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Ambivalence and Identity in Russian Jewish Cinema

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'The Jew is ambivalence incarnate.'

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

HISTORICALLY, the representation of Jews in Soviet national cinema (when and where it has been allowed) has been a litmus test for the Jewish position in Russian culture. Jews have been variously, and paradoxically, stereotyped: they could simultaneously symbolize backwardness (as ignorant shtetl dwellers) or progressiveness (as the learned 'people of the book'); they could stand for emasculated weakness (as victims of pogroms and genocide) or virile leadership (as rabbis or commissars); they could be seen, in short, as heroes or anti-heroes (Bartov 2005). For scholars of contemporary Jewish cultures, film therefore provides eloquent material for research on identities and their construction and reconstruction. According to Stuart Hall (1990), cinema is a potent medium in which identities are produced. Rather than being a 'second-order mirror held up to reflect what already exists', it is 'a form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover places from which to speak' (1990: 236–7). Moreover, because of their profound influence on society and culture, films constitute a source of the visual memory transmitted to future generations (Portuges 2005). Taking these formulations as a starting point, I will approach the subject of Russian Jewish identity by studying representations of Jews in Russian national cinema.

Russian Jews in the Soviet Union and After

The mass emigration of Russian Jews and the introduction of Western Jewish organizations to Russia have brought Russian Jews back into contact with world Jewry. This meeting revealed great cultural differences, and brought the issue of Russian Jewish identity to the fore. Russian Jews as a group are hardly homogeneous, and defining Russian Jewish identity can be a trying task, which is further complicated by the fact that most scholarship in the field has explored the history and culture of Jewish elites. With rare exceptions (such as Shternshis 2006), cur-

rent studies of Russian Jewish identity focus mainly on ‘Hodl’s children’—descendants of Jewish migrants from the shtetls to the big urban centres in the early Soviet era who joined the ranks of the Soviet elite and the intelligentsia. The social and cultural profile of ‘Tsaytl’s children’—descendants of those Jews who remained in the shtetls in the east and south—remains largely unexplored.¹

Defining Jewish identities is in general problematic, not only because they vary across different historical periods and geographical locations, but also because the very concept of Jewishness can be defined in so many ways: religious, ethnic, racial, or cultural. In addition, Jewish identities are influenced by both self-representations and representations by outsiders—and Jewish responses to these. Jewish identities therefore emerge as contradictory and ambivalent. This ambivalence, of both Jews themselves and the surrounding society, has been theorized in several historical and cultural contexts, including cinematic representations (Adorno and Horkheimer 1989; Bauman 1998; Biale 1986; Homberger 1996; Sutcliffe 2003). Here I will argue that the concept of ambivalence is useful in trying to understand how Russian Jewish identity, with all its ruptures and discontinuities, is constructed and reconstructed. Keeping in mind theories of identity as constantly in the making, I understand Russian Jewish identity not as a resting place but as a ‘perpetual creative, diasporic tension’ (Boyarin and Boyarin 1993: 714).

The concept of ambivalence (in psychoanalysis, a simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from a person or an object or a wanting of both a thing and its opposite) underscores the fluidity of identity and its resistance to essentialization. The usefulness of the concept of ambivalence here—and indeed its very meaning—is clear from the existing research on Russian Jewish identity. It has become a commonplace in the scholarly literature to see Jewishness in Russia as a matter of ‘sentiment and biology’ (Gitelman 2003: 55). Having roots in the racialized perception of Jews in imperial Russia, the notion of Jewishness as *natsional’nost’* (ethnicity) took a firm hold in the Soviet era. Even in post-Soviet times it remains completely disconnected from religion.² This means that Jewishness is understood as a primordial (rather than a constructed) category.³ For Russian Jews, biology is destiny, and neither conversion to Christianity nor complete identification with Russian culture will change it. Jews are seen as fundamentally—i.e. biologically—different.

But in addition to biology Jewishness is also, in Zvi Gitelman’s words, ‘the subjective feeling of belonging to a group’ (2003: 54)—an understanding in which Jewishness is constructed rather than primordial. This sense of one’s Jewish identity can be either positive or negative. It can be forced on one as a result of an encounter with antisemitism or a memory of the Holocaust, or it can be experienced as a result of pride in Jewish culture and accomplishment, leading to an open awareness of one’s Jewishness. Researchers vary in their evaluation and interpretation of this ‘biological’ and ‘sentimental’ identity. Gitelman (2003) con-

cludes that in the absence of a 'thick culture' (language, religion, tradition), Russian Jewish identity is built on a 'thin culture' devoid of any real content, and as such is hardly viable.⁴ This pessimistic position is supported by Rozalina Ryvkina, who announces a 'crisis of national self-identification' and a 'turning off of Jewish culture' (2005: 78), and quotes Leonid Radzikhovsky's expressive term *raz"evreivanie*, which may be translated as the 'unravelling of Jewish identity' (2005: 56). Building on earlier work by Gitelman (1991), Mikhail Chlenov (quoted in Ryvkina 2005: 84–5) expresses his concern that Russian Jewish identity is 'passive' (stemming from biology), in contrast to Western Jewish identity, which is 'active' (requiring actions from individuals).

