



Towards a New Ideal America

*Anzia Yezierska and Justice as Democratic
Understanding*

Course : Master Thesis American Studies
Student : Kirsten Virágh
Student number : 0239399
Thesis professor: Derek Rubin

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Anzia Yeziarska and the Search for a Common Language of Justice

“Writers, like language, are subject to the *situation*, in that they must say something *mean[ingful]*.... they are limited *as any speaker is* limited to a situation in which words have meaning.”

Bill Ashcroft, “Language and Transformation” (235)

The immigrant novel, also termed ethnic literature, or multicultural representation, has been discussed in many ways. It has mainly been considered as a means of coming to terms with the dilemmas of immigrant experience. Ethnic literature takes into account topics of cultural conflict, transition, assimilation, intermarriage, and generational battles (Ferraro 7). During the 1970s there was a revived interest in immigrant fiction by scholars and formerly disregarded writers were rediscovered (Ebest 105). One of these writers was Anzia Yeziarska (1880-1970), a Jewish immigrant who arrived in America sometime around 1890 (Gornick vii). This author, who “dipped her pen in her heart” (Kessler-Harris, *The Open Cage* v), used New York’s Lower East Side ghetto as a setting to express immigrant aspiration and disappointment. Publishing her stories in major American magazines such as *Harper’s*, *The Century*, and *The Forum* during the heyday of American Nativism in the 1920s, Yeziarska believed her task was to “mediate between her culture and the dominant culture of America” (Ebest 106).

Yeziarska’s fiction is part of Jewish American immigrant literature concerned with “the Jewish immigrant’s experience in the New World and the possibility of a successful and fulfilling life in this alien culture” (Wilentz 34). Written in a realistic tradition and in the authors’ newly acquired English language, this genre includes writers such as Henry Roth, Mary Antin, and Abraham Cahan. These authors addressed the Eastern European Jewish experience within their newfound American life. They lay bare the struggles of consolidating the traditions of the Old World with life in the “Promised Land.” Yeziarska’s stories confront feelings of “in-between” and difference from a feminine perspective. Yeziarska used strong female characters who vividly express their emotions that are related to the trials and tribulations of immigrant life. Yeziarska only uses female protagonists and therefore she is often considered to be a proto-feminist writer who “dares to redefine traditional beliefs that matrimony and assimilation lie at the

core of a Jewish immigrant woman's empowerment and social mobility" (Coklin 154). The Jewish heroine in America is portrayed by Yeziarska as a source of positive female energy, someone who is willing to "make from herself a person" (155).

Critics of Yeziarska have often analyzed the main characters who experience the transition of becoming *Americanerins*, as the archetypical "others" in American society. The Jewish-American women in Yeziarska's fiction have the desire to make their voices heard (Gelfant xxxii) and protest against authoritative elements in American life. These female immigrant voices react against forms of Americanization, Old World ways, and the traditional roles for women. By addressing these struggles Yeziarska's heroines imagine America not as a *Goldene Medina* "but as a site of difference, diversity, internal powers struggles, and imperialistic designs" (Gelfant xxx). This social criticism, communicated through Yeziarska's fiction, did not only assess the goals and methods of various Americanizing institutions but it also addressed "the ethnicity of her Jewish characters...highlighting... their unique way of appropriating and reshaping Anglo-American culture" (Konzett, *Administered Identities* 597). Delia Caparoso Konzett explains that one of Yeziarska's tools to emphasize this collective reshaping was her use of Y'inglish. This is "a deliberate awkward mixture of Yiddish and English" (*Ethnic Modernisms* 10). In Yeziarska's stories this mixture is often used to accentuate the emotions of her characters. Some critics, however, see this style as excessive and regard Yeziarska's fiction as popular culture (Stubbs xvii). Others considered this "clumsy" and "awkward" writing style as a contribution to "the documentation of the immigrant woman's experience" (Ebest 105).

The emphasis on the social historical value of Yeziarska's fiction and on her writing style led to the neglect of "imaginative engagement" by her literary critics (Ferraro 5). These critics connected Yeziarska's fiction to her real-life "rags-to-riches" experiences and therefore Yeziarska "comes before us not as a novelist whose work compels our scrutiny but as an ethnic literary personality whose encounter with America is the better story" (56). The reliability of the "social histories" analyzed in her work are questioned as well. Despite the fact that Yeziarska mostly wrote from her own experience she was "incapable of telling the plain truth. Everything she wrote was fantasy fiction" (Hendriksen 255). The debate whether Yeziarska's work should be considered as a memoir or as a work of fiction should not diminish its social and artistic value. Yeziarska's "stories were true to the essence of her immigrant

experiences...[and] the experience of others”(256). They are skillfully told narratives that are used as a tool to communicate. Yeziarska intended to “build a bridge of understanding between the American-born” (*Children of Loneliness* 33) and the experience of dislocation in the Lower East Side ghetto.

