

# **'Platoon' Relations within the Trans-national Space of the Soviet Academic Diaspora**

## **Introduction**

My work responds to Brubaker's (2005) concerns about the 'diaspora' diaspora' effect on sociology of national identity and migration, and the related thought by Kaplan (2007) about a national community as something more tangible and close-knit than just 'imagined' by Anderson (1991).

## **Basic concepts**

In sociology of nationalism there is a general demand for 'limiting' the boundaries of the imaginative thinking about national communities, and thus epistemologically turning them into 'political communities' of a specific civic relationship, more tangible than just 'imagination' (Kaplan 2005; 2006; 2007). Within the diaspora studies, in particular, there is a large problem area related to this issue. The diaspora concept as such is 'under-theorized' as 'too broad' and lacking specific criteria (Anthias 1998; Brubaker 2005; Vertovec 1997; Wahlbeck 2002). This 'under-development' of the diaspora theory results in the 'proliferation of a variety of putative diasporas' (Brubaker 2005), which has its pros and cons. On the one hand, the over-abundance of diasporic groups confuses scholars and makes them search for more rigid criteria for assigning a group the diaspora status. On the other hand, some of these putative diasporas can be epistemologically quite legitimate and heuristically useful for thinking about 'diaspora as a typological tool' (Anthias 1998). The question is whether a diasporic segment – rather than an overall ethno-national diaspora - can be a valid heuristic device when we think about diasporic life.

Recent sociological thoughts on national identity are marked with 'conflation' approaches. One such approach is related to the fusion of friendship and nationalism, synthesized by Kaplan (2005; 2006; 2007) on the grounds provided by Aristotle, George Mosse and feminist scholarship. In this connection, the earliest work of Edward Shils (1957) presents the idea of nationalistic friendship or comradeship, grounded on Shils' revision of 'primary group' – or 'platoon', as Hearn (2008) further conceptualizes this position. Through the prism of sociology of work and organisations, Shils' 'platoon' can be understood in broader terms – that is, as a *jobsite*, since people frequently initiate friendships or *platoon relationships* at work.

Another conceptual conflation is that of 'class' (whose one operationalization unit is occupation or work) and 'ethnicity'/'nationality'.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, considering the relationship between these three elements, it makes sense to think about one more fusion – a *triangular* relationship between *occupation*, *friendship* and *national identity*.

Thus on the one hand, we have come across the sociologically salient concept of the 'occupation/friendship/nationalism conflation'. On the other hand, diaspora is conceptualized as 'a segment of nation in exile' (Malkki 1994), and diasporic consciousness is largely

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<sup>1</sup> For more detail on the 'class-ethnicity conflation' in nationalism studies, see Riga (2008).

inclusive of the *pre-exilic* consciousness (Brubaker 2005; Clifford 1994; Safran 1991; Vertovec 1997). Logically, the occupation/friendship/nationalism conflation should be salient in diaspora studies as well. It might make sense to use this conceptual conflation as a heuristic tool for understanding the trans-national diasporic space, part of which - according to its definition by Faist (2000) - are *bonds of pre-exilic friendship*.

The purpose of my research is thus to see to what extent the pre-exilic platoon friendship can impact upon diasporic space through the popular heuristic device of Anthony Smith's (1997) 'Golden Age' myth. This knowledge is to help us to see to what extent the platoon friendship can become a criterion for a putative ethno-professional diaspora. I look at the diasporic ethno-professionalism – or national professionalism – as one of the 'complex ways [in which] class and ethnicity fuse or converge' (Riga 2008: 650; Gellner 1996) and reveal a potential for shaping a diasporic segment.

### **A note on methodology**

Grounded on my recently completed PhD (2008), this paper presents a work-in-progress and maps possible directions for future research on *immigrant identity* and *putative ethno-professional diaspora*. I have interviewed twenty-five academic immigrants from the former Soviet Russia now working in leading universities in the UK and the USA. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and over the phone, with the average interview duration of three hours. This cohort includes people who left Russia in the late 1980s-early 1990s – shortly before and after the Soviet collapse – and now form the generation of the so-called Soviet academic immigrants, which is different from later waves of academic migration from Russia.