Other scholars try to locate the characteristics of Russian Jewish identity without evaluating it or its future. Larissa Remennick reasons that the 'thinness' of the culture does not make it any less real for its carriers. She identifies several characteristics of Russian Jewish identity, all of them traced back to the traditional 'mercurian' (Slezkine's term, 2004) Jewish culture and lifestyle rather than religion. These characteristics are: 'cultivation of intellectualism, respect for hard effort and know-how in one's line of work, strength of family networks, in-group solidarity, moderation in . . . lifestyle, quiet negation or sheer manipulation of the Soviet system' (Remennick 2006: 31). Anna Shternshis (2006) builds an argument for the hybridity of Russian Jewish identity as both 'Soviet' and 'kosher'. She shows how this hybridity has evolved historically, in connection with such characteristics of Jewish identity as Jewish pride, solidarity, and the preference for cultural products with Jewish content. Alice Nakhimovsky (2003) sees in Russian Jews such cultural characteristics as a particular type of Jewish humour as well as a playful and verbose use of language. These characteristics have created cultural codes which have contributed to in-group Jewish identification. Simultaneously, these characteristics have been used by the surrounding society in negative stereotyping.⁵

In his discussion of Jewish identity as expressed in fiction, Mikhail Krutikov (2003) adds two major characteristics: the influence of a Jewish role model (usually an older male relative, who becomes a yardstick of Jewishness) and emigration (as the ability to emigrate was a singular prerogative of Jews in the USSR from the 1960s to the 1990s). The prospect of emigration, whether real or theoretical, opened up questions of national loyalty and belonging, and also separated Jews into a distinct group, for better and for worse.

Another important dimension of Russian Jewish identity has been the adoption of what Slezkine (2004) coins as 'Pushkin faith'—admiration of and adherence to great Russian culture and literature. This led Russian Jews to identify with the Russian intelligentsia (the words 'Jew' and 'intelligent' were virtually synonymous in Russian) and as a result, despite the Soviet-era barriers and tacit quotas, Jews were markedly successful in the sphere of Russian high and popular

culture, including film-making. As in the United States, the ‘people of the book’ became what I would call the ‘people of the media’.⁶

Other characteristics that have had a profound effect on Russian Jewish identity have not yet been theorized: the Jewish body, Jewish names, and Jewish communicative performance.⁷ There are multiple references to these characteristics in Russian Jewish literature, folklore, and art, suggesting that they play an important role for both in-group identification and solidarity, as well as for negative stereotyping by outsiders, internalized at times as Jewish self-hatred.

All these characteristics combine into an uneven and contradictory picture which is constantly in flux and eludes definition. They reflect the ambivalent position of Russian Jews as—in the words of an old Soviet joke—‘either kikes or the pride of the Russian people’ (*ili zhidy ili gordost’ russkogo naroda*).⁸ Indeed, in the Soviet era Jews occupied a paradoxical position as what Larissa Remennick calls ‘discriminated elites’ (2006: 31). Though subject to discrimination, Jews were also capable of achieving incredible social success—they were simultaneously deprived and privileged. In turn, they were ambivalent about themselves: they were proud to be Jews yet embarrassed by it; they looked back on their shtetl past with nostalgia but also with repulsion. As Mariya Yelenevskaya and Larisa Fialkova have noticed: ‘Jewish self-stereotypes . . . are polar, and either idealize Jews, or humiliate them’ (2005: 80). Ryvkina notes that Russian Jews today combine the ‘unravelling of Jewish identity’ (2005: 107) with pro-Jewish positions. At the same time, Jews were also conflicted in their attitudes toward Russianness. In Ryvkina’s terms, their identity is ‘a Russian Jewish hybrid: a combination of Jewish sensibility and Russian-language culture’ (2005: 113). And so, despite Pushkin faith, Jews remained proud of their *yiddishe kop*, and looked down on people whom they perceived as ‘the sluggish and drunk Russian bears’. As the Russian Jewish writer Efraim Sevela notes, ‘earlier on, Jews were kicked around’; now they ‘demonstrate their superiority’ (quoted in Ryvkina 2005: 110).

Another locus of Jewish ambivalence is in gender expression and representation, which, as Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus note, ‘is in constant dialogue and conflict with “racial” and cultural identity and difference’ (1998: 7). Jewish gendered expressions have been theorized as ranging from ‘sissy’, with its historic variations of *yeshiva-bochur* and *mensch*—‘the East-European Jewish ideal of a gentle, timid, and studious male’ (Boyarin 1997: 2)—to ‘tough Jews’ (Breines 1990), with its variation ‘Muscle-Jew’ (Nordau 1980), and, later, ‘sabrá’ (Almog 2000). Jewish women can be perceived as materialistic, independent ‘princesses’ or selfless and overbearing ‘Jewish mothers’ (Prell 1996), ‘beautiful Jewesses’ or ‘ugly old kikes’. All these ambivalent images both challenge and reinforce gendered ethnic stereotypes within the context of Russian–Jewish relations.

In conjunction with gender, the theme of intermarriage, with its threat and lure, has been at the centre of the cultural imagination, reflecting relationships between Jews and non-Jews at least since the Middle Ages. The representation of

Russian–Jewish intermarriage is equally important for understanding the cultural positioning of the Jew as a desirable partner or as a forbidden one. This is still a work in progress, but demographic data hint at some trends: the fact that in Russia many more Jewish men than women intermarry (73 per cent of men and 62 per cent of women: Tolts 2004) may suggest that Jewish men are more desirable as partners (or have a more positive image) than Jewish women. Russian polls confirm these attitudes (Kreiz 2005: 17–18). With such a high rate of intermarriage among Russian Jews, the vast majority have mixed backgrounds. As Elena Nosenko's (2004) pioneering research indicates, these Jews (conversationally known as 'halves' and 'quarters') are even more ambivalent about their Jewishness than their parents.