While considering these artistic and social values and acknowledging the different analyses of Yeziarska’s immigrant fiction, I wish to suggest an additional reading of her stories. One of Yeziarska’s concerns was the concept of justice within American society. In her fiction the narrator invokes a strong feeling of justice by articulating the complex situation of Jewish immigrant women in their pursuit of self-development. In doing so, Yeziarska’s fiction is positioned within the “larger cultural process of forming new concepts, or extending, criticizing or reconstructing already existing concepts” (Kelly 95). Thomas Ferraro argues in his introduction to *Ethnic Passages: Literary immigrant in Twentieth-Century America* that to explore what most concerns a writer the primary task of interpretive and close reading is to search for “deeper ambitions and larger receptions of individual texts” (5). Yeziarska’s deeper ambition to address the concept of justice in the American immigrant society at the beginning of the 20th century creates the possibility to look for immigrant ideas on justice within her fiction. Yeziarska’s accomplishments could therefore be placed within the discussion of justice that is connected to the understanding of immigrant displacement.

Yeziarska’s heroines deal with the experiences of immigrant women who are confronted with the difficulties of assimilation, family tensions, and gender roles within American life. Justice, or the lack of it, seems to be the overarching theme of these conflicts. This is vividly expressed, for example, in the short story “How I found America.” When the autobiographical I is confronted with the cruel dealings of her sweatshop boss, she boldly marches into his office allowing her emotions free rein: “America, as the oppressed of all lands have dreamed America to be, and America as it is, flashed before me—a banner of fire! Behind me I felt masses pressing—thousands of immigrants—thousands upon thousands crushed by injustice...” (*Hungry Hearts* 164). In this passage the heroine connects the newcomers’ imagining of America to concept of justice, or in this case injustice. The negative experience with her dominant boss shatters the image of America as the land of freedom. By reacting against her superior the heroine considers the reality of America within a normative framework of justice.

The suffering of ghetto life, communicated by Yeziarska's protagonists, becomes an indicator of what is right and wrong and this creates a social situation between the narrator and reader (Ashcroft 287). The narrator is "saying" something about the concept of justice within the immigrant context. In this way Yeziarska's work articulates a sense of fairness that is related to the experience of Eastern European Jews who lived in Lower East Side at the beginning of the 20th century. As Gordon Kelly argues: "discovering themes and meaning in a work... involves us in making connections between [fictional] work and the world outside it. These connections *are* meaning" (100). Yeziarska created such meaning through her fiction by vividly describing the emotions of her heroines that were related to real-life experiences. These emotions convey a sense of justice which have the "potential to make a distinctive contribution to our public life". They can hold "visions of humanity [and] expressions of a complete sense of social life." They can shape and nourish the public imagination, educating the public rational (Nussbaum 2). Yeziarska's fiction intends to cultivate thoughts on fairness and can therefore be considered a significant literary source with historical and sociological value on how the concept of justice was expressed, perceived, and received in the early 1900s.

Yeziarska's realistic representation conceptualizes society as a system in such a way that "particular instances of misunderstanding, mistreatment, or cruelty, can become metonymies of the inhumanity and injustice of American society as a whole" (Fluck 33). This realistic depiction of modern life is, combined with sentimental expressions, used to invoke empathy and compassion with the reader. The feelings of sympathy intend to create a form of emotional identification by the reader with the characters of Yeziarska's stories. This identification "involves us in their values and beliefs, since these determine what they perceive"(Jay 123). The use of these emotions by Yeziarska, their passion increased by autobiographical elements, aid her quest to build the bridge of understanding between the Jewish immigrant woman and the American-born. The mutual understanding of the immigrant experiences, however, depended on the different conceptions of justice within the experience of difference and displacement.

