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U.S. American and Canadian Immigrant Fiction
in Selected Texts by Anzia Yezierska and Adele
Wiseman“

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I confirm to have conceived and written this diploma thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references, either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors have been truthfully acknowledged and identified in the footnotes.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Hungry Heart - HH

Red Ribbon on a White Horse - RR

The Sacrifice – TS

1. INTRODUCTION

Pulled in seemingly opposite directions by the force of American hope and the power of Jewish memory, America's Jews were forced to define what it meant to be a Jew in America, to articulate the relationship between American and Jewish identities, and to develop lifestyles both fully American and fully Jewish. No other ethnic group has been as concerned with defining their relationship to America. (Shapiro 150)

In the course of finding a place for themselves in their new home countries, Jews had to adapt to an already established community and to form a new, an American or Canadian identity. This process ranged from letting go of their cultural roots to a certain degree to adapting to a completely new cultural setting. As Edward Shapiro points out, it was believed that “[t]he true American had also discarded European modes of thought. *He* is an American, who, leaving behind him all the ancient prejudices and manners, acts upon new principles, entertains new ideas, and forms new opinions” (Shapiro 149). This process of assimilation certainly was highly complex and greatly dependent on the individual immigrant and his position within the Jewish immigrant community.

This diploma thesis attempts to show these struggles and negotiations central to the creation of new identities of Jewish immigrants in U.S. American and Canadian immigrant communities as well as the dynamics and compositions of such communities reflected in Jewish immigrant fiction. For this purpose, two authors were chosen: the Jewish American author Anzia Yezierska, who had emigrated to America from Poland as a child around 1890, and Adele Wiseman, whose parents had emigrated to Canada from the Ukraine in 1923. Although Wiseman was a second-generation immigrant and thus did not experience these cultural challenges herself, she was highly influenced by her Jewish cultural roots, as Coldwell confirms stating that her “imagination was shaped by her Eastern European Jewish heritage” (Coldwell 1183). Additionally, Adele Wiseman was part of the “first wave of ethnic writing” (Kortenaar 561) in Canada, meaning authors born or raised in Canada with English, not their mother tongue, as their preferred writing language. This group also includes prominent authors, such as A.M. Klein, Irving Layton, Mordecai Richler, Leonard Cohen, Norman Levine, Matt Cohen and Anne Michaels.

Thus, by writing about their own ethnic communities, these two authors offer the reader

authentic impressions and insights into the highly complex developments inherent in immigration processes, especially in a time when these journeys were usually undertaken out of desperation rather than curiosity.

Anzia Yeziarska's texts have largely been analyzed as social studies and veiled fictional autobiographies. Her very realistic and colorful style of writing virtually allows the reader to see the Jewish immigrant community before his or her own eyes. The writer's stories are full of energy, yearning and very straightforward in their descriptions. In this thesis, her short story collection *Hungry Hearts* will be analyzed, because these stories offer a wide range of interesting aspects. They largely focus on young Jewish immigrant women, who are trying to create lives for themselves in New York's Jewish ghetto in the Lower East Side.

Wiseman's text chosen for this thesis is her award-winning novel *The Sacrifice*. It follows an immigrant family from Eastern Europe, mainly focusing on the male protagonist Abraham. The novel is highly influenced by biblical stories and more complex in its themes than Yeziarska's *Hungry Hearts*. Nonetheless, Adele Wiseman includes numerous references and descriptions of the Jewish community in Winnipeg, which will be used as the basis of this analysis.

In order to be able to grasp the community as such, aspects of everyday life will be analyzed, which are of specific importance to the members of said community. These aspects include education, work and working conditions, representations of Jews and their traditions, hope and past traumatic experiences, the use of language and communication as well as the importance of family, the status of women in society and religious aspects.

In order to be able to understand these processes of assimilation and dynamics of Jewish immigrants more fully, this thesis also includes a definition of community and provides a historical introduction into immigration to the United States of America as well as to Canada.

2. COMMUNITY: A DEFINITION

Fulcher and Scott write in their textbook on sociology that communities “meet deep human needs for integration, identity, and mutual support” (Fulcher and Scott 498). But what, in fact, is a community?

Community, as defined by Fulcher and Scott, may have the following characteristics: People living in a community share certain features “that [bind] them together”. This may include the same place of residence, the same class, ethnicity or religion. Members of a community may be involved in the same activities, including, for example, work, politics or sports. They have a sense of shared interest and may “organize collective action” (Fulcher and Scott 496) in order to achieve these common goals, for example building a community center, organizing political activities etc. Members of a community also have a shared identity to some extent, meaning that there is “a sense of belonging to a distinct group that has an identity” (Fulcher and Scott 496). This feeling is emotionally charged and with it comes a sense of loyalty to a greater unit (Fulcher and Scott 496-497).

The Jewish communities dealt with in this thesis are residential communities, on the one hand, because they are located in one specific area, such as a Jewish ghetto in New York. On the other hand, they can also be defined as non-residential as members of this community also belong to the Jewish ethnicity, which can be seen as a worldwide community in diaspora. Fulcher and Scott define ethnicity in the following way:

Ethnicity is a general category for describing collective identities. Ethnic groups are defined by their sense of sharing a distinct culture that can be traced back to the historical or territorial origins of the group. Ethnic groups build an ‘imagined community’ (B. Anderson 1991), an image of themselves as a collectivity. The solidarity and group consciousness of an ethnic group are organized around this idea of origin and cultural history (A. Smith 1986). (Fulcher and Scott 200).

Furthermore, concerning the importance of language in a community, they state that “[e]thnicity is often expressed in a common language, though merely having a common language does not necessarily confer ethnicity. Hebrew and Arabic are the basis of distinct ethnic identities, while the English language is now a global language spoken by many people of many ethnicities [...]” (Fulcher and Scott 200).

Newly arrived Eastern European Jewish immigrants, largely tended to settle in preexisting communities, for instance in the Jewish ghetto in the Lower East Side of New York's Manhattan. In *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, Portes and Rumbault explain the advantages and disadvantages of the building and continuance of ethnic and/or immigrant communities (63-66). They argue that, according to assimilation theory, it is beneficial for new immigrants to be mobile in order to improve their economic situation as “[i]ndividualistic aspirations should lead to dispersal because upward economic mobility often requires spatial mobility” (Portes and Rumbault 63). Alternatively, remaining in larger communities provides safety and “social and moral resources that make for psychological well-being as well as for economic gain” (Portes and Rumbault 63) for the individual member of the community. Additionally, according to Portes and Rumbault, even small groups can gain significant influence in economic and political matters when concentrated in an area. The preservation of a lifestyle with access to networks, moral and social support as well as the possibility to keep some control over younger generations is far likelier in a community. Ethnic bonds and thus family ties can provide opportunities for economic success of younger generations by providing networks and capital¹ (Portes and Rumbault 64).

Among the disadvantages of settling in tight immigrant communities is a fear of mainstream society that these communities will eventually be revealed as “Trojan horses” (cf. Portes and Rumbault 65). Ethnic neighborhoods or even ethnic regions may, according to some skeptics, eventually lead to secessionist movements. However, Portes and Rumbault invalidate this argument by pointing out that even in the first two decades of the 20th century, when most of the urban population was constituted by immigrants, secession was neither largely advocated nor attempted. At the same time, the labor force provided by immigrants and their children greatly influenced and aided the economic success of the US (Portes and Rumbault 65).

¹ Peddling, a common occupation among Jewish immigrants, is a classic illustration of this as will be explained in section “The German Migration, 1830-1880”.

3. A HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION AND SHORT INTRODUCTION TO JEWISH CULTURE

In an article from 1905, Professor Abram Isaacs wrote that, “[w]hen the Old World offered no hope and little security or permanency, a New World was at hand for him and all who demand liberty as the first condition of existence” (Isaacs 677). This urgent need for a new, stable and safe home and the promise of the “golden land” caused – among other factors – an enormous flow of immigrants to North America. This chapter aims to give a short overview of Jewish immigration to the United States of America and to Canada until the early 20th century as well as an introduction into cultural aspects of immigration and Jewish communities, especially focusing on the wave of immigration of Eastern European Jews.

3.1. Jewish Immigration in the USA until the 1920s²

While America was not the Promised Land, it was a land of promise. (Shapiro 169)

In 1654, the first group of Jews, counting 23 people, arrived in the New World, namely in New Amsterdam.³ According to the *Harvard Encyclopedia for American Ethnic Groups*, Jewish immigration to the United States of America was continuous since then, but considerably increased only in the second third of the 19th century (Goren 571). By 1880, about 180,000 Jews had immigrated to the US. The following numbers illustrate this even more graphically: The Jewish population had been around 2,000 in 1790, grown to approximately 6,000 around 1830, to approximately 150,000 by 1860 and to the considerable number of 250,000 people of Jewish decent in 1880. During the next 42 years, another 2.3 million Jews came into the country and by 1924, the total Jewish

² Periodization taken from Goren, *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*.

³ The first group of settlers presumably came from Recife, Brazil, fleeing from the inquisition, which had been imported by the Portuguese after claiming the area from the Dutch (Isaacs 678).

population was around 4.2 million.⁴

Despite the fact that these numbers account for the entirety of Jewish immigrants in US America, it has to be mentioned that this actually was a very heterogeneous group consisting of immigrants with very diverse origins and with “variant ethnic traditions” (Goren 571). One important distinction has to be made between the group of Sephardic Jews, who mostly spoke Portuguese, and Ashkenazi Jews, who spoke Yiddish, a language derived from Middle High German which includes elements of Hebrew, Aramaic and of the language of the country of origin of the individual speaker. Yiddish-speaking Jews from different countries thus spoke in their own regional varieties, especially those coming from Lithuania, Poland, the Ukraine, Galicia, Hungary and Romania during the course of the great migration to the US from Eastern Europe, which started in the 1880s. Other Jews, who came from the disintegrated Ottoman Empire in the early 1900s, or later from Nazi Germany, the rest of Europe, Latin America or Israel, spoke languages such as Ladino, Arabic, German, Yiddish, Hungarian, Spanish, Hebrew or Russian (Goren 571).

Different times of arrival and the then current state of the American economy greatly influenced the formation, integration and economic situation of Jewish communities. For example, German Jews arriving in the years before the Civil War mostly became merchants and spread out all over the country as the economy was expanding. They quickly integrated and became part of the middle class. Jews from Eastern Europe, who arrived later, mostly became industrial workers or suppliers of consumer goods with a vibrant community life, which made the distinction between the assimilated Jews, who had arrived earlier, and them much more distinct (Goren 571f).

So, to say that one single Jewish community existed in America or even in one location, like New Amsterdam/New York, would simplify matters too much. This certainly posed a problem for newcomers and did not further a sense of group identity and heritage. Their historically infused separatism and strong traditions also complicated integration. In America, a feeling of belonging to a community of fate and a responsibility to help their “brethren in distress” (Goren 573), as well as the discipline imposed on them by the *halacha*, the Talmudic law, were very important in Jewish immigrant communities.

⁴ For more information on legislature etc. concerning immigration to the United States of America, please consult LeMay’s *U.S. Immigration: A Reference Book*, pp. 93-106 and pp. 129-178.

Nonetheless, personal freedom as well as fewer commitments to family and communities became more and more important to younger and more adventurous generations of Jews. This led to a tension between the individual and its desires and the feeling of obligation to the community. A strong self-image and self-definition became increasingly important (Goren 573).

3.1.1. The Colonial and Early National Periods

Sephardic Jews, who had been expelled from Spain and Portugal in the 15th and 16th centuries, had partially moved to Holland and England as well as to their colonies. Upon moving to America, they adapted well to leading the lives of pioneers and developed skills for mercantile work and the frontier economy. In the concentrations of urban centers, viable Jewish communities were established, but their traditions also encouraged cultural flexibility.

Five large congregations were dominated by the influence of Sephardic Jews: New York; Newport, Rhode Island; Savannah, Georgia; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Charleston, South Carolina. These communities kept a close bond with their Jewish mother communities in London and Amsterdam (Goren 574).

Ashkenazi Jews came from widely diverse origins and most immigrants of this religious group were young, unmarried and ready to adjust to their new circumstances. Thus they were able to integrate and fuse with the group of already established Sephardic Jews. Intermarriage became more and more popular as the group of Jews in America was relatively small and marrying outside the faith was forbidden (Goren 574).

The first small Jewish congregations catered to all of the needs of the Jewish communities, including religious services, schools, *mikvehs* (ritual baths), supervision over the amount of kosher meat available and *matzot* (unleavened bread) for Passover and cemeteries. Additionally, synagogues cared for the poor and provided medical care (Goren 574).

Prejudicial remarks against Jews appeared regularly in newspapers etc., but have to be seen as traditional rather than as true markers of social mistreatment. For example, Jews were allowed to join the same clubs as Christians and Jewish children went to the same schools

as Christian children. Gradually, Jewish immigrants acquired privileges such as the right to vote, to trade and to religious organization. Some were even granted citizenship and held appointive offices. Other colonies ignored the question of citizenship entirely and allowed the establishment of permanent settlements. In 1740, Jews were formally granted the right to become citizens after seven years of residence and, additionally, Jewish immigrants did not have to take the oath “upon the true faith of a Christian” (Goren 575), which would have stood in conflict with their own faith. After the American Revolution in the second half of the 18th century, in which many Jews had participated on the side of the United States of America, only minor disabilities remained and by the end of the century “a largely native-born” American Jewry participated in an increasingly open society” (Goren 575).

3.1.2. The German Migration, 1830-1880

After a time of relative harmony, the Jewish community began to diversify again as Ashkenazi newcomers grew less content with adapting to Sephardic rituals etc. and started building their own congregations. Thus, the number of synagogues increased considerably, for example, the number of synagogues in New York rose from two to ten. Diversity was also encouraged by the arrival of many immigrants who came with their families, like Simon and Rachel Guggenheim with their 12 children, or the arrival of groups of families who had common ties in their places of origin. Old structures were thus imported to the New World. Nonetheless, most of the new immigrants were young, unmarried and male upon their arrival. Many of them were not extensively educated in religious or secular matters. Many families sent a son ahead who should then arrange for the whole family to join them later. Thus “youth-led family chain migration” was set in motion (Goren 576).

Most of the Jews entering the country in this period were of German origin. They were drawn to the already established German cultural and social milieu in the US. Today’s formation of Jewish communities in the USA basically goes back to this period as Jews moved all over the country. A number of large Jewish communities were established among them, for instance, in San Francisco (Goren 576). Hasia R. Diner states that, “American Jewish immigrants of the mid-nineteenth century avidly formed Jewish communities. Regardless of where in the United States they lived, Jewish women and men

identified with one another, lived, worked and socialized with one another, collectively fulfilled religious obligations and created institutions that embodied their sense of belonging while serving practical communal needs” (Diner 86).

In terms of occupation, Jewish immigrants were often tradesmen, tailors or shoe-makers. However, the most important way of making a living for most of them was peddling. Large cities had a number of retail stores, but peddlers were needed to bring these goods to the countryside. Peddlers bought their stock in New York or other large cities and then travelled along their routes to re-sell it. Peddling could be taken up on credit, meaning that not much capital was needed to start. Family ties remained very important in this line of business because of the credits needed in the beginning (Goren 575). These credits could also be obtained from fraternities or other social institutions (Sorin 3). Peddlers were also very important in terms of creating new settlements. The main distribution routes shaped the map of Jewish settlements (Goren 576) as it remains intact today (Sorin 3). A strong network developed including peddlers, creditors, suppliers, retailers, wholesalers, clerks, bookkeepers, skilled workers, clothing manufacturers and importers, benefitting all of them (Sorin 3).

During this time, the fragmentation of Jewish communities and congregations continued, but rather due to social and cultural reasons than doctrinal ones. A trend to Americanize the synagogues, which also led to splits, manifested itself in the growing demand for and the number of English services rather than German or Hebrew ones. In the 1840s, the first ordained and university-trained rabbis arrived in the USA. Interestingly, these religious authorities used their power to legitimize reformed Judaism. In the 1850s and 1860s, efforts were made to establish a synod, a common, standardized prayer book, a set of guiding principles, a federation of synagogues, etc. for all American Jews, but these projects failed due to theological disputes and personal feuds (Goren 577). A Reform denomination finally crystallized and Jews were no longer declared to be a nation, but rather a religious group (Goren 578). Rabbis lamented that clubs, societies, lodges and other institutions “undermined their authority” and caused a receding number of membership of the congregations as well as “encourag[ing] American Jewish indifference to religion” (Diner 87).

Responsibility for those who needed help shifted: relief societies (outside of the

synagogues) became an important way to express ethnic community. State-run societies were usually led by Christians and were in wretched condition themselves. Thus new hospitals, orphanages, homes for the elderly, schools, etc. were founded by Jewish organizations. Social and literary societies as well as Jewish fraternities were established in large numbers. This also led to discrimination, as the YMHA (Young Men's Hebrew Association⁵), for example, did not accept Eastern European newcomers (Goren 578). Due to the separation of church and state in America, rabbis and other religious leaders were not able to pronounce judgment or impose taxes on their congregations. Thus Jews supported these charities and succumbed to religious rules out of their free will entirely (Diner 87).

The Jewish community had become much less homogenous in the period of German migration, but the diversity was not necessarily divisive as German culture became a major integration factor because it played such an important role in Jewish social and intellectual life (Goren 578). Thus, German culture became a unifying source and many Jews read German newspapers, went to German theaters or were members in German clubs (Sorin 6).

Business men accumulated money and were able to enter the capital market in the 1850s (Sorin 5). Between 1860 and 1880, a Jewish business elite was formed consisting of investment bankers, department store tycoons, shoe and clothing manufacturers and meat processing entrepreneurs. Especially in New York, a German Jewish patrician class was established, which was tightly connected by ethnic, family, business and social factors. In New York, Jews owned 80 percent of all retail and 90 percent of all clothing firms. American Jews in general were rather successful and relatively rich. Thus, impoverished Eastern European Jews were seen as threats to this successful system (Goren 579) as German Jews feared that there would be no more distinction between them as "the better class of Jews" and Eastern European Jews had who just immigrated as "vulgar Jews" (Sorin 10).

⁵ According to Edward Shapiro, German Jews often used the word "Hebrew" to describe themselves and name their organizations in order to distinguish themselves from the Eastern European "Jews", whom they considered to be inferior and "less Americanized" (151).

3.1.3. Migration from Eastern Europe, 1881-1924

Sudden and violent changes which have sounded the death-knell of many races and religions, or have fused and cross-fertilized them beyond recognition, seem only to have vitalized the Jew. (Isaacs 676)

The mass migration from Eastern Europe to the US considerably changed the demographic of the American Jewry. In 1880, about one sixth of all American Jews (about 250,000) were of Eastern European decent, whereas forty years later, Eastern European Jews constituted about five sixths of the 4 million Jews living in the Unites States of America. About one third of all European Jews left their home countries during these years and 90 percent⁶ of those chose America as their new home (Goren 579). Or, in other words, at that time almost 6 million of the 7.7 million Jews worldwide lived in Eastern Europe in 1880, while only 3 percent called the USA their home. By 1920, only 40 years later, almost 23 percent of the Jews worldwide lived in the United States (Sorin 12).

Reasons for this mass migration from Eastern Europe to America were numerous. Jews were confined to living in certain areas, mostly separate parts of cities or towns, and a high birth rate and low death rate had contributed to the explosive increase from 1.5 million Jews in Eastern Europe in 1800 to about 6.8 million in 1900. About 75 percent of these immigrants were from Russia⁷ and lived under very repressive circumstances. They had no civil rights, suffered from many severe restrictions on trading etc. and were subject to periodical expulsions from cities and towns (Goren 579). Poverty had been an issue in these regions from the 1650s on, but became an even bigger problem in the late 18th and 19th centuries (Sorin 13). 18 percent of immigrants were from Galicia, Hungary and Bukovina, which were all part of Austria-Hungary. They had been granted civil rights by the Habsburg monarchy in the 1860s, but local circumstances created a repressive and sometimes even dangerous environment nonetheless. Additionally, industrialization and the development of modern agriculture had a negative influence on Jewish work-life as petty merchants, peddlers, artisans, etc. were slowly being replaced (Goren 579).

In 1881, Tsar Alexander II was assassinated and the following regime initiated a number of pogroms (in 1881 and 1882), which affected more than 200 Jewish communities and

⁶ Gerald Sorin states that about 80 percent of all Jews emigrating from Eastern Europe during this period came to the United States (Sorin 1).

⁷ They particularly came from the Russian Pale of Settlements, which consisted of the 15 Western provinces of European Russia and the ten provinces of Russian-held Poland (Sorin 12).

started 30 years of “anti-Jewish outbursts” (Goren 581) fostering a climate of mob violence. The so-called May Laws of 1882 constituted an “economic policy of pauperization” (Goren 581) and brought the expulsion of Jews from villages and rural centers as well as restrictions on trade in cities. Thus many Jews became highly dependent on welfare. In 1891, approximately 20,000 Jews were expelled from Moscow and in 1903 and 1905 new pogroms followed (Goren 581). Thus, Jews had to live in fear and, additionally, most of them were easily recognizable by their distinctive way of dressing and speaking, making them an easy target for mob violence (Sorin 14).

Nonetheless, many Jewish immigrants came to the USA for personal reasons. The *golden medine* (“golden land”) promised ways of self-expression and actualization that was very appealing to young Eastern European Jews. Many of them would have also left their home countries if hunger and oppression had not gotten worse. Thus, it could be said that their despair pushed them out of Eastern Europe and their hopes and – sometimes greatly exaggerated – stories about new possibilities and opportunities pulled them towards America (Sorin 49f).