In sum, the concept of ambivalence is needed to theorize the multiple ruptures and discontinuities of Russian Jewish identity, and this ambivalence arises at multiple points for Russian Jews, including national identification, intermarriage, and gender. For the purposes of my analysis, I will consider three expressions of this Russian Jewish ambivalent identity as they are represented on screen. First, there is the issue of national identification: do the Jewish characters feel Russian or Jewish? Are they at home in Russia? Second, there is the issue of intermarriage (or inter-ethnic romance), attitudes towards which serve as an important indicator of Jewish identity in the cinema. Is intermarriage desirable? Is it a viable option, and for whom? The third and final expression of Jewish ambivalence occurs in connection with the gendered construction of the characters. What are the gendered expressions of Russian Jewish identity, and how is this identity constructed through gender?

Love and Daddy: A Cinematic Context

I will look at two representative films, *Love* (*Lyubov'*) directed by Valery Todorovsky (1991), and *Daddy* (*Papa*), directed by Vladimir Mashkov (2004), to identify and discuss the ambivalent points of Jewish identification outlined above. Like any complex texts, these films are open to multiple interpretations, but my project here is to focus on the image of the Jew as these films create and circulate it. As Omer Bartov argues, if Jewish stereotypes were once produced and disseminated through other genres, today it is in film that 'one encounters the formation of stereotype and the impregnation of viewers' minds by those stereotypes' (2005: 311).⁹

Both *Love* and *Daddy* emerged in the cinematic context of post-Soviet Russia. The new openness of perestroika brought both Jewish culture and popular anti-semitism out into the public sphere. After decades during which Jewish topics in art had been silenced, bans were lifted, and films on Jewish issues started pouring onto the screens. This Jewish cinematic renaissance encompassed a wide range of subjects, genres, and authors,¹⁰ reflecting and shaping the ambivalent

portrayal of Jews. Whatever the topic, Jewish characters are always portrayed at one polar extreme or the other, either as victims or heroes, as miserable, persecuted women and elderly folk or as noble warriors. These films combine a view of Jews as members of refined Russian intelligentsia with stereotypical ethnic schmaltz, evoking feelings ranging from philosemitism to antisemitism. Other media, such as newspapers and fiction, featured similarly complex images of Jews (Elias and Bernstein 2006; Kreiz 2005).

Love and *Daddy* are among the more significant of the post-perestroika Jewish films in terms of critical success, audience popularity, and the celebrity of the film-makers and actors. *Love* was a winner of awards at the international festivals in Montpellier, Chicago, and Geneva, as well as at the national Russian festivals, Kinotavr and Sozvezdie. It also won the Russian film critics' annual award and was popular with audiences. *Daddy* won the audience popularity award at the Moscow International Film Festival and several awards at the national film festivals. It received a positive critical reception at home and was distributed abroad. Both films were clearly interpreted by critics and audiences as Jewish. Given their cultural significance, they provide excellent sites for studying the pervasive cultural ideas about Jewish identity that they both reflect and help shape.

Valery Todorovsky (b. 1962) and Vladimir Mashkov (b. 1963) are among the most popular and critically acclaimed Russian film-makers of the young generation. Todorovsky, who is ethnically Jewish, is the son of the famous film-makers Petr and Mira Todorovsky. His films have all been major hits, including *Katya Izmailova* (1994), *The Country of the Deaf* (1998), *Lover* (2002), and *My Stepbrother Frankenstein* (2004). In many cases he has also acted as screenwriter and producer (*Love* was both written and directed by him). The influential Russian daily *Nezavisimaya gazeta* called him 'the most successful director of the young generation' (Salnikova 2001).

Vladimir Mashkov, originally trained as an actor, became internationally famous for his portrayal of extremely masculine gangsters in *Thief* (1997), *Quickie* (2001), and *Tycoon* (2002). He is tagged as a sex symbol in Russia. *Daddy* is the second film which Mashkov has directed (the first, in 1998, was a comedy, *Sympathy Seeker*). He also co-wrote *Daddy* (with Ilya Rubinstein). Mashkov is ethnically Russian, but has a long history of representing Jewish characters. He played the handsome communist Aaron in *I Am Ivan, You Are Abraham* (1993), directed by Yolande Zauberman, for which he allegedly learned Yiddish (Mashkov 2005). In *Tycoon*, he played a character loosely based on Boris Berzovsky, a Russian Jewish businessman. Finally, he cast himself as Abram Schwarz, one of the main characters of *Daddy*.¹¹

Todorovsky's *Love* and Mashkov's *Daddy* have much in common: both focus on the Jewish theme, and both combine the genres of Bildungsroman, family drama, and romance. Both have Jewish and non-Jewish casting and crew, and thus combine Jewish and non-Jewish points of view.¹² Both films highlight criti-

cal moments in Russian Jewish history—the Holocaust and emigration. Both present a generally sympathetic picture of Jews. But even this sympathetic representation is deeply ambivalent.

Love/Hate Relationship

Love, as its title promises, is a love story of two inter-ethnic couples: one Russian and Tatar (Vadim and Marina), the other Russian and Jewish (Sasha and Masha). The courting of the first couple, although not ideal, ends with a wedding, and they are comfortably settled. The story of the second couple, which occupies most of the screen time, is more complex. Throughout the film, Sasha (Evgeny Mironov) and Masha (Natalya Petrova) grow, moving from an awkward start, through a violent row, to true intimacy and trust. Yet theirs is a story of disrupted love, of life together undone by antisemitism. Ultimately, it is a story about the impossibility of Russian–Jewish romance (in a sense Vadim and Marina function as a ‘control group’, demonstrating successful inter-ethnic romance). At the end of the film, Masha and her family are pushed out of their Russian life by persistent and omnipresent antisemitism. They have no choice but to go to Israel.