Yeziarska reacted against the position of immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century by incorporating the conception of justice in her fiction. By articulating a sense of fairness Yeziarska's protagonists try to create a mutual language between their people and the Anglo-Americans. To

understand Yeziarska's reaction against the immigrant situation it must be seen in the proper historical context of her time. As Gloria Anzaldua argues: "all reaction is limited by, and dependent on, what it is reacting against. Because the counterstance stems from a problem with authority – outer as well as inner—it's a step towards liberation from cultural domination" (209). Inner and outer authorities surfaced while dealing with assimilation, social emulation, and family structures within American society. Cultural dominance within these immigrant experiences refer to the pressures of Old World culture as well as that of the New. In Yeziarska's fiction the main characters react against the situation on the Lower East Side and in doing so, articulate ideas on justice within the immigrant experience.

These expressions within the immigrant context are part of the discussion on the idea of justice. The immigrant experience is related to this discussion because the idea of justice also entails notions of equality, behavior between different groups, and the adjustment to certain standards. Justice can be considered a virtue as well as a set of "normative principles designed to guide the allocation of benefits and burdens of economic activity" (Lamont and Favor, *Distributive Justice* 1.0). In this analysis of Yeziarska's fiction the concept of justice as a virtue will be explored within the immigrant experience, because justice as a virtue discusses the individual capacities of just action as well as justice within social and economic institutions (Slote, *Justice as a Virtue* 1.0). Justice as a virtue consists of all ideas on justice including distributive justice and in the following sections "justice" will refer to justice as a virtue. Justice is considered to be "a framework for decreasing the cost of living together" (Smidtz 11). The process of adjustment and integration should therefore be explored through the concept of justice, linking the immigrant experience to fair conduct within every social setting.

The virtuous nature of justice has extensively been discussed in Plato's *Republic*. Plato regarded a just individual as someone "whose soul is guided by the vision of the Good" (Slote *Justice as a Virtue* 1.1). This "Good" was created through reason and only a harmonious soul could perform just actions. The connection of character with justice was further investigated by David Hume. He reflected on the subject of harmony, and elevated this individual trait of justice to a more communal level. Hume believed that justice would "arise out of a sense of advantage to be obtained" (Barry, *Treatise* 148). The conception of "Good" was cast in terms of development, or improvement. The community should advance towards a "definite optimum state" (Hart 184). The community should design a "rational cooperation for mutual

advantage”(Barry 148) and justice would only be granted to those persons contributed to this cooperation. Within Yeziarska’s fiction the immigrant protagonists are measured by their ability to contribute to society. Brian Barry argues that “a common standard” should be implemented to secure “impartial sympathy with interests of all those affected” (149) when considering mutual advancement. This impartiality would arise, as Harsanyi argues, when a judgment “does not reflect the particular position of the person making it” (qtd. in Barry 76). This impartiality is considered as an important aspect within the process of mutual advancement by Yeziarska’s heroines.

The maximization of mutual advancement within society is often considered a prerequisite for justice, because the concept of justice is formulated to achieve a common future goal. (Hume, Rawls, and Barry). John Rawls argues that this mutual advancement should take place within a “fair system of cooperation” (6). The standards for this system should be proposed by reasonable persons, and these rules should be understood, and honored by the entire community (Rawls 7). The elements of justice present in Yeziarska’s fiction are reciprocity, mutuality and deservedness (Schmidtz 13). These elements appear in any fair cooperation among individuals or groups. These concepts, however, are only applicable to equal and free persons (Rawls 41). This standard must be met before justice can occur within any particular situation. Justice in the context of the immigrant experience requires the imagination of circumstances that “determine an individual’s action” to “judge whether what happens to that individual is deserved” (Jay 123). The elements of justice are used for “maintaining or restoring a *balance*” within society (Hart 155). The search for such a balance is present within the Yeziarska’s fiction when the immigrant circumstances of displacement are explored. The concept of justice becomes important when the immigrant experience of “difference” creates an unfair situation. The mutual achievement within a society should create a balance between all members of the American community, including minorities.

Within Yeziarska’s fiction the unbalanced situations of her immigrant characters are found within passages on assimilation, pragmatic and philanthropic institutions, and within the roles given to women by society. The treatment of difference empowers the female protagonists to articulate an alternative conception of justice. Yeziarska’s fiction will be explored according to the characters’ expressions of the idea of justice within the experience of adjustment. An example of the ongoing search for justice is found in the short story “The Lost Beautifulness”. The main character Hanneh Hayyeh believes she is treated

unequally and confronts her Anglo-American employer Mrs. Preston. Hanneh hopes to find understanding: “ ‘You are always telling me that the lowest nobody got something to give to America. And that’s what I got to give to America – the last breath of my body for justice. I’ll wake up America from it’s sleep....’ ”(*Hungry Hearts* 56). Hanneh expresses the immigrant aspiration to appropriate and reshape the idea of “America.” This desire is at the heart of Yeziarska’s fiction. By confronting Mrs. Preston with her desire for a just America Hanneh tries to invoke sympathy between her and the American-born. The exchange of ideas on justice thus functions as a bridge of understanding Yeziarska’s heroines, as expressed by Hanneh Hayyeh, have the compelling need to contribute to the mutual advancement of American society. They eagerly search for justice while they struggle with double-consciousness, difference and the pressures of assimilation. This search leads to a reexamination of the concept of justice in relation to the immigrant experience in the 20th century.

