

Resilience in Russian Immigrant Stories: An Alternative to Deficiency Models

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Review Essay:

Dennis Shasha & Marina Shron (2002). *Red Blues: Voices from the Last Wave of Russian Immigrants* (Ellis Island Series). New York, NY: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 258 pages, 0-8419-1417-6 (hardcover) \$30.00

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Abstract: At first glance, "Red Blues: Voices from the Last Wave of Immigrants" is simply a collection of immigrant stories. However, SHASHA and SHRON capture immigrant experiences from a rich array of social landscapes such as "Privilege Lost," "God and Religious Dissent," and "Scientists and Doctors" and make special note of the common strand of the ingenuity necessary for these individuals to survive. This review suggests that these resilient attitudes contrast sharply with common perceptions of immigrants as deficient and identifies several faces of resilience evident in excerpts from these stories. It also notes that this sort of collection is of particular importance to educators and other community leaders who need a greater awareness of the heritage and the strengths of the immigrant students in their communities and schools.

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1. Introduction

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to
land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall
stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes
command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!"
cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your
poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe
free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to
me.
I lift my map beside the golden door."*

"The New Colossus" by Emma LAZARUS
(Quoted on a bronze plaque inside the base
of the Statue of Liberty)

Pennsylvania born, I stood in scorching summer heat beside a friend from Chernogolovka, Russia, both gazing thoughtfully up at Lady Liberty. As we toured the area, there was a cacophony of languages and I thought how similar these sounds must have been at the end of the 19th Century. As our ferry headed for its next stop, my Russian friend asked how Ellis Island had been used and I had the opportunity to talk about the United States' legacy of immigrants. I admitted, however, that it is difficult for many Americans to clearly trace their heritage because subsequent generations marry "outside" their immigrant group over time. Some of my own ancestors came to North America before the Revolution, which makes those Scottish, Irish, German and other roots seem all the more distant. [1]

This, perhaps, is one of the reasons Americans easily take the Statue of Liberty's legacy for granted, sometimes going so far as to view newcomers as deficient because of their limited English proficiency or unfamiliarity with various American systems. In schools, one of the largest and most influential systems in the nation, this may result in students being marginalized, placed in classes below their academic capabilities, or even assigned to special education instead of specialized English language instruction (COLLIER, 2001; CUMMINS, 2000; SCHILDKRAUT, 2005). It is as though Lady Liberty's welcome is often forgotten. [2]

In contrast, Thomas SOWELL (1991) explains that immigrants are not merely helpless or only on the receiving end of influences in the United States; they, in fact, have shaped the United States (p.14). The difficulty is that limited English proficiency can mask a wealth of knowledge, strength, creativity and cultural richness that has enabled immigrants to be resilient in the face of the adversities of their past and present lives, and has also enriched American communities and cultures. If educators and other community leaders are to make informed decisions that benefit all students and American society as a whole, we must recognize this rich legacy of immigration. While statistics of broader histories are limited in their capacity to reveal the strengths of our immigrant populations, personal histories are often able to fill in some of these gaps. [3]

Having taught a number of students from the former Soviet Union and recognizing that these ethnic groups are highly under-researched, particularly in the field of education (DELGADO-GAITAN, 1994), I read *Red Blues: Voices from the Last Wave of Russian Immigrants*, a collection of stories compiled by Dennis SHASHA and Marina SHRON. CLANDENIN and CONNELLY explain the utility of narratives for social science and education researchers: "Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it" (2000, p.18). While the collection did not include a theoretical analysis of the individual stories, the complete, uninterrupted nature of the personal narratives afforded me the opportunity to genuinely hear the voices of each person and to see vivid, real-life portraits of resilience that counter common notions of deficiency. [4]

2. Resilience, Russia, and Emigration

Edith Henderson GROTBORG (2003, p.1) defines resilience as "the human capacity to deal with, overcome, learn from, or even be transformed by the inevitable adversities of life." Twentieth century Russia has been marked by adversity: the bloody upending of the Russian monarchy, involvement in both World Wars, collectivization, Stalinist purges and Gulag, wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya, the disaster surrounding Chernobyl, the collapse of the Soviet Union, economic problems, and the growing power of the Russian Mafia. Within these contexts, Russians have had to negotiate challenges to their physical safety, government control over individual's lives, economic problems, an extremely oppressive atmosphere, and the denial of numerous opportunities. [5]

Many Soviet citizens emigrated to escape these kinds of adversities, but emigration poses its own share of challenges.