Eastern European immigrants were usually young people wanting to settle in America permanently. Many of them were skilled workers⁸, and it was common for young Jewish fathers to emigrate first and consequently send for their families, wives and children, as soon as possible. About 70 percent of all Eastern European Jewish immigrants in this period were between the ages of 14 and 40 while only 47 percent of the total Russian Jewish population were of the same ages. Only 5 out of 100 Jewish immigrants returned home in this period, whereas about 33 out of 100 returned of the total Jewish immigration (Goren 581). Remarkable is also the high percentage of Jewish women and children, who immigrated to the USA: 43 percent women and 25 percent children under 14 (Sorin 38).

After reaching their ports of embarkation, immigrants had to prepare for a tedious, long sea journey of about 13 to 20 days in steerage. Berths included an iron bunk, a straw mattress and no pillow. Only two toilets were available for the whole steerage and to be used by men and women alike. There was always a shortage of buckets etc. in case of sea sickness and the general condition of the steerage became filthier by the day. Stormy passages meant vomit on the decks and shortages of drinking water. These terrible conditions were

⁸ Most of these skilled workers were in the clothing trades (Goren 581).

recognized by U.S. American immigration as early as 1882 and attempts were made to improve the situation as immigrants arrived in desolate shape, but only in 1900 did changes begin to take effect (Sorin 45f).

After surviving the passage, immigrants had to be processed in Castle Garden or, from 1891 onward, on Ellis Island before being allowed to enter the country. Facilities were soon crowded with people and conditions for the newly arrived immigrants were inadequate at best. Between 1881 and 1891, more than 5 million people entered the United States via Castle Garden (Sorin 46f) and between 1880 and 1930, about 20 million passed through Ellis Island (The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation) with approximately 5,000 immigrants being inspected there per day (Sorin 47).

Upon arrival, Eastern European Jewish immigrants, like other immigrants in the late 19th and 20th centuries, moved to ethnic ghettos in cities (Goren 581). Urban neighborhoods offered familiarity, friends, relatives, synagogues, kosher meat, Hebrew teachers, etc. (Sorin 64). In New York, the Jewish quarter was in the Lower East Side and covered about 1.5 miles.⁹ The area was densely populated with about 540,000 people living there in 1910 (Goren 581). Most of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants settled in the nucleus of the ghetto, which was constituted by a twenty-block area south of Houston Street and east of the Bowery (Sorin 70).¹⁰ As German Jewish immigrants continuously moved north of Houston Street, their former places were taken by Hungarians, Galicians, Romanians, Sephardic Jews from Turkey, Spain, Greece and Syria as well as by Russian Jews, who lived in clusters according to their countries of origin (Sorin 71).¹¹

Jews lived in these ghettos, worked there and were able to become part of an already existing social and cultural network. Houses were usually five or six stories high, with three or four rooms per apartment for families with about four or five children. Additionally, many families had to take in boarders as well in order to be able to afford the rent. In 1908, a survey showed that about 50 percent slept in rooms with two or three others in a room; almost 25 percent with four or more others in a room and a mere 25

⁹ In Chicago, the Jewish ghetto was located on the West Side, others were in Boston's North End or in South Philadelphia (Sorin 63).

¹⁰ Cf. Note 12.

¹¹ Despite the fact that great numbers of them settled in American cities, generally, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe did not come from cities themselves, but rather from rural areas in their home countries, for example villages and small towns (Daniels 213).

percent slept with only one other person in a room (Goren 581). Efforts to improve housing were made from 1879 on, but conditions improved only very slowly (Sorin 72).

In the middle of “any large ghetto” (Goren 581) there was a square block with workshops of the garment industry, synagogues in basements and saloons as well as cafés. Here, men, including workers, intellectuals, functionaries, pious men as well as gamblers, prostitutes etc., came together. Crime was not a major problem in the Jewish ghetto, but monitored closely by the Jewish community (Goren 581f). Soon communities were established that fostered a kind of “transitional culture” (Sorin 70) for new immigrants with considerable influence on processes of Americanization.¹²

*Landsmanshaftn*¹³, established as separate societies, built microcosms depending on the origin of the immigrant and offered insurance, sick benefits, interest-free loans and cemetery rights as well as organizing the sending of aid to their places of origin (Goren 582). For immigrants, they served as a “a breathing place, a place to be themselves, a place to continue the tradition of *thedakah*¹⁴ and self-help, and also a place to play a game of *pinochle*¹⁵.” (Sorin 97) These *landsmanshaften* also often helped with the obtaining of a job, which was one of the most pressing needs of a recent immigrant. Mostly, jobs were found within the Jewish ghetto, for example, in the important garment industry. Because of the high degree of specialization, immigrants were able to learn to master their new jobs quickly. Long workdays up to 70 hours per week as well as poverty account for the need to live as closely as possible to the workplace. Other major providers of jobs were the tobacco and cigar industry, bakers and the companies responsible for the slaughtering and dressing of meat, which was important for festivities as well as for a proper Jewish lifestyle. Other important occupations were various functions in the mercantile trade, such as petty tradesmen, peddlers, proprietors of retail stores or real estate. Mostly employers as well as landlords were Russian or German Jews themselves, who had found a way to climb the social ladder. Sabbath was not necessarily honored by them though either, which especially complicated the lives of orthodox Jews (Goren 582f). Additionally, workspaces were

¹² In New York, such communities were established in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, a decade later in Harlem and in the Brooklyn neighborhoods of Williamsburg, Boro Park and Brownsville (Sorin 70).

¹³ According to Hannah Kliger, these *landsmanshaften* as well as other societies are not merely reconstructed “relics of a bygone heritage”, but rather “vehicles of continuity and change” (224). She calls them an “experiment in ethnic self-help” which “facilitated accommodation to life in the new land” (224).

¹⁴ Italics mine.

¹⁵ Italics mine.

crammed and dangerous, wages low (Sorin 70f) and child labor was necessary for most families to survive (Sorin 79f). Nonetheless, mortality rates for Jews were very low compared to other immigrant groups, which can be attributed to - among other things – the fact that Jews did not usually drink excessively but rather preferred seltzer and that they developed almost an addiction of going to one of the 62 bathhouses in New York. Nervous disorders, such as ulcers, depression, suicide, hysteria or neurasthenia were rather common though.

Most Russian Jewish immigrants were orthodox upon arrival, but found it difficult to simply transplant their lives as no authoritative religious leadership comparable to the one in their home towns had been established in America and various organizations, such as fraternities, trade unions or cultural centers, constituted an alternative to religious communities. Many of the rabbi's duties now became private responsibilities, such as the supervision of *kashruth* (meaning the observance of dietary rules (Sorin 77)), or matters of state courts, such as divorces (Goren 583).

In terms of traditional education, the *heder*¹⁶, a conventional form of elementary schooling for boys, which had been attended from early morning until dusk in Eastern Europe, was attended after regular school hours in the USA. Boys learned the prayer book in Hebrew, the Pentateuch as well as legal codes and biblical comments for more advanced learners. Teachers were ill equipped in the New World, but attending *heder* nonetheless created a degree of Jewish continuity. State education was embraced by the Jewish community as education furthered the possibility of economic advance for children. Talmud Torah schools, communal schools taking place in the afternoon, were an additional possibility for families who could not afford tuition fees for *heder* to allow their children to profit from a Jewish education. A conflict between traditional Jewish values and rituals and the new American way of life was enhanced by this situation and many tried to find a compromise between the ties to their traditions from the Old World and their desire to assimilate in the New World (Goren 583).

Yiddish press and literature were used as “polemic platforms and binding forces (Goren 583)”. Gerald Sorin writes that, “[w]hether politically conservative or radical, whether theologically Orthodox or secular, the Yiddish press was often sensationalist and extremist,

¹⁶ Spelled *chaidar* in Adele Wiseman's novel *The Sacrifice*.

lashing out at capitalism, socialism, Jewish institutions, or competing papers.” These papers functioned as Americanizing agents by printing English words, articles on topics, but they also promoted serious Yiddish literature (Sorin 103f). The so-called “sweatshop school” of writers described the terrible, dehumanizing social situation of workers. Another group of young writers called the *Yunge* (the young ones) demanded art in the place of propaganda in literature, and yet another group of young writers rebelled against them in the 1920s (Goren 583f). Some of these books were even translated into English for an American readership. At the turn of the century, serious drama was introduced in Yiddish theater though it tried to cater to all tastes. Journals were launched and used to express opinions about politics and ideology (Goren 584). They tried to contribute to Jewish identity. A prominent example here is the *Jewish Daily Forward* which was founded in 1897 and had a daily circulation of about 54,000 newspapers. In 1908, so just eleven years later, it had a daily circulation of 175,000. It served as a medium to popularize radical ideas, interpret the United States to the immigrant and constituted a platform for men of letters. The writer Abraham Cahan was one of the most influential editors there (Goren 585).

Although attempts by German Jewish organizations were made to diffuse them (Sorin 65), Eastern European Jews did not spread across the country like German Jews had done before, but rather settled in the great cities of the East and Midwest, especially in New York. Between 1881 and 1911, about 1.5 million Jews landed in New York and about 70 percent of them stayed there. In 1860, about a fourth of the Jewish population of America lived in New York. In 1920, about 45 percent lived there (Goren 581).

Trade unions were strong in the Jewish communities before World War I. They worked to improve living and working conditions for Jewish immigrants as, for example, a 50-hour-work-week and a rational organization of industry. (Goren 584). Boycotts, such as the boycott of Jewish women against kosher meat shops in various New York neighborhoods after a surge of prices, were effective and often well organized. This use of modern means to gain power and influence by forming a union and standing up for themselves as well as winning support from the labor movement and socialists, shows a “relatively sophisticated political mentality” (Sorin 94f).

A “nascent but energetic” (Sorin 173) Zionist movement became more and more popular

as well, although it only counted 12,000 members in 1914. A settlement in Israel and cultural and religious basis would ensure the survival of Jews everywhere in the world and counter the dangers of assimilation (Goren 585).

American Jews, who had established themselves in the middle class, became increasingly hostile towards the large number of new Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe.¹⁷ They saw them as a threat to their own status and a burden to society. Although Jewish charities tried to make their European counterparts impede emigration or to establish a difficult selection process, the flood of Eastern European Jews emigrating to the United States could not be stopped. Among American gentiles, anti-immigration and anti-Semitic feelings grew and more and more establishments tried to exclude Jews completely, for example stating in ads that they “prefer not to entertain Hebrews (Goren 585)”. The stereotype of the Jew became more pronounced and virulent until the turn of the century. Jews were seen as “money powers, manipulating world finances and involved in a giant conspiracy to dominate the world” (Goren 585). Of course, anti-Semitic views were also imported from Europe and defined the Jew as clannish, vulgar, greedy, physically inferior and parasitic. These traits were then ascribed not only to the Russian Jews, who had recently immigrated, but to the entire Jewry in America, including the assimilated middle-class Jewry. This increased the established American Jews’ fear and dislike of the new immigrants even more (Goren 585).

Nonetheless, the assimilated American Jews took responsibility for the new arrivals as it also was in their interest to help them to integrate as quickly as possible. They showed compassion for victims of oppression and helped raise funds to cater to the needs of the newly immigrated Eastern European Jews. Vocational training schools were established as well as settlement houses, homes for delinquent youths and agencies to assist women and the handicapped. Programs in art, music appreciation, drama, physical education, English, civics and domestic science were offered to immigrants showing the importance of Americanization as the uppermost goal of these endeavors. Unfortunately, Orthodox organizations were by trend excluded from fundraising by the state, because they were

¹⁷ A hierarchy had been established within the Jewish community ever since the Sephardic Jews had emigrated to the United States from the Iberian peninsula. Deciding factors here were the time of arrival as well as place of origin, meaning that the farther West the Jewish immigrant was from, the higher his/her status was (Sorin 2).

seen as being too sectarian (Goren 585f).

As a response to the bloodshed and violence following the Kishinev pogrom in 1903 and the vast number of new immigrants, the German Jewry founded the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in 1906 to defend Jewish interests and consequently assumed leadership of the American Jewry on national issues. This committee served as much as a tool to reestablish German Jewish hegemony within the ethnic group as as a means to help Eastern European Jews (Goren 586).

Orthodoxy - as it was rather difficult to obey its dietary rules, pray three times a day in such a busy city or to retain all the numerous religious regulations (Sorin 96) - only survived in alienated synagogues, while communal leaders became more and more worried about the rapid Americanization of second generation Jews. They favored the concept of ethnic pluralism over that of the melting pot. (Goren 586).

Partly due to new laws, it came to a “near-cessation of immigration between 1915 and 1920” (Goren 588), which coincided with a great economic and social improvement raising the standard of living for Jewish workers considerably. Wages went up and workers, merchants and white-collar workers moved out of the ghetto. Acculturation had been encouraged by the war and about 250,000 Jews served in the armed forces, many of them being young men who had recently immigrated (588).

In terms of self-perception, Abram Isaacs, a Jewish American rabbi, author and professor, listed the merits of Jewish Americans and their most important contributions to America in his rather polemical article as follows: the Jew’s “spirit of enterprise”, his “breadth of view”, meaning that he “is never a bigot” and respects other faiths, his patriotism, and, foremost, his “love of education” (Isaacs 682). Focusing on this aspect of education, he writes that “[t]he spirit that moves a poor peddler in a New York Jewish quarter to study Kant’s philosophy while on his rounds, or to read in faithful translation Herbert Spencer or Darwin, is particular to the Jew and proves his moral superiority though his garments be torn and his occupation lowly” (Isaacs 682). Isaacs goes on to say that, “[t]he same spirit impels the poorest to send his children to the public school and to aid them at great personal sacrifice to study for the learned professions; for he knows that education is the most enduring wealth he can bequeath” (Isaacs 682) and that “Jewish students at school

and college are among the most successful is the general testimony of teachers in every city; and, apart from natural aptitude, their high standing is due to the interest evinced by their parents and the value assigned to education” (Isaacs 682). Whether this view should be taken at face value shall not be discussed here; in any case, it shows the emphasis put on the importance of education within the Jewish community. Certainly, not all families were able to afford sending their children to school, or rated education as highly as the learned Abram Isaacs.

The situation for Eastern European Jewish immigrants arriving in America to build a new life in the New World thus appears as truly challenging. Many factors have to be taken into account and many connections between the layers of society considered.¹⁸

3.2. Jewish Immigration in Canada

In 1760, the first (recorded) Jews entered Montréal with General Jeffery Amherst. Most of these settlers emigrated from the United States of America and settled in Montréal. A census from 1831 counted 107 Jewish residents; twenty years later, the number had increased to 451 already. According to Joseph Kage, these settlers were mostly from a middle class background, educated and “engaged in trade, commerce and industry” (918). In 1871, the census counted 1115 Jews, 409 of whom lived in Montréal, 157 in Toronto, 131 in Hamilton. The others lived in small groups in Québec City, Saint John, London, Kingston and Brantford. Around 100 Jews also lived in British Columbia (Schoenfeld).

From the 1850s onwards though, large scale immigration from Europe began. The new residents’ reasons for emigration to Canada were largely the same as of those, who chose to emigrate to America: wars, revolutions, national rivalries and religious conflicts in Europe. The New World, on the other hand, was in need of people willing and capable of working (Kage 918).

Between 1850 and 1900, about 15,000 Jews entered the country and until 1920, another 120,000 Jewish immigrants were registered, most of which came from Eastern Europe. From 1920 until 1940 about 60,000 Jewish immigrants arrived and from World War II

¹⁸ For more information on Jewish immigration to America with a focus on social aspects, cf. Irving Howe’s *World of Our Fathers*, 1976, which offers a very thorough study.

until 1985, around 135,000 more were counted. Immigrants in these last two periods included Jews from the US, from North Africa and the Middle East (Kage 918).

Until 1914, there were very few restrictions for immigration to Canada, but after World War I, restrictions “tightened” (Kage 918), which coincided with the time many Jews were forced out from Russia, Poland, Austria-Hungary, Romania, the Baltic states and other countries for reasons already mentioned in the previous section on Jewish immigration to the United States. During the 1930s and 40s, immigration restrictions were very strict in Canada and as a result, many potential European refugees perished in the terror regime of National Socialism. As Joseph Kage puts it, “Canada’s record was particularly dismal” (Kage 918).

In terms of settlement patterns, Jewish immigrants first settled primarily in Upper and Lower Canada, but “by the 1850s they had settled in all provinces” (Kage 918). As in the US, they mainly chose urban areas, but there also were Jewish farm colonies (Kage 918), for example, eleven Jewish farms which were located in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Around 1914, about three quarters of all Canadian Jews were settled in Toronto and Montréal (Schoenfeld).

Although Jews were discriminated against by restricted access to education etc., they entered into a varied field of occupations (Kage 918), such as working as retailers or wholesalers, peddlers, etc. trying to work their way up. Stuart Schoenfeld also mentions that Jews provided much of the labor for the urban sweatshops of the new ready-to-wear clothing industry (Schoenfeld).

The “pecking order” (Palmer 1470) of desirable immigrants put Jews at a very low level. “Bolstered by pseudo-scientific ideas of race” (Palmer 1470), also called “Social Darwinism”, anglophone Canadians believed that the Anglo-Saxon peoples with their British way of governing were “the apex of biological evolution and that Canada’s greatness depended on its Anglo Saxon heritage” (Palmer 1470). Thus people of other ethnic and cultural backgrounds were seen as threats to this development. Although it had not been “as significant an issue in Québec as it was in Ontario and the West” (Palmer 1470), prejudice and discrimination against Jews also became an issue in Montréal by 1914. Jews were seen as “exploiters, as threats to Christian morality and civilization, and

as symbols of the evils of internationalism, liberalism, bolshevism, materialism and urban life” (Palmer 1470). Street fights and occasional desecrations of Jewish cemeteries as well as discussions about Sunday-closing legislation were results of these tensions (Palmer 1470).

The synagogue generally served as a place of worship as well as as a community center (Kage 918). By 1768, the first one, called Shearith Israel, was established in Montréal (Schoenfeld). Within the Canadian Jewish population, a number of religious denominations have existed: orthodox, conservative, liberal and reformed ones. Orthodox Judaism is based on an authoritative code of religious observance, which is a part of Talmudic law. The influence of Conservative Judaism, an essentially American movement, is spreading. Here, the emphasis is set on the ability of Judaism to adapt to the changing of social, economic, religious and moral needs without losing its distinctiveness. Reform Judaism holds the view that certain beliefs and traditional practices which are seen as anachronistic, should be abolished (Kage 918).

Similar to their US American counterparts, Jewish communities started to develop aid societies, founded organizations providing health and social services intended to help immigrants and residents alike (Kage 918). As Stuart Schoenfeld writes, “[d]uring their long period of international dispersion, Jews had developed an identity based on being a national minority with a distinctive religion and communal structure. When Jews settled in Canada, they founded organizations which expressed each of these dimensions of their identity” (Schoenfeld). Additionally, in an attempt to regain their identity, there were two movements concerning the reconstruction of Jewish identity among the mass of Eastern European immigrants: the first one longed for a modern, independent Jewish society within the state with separate social institutions, Yiddish as the primary language of Jewish cultural life and guaranteed minority rights, whereas the other movement, Zionism, was striving for the establishment of an “independent national state in the ancient Jewish homeland” (Schoenfeld). Both movements gained wide support and Yiddish did indeed become the language of the Jewish theater, writing, of fraternal organizations and everyday life.(Schoenfeld).

As they did in the United States, Jews also established *kehlillahs* in Canada, which served to “look after their social welfare needs” (Schoenfeld). In 1863, the Young Men’s Hebrew

Benevolent Society was founded in Montréal as the first social welfare organization to assist Jewish immigrants.¹⁹ Also similarly to Jewish communities in US America, *landsmenschaften*²⁰ were established, which, as already explained above, were societies of people from the same hometowns, who organized help for relatives left at home or sponsored synagogues. A number of communal organizations were founded in Montréal and Toronto, the cities with the largest Jewish populations, including hospitals, social work agencies, homes for the elderly, libraries, etc. (Schoenfeld).

Thus, concluding, it can be said that US American and Canadian Jewish immigration are similar in many ways. Especially the formation of communities and establishment of social and religious organization and structures, all of which are important markers of communities and society as such, bear striking similarities. Since Eastern European immigrants from the same background and with the same needs came to both nations, this seems quite plausible.

¹⁹ In 1900, the society's name was changed to Baron de Hirsch Institute in recognition of his financial support (Schoenfeld).

²⁰ Spelled *landsmanshaften* in Goren's encyclopedia article (582).

4. AUTHORS AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In this chapter a detailed analysis of the texts chosen will be provided. Representations of language, of location, of Jews in general and Jewish traditions more specifically, as well as representations of living and working conditions, and the myth of the “Golden Land” in selected texts by the US American writers Anzia Yeziarska as well as by the Canadian author Adele Wiseman will be examined in detail and analyzed in terms of their content and way of representing these features.

Because of their own immigrant background, which certainly considerably influenced their views and stories, biographies of the authors will be provided as well as short overviews over their styles of writing and general criticism. This is of utmost importance despite the number of pages this chapter will need because these texts all feature autobiographical passages and stories, and excluding the author from textual analysis in this genre would cause a great loss in understanding these texts.

4.1. Anzia Yeziarska's *Hungry Hearts*

Anzia Yeziarska wanted to tell what was in her ... with the passion of a Christian martyr or a Moslem fanatic. And she did it. Patiently, giving up all things else, she climbed the altar and fed the flame. (Dr. Frank Crane in Henriksen 149)

This passion for expressing her experiences and feelings as well as her craving for learning and the need to finally really belong somewhere are symptomatic for many Jewish immigrants of her time. The struggle between the Old World with its traditions and family bonds and the New World with its opportunities and promise of more personal freedom, but also its limitations and disappointments is a very important issue in Yeziarska's stories. Furthermore, in the introduction to her short story collection *Hungry Hearts*, Yeziarska's passion and need for self-expression is described:

After she began to write, it was her necessity. She was a misfit all her life. Throughout the years she saw herself standing on the street with her nose pressed against the bakery window: hungry and shut out. No matter what happened, she felt marginal. Not belonging became her identity, and then her subject. (Gornick in Yeziarska, *HH*, Introduction, vii)

These are recurring themes in Yeziarska's stories and illustrate her struggle as well as that

of many of her peers. Thus, her own biography is vital to understanding her works, which, in some aspects, can almost be regarded as a kind of social study.