The sample embraces people who managed to graduate from the University before the official Soviet breakdown, and are now of the age of between forty and seventy. They come from the same elite universities in Moscow, Leningrad and Novosibirsk and represent a variety of academic disciplines – though mathematicians and physicists are in the majority, correspondingly comprising ten and six respondents. The prevailing mathematicians had graduated from the Faculty of Mechanics and Mathematics/*MechMat* (Moscow State University/MSU). Some of them had worked in the Landau Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences/SAS.

## **Literature Review**

### **Diaspora and its problems**

Two basic features can characterize the term 'diaspora' – its high frequency and 'under-theorisation' (Anthias 1998; Vertovec 1997). In fact, the concept of diaspora has various scholarly definitions falling 'within several different academic traditions' (Wahlbeck 2002: 229). As a result, the term has become 'kind of mantra' (Anthias 1998: 557) to cover 'any phenomenon of dispersion from a place [of origin]...meaning nothing more than the idea of displacement and the maintenance of a connection with a real or imagined homeland' (Dufiox 2008: 2).

*“Diaspora” is the term often used today to describe practically any population that is considered “deterritorialized” or “trans-national” – that is, which has originated in a land other than that in which it currently resides, and whose social, economic, and political networks cross the borders of nation-states or, indeed, span the globe...the current over-use and under-theorization of the notion of “diaspora”...threatens the term’s descriptive usefulness...the term has become a loose reference (Vertovec 1997: 277).*

As seen from Vertovec’s quotation, even such features as the ‘global span’ and network activities are not enough to think about a group as a diaspora. Therefore many scholars of diaspora studies strongly object to this proletarianization of the term and point to the ‘typological’ and ‘heuristic’ problems (Anthias 1998: 33) deriving from the ‘diaspora’ phenomenon (Brubaker 2005).

First, ‘diaspora’ fails to be a valid ‘typological/heuristic tool [that would] describe a social condition’, because it neglects the intra-diasporic social distinctions and experiences such as gender, class, occupation; and thus falsely presents expatriates as a homogenous body (Anthias 1998: 558). In his classic conceptualization of diaspora, Safran (1991) shares this concern about the lack of social class connotation within this term. So does Dufoix (2008: 33) in his reference to another classic ‘diaspora’ version: he notes on Clifford’s (1994) failure to ‘articulate the differences within diasporas, in particular, the role played by differences of social status in the perception or the construction of ethnicity’.

Second, diaspora studies lack a substantial analysis of intra-diasporic connections within emerging trans-national social spaces and/or diasporic spaces (Anthias 1998; Cohen 1997). The third missing element in diaspora studies is the missing exploration of diaspora cycles (Dufoix 2008; Waldinger 2008). As Dufoix (ibid: xiv) observes, ‘scholars fail to...explain why diaspora communities may arise and decline’. In other words, these critiques are about the existence of several diasporic forms within and beyond ethnic boundaries. In this connection Safran (1991: 95) asks: ‘How long does it take for a diaspora consciousness to develop, and what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for its survival?’ ‘By treating the concept of diaspora as an ideal type, it becomes possible to study the causes and consequences of diaspora formation’, says Wahlbeck (2002: 231).

Thus among the un-answered questions within the ‘still under-developed diaspora theory’ (Wahlbeck 2002: 231) are (a) trans-national intra-diasporic connections and dispersal maintenance; and (b) diaspora cycles. Thinking about these issues, neither of the mentioned scholars denies the term ‘diaspora’ as such. Their views on diaspora are more related to the demand for the clarification of the term and the development of additional criteria of diasporic classification rather than rejection of the term. The suggested ‘critical eye’ solution is the re-formulation of the term ‘within a paradigm of social divisions and identities’ (Anthias 1996; 1998) – such as diasporic women or academic diasporas. The existence of ‘putative diasporas’, with their additional criteria, is to enrich the understanding of the diaspora phenomenon if these diasporas match criteria more tangible than just ‘imagination’ of communities (Brubaker 2005; Tololyan 1996).

In response to these issues, my case is based on the following three ideas, deriving from both the critique and recognition of the “‘dispora’ diaspora’ effect: (1) ‘a proliferation of putative diasporas’; (2) a consequent necessity of ‘some stringency of definition’ (Brubaker 2005: 3-4); and (3) the importance of enriching the diaspora theory through additional studies of homeland attachments of dispersed communities (Wahlbeck 2002: 231).