"If resilience is, by definition, to be found in conditions of adversity and vulnerability, then it is particularly apropos to look for it among immigrants and their children. After all, it is commonplace in the literature on migration and adaptation to observe that long-distance journeys entail a set of engulfing life events (losses, changes, conflicts, and demands) that, although varying widely in kind and degree, severely test the immigrants' resilience" (RUMBAUT, 2000, p.257). [6]

These immigrants to the United States dealt with homesickness for Russian culture, ways of living, social context, family and friends; Americans not understanding their cultural background; limited recognition for artists; the intensity of the American work force; language barriers; and the differences in skills necessary for a field in a different culture, amongst numerous other things. Each of these immigrants has additionally faced the daunting challenge of acquiring a new language in order to be able to negotiate life in this new environment. [7]

3. The Many Faces of Resilience in *Red Blues*

In the preface, authors SHASHA and SHRON depict the crumbling state of the Soviet empire that these immigrants and non-immigrants have survived.

"The people who tell their stories here have dodged this wreckage by emigrating or by avoiding the falling pieces ... While they articulate a loss of connection, they mostly talk about the creative ways in which they have formed new lives. In this they tell a universal story" (p.xi). [8]

In the forward GOLD refers to this creative resilience as a "culture of savvy" and suggests that immigrants have carried this from the former Soviet Union to the United States (p.viii). [9]

SHASHA and SHRON have included unedited narratives from thirty open-ended interviews and organized these into eight sections, preceding each narrative with a brief introduction that reveals the nature of each individual's experiences. All narrators except those in the final section are immigrants to the United States. "*Privilege Lost*" includes stories of a Russified aristocratic family who become refugees, the patriotic son of an imprisoned Communist, a disillusioned military veteran in the Gulag, a dissident missile designer, and a Tajik war refugee. In "*God and Religious Dissent*," an Orthodox priest and an underground Jewish radical describe their flight from religious oppression and the overwhelming nature of emigration. In the following section, "*Artists*," a musician recalls the aftermath of Chernobyl; an architect, a painter, and two filmmakers describe how Soviet oppression led to resourcefulness and creativity; and an artistic director of theater and his wife discuss their fears before and after emigration. SHASHA and SHRON then transition to "*Scientists and Doctors*," where a number of scientists depict the steep decline in industry and opportunities for science in the former Soviet Union, and one couple portrays the hostility of Latvian nationalism towards them as ethnic Russians. In "*Entrepreneurs*," former physicians talk about the deplorable conditions in Soviet medicine and their paths to business; a former physics student describes the dangerous post-Soviet business world; and a café owner admits that he left Russia because of his hunger to see the world. Sharing characteristics with many of the other accounts, are stories of "*Survival*": an itinerant painter remembers the German bombings that killed 34 members of his family and the anti-Semitism he endured after surviving the war, and all three describe the struggle to gain footing in the United States after emigration. In "*The Gray Zone*," a New York madam, a topless dancer, and a dominatrix describe

their fight to survive in the United States and their hopes for the future. Finally, in "*It's a New Old World*," a night driver hopes his daughter will emigrate, while a businessman dreams of Old Russia and a writer regrets the West's lack of appreciation for what Russia has to offer. After the Epilogue, SHASHA and SHRON share a few excerpts from additional conversations with several other immigrants from the former Soviet Union. [10]

In their Epilogue, SHASHA and SHRON explain the significance of these stories. "Living in a Blue world, a person may not notice the background color everywhere is blue. The eyes find the color natural. It takes someone from a different world, say a Red world, to understand what is so special about the Blue world. The comparison brings clarity to both" (p.253). Coming from the former Soviet Union, these immigrants have had to negotiate excessive government power and broken promises with a kind of creativity and courage that can be difficult for Westerners to understand. [11]

As I read the stories in *Red Blues*, it became clear that the resilience, or "culture of savvy" Gold speaks of, is present throughout these stories in a variety of forms. For some, resilience is the act of *making do* with very limited resources or opportunities. For others, it is outright *dissidence* against authorities. For many of the voices in *Red Blues*, it is *risk-taking*. Sometimes it is *coming together as a community*. And underlying these kinds of actions, there often seem to be attitudes of *hope* and *determination*. Each of these faces of resilience is salient in particular parts of various stories. The following excerpts can remind educators and other community leaders of the strengths that our immigrant students and their families bring to our schools and ultimately to our society. [12]