4.1.1. A Biography

Anzia Yeziarska was born into a Jewish family sometime between 1880 and 1885 in Plinsk²¹, a village near Warsaw, Poland. She was the youngest of nine children. Around 1890 the family emigrated to America, following Yeziarska's eldest brother Meyer, who had arrived there a couple of years earlier.²² As to why Yeziarska's date of birth is uncertain there are two theories: she herself might not have recollected it, or, according to her daughter, she reinvented her own history various times in interviews and made herself younger in order to make up for her comparably late start as a writer (Horowitz).

As the family arrived in Ellis Island²³, they were given the last name "Mayer" and Yeziarska's first name was changed to "Harriet" or "Hattie". Later on she reclaimed her own name at the age of 28. After passing the immigration process, Anzia and her family settled into a tiny apartment in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Because Yeziarska's father Baruch, or Bernard, was a Talmudic scholar and studied Holy Scriptures around the clock and thus was not able to financially support his family, Yeziarska's mother, Pearl, had to take odd jobs. After two years of elementary school, Anzia Yeziarska had to take various domestic jobs, such as working as a house servant for distant relatives who had arrived in America some years earlier (Henriksen 16), as well as factory jobs, like working as a button sewer (Henriksen 1). Despite their difficult financial situation, four of Yeziarska's brothers studied pharmacy, one became a Math teacher for high school students and another one became a colonel in the army (Horowitz). For the young immigrant girl, matters were not quite as easy. Carmen Birkle defines her inner drivenness as "a hunger and desire for belonging" instilled in her by her "experiences of uprootedness and subsequent immigration" (Birkle 104).

Yeziarska frequently fought with her father. His opinions on religion, poverty and the

²¹ Zierler gives Plotzk as Yeziarska's hometown.

²² He was given the name "Max Mayer" on Ellis Island. (Horowitz)

²³ Louise Levitas Henriksen states that the family actually arrived in Castle Garden around 1890, when Yeziarska was about 8 to 10. (Henriksen 14).

Eastern European way of life were a barrier to full integration into American society as she saw it. In her (fictionalized²⁴) autobiography *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, Yeziarska writes about her father, “Dimly I realized that this new world didn’t want his kind. He had no choice but to live for God” (Yeziarska, *Red Ribbon* 32). Consequently Anzia moved into the *Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls*²⁵ and studied English at night school while working in sweatshops. In order to be able to attend Columbia University, which she did from 1901 to 1905 (Columbia University Teachers College), she invented a high school career for her application and even gained a scholarship for her studies. From 1908 until 1913 she then taught in elementary school and started to write fiction in 1913 (Horowitz). While studying and working, Yeziarska also produced stories to express her emotions: “Burning all along with the need to express her immigrant aspirations, she labored at the craft of writing, creating stories which eventually propelled her to stardom [...]” (Zierler). Yeziarska also won a one-year scholarship for the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, intending to become an actress although her family ridiculed her plan. After her scholarship ended, Yeziarska became insecure about her possible success in this field and developed new aspirations to become a writer (Henriksen 19-21).

As to her personal life, Yeziarska married Jacob Gordon in 1910, but the marriage was annulled shortly after, because, according to Yeziarska, she valued her husband’s friendship, but was not prepared for the physical aspects of marriage. Apparently she had been in love with Arnold Levitas, whom she finally married a year later. With him, a teacher and textbook writer, Yeziarska had a daughter, Louise Levitas Henriksen, who was born in 1912. The couple soon separated, however, and Yeziarska moved to San Francisco with her daughter, where she took a job as a social worker. Unable to support herself and her daughter and possibly also because she felt overstrained by her duties as a mother, Louise was sent back to her father at the age of five. The author retained a close but troubled relationship with her daughter throughout her life. In 1916, Yeziarska and Levitas divorced (Horowitz).

In 1917, when Yeziarska was in her mid-thirties, she met John Dewey, who was then fifty-

²⁴ *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* cannot be seen as an entirely reliable source on Yeziarska’s life as will be explained in more detail in the next section of this thesis.

²⁵ During this time, it was inappropriate for a Jewish girl to leave her home for another reason than getting married. (Henriksen 17) This shows Yeziarska’s strong-willed and free-spirited character.

eight. He turned out to be the romance of her life. Yeziarska attended his seminar about social and political thought at Columbia University and he was attracted to her because of her emotionality, passion and her outspoken manner. From 1917 to 1918, Dewey wrote several poems about Yeziarska and she wrote him into her stories as the prototype of the Anglo-Saxon gentile mentor or lover²⁶. In *All I Could Ever Be* from 1932, Yeziarska fictionalized this relationship and according to her daughter she used phrases and poems by Dewey in her works without giving him due credit (Horowitz). Dewey had great influence on Yeziarska and he was supposedly the one who set her on the track to become a writer. After observing one of her ill-prepared lessons as a substitute teacher and having been made to read two of her stories, he advised her to work on a career as a writer rather than as a teacher (Zierler). After the affair ended in 1918, Yeziarska is said to have been devastated, but inspired and driven to write at the same time. Her experience with John Dewey, the finding and subsequent loss of the love of her life, was written into various stories and, according to Wendy Zierler, may even lie at the heart of her understanding of the “elusive promise of America” (Zierler).

By 1919, Yeziarska had been able to publish some of her stories in renowned magazines, such as *The Metropolitan*, *The New Republic*, *Harper’s Magazine*, *The Century*, *The Nation*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Good Housekeeping* (Zierler). In 1920 *Hungry Hearts*, a collection of short stories was published and Yeziarska later wrote, “*Hungry Hearts* had been my first book. It had been praised by critics, esteemed as literature. That meant it didn’t sell. After spending the two hundred dollars I had received in royalties, I was even poorer than when I had started writing” (Yeziarska, *Red Ribbon* 26). In 1922 though, Samuel Goldwyn, a movie producer from Hollywood, based a silent movie²⁷²⁸ on the book. It was shot on site in New York’s East Side. In 1925 a silent movie was based on

²⁶ For example as “John Morrow” in *How I Found America*.

²⁷ In his *Studies in Modern Jewish Literature*, Arnold J. Band quotes Neil Gabler, who wrote that “The American film industry ... the quintessence of what we mean by “American,” was founded and for thirty years operated by Eastern European Jews who themselves seemed to be anything but the quintessence of America [...]” (Band 410), but that movies were of great interest to these Jews much longer, because of “the way in which the movies could uniquely assimilate [sic] [the] hunger [for assimilation]” (Band 411). Creating a “new country-an empire of their own so to speak” (Band 411) they were able to create images of themselves any way they wanted to:”It could be an America were fathers were strong., [sic] families stable, people attractive, resilient, resourceful, and decent. This was their America, and its invention may be their most enduring legacy” (Band 411).

²⁸ For more information on Yeziarska and her stint at Hollywood, cf. Botshon, Lisa. “Anzia Yeziarska and the Marketing of the Jewish Immigrant in 1920s Hollywood.” *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory* 30.3 (Fall 2000): 287-312.

Yeziarska's *Salome of the Tenements* as well. Goldwyn later offered a contract of 100,000 Dollars to Yeziarska as a screenwriter, but she refused and returned to a reality of economic difficulties in New York, because she decided that she could not live in shallow Hollywood surrounded by so much wealth and being removed from her cultural roots after having lived there for a while (Horowitz). Yeziarska could not write stories about poverty while living the life of someone rich. (Ziegler) At this point, Anzia Yeziarska seemed to be the embodiment of the American dream, "Sweatshop Cinderella". Nonetheless, her career did not develop as expected. Within ten years, she fell back into obscurity without an income, readers or a publisher (Zierler). The constant repetition of her themes²⁹ as well as her very emotional and overly dramatic style were among the factors that made critics more and more tired of her books. Additionally, Yeziarska used excessively long interior monologues in *Children of Loneliness*. (Zierler)

Finally, in 1950, Yeziarska's fictionalized autobiography *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* was published. The book is considered to be factually unreliable, but nonetheless vibrant in writing. This publication then revived interest in Anzia Yeziarska and her works (Horowitz).

During the 1950s and 1960s, Yeziarska took up the theme of Puerto Rican immigrants in New York as well and then – in the last decade of her life – she started to write about the theme of aging, including the loss of dignity, respect and independence.

On November 21, 1970, Yeziarska died of a stroke in Ontario, California.

4.1.2. Writing and Criticism

Yeziarska herself was not a good and truthful source for the events of her own life. In fact, her daughter, Louise Levitas Henriksen, a professional journalist (Komy 38), writes in her mother's biography *Anzia Yeziarska: A Writer's Life*³⁰, "Whenever she talked about

²⁹ In "Mostly about Myself", which is part of *Children of Loneliness*, Yeziarska confides that she has "one story to tell", which she tells in many different ways each time she writes. This story is "Hunger. Hunger driven by loneliness." (Zierler)

³⁰ Komy claims that Henriksen, whose existence had not been included in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, needed to rewrite her mother's (auto-)biography because "[r]ewriting her mother's life story allows her to write her own story, and in doing so she reinserts herself into the biography of the mother who omitted her from her autobiography" (Komy 33). She also points out that the omission of her daughter and her marriages

herself, to interviewers or even to intimates, she had a way of rearranging or inventing the facts to suit her current feelings” (Henriksen 1-2) and “Anzia never corrected those who took her fiction literally, although she frequently changed the details and dates of such events” (Henriksen 14). Nonetheless, her fictionalized autobiography *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, Yeziarska’s fictionalized autobiography, had at first been accepted as a truthful account of Yeziarska’s life “as she saw it” (Komy 35), but during the period of the renewal of interest in the author’s work in the 1970s and 1980s doubts began to arise about the truthfulness of her account (Komy 35).³¹ *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* is interesting in terms of the plot as well as in terms of language, style etc. Yet other sources have to be used and can be used to describe her actual biography.

As to her style of writing, critics have praised Yeziarska’s work as an authentic voice of the tenements, but also denounced it as “too Jewish” or even offensive (Horowitz). Louise Levitas Henriksen, Yeziarska’s only child, writes, “I think it was the passion, the nakedness of her words that made her a best-selling writer for over a decade. Her subject was, to most readers, colorful, exotic” (Henriksen 6). By the 1940s, Yeziarska had fallen into obscurity again - despite her stint at Hollywood. In the 1980s, more than 10 years after her death, interest in Yeziarska was renewed, because of the increasing popularity of women’s and ethnic writing (Horowitz). Feminists, historians, scholars and readers interested in ethnic groups and culture rediscovered her stories and various biographies were published (Zierler), including *Anzia Yeziarska: A Writer’s Life* by her daughter Louise Levitas Henriksen.

Usually Yeziarska’s work is analyzed in terms of sociological aspects rather than aesthetic ones for stylistic reasons:

Many critics praise the raw power of her writing but see in it no real artistry. They cite the proliferation of stock characters—the overworked mother, the ineffectual father, the intellectual gentile or assimilated male savior, the cold WASP, the rootless Americanized Jew, the condescending social worker, the passionate and intelligent young Jewish immigrant woman. (Horowitz)

Henriksen calls her mother’s writing “stories of protest, in crude, ungrammatical, ghetto

is something Yeziarska used in order to avoid creating the image of a woman who had, at least, partially lived a traditional life like a “conventional Jewish immigrant woman of her time” (Komy 40).

³¹ As Komy points out, it is quite interesting that most of Yeziarska’s stories are seen as autobiographical, but her intended autobiography is widely recognized at least as a very fictionalized account of her life (Komy 35).

idiom, about the desperate lives of immigrants like herself” (Henriksen 1). Sometimes the author uses a rather unusual word order or other unidiomatic expressions, but with her use of the language, she creates powerful and authentic pictures of immigrant dreams and reality. Her unpolished writing style is evident, for example, in the short story “Wings”, which was originally published in *Hungry Hearts* in 1920, when the protagonist, another young, Jewish immigrant girl exclaims, “What is the matter with you? Are you going out of your head? For what is your crying? Who will listen to you? Who gives a care what’s to become from you?” (Yeziarska, *HH*, 4).

Nonetheless, there seems to have been a slight shift in perception as Horowitz also argues that, “[s]ome contemporary readers note Yeziarska’s artful use of metaphor, her ability to present multiple points of view, and the broad humor of her exaggerated types” (Horowitz). Zierler calls Yeziarska’s stories “crude compositions by conventional standards, written in the raw unpolished Yiddishized diction and syntax of an immigrant, but redolent with emotion, energy and striving” (Zierler). Yeziarska’s depictions of cultural and geographical displacement, the “American dream” and the disillusioning reality of the lives of immigrants as well as the struggle to acculturate seem almost tangible and realistic. Later in life, Yeziarska wrote stories in a more polished and educated way, but was not able to reclaim her former status as an applauded writer, as “she didn’t shock and titillate readers as she had when she knew less” (Henriksen 3).

Yeziarska’s protagonists are usually female and she likes to explore their path of acculturation, mainly focusing on Jewish immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century. Her topics are the struggle against poverty, patriarchy, and restrictive Jewish practice. She writes about the fight for acceptance and independence and about personal loss and gain through assimilation. One of her favorite themes is the burden of child care and financial dependence on husbands. Her protagonists often engage in relationships with sophisticated white Anglo-Saxons or assimilated Jewish men rather than other immigrants. These then often function as mentor figures or as lovers (as already hinted at above). Her works are often read as veiled autobiographies, taking the voice of her protagonists (who are usually female, intelligent and passionate young Jewish immigrants) as the author’s own (Horowitz). Vivian Gornick even writes that, “[...] she is her own character, the longing for her own life the thing that seizes her repeatedly by her throat, drives her to find release

in writing” (Gornick in Yeziarska, *HH*, Introduction, xi). Although her autobiography adds to the image of “Sweatshop Cinderella”, Yeziarska herself did not want to be seen as an example of the American Dream (Horowitz). Her daughter Louise Levitas Henriksen writes that with the publishing of Yeziarska’s fictional autobiography *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* “[her] Cinderella history was repolished to a new shine, although in that book she acknowledged failure as the only truth she could believe in and questioned her own integrity when she had been most successful” (Henriksen 3), showing how troubled Yeziarska was.

Yeziarska has often been defined as an ethnic writer. Her descriptions of ethnic women are claimed to be important to “both feminist and labor historians” as “such documentation was crucial to the expansion of labor histories to include more diverse voices in the understanding of twentieth-century labor” (Hefner 188). But, as Hefner discussed in her article, “designat[ing] a writer as ethnic suggests thematic, aesthetic, and ideological affinities with other writers sharing a similar background. This serves as an effective means of generating narratives of ethnic literary history, but often does a disservice to the writers themselves, most of whom neither published in exclusively ethnic literary journals nor explicitly targeted an ethnic audience” (188f.). Yeziarska’s writings had been published in *Metropolitan* and *Century* next to F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Willa Cather and Katherine Anne Porter. Hefner states that Yeziarska’s work “exemplifies ‘vernacular modernism’” (189), meaning that she combines features of modernism with a very expressive language, using the vernacular of her fellow immigrants.

Anzia Yeziarska’s works include *Hungry Hearts* (a collection of short stories published in 1920), *Children of Loneliness* (short stories, published in 1923), *Salome of the Tenements* (novel, published in 1923, reprinted in 1992), *Bread Givers: A Struggle between a Father of the Old World and a Daughter of the New* (novel, published in 1925, reprinted in 1975 and 1984), *Arrogant Beggar* (novel, published in 1927), *All I Could Never Be* (novel, published in 1932), *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* (supposedly autobiographical novel, published in 1950, reprinted in 1981), *How I Found America: Collected Stories* (short stories, published in 1991, reprinted in 2003).

4.1.3. Analysis of Hungry Hearts

Amy Koritz wrote that Yeziarska “was explaining and justifying her immigrant community to native-born readers” and that she defined citizenship in cultural rather than political terms (Koritz). Being accepted and belonging was a necessity. Furthermore, the fact that Eastern European Jews had fled an oppressive regime and intended to settle in the United States permanently made it “crucial” for them to “figure out quickly what it meant to be an American” and adapt to this (Koritz). Additionally, in the time period in which Yeziarska experienced her biggest success, the 1920s, and the preceding years, the “Jewish Question” was heatedly discussed. The discussion was initiated by the wave of Eastern European Jewish immigrants newly arriving in the country, as previously described in detail. Various prestigious periodicals took part in this discussion, among them *Cosmopolitan*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, *The American Magazine*, *The Century* and *The Outlook*. In some of these magazines, for example *The Century*, *Harper's* and *The Forum*, Anzia Yeziarska published her stories. As Ebest notes, “[t]hese were the same publications upon whose pages the debate over the Jews was raging. In other words, Yeziarska's stories engaged this debate in the space it was already occupying” (106). Thus, Ebest claims, “the stories may be understood as arguments, offered by one of the Jews under discussion, and interjected into an on-going, often ugly, frequently nativist, many-voiced debate” (106).

4.1.3.1. Language Use, Narration and Identity

The typical female immigrant protagonist in Yeziarska’s short story “How I Found America” exclaims full of passion, “And it’s the chance to think out thoughts that makes people” (Yeziarska, *HH*, 121). It can be said that, even more so, translating these thoughts into words and sentences is important in terms of perception. Language is an important marker of personal and/or group identity as well as a means to express membership of a community, as we know from our daily lives. When we hear people speak, we assume that their register, dialect, way of phrasing etc. gives us information about their backgrounds and lives. Therefore, the way in which the writers dealt with in this thesis use language as a means to deliver the plot of these stories as well as trying to convey their characters’

emotions, feelings of identity and membership of the Jewish community is highly interesting and will be a major part of the analysis.

For instance, the question of identity is raised numerous times throughout Anzia Yeziarska's stories. In the short story "How I Found America", which was originally published in *Hungry Hearts* in 1920, an immigrant girl is desperately searching for a way to learn how to express her thoughts, because thoughts make people and she came to America to "become a person", to change the country for the better: "But there's got to be change in America! Us immigrants want to be people – not 'hands' – not slaves of the belly! And it's the chance to think out thoughts that makes people" (Yeziarska, *HH*, 121). The connection between being able to express oneself with words and being "a person" is evident here.

In terms of language analysis, Yeziarska's texts have largely been neglected. Brooks E. Hefner writes that, "[...] the narration of her texts – particularly the short stories in *Hungry Hearts* and the novel *Bread Givers* – exhibits a reliance on Yiddish syntax, code switching, and elusive suggestion. Yeziarska takes advantage of her own relationship to language to denaturalize the written word and destroy naïve trust of language in realist writing" (190). Continuing, Hefner explains that the majority of immigrant writers employed visible linguistic differences to show cultural differences. Social hierarchies are created by the use of dialects and "[t]hese realist conventions became a means of textually demonstrating both the humanity and the Americanness of some immigrants, especially those who spoke or narrated in standard speech" (Hefner 190f). Yeziarska's use of language challenges this concept, though. By using this new aesthetic practice, she implicitly criticizes realist writers, such as Mary Antin or Abraham Cahan, for stressing "a sameness" (Hefner 191) of Jewish immigrants and Americans in their texts. Hefner quotes Ann Drucker, who wrote that Yeziarska "used [dialect] to show that her characters came from the culture of the ghetto, but without that culture denigrating or debasing them" (Hefner 191). The writer "celebrates the multiethnic quality of American society and the value that immigrants bring to the linguistic identity of the United States" (Hefner 194) in a letter she once wrote to the *New York Times Book Review and Magazine*:

Foreigners bring new color, new music, new beauty of expression to worn-out words. The foreign mind works on an old language like the surging leaven of youth. It rekindles and

recreates our speech. Trite words, stale phrases, break up into new rhythms in the driving urge to express more vitally the rush of new experience, the fire of changing personality. (Yeziarska in Hefner 194)

In terms of narration, it has to be pointed out that Yeziarska, in marked contrast to Antin, Cahan and other Jewish immigrant writers, always “foregrounds an immigrant consciousness” in her stories, allowing us to experience the plot through the protagonist’s eyes.

4.1.3.1.1. Yiddish

Immigrants lived in tight, ethnically separated communities, which stretched over a few streets in a certain area of a city. Their next-door-neighbors were most likely from the same ethnic background and - more or less - in the same financial trouble. Quarters like the Jewish ghetto in Manhattan’s Lower East Side, Little Italy etc. were tightly knit and very different from each other. Language in such a community is a very interesting matter. Amongst each other, Eastern European Jewish immigrants surely used their mother tongue, Yiddish, especially if they originally came from the same region. As Yeziarska’s stories are not part of the Yiddish canon, the writer had to find a way to make a distinction between their protagonists’ use of English and Yiddish throughout their stories.

Anzia Yeziarska uses Yiddish expressions in various situations. Interestingly, she seemingly applies these in rather emotional moments or for emphasis. “Oï weh” is used very often as an expression for pain, fear or sadness. “Oï” is also used as a marker of surprise, for example when the protagonist is offered more money from the pawnbroker for her last heirloom from her dead mother than she expected: ““Oï mister!’ cried Shenah Pessah³², as the man handed her the bill. ‘You’re saving my life! God will pay you for this goodness”” (Yeziarska, “Wings”, *HH*, 11) or when she is pleasantly surprised: ““Oï-i-i! Yes! Thanks-!’ She stammered in confusion” (Yeziarska, “Wings”, *HH*, 12).