### **Socio-cultural locality of national identity**

The intersecting concepts of *class* and *friendship* have been recently emphasized as contributing to the construction of national identity. The nationalistic discourses abound in the vocabulary of class, status and occupational differences. For example, ethno-symbolists point to socio-cultural fine gradations within the crystallization of national identity. In functionalist terms, national myth is ‘contextualized within the daily social and political life of the [particular] community and in the [particular] arena of pragmatic socio-cultural communication’ (Overing 1997: 8). Smith (2004: 198, as cited in Hearn 2008: 40) stresses that national identity is ‘sustained through countless symbolic processes’ and ‘located in [various] cultural and symbolic spheres’, and recognises ‘the different kinds of collective cultural identity’ with a focus on ‘elements of [national] myth, memory, value, symbol and tradition’ (ibid). Thus ‘the idea of unique cultural and spiritual entity provides a possible source of common identity’ (Cibulka 2000: 326).

### **Friendship**

As for modernists, they do too acknowledge the idea of socio-cultural locality and, especially, class and status as impacting upon feelings of collective belonging. Thus writing about ‘invented’ tradition, Hobsbawm (1983: 272) observes that it includes ‘the commemoration of notable figures from the local past. Eriksen (2002: 45) sees ‘the political bonds and vocabularies of select [social groups] more directly linked to states and institutions’ as directly constructing a modern nation. Hobsbawm and Mann conclude on the modern period as ‘producing a *fusion* of national and class identities in practice’ (Hearn 2008: 187, emphasis added).

Analysing Anderson’s (1991) fundamental work, Kaplan (2007: 239) notes: ‘The expansion of [nationalistic] ties between distant others is not an open-ended process. The significance of national identification is in the way that the nation is imagined as socially limited’. In this connection, Shils – who ‘was actually concerned with matters strikingly different from those primordialists have tended to pursue’ – asks, ‘How do large ideological systems succeed or fail in insinuating themselves into the fabric of primary groups?’ (Hearn 2008: 5). Referring to Mosse as a lonely pioneer on this route, Kaplan (2007: 225) believes that ‘understanding national identity requires a reappraisal of friendship as a political sentiment’, which studies of nationalism ‘fail to acknowledge’. Based on the ‘Aristotelian paradigm of civic friendship’ and feminist views on ‘male fraternity as a mediator of both patriotism and nationalism’, Kaplan (ibid: 227) points to the emotional inter-subjectivity of friendship, ‘incorporated into the rhetorical devices of nationalism’. In reference with the inter-subjective power of symbolic processes, Schopflin (1997: 21) says that the purpose of the nationalistic ritual – that is ‘participants’ recognition of one another’ – is ‘to establish patterns of [their] social

dependence'. Consequently, the success of the nationalistic ritual is about the participants' 'mutual inter-dependence' (ibid). Thus Kaplan concludes on the nation – or its segment – as 'a political [rather than "imagined"] *community of friendship*', the latter mobilizing the power of ethno-national symbols in people's identities. Thus conceptualizing national identity, Smith (1991: 162, cited in Hearn 2008: 40) recognises the validity of its constitutive 'fraternity'-grounded national slices by observing that one "function of national identity is the prominence it gives to realizing the ideal of fraternity" and by viewing "nation" as "simply a sum of many inter-related families".

### **Myth and 'platoon' comradeship**

Kaplan (2007: 226) also links solidarity with nationalistic myth, pointing to 'the recurrent application of family metaphors in national discourses' and the presence of 'a rhetoric of solidarity [with its multitude of forms] in the rise of modern nationalism'. There are actually two ways of how this link may reveal itself: collective appropriation of myths, and representations of primary collectivities in nationalistic myths. It means that for the myth to be appropriated successfully, it should exist and have its own peculiarities on the primary group level.

According to Schopflin (1997), myth is a nationalistic narrative, a set of nationalistic ideas, which can be quite broad. However, to be fleshed out and brought to life, these ideas need to be articulated, or acted out – that is processed or operationalized through the nationalistic ritual. Without a ritual, a myth will have no power. A ritual is an event that cannot be performed in a vacuum – it needs locality, a specific group of people to articulate the myth in a specific locality. Even if the myth is very broad, it is to be articulated by concrete people and within a specific socio-cultural context, which involves very specific, concrete symbolic objects. And to make the ritual maximum successful, this group should be bound by a natural, habitual social bond and act out in their habitual setting, which is part of their daily routine. Second, to be the most successful, this ritual must be highly repetitive. Thus the environment of banal nationalism is probably one of the most prolific for the operationalization of nationalistic myths. And where can banal nationalism be found other than at work, or school – if the majority of people actually 'live their lives at work'? Shils' 'platoon' is thus the embodiment of the ritual, banal nationalism and comradeship altogether. Jobsites are among such platoons, as places highly conducive to such banal and ritualistic activities.