3.1 Making do

In *Red Blues: Voices from the Last Wave of Russian Immigrants*, I noted that one of the most easily recognizable forms of resilience involved Russians "making do" with the limited resources and opportunities available to them. Under Soviet rule, the aristocrats were the first to be stripped of their belongings, rights, and safety. But instead of shifting the power to the people, it was simply transferred from one ruling class to another bearing a different uniform. And once again, the lives of the working class were often out of their own hands, and they were subject to discrimination, false accusations, collectivization, and sometimes war. Survival often required persistence, courage, and creativity. [13]

For some, resilience was manifest in taking the initiative to change careers when one opportunity was denied or opportunities in their given field disappeared. Vladimir KANEVSKY was an architect until his Jewish heritage got in the way.

"I was an active young architect, a member of the Union of Architects. I won awards ... I went from being a promising young talent to a white-collar worker ... I decided to find a new job ... On my first day at work, my new boss gave me a kind of embarrassed look, and told me: 'You know, we don't need architects anymore' " (pp.180f.). [14]

Vladimir managed to find work at a new art enterprise, get into work with ceramics, become a board member, and then become the director of that board. When he came to the US in 1989, he survived by making porcelain flowers, occasionally sculpting when he found time. One of his sculptures was bought by the museum at Duke University. [15]

Many immigrants have also survived on very little. Alex FEOSTIKOV describes how he and his wife Masha made do when they first came to the United States.

"When we came to America—our first months here ... We left everything behind: our professional positions, apartments, cars. We came to America with literally the clothes on our backs. And we had to live, somehow. So, we couldn't afford any problems—emotional, linguistic, or cultural problems. We pushed forward, didn't look back or around. We had one goal: survival. We had to live on \$400 a month ... I had to walk to my job and back, because I couldn't afford to buy a token" (pp.144f.). [16]

For a time, Masha worked as an administrative assistant at the New York University lab where Alex worked in order to help make ends meet, but Alex eventually managed to obtain a residency at a local hospital. Both explained that they felt with an attitude of flexibility, there were opportunities to be had in the United States. [17]

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the decline of industry, scientists were apt to switch fields—often to business. Around this time there were business opportunities available, but one had to be savvy about both government bureaucracy and the Mafia in order to keep business alive. Sergey TCHAVRETOV, a physics student who chose a career in business, describes the measures necessary for running his company.

"The tax law changes almost every month, and taxes are going up ... Sometimes, different groups of influential people lay claim to the same enterprise, bringing about a conflict of interest which they resolve through judicial or violent means. Our company, for instance, keeps a security division of 70 people, 20 of them armed ... to look after our 400 employees ... You see, nobody in Russia would take seriously a threat of being take to the police station ... But the threat of losing your health does scare people" (pp.178f.). [18]

Sergey later emigrated to work at the New York branch of his company, where he appreciates the safer aspects of business. [19]

These immigrant stories are reminders of the types of resilience that sometimes go unnoticed in our communities and our schools. Instead, we are sometimes guilty of focusing on the limitations of the different linguistic and cultural background. Many of their families have had to "make do" with limited resources and possibilities. It is not uncommon for immigrants in our local school district to have difficulty finding work in their field when they first come to the United States, largely because of language barriers. Some make do with more menial jobs. A teacher might serve as a volunteer or work as a substitute while trying to acquire

the necessary qualifications to teach here. A young family might survive on one or two graduate assistantships, biking to work and school or juggling a used car. Kindergarten through twelfth grade students themselves are forced to "make do" when they are thrown into mainstream classes, as is often the case when even beginner level English language learners have less than an hour or two in an English as a Second Language or Bilingual Education classroom each day. Immigrant students often negotiate English language classrooms in a completely different system of schooling with a limited amount of assistance. Our job as educators and community leaders, then, is to recognize their efforts to "make do" as opposed to dwelling on what we think they cannot do. [20]

3.2 Dissidence

It is remarkable the ways in which these individuals in *Red Blues* managed to "make do" with little, and yet some managed to do more than just survive. Some openly dissented against governing forces. The oppressive atmosphere of the former Soviet Union was especially ripe for dissidence, which was sometimes written, sometimes spoken—sometimes organized and sometimes spontaneous. [21]

Arrested after a visit from a dissident nephew, Seymon SLUTSKY, a veteran military officer who had fought in World War II, was sent to prison for six months. Four months into imprisonment, he lost his temper when he was brought to the Minister of National Security and accused of being involved in a group attempting to arm itself.