Additionally, Yiddish terms are used when necessary for the cultural background, for example for food (“gefüllte fish” (*RR*, 49)) or folk songs (“Vos mir sannen sannen mir, ober Iden sannen mir.”(*RR*, 50)). They create a link between the story told in English and

³² Shenah Pessah is “the paradigmatic Yeziarskan heroine: uneducated, but eager to learn; lonely; longing for community and engagement with others; passionately emotional” (Pavletich 86).

the cultural background implied in the text. Certainly, Jews on Hester Street speak Yiddish with one another instead of English, a foreign language to them or at least to the first generations of immigrant families. Wendy Zierler states that, “[l]ike other Jewish writers – Abraham Cahan and Henry Roth, just to name two – [Yeziarska] employed immigrant dialect as an authentic means of probing the hearts of her characters and recording their impressions of the American Promised Land” (Zierler). Thus, Yeziarska’s use of language to imply dialect and immigrant background cannot be said to be due to the author’s own insecurities with the language, but rather a skillful use of words and expressions typical for the vernacular.

4.1.3.1.2. English

When Yeziarska’s immigrant girl tries to stand up to her boss in “How I Found America”, he tells her, “You – loaferin – money for nothing you want! The minute they begin to talk English they get flies in their nose ... A black year on you – trouble-maker! I’ll have no smart heads in my shop! Such freshness! Out you get ... out from my shop!” (HH, 117). The way in which the - also Jewish - shop owner defines the ability to speak English as the marker of Americanization, the point at which “trouble” starts, is very interesting. The use of language as a means of assimilation is represented here quite clearly. For Yeziarska’s protagonist in this story, English becomes a way to free her mind and allow her to fully arrive in America as an American, which allows her to finally belong somewhere.

The protagonist evolves from an immigrant girl, who can only be used for hard physical labor, from someone who can be abused by people who are able to exert power over her for various reasons, into a full person with a mind to think about more abstract and complicated things than the next meal to fill her belly and those of her family members. English here is the key to freedom because it marks the moment where “hands” become “people” who think and speak for themselves. Speaking English was a major step forward in becoming a “real American”, an “Amerikanerin”.

To some immigrants, this development seems to have had a negative connotation though as the use of the word “Amerikanerin” in the following two examples shows. In “How I Found America”, the protagonist, an immigrant girl stands up to the boss of the sweatshop

for her co-workers and herself. He then tells her, “I want no big-mouthed Americanerins in my shop” (*HH*, 117). Consequently he fires her. “Americanerin” obviously means considerably more in this context, than just an immigrant girl who settled in America. It clearly has a negative note, corresponding to an image of a lazy, big-mouthed girl, who feels that she is too good for hard work among her uneducated fellow Jewish immigrants.

In *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, Yeziarska goes to visit her father after not having seen him for quite a while and he is very unhappy with the fact that she does not take care of him the way he expects her to. He says, “Your first duty to God is to serve your father. But what’s an old father to an *Amerikanerin*, a daughter of Babylon?” (*RR*, 33). Here “Amerikanerin” is used in a very negative way as well, again showing that old traditions and family structures were very difficult to maintain in the New World and the struggles of Yeziarska herself and her immigrant protagonist, who tried to make a different living for themselves in the New World.

Edward Shapiro writes,

The character of Jewish immigration clearly showed the extent to which American Jews identified with their new homeland. Of all the major immigrant groups, Jews had a larger percentage of children and, next to the Irish, a larger percentage of women. When Jews came to the United States, they came with their families, and they came to stay. Their rate of repatriation was far lower than of other immigrant groups. With nothing to return to in Europe, Jews had decisively broken their ties with the old country. And once in America, Jews rapidly learned English, flocked to the public schools, and became citizens with alacrity. (Shapiro 162)

This need to stay in America as well as their willingness to learn English and thus assimilate to the new situation in their new homes is evident in Yeziarska’s texts. Usually, her protagonists are rather young. Despite this willingness to learn, the characters in Yeziarska’s stories face difficulties with the new language. Hefner claims that in Yeziarska’s stories, “[h]er characters, always striving to become American, find themselves drawn back to their Lower-East-Side, Jewish roots, even in the syntactical construction of language” (Hefner 193). This discrepancy between assimilating to a new culture while being strongly connected to old, cultural roots is reflected in Yeziarska’s use of language very well.

4.1.3.2. Location

The stories published in *Hungry Hearts* are set in New York's Lower East Side, at the site of the major Jewish immigrant ghetto. Throughout her stories, Yeziarska describes this community as buzzing with noise, people and movement. In the "intensely interactive community of the Lower East Side" (Koritz) protagonists live, work, unsuccessfully look for or find true love and always search for a way to "become a person" or a "real American". For example, in "Hunger", Anzia Yeziarska writes, "Through streets growing black with swarming crowds of toil-released workers they made their way. [...] The haggling pushcart peddlers, the newsboys screaming, 'Tageblatt, Abendblatt, Herold,' the roaring noises of the elevated trains resounded the pæan [sic] of joy swelling his heart" (*HH*, 25). The mixture of languages in the Jewish community, the noise of the ghetto as well as Yeziarska's educational background (through the use of the unusual word "pæan") become quite clear here. In "My Own People", we see the busy Jewish ghetto through the story's protagonist's eyes: "With the suitcase containing all her worldly possessions under her arm, Sophie Sapinsky elbowed her way through the noisy ghetto crowds. Pushcart peddlers and pullers-in shouted and gesticulated. Women with market-baskets pushed and shoved one another, eyes strained with the one thought-how to get the food a penny cheaper" (Yeziarska, "My Own People", *HH*, 97).

Furthermore, as Koritz writes, "[t]he space inhabited by characters is seldom private or under their control, unlike the personal space of a college professor or other professionals" (Koritz). This marks an important distinction in Yeziarska's writing although it is not as prominent in the stories analyzed in this thesis and, thus, will not be dealt with in detail here. Nonetheless, one of the short stories in *Hungry Hearts* particularly shows the importance of personal space. In "The Free Vacation House", the protagonist, an exhausted mother, realizes how important her home, her personal space with her own rules is after returning from a free "vacation" in the country provided by a charity society: "I was always kicking that my rooms was small and narrow, but now small rooms seemed to grow so big like the park. I looked out from my window on the fire-escapes, full with bedding and garbage-cans, and on the wash-lines full with the clothes" (*HH*, 49).

Disappointment with America in terms of living conditions is expressed in "How I Found America" by the story's protagonist: "'Where are the green fields and spaces in America?'"

cried my heart. “Where is the golden country of my dreams?”” (*HH*, 114). On the one hand, this certainly refers to the location, to the desperate living conditions in an overcrowded area, where living in an apartment with sufficient light was a luxury, but, on the other hand, certainly also to the protagonist’s despair at realizing that the “golden land” as such did not exist.

Yeziarska continuously represents “emotionally intense, often histrionic, interactions among casual acquaintances and family members alike” (Koritz). Locations as markers of community play an important part in this. In “The Lost Beautifulness”, the butcher’s shop, for instance, functions as a meeting place for Jewish women, who “all got time to stand around here and chatter like a box of monkeys, for hours” (*HH*; 33). When the protagonist, Hanneh Hayyeh, is desperate after receiving devastating news, she “[m]echanically halted at the butcher shop” and “[t]hrowing herself on the vacant bench, she buried her face in her shawl and burst out in a loud, heart-piercing wail” (*HH*, 37). In the shop, Hanneh Hayyeh is consoled by her friends, whom she always meets there, and, apparently, such an emotional outburst at the butcher’s shop is nothing too unusual.

4.1.3.3. Jews and Jewish Traditions

Anzia Yeziarska struggled with her own Jewishness and that of her very religious father (Adelman). In her stories, Jewishness in terms of religion does not necessarily play an important role. Carmen Birkle writes that, “[i]n her stories, however, [Yeziarska] never ceased recreating her characters and herself as a kind of “American Cinderella” but finally believed that “because she had denied her heritage ... she was not a real Jew”. Despite their assimilationist tendencies, Lazarus, Cahan, and Yeziarska realized the relevance of their Jewishness as well as their national origins in the formation of their identities in which migration was an essential feature” (Birkle 105). Representations of the “nature” of Jewish immigrants, who supposedly are very different from Anglo-Saxon Americans, are far more important in Yeziarska’s stories than descriptions of religious acts. Nonetheless, sometimes, if important for the plot, they are mentioned.

For instance, as Gerald Sorin explains, “[o]ne of those [mother’s] duties was preparing for the Sabbath. It was necessary to have the apartment clean, the best meal of the week

prepared, the challah baked, or at least bought, and the wine and candles ready” (Sorin 96). In the short story “How I Found America”, the protagonist’s family is evicted from its lowly home after not being able to pay the rent, but, nonetheless, Sabbath is being respected:

It was Sabbath eve. My father was in the synagogue praying and my mother, defiant of disgrace, had gone on with the ceremony of Sabbath. All the romance of our race was in the light of those Sabbath candles. Homeless, abandoned by God and man, yet in the very desolation of the streets my mother’s faith burned – a challenge to all America. (*HH*, 122)

Yeziarska, whose stories can largely be seen as autobiographical, portrays her protagonist’s mother in an emotional and respectful way. At the same time, the difficulty of belonging to two worlds is evident.

Jewish immigrants, especially women, are generally portrayed as very emotional, animated and “fresh”. Pavlevitch states that

[t]he texts juxtapose the ardent and dynamic emotion culture of the immigrant female against the narrowly circumscribed emotion culture of the dominant Anglo-Saxons. This narrative strategy exposes the limits of an emotion culture that emphasizes restraint and reserve as markers of civilization while it offers the passionate emotionalism of the immigrant as the antidote to those limits. (Pavlevitch 86)

This intensity can be related to Yeziarska herself as “[John] Dewey³³ was apparently attracted to the spontaneous and unrepressed emotionalism of Yeziarska’s personality, a style understood and accommodated in the Jewish ghetto but foreign to the habits of emotional restraint nurtured in Anglo-Saxon families” (Koritz). Representations of this are numerous in Yeziarska’s texts. For example in “The Miracle”, in which the protagonist emigrated to America to find love and get married despite being destitute, the girl says at one point: “I’m afraid of my heart,” I said, trying to hold back the blood rushing to my face. “I’m burning to get calm and sensible like the born Americans. But how can I help it? My heart flies away from me like a wild bird. How can I learn to keep myself down on earth like the born Americans?” (*HH*, 59).

The difference between Jewish immigrants and Anglo-Saxon settled Americans can thus be defined the following way: Jews (especially women) are emotional, very intense and outspoken, whereas Anglo-Saxons are much more restrained and less emotional. Jewish immigrants are portrayed as warm and ambitious, Anglo-Saxons often as cold and

³³ John Dewey was Yeziarska’s lover and greatly influenced her writings (Koritz).

calculating.

4.1.3.4. Family and Marriage

Family and marriage are central to Yeziarska's stories. The social status of women, their struggle to become independent or, at least, to find a husband in order to secure their financial well-being are recurring themes in her stories.

Numerous times, Yeziarska refers to the fact that a young woman without sufficient money, thus without a dowry, was very unlikely to find a husband as marrying for love apparently was rather the exception than the rule. In Yeziarska's stories, her protagonists, who usually are young Jewish female immigrants, as has been previously established, are often looking for love and, thus, at the same time, for security and a place to belong. Their despair at being destitute is apparent in the texts. For example, in the short story "Wings", the protagonist, a young Jewish immigrant, of course, laments the fact that she seemingly has no future marital happiness in front of her, because she has no dowry to offer to her future husband, but, nonetheless, she enjoys a brief moment of hope: "This new wave of hope swept aside the fact that she was the greenhorn janitress, that she was twenty-two and dowryless, and, according to the traditions of her people, condemned to be shelved aside as an unmated thing – a creature of pity and ridicule" (*HH*, 4). In "The Miracle", this notion is worded even more drastically: "In my village a girl without a dowry was a dead one. The only kind of man that would give a look on a girl without money was a widower with a dozen children, or someone with a hump or on crutches" (*HH*, 51). Emigrating to America gives these female characters hope that a lack of money will not hinder marital happiness, as shown in the short story "The Miracle": "'America is a lover's land,' said Hanneh Hayyeh's letter. 'In America millionaires fall in love with poorest girls. Matchmakers are out of style, and a girl can get herself married to a man without the worries for a dowry'" (*HH*, 51).³⁴

Finding a husband was a difficult task. Despite the content of the aforementioned letter, so-called matchmakers were often consulted to help find a suitable partner. Their services

³⁴ Letters such as this one used as a plot device by Yeziarska often arrived in the Old World and "vibrated with optimism, sometimes falsely so" (Howe 35).

were usually quite expensive and, of course, no guarantee could be given as to the success of the venture. In Yeziarska's stories, these matchmakers are always portrayed as greedy persons, profiting from their fellow immigrants' innermost wishes. In the short story "Wings", Shenah Pessah, the protagonist, overhears a matchmaker talking to her uncle trying to make a deal:

Then from the open doorway of their kitchen she overheard Mrs. Melker, the matchmaker, talking to her uncle. "Motkeh, the fish-peddler, is looking for a wife to cook him his eating and take care of his children," she was saying in her shrill, grating voice. "So I thought to myself that this is a golden chance for Shenah Pessah to grab. You know a girl in her years and without money, a single man wouldn't give a look on her. (HH, 8)

The uncle resists this attempt though because he needs his niece to continue working for him. Mrs. Melker, the matchmaker, then draws a very dark picture of the situation Jewish immigrant girls without money faced when wanting to marry.

'Living is so high,' went on Mrs. Melker, 'that single men don't want to marry themselves even to *young* girls, except if they can get themselves into a family with money to start them up in business. It is Shenah Pessah's luck yet that Motkeh likes good eating and he can't stand it any more the meals in a restaurant. He heard from people what a good cook and house-keeper Shenah Pessah is, so he sent me around to tell you he would take her as she stands without a cent.' (HH, 8)

Here, not only the desperate situation of these young women becomes clear to the reader, but also the status of marriage in this community. It has to be seen as a partnership of convenience rather than a sacred union or even a commitment for love. In "The Miracle", the protagonist also consults a matchmaker after coming to America to find a good husband and comes to the realization that marriage rather depends on money than love, as illustrated here: "'Oh-h-h! Is it only depending on *money*?' asked the immigrant girl and the matchmaker coolly answers, 'Certainly. No move in this world without money'" (HH, 56).

4.1.3.4.1. Women

Women's social status is closely connected with concepts of marriage and culture. Their dependence on men is represented time and time again in Yeziarska's stories, as is the power held by men over women in daily matters. For example, in the short story "Hunger", the protagonist's uncle, who uses his niece to do his jobs, tells her after she forgot to add salt to the food she prepared for him, because she is head over heels in love, that "[i]n the

Talmud it stands a man has a right to divorce his wife for only forgetting him the salt in his soup” (*HH*, 18).

Women were bound to fulfill roles already laid out for them by society. As Amy Koritz writes in her article, “For many Jewish women, opportunities were defined by traditions that dictated early marriage and motherhood, or the obligation to support family members” (Koritz). Thus, a woman’s purpose in life was to marry and have children and/or to take care of her family.³⁵

Again, hopes were high that in America women would have more rights and an easier life. In “The Miracle”, a letter describing the supposed situation in America astounds an entire Polish village:

‘In America is a law called ‘ladies first,’” the letter went on. ‘In the cars the men must get up to give their seats to women. The men hold the babies on their hands and carry the bundles for the women, and even help with the dishes. There are not enough women to go around in America. And the men run after the women, and not like in Poland, the women running after the men’ (*HH*, 51).

Certainly, this does not turn out to be a truthful account, but it clearly shows the wishes pronounced by Jewish women and hopes held by them.

Nonetheless, as shown by the protagonist in “Wings”, Yeziarska’s main characters develop and become stronger. They try to strike out on their own and to defy a social system that was carried across the Atlantic ocean by them and their fellow immigrants. In “Wings”, Shennah Pessah voices this when happening to overhear the matchmaker’s attempt to persuade her uncle to marry her off: “‘Don’t you worry yourself for me,’ she commanded, charging into the room. ‘Don’t take pity on my years. I’m living in America, not in Russia. In America, if a girl earns her living, she can be fifty years old and without a man, and nobody pities her’” (*HH*, 9). This moment is what Pavletich calls the “‘first act of acculturation’ in ‘a moment of anger and rebellion’ (89) in “Wings”.

Besides the obvious references to women’s social status and limited power, Yeziarska also incorporates in her stories very clear statements concerning men’s low opinion of women. For example in “The Lost Beautifulness”, the protagonist’s husband ridicules her for realizing her dream of having a beautiful, white kitchen with great effort. He says, “Och!

³⁵ As portrayed in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, the strained relationship between Yeziarska and her father, who expects her to fulfill her obligations as a faithful daughter to him, further illustrate the argument.

Stop your dreaming out of your head. Close up your mouth from your foolishness. Women got long hair and small brains” (*HH*, 32). Nonetheless, these women do not necessarily allow men, especially their husbands, to treat them like that. Hanneh Hayyeh, the protagonist in the aforementioned story, stands up to her husband and chases him out of their apartment after he derides her once again. Yeziarska writes, ““Out! Out from my sight! Out from my house!” shrieked Hanneh Hayyeh. In her rage she seized a flat-iron and Jake heard her hurl it at the slammed door as he fled downstairs” (Yeziarska, “The Lost “Beautifulness””, *HH*, 41). Thus, these women claim power more and more.

4.1.3.5. Education

Education is one of the most important themes in Yeziarska’s stories. Her protagonists yearn to learn and, as already quoted above³⁶, they associate education with “becoming a person” and, thus, gaining power and being able to build a life for themselves. Nonetheless, “Yeziarska depicted schools both positively and negatively; though seeing them as sources of generous mentors and patrons, she resisted their demands for docility and self-discipline” (Koritz). Additionally, she seemingly doubted the schools’ curricula, which is reflected in her protagonists’ opinion on this. Thus, learning and getting an education was two-sided for the writer as well as for her protagonists. For example, in “Soap and Water”, which is a very autobiographical story, the protagonist describes her frustration with this system: “For six years I worked daytimes and went at night to a preparatory school. For six years I went about nursing the illusion that college was a place where I should find self-expression, and vague, pent-up feelings could live as thoughts and grow ideas” (*HH*, 73). In “How I Found America”, this notion is voiced even more clearly: “That was the first of many schools I had tried. And they were all the same. A dull course of study and the lifeless, tired teachers – no more interested in their pupils than in the wooden benches before them – chilled all my faith in the American schools” (*HH*, 124).

Thus, in conclusion, the need of “becoming a person” lies at the heart of Yeziarska’s stories and education seems to be a means to achieve this goal. Immigrants, like Anzia Yeziarska herself, were offered courses at night schools or immigrant schools where they were taught practical skills, but being able to really learn and attend college signified a

³⁶ This was discussed in more detail in the chapter on the use of English in Yeziarska’s stories.

long and exhausting struggle.

4.1.3.6. Poverty

Poverty is depicted various times throughout Yeziarska's stories. The protagonists' strife for a better life is always hindered by financial needs and daily life is greatly concerned with the struggle to survive physically as well as mentally.

One recurring aspect of this is the negative characterization of landlords: "The dogs! The blood-sucking landlords! They are the new czars from America!" (Yeziarska, "The Lost Beautifulness", *HH*, 38). Many of these landlords are Jewish as well, but seemingly unconcerned by their tenants' poverty. Especially in "The Lost Beautifulness", the landlord uses the protagonist's improvements of the rented apartment to raise her rent and, when she cannot afford it anymore despite saving all the money she can by half starving to death, he has the family evicted. In the short story "How I Found America", the protagonist is greeted by a most unwelcome sight upon her arrival at home: "On the sidewalk stood a jumbled pile of ragged house-furnishings that looked familiar – chairs, dishes, kitchen pans. Amidst bundles of bedding and broken furniture stood my mother. Oblivious of the curious crowd, she lit the Sabbath candles and prayed over them" (*HH*, 122).

The second necessity for survival besides shelter certainly is food. In "The Fat of the Land", the struggle for cheap food is portrayed very well: "Because of the lateness of her coming, the stale bread at the nearest bakeshop was sold out, and Hanneh Breineh had to trudge from shop to shop in search of the usual bargain, and spent nearly an hour to save two cents" (*HH*, 83). Passages like this also show women's role in caring for a family. Men went to work, often for minimum wages, while women had to "pinch every penny" in order to "stretch" the money they had to be able to feed their husband and children.

Despite these images of biting poverty, the stories' protagonists never lose hope and still remain settled within themselves. Evictions, although life-changing events, seemingly were commonplace and, apart from a little curiosity and compassion, resulted in little attention.

4.1.3.7. Charity Societies

The importance of state-financed as well as private Jewish charity societies was emphasized in this thesis in the introduction to immigration history and culture. Nonetheless, these charity societies “left a deep sense of shame and inadequacy that [Yeziarska’s] writing returns to repeatedly” (Koritz). For example, in Yeziarska’s short story “The Free Vacation House”, a young mother of four unwittingly applies for and is granted a holiday in a vacation home for exhausted immigrant mothers by a charity society. This story, which was based on experiences of Yeziarska’s sister (Koritz), shows a very negative side of these social charities and demonstrates, on the one hand, how necessary they were, but also, on the other hand, how many immigrants despised being dependent on them.