This logical chain around myth and its ritual returns us to the idea of primary group and friendship/comradeship. There are many studies about friendship among intellectuals in totalitarian societies of modernity (Shlyapentokh 1997; Neumann 1958; Voslensky 1998).

Kaplan's emphasis on the limits of broad 'imagined communities' and on corporeal friendship as a constituent of national identity is largely applied to a particular national segment – a platoon – as a slice of nation. This platoon can be any group, characterized by its ideological and routine stability.

If friendship is an element of national identity, if diasporic consciousness is largely based on this pre-exilic national identity, if people frequently migrate in their pre-exilic networks, if there is such a phenomenon as migratory capital – then I would like to set the hypothesis that

*pre-exilic platoon friendship* should be fundamental for the construction of diaspora, with its ‘diasporic consciousness’, ‘cultural reproduction’ (Brubaker 2005; Vertovec 1997) and ‘locational trans-positionality’ (Anthias 1998).

The nature of diasporic friendship is under-examined in diaspora studies. Therefore, my argument is that diasporic friendship is a determining factor in diasporic formation and a valid heuristic device and classification criterion in diaspora studies. Among the heuristic devices for studying nation and diaspora, national myth has been recognised as the most traditional. Through this device I am going to show how diasporic friendship can become a diaspora criterion – as it helps to operationalize the diasporic myth and thus socially limit the ‘diaspora territory’ of Soviet academics abroad.

### **Platoons of the Soviet nation**

The Soviet Union and the Soviet people could be possibly conceptualized as ‘an invented nation’ (Eriksen 2002: 102) and ‘an invented *ethnie*’, whose ‘ethnicity [was] largely mythic and symbolic in character’ (Smith 1986: 16). For example, there was a grand Soviet myth about the grandeur of the Soviet Union and its confrontation to the West. Considering the social and demographic controversies within the Soviet society and resonating with the above ‘myth’ conceptions of Smith and Schopflin, the Soviet myth was to be refracted differently in different social spheres, thus giving way to a variety of *mirror-myths* or *vector myths*, found in various Soviet platoons.

Part of that grand myth was ‘friendship’, conveying the model of the overall societal life and becoming an essential part of the Soviet national identity (Horowitz 1986; Shlyapentokh 1997). Thus Kaplan’s (2007) conceptualization of ‘comradeship nationalism’ above is especially applicable to the Soviet case. It is illustrated by ‘the 1958 concept of “coming together” (*sbliizhenie*) or even “merging” (*sliianie*) of nations within the USSR’, which ‘seemed to have gained favour within the Soviet rhetoric [through] the period of mature or developed socialism [Brezhnev era] and the interregnum period of Konstantin Chernenko’s rule’ (Cibulka 2000: 321). Particularly, the lives and work of Soviet academics as a national slice were acknowledged as ‘friendship’- framed in literatures (Horowitz 1986). The idea of comradeship was constantly supported through the Soviet ‘invented’ tradition of informal education in universities (ibid.).

## **Findings: The Soviet Academic Platoon and ‘Golden Age’**

### **Fraternity spirit**

Smith points to the “‘golden age’ of communal splendour, with its sages, saints and heroes, the era in which the community achieved its classical form, and which bequeathed a legacy of glorious memories and cultural achievements’ (Smith 1986: 191). In shi opinion, ‘there is the golden age of intellect and beauty, in which philosophical, literary and artistic creativity was particularly concentrated’ (Smith 1997: 42).

### ***Communication with heroes***

M(Y): The main point is why the strong mathematical school developed in the Moscow State University. It happened due to a unique non-formal, friendly, benevolent and stimulating atmosphere that was in the MechMat Faculty in the 1960-70s. Professors, students and post-graduates mutually participated in different events. For example, they backpacked in *pokhods*<sup>2</sup> and attended concerts together. Also professors invited students to their homes etc. I can recall more than 60 research seminars for professors and students, during or after which all seminar members participated in some joint extra-curricular activity (e.g. played football). I have an impression that it was one huge brotherhood. It gave me a lasting feeling of fraternity... Once in a while Mr.β was hiking with us, first-year students, in the forest or in the park. During those walking tours we talked a lot about maths.