" 'We are waiting for your confession,' Abakumov said. And there, for the first time, I lost my temper. 'I have nothing to confess,' I replied. 'What do you want? You executed the best generals and officers before the war. You killed Blucher and Tukhachevsky.' I was shouting. ... The Soviet Army was literally beheaded. But that hadn't undermined my faith in the regime" (pp.39f.). [22]

His moment of dissidence initially seemed like a one-time incident, but when Seymon was offered another military position once he was released from prison, he rejected the offer and later followed his children to the United States. His feelings towards the former Soviet Union changed over time in his new home. "Nothing connects us to Russia ... If not for my age, I would take a pledge of loyalty to America, would fight for it if needed. But I'm too old" (p.41). [23]

Although he spent much of his life in the former Soviet Union, including the years he fought to defend it, his heart seems to have opened to the United States, which he adopted the as his own country. [24]

Dissidence also took on written forms. Alexander BOLONKIN, a missile designer, became involved in underground publishing.

"I soon formed a group with other dissidents. I invented a simple printing device that allowed our new dissident group to print and make multiple copies of all kinds of materials ... Our group even published its own underground magazine, which we

called Free Opinion. I wrote a number of articles for this publication, analyzing and comparing the quality of life in the Soviet Union and Western countries ... We also printed flyers, about 3,500 during the period our group was active" (p.43). [25]

Alexander was eventually arrested and sent to concentration camps and then exile in Siberia for fifteen years. He was released in 1987. His apartment had been confiscated, and he was forced to pay compensation before leaving the country. [26]

Father Michael's dissent was directed at not only the Soviet regime, but the Orthodox Church as well.

"I had wanted to become a priest, but I could not hope to be accepted at the Orthodox seminary in Russia for two reasons. First, I had attended university; and second, I had taken part in the dissident movement ... We published 'Father Alexander' Men's own manuscripts, as well as works by Solzhenitsyn, and by Russian philosophers and theologians of the early twentieth century ... My religious position always put me in the position of an outsider ... At the university I had to conceal my faith, particularly because I was trained as a historian, a profession closely linked to ideology ..." (pp.55-56).

Father Michael was keenly aware of why he was being oppressed and used his understanding to conceal his beliefs when necessary and spread them through an underground press. More broadly, he notes: '... only two countries—Russia and Germany—allowed themselves to throw overboard such large numbers of intellectuals' " (p.57). [27]

Faced with the options of arrest or emigration, Father Michael chose to leave for the United States where he was able to establish an Orthodox Church with more freedom. [28]

These stories remind us that some of the immigrant families in our communities may have been involved in dissident movements, and that this history may impact their involvement in our community and schools. One example is the Russian Baptists, who began emigration to the United States to escape persecution. For many years, evangelicals attended underground churches in spite of the threat of imprisonment. When they made their faith known, they could also be denied educational and career opportunities. Educators and others who work with these students and their families need to realize that this is one of their primary reasons for emigration; they are here because they believed they would be able to worship freely, without their past fears. It is also useful to recognize that having been oppressed, denied opportunities, or even punished in schools and in general within their Soviet communities, their past experiences may impact their opinions of and participation in American schools and communities. For instance, families might not respond to invitations requesting parental involvement, pull their children out of school on a holiday that they find offensive, or tell their children not to read literature they deem to be contradictory to their beliefs. [29]

3.3 Risk-taking

Many of the voices in *Red Blues* evidence a willingness to take risks, yet another form of resilience. Emigration involves a risky journey into a new environment, but the journey transcends the physical move. Emigration entails process of learning how to shop for groceries, complete forms in English, and negotiate a school or work environment in a language other than your own. Both the known and unknown challenges can prove daunting. [30]

Father Michael and Yelena MANDEL depict the kind of courage it took to set out for the unknown.

"... when I chose to emigrate, I had no idea where I was going. It was like a trip to the moon for me. In the early 1970s, we had no information about the West, or very little, often not quite accurate" (p.57).