During the application procedure, the young mother is questioned about her personal life and her family various times: “What is my first name? How old I am? From where come I? How long I’m already in this country? Do I keep any boarders? What is my husband’s first name? How old he is? How long he is in this country? By what trade he works? How much wages he gets for a week? How much money do I spend out for rent? How old are the children, and everything about them” (*HH*, 44). This invasion of her privacy by a well-off lady with “a white starched dress like a nurse” (*HH*, 44), is a great burden to the protagonist and, as it turns out, her negative feelings about this charity society turn out to be right. As she discovers, the beautiful house with its garden and lovely porch is a strictly regulated place. Immigrants, who are granted to stay there for a while, have to adhere to innumerable rules: “We dassen’t stand on the front grass where the flowers are. We dassen’t stay on the front porch. We dassen’t sit on the chairs under the shady trees. We must stay always in the back and sit on those long wooden benches there. We dassen’t come in the front sitting-room or walk on the front steps what have carpet on it-we must walk on the back iron steps” and - this is the changing point of the story - “Everything in the front of the house must be kept perfect for the show for visitors. We dassen’t lay down on the beds in the daytime, the beds must always be made up perfect for the show for visitors” (*HH*, 48). The misunderstanding between new immigrants and settled benefactors from charities or other establishments, which attempt to offer immigrants help and a new starting point in life, like, for example, night school as discussed earlier, is a recurring

theme in Yeziarska's stories. The writer often depicts a strong and proud (usually female) Jewish immigrant who struggles with her own need to accept help from others. But, as Amy Koritz brings it to a point, "[t]he officials of the charities are inevitably depicted as unfeeling, indifferent to the dignity of their clients, and more worried about being taken advantage of by undeserving poor than respecting the dignity of those in need of help" (Koritz). Yeziarska's protagonists try to rebel against these impositions, but turn to charity organizations for help nonetheless.³⁷

4.1.3.8. Work

Work is a central theme in Yeziarska's writing - not only a necessity to survive, but also as a sought out way to "become a person". Koritz writes that "Yeziarska's characters seek highly autonomous, individualistic, and self-expressive modes of work. They seek to forge identities for themselves that would be recognizably middle-class, often intellectual or creative, and self-directed" (Koritz). As already mentioned in her biography, Yeziarska strove to learn and to become a teacher and then a writer, but she had considerable experience with hard work. From early on in her childhood she had had to work as a servant or in sweatshops to support her family and later to support herself and to be able to study. These experiences can be seen as reference points (Koritz) for the "physically intense" work her characters have to do in spite of their strife for higher purposes (Koritz). Amy Koritz even goes so far as to say that Yeziarska did not only treat sweatshops in an entirely negative way in her fiction, because "[a]lthough she frequently complained that the sweatshops she was forced into as a new immigrant were deadening and oppressive, and that this kind of work denied her potential as a person and as an American, the sweatshops also grounded her identity in a community in ways that professional work did not" (Koritz).³⁸ The individuality longed for by the immigrant protagonists builds a strong contrast to representations of work in the sweatshops.

Descriptions of terrible working conditions are numerous in Yeziarska's stories. For example, in "Hunger", a male character, Sam Arkin, upon arrival in the United States "fell

³⁷ In "My Own People" another family's negative encounter with a charity organization is described, but, due to reasons of space, this will not be discussed here at length.

³⁸ This may also have been a reason for her to not further her Hollywood career, as she felt uprooted and unconnected in Los Angeles (Yeziarska, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, 1987).

into the hands of a cockroach boss” (*HH*, 26). This “cockroach boss” uses hopeful and unsuspecting newcomers in his sweatshops, picking them up upon arrival and tricking them into accepting his work offer: “A black year on him! He was a landsman, that’s how he fooled me in. He used to come to the ship with a smiling face of welcome to all the greenhorns what had nobody to go to. And then, he’d put them to work in his sweatshop and sweat them into their grave” (*HH*, 27). Here the different situations of earlier and later immigrant becomes clear.

A usual workday is described in Yeziarska’s fiction as well. Her protagonist in “The Miracle” described her workday the following way: “Ten hours I pushed a machine in a shirtwaist factory, when I was yet lucky to get work. And always my head was drying up with saving and pinching and worrying to send home a little from the little I earned. All that my face saw all day long was girls and machines – and nothing else” (*HH*, 55). The enormous strain this put on immigrant workers is vividly described in “How I Found America”, when the protagonist relates to the reader, “My eyes were shutting themselves with sleep. Blindly, I felt for buttons on my dress, and buttoning I sank back in sleep again – the deadweight sleep of utter exhaustion” (*HH*, 114).

Despite these working conditions, immigrants had to accept such offers because not having a job would mean utter destitution. Because of the large numbers of new, unskilled immigrants, jobs were desperately sought for and, as described in “Hunger”, not all of the settled immigrants were content with the situation as they feared for their own working positions: “Another greenhorn with a wooden head!” she whispered to her neighbor as Shenah Pessah removed her shawl. “Gevalt! All these greenhorn hands tear the bread from our mouths by begging to work so cheap” (*HH*, 21).

The attitude of the employers towards their employees is documented in Yeziarska’s writings as well: “‘Hands,’ he addressed us, fingering the gold watch-chain that spread across his fat belly, ‘it’s slack in the other trades and I can get plenty girls begging themselves to work for half what you’re getting – only I ain’t a skinner. I always give my hands a show to earn their bread. From now on, I’ll give you fifty cents a dozen shirts instead of seventy-five, but I’ll give you night-work, so you needn’t lose nothing.’” (*HH*, 116). On the one hand, employers needed workers to be able to produce, but, on the other hand, the vast amount of people ready to take over a free position allowed them to keep

wages low and working hours long.

Children were a great burden on a family in terms of money, but could add to the household budget when growing older by working in a sweatshop or as a servant in a household as well. In “The Fat of the Land”, the despairing protagonist, who constantly worries about being able to feed her children and herself, is encouraged by her good-hearted neighbor, who says, “‘Wait only till your children get old enough to go to the shop and earn money,’ she consoled. ‘Push only through those few years while they are still small; your sun will begin to shine; you will live on the fat of the land, when they begin to bring you in the wages each week’” (*HH*, 81f). Children were not allowed to work from an early age on though, but had to get “working papers” in order to be accepted by sweatshops: “‘Never mind; you’ll yet come out of all your troubles. Just as soon as your children get old enough to get their working papers the more children you got, the more money you’ll have” (Yeziarska, “The Fat of the Land”, *HH*, 82).

An improvement of working conditions is shown in Yeziarska’s stories nonetheless. In “How I Found America”, the protagonist finally accepts that she will have to work in a sweatshop for a while. She is astounded by the changes of her workplace and notices that, “[f]or that was the first I had heard of improved conditions of work. But little by little, step by step, the sanitation improved. Open windows, swept floors, clean washrooms, individual drinking-cups introduced a new era of factory hygiene. Our shop was caught up in the general movement for social betterment that stirred the country” (*HH*, 123).

4.1.3.9. America, the “Golden Land”, and Americanization

In America a person can’t live on hopes for the next world. In America everybody got to look out for himself. (Yeziarska, “Wings”, *HH*, 8)

Hopes for change and a better life were great upon immigration to America, the “golden land”. Immigrants' strategies of adapting and transforming themselves are represented numerous times throughout Yeziarska’s work and they “[reveal] not only [...] the attitudes and aspirations of these immigrants but also [...] the messages - not always unmixed - being conveyed to them by the culture they confronted as strangers” (Koritz). Hopes and even expectations of a better future in America were not always met and life in America

certainly posed many more difficulties than expected. Yeziarska portrays these in vivid detail and with her typically colorful language. Thus, she allows the reader to feel with her protagonists.³⁹

In order to be able to afford immigration to America, potential Jewish immigrants, or at least Yeziarska's characters, have to give up what is most important to them. For example in "The Miracle", the protagonist's family sells their culturally most important and prized possessions in order to be able to afford a ticket to America for their daughter. At the first suggestion to sell his torah, the father reacts defensively and shocked, crying out, "What? A Jew sell the Saifer Torah or the Sabbath candlesticks?" My father fixed on us his burning eyes like flaming wells. His hands tightened over his heart. He couldn't speak. He just looked at the Saifer Torah, and then on us with a look that burned like live coals on our naked bodies. 'What?' he gasped. 'Should I sell my life, my soul from generation and generation? Sell my Saifer Torah? Not if the world goes under!'" (*HH*, 53). The "world does not go under" in the story, of course, but he finally decides to sell his beloved torah alongside the Sabbath candlesticks nonetheless. This unselfish action clearly shows how great hopes for America were. Even the greatest sacrifices were worth the chance at a new life in the "golden land". This is also reflected in numerous exclamations of excitement and satisfaction upon the acquirement of a ticket, among them: "Fifty rubles! A ship-ticket to America! That so much luck should fall on one head!" (Yeziarska, "How I Found America", *HH*, 111).

America signifies much more to these new immigrants than just a geographical mass. JoAnn Pavletich defines it the following way: "America is not the land occupied by the United States of America, nor is it the laws or customs. It exists variously as particular attitudes or poses in certain individuals or, sometimes, in an event. It operates in ways that are often in opposition to other less enabling yet material forces in the immigrant's world. America is part of the immigrant's vision and as such is, at least in part, her construction" (Pavletich 94).

This view is reflected in many passages of Yeziarska's texts. America does not only give hope to the immigrants' wishes of material improvement, but also a hope of spiritual

³⁹ This is even amplified in the stories with a first person narrator as we see the immigrants' world through one of them even more directly.

fulfillment and the opportunity to “become a person”:

‘In America you can say what you feel – you can voice your thoughts in the open streets without fear of a Cossack.’

‘In America is a home for everybody. The land is your land. Not like in Russia where you feel yourself a stranger in the village where you were born and raised – the village in which your father and grandfather were buried. Everybody is with everybody alike. Christians and Jews are brothers together.’

‘An end to the worry for bread. An end to the fear of the bosses over you. Everybody can do what he wants with his life in America. There are no high or low in America. Even the president holds hands with Gedalyeh Mindel. Plenty for all.’

‘Learning flows free like milk and honey.’ (Yeziarska, “How I Found America”, *HH*, 112f.)

This need for change and for a betterment of their powerless situation even leads to some interest in politics, as reflected in the short story “The Lost Beautifulness”: “She’s been telling me about a new word – democracy. It got me on fire. Democracy means that everybody in America is going to be with everybody alike” (*HH*, 33). This is only a very fleeting notion though and it is certainly not difficult to understand why female immigrant protagonists would not perceive politics to be one of their most immediate and important interests.

The change that all of Yeziarska’s immigrants are longing for first starts within their minds. In “Hunger”, the protagonist confronts her uncle, who puts her to work without paying her. She says, “Other girls come naked and with nothing to America and they work themselves up. Everybody gets wages in America” Of course, her uncle disagrees and forcefully answers, “Americanerin! Didn’t I spend enough money on your ship-ticket to have a little use from you? A thunder should strike you!” (*HH*, 19)

Despite these hopes of the possibility to build a better life for themselves, Yeziarska’s protagonists are usually faced with a crisis. They begin to realize that simply moving to America and being industrious will not necessarily allow them to become happier and life easier. Immigrants in these stories become disenchanted with their lives and America or its people at one point of the story. For example in “The Lost Beautifulness”, the protagonist begins to have doubt in the “golden land” upon losing her home after improving it with her own time and money. She wails, “Someone who got nothing but only money will come here and get the pleasure from all the beautifulness that cost me the blood from my heart. Is this really America? What for was my Aby fighting? Was it then only a dream – all

these millions people from all lands and from all times, wishing and hoping and praying that America is? Did I wake myself from dreaming to see myself back in the black times of Russia under the czar?" (*HH*, 41).

After these crises, Yezierska's protagonists somehow always reclaim hope and find a way to carry on with their lives with faith in the "golden land". In "How I Found America", the story's protagonist attributes this to her ancestors. She says, "My faith is dead, but in my blood their faith still clamors and aches for fulfillment – dead generations whose faith though beaten back still presses on – a resistless, deathless force! In this America that crushes and kills me, their spirit drives me on – to struggle – to suffer – but never to submit" (*HH*, 118).

These crises of faith in their new homelands have to be seen in context with the immigrant characters' backgrounds in order to understand their severity. As already mentioned above, Eastern Jews immigrated from countries in which they were greatly oppressed and often even in physical danger. They sold their most important belongings to be able to leave their home countries in which generations of their families had lived. America, seemingly a safe haven, gave them hope and a will to bear the loss of a home, family and friends in their old homes, an exhausting and dangerous journey at sea and all the hardships of adjusting to and surviving in America. A crisis of faith in their new homes would certainly challenge all that in a way.

Nonetheless, Yezierska's characters certainly strive to adapt to their new living circumstances. This involved eating habits, dressing styles and language as well as education. As Amy Koritz writes, "[F]or the characters in Yezierska's fiction, American citizenship is a lifestyle. To become American was to enter into the lifestyle of middle-class consumerism, with the aesthetic tastes, personal habits, and modes of interpersonal interaction appropriate to that market segment" (Koritz). JoAnn Pavletich additionally points out "that the immigrant female is an especially proper candidate for assimilation. [...] Indeed, their heritage – as manifested in these strong emotions - impels their mobility" (89f.).

In Yezierska's stories, clothes function as a symbol of Americanization or, at least, of the desire to "become an American". Amy Koritz states that "[c]lothing was particularly

important in establishing an American identity for Jewish immigrants” (Koritz). Clothing could be acquired relatively easily and thus was an opportune means to express an inner feeling or need. In her study on the importance and function of clothing in Yeziarska’s texts, Katherine Stubbs states that “[...] ready –made clothing is prized for its almost magical transformative power, its aura of instant respectability; it functions as testimony of an immigrant’s new American status, the external proof of economic and cultural viability” (Stubbs) and, to quote Amy Koritz again, “[t]o become an American was to attain the appearance of an American, something accomplished not by voting but by dressing, acting, and decorating one’s home as *Ladies’ Home Journal*⁴⁰ dictated” (Koritz). Thus the importance of clothes in Yeziarska’s texts seems evident.

In her short story “Wings”, Yeziarska represents this need with her usual intensity. Her protagonist, Shenah Pessah, suddenly worries about her shabby dress because she wants to be admired by an Anglo-Saxon man, Mr. Barnes, and to be seen as an American, as a person – especially by him. She wails, “But from where can I get the money for new clothes? Oi weh! How bitter it is not to have the dollar! Woe is me! No mother, no friend, nobody to help me lift myself out of my greenhorn rags” (HH, 9). The use of “greenhorn rags” shows how strongly connected a certain way of dressing was with the cultural background and social situation of new Eastern European immigrants. This is represented even more vividly and plainly when Shenah Pessah finally sees the Anglo-Saxon man again:

‘My! Haven’t you blossomed out since last night!’ exclaimed Mr. Barnes, startled by Shenah Pessah’s sudden display of color. ‘Yes,’ she flushed, raising to him her radiant face. ‘I’m through for always with old women’s shawls. This is my first American dress-up.’ ‘Splendid! So you want to be an American! The next step will be to take up some work that will bring you in touch with American people.’ (HH, 12)

Mr. Barnes recognizes her passion to become an American, but her change of style does not only have a positive effect. JoAnn Pavletich explains, “Pessah's attempt to materialize her joy and her dedication to becoming an educated American further positions her in Barnes's eyes as an exotic primitive: he sees her colorful clothes as an external sign of an inward propensity to emotional expansiveness” (90). This, of course, relates to the concept

⁴⁰ This is a reference to the short story “Where Lovers Dream“, in which David buys his love the *Ladies’ Home Journal* in order to make her read about the American style of life to enable her to make herself appear more American.

of the intense, emotional Jewish immigrant as discussed in the chapter on Jews and Jewish traditions.

Another marker of Americanization is food. For example, in “Hunger” a situation is described in which a great difference is created between two characters, who are both Jewish immigrants. One of them, the female protagonist, is eager to assimilate and to become an American, while her suitor, who had emigrated to America a few years earlier, is content with his lifestyle as a Jewish immigrant in the United States. Their food preferences reflect their personal views:

‘Here it is.’ He led her in and over to a corner table. ‘Chopped herring and onions for two,’ he ordered with a flourish. ‘Ain’t there some American eating on the card?’ interposed Shenah Pessah. He laughed indulgently. ‘If I lived in America for a hundred years I couldn’t get used to the American eating. What can the mouth so water like the taste and the smell from herring and onions?’ (*HH*, 26)

Not all of Yeziarska’s characters are able or willing to become Americans. In “The Fat of the Land”, the protagonist’s children, who have risen on the social ladder and made fortunes in their jobs, have made themselves “real Americans”, but their mother resists their attempts to change her as well. This conflict between generations and points of view is caught in the following passage:

I’ve born the shame of mother while you bought her off with a present and a treat here and there. God knows how hard I tried to civilize her so as not to have to blush with shame when I take her anywhere. I dressed her in the most stylish Paris models, but Delancey Street sticks out from every inch of her. Whenever she opens her mouth, I’m done for. You fellows had your chance to rise in the world because a man is free to go up as high as he can reach up to; but I, with all my style and pep, can’t get a man my equal because a girl is always judged by her mother. (*HH*, 90)

Here, the protagonist’s daughter uses the word “civilize” when describing her efforts to Americanize her mother. Obviously, this indicates the children’s opinion of their own roots and how distinctly they are disconnected from them. This is illustrated in another passage very well, when the daughter catches her mother after a short trip back to the Jewish ghetto, carrying a basket with herring etc. through the main hall of her elegant apartment building. She says to her mother, “And here you come with a basket on your arm as if you just landed from steerage! [...] When will you ever stop disgracing us?” (*HH*, 93).

4.1.3.10. Outsiders' Views of Jewish Immigrants

Outsiders' views on Yezierska's protagonists are not very frequently represented. Usually, if given, they are rather negative. A prominent example is the life-changing speech of an elderly Jew in "Where Lovers Dream". This character had either established himself in business and society earlier or, much more likely, his family had immigrated a while earlier during the wave of German immigration and had succeeded in climbing the social ladder. This character, Mr. Rosenberg, greatly discourages his protégé, a young doctor, from marrying the love of his life, because her family is too poor. He says,

Poverty winking from every corner of the house! Hunger hollering from all their starved faces! I got too much sense to waste my love on beggars. And all the time I was planning for you an American family, people which are somebodies in this world, which could help you work up a practice! For why did I waste my good dollars on you? (*HH*, 67)

His aversion shows the negative attitude of previous immigrants towards the vast number of new immigrants from Eastern Europe, as described in the historical overview of immigration to the USA in this thesis.

The presumption that immigrants are poor and lonely is represented in "Wings" as well. Here, a guilt-ridden Anglo-Saxon is confronted with a beautiful, energetic and out-going Jewish immigrant girl, who is very thankful for his assistance in her strife for an education and for his attention. His views, and thus probably what Yezierska believed to be the views of many Anglo-Saxons, are clearly portrayed in the following passage: "He hurried out embarrassed by the grateful look that shone to him out of her eyes. The gaze haunted him and hurt him. It was the beseeching look of a homeless dog, begging to be noticed. "Poor little immigrant," he thought, "how lonely she must be!" (*HH*, 12).

In another short story, namely "The Free Vacation House", the self-approving perception of charity ladies is related to the reader. The unhappy, exhausted mother, who is in deep conflict with her stay at the holiday house, as mentioned in the chapter on charity societies, overhears a visiting benefactress say "How nice for these poor creatures to have a restful place like this" (*HH*, 48). Not only is the protagonist deeply ashamed for accepting charity, the house is not nearly as comfortable or as relaxing for her as it is presented to the benefactors and benefactresses.

Outside views are not nearly as important as self-perception and self-inspection in

Yeziarska's stories, because the writer is mainly concerned with inner processes.

4.2. Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*

Wiseman has brought a whole community to life and delved deeply into the secret places of their heart. (*New York Times* on *TS* cover)

As already mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Wiseman was heavily influenced by her Eastern European heritage despite being a second-generation immigrant unlike Anzia Yeziarska. Her parents' experiences, Jewish culture and traditions as well as modes of thinking are portrayed vividly in Wiseman's *The Sacrifice*. This chapter attempts to analyze her representations of various aspects which are important for the Jewish community portrayed in her novel *The Sacrifice* and which show how this community functioned, such as religion and spirituality, family, women's social status and function, education and past experiences. Furthermore, this chapter will provide a short biography of the author and a more general section on her cultural roots and her writing.

4.2.1. Adele Wiseman – A Biography

Canadian novelist Adele Wiseman was born on 21 May 1928 in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Her parents had emigrated from the Ukraine to Canada in 1923 and were part of the “secular, Yiddishist world of Winnipeg's North End” (Brown). Wiseman's father was a tailor and her mother a dress- and dollmaker. The author was certainly influenced considerably by her childhood “[i]n the multi-ethnic and deeply prejudiced Winnipeg” (Brown) as “the future author found that admitting to being Jewish turned her ‘into an instant monster’ in the eyes of other children” (Brown). Thus, Wiseman experienced the importance of cultural and ethnic background at a very early age and, as Michael Brown states, “[s]olace was to be found in the family and in the world of books. Both were lifetime commitments” (Brown).

Wiseman's education began at the I.L. Peretz secular Jewish school (Brown) and she continued her studies at the University of Manitoba, where she received a bachelor's degree (B.A.) in English and psychology in 1949 and began her life-long friendship with Margaret Laurence (New 1218). She then started to work in various jobs, for instance as an

executive secretary, teacher or social worker in Canada as well as abroad⁴¹ in order to “support her early intention to be a writer” (Coldwell 1183). During her time abroad, she wrote her first novel *The Sacrifice*⁴², which will be the subject of the following analysis. It was published in 1956 and the writer was widely praised for it and even received the Governor General’s Award in the same year. Michael Brown calls the debut novel a “somewhat bizarre tale of a butcher turned murderer” (Brown) and states that it “was one of the first novels in English to deal with the Holocaust, albeit obliquely, and it expressed a harsh critique of traditional Jewish theology” (Brown). Possibly due to her financial insecurity, Wiseman “was not a prolific author” (Brown). *Crackpot*, her second novel was published 18 years later in 1974: “A comic and wonderfully affirmative moral novel” (Boyd) about an obese Jewish prostitute that “celebrates life in all its richness and complexity and [...] demonstrates the paradoxical knotting of good and evil within one action” (Coldwell 1184).