### ***Friendship and nobility***

Aristotle refers to ‘the higher friendship based on virtue, a bond between two men ‘who arte alike in excellence or virtue’, advancing the happiness of each other as an end in itself – a perfect, altruistic friendship’ (Kaplan 2007: 231).

F(X): Without a moment of hesitation, I can say that it was the best time of my life. I was fortunately affiliated with a wonderful group of students and later got married to one of my group fellows. In our group we all became great friends. It was a real student life, a wonderful life, with backpacking, camping holidays and the unbelievable delight of socialization. That terrific atmosphere of friendship and nobility instigated me to learn. I started to enjoy every single day while at college.

### ***Long-term friendship***

M(H): Since the moment we first met (when I was a college junior), Academician Prokhorov and I had been very great friends [his face is absolutely happy]. He remembered me and always kept supporting me since then. When I myself started to work in FIAN our relations became especially warm.

### ***Golden Age territory as the embodiment of the GA spirit (Home spatially)***

M(Y): If there could be such a thing as the Cathedral of Knowledge, that was the Moscow State University for me. I was entering it with a feeling of worship every time, as it I was coming into the Temple of Wisdom, the Temple of Science [he speaks with adoration and exultation]. My heart was dancing with

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<sup>2</sup> ‘*Pokhod*’ (Russian) means ‘a camping holiday’ – an essential part of student life in the Soviet Union.

joy. I was feeling a sort of holy tremble over my body. I was blissfully happy there.

M(X): That was the best academic research institution of the country, the Landau Institute of the Academy of Sciences... That job was a gift of fate. It was a unique institution, the best not only in our country but also in the whole world. There were many unique personalities from theoretical physics at Landau. The working conditions there were just perfect. I mean I never worked in such conditions afterwards and I think I never will. They were just *perfect* if to consider all the factors, such as the degree of freedom. It was definitely a *non-Soviet* institution.

F(W): There were some niches where our closed society was truly open - those Alladin Caves to the academic Eden.

Aristotle links such a ‘fraternal friendship with democracy or republican polity’ (Kaplan 2007: 233).

### ***‘How became famous’***

The virtuoso level of performance was achieved through ‘rigid drills’, as M(S) mentions, and by means of what the informants identify as ‘necessary, needful, or inexorable humiliation’. The virtuoso requirements for scientific ascetism turned teachers into severe gate-keepers, who used every means to discover the young talent. The informants themselves justify the needful humiliation and view the ascetic educational process of Soviet higher education as the “survival of the fittest”, proudly regarding themselves the “fittest” champions of the true knowledge – as those who have eventually deserved their placement among the intellectual elite:

M(S): I remember a very good system of education, with very serious requirements. We were snowed under with home assignments; over the top. It was *very* hard to learn actually, which was very good because those of us who survived and managed to emerge through the hardships, eventually got a *very* good brand of education. As for those who did not survive, they did not get anything. Well, this is life, cruel yet just: *natural selection* and survival of the fittest. There are students who want to learn yet cannot because they are not organised. They *must* be pressed upon and wound up. Sometimes, when you press upon a student something happens to his brains because you have pressed the right button to open up his hidden talent. Whereas if you do not press, there will be no talent discovery. At the MechMat teachers were very good at discovering and winding up talent.

M(S): Humiliation was part of our daily routine at the MechMat. We often heard from our teachers such phrases as ‘How did you dare not to solve this equation?’ As college students, we heard it all the time. Through rigid drills we were taught to become virtuosos in solving equations whereas here there is

no virtuoso teaching at all. Most of our teachers were very spiteful. Yet that spitefulness constituted the overall working atmosphere, which was extremely favourable for capable students in the long run. If you missed something or did learn something properly, you were told in plain words, 'Enough, Mr. Idler! When on earth will you stop saying nonsense?'

### ***Mission of the platoon and its leaders***

The mode directed toward *discovering talented students* (or 'turning the average into the genius), who would become *virtuosos* in their areas. M(G) says, 'The MSU had the following principle - to search for talent. Teachers were mostly oriented toward talented students. If there were no talented students, the teacher would make them'.