In the light of justice Yeziarska’s characters will explore the complexities of assimilation, respond to the theories of pragmatists and philanthropists, and try to adjust the dominant gender roles within American life. First theories of assimilation will be considered and the integration process of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants within American society will be more clearly connected to the concept of justice. Secondly, justice in American society will be explored within the context of the pragmatic and philanthropic institutions located in the Lower East Side. Conceptions of justice within these organizations will be examined as well as the reality these ideas brought. The failure by “the objective distance of the science of sociology” (Konzett 38) is a recurring theme within Yeziarska’s stories. Yeziarska’s relationship with pragmatist John Dewey and her personal experiences at the “Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls” gave the impulse to look at the cultural imperialism found within the ideas conveyed by pragmatic and philanthropic institutions.

Other dominant structures are found within the gender role of Jewish immigrant women. Yeziarska wrote about the struggle for adjustment from a feminine perspective, using only female protagonists. The experience of assimilation and cultural imperialism “the female position is an important factor.” It focuses “on their double “otherness” – as marginalized ethnics desiring inclusion and as the “other” gender—foreign women – which confronts patriarchal oppression both in Old and New worlds” (Zaborowska 14). Given that Yeziarska was “convinced of her own right to make choices” (Kessler-

Harris, *Bread Givers* xii) and resisted any form of authority, this anti-authoritative characteristic was added to the personalities of her heroines. They are boastful “Ghetto Girls” and women who try to find their place as *Americanerins* and who look for a democratic justice that accepts them within their newfound world.

America, Assimilation and Justice

Yeziarska's protagonists seek just treatment within the assimilation process. Within the experience of adaption character and communal advantage are important aspects. Within the process of acculturation cultural character of a minority, is intended to be replaced by, or adjusted to the "good" character of the host society. The personality type of the—in this case— American group is cast in terms of improvement that will lead to an "optimum state" (Hart 184). The American character is defined by immigration and assimilation as Yeziarska makes clear in the short story "How I Found America" when the autobiographical I talks to her teacher Miss Latham, an American-born, about ancestry: " 'For all your mother's pride in the Pilgrim's fathers, you yourself are as plain from the heart as an immigrant?' [Miss Latham answers:] 'Weren't the Pilgrim fathers immigrant two hundred years ago?' " (*Hungry Hearts* 179). The Anglo-Saxon teacher explains in the words of Waldo Frank that everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the ideals of America to reach the ultimate state of living. The mutual advantage that can be reached by achieving the "optimum state" thus depends on character. In the passage of "How I Found America" the character of the Pilgrim fathers is considered "good." Assimilation is cast in terms of cultural character and adjustment towards a certain personality type is its goal. The concept of justice is related to character and mutual advantage (Rawls 9). The justice that is gained from this adjustment is articulated within the different assimilation theories.

Yeziarska's fiction dramatizes the relationship of the immigrant and American society, exploring the concepts of assimilation that lie at the core of the American experience that are part of the national narrative. This process of adaption became "synonymous with the process of "Americanization," referring in its broadest sense to "becoming American" and achieving the "American Dream" (Rumbaut 924). Initially taken for granted among the European peoples in America, assimilation emerged as a problem during the mass immigration period of 1880-1920. This raised consciousness "marked a great crisis in ethnic relations" (Hingham 7). The old stock Americans, mostly of Anglo-Saxon origin, feared that the new immigrants would become a threat to their society that was generally built on Protestant values. During this period a large part of the millions of immigrants came from Eastern and Southern Europe as

opposed to earlier immigrant waves that mostly included settlers from Northern and Central Europe. A significant part of this new wave of immigrants were Eastern European Jews who had fled their homelands to find a better life across the ocean.