"When I first came to America, I remember it felt like being on Mars ..." (p.68). [31]

There were no guarantees that life would truly be less adverse or what it would be like to try and adjust to a new life, but these individuals and their families took the incredible plunge. [32]

Emigration could take a great deal of persistence and patience in spite of the necessary risks, as was the case for Matvey KANENGSIGER, a Ukrainian hair stylist who decided to leave Kiev after Chernobyl: "The whole emigration process took me five years. At the end, I could think of nothing but getting away from Russia. All the political and social upheavals in the country passed me by" (p.202). When he finally arrived in Brooklyn, he was unable to get work even in salons run by Russians because of his limited English. He managed to find work at a French salon that capitalized on the desperation of newly arrived immigrants and made a fortune from upper-class patrons and celebrities. Once he grew confident in his English and hair styling skills, he established his own business. [33]

One remarkable trait of some immigrants is their honesty regarding the trying nature of their adjustment process, coupled with the appreciation for the new country. There was no guarantee that the initial hardships would pay off and turn into a less difficult, let alone better life. Boris KARDIMUN shares his early struggles. Once lauded by New Yorkers while he was a dissident living in Moscow, he had become "a common immigrant."

"My wife didn't have such problems: she had her job, she had a family to support. She became the family provider ... Here, the master turned into a zero ... It took me a long time to admit that despite all my hatred for the Soviet system, I was, in fact, a typical product of it ... Still, there was not a single moment in all my years in America that I missed Russia" (pp.197-198). [34]

His preference for the adversities he encountered in the United States may have been rooted in his youth, when he lost 34 family members and was forced to run

with his mother to survive the German bombings—and later when he was beaten before an unflinching crowd for being a Jew. Boris went on to give art tours in Europe and to work with an organization for new immigrants. [35]

The stories in *Red Blues* illuminate for us the kinds of risks people encounter in the process of emigrating and the amount of resilience needed to survive, let alone thrive, in the midst of this dramatic change. A Kuwaiti boy's words demonstrate the loss of familiarity his family risked in coming to the United States. "I want to go home; I don't care if there is a war there." Even a war-torn country is still home to many people, and immigration requires leaving this. I remember the ironic picture of a tall Egyptian man bundled up in a bulky winter coat as he spent his first months in the United States trudging through the Pennsylvania snow, wife and infant child still at home in Egypt. In working with immigrants, it is easy to forget that they are negotiating a new climate, language, system of education, and daily life while dealing with separation from familiar surroundings and perhaps their own family. On the flip side, there is also the picture of a Chinese student laughing as she becomes comfortable in her new school, learns to participate in all of the school activities ranging from a social studies journal to recess to flute lessons, and begins to pick up on humor and share some of her own. It is a challenge for any teacher or community leader to be cognizant of the backgrounds of a diverse array of immigrants; even people from the same town in Pennsylvania or the Ukraine or Ghana can have very different backgrounds. But we can begin with the recognition of the kinds of dramatic changes that occur in the life of immigrants in our communities and schools and the risks that they take in negotiating our language and our systems. We can also work to become careful observers and sensitive listeners. [36]

3.4 Finding and sharing strength in Russian community

It also becomes apparent that the narrators in *Red Blues* were finding strength in connections with others of a similar background. These include Some Russian communities (such as members of the Orthodox Church), Jewish radicals and scientific communities formed prior to immigration as well as other groups formed specifically for immigrants. [37]

Konstantin LIKHAREV, who moved his electronics laboratory to the United States when work dried up in 1990, explains the various reasons for community building in the former Soviet Union versus the United States:

"... when you lose this cultural support, you feel bad. That's why Russians are forming groups now in America, just as before Perestroika, Jews clustered together in Russia. The reason for organizing such groups is obvious: people were protecting themselves against anti-Semitism ... Here it's different. Nobody is attacking you. There's no anti-Russian or anti-Soviet mood. It's simply easier for people to be with their own kind. Take our Russian pipeline here: the reason why it was created and why it keeps working is probably the unconscious desire of people to re-create a Russian cultural atmosphere in which they can breathe. In Russia, we didn't need a special Russian community. You could go anywhere ..." (pp.132-133). [38]

Konstantin felt that these organized communities were more apt to form in the former Soviet Union in order to survive discrimination and other hardships, whereas groups in the United States were more likely intended to help immigrants make cultural connections. [39]

With his experience in the Gulag, Alexander BOLONKIN founded the International Association of Former Soviet Political Prisoners and Victims of Communism, which, at the time that the book was compiled, had 31,000 members. The group has made efforts to demand compensation for their losses. Boris KADRIMUN also works more broadly with the New York Association for New Immigrants. [40]