For M(G), Mr.β is also 'his hero' and a 'star-maker'. Thus M(G) admits, 'In the early years of my career he was my mentor, my academic guardian. Of course, it was Mr.β who created me as an expert, as a mathematician'. And the molecular biologist M(E) keeps marvelling at Academician P.'s virtuoso instruction, who was 'a remarkable scholar and a virtuoso anatomic pathologist of the Soviet times'.

### ***'Usable past' – the 'past lived' within the platoon (Smith 1997: 56)***

A usable [national] past must...be created from within, not imported and imposed from without. The better documented and more securely attested the golden age, the more it can bear the weight of emotion placed upon it, and withstand processes of demythologization (Smith 1997: 56).

It is not surprising that thinking in terms of academic Eden, the informants imbue their academic 'fathers' and 'grandfathers' with legendary status and regard them as 'academic heroes' of Soviet science. Here we come across the whole chain of such heroes, constituted by Kolmogorov and Dynkin in mathematics, Prokhorov and Basov in physics, Postnov and Ovchinnikov in molecular biology, Grushin in sociology, and Smirnitskaya and Akhmanova in Philology:

M(G): Kolmogorov has been the most legendary figure in my life. As a scholar, he was an *academic Leonardo de Vinci*! And my undergraduate instructor and supervisor Mr.β was an *awesome* teacher.

M(H): In his kingdom of laser physics, whose doors he once opened to me; he was the God of the latest and the most outstanding achievements in laser technology.

As the turning point in their lives, the informants acknowledge *the fact of having been noticed* by one such academic giant, who made the informant part of the holy academic dynasty:

M(Y): Our absolutely unique teacher Mr.β gave us *amazing* lectures on linear algebra. He is my *academic granny*: he was the advisor of my advisor. Mr.β lectured first-year students. He also arranged seminars for us, where he usually told us about a new, emerging, domain in mathematics, for example, something from applied maths or theory of probability. After that he gave a series of tasks to solve on our own. If a student was keen in a particular category of task, Mr.β directed him to his postgraduate student Iceberg. Thus I began to study Leigh groups under Iceberg's supervision. And later Dr.Iceberg himself turned into an academic giant and became my PhD supervisor. Dr.Iceberg and I have been great friends since that time.

***'Trans-locational positionality' (Anthias 1998): recognising (not) 'your platoon fellows'***

Their representations of their platoons are a way of 'establishing the self and the group, of establishing a sense of belonging and of demarcating who belongs and who is *excluded*' (Anthias 1998, emphasis added).

The GA habits can be very robust and not easily transferable to another context, depending on the platoon bonds. While living abroad, the respondents acknowledge the differences in platoon mission and friendship, which causes problems around 'fitting the different platoon'.

***Different platoon mission:***

M(G): Even Mr.β himself, who arrived here, in the USA, more than twenty years ago, is constantly complaining that he does not have brilliant students here.

This lack of informal communication often leads to a sense of identity loss – 'out of one's platoon':

F(X): In the USSR it was a real student life, a wonderful life, with backpacking, camping holidays and the unbelievable delight of socialization. If you say something like this here to American students, you will have serious consequences whereas, as college students, we heard it all the time. It is not common here to call the student to the chalkboard, while in the Soviet Union we were called up to the board every day. Western students are happy people because their human rights are never trodden on.

***Different fraternity mode:***

F(X): I am indignant at the absurdity of the Princeford bureaucracy and the indifference of my colleagues. If it is not their business, they will not lift a finger in my defense. My American colleagues are remarkable people but I do not feel their souls. *They are not my kindred spirits!* This indifference is the most terrible in this huge, healthy, rational country!

M(E): My professional communication within my department is limited by a very formal intercourse. I simply try to be polite because I *cannot afford being straightforward*, regardless of how reasonable it may seem to me.

*Problems with fitting the different platoon:*

M(S): It is totally unacceptable here to make spiteful remarks to students. I know many Russian teachers who have suffered for that. I must admit that I myself miss that inexorable humiliation very much.