Coming countries such as Russia, Poland and Romania, almost one third of the entire Eastern European Jewish population left their former host countries. These immigrants fled the Pale of Settlement and the violent *pogroms*, hoping to leave exclusion, fear, suppression and economic deprivation behind. However, “they moved westward not only because life was hard under the Russian czar but because elements of strength had been forged in the Jewish communities and flashes of hope sent back by brothers who had already completed the journey. They moved westward because they clung to a dream...” (Howe 27). The anti-Semitism found in Eastern Europe included legal, commercial, and professional exclusion. The confinement to the Pale, where Jews lived in their *shtetl* homes, did not protect them from waves of native violence. A new and free life in America seemed the solution to their outsider status, and would hopefully result in fair treatment of the Jewish people. The Jews from the *shtetls* of the Russian Empire longed for freedom, equality, opportunity and accomplishment. These immigrants longed for a democratic and just land called America and were willing to leave their homelands. During their migration these men and women “were struggling to synthesize the ideals and values of their familiar Jewish religious culture with the demands and enticements of the modern...world” (Sorin 1). When they reached their America the immigrants tried to find justice in this new country.

Yeziarska’s literature articulates these dreams of justice. Jewish immigrants hoped for a better life in democratic America. In the short story “The Miracle” the heroine expresses this hope forcefully: “Like all people who have nothing, I lived on dreams. With nothing but my longing for love, I burned my way through stone walls till I got to America” (*Hungry Hearts* 72). The desires of a better life for the immigrants are represented by the main character. This Eastern European Jewish girl wishes to have the opportunity to find love without a dowry, and to escape an arranged marriage. This example of the aspiration to “modernize” the ideal of marriage, is only one of the many dreams that were part of the mass migration to the “Promised Land.” The heroine has nothing to gain but independence. She has nothing, no freedom to make her own choices and she is not safe from pogroms or economic hardship. Safety, freedom, and economic opportunity were great pull factors that drew migrants to the American shores. Many Jewish

immigrants also sought *takhtes*— meaning “purpose” in Yiddish— in the “spheres of learning, status, and financial security” (Meltzer 23). The *Goldene Medina*, presented as a new and democratic society, lured these fortune seekers who were severely oppressed in their former host countries. A just society, envisioned in America, would secure the basic needs of freedom of oppression and equality of opportunity.

The justice perceived by immigrants in Yeziarska’s stories can be found in the short story “How I found America.” When the immigrants have decided to leave their old homes behind they are all packed together on the boat to America. The image of American life that these immigrants whispered to each other on deck, includes the hope for a certain form of justice:

‘In America you can say what you feel – you can voice your thoughts in the open streets without the fear of a Cossack.’ ‘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 which your father and grandfather lie buried.’ ‘Everybody is with everybody alike, in America. 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 and low in America...Plenty for all. Learning flows free like milk and honey.’

(*Hungry Hearts* 158)

The elements of justice –reciprocity, mutuality, and deservedness —are present in these visions of the immigrant’s new land. The traveling crowd hopes for a fair rights and privileges within their new American community. For the characters in Yeziarska’s story this meant that they were able to say what they felt without repercussions. These newcomers hope for mutuality and for the common acceptance of different opinions. With this story Yeziarska represents the feelings of the immigrant Jews who came to the American shores. They wanted to be able to express themselves freely and live among peers and to feel included and not a stranger (Howe 24).

The dream that "everybody is with everybody alike" as is expressed in “How I Found America” entails equality and freedom which are prerequisites for justice. These conditions indicate a balanced power relation and equality of opportunity within American society. Privilege and exclusion which were

present in the Russian empire would disappear. This notion of justice is central to the images of justice expressed by the Jewish immigrants in “How I Found America.” Additionally equality of opportunity is clearly present in the newcomers’ wish that “everybody can do what he wants with his life in America.” Hoping for multiple opportunities of self-development, the Jewish immigrants hold on to the American ideology of individualism. This ideal includes the belief that industriousness is highly valuable within a society and that diligence guarantees certain rights and freedoms (Applebaum x). Hard work that benefits society is “translated into the idea that each person [is] responsible to find his own way in society”(Applebaum xiv) as long as justice is maintained.