Furthermore, Wiseman published *Old Markets, New World* in 1964, her memoir *Old Woman at Play* in 1978 and *Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood and Other Essays* in 1987. She also wrote various plays and stories for children, but not all of them were published.

Adele Wiseman also taught at a variety of universities and colleges, including the University of Manitoba, Macdonald College of McGill University, Sir George Williams (now Concordia) and Trent universities, the universities of Western Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and Windsor, and the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Montreal YM-YWHA (Brown).

Her numerous awards and honors include, as already mentioned, the Governor General’s Award for *The Sacrifice* in 1956, the Beta Sigma Phi Sorority Award in 1957, the Brotherhood Award of the National Conference of Christians and Jews in 1957, Canadian Foundation (1957) and Guggenheim (1958) fellowships, a Canada Council Arts Scholarship in 1959, the Leipzig Book Fair Bronze Medal in 1964, the Canadian

⁴¹ She also worked in Italy as a social worker and in England as a teacher (Boyd).

⁴² *The Sacrifice* “is the moving and complex story of Abraham, an orthodox Jew with Old World values whose life turns to chaos and tragedy in the New World. Grounded in biblical myths, the novel rewrites the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac and skillfully mediates between traditional Jewish myth and modern secular experience” (Boyd).

Booksellers Association Book Award in 1974, the J. I. Segal Foundation Award in 1974 and 1988 and the Three Guineas Charitable Foundation Agency Award (1984–1985). In 1989, she received an honorary LL.D. from the University of Manitoba (Brown).

Living in Toronto, Adele Wiseman had one daughter, Tamara, with husband Dmitry Stone. The marriage dissolved in 1990. Wiseman died in Toronto on 1 June 1992 at the age of 64.

4.2.2. Adele Wiseman, Cultural Roots and *The Sacrifice*

Although Wiseman did not immigrate to Canada herself but was already born there, she was deeply influenced by her parents' experiences, who had come to Canada from Ukraine in 1923. As Colin Boyd noted, "[t]he landscape of Winnipeg and her Jewish heritage were formative influences on the author; immigrant settlement on the Prairies and second-generation acculturation to Canadian society are explored in her fiction" (Boyd). Thus, her works can be regarded as important in terms of ethnic immigrant fiction.

As already mentioned, Adele Wiseman was the "first woman novelist to write about the Holocaust and Jewish diasporic experience in Canada" (Howells 300) and, as discussed above as well, she won the first Governor General's Award for a Jewish Canadian novel, *The Sacrifice* in 1956. Howells writes about the book that "[i]t follows realistic conventions in depicting the lives of poor working-class immigrants in Winnipeg's Jewish ghetto during the Depression, though its most striking feature is the way that social realism is shaped into the contours of myth as the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac is revised in a modern North American context" (Howells 300). This combination of spirituality, old myths and realistically portrayed living situations of Jewish immigrants provides the reader with a gripping and thought-provoking portrait of the Jewish community, showing a multi-faceted world.

Wiseman not only explored the importance of roots, of the past in *The Sacrifice*. W. H. New states that "[i]n plays such as *Testimonial Dinner* (1978), Wiseman explores ways in which the past and present coexist. The inheritance of history affects the individual because it affects cultural identity; hence, the need to acknowledge the force of the past precedes and inevitably shapes how people live their way into the future." Thus, it only

seems to be the next logical step that, as New continues, “[p]eople’s difficulties, in Wiseman’s fiction, derive from the dilemmas they create by not always seeing clearly the ramifications of their histories” (New 1218). As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, this is a crucial aspect dealt with in *The Sacrifice* as well. This interest and apparent need to deal with the past emphasizes the importance of Wiseman’s own roots and thus her Eastern European Jewish heritage.

According to W.H. New, *The Sacrifice* “was regarded during Wiseman’s lifetime as her most successful work, perhaps partly because it is formally the most conventional. Told by an omniscient narrator, the novel reiterates the tale of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac, turning the biblical figures into modern-day immigrants to a Canada that this Abraham cannot comprehend” (New 1218). Thus, the novel combines religious and social aspects on more than one level: on the level of the plot by incorporating the biblical story of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac as well as on a descriptive level by describing the lives of Jewish immigrants in Winnipeg in a realistic and detailed way.

Wiseman does not present her readers with a unified world though. She allows her characters to be confronted by numerous aspects of life, which range from family issues over religious questions to practical matters of life, including education, work and coming to terms with their lives in the New World. Additionally, her characters are constantly struggling. In his book *Third Solitudes*, Michael Greenstein states that “[d]isplacing patterns of movement and vision impose themselves on characters whose free will clashes with the deterministic forces of a disruptive universe. The auxiliary world of immigrant, orphan, and adolescent settles at best for an almost meeting with the Canadian landscape and culture” (Greenstein 104).

4.2.3. Analysis

This chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of representations of Jews, Jewishness and other factors important to the Jewish community and central to Wiseman’s novel *The Sacrifice*, such as portrayals of location, education, religion and outsiders’ views of new immigrant Jews etc. Since this novel is not as autobiographical as Anzia Yeziarska’s short stories discussed in the previous chapters, the focus of this analysis will mainly be on how

Wiseman's Jewish characters and the community they live in are represented and less on how she represents known experience in her fiction.

4.2.3.1. Religion⁴³ and Spirituality

The first suggestion of the deep connection of Wiseman's novel with religion and religious myths is in the names of her main characters. Greenstein points out that "Adele Wiseman's first novel, *The Sacrifice* (1956), bases its characters' names – Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Laiah, and Moses – on the Old Testament"⁴⁴. This is emphasized by their lack of a last name, a family name "as if to suggest simultaneously their homelessness and the universality, for each of these rootless refugees may be taken as Everyman of contemporary society" (Greenstein 104). Thus, Wiseman constructs a family in her novel that stands for great numbers of immigrants and their past, hopes, future, traditions and more.

From the beginning of the story, it is clear that the protagonists are rooted in their strong belief in God, especially the aging man Abraham and his very traditional friend Chaim Knopp. They turn to God in their everyday lives and even in times of hardship, they believe that God's decision has to be accepted and honored, no matter what that might entail. At the onset of the story, even before the reader finds out about the tragedy that happened to Abraham's family in losing two sons during a pogrom in the Ukraine, the Jewish man ponders his family's future: "After all these sorrows, God had chosen to set him and his family down in this strange city to await what further He had in store for them. Very well" (*TS*, 22). With this statement, Abraham surrenders himself and his family to the destiny provided to them by the almighty God.

This strong need to believe continues to be important in the course of the novel, as even in the face of his third son's death, Abraham still believes in God's decisions and allows his friend Chaim Knopp to console him with words of faith and encouragement: "God will help us. Don't worry. He saved the Torah" (*TS*, 219). Later on, Chaim begins to wonder why Isaac had to die, but finally comes to the conclusion that, "[i]t was not for them to

⁴³ For more information on religion in Canadian literature, cf. Jamie S. Scott's article "Religion, Literature and Canadian Cultural Identities" in *Literature & Theology* 16.2 (2002): 113-126.

⁴⁴ For a clear reference to the biblical names used within *The Sacrifice*, cf. pp. 96-97.

question the will of God” (*TS*, 231). This surrender to the supposed will of God shows how important a spiritual foothold must have been to immigrants after escaping the dreadful situation in their home countries during the pogroms.

LoVerso states that in *The Sacrifice* “the individual [must] participate in the circle of conversation with his God and with his fellow man”. The idea of surrender is important here: “Isaac surrenders himself to the will of Abraham; Abraham surrenders himself to the will of God; and God, in the face of such faith, surrenders new life to man” (Lo Verso). This circle of surrender and belief in one another cannot be broken, because the future not only relies on the individual but rather on his or her participation in this circle. Isaac, who is portrayed as an agnostic or even as an atheist thus becomes isolated and, in the end, dies as life apart from this circle is not possible (LoVerso).

Throughout the novel, there are various instances in which religious acts are portrayed. The first and a very memorable one is the scene in which Abraham, as a young butcher’s apprentice in Ukraine, has to ritually slaughter a cow, because the *shoichet* (a butcher, who is the only one allowed to slaughter according to the rules for kosher meat, because he has been educated and trained to ritually slaughter cows according to religious criteria) was prevented from doing his duty and Abraham’s master did not want to lose the money that his customers are willing to pay for kosher meat. This scene heavily influences Abraham and he even calls it his “real Bar Mitzvah” when relating the story to his friend Chaim Knopp. He says, “Perhaps it was wrong of me to think so, but I have always felt that that was my real Bar Mitzvah.” While slaughtering the cow, Abraham knows that he is doing something that he is not allowed to do and he is overwhelmed by the sensations aroused in him, trying to understand that the animal was going to die by his hand: “[I]t was not until after I had been forced to take a life that I really changed and was no longer a child.” (*TS*, 37). Michael Greenstein writes that in this scene Abraham is “groping for the knife and for psychological balance” (Greenstein 106), which will be mirrored in the murder scene later on in the novel.

Because of the great importance of religion, in Abraham’s mind, denying it equals going insane. Abraham tells Isaac and his wife Ruth the story of a family member in order to persuade them not to go to a hospital for the birth of their child, because he is afraid that the doctors might not return the right child to them. The fact that he chooses this story

emphasizes how unthinkable it was to him to fall from the Jewish faith. Wiseman phrases the old Jews conviction about him, “‘I remember a second cousin of my wife’s went mad and became a Christian.’ Abraham paused to let them appreciate the full enormity of his statement. ‘So?’ said Ruth. ‘That’s just the point. Who knows if he was a Jew in the first place? Some said the gypsies changed him soon after he was born’” (*TS*, 124). So, Abraham here seemingly implies that this cousin might not have been a Jew to begin with because a real Jew would not deny his God. Thus, it can be concluded that losing faith, denying Jewish heritage and membership to the community is the worst thing that could happen in the mind of a very traditional Jew who is deeply rooted in his Eastern European heritage.

This fear of the scarcely assimilated immigrant Abraham becomes real, when he realizes that his only remaining son Isaac has doubts. He wails, making “a hopeless gesture, turned his eyes to the sky, and declaimed loudly, ‘O God O God O God, that my only remaining son should become an atheist!’” (*TS*, 126). Isaac only redeems himself by saving the Sepher Torah in the fire of the synagogue, which eventually leads to his premature death.

Traditions depicted in the novel show the importance of religion on an everyday level within the Canadian Jewish immigrant community. For instance, the ceremony of Moishele’s circumcision is described as intricate and socially very important. The fact that a reverend from the Old Country performs it rather than an a trained doctor and that there is an important choreography as to who gives the baby to whom etc. shows that holding on to roots and traditions welds the community together.

The synagogue is an important center of the Jewish community. Men, like Chaim Knopp, spend many hours in the day there and discuss various topics. There are a number of synagogues, which cater to a different public, as shown in the following passage: “Chaim Knopp and Abraham were members of the same synagogue, the old white synagogue that was close to where Abraham lived. Chaim’s wife preferred the new brick synagogue, which was attended by the more fashionable, but he was loyal to the synagogue that he had prayed in when he had first come to the country more than twenty-five years ago” (*TS*, 50). Here it becomes clear how divided the Jewish community was and how great the difference between newly arrived greenhorns and already settled Jews was. Later on, in the course of the novel, this distinction becomes even more pronounced. After the old

synagogue burnt down, the Jewish community wants to build a new one. This new synagogue should hold the Torah saved by Isaac in a heroic act and donated to the congregation by a rich old immigrant Jew, called Schwarzgeist. Because the Schwarzgeist family has risen up in society, the new synagogue will not be built in the same place as before. Chaim Knopp explains, “‘Well’ – Chaim sighed – ‘since Scharzgeist’s son is taking a money interest for the sake of his father’s Sepher Torah, it’s practically certain that they won’t [rebuild on the old site]. This district is too low-class. In fact, they’re talking of a site on the heights, near some big church – only it should be bigger’” (*TS*, 254). This simple change of location brings a lot of difficulties with it, as Abraham, reflects, “How would he reach the synagogue on the Holy Days when riding was forbidden? And they would have an expensive membership, too, in their rich man’s synagogue” (*TS*, 254). Thus, by building the synagogue in a different area, devout Jews are deprived of one of the most important centers of their lives.

Deeply rooted within the Jewish immigrant community is also the fear of being under attack because of their faith. This is shown when a “woman began to scream hysterically that it was a pogrom” (*TS*, 195) when she saw that the synagogue was on fire. Traumata, like the ones experienced by Abraham and his family, cannot be expected to heal so quickly.

4.2.3.2. Location

Representations of location are numerous in Wiseman’s text. We have to distinguish between two specific kinds of locations though: Canada, or more precisely Winnipeg as such, and the home, workplace etc. of the immigrant characters in *The Sacrifice*.

Concerning the city, Greenstein states that “[...] Wiseman’s Winnipeg remains unnamed since it is everywhere and nowhere, universal and unique” (Greenstein 104). Thus, the author allows us to project the story anywhere.

Land- or cityscape descriptions occur as parts of the story emphasizing a certain mood or story-line. For example the icy, cold winter setting of Winnipeg:

The wind that blew down from the northeast past Mad Mountain and whipped across his

shoulder blades seemed, in its way, to be trying to help him along. Every now and then a strong gust lifted and carried him a few steps upward. But Isaac's mood was not a grateful one. He would have liked to sit in the streetcar, on the first seat of the bench closest to the little coal stove that stood behind the conductor. Thinking of it, he could almost feel the pins and needles melting inside of him. (*TS*, 139)

Of course, this description of the location also relates to the reader how destitute the character must be as he cannot afford to ride in the streetcar on his way to his next student despite the cold winter and his heart condition.

Descriptions of the city usually occur in connection with almost philosophical thoughts, for instance in the next passage, when Isaac reflects on the view of his neighborhood:

The city rose about him, planted on an undulating countryside that seemed to have spilled over from the ridge of dark hills in the western distance. The life he remembered wavered uncertainly forward to meet the life that he seemed just about to live. In the morning he had wandered around in the flats of the city, the crowded, downhill area in which he lived. The flats scooped down toward the edge of the brown river with a sort of lilting quality, as though the earth had lifted a shoulder and the houses had slid closer together and the factories had spilled and jostled one another to the river bank. (*TS*, 12)

Wiseman does not only incorporate descriptions of the Jewish ghetto, where most of the story is set, but also that of seemingly richer areas:

Westward, above the flats, grand houses spread themselves. Their rocky gardens and many trees prepared, with an autumnal festival of color, for the austerities of winter. Along the edge of the sharp incline which, like a small cliff, separated the heights from the flats, the streets lit up brightly at night and were crowded with people. In the day they were filled with traffic and the commerce of the city. (*TS*, 13)

Descriptions of the land- and cityscape are sometimes mingled with thoughts about time as well. Greenstein gives an interesting example here: When observing the landscape, Isaac connects it with his own life: “‘To Isaac the land seemed like a great arrested movement, petrified in time, like his memories, and the city crawled about its surface in a counterpoint of life’ (13). This nomadic immigrant seems especially sensitive to patterns of motion and stasis, those rhythms in his own brief life where space is translated into time” (Greenstein 106).

A landmark mentioned numerous times throughout the novel, which also somehow seems to be overshadowing the city and the plot, is Mad Mountain: “He looked sideways and back toward it, and the mountain assumed its proper proportion, the weeping double hump carelessly mantled in splotches of autumn color.” This mountain is of particular interest to Isaac as it is the location of the psychiatric hospital of the city: “The younger daughter

whom he had asked whispered, ‘Crazy-house,’ giggled, and shuddered fearfully closer to him. This was why it was called Mad Mountain – a strange name to call a mountain that looked so intimately on all the affairs of the city” (TS, 13).

As to descriptions of living situations, Wiseman offers far less detail than Anzia Yezierska. For example, we get only a very biased view of the room rented out to the new immigrant family by Mrs. Plopler through the landlady’s eyes: “Her eyes took in their portable belongings. She concluded that they were lucky to get her room, and, reminding them again that they would have the benefit of a furnished room with a bed, a couch, a bureau, a chair, and a big window, as well as kitchen and bathroom facilities, which they would share with her family, she asked for her rent in advance” (TS, 7). As it turns out, the great furnished room actually is very shabby and unwanted by anyone else. Because of its meager size, Abraham begins to wonder, “How much longer could the three of them squeeze their bodies and their personalities into Mrs. Plopler’s big room?” (TS, 43). Consequently, the family moves into a little house, rented from a bootlegger: “To look at, it was shabby. The kitchen floor needed linoleum, and the whole would be pitifully bare at first. But gradually they could fill it in with furniture, paint a little bit, make it fresh. There were things a man could do himself in a place like this” (TS, 43). Despite the house’s appearance, it is quite an improvement for the family to be able to call a place their own.

4.2.3.3. Family

Family is one of the most important themes in *The Sacrifice*. It is at the heart of the novel. Sons are especially important as they seem to be the ones carrying on the tradition and somehow the spirit of the family. For instance, Chaim Knopp’s son Ralph already has a daughter, but only a son would make his family complete: “Well it was true that they already had a little girl, a precious little thing. Still, the news that they might never have a son was a blow to Ralph, a blow to all of them” (TS, 51).

The loss of his two older sons during the pogrom in Ukraine almost causes Abraham to lose faith in God, which seemingly is the ultimate offense for a traditional Jew in Wiseman’s *The Sacrifice*. His family, especially his sons, is everything to Abraham. When he realized that he may be losing his third son as well, he tells his friend Chaim, “[M]y son

is the heart in me; he is my arms” (*TS*, 219). This connectedness with his family, his children as well as his beloved wife Sarah whom he dotes on, clearly shows how tightly knit immigrant families must have been on arrival. Staying together and working together to make a living for themselves enhanced chances of survival and integration.

Not having children is a major problem, a major offense in *The Sacrifice*. In connection with Ralph’s innermost wish for a son, his mother Bassieh has a very low opinion of her daughter-in-law: “Bassieh had the story that her daughter-in-law deliberately refused to have any more children, just to spite Ralph because she knew he wanted a son an heir” (*TS*, 115). Earlier in the story, it is revealed that the unfortunate daughter-in-law has lost a child before and is said to be practically infertile by doctors. Nonetheless, Bassieh insists on her belief, showing that not giving birth to at least one son has to be considered an offense.

Abraham’s wish for grandchildren and his later devotion to Moishele, his grandson, further illustrate the importance of family in Wiseman’s novel. What has to be pointed out as well though is that Abraham is hoping for a grandson: “At last Ruth was pregnant. And it would be a boy; there was no doubt of it. Even before there had been much swelling Sarah had seen, by that species of abdominal phrenology that is traditional among the women, that it was pointed in front, rather than rounded, which surely meant that a son would be born” (*TS*, 122).

Family dynamics are also depicted in Wiseman’s novel. She skillfully shows how difficult family relationships can be in a changing community. When Ruth moves in with Isaac’s family after their wedding, she has to adapt to her husband’s family’s structures. She calls her father- and mother-in-law “Pa” and “Ma” and assumes the position of the caretaker, when Sarah’s health deteriorates. Fitting in is not so easy for her though, as especially Sarah is rooted in their old traditions very much – to emphasize this even more, Sarah does not seem to have arrived in the New World fully and is more of a passive recipient in the story than an active participant. For example, when Ruth introduces new foods to the family’s diet, Sarah continuously insists that the men will not eat or will not like what Ruth has cooked. As it turns out, this is not the case, and it seems that Abraham and Isaac are adapting more easily to their new living conditions. Another scene highlighting the difficulties of assimilating for some is when Sarah is irritated by Ruth’s singing, which is too loud and shrill for her. She thinks that, “There were no singers nowadays” (*TS*, 120),

which implies that Sarah is somehow wishing herself back into the Old World despite the family's heart-breaking history. The intricate family relations and dynamics as well as the different "levels of having arrived" in Canada are represented very well by Wiseman's description of family life in *The Sacrifice*.

Family provides a safe haven in Wiseman's novel. This is illustrated clearly when Isaac is dying after saving the Torah out of the burning synagogue and is longing to feel the assurance of his deeply religious father: "He wanted to release all his uncertainties and watch them disappear in the vast area of his father's confidence. Somewhere, there, was safety" (*TS*, 212). When this safety is threatened in Abraham's life later on by Ruth's supposed wishes to build a life for herself and her son only, Abraham goes so far as to commit the murder of Laiah out of sheer desperation.

Not only children are important to a family, fathers are supposed to protect and nourish their wives and offspring. After Isaac's death, Abraham worries about the future of his offspring, "And now there remained only this frail sprout, again on the brink of life, unprotected, as though all his prayers and his efforts had never been, no further ahead" (*TS*, 224). Thus, the physical and spiritual survival of a son was of uttermost importance.

Worrying about his family and, in the end, desperately longing for his lost loved ones is another very important theme in *The Sacrifice*. Wiseman allows the reader to feel the importance of family and Abraham's strong connection with his family on almost every page. Especially after Isaac's death, Abraham is lost: "Sometimes his heart seemed to cry out in him with pain and a sort of hunger. And it seemed to him that there must be something more for him, something that would bring him hope, that would help him to understand" (*TS*, 237).

As important and as positively represented family ties are in Wiseman's novel, they also prove to put characters into difficult situations. After he has lost his wife and last remaining son, Abraham is still tied to Ruth, and Ruth continues to be tied to her dead husband's father. The only remaining family member connecting them is Moishela, Isaac's son. Abraham even tells Ruth that she is free of him during an ugly fight. He says, "Why should you suffer me? Why should I always remind you of something that's dead? Why should you take it as a duty to tie yourself to someone you don't belong to when you might

even want to marry another, make another family?” (TS, 285f).