F(X): At Princeford, I had a colleague among Soviet immigrants. And her major problem is her straightforwardness. Like many people from the Soviet Union, she is inflexible and zero-tolerant to everything that may vex her. She cannot follow the rules of the games, according to which Americans do not accept categorical judgements. A Russian person finds it very hard to understand. It often drives me nuts. I call it 'verbal semolina' or 'verbal mash'. For example, I want to say that this is a bad essay and that is a bad poem. For Americans it sounds too categorical. They would prefer to say that this essay stands a little aside from being brilliant or that the poem is not one of the masterpieces. Jesus, all this is so annoying!

Their locational trans-positionality involves not only their alienation from the host land but also from their native homeland and from the diasporans beyond their diasporic platoon/segment:

F(B): Living in diaspora, I came to understand how much I differ from Russian people who have never been abroad and never lived like us. They possess totally different cultural values, with which it is difficult for me to negotiate. Thus at conferences, they are more straightforward in their judgment and less open to criticism. I just do not belong to their world. Neither do I want to belong there.

F(X): In Chicago, there were plenty of our folk. But all of them were 'merchants' – not intellectuals – nothing in common with me.

## **Discussion**

What is going on within the diasporic space? 'New fraternal orders often seem to invoke *ancient* myths of clan fraternity' and its 'symbolism' (Kaplan 2007: 241, emphasis added). The diasporic friendship is not the same as diasporic networks or intra-diasporic connections, which can include quite superficial and short-term relationship between a diasporic node and recruit. The diasporic friendship conveys the intra-diasporic connections that have emerged from their pre-exilic platoon friendship and now comprise their diasporic capital. Here I am thinking of the so-called 'diasporic symbolic capital', or 'diaspora symbolic capital': the socio-cultural capital (such as occupationally localised Soviet invented traditions) that helps the diaspora to hold on together and dissociate itself from the hosts and other diasporic segments that do not share this experience. This form of capital is different from the just

mentioned ‘immigrant symbolic capital’ because the diasporic symbolic capital is not supposed to help the immigrant to adjust to the host society to the fullest.

## Several illustrative cases

### *Mathematicians*

- M(G), 70, mathematician - *MechMat*, mathematical clubs - informal communication, part of Professor X’ academic dynasty – emigrated in 1994 as a diasporic, through the Moscow pre-diasporic connections, to a mathematical diasporic cluster in MA, the same MSU cohort
- M(S), 66, mathematician – *MechMat* – informal communication, part of Professor X’ dynasty – emigrated in 1990 as a diasporic, through the diasporic connections – now part of the *MechMat*-in-the-Midwest diaspora
- M(X), 51, mathematician – *MechMat*, Landau-SAS – informal communication – migrated in 1990 as a diasporic joining various Soviet mathematical clusters in the USA (through the academic hero - diasporic node)

### *Physicists*

- M(J), 66, physicist – Novosibirsk – informal communication, part of the inter-city or cross-regional Soviet physicists’ dynasty (Novosibirsk as a MSU’ satellite academic city) – emigrated in 1991 as a diasporic, through his pre-diasporic connections, to the physicists’ diasporic cluster/platoon in the Midwest (MSU-in-the-Midwest).
- M(B), 45, physicist – MSU – immigrated to Israel in 1988 as a dissident – re-united with the Soviet physicists’ diaspora first in Israel, then joined the MSU-in-the-Midwest platoon
- F(B), 40, physicist - MSU, SAS - informal communication, part of the academic dynasty - emigrated in 1993 as a diasporic, through the Moscow pre-diasporic connections, to a physicists’ diasporic platoon in continental Europe

### *Philologists*

- F(X), 66, philologist, MSU - Moscow dissident (literary 1960s’) clubs, informal communication – emigrated in 1978 as a dissident on ‘the second Jewish wave’ (not as a diasporic), to a Soviet diasporic cluster in Chicago (but did not fit in there) – became a Soviet diasporic years later, in 1985, when she got to a philological diasporic platoon in Princeford
- F(D), 51, philologist, KSU – informal communication and dissident circles – migrated in 1990 through the first US exchange programmes, not as a diasporic – joined the diasporic cluster later when got to Princeford
- F (W), 48, philologist, LSU - Leningrad dissident literary clubs and informal communication – emigrated in 1988, through one of the first Soviet-British exchange programmes, not as a diasporic but as a ‘cosmopolitan’ – became a temporary diasporic

later in the mid 1990s, the philological European diasporic platoon comprised of her LSU cohort fellows – not part of it anymore, because of the assimilation pull and loss of ties with the diasporic cluster.