Love is thus also a film about emigration. Naturally, this is a recurrent theme in Jewish films, which often deal with the issues of displacement and otherness. Yet the focus of *Love* is not so much the Jewish experience as the Russian–Jewish relationship. Speaking more broadly, it is the story of both the potential for and the failure of love between different, or rather divided, people. This is why emigration is an end point in its plot, rather than a point of departure.

Filmed in a discomfiting tone typical of the post-perestroika era (Lawton 2002: 321), much of the *mise en scène* is set among cold, grey apartment blocks completely devoid of Moscow charm, or in cramped, dark interiors. The atmosphere of alienation and impending danger is emphasized by documentary footage of wars and catastrophes, introduced into the narrative through the depiction of Marina’s grandmother watching the television news. These images of violence and destruction hover over the entire movie.

Masha’s actions, including emigration, are merely a response to events that have been forced on her—literally. In one of the most visually haunting scenes, she recounts her experience of being victimized on two levels: as a woman and as a Jew. First she was gang-raped; then, when her mother tried to prosecute the offenders in a Soviet court the antisemitic judge sneered: ‘Go to Israel, demand your rights there.’ Masha’s story of rape and failed litigation is told through a montage of disjointed medium shots depicting her and Sasha doing chores around his house. The scene is shot without diegetic sound and is held together by Masha’s whispered voiceover. As if to express their alienation and the incommensurability of their experiences, the camera pans at high and low angles, with Sasha and Masha in the same frame, but in different corners, or upside down in

relation to each other. The characters finally make eye contact, but their mouths are conspicuously stuffed with food. Only at the end of the scene do they appear facing each other in close-up, filmed in grey, cold tones. The barrier is broken, and they both cry. Masha's voice trails off as she says: 'They call you a kike once . . .' and, presumably, your life is changed. As Mikhail Krutikov has said, 'Jewish identity is completely arbitrary, but once a person is marked as Jew it becomes his fate' (2003: 270).

Symbolically, there are no men in the family, as her mother has thrown out Masha's father for his inability to stand up for them (signalling his emasculation). Masha's family's femininity stands for weakness, passivity, and an inability to defend oneself. The stereotype of a Jewish sissy here is taken to the extreme—when male Jews do appear on the screen it is only as little boys or fragile old men. At the end, Jews are feminized to such a degree that they are not just 'Jewish male femme[s]' (Boyarin's term, 1997), they are actual women. In Masha's female household, Sasha—the man, the proletarian, the Russian—comes to help the weak, feminine, and incompetent Jews. His masculinity is brought out cinematically, as in the shot/reverse shots of him facing Masha, her mother, and her grandmother, lined up and smoking in an identical fashion, as if reproducing different versions of the same image.

Sasha helps the family in minor practical ways, but cannot protect them from antisemitic harassment. Antisemitic slurs are scattered throughout the film (for example a policeman near a synagogue asks Sasha, 'Looking for a kike bride?'), yet the audience's most direct diegetic exposure to antisemitism is through the anonymous voice of a telephone harasser, who persistently rings Masha at home. Antisemitism does not have a face; it is everywhere, like the air. Sasha's attempts to confront this antisemite and meet him face to face fail: when he rushes to the deserted phone booth, he sees only his own reflection in the glass. Everybody is an antisemite. This antisemitism robs Masha of her sexuality, and she can have sexual relations only once she escapes it, on the brink of her departure. The silent scene of final intimacy between the lovers is the only poetic episode in the movie. Filmed in a series of beatific close-ups, awash in warm cream and yellow tones, it stands out from the gloomy colours of other scenes. The only sound is the noise of airplanes, emphasizing Masha's impending departure.

At the end of the film, Masha's family is gone. Sasha comes into their empty apartment. He brings a phone with him, and plugs it in, perhaps hoping to deal with the antisemitic caller, or perhaps, symbolically taking the Jews' place. The Jews are gone, and only Russians are left. Sasha, the good Russian, comes to settle the score with the bad, antisemitic Russian. But Jewish absence is as conspicuous as Jewish presence. As Krutikov sadly comments, 'Antisemitism is a core element of the Russian collective identity, but at the same time, life without Jews is unimaginable to the Russian mentality' (2003: 270). Historically Jews have played a special role in the Russian national imagination, as paradigmatic inter-

nal others whose 'otherness' served as a touchstone for Russian 'sameness'. Thus Russian national identity evolved in reflexive connection with perceptions of Jewishness: stereotypical Russian soulfulness, generosity, and rootedness in the Russian soil emerge in juxtaposition to stereotypical Jewish intellectualism, calculated pragmatism, and rootlessness or double loyalty.

In *Love*, Masha has to leave because she is Jewish. Yet 'Jew' appears to be an empty signifier. Masha's Jewishness is residual at best. Her dark hair and slightly hooked nose mark her as non-Russian. Her mother is a dentist, perceived as a Jewish profession. Her grandmother's voice has shtetl-like intonations, and she has hopes for a Jewish match for Masha. The family's religious observance amounts to serving matzo with tea, instead of cookies (rather than as a part of Passover celebrations). But what really makes Masha Jewish is antisemitism. In fact, according to Todorovsky's film, Jews are not intrinsically different from Russians; they are othered through antisemitism and hatred. The key to understanding Jewishness as *Love* presents it is victimhood.