Despite these rather negative notions of family ties “in *The Sacrifice*, there is a glimmer of hope or reunification at the end of the novel as Moses visits his grandfather on Mad Mountain and joins hands in a linkage of generations” (Greenstein 109). In this scene, Moses comes to terms with his grandfather’s past and even grows to love him again. Abraham is able to unload some of the burden of his guilt. As Greenstein points out, “[d]espite the defeat of an individual, only through a larger sense of familial unification can any semblance of continuity be guaranteed; one generation sacrifices itself in order to be restored through its progeny, but when the reverse occurs, tragedy hangs in balance” (Greenstein 109f). Thus, ultimately, fate is balanced out with the generations of family ensuring continuity and coherence.

4.2.3.3.1. Women

The Sacrifice mainly focuses on Abraham and Isaac, thus, on male protagonists. Women play an important role throughout the novel as well though, and their position in society is even discussed openly. Wiseman additionally includes many hints on stereotypes of women. For example, all women like to gossip: “And when the women get hold of something like that their tongues run ahead of them. Can’t talk of anything else.” This notion is then even amplified, when the speaker continues, as if every man had the same general opinion of women, “You know how women are” (TS, 11).

Even young Isaac realizes that there is a difference between girls and boys and that, “[i]t was not a thing to laugh and giggle about as these girls did. But with women it is always so, Isaac told himself sagely. What they said meant little. It was merely to draw your attention to the other things that their eyes and lips could tell you” (TS, 13). Not only does he reflect that girls act differently, he also feels that there is some kind of purpose behind it. Of course, this scene takes place during his adolescence, which is a time of beginning interest in girls and of sexual awakening. Nonetheless, this quote shows that the importance of what girls (and later women) have to say is not rated as highly as what men have to say.

The men of the story generally feel a great responsibility towards their wives, who usually

are homemakers. The classic gender roles are assigned: men go to work and financially support their families, whereas women stay at home, take care of the children, cook, clean and do everything else they can to make their homes comfortable for their husbands and sons. Consequently, men take their responsibility to provide for their families very seriously. Abraham states at one point, after Ruth has lost her job and worries that she might be a burden on the family, that “[t]hey never had to rely on the earnings of their wives before” (*TS*, 108).

As already mentioned above, Isaac and Abraham discuss the differences between men and women at one point in the novel. Abraham, the older Jewish immigrant deeply rooted in traditions from the Old Country, cares deeply for his wife Sarah, but, nonetheless, thinks that men are those who are responsible and capable of seeing, planning and handling larger aspects of life than everyday occurrences. He tells his son Isaac, “A woman can’t always look to the future. She needs the present, the immediate satisfaction of life. These things a man wants too, but he looks beyond them. He sees the present stretching out toward the future. A woman claps her hands and is happy because a child is learning to walk” (*TS*, 109). Furthermore, Abraham compares man to the wind and woman to the tree: “A man could be compared to the wind, which must riffle through life, turning over the leaves of time with a restlessness, trying to see everything at once, always seeking. A woman waits, rooted in the earth, like a tree, like a flower. Then she comes to life; she seizes it, clasps it, and works with it the miracle of creation. Now it is his turn to wait. He hovers over her, trying to see, to understand” (*TS*, 110). Now this creation of a new life, the miracle, is what seemingly gives women worth in Abraham’s eyes. Creating a child, nurturing it and giving birth is something no man can accomplish and, ultimately, it is woman’s purpose in life.

Isaac, who came to Canada as a boy and who is more modern in his views, thus asks his father whether he thinks that man is woman’s master. Abraham answers, “Have I ever given you any indication that I am one of those old-fashioned Jews who thinks he is his wife’s master? And I didn’t say women can’t think. My wife can think just like anybody else, even though she herself prefers to trust to my judgment” (*TS*, 110). The fact that Sarah submits to Abraham without questioning his lead is the key of this passage. Abraham might believe himself to think that he perceives men and women to be equal, but when Ruth does not need him to decide her future for her anymore, Abraham feels that his

patriarchal power is dwindling. Palmateer Pennee pinpoints this as the crisis of the book: A “modern” daughter-in-law assumes the position of head of the household and thus threatens the patriarchal lineage and power (Palmateer Pennee 12).

There certainly are changes within the gender dynamics in the course of the book. At first, we see that Sarah completely submits to Abraham, then, later, Isaac states that “[w]e don’t think about women as our inferiors anymore. Marriage is a partnership” (TS, 111). In the final chapters of the book, Ruth makes the decisions for the household Abraham is living in. She assumes, as already mentioned above, the position of head of the household. Palmateer Pennee pronounces this even more pointedly, “[M]en make and represent culture while women, closer to nature than men, are to be controlled by men(’s) / culture” (11).

The Sacrifice does not only consist of socially accepted, dependent women though. Palmateer Pennee states that women “who exceed their subordinate social/familial position” (17f) generally meet a rather gruesome end. For instance, Chaim Knoff’s wife Bassieh and Mrs. Plopler both die of gender-specific ailments, which most likely correspond to cancer of the womb and breast cancer respectively. Both of these women are represented as very opinionated, frustrated with their husbands and meddling with other people’s affairs. They disturb the patriarchal order of things, so to say. Thus, as Palmateer Pennee points out, they have to be punished somehow by fate: “Women, especially independent or vocally overbearing women, or those who rule the family or threaten its unity, or who have economic means apart from a husband or father, must be refigured as diseased, as dangerous, to justify the sacrifice” (19).⁴⁵

Laiiah is the most extreme of these women. She is a fallen woman, who has openly had various sexual relationships out of her marriage, which was eventually dissolved by a divorce, and who does not depend on a husband to make a living. Thus, she threatens the male world order the most and consequently becomes the victim of murder. The worst thing a woman could do, according to Abraham and other male patriarchal characters probably too, is to deny the miracle of the creation of life. Thus, “Laiiah, in whom the independence and excess of all these women are represented, is figured as a dead womb”

⁴⁵ Whether this is the interpretation of a feminist scholar or was truly intended by the author cannot be determined fully.

(Palmateer Pennee 18). During one of his encounters with Laiah, Abraham reflects on this, “She was a great overripe fruit without seed, which hung now, long past its season, on the bough. How many generations had been denied in her womb? What festered there instead? She had denied creation, and to deny is to annihilate” (*TS*, 261).

Laiah is “a woman, who is in excess of everything that would make her ‘respectable,’ or a woman insufficiently ‘socialized’ or ‘culturalized’” (Palmateer Pennee 11f). The women of the community eye Laiah with suspicion. For instance, Mrs. Plopler comments on her, “There were some women [...] that didn’t know what decency meant. Yes, and they seemed to think that all the rest of womankind didn’t follow their example and act like animals because they had never had a chance to” (*TS*, 27). During her first sexual encounter with a much older man in the Old Country, Laiah herself realizes that being a woman and using her sexuality also gives her power over men – at least for a while: “She had realized then [...] that she was as much his master now as he was hers” (*TS*, 193). Thus, Laiah is using her status as a fallen woman in order to establish herself in the community as well.

Laiah, like the other women who fall out of line and do not conform to the socially and culturally accepted norm of a good woman, has to be penalized. Palmateer Pennee explains, “I am reading Wiseman’s novel with representations of gender difference in mind, for the murder in this novel is not a homicide but a femicide, and specifically for the purpose of renewing a patriarchal structure and community, a femicide recast in the criticism as a necessary part of ethnic, national, and universal tragic traditions” (13f). Thus, it certainly is not a coincidence that the murder scene resembles the ritual slaughter scene from Abraham’s “real Bar Mitzvah”. It is also illegal, also ritual, and takes place at a moment when Abraham is most threatened in his patriarchal status (Palmateer Pennee 14).

4.2.3.4. Acculturation and the Generation Gap

Michael Greenstein points out that

[t]he frequency of similes and “as though” constructions in *The Sacrifice* points to a highly comparative mode in which immigrants adjust to new American circumstances so different from their previous European habits. (Greenstein 105)

Throughout the novel, the reader follows the path of an immigrant family struggling to assimilate to a new home country, which gives them so much hope for the future. Wiseman represents this struggle in many ways, some of which will be introduced here. In this section, several of these challenging changes will be presented, with the following subsections focusing on language use and communication as well as education.

After “[h]aving wandered for fifteen months and eleven days, Abraham is determined to set down roots no matter where he is” (Greenstein 105). He even gets off of the train a couple of stops too early because he cannot bear to flee anymore. Upon arrival he and his family are met with a variety of challenges, just like many immigrants certainly were confronted with these challenges of acculturation portrayed so vividly by Wiseman.

Probably most difficult to get accustomed to were the changes going on in the immigrant community, while its continuously arriving new members were trying to assimilate to new cultural surroundings. For instance, the less rigorous observing of religious rules is noted by more pious Jews as shown when Abraham notes that his friend’s son Ralph drives his car even on Saturdays, thinking that “he was already one of those who did not observe the rules of his religion as strictly as he should” (*TS*, 51). This points to a decrease of the importance of religious traditions in the New World, bringing with it a loss of culture and roots. Isaac, who is struggling with his belief in God, has to argue with his father about the necessity to work on Saturdays as well: “But I’ve told you before, Pa, in this country you can’t keep a job in my trade unless you work on Saturdays. The bosses are no longer very sensitive to the feelings of religious immigrants. Either you work or there are plenty of others who are willing to work on Saturdays, if they could only find the work” (*TS*, 127). Similarly to Yezierska’s sweatshop bosses, Wiseman’s lose interest in allowing their workers to live according to their religious rules. Time is money and thus all that counts is whether a worker is quick enough.⁴⁶

Various comments within the narrative allow the reader to trace the changes within the community. For instance, Abraham proudly notices that Isaac dances “all the modern dances” (*TS*, 74) with Ruth at a Chaim’s daughter’s wedding rather than merely traditional ones.

⁴⁶ This aspect will be discussed in further detail in chapter 4.2.3.6. on work.

Already settled immigrants, who had arrived years earlier, seemingly try to set themselves off from the newly arrived greenhorns. For example, Bassieh Knopp, the traditional *shoichet's* Chaim's wife, enjoys showing everyone that her son has worked his way up from a poor immigrant to a rich manufacturer.

Now that her son's a manufacturer she's too busy learning the modern ways. She entertains now. You know, this entertaining. When I come home there are ladies with colds in their noses drinking tea. She serves them fancy little sandwiches and lets them know that her son's a manufacturer and that Lucy married a doctor and Paulia married a rich man's son. Mind you, she's a good woman, my wife – don't think I'm criticizing her, you've got to accept your luck – but she is apt to blow herself up a little, now that the children are doing so well. (TS, 41)

Bassieh sees herself and her family moving up in the hierarchy of the community and thus intends to change her lifestyle in a way to show everyone. Nonetheless, she accepts Abraham and his family at her daughter's wedding, because her husband has befriended Abraham, the old Jew: “[...] it was a small thing to accept also the presence of a family who, although they'd been five years in the country, she still considered immigrants, insofar as they still hadn't arrived anywhere” (TS, 73). Not having arrived anywhere probably refers to the fact that the family is still poor and, apart from Isaac, they have not really mastered the new language or shed their greenhorn appearances. Nonetheless, Chaim accepts them the way they are and respects Abraham. Abraham notices that and seems to realize at the same time that he and his family are different indeed and that they are not members of the community in the same way that Chaim and his family are: “‘You see,’ said Abraham to his wife, ‘he is not ashamed to introduce his elevated children to his friend Avrom the butcher. We stand somewhere in this world yet’” (TS, 75).

Minor comments on the changing of traditional roles underline this continuous remodeling of society. For instance, Abraham learns that circumcisions are not necessarily performed by learned *mohels* like Chaim, but can be done by doctors who have learned the traditional blessings for the ceremony just as well. Another instance pointing to the small ways of assimilation is when Abraham has tea with Laiah and her neighbor Jenny. Laiah is excited to serve tea to her guest and says, “After tea Jenny will read our cups. But you drink from a glass, don't you? I've become assimilated” (TS, 239).

Modern, non-traditional medicine is also a recurring topic in the novel. For instance, at one point in the novel, Ruth and Isaac decide that they want to make use of modern medicine

and have their baby at the hospital. Abraham and Chaim do not understand why this would be necessary as generations of women have never found it necessary to do such a thing in the Old Country: “But one thing was certain. His wife had never during her pregnancies been inclined to get such notions as Ruth. What perfectly healthy woman would want to have her baby in a hospital?” (*TS*, 123). Not only does it seem unnecessary to Abraham, he even thinks it to be dangerous: “The mothers were fed unclean meat. A crowd of young interns made indecent and unnecessary examinations at will. And of course the mothers were separated from their babies. Who knew for a fact whether they ever returned the right babies to the right mothers?” (*TS*, 123). This fear of a new system and rejection of technical and medical advances shows how deeply rooted this character is in his own traditions and history. He believes his people’s traditional possibilities to be enough and, even more so, new ones to be suspicious.

Besides being less diligent about traditional religious rules, losing faith in God, becoming an agnostic or even atheist is a major aspect of acculturation. Abraham is deeply rooted in religion and has kept his faith despite the ordeals his family has had to go through, but he is worried about his son Isaac: “It was the ideas he picked up, the books he read. And so stubborn about them! Who was the older, anyway, himself or his son? To call his father old-fashioned because he refused to believe that he was descended from a monkey!” (*TS*, 77). Thus, education and a different social background challenge Isaac’s beliefs.

Nonetheless, these changes of society do not take place at the same speed within each generation. As it usually seems to be the case, the younger generations adapt more easily, whereas the older ones cling to their roots and traditions. This can lead to difficulties within families as shown in Chaim Knopp’s case. Ralph forces his father into retirement, because he is embarrassed by his old father, as Chaim explains to Abraham: “‘You understand,’ said Chaim confidentially, ‘it embarrasses them when their friends see me in the street, still with a chicken under my arm’” (*TS*, 157).

Interestingly, the older generation realizes that they are not able to change what is going on around them and thus they resign themselves and figure that “[i]t was getting late for the old to conquer the world. Let the young start anew” (*TS*, 91).

4.2.3.4.1. Education

Education is very important in *The Sacrifice*. Various aspects have to be considered here: Education means a variety of things in Wiseman's novel. Learning English is education, and so is learning Hebrew and Yiddish, religious traditions in *chaidar* as well as learning about life and being taught by life itself. In Wiseman's representation of the Jewish community, traditional religious education goes hand in hand with "modern" English education. For example, upon arrival, the new immigrants have to learn English, and thus they attend English courses offered in their community.

After lunch, when Isaac went to the English-language course that had been organized in the district school, Abraham left the house with him. Isaac pointed at objects, enunciating carefully the English names. "Tree. Sky. Cloud. House. Mountain." Abraham would repeat, fingering the syllables clumsily with his tongue, but with immense satisfaction listening to the sound of his son's apparently adroit mastery. (*TS*, 10)

This passage clearly shows how much easier it is for young Isaac to get accustomed to the new language and the new surroundings. Abraham, part of an older generation, finds it much more difficult to remember these new, foreign words: "The little leaves are falling from the trees. Abraham expanded his scope, carefully enunciating his thought mentally, as though it were an elementary language lesson, thinking in Yiddish, but laboriously, so that he could feel pleasantly as though it were the English equivalent" (*TS*, 11).

Nonetheless, Sarah and Abraham attend courses too, aiming to improve their language skills and thus be able to adapt more easily to this new world.

For a while, twice a week in the evenings, he and his wife had gone to the English classes. Sarah sat shyly, and blushing couldn't answer the questions that were put to her by the young teacher, who spoke neither Yiddish nor Ukrainian nor Polish nor Russian nor German, but had nevertheless attained an appalling fluency in the English tongue. Abraham fidgeted during the class and came privately to the conclusion that, beyond the parts of speech, the teacher did not seem to have too much to tell him. In the end, what with Sarah's indifference and his own overtime at the butcher shop, he had decided that they could teach themselves. (*TS*, 24)

As shown in this quote, language courses offered to immigrants were not necessarily very effective. Their teacher, for example, does not speak any of the languages his students understand and thus teaching them a new language without a common base proves to be very difficult. Additionally, these courses had to be attended while having a full and exhausting workday. Consequently, Sarah and Abraham quit the course and try to learn

English with Isaac's help as well as through everyday communication. It becomes quite obvious though that they are able to communicate in their own languages within the Jewish community and do not need to speak the foreign language very well to survive.

English school and traditionally Jewish school, *chaider*, are both important in the community depicted in *The Sacrifice*. They are everyday aspects of modern life in the New World. Of course, Moishele goes to English school and afterwards to chaider, like his father Isaac used to and it is apparent how important it is to his remaining family that he gets a proper and thorough education. Abraham realizes that education can serve as a means to create a better life. He clearly wishes his son Isaac to continue school and even argues that his boss's no-good son should stay in school: "Why shouldn't the boy at least continue to go to school and try to make something of himself?" (*TS*, 113). Here we have the same notion as in Yezierska's texts that education, knowledge helps to "make something out of oneself". It is very important to Abraham that his son and grandson will have a better life and not merely become butchers like him.

Despite his father's and his own wishes, Isaac decides to quit English school, because the family needs money and he does not want his father to "carry him on his shoulders" (*TS*, 47) anymore. He decides to work in a sweatshop as a tailor instead and to teach Yiddish and Hebrew at night as well as preparing boys for their bar mitzvahs. Thus, he passes on his own knowledge, while trying to read as many books as possible to keep learning himself. Thus, while toiling at a sweatshop, he "had taken to reading more and more books from the English library". He realizes that "[t]hat was something that his father approved of" and thinks to himself that "[b]ooks were to make something fine of him, an educated man. The Hebrew and Yiddish books weren't enough. They dealt with past things, old solutions. Perhaps these books could answer the question about his life, about people, the question that sorely needed answering" (*TS*, 62). Unfortunately, Isaac realizes that "the books, though they pulled him further and further into themselves, brought him no closer to certainties" (*TS*, 62). Additionally, these books provide Isaac with ideas, which do not comply with his father's faith. The more he reads, the more the young man starts to doubt and Abraham, noticing this "had threatened, heaven forbid, to throw Isaac and his atheistical books out of the house altogether" (*TS*, 77). Thus, education is shown to be something dangerous as well, something that challenges traditions and the safety of a well-

structured community.

Furthermore, Abraham clings to a very traditional concept of education for himself. Throughout the story, Abraham wishes that he himself had had a “proper education” (*TS*, 39). He wants to be learned man. For him, this does not necessarily include learning the new language so much as a thorough religious education. For instance, he ponders that he could have become a *shoichet* as well: “He himself could never have been a *shoichet*, bringing the knife down again and again, rejecting life after life. Of course you had to be educated to do a job like that” (*TS*, 101).

4.2.3.4.2. Language and Communication

This chapter will attempt to analyze the use of language and idioms as well as its function in *The Sacrifice*, following LoVerso’s and Greenstein’s comments on the topic.

LoVerso points out the language and communication are central to the novel. A community is only able to exist as such if its members communicate with one another.

Language is, after all, the most basic of social tools. With it a community defines its vision of the world and its ethical standards, standards that are the result of public agreement, standards that may change as the community changes. In brief, language reflects the vitality of a community, a vitality that depends on a basically public and non-individualistic involvement in human problems. It is only through this kind of cooperation that the community can survive and grow. Indeed, language itself, in being a system of verbal conventions, reflects this cooperative spirit. Thus, when individuals in a community use the language in an ego-centered rather than a public way, when they become monologists rather than conversationalists, they become destructive to themselves, to the community, and to the language. This is what *The Sacrifice* illustrates most brilliantly. (LoVerso)

The first obstacle in terms of communication is not speaking the same language. The immigrant family portrayed in the novel encounters this hindrance in the first pages of the book after having been on the road for more than fifteen months: “As though summoned, the conductor entered the coach. Abraham turned his head and beckoned imperatively. “‘Where are we?’ he asked in Ukrainian” (*TS*, 3). Unfortunately, the conductor does not speak Ukrainian and answers, “‘I beg your pardon?’ he said in English. ‘Where are we stopping, please?’” Abraham asked urgently in Yiddish, speaking slowly and patiently so that the man must understand. The conductor shook his head. ‘No speak, no speak,’ he said, pointing to Abraham’s mouth, then to his own, with a deprecating gesture. Abraham

looked at the man with irritation. Was there anyone on the train who could do anything but make faces and smile? ‘Why does the train stop?’ he asked suddenly, hopefully, in Polish.” The conductor still does not understand this strange-looking, bearded man and Abraham grows impatient: “‘The train! Stop! Why? What city?’ roared the Jew in exasperation, spitting out the words in broken German” (*TS*, 4). This scene showing the “migratory babel” (Greenstein 105) already introduces to the reader one of the major issues of the novel: not understanding and misunderstanding one another. Michael Greenstein goes even further and states that “linguistic incompetence is only an external manifestation for a far more deep-seated psychological and existential incomprehension which overwhelms Abraham’s family” (Greenstein 105).

The use of different languages is indicated by comments in Wiseman’s text, not by the use of a vernacular or rather crude word order as we have seen in Yeziarska’s stories. For instance, in this passage, Wiseman directly tells the reader which language her characters are currently using: “*Boim*. Isaac’s voice, speaking cheerfully in Yiddish, came to his mind” (*TS*, 11).

Wiseman uses some Yiddish expressions within the text as parts of communication as well. For instance, Bassieh Knopp, groans “*Oi oi oi!*” (*TS*, 98) when she is in pain or the barber greets Abraham traditionally with “*Lachaim*” (*TS*, 148), when he enters. The word *grobion* is used frequently by Laiah, when speaking about Polsky, the butcher, or his son Hymie.