These articulated desires for community remind educators and other community leaders that participating in an ethnic community can connect settled immigrants with newcomers and prevent some of the common feelings of isolation. The Russian Baptist Church is one such community. It helps Russians maintain their heritage and the language, keeps them connected and provides opportunities to support one another physically, socially and spiritually. Some Russians have also been able to find fellow Russians in the local Orthodox Church, though the membership also includes Greeks and Americans. Heritage language schools provide a similar support system for speakers of Chinese, Arabic and other languages. Oftentimes families from the former Soviet Union form friendships as they encounter one another at the university, at their children's activities or other community events. It is important for educators and community leaders to be aware of potential connections that a family might have or be able to make that may help with the adjustment process and make them feel more at home in their new environment. [41]

3.5 Hope in spite of adversity

Underlying the resilient actions of many in *Red Blues* seemed to be certain attitudes. Sometimes resilience is, very simply, an attitude of hope. Citizens of the former Soviet Union often had slim threads on which to hang their hopes. When it came to life in the United States, they had to base their hopes on what little they knew prior to emigration or what they had learned in the short time since they had lived in the United States. [42]

Some of the immigrants in *Red Blues* evidenced a remarkable hope in their homeland. Vadim SHRON talks about his unwavering faith in Stalin and the Soviet system.

"I had a very happy childhood, 'bright and radiant as the sun,' as one of the Soviet songs of that period put it ... All that lasted until 1937, when my father suddenly was arrested. That was his first arrest, and I have only a vague recollection of it: I was nine at the time ... We'd go every day—me, my mother, and my younger brother—and stand there for hours, along with thousands of others, waving to prisoners behind bars and trying to catch a glimpse of them waving back ... I believed that my father would be released in a couple days, and when, after a couple of weeks he was still in

prison, I wrote a letter to Ezhov, the Commissar of Internal Affairs and chair of the KGB. 'My father has been arrested,' I wrote. 'It must be a mistake. Oh, I understand: it is a test ...' " (pp.15-16). [43]

Even after a second arrest, his father managed to survive. Meanwhile, Vadim's mother was forced to flee as the Germans began bombing their town. They survived the nine-day train ride by eating bits of moldy bread and later slept on the streets before receiving an invitation from a relative. At fifteen, Vadim's loyalties unphased by his father's imprisonment, joined the League of Young Communists. In fact, when his father declared in 1953 that "*the tyrant is dead*," he and his brother were furious. He explained that many Soviet citizens felt lost without Stalin, as though God were dead. Vadim eventually became an engineer and reluctantly left Russia when his own country failed to recognize the quality of his work. [44]

Konstantin LIKHAREV has continued to hold out hope for his country of birth. A physicist who became the director of a national laboratory, Konstantin decided to move his core staff to the State University of New York at Stony Brook when the decline in industry drastically reduced the demand for scientists and engineers, but as he keeps an eye on Russia, he hopes:

"I believe that Russia is a country of immense opportunity right now. If you want to believe in a great future for Russians, you realize that its foundation is being laid now ... I went back to Russia in 1993. It was great. For the first time I saw the expression of freedom on people's faces. Previously, they had worn an expression of misery, as if they were beaten up or walked over. It was the expression of people who can't control their lives ... They may not smile much—smiling is rare in Russia—but they're doing something important, they're building their lives" (p.135). [45]

He does not deny the struggles, but he has chosen to look beyond them to see possibilities for the future. [46]

Resilience is also evident in the hopes which most have for life in the United States. When Masha and Alex FEOSTIKOV, dentist and doctor, found themselves as Russian outcasts during a surge of Latvian nationalism, they chose to emigrate. Masha talks with an incredible hope for opportunities in the United States despite of the fact that both initially had to work lower-level jobs.

"... here, suddenly, my long-dormant sense of human dignity was awakened. And this reborn sense of human dignity could be expressed even in cleaning toilets. Anyway, we don't know this country too well, we only know NY. But we love this country and are grateful for what it has given us, and it has give us a lot" (p.145). [47]

Alex contrasts their status in Latvia with the United States.

"In the US, this feeling (of being an outsider) was never as desperate and hopeless as it had been in Latvia. Here I felt that once you have a goal, and you're working hard to achieve it, you'll get there—and if not exactly there, then some other place" (p.145). [48]

It seems that the adversity that they encountered in the former Soviet Union helped them to see a situation that might have seemed bleak to an American as an opportunity with great potential. [49]