Here is the parting message of *Love* on the place of Jews in Russia. As to national loyalty, the Jews have left for Israel. As to Jewish–Russian romance, it is impossible. As to gender, the Jews are portrayed as feminized, confirming antisemitic stereotypes of them as weak, disempowered, and unmasculine. That is why the bad Russians can rape or torture them, and even the good, strong Russians like Sasha cannot save them. The Russian Jewish stereotypes are polar—they are either 'kikes' or 'the pride of the Russian people'. In *Love*, Jewish representation is located at the pole of victimhood. Even though the sympathies of the film-makers are clearly with the Jews, they emerge as displaced, effeminate, and powerless. The film thus represents one extreme of the Jewish ambivalent position.

Daddy and the Motherland

Daddy is based on Aleksandr Galich's play *Sailors' Rest*, written between 1945 and 1958, and banned from performance for over thirty years. In 1993 Oleg Tabakov (the famous director, who played a minor role in the original banned production in 1958) directed the play, with 24-year-old Mashkov cast as the elderly Abram. The production was so successful that it ran for over 400 performances. In 2004 the script was turned into a \$4 million feature, produced by Jewish producer Igor Tolstunov and financed by the Russian Ministry of Culture. Even though the narrative is set in the first half of the twentieth century, the film begs to be read within a contemporary context.

The entire form of the film is different from that of *Love*. Gone is the post-perestroika gloominess: the film is shot in a socialist realism-meets-Hollywood style; the colours are bright and vivid, and the shots are long and deep, letting the



Figure 1 *Daddy*: Egor Beroev as David Schwarz

viewer fully enjoy the perspective (metaphorically, a promising future). And even as the internal spaces remain dark and cramped, the outside shots are full of air and often flooded with sunlight. The editing is Hollywood-smooth.

Daddy is a Bildungsroman—the coming-of-age story of David Schwarz. As is characteristic of such films, the narrative is structured as a triptych—childhood, youth, and young adulthood. The childhood segment takes place in 1929 in Tulchin,¹³ where the young David (Andrey Rozentend) is growing up. The opening scene at a railway station introduces the leitmotifs of trains and railway tracks. For the Jewish imagination operative in the transnational media circuits (including post-Soviet Russia), trains symbolize both the Holocaust and social/geographical mobility. Low-angled close-ups of rotating wheels and pumping pistons (repeated throughout the film) also echo the visual aesthetics of the avant-garde Russian Jewish film-maker Dziga Vertov.

This segment sets the stage for future drama, namely David's conflict with his father Abram (Vladimir Mashkov). Abram is portrayed with sympathy but stereotypically. He is a shtetl Jew—grimy, scheming, worried, but deeply invested in his son's musical education. David, despite his 'Jewish' violin, is strong and proud; he is a 'new Jew', as tough as his Russian friends. (He makes a bet with a gang of rough local boys over who will stay on the tracks longer in front of an oncoming train—and wins.) Abram collects postcards of European cities (symbols of his unrealized dreams); David cherishes only one picture, a photograph of Moscow (a symbol of his future)—hinting at his national loyalty.

Yet David inherits Abram's dream. As Abram puts it: 'A big hall, beautiful men and women look at the stage, and they hear: David Schwarz. You come out, start playing, and they cry "Bravo!" and applaud, send you flowers and ask you to play again.' Abram's dream is a paradigmatic Jewish success story, yet David is hardly another one of those musical prodigies whom Isaac Babel described as 'Jewish dwarfs . . . with swollen blue heads' (2002: 628). Neither is he a descendant of the folksy 'fiddler on the roof' reminiscent of Sholem Aleichem's Stempenyu or Chekhov's pathetic Rothschild. David (had he been real) would have belonged to the elite group of Jewish musicians, along with David Oistrakh, Elizaveta Gilels, Boris Goldstein, and Mikhail Fikhtengolts, who conquered both local and international stages in the Soviet era (Svet 1968).

The scenes of David's adventures are interspersed with those of another Jewish character, Meyer Wolf (Sergey Dontsov-Dreiden), who returns from Palestine. It is the meeting with Meyer that sets up another theme in the movie—that of a national home. In an extraordinary monologue, Meyer tells David that his return is a true homecoming: 'When I was young and travelled with my father, in every shtetl there was a wise man who said, go to the Wailing Wall . . . But the Wailing Wall proved to be just some old lousy wall, and when I came to Jerusalem, it turned out that I had come not home, but to a foreign country, where one can only weep and die, and where people are strangers to me.' As the camera pans from the startled and confused David to Meyer, who is turning to leave, the long pause indicates the importance of Meyer's words for David. Perhaps this moment poses to David (and the audience) the question of his loyalty, and asks him to locate his own Wailing Wall. This is the first point in the film where the loyalty of Jews to their Russian motherland is stated directly (in Meyer's words). Later on this loyalty will also be expressed through narrative. But beyond the diegetic importance, this moment has particular resonance for contemporary Russian Jewish audiences. In Galich's play, Meyer's words might have reflected the experiences of early Jewish settlers in Palestine, but in the 2004 movie they refer more immediately to recent Russian immigrants to Israel, some of whom, like Meyer, returned to Russia.¹⁴