LoVerso introduces the idea of a circle of participation in communication: “As long as the individual avoids isolation and surrenders himself to the life of the community by actively using language in a productive, public way, then he will continue to participate in the circle-conversation of his life. But if he fails to be both ‘receptive’ and ‘expressive’ - that is, both a listener and a talker – then he will fall out of the conversation, out of the circle, out of life” (LoVerso). Life in isolation from the community is not possible, at least not for long. This notion of the importance of communication and conversation is emphasized when Wiseman describes the slow physical and mental decline of Sarah: “Sarah began, almost imperceptibly at first, but in Abraham’s eyes at least more clearly, to fade away. [...] Her life had become like a long conversation in which she had somehow said all that she had to say, and to which she was now even forgetting to listen” (*TS*, 133). As Sarah “fades away” from life, she loses touch with her surroundings. She stops to communicate,

has nothing more to say and, thus, seemingly no more purpose in life. She falls into isolation and, consequently, dies.

The power of words is emphasized by Wiseman as well. When Isaac fears for his mother's life, he tries to conjure her up alive: "But she was alive. He had seen her alive just this morning. She was. Alive. It was absolutely necessary to be convinced of her aliveness. He wasn't satisfied with just the word. He needed more than the word; he needed the feeling of it. Alive, alive. Alive. The word began to lose itself in its repetition" (*TS*, 140f). Unfortunately, despite his desperate attempt to influence his feelings, Sarah dies. Nonetheless, this scene shows how highly rated language and communication is in *The Sacrifice*.

According to LoVerso, the language of the murder scene is symptomatic for language in the whole novel. The use of words by individuals signifies their moral success:

When he attempts to use words in a serious and public way – that is, when he seeks understanding through conversation – then he maintains vitality and moral integrity. But when he does not take the words seriously enough or when he drops out of public conversation and falls into a private world, then he runs the risk of succumbing to confusion and even death. (LoVerso)

In the final scene between Laiah and her murderer Abraham, "Laiah does not take life and language seriously enough. And Abraham, although he seeks the truth, is blinded by his too private perception of evil. Consequently, their conversation is not a conversation at all but merely two monologues at cross purposes with one another. The end result is death" (LoVerso). Because of their mutual misunderstanding of each other, Laiah makes advances, which are too forward, and Abraham feels that he can only "take himself out of this conversation" by killing her. Thus, language and communication are key aspects of the novel and even important in the decision of the individuals' fates.

4.2.3.5. Past Experiences

In coming to Canada, the immigrant family depicted in *The Sacrifice* carries with it its past experiences. These memories become the basis of the characters' actions and reflect the histories of many Jewish immigrants, who had immigrated to Canada in real life.

The reasons for the emigration of Abraham's family from Ukraine to Canada are easily

comprehensible. They were victims of pogroms in their hometown and two of their sons, Moses and Jacob, were murdered by Cossacks and neighbors during these pogroms, as described by Abraham to his friend Chaim Knopp (*TS*, 52-60). Former friends and neighbors betrayed the family, “egg[ing] the Cossacks on” (*TS*, 56) and stealing Sarah’s prized family heirloom, her samovar. Nonetheless, Isaac feels “nothing but fear and the automatic guilt of the prey” (*TS*, 67) upon discovery.

Immigrants met numerous obstacles on their way to the New World. For example, being taken advantage of by others, who pretended to help them along: “We were met at the border by Polish Jews who helped us escape – helped us! Pious Jews with long sideburns and black frocks – they made a living of it. Big business” (*TS*, 69). Additionally, as explained earlier in the introductory chapter on Jewish immigration to Canada, it was not easy for a Jewish immigrant to be allowed into the country. After having been stripped of almost everything they had by these “helpers”, immigrants had to find a way to apply to the Canadian immigration in a favorable way. Otherwise they would not be allowed into the country. Wiseman lets Abraham explain, “Countries want you, countries don’t. Who wants a Jew? This is our life, to hammer on doors. Here they wanted only farmers. So, I am a farmer. I started to make papers to go with my family as farmers. In the meantime I went to work. Papers cost money, and what I had left that I had saved from the various thieves was needed for papers and for the journey.” (*TS*, 70). Unfortunately for the protagonists, Isaac caught typhus and was sick for a considerable time. Thus, the family needed new papers: “Now the Canadian government wanted something else. We had to make new papers. We waited for months” (*TS*, 70).

Escaping to the New World is shown to be a very tedious and exhausting journey, taking more than fifteen months: “‘No; enough, I say,’ said Abraham. ‘Fifteen months and eleven days’” (*TS*, 5). After such a long time of being on the road constantly and worrying about what the future might bring, Abraham feels the need to settle down again: “‘The important thing now,’ Abraham continued, ‘is that we must stop running from death and from every other insult. We will seize our lives in these scarred hands again’” (*TS*, 5f). He takes matters into his own hands and decides how, after getting off the train early, the family had to go about finding their new home: “First, to find the immigration barracks – to sleep, at last, without the artificial pulse of engines to remind them even in sleep that they were

wanderers” (*TS*, 6). This not only emphasizes the strain of the journey, but also that immigrants expected some kind of provisions made for them upon their arrival.

Michael Greenstein states that in *The Sacrifice* “[...] the immigrant’s expansion into the New World proves to be a tragic illusion in the face of fate’s limitations”. He goes on to say that, “[t]o break through the bubble of confinement is to die, so that choice or individual free will has no place in a blind universe where ecstasy is sheer fantasy” (Greenstein 109). Thus, the immigrants’ hope of building a new life in the New World in *The Sacrifice* ultimately has to be disappointed as fate, not free choices, decide their future.

4.2.3.6. Work

Finding work is hard for new immigrants. Abraham is lucky to find a job as a butcher, whereas his son has to start working in a sweatshop to be able to help supporting the family. Isaac expects to learn the trade of tailor when he starts working there, but soon he finds out that working in a sweatshop merely means handling the machines and being a small part in a long chain of stations a garment has to go through before being completed and ready for sale.

The work itself was not what he had expected. It was not as in the old country. There, when you learned a trade you learned it all. A tailor was a tailor, from the first snip of the scissors to the last button. Here he couldn’t call himself a tailor. If he could have made a pair of pants, a jacket, it would have been something – out of his hands, something whole. But from the first day when he had sat down at the machine, months ago, to the present, he was on pockets. (*TS*, 61)

Additionally, working conditions are far from comfortable: “There was certainly a great deal of vulgarity in the shop, Isaac discovered; more than his father realized. The men and girls in the stuffy factory, which smelled of sweating bodies, were very free and easy together” (*TS*, 61). This certainly is appealing to a young man in a way, but unfortunately, these vulgarities sometimes turned into even more drama: “There were fights in the shop too, between the workers – sometimes over work, sometimes over vulgarities that were said too sincerely and taken as insults. One of the girls had thrown a pair of cutting scissors at one of the men halfway across the room, because of something he had said.” (*TS*, 61).

Being a tailor in a sweatshop did not entail interesting and diverse work, but mainly consisted of the same movements, which had to be done as quickly as possible: “Speed,

that's what counts in piecework. He was quick. The scraps fed the sewing machine and came out stitched, formed, ready for the next operation at the next machine. Every piece was a few cents. Zip zip – five cents – zip – seven cents – zip zip zip – another dollar. Another bundle” (TS, 81). Thus, the quicker Isaac sews the pockets, the more money he can take home to his family.

Once, the workers even tried to improve their working conditions by going on strike. They “had stood as a picket outside the shut-down shop” (TS, 82). Their leader during the strike lost his job and the workers had to go back to their old jobs unsuccessfully after their boss had returned from a holiday in California. Isaac finally loses his job when he stands up to the foreman to help an old co-worker. Similarly to Yeziarska's protagonist, who loses her job because she dares to speak up, Isaac is no longer tolerated at the sweatshop after this incident.

Traditional occupations are depicted in the novel as well. Chaim Knopp, for example, works as a *shoichet* and sometimes performs circumcisions. These jobs do not offer a lot of money, as Chaim's son Ralph contemplates: “What would a *shoichet* know about finances?” (TS, 51). Nonetheless, they are important to allow the Jewish community to live according to religious rules and principles.

Ralph Knopp, a second-generation immigrant, is an example for a Jew who has worked himself up in economy and society. He becomes a manufacturer, goes on business trips and plays cards with other businessmen. Wiseman hints at the possibility that Ralph may be exploiting his fellow countrymen in his shops in a rather covert way. She lets Chaim Knopp reflect on his son: “He was sure that Ralph was not unjust to the workers – not the sort of boss, for instance, that Isaac had. He himself had heard Ralph mention Isaac's boss in a derogatory way. But Ralph grew richer. And this growing richer is a thing a man should do carefully” (TS, 50f).

4.2.3.7. Jewish Self-Perception

Jews are represented as very resilient in Wiseman's novel. For instance, upon arrival in Winnipeg after all they had been through, Abraham reflects about the nature of the Jew and about his son in particular: “No matter what is done to the plant, when it falls, again it will

send out tentative roots to the earth and rise upward again to the sky, The boy was young, the boy was blessed, the boy would grow” (*TS*, 6). This shows the great hope that moving to the New World gave them.

Assimilating to their new home is not easy for newcomers, as has already been established previously. Chaim Knopp remembers how he felt as a newcomer: “Yes, it’s true, when you first come to a strange country everyone else looks so big, so assured, and when you feel yourself so small, so lonely, such a *pintele Yid*. I remember yet from twenty-five years ago, when I first brought my family over” (*TS*, 33). Others, however, who most likely barely remember the Old Country, were able to adapt much easier. For example the butcher Polsky, who thinks, “He himself had come to the country when he was still a child, which made him practically a native” (*TS*, 33).

The difference between Jewish immigrants and settled Christians seems to run quite deep. Even children voice that there seemingly is a difference between them and Jewish children. Moishele, for example, is teased by other children because he is Jewish. They call a girl who would like to play with him “Junie Jewlover” (*TS*, 167) or run around shouting “Dirdyjoo, dirdyjoo” (*TS*, 168) at him. Young Moishele, in return, is already aware of the special position of Jews in history. He feels a glooming danger without being able to pinpoint where it comes from: “They did terrible things to Jewish boys. They had done something terrible to his uncles, he knew” (*TS*, 171).

As to why Jews have been made the scapegoats of history again and again, Abraham has his own theory. During a discussion about the fact that there are Jewish sinners and criminals as well with his son Isaac, Abraham says: “You know well how a Jew can do a thing when he sets his mind to it. Why else are we hated? It may seem that we have more villains than they simply because one gifted Jewish villain can outshine any three of theirs” (*TS*, 133).

Thus, Jews in Wiseman’s novel perceive themselves to be different from the rest of the population as much as they perceive them to be different. This is not something the main characters want to overcome though. Their roots and traditions are of great importance for them. They are merely looking for a place to build their new lives in peace.

4.2.3.8. Outsiders' Views and Expectations

After the newly immigrated Jewish protagonist family gets off the train in the first chapter of the novel, unsuccessfully having tried to communicate with the conductor in various languages other than English, “[t]he conductor stood shaking his head in exasperation over these immigrants” (*TS*, 6). This situation clearly describes how different these new immigrants must have seemed to already established ones.

However, the immigrants themselves were also conscious of their difference. Isaac, for example, wonders what their landlady’s daughters might think of him: “What would two native girls think of him?” (*TS*, 7). Of course, Mrs. Plopler and her family are Jews as well, having emigrated a while earlier and thus consider themselves natives. This shows again the difference between recent immigrants and assimilated ones and how quickly these groups differentiated themselves from one another.

Isaac continues to think about how different his appearance seems: “It was different when they had changed boats and were in England for a short while. There it didn’t matter that his clothes were different. He could walk with his hands in his pockets, knowing he’d be leaving soon, and pretend he was a tourist – wealthy, idle, indolent, even perhaps a bit supercilious” (*TS*, 10). The young boy already realizes that people form opinions on the basis of looks and thus contemplates his own.

Showing how tightly knit the Jewish community was, Wiseman depicts how great an interest the new immigrants aroused in the neighborhood: “Half an hour after they were securely installed and she had their rent pinned away warmly, their landlady was telling a neighbor how she had taken a poor immigrant family into the house, practically right off the train, and how she had made them feel immediately at home” (*TS*, 7). Especially Mrs. Plopler, a very – let’s say – communicative woman, enjoys spreading her own thoughts and prejudices: “They’re greenhorns; they won’t want to bathe very often. You know how filthy these people are apt to be” (*TS*, 8). Unsurprisingly, these prejudices are negative. Mrs. Plopler eyes the family’s “outlandish bundles” (*TS*, 9) wondering about everything they might be doing in her house. She is very nosey and cautious.

Another scene showing the curiosity of outsiders in the Jewish community is the following: “Jenny busied herself in the kitchen. In her heart she positively thrilled with the

strangeness of this exotic Jewess who was her friend. They did things differently. Here was this bearded old man. What could she call him? Distinguished” (*TS*, 239). Here, Jenny seems to be fascinated by the otherness of the immigrants, but in a distinctly positive way.

Although Mrs. Plopler is portrayed as a very particular character, the stereotypes and prejudices pronounced by her most likely reflect those of many real-life assimilated Canadian Jews during this time period. On more than one occasion, she voices negative, uninformed opinions, for instance, “‘Cuff for kindness,’ she concluded, was all you could expect from these people” (*TS*, 18). She feels that she is superior, although her own family life seems to be lacking as Mr. Plopler goes out to have fun with his friends “in the American style” (*TS*, 24), while Mrs. Plopler is not too happy about this. She thinks, “This immigrant had not yet picked up the habit. Of course where he came from they had never heard of such a thing. Old-country Jews. Mrs. Plopler smiled to herself in a superior way” (*TS*, 29). Whenever she is not of the same opinion as her tenants, she attributes this to their immigrants background: “Funny people, these. Such odd views on things. Well, people make their own beds” (*TS*, 97). It has to be pointed out though that Mrs. Plopler herself is not a bad person wishing the family bad luck. She is portrayed as an unhappy, gossipy woman and remains a life-long friend of the family. Thus, her negative remarks on the immigrant family cannot be considered real anti-semitism, which rarely occurs in the book.

However, positive stereotypes are portrayed as well. For instance, Polsky, the butcher, immediately hires Abraham, saying, “One thing I know about an old-country man. He knows his craft” (*TS*, 18). This certainly ties in with the fact that in the Old Country, trades were learnt more thoroughly, which has already been discussed in connection with Isaac’s job in a sweatshop.

Concluding, newly immigrated Jews are rather depicted as evoking curiosity, as old-fashioned and uninformed. Positive as well as negative prejudices are pronounced and these ethnicities are sometimes perceived as inferior. Nonetheless, as some of the characters show, Canada provided them with opportunities to establish themselves and create a better life for themselves.

5. CONCLUSION

Anzia Yeziarska and Adele Wiseman both present their readers with detailed descriptions of Jewish immigrant communities in their new cities. Both writers are deeply rooted in their Eastern European heritage and thus are able to present us with an insider's view.

Interestingly, these texts offer similarities as well as differences. For instance, Yeziarska's protagonists are always struggling to adapt to their new home countries. The young women she represents are highly reminiscent of Yeziarska herself. They are yearning for a better life, craving education, which seems to them the only way to "make" themselves a person. These women are always powerful and energetic as well as intelligent and sensitive. They take their lives into their own hands and barely have any family ties. These women always find hope in the end of the story and the will to carry on their difficult search for an identity and a place in the community.

As previously explained, America is much more to these characters than just a country. It is a concept, a collection of images and hopes that allow the immigrants to survive the hardships of their lives, dreaming of a new home allowing them to live in peace and to be seen as something more than "just" a Jew. This concept of being a Jew is also challenged in Yeziarska's texts. It soon becomes clear that she is less concerned with religion and more with cultural heritage. As her protagonists largely struggle with the faith, as the writer herself did as well, her characters are imbedded in the Jewish community, which certainly offers various opportunities for pious Jews. Consequently, religion is not discussed as such and is not at the center of Yeziarska's stories, but rather traditions and rites, which are a part of everyday Jewish life.

Yeziarska's characters try to break out of their old lives in order to be able to create a new one for themselves. They have to leave everything behind and satisfy their own hunger for education in order to be able to find their place in life.

While Yeziarska's messages in her fiction are very direct and clear and reflect her own life choices, Adele Wiseman's novel is more complex. The importance of religion is evident and already introduced to the reader on the first pages of the novel, when the names of the immigrant family members are revealed: Abraham, Sarah and Isaac. The family lacks a

surname, which emphasizes this effect. Furthermore, Wiseman focuses on religious traditions and rites throughout the novel. Her characters are deeply imbedded in their faith and are struggling with their need to find a place for themselves in a rather modernized Jewish community in which religion does not always play a major role. Wiseman's immigrant family is confronted and struggling with their need to assimilate, while trying to hold on to their roots. When Isaac finally voices his doubts in the faith, Abraham falls into a crisis, fearing for his son's soul. Although he partly blames this loss of faith on Isaac's reading, it is obvious to the family patriarch that education is the key to a better life. While education in Yeziarska's short stories refers to an English, modern education, Wiseman's characters think of it in a broader sense. For them, education includes English, modern education as well as a traditional Jewish one, lessons of life and professional education.

Wiseman not only represents the daily struggles of immigrants trying to "fill their bellies", but writes from a more philosophical and reflective point of view. Her messages are interwoven with myth, but this would be a topic for another thesis.

Unlike its status in Yeziarska's texts, family, apart from religion, is the most important aspect of the lives of Wiseman's protagonists. Traditions and history are carried on from generation to generation and, thus, children and grandchildren are at the center of the patriarch's universe.

Wiseman's characters desperately try to fit into their new community, but they cannot help holding on to their roots, which considerably impedes this process. They do not try to break out like Yeziarska's characters. Additionally, because their family ties are so strong, they are faced with problems created by the generation gap. While the older generation is very set in its lifestyle, the younger one is starting to adopt a modernized, North American way of life.

The community represented in Wiseman's novel is multi-faceted, offering multiple views of the themes in the plot. She is able to relate to the reader detailed descriptions of locations, people, opinions and interpersonal relationships and, thus, fleshes out vivid and colorful picture of Jewish immigrant life in Canada's Winnipeg.

So, in conclusion, Wiseman and Yeziarska show us two different ways of acculturation. They both represent Jewish immigrant communities as complex systems with distinct

hierarchies and communities within the community. Yeziarska's immigrants find a solution for their struggles in standing up for themselves and claiming a space for themselves, whereas Wiseman's protagonists have to surrender. Yeziarska's women free themselves of their family ties and even reject the Jewish faith, while in *The Sacrifice*, only family and believing in God's almighty power and wisdom can redeem the sinner. The difficult economic and social situation new immigrants are faced with is represented in both texts. It becomes clear that in adapting to these new living situations, changes have to be made concerning the individual immigrant's lifestyle and some religious rules have to be softened in order to be able to adjust. Younger immigrants seem to be able to do this much more easily, as shown in both texts. In the end, it seems that both the U. S. American Jewish community as well as the Canadian one is becoming more and more Americanized and modern. Individuals not willing or able to adapt to that unfortunately will not be able to find peace and a truly new home.

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ABSTRACT

Diese Diplomarbeit untersucht die Art und Weise wie die jüdischen Gemeinschaften (Communities) im amerikanischen New York City und im kanadischen Winnipeg in Texten von den beiden jüdisch-stämmigen Autorinnen Anzia Yeziarska und Adele Wiseman dargestellt werden.

Anzia Yeziarska's Sammlung von Kurzgeschichten namens *Hungry Hearts* wurde 1922 publiziert und bescherte der jungen Autorin Yeziarska kurzzeitig plötzlichen Ruhm. Sie wurde als „Sweatshop Cinderella“ bekannt und als authentische „jüdische Stimme“ in einer Zeit der rasanten Entwicklung und starken Einwanderung von osteuropäischen Juden gelesen. Yeziarska baute vor allem ihre persönlichen Erfahrungen als Immigrantin in ihre Geschichten ein. Adele Wiseman wurde zwar bereits in Winnipeg geboren, zog aber ihr Inspiration aus den Erfahrungen ihrer Eltern, die 1923 aus der Ukraine nach Kanada eingewandert waren. Sie erhielt den Governor General's Award für ihren Roman *The Sacrifice*, der 1956 erstmals veröffentlicht wurde.

Anhand von Themengebieten wie Religion, Sprache und Kommunikation, Arbeit, Familie, dem sozialen Status von Frauen, Darstellungen von Orten und Landschaften, von Juden und jüdischen Traditionen, etc. wird in dieser Diplomarbeit untersucht wie die fiktionalen jüdischen Gemeinschaften in den beiden Großstädten funktionieren. Besonderes Augenmerk wird auf den Prozess der Anpassung der Charaktere an ihre neuen Lebensumstände und an einen neuen kulturellen Hintergrund gelegt.

Anzia Yeziarskas Protagonisten sind meist junge, jüdische und durchwegs intelligente Frauen, die versuchen sich durch Bildung zu „echten Amerikanerinnen“ zu machen. Yeziarska stellt ihre Charaktere und die Welt in der sie leben sehr realistisch dar. Ihre facettenreiche Sprache ist sehr ausdrucksstark und erlaubt dem Leser sich vollkommen in ihre Geschichten hineinzusetzen. Adele Wisemans Text hingegen ist wesentlich komplexer. Die Autorin verwebt ihre Geschichte mit biblischen Mythen und fokussiert dabei besonders auf die Schwierigkeiten eines sehr traditionellen, traumatisierten, alternden jüdischen Mannes sich an seine neuen Lebensumstände und die sich verändernden Familien- und Gesellschaftsstrukturen anzupassen.

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