Engaged in a variety of responsibilities, educators and community leaders may have difficulty finding the time to understand the kind of strength it would take to find hope in the face of the adversity as the immigrants in *Red Blues* as well as in our own community and schools have. I recognized this kind of hope as a young man from the Moscow region recounted how his father (a geologist with a doctorate), as recently as five or six years ago, grew extra potatoes in his kitchen garden to help friends or relatives survive the Russian winter. His mother held out another kind of hope for her sons: she encouraged them to seek work in the United States, even though assistantships pay little and American citizenship is not easy to come by. She saw this as a way for her sons to have even more opportunities than her husband. If American schools and their communities are to pave the way towards opportunities for all students and citizens, educators and community leaders must learn to recognize the hopes these students and their families have. [50]

3.6 An attitude of determination

An attitude of determination is another resilient trait in the accounts in *Red Blues*. This determination is evident in both their perspectives on life and their persistence as they live it. [51]

Julia was an artist in Russia, but when she came to the United States, she took a job as a dominatrix because she did not want to live on welfare. When she left this job, she began to shoplift.

"I couldn't find a way to make money and buy things ... I was only taking what was necessary—like a few tomatoes and a piece of cheese for dinner ..." (p.228).

"Now I have a job that I really enjoy—taking care of children. This is not as a baby-sitter, but more like a governess. I stay with kids and I teach them Russian. In the future, I would like to open a day-care for children of my friends ..." (pp.227, 228). [52]

Julia initially took a job deemed by many as undesirable just to survive. Even when she turned to shoplifting, she did not give up on finding another means of survival, and in fact found a type of work she sincerely enjoys and dreams of expanding. She goes so far as to say that she is grateful for these experiences in

the United States, because she feels they have helped her to be independent in a way she was not in Russia. [53]

Tatiana ALEXA and Ella KOZHEMIKOVA both left medicine for business after the Soviet economy began to shift in 1989. Tatiana explains the dire state of medical practice at the time:

"I often had to cure my patients with the power of words rather than medications; there simply was no medicine available. I'm not talking about a lack of complicated medical or surgical equipment, but of a simple first aid kit, even pain relievers" (p.153). [54]

Aware that some of her fellow doctors were turning to business, Tatiana joined a business firm and quickly became a partner. Meanwhile, Ella had her own share of struggles in the medical world.

"They often tested new equipment, or new procedures, directly on patients. Some patients would come in for surgery, standing on their feet, and they would be carried away from the operation with their feet forward, dead ... And then there was another issue—bribery. The director of the cardio center was known for taking money from patients" (p.164). [55]

In sharp contrast to physician's salaries in the United States, Ella's family struggled to survive on her husband's income as a surgeon when she took maternity leave, so she eventually turned to waitressing at a nice restaurant in Moscow. When her husband was able to go to work for the New York branch of Tatiana's business, she first began working for Mary Kay (a cosmetic home-selling scheme), and then managed to open a café with a friend. In the United States, both women exuded a spirit of determination in spite of the fact that they initially felt like outsiders. Tatiana explains: "... it's okay to be a guest—but, God forbid, an immigrant. Then they'd never forgive my bad English. But the stronger that feeling, the stronger is the temptation to make it mine." [56]

Other immigrants might have other explanations for their efforts to survive and succeed, but there is a common thread of determination throughout them. [57]

The stories in *Red Blues* illuminate the strength of these individuals' sense of determination, a strength that educators and community leaders may not easily recognize. Seeing English as essential and higher education as extremely beneficial, we may fail to see strength in immigrants' determination to maintain their home language and culture or the positive side of determination to pursue a field that might be perceived as "blue-collar." We also may have difficulty realizing how much determination it takes for immigrants to compete with Americans in school and the work force. With all that we have to negotiate in our classrooms and communities, it is easy to unintentionally lack cultural sensitivity. In an English-speaking context, heavily influenced by American media and education, it takes considerable effort for an ethnic community or family to preserve their language and culture. Both churches such as the Russian Baptist and Chinese

churches, and heritage language schools, such as the ones for Chinese and Arabic speakers, serve these purposes. Families may preserve some of their culture as well by speaking their language at home, having their children read a book or write to a grandparent in their home language, and keeping some of their traditions to pass down to future generations. Determination is also evident in the Kyrgyz student who makes it into the Pennsylvania Governor's School for Art or the five Ukrainian teens who survive on their own by setting up a plumbing business like their father's and working at the Eastern European store owned by a friend. Combined with hope, this kind of determination is a powerful force underlying these many kinds of resilient actions. [58]