The second segment takes place in 1939 in Moscow. The Jewish dream has come true: a grown-up David (Egor Beroev) is playing solo at a May Day concert at the Great Hall of the Conservatory. Moreover, he has a beautiful Russian girlfriend, Tanya (Olga Krasko).¹⁵ The scenes of David's triumph are visually contrasted with the shots of Abram, who has come for an unannounced visit. He is portrayed as a pathetic shtetl Jew in the big city. In a conspicuously comic sequence the camera follows Abram's awkward walk through bright red and white Moscow, as he juggles his meagre luggage and bags of garlic (a markedly Jewish flavouring). Although Mashkov's ethnic acting style was probably supposed to echo Solomon Michoels's charming *luftmentsh* in the classic 1925 Soviet Yiddish film *Jewish Luck*, it fails to do so. Instead, his portrayal of Abram in these scenes

reproduces the crudest stereotypes of the Jewish body (Gilman 1996), including the shaking hands and ‘clumsy, heavy-footed gait’ (Muscat 1909, quoted in Gilman 1992: 228). Predictably, the visit results in a falling out—David rejects Abram, with his scheming, his garlic, and his worries. In this way, David rejects the ‘old Jewishness’.

The third segment of *Daddy* takes place in 1944. Relying on a flashback structure, it intercuts David’s fighting in the Second World War with his delirious visions as he lies injured in a hospital train. Two scenes are particularly significant here. In the first, one of the nurses who happens to be a friend from the past tells David about her last meeting with Tanya, now David’s wife. She describes how the women were listening to the news on the street radio, read by the legendary Soviet announcer Yury Levitan, followed by a broadcast of David himself performing a piece by Tchaikovsky. This scene encapsulates the place of the Jews in Russian culture: the official voice of the motherland throughout the war is the voice of a Jew, Levitan; the music of the national composer which follows this voice is performed by another Jew. Importantly, in Galich’s play, David plays a mazurka by Wieniawski, a Polish Jewish composer, not a concerto by Tchaikovsky, a composer who is a symbol of Russian national music. In this way, the movie deliberately places emphasis on David’s embrace of Russianness, while at the same time giving him (and by extension other Jews) a more central place in Russian culture. In the second key scene, David has a vision of Abram, who tells David the story of his execution in the Tulchin ghetto. His words come to life on screen, presenting the now iconic image of Jews with yellow stars, walking towards their death; Abram walks next to Meyer. Here *Daddy* also departs from Galich’s original story. In the play, Abram does not die passively: provoked by the antisemitic insults of a local Nazi collaborator, he hits him with David’s childhood violin, and is shot. The presence of a Russian Nazi collaborator and Abram’s active resistance did not fit *Daddy*’s narrative.

Intercut with Abram’s story is David’s story of fighting for Tulchin, told in voiceover as the camera surveys the desolate landscape with anti-tank barriers. Finally the camera finds the wall next to the railway station, where young David used to play. Echoing an earlier scene, David’s voice continues, ‘Meyer went to Jerusalem to see the Wailing Wall, and I saw it in our town—a simple stone wall.’ As David asks Abram for forgiveness, Abram reassures him: ‘This is your motherland for which you are fighting.’ The statement is clear: the true Wailing Wall is in Tulchin, and the real motherland is Russia. Both Abram and David made their choice.

How is Jewishness expressed in *Daddy*? David is portrayed as an *über*-Jew. He is typed as both Jewish-looking (with wavy dark hair and large expressive eyes) and conventionally attractive. Rejecting centuries-long stereotypes of Jews as unfit for military service, he is a fighter (his wounds make him even more of a battle hero). But he is not only a man of the sword, he is also a man of culture—a

talented violinist, recognized nationally. He is not only the son of a shtetl Jew, he is the husband of a beautiful Russian woman, and (as the script hints) the father of a Russian Jewish son. So, in all respects David embodies the heroic (as opposed to the victimized) pole of Russian Jewish ambivalence. David's Jewishness is less arbitrary than Masha's—he is connected to his roots more directly—through a shtetl childhood, through losing his father in the Holocaust, and even through a reference, however negative, to the larger picture of Jewish history and culture (the Wailing Wall, Palestine). Moreover, the very negotiation between the 'old Jew' and the 'new Jew' is typical of modern Jewish histories, since, as Joseph Roth noted, 'Attacking the tradition is an old Jewish tradition' (quoted in Hoberman 1998: 281). But what emerges in this negotiation is a rejection of victimhood. David, the new Jew, is a proud, strong, and dignified Jew, and he is fighting on the same side of the barricades as the Russians.

The film also marks a change in the content of Jewish identity, which becomes positive (or active) in a particularly Russian way. This new content emerges from a combination of 'Pushkin faith' and professional excellence. And so, paradoxically, the positive active Jewish content comes from the leading Jewish position in Russian culture. Jews are not only staying with the Russians, they are becoming the best of them. This Jewish drive for excellence becomes a source of assimilation. Jews become Russians because they are so good at being Jewish.

So what is the message of *Daddy* on the place of Jews in Russia? As to national loyalty, the Jews in *Daddy*, from Meyer to David, choose Russia. The Jews are staying, and these Jews are men who are marrying and impregnating Russian women. And if the old generation were led 'as sheep to the slaughter', the new generation have fought for their motherland and reasserted their masculinity.

Significantly, there are no positive characters of charismatic Jewish women in *Daddy*: the film's only Jewish women are sad, needy Hanna and her fat, overbearing mother. They are portrayed sympathetically, but they are hardly charismatic. In order to give a positive portrayal of Jews, the film needed to depict them as men. The impossibility of creating a positive Jewish female character confirms an unfortunate stereotype of the undesirability of Jewish women (Berger 1996: 102).