Yeziarska’s protagonists lack the opportunity to pursue these desires freely in the Russian Empire and the immigrants hoped that the multitude of possibilities in their new host country would enable them to carry out their own wants without restraint. The reality they encountered, however, did not provide such a just and carefree life. From the moment these immigrants entered America they were compelled to adjust to their new surroundings, in one way or another. The anxieties that accompanied the experience of dislocation became a part Jewish immigrant life. Language, dress, and simple everyday activities such as eating diner could pose a threat to traditional ways of living. The adjustment of newcomers to America was an important aspect of the immigrant lives. Many theorists debated about the proper forms of assimilation and these theories intended to shape the lives of the newcomers (Gordon 83). Three central theories of assimilation that are expressed in Yeziarska’s fiction will be discussed while considering the just treatment of the immigrant. Russell Kazal defines these three theories as follows: Anglo-Saxon Conformity demands “the complete renunciation of the immigrant's ancestral culture in favor of the behavior and values of the Anglo-Saxon core group”; The Melting Pot theory promotes the “biological merger of the Anglo-Saxon peoples with other immigrant groups and a blending of their respective cultures into a new indigenous American type”; and theories of cultural pluralism “advocate retaining the communal life and significant portions of the culture of the later immigrant groups” (442).

Anglo-Saxon Conformity

Anglo-Saxon Conformity insists on the adjustment of the immigrant to cultural character of the Anglo-Saxon protestant. Transformation would only take place within the cultural character of the immigrants.

The culture of the Anglo-Saxon protestant community should remain the same and should not be affected by external influences. This form of assimilation is considered to be unjust by Yeziarska's protagonists. For example, the autobiographical I of Yeziarska's short story "Mostly About Myself" expresses the disappointment many immigrants felt when they arrived in their new country:

Had I not come to join hands with all those thousands of dreamers who had gone before me in the search of the Golden Land? As I rushed forward with hungry eagerness to meet the unexpected welcoming, the very earth danced under my feet. All that I was, all that I had, I held out my hands to America, the beloved, the prayed-for land. But no hand was held out to meet mine. My eyes burned with longing – seeking – seeking for a comprehending glance.

(Children of Loneliness 140)

The heroine explains that the commitment of the immigrant spirit to America was not met with an even commitment of the Americans. The dedication of both sides to give themselves to the development of America society was not always an act that was mutual, or evenly carried out. The justice that immigrants sought— to be an equal and accepted part of the American society— was often ignored by those who already considered themselves "American."

The process of assimilation demanded fair treatment. This treatment was difficult to visualize, because it was not presented in the form of a commodity. This form of justice was more related to the concept of good, or fair, within a community. The immigrant wish that everyone was considered equal expressed a certain expectation for democratic inclusion (Benhabib ix). The assimilation process in America, however, was not always as inclusive as the immigrants hoped for. The initial disappointment that is expressed in "Mostly About Myself" is experienced as an injustice because the female characters in Yeziarska's stories immediately expected to become accepted members of America society. They believe that the American character was linked to the immigrant character. However, they do not encounter equality as they envisioned and are confronted with many rules. In "The Free Vacation House" the mother of Sam, Sonya, Mendel, Frieda and Masha is offered a free vacation by Miss Holcomb. She quickly discovers it is not a free vacation at all, and she has to abide by all the rules set by the Anglo-Saxon ladies:

When she got through with reading the rules, I was wondering which side of the house I was to walk on. At every step was some rule what said don't move here, and don't go there, don't stand there, and don't sit there. If I tried to remember the endless rules, it would only make me dizzy in the head. I was thinking for why, with so many rules, didn't they also have already another rule, about how much air in our lungs to breathe.

(Hungry Hearts 69)

The Jewish mother is wondering if she is allowed to live how she pleases within American society. The rules that are bestowed upon her influence her private sphere. She is not capable to live freely within the American community and is treated unfairly. She eventually no longer feels treated like a human being: "For why must we always stick in the back, like dogs that have got to be chained in one spot? If they would let us walk around free, would we bite off something from the front part of the house?" (71). The protagonist feels unjustly treated and chained in her ability to contribute to American society. She is kept in check because the Anglo-Americans are afraid she otherwise would threaten their cultural hegemony. The Americans in this story ignore the fact that the immigrants might have something to contribute and discriminate them by restricting the newcomers with all their rules.