### ***Molecular biologists***

- M(E) and M(Q), both 53, MSU and SAS – informal communication – migrated in 1985 and 1989 through the pre-diasporic connections (recommendations and trans-national ties of their Soviet academic heroes) but not to the Soviet diasporic clusters – joined their clusters later in the same place. Now their molecular-biological cluster is wearing out because of its re-territorialization (part of it transferred to another school). They try to pull other Russian molecular biologists – they have their postdocs from their former Soviet undergraduate students. But they do not make a good diasporic cluster because they are ‘different’. M(E) and M(Q) associate themselves more with the diasporic cluster of the Soviet hard scientists from the MSU and call themselves ‘Soviet/Russian scientific diaspora’.

### **Constructing the Diasporic Platoon**

These people come from the same academic platoons, which significantly impacts upon their diasporic lives. As they themselves say, to live in diaspora means to belong to their platoon, to the people from the same educational background and with the same values. They started to see themselves as diasporic only after they had re-united with their platoons.

For example, many of them belonged to the platoon of *MechMat* – or we may call it the inter-departmental/inter-squad platoon of *MechMat*-Landau, in which there was a lot of reciprocity. Alternatively, the Moscow academic circles can be conceptualized as the Soviet platoon because there was a lot of communication in-between hard science platoon or humanities platoon.

Within one and the same platoon – for, example, *MechMat* - there were the same ‘heroes’, including the same ‘hard core’ (Shils 1957) such as rector, department head, first department head and even the same ‘junior officers’ (such as Professor X). But the informants belong to different chronological cohorts within the same platoon. Because that was *the same*, though inter-generational, platoon – they are attracted to re-unite in diaspora and construct their diasporic platoon on the basis of this re-unification.

The construction of the diasporic platoon is also possible on the basis of the *sister (sibling/twin) platoons*, such as:

- a) Faculty of Physics (MSU) and Faculty of Physics (the Novosibirsk Great Academic City), whose veterans have re-united within their Moscow-on-the Mississippi platoon; or
- b) PhilFac-MSU, PhilFac-LSU and PhilFac-KSU, whose veterans have re-united within their Princeford platoon.

I call these places sibling platoons because, according to Gellner’s (1983) ‘four-zone’ theory, they had the same parents: the same ‘bridegroom’ or husband (the state regime) and the same ‘bride’ or wife (national culture and ideology). The one and the same marriage (if we borrow

Gellner's metaphor) was producing identical 'hard cores' (Shils 1957) and institutions that might not be *quite* the same but genealogically *very much alike*.

In my opinion, the platoon metaphor can be highly applicable to the Soviet academy, as frequently conceptualized by scholars (Mitrokhin 2003; Shlapentokh 1997) and my informants as the 'ideological battlefield' (F(X)), some of whose platoons could be 'relatively free from ideology' (F(Y), M(X)). The platoon metaphor determines the informants' consequent diasporic platoon affiliation and their 'trans-locational positionality' (Anthias 1998) and 'boundary maintenance' (Brubaker 2005) with both the host society and first homeland:

- my respondents are not like hosts – that is, American and British academics - because they are from different platoons, and, consequently, they share different myths. The same can be said about their self-positioning in regard to consequent waves of academic migration from Russia, who are also from different platoons (produced by another marriage – between another, post-Soviet, state and another, post-Soviet, culture);
- my respondents also are different from the Russian academics, their old platoon fellows, who are now living in Russia. This difference emerges from their different veteran routes, which contributed to the shape of their national consciousness.

They see their old platoon as extinct. Their diaspora is 'dying' because it is not being filled with people from the same platoon. Therefore, their case can be conceptualized as the 'short, happy life' of the Soviet academic diaspora.

## Conclusion

The Soviet academic diaspora is a putative professional diaspora, whose national membership is restricted on the professional criterion and at the same time, expanded beyond the simple ethnicity to nationality of 'the socialist imperial universalism'. This diaspora has its own *mirror-myth* and *fraternity order*, which is probably another way to think of putative diasporas.

The nature of diasporic friendship is under-examined in diaspora studies. Therefore, my argument is that diasporic friendship is a determining factor in diasporic formation and a valid heuristic device and classification criterion in diaspora studies.