Ambivalence and Identity

Jews appear in *Daddy* and *Love* at opposite ends of the spectrum. If in *Love* they were portrayed as victims, in *Daddy* a different image emerges—a rooted, masculine, and powerful Jew, 'the pride of the Russian people'. *Love* and *Daddy* capture different moments in Russian Jewish history. *Love* is a film about emigration, yet it is an unusual film in this genre. Emigration films are often made from the vantage point of the émigrés themselves, reflecting their experiences of leaving the old home and coming to terms with a new one. *Love* is a story of emigration filmed from the vantage point of those who stayed. Therefore the journey taken

by Sasha from his own antisemitism to outright advocacy, and from indifference to deep sympathy, is more important than Masha's trip from Russia to Israel. This is indeed reflected in Todorovsky's autobiographical comment: 'When I shot *Love* in 1990, the country was going through a very unpleasant moment: mass emigration, empty shelves in the stores, and an atmosphere of impending civil war in the air . . . And I remember how I argued, sitting in a kitchen with my friends, tried to convince them: wait, don't leave, it will get better . . .' (Salnikova 2001).

As a snapshot of the mass exodus of Russian Jews, *Love* presents a grim picture. The Jews are forced out of Russia. Their decision to go to Israel is influenced by the direct experience of antisemitism. Historically, these reasons are not typical. Persecution and antisemitism were not the main 'push' factors of the Russian Jewish exodus of the 1990s. People left for a variety of reasons, mainly economic difficulties and political instability, but also the hope of improving their quality of life. Antisemitism contributed to the decision to emigrate mainly on the level of latent fear.¹⁶ Neo-fascist organizations such as Pamyat never implemented their threats, and the majority of Soviet Jews did not take them seriously. But this is the story that Todorovsky chose to present in 1991, when antisemitism was a newly permissible subject in cinema. Indeed, film critics in Russia hailed *Love* as an honest look at antisemitism. However, the portrayal of Russians as antisemites also entails the portrayal of Jews as victims.

In contrast, Mashkov captures a different historic moment. The enormous wave of emigration is over. The Jewish population in Russia has diminished dramatically (recent estimates range from 230,000 to 500,000: Aviv and Shneer 2005). At the same time, there has been a great surge in the establishment and rebuilding of Jewish communities, including cultural centres and educational and political organizations (Aviv and Shneer 2005). Some Jews have joined new Russian professional and business elites, and even though their numbers are small they have achieved a strong public presence. All this has led to a resurgence of the old antisemitic suspicions of Jewish political, economical, and cultural dominance, and foreign loyalties.

Daddy can be read as a response to these attitudes: without underplaying Jewish membership of elite circles, the film gives it a highly positive framing, simultaneously alleviating anxieties over Jewish 'double loyalty'. The Jews in *Daddy* have not only stayed in Russia, but they have also integrated into Russian culture and intermarried. They have chosen to live in Russia, to fight for it, and to call it their motherland—by implication, like real-life Russian Jews today. Indeed, as Slezkine writes, based on the 2002 census, 'More and more Russian Jews (the absolute majority) marry non-Jews, strongly identify with Russia as a country, and show no interest in perpetuating their Jewishness in any sense whatever' (2004: 361).

Paradoxically, along with a resurgence of antisemitic attitudes in post-Soviet Russia, there is also a greater acceptance of Jews as a result of the emergence of

new cultural others. These include Muslims from the Caucasus and central Asia, perceived as terrorists, enemies, and in general racially and culturally inferior people. In contrast to these new others Jews appear as more acceptable members of the Russian nation. The question about the future of Russian Jews remains open. But it is clear that contemporary Russia emerges as a site of Jewish expressions of identity that were not possible before. It is in this context that *Daddy* represents Jews positively.

The fluid concept of ambivalence provides insight into Russian Jewish identity as it is constructed in both films. Here I have considered three expressions of this ambivalence: national loyalty, intermarriage, and gender. In *Love*, Jews are forced out of Russia by pervasive antisemitism, and must find their home elsewhere, in their true home, Israel.¹⁷ Their Jewishness is mainly a result of the antisemitism, rather than any authentic or identifiably Jewish culture. In *Daddy*, Jews are not only staying in Russia, they are becoming the elite of its citizens. In the paradoxical affirmation of their Jewishness in its Russian incarnation (professional excellence), they take a leading role in Russian culture and history. It is through being Jewish that they become exemplary Russians, or through being Russians that they become exemplary Jews.

In *Love*, intermarriage is impossible. In *Daddy*, it is not only possible, it is a viable and productive option (at least for Jewish men), one which is even preferable to in-group marriage. Indeed, recent polls show that the majority of non-Jews in Russia are neutral or positive about marrying Jews (Slezkine 2004: 361).

The representation of gender in *Love* feeds into long-standing stereotypes: Jews are not just metaphorical 'sissies'—they are actual women. Passive, powerless, and weak, Jews are in need of defence and advocacy. In *Daddy*, Jews are male. Even as *Daddy* represents both 'old Jew' and 'new Jew', the identification is with the winning image of the 'new Jew'. However, the conspicuous absence of positive images of Jewish women is also a perpetuation of Russian gender and ethnic stereotypes.

Today, when post-Soviet Russia is struggling with the creation of a new collective identity, film (and other media) are using images of others to draw and redraw symbolic borders between 'us' and 'them'. Both *Love* and *Daddy* reflect this struggle. Both films aim to resolve the tension of hybrid Russian Jewish identity by forcing it to one side or the other. *Love* ends by choosing Jewish identity (and Israeli nationality), *Daddy* chooses Russia and the Russians. Through the delicate shifts of inclusions and exclusions, both films reveal ambivalence about Jewishness. On the one hand, 'the Jew' becomes a stockpile of negative images—a symbolic trashcan of unwanted meanings and polluting influences. But at the same time 'the Jew' is also a projection of the desirable qualities and character that a Russian collective identity aspires to. The Jew is ambivalence incarnate.