4. Conclusion

The New London Group (2000, p.14f.) suggests that we need to replace "the old, monocultural, nationalistic sense of 'civic' " with a "civic pluralism" where anyone, regardless of nation of origin or linguistic background, has access to wealth and power. Pierre BOURDIEU (1977) reminds us that relationships between language learners and those who already speak it are often marked by an imbalance of power, and this balance is easily exaggerated with the power of a school system or community over immigrant students and their families. Within these contexts, Concha DELGADO-GAITAN (1994) explains that immigrants, who have, in their pursuit of the American Dream for their children, shaped the United States over time, often come to realize that school is essential to their success. "Such programs need to support opportunities that prevent language barriers, residential segregation, prejudice, and religious barriers" (p.138). Educators along with community leaders need to think not only the external features of this imbalance of power, but the internal feeling immigrants can have that they are merely "second-category citizens" (NORTON, 1998, p.452). Instead, we should view "cultural and linguistic diversity" as a resource that can help learners develop a critically reflective view of the complex systems of their school and community and their interactions within these contexts (New London Group, 2000, p.15). [59]

In trying to arrive at a better understanding of culturally and linguistically diverse people, records of firsthand experience, or personal narratives, can create "a sense of particularity that abstractions cannot render. We come to see the place, to know each individual character ... Authenticity is not a bad quality for any kind of research to have ..." (EISNER, 1997, p.9). EISNER further explains that scholars want to foster empathy for the people who are the subject of a study because it may be a necessity for understanding both these people and their context (p.8). This point rings particularly salient in terms of the need for cultural understanding that can help enable advocacy on the part of both educators and community leaders as well as immigrants themselves. With its personal, authentic presentation, *Red Blues* provides valuable opportunities for the development of cultural understanding. [60]

A fundamental challenge facing researchers seeking to do narrative inquiry is representation of participants' stories.

"As researchers, we need to learn to see (hear, feel) through different eyes. The act of researching, however, is fraught with problems because the process generally situates the researcher as designer, sense-maker, and storyteller. And the researcher will never 'see' through all the lenses needed to 'get it right' for everyone ..." (GLESNE 1999, p.218). [61]

GLESNE goes on to explain that this is not necessary, that the researcher's goal is actually to incorporate multiple perspectives and to reveal complexity as opposed to norms (p.219). Additionally, GLESNE (1999) and EMERSON, FRETZ and SHAW (1995) recommend staying close to the data in order to allow narrative pieces to speak for themselves. VAN MANEN then argues for a balance of subjectivity and objectivity, where objectivity means bracketing one's judgments as a researcher until the data has been conveyed in its entirety (1990, p.20). SHASHA and SHRON have clearly done all of this, reserving their perspectives for the introduction and the epilogue and allowing this array of individuals to speak for themselves. [62]

What *Red Blues* lacks is a simply specific theoretical analysis of each story or the collection as a whole. SHASHA and SHRON could have highlighted and expounded upon a number of themes pertinent to social science and education researchers. On the other hand, *Red Blues* easily lends itself to analysis, as is evident in this review. The collection could be used in a professional development situation for those who will find themselves working with immigrant populations—particularly of Russian heritage, but it is also a useful read for social science and education researchers whose work may have a more indirect impact on these populations. [63]

Free from the political views of academic researchers, *Red Blues: Voices from the Last Wave of Russian Immigrants* allows readers to clearly hear the voices of these immigrants and to recognize for themselves the adversity these people have endured and often overcome through words and actions of resilience. It is a glimpse of experiences particular to immigrants from the former Soviet Union; nonetheless, the stories also describe experiences and feelings that may be common among many of the 11 percent who were born outside the United States. Responsible educators and community leaders cannot, in good conscience, neglect an awareness of this legacy of immigrants. To ignore the stories of these recent immigrants is to pretend that the United States has not been built upon or deeply enriched by its legacy of these very people. [64]

The faces of resilience I have noted in *Red Blues* remind us that we need to:

1. Recognize and be supportive of immigrants' efforts to "make do" within their new community and schools.
2. Recognize immigrant groups that have been oppressed prior to emigration and realize that this may impact their involvement in the local community and schools.

3. Recognize the kinds of risks immigrants have taken to emigrate and adapt to life in a country different from what they have always known.
4. Recognize the importance of connections to their cultural communities for support and maintenance of their heritage.
5. Recognize the kinds of hopes immigrant families have for themselves and their children.
6. Recognize the determination it takes to preserve their home language and culture and to compete with Americans in school and the workforce. [65]

Such efforts would not only better welcome and serve immigrant students and their families, but would enable immigrants to enrich the lives and experiences of the rest of us as well. [66]

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