Within the theory of Anglo-Saxon Conformity the Americans took a passive position, leaving the newcomers to "do all the changing" (Berkson 55). The search for the American identity has been part of American society since the 18th century (Meister viii). During the period of the great immigrant wave of 1880-1920, there was an increasing negative feeling of the natives towards the new arrivals at Ellis Island. The greenhorns were seen as "uncivilized, unruly and dangerous" (Higham 89) to the American Protestant values. Nativists wished to protect these values, describing their efforts as "Americanism." They wanted to defend the "principle of nationality...[and]to protect and vindicate it. If we do not it will be destroyed" (4). They wished to maintain the national character of the United States as it had evolved up to that time. The negative attitude towards immigrants in this "Americanizing" process was expressed by the so-called "Americanization Movement." This movement believed that Anglo-Saxon conformity was the just process of assimilation. They felt that if the immigrant would "Americanize" by fully adapting to the Anglo-Saxon culture a mutual advantage would be created within American society. The status quo

would be upheld and the character of the immigrant would be formed in order to become a good and reasonable part of the community. Only then would the state of equality truly emerge. They used the term “Americanization” in a narrow sense, indicating that the immigrants should be stripped off their culture, language, and history, and that they should be educated in the ways of American society. Assimilation was not seen as a natural process, that changed the newcomers by the forces of America. It was considered as a procedure where immigrants were taught the necessary elements of the American character (Meister 48). This character was, according to the Americanization Movement, present in the form of the Anglo-Saxon protestant.

In *Salome of the Tenements*, published in 1923, Yeziarska’s main character shows that this method of assimilation is restricted to the insistence on submission to protestant values, and that this treatment was discriminating and unjust. *Salome of the Tenements* tells the story of Sonya Vrunsky a ghetto girl who falls in love with her millionaire John Manning. In this story Sonya, after eagerly seeking entrance into the Anglo-Saxon world, is confronted with the demands of conformity. At her wedding reception she is rejected as a savage by the American-born women, accusing her of using her body in her conquest for their fellow Anglo-Saxon, John Manning. They judge Sonya, and stereotype her as an Oriental whore: “ ‘Russian Jewesses are always fascinating to men. The reason, my dear, is because they have neither breeding, culture nor tradition....With all to gain and nothing to lose. They are mere creatures of sex’ ” (128). In this passage, the native women make a distinction between themselves, and the “orient,” or “savage” woman. Only the Anglo-Saxon women have breeding, culture, and traditions. These women easily denounce the value of Jewish culture. The immigrant women are expected to take on Anglo-Saxon way and by doing so they would gain culture instead of losing it. Only when this process is accomplished would these former immigrants be considered as full participants in the American society.

Discrimination of “different” cultures results in unequal conditions within the assimilation process. Acculturation is considered to be a transformation towards a new equilibrium (Meister 51), however, intolerance does not support “a fair system of cooperation” (Rawls 6). Anglo-Saxon conformity neglects the freedom and equality of parts of the American community, and this results in a unjust situation within the assimilation process of the immigrants. The newcomer was not allowed to give part of their culture to their newfound land. They were only allowed to receive new cultural traits and adjust to

Anglo-American culture. Yeziarska's heroines searched for an equal cooperation among all parties who were creating the yet unfinished America. A fair system of cooperation which strives for mutual advantage of all groups within American society was the just situation that Yeziarska's protagonists envisaged when they came to America.

These immigrant women relate their journey to the experiences of the Pilgrim fathers as is explained in the short story "America and I" by the autobiographical I: "I saw America—a big idea—a deathless hope—a world still in the making...I, the last comer, had her share to give, to the making of America, like those Pilgrims who came in the *Mayflower*" (*Children of Loneliness* 153). By making this comparison the heroine articulates the equality between her and the earlier immigrant. All have come to find America and all should be able to contribute the cultural baggage they bring. Would an equal power relation be present then the latecomers will be able to freely share their ideas to America. This notion was promised by the idea of America. Priscilla Wald explains that the American character is synonymous with the concept of transformation. This concept of "Americanness" rejects the notion of conformity to one particular culture (112). Yeziarska's heroines see this constant transformation as a positive process towards an "optimum state" (Hart 148). By connecting her faith to the Pilgrim father, the main character of "America and I" expresses her belief in renewal and reconstruction.

This renewal should be conducted within a framework of equality and freedom. In the eyes of the Americanization Movement these conditions were nonexistent within the assimilation process. The Anglo-Saxon conformists proposed an unjust assimilation setting for the immigrants. Renewal and reconstruction would only appear within the immigrant culture and not within their own. The distorted balance of power within the assimilation process, between newcomer and native, was influenced by many different things. Wealth, education, and occupation played important roles in the social positioning and mobility of the Eastern European Jews. However, the most pressing issue that limited the free choice of immigrants in their integration effort was the continuation of the position as outsider. The feeling of displacement remained a prominent feature of the Jewish group. Anglo-Saxon Conformity did not provide relief concerning this disposition. The assimilative notions articulated by these conformists, viewed the newcomers as "others" who needed to be educated to become American.