Notes

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- 1 The term ‘Hodl’s children’ is from Slezkine 2004, and refers to Tevye’s second daughter in Sholem Aleichem’s *Tevye’s Daughters* (dramatized as *Fiddler on the Roof*). Hodl is the first to leave the shtetl, to follow her revolutionary husband. ‘Tsaytl’s children’ is also from Slezkine 2004, and refers to Tevye’s eldest daughter, who marries a tailor from the shtetl.
- 2 This disconnection is even expressed linguistically. In contemporary Russian, two different words are used to mean ‘an ethnic Jew’ (*evrei*) and ‘a religious Jew’ (*iudaist*); see e.g. Chkhartishvili 2006.
- 3 For more background on primordialist and constructivist approaches to ethnicity see Comaroff (1994), Scott (1990), Smith (1998), and the special issue of *Theory and Society*, 20 (1991), on ethnicity in the USSR.
- 4 Many scholars of culture would disagree with Gitelman’s argument. Starting from Edward T. Hall’s now classic study (1966), the established view is that the most profound and resilient cultural differences are found in the invisible, ‘tacit’ understandings that cultures share, rather than in the visible, tangible differences of language, custom, dress, food, etc. But this issue is beyond the scope of the present discussion.
- 5 These characteristics are transnational and resonate with east European Jewish traditions elsewhere, for instance in the US. For characteristics of Jewish American humour and culture, see Desser and Friedman 2003: 1–34.
- 6 For an excellent analysis of a similar process in the United States, see Gabler 1988.
- 7 For research on the issues of the Jewish body and communication in other cultural contexts, see e.g. Gilman (1996) and Tannen (1981). As to Jewish names, there is an extensive literature that covers history and etymology (Singerman 2001), including Russian Jewish names (Feldblyum 1998), but not their social and cultural function.
- 8 I am grateful to Gennady Estraiikh for reminding me about this joke.
- 9 A similar argument is made for Asian Americans, whose stereotypes range from ‘yellow peril’ to ‘model minority’, and are expressed cinematically, as well as in other genres of popular culture (Lee 1999).
- 10 For the study of the Jewish representational tradition in Soviet cinema, see Chernenko 2006 and Hoberman 1994. The phenomenon of Jewish film in the post-Soviet era was so prevalent that in 1992 the foremost Russian film journal *Iskusstvo kino* published a special ‘Jewish’ issue (vol. 5). The topics of these Jewish films ranged from literary classics (several adaptations of Babel, Sholem Aleichem, and Kuprin’s *Gambrinus*) to the topics of the Holocaust (*Lady’s Tailor*, dir. L. Gorovets, 1990; *The Parrot Who Spoke Yiddish*, dir. E. Sevela, 1991; *Get Thee Out!*, dir. D. Astrakhan, 1991), antisemitism (*To See Paris and Die*, dir. A. Proshkin, 1993), emigration (*Nice Weather on Deribasovskaya*, *Rain on Brighton Beach*, dir. L. Gaiday, 1992), and the history of Soviet Jews (...and the Wind Returns, dir. M.

- Kalik, 1990; *Chekist*, dir. A. Rogozhkin, 1991). There were also several co-productions, among them *Passport* (dir. G. Daneliya, 1990, USSR/Austria/France/Israel); *Jewish Vendetta* (dir. A. Shabataev, 1999, Russia/Israel); and four Russian/French films by P. Lungin: *Taxi Blues* (1990), *Luna Park* (1992), *Tycoon* (2002, Russia/France/Germany), and *Roots* (2006).
- 11 Unsurprisingly, the paths of Mashkov and Todorovsky crossed. Todorovsky directed and Mashkov acted in *Katya Izmailova* (1994). Further, Mashkov's acting partner in Tabakov's production of *Sailors' Rest* was Evgeny Mironov, who played the main role in *Love*.
- 12 They also had the same producer, Igor Tolstunov.
- 13 Tulchin is the town where Babel's Baska grows up, in the story 'Father'. This is potentially also a reference to Tulczyn as a site of Jewish martyrdom in 1648 (Fram 1998). The story of this martyrdom was widely circulated and available in Russian, but there is no way of knowing whether Galich was exposed to the story.
- 14 For more background on Jewish emigration from Palestine see Alroey 2003. For contemporary emigration from Israel to Russia, see Ryvkina 2005.
- 15 *Daddy's* cast had celebrity status in Russia: the actors playing David and Tanya (Egor Beroev and Olga Krasko) went on to star in *Turkish Gambit* (dir. D. Faiziev, 2005), a Russian blockbuster based on the cult novel by Boris Akunin. Beroev plays the leading male role of the charismatic officer Fandorin, and Krasko plays the leading female role.
- 16 For an overview of the motivation to emigration, see the empirical studies by Al-Haj and Leshem (2000: 11–13) and Yelenevskaya and Fialkova (2005: 47–63). Although their data differ slightly, both report that the majority of immigrants were motivated by economic and social concerns. Antisemitism was not a defining factor.
- 17 This conclusion echoes the message of earlier international films on Jewish topics, such as the acclaimed *Europa, Europa* (dir. Agnieszka Holland, 1990), in which the protagonist negotiates his three different identities—German, Jewish, and Russian. But in the end he chooses his Jewish identity in Israel.

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