Even if Eastern European immigrants aspired to comply with these restrictive measures the position of an actual “insider” seemed hardly attainable. This is shown in Yeziarska’s short story “The Fat of the Land” where the feeling of difference never seems to disappear. Fanny, the educated daughter of the main character Hanneh Breineh, rages against her brothers about the shame her mother brings her. Her mother’s habits and appearance smudge her and cannot seem to be washed out: “ ‘God knows how much I have tried to civilize her so as to not have to blush with shame when I take her anywhere. I dressed her in the most stylish Paris models, but Delancey Street stick out from every inch of her...but I, with all my style and pep, can’t get a man my equal because a girl is always judged by her mother’ ” (*Hungry Hearts* 128). Fanny represents the Americanized daughter and her mother represents the Old World. Fanny perceives her mother as a black mark on her assimilation. Fanny is styled and prepped but cannot find her equal within American society because she will still be stereotyped by her cultural inheritance. She pleads for inclusion of this difference and for the acceptance of her cultural heritage so that she can finally feel at home in America and embrace its ideals. Only then will she be treated equally and will she be able to make free choices without constantly trying to hide this part of her identity.

Anglo-Saxon conformity has no room for difference. Hegemony is the ideal and this eventually results in cultural imperialism. Fanny is not accepted because she is not “fully” Anglo-Saxon. Her example shows that Yeziarska’s fiction adds to the concept of justice in relation to the assimilation experience. Her characters plead for an inclusive form of integration that is mutually beneficial to all groups in American society. Americanization as Anglo-Saxon conformity was not seen as just for it did not include the immigrant culture on an equal basis. This assimilation theory merely showed that “English culture has constituted the dominant framework for the development of American institutions, [and that] newcomers should expect to adjust accordingly” (Gordon 104). Immigrant choice was thereby limited, and this meant that they were unable to develop freely, and individually in American society. By the conformists the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were perceived as a group that had nothing to contribute to the American civilization. In *Arrogant Beggar* Adele Lidner is forced to conform to the Anglo-Saxon protestant rules of her educators. She is not allowed to talk back or contribute her own ideas to the plan that is set out for her. Finally she snaps and tolerates this injustice no longer: “ ‘You robbed me of my soul, my spirit! You robbed me of myself. When I hated you, I had to smile up to you and flatter you’ ” (86). Adele

expresses the feeling of uselessness that is projected upon her by the Anglo-Saxon conformists who merely wanted her to adjust to their needs.

This feeling of uselessness is related to the idea of justice articulated by Hume. He claimed that if no advantage would be obtained by the contribution of certain participants within society there would be no duty of justice necessary towards them (Barry, *Treatise* 148). The conformists believed that immigrants had nothing essential to offer American society and could therefore not engage in an equal exchange within the assimilation process. These Anglo-Saxons felt that they were actually contributing to the development of the immigrant, because the newcomers had the opportunity become part of the “superior” American culture. The education of the immigrant would be necessary for American society to advance. It is for this reason the heroines of Yeziarska’s fiction demand the opportunity to create an equal exchange among the different groups within American society. Yeziarska felt that the Eastern European Jews did have valuable cultural traits to contribute to American society (Kessler-Harris, *Bread Givers* x) and to acknowledge this would create mutual advancement in a just community. This equal exchange of cultural traits was, however, considered a possibility among other assimilation theories of that time (Meltzer ix). The assimilation theory of The Melting Pot did envision a mutual development through the fusion of all different cultures within American society. Within this theory cultural values were able to be contributed to recreate the American character.

The Melting Pot theory

The Melting Pot theorists believed that the immigrant did have important values to contribute to America. This theory viewed the ideal American identity as the fusion of all cultures within society. The Melting Pot theory promoted the “fusion of the races.” Influential thinkers about this subject were St. John Crevecoeur, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Frederick Jackson Turner (Gordon 120). These theorists’ ideas were seen as belonging to the Melting Pot theory that was named after Israel Zangwill’s play *The Melting Pot* (1908). This theory presented assimilation as a form of amalgamation, biologically as well as culturally, creating a “distinctly new type.” Initially only Northern and Western European races were considered part of the American mix and it was not until the new immigration of 1880-1920 that the uprooted of other national origins were seen as part of the melting process (Gordon 121). Race in this context refers to the

perceived differences between cultural communities in American society. At the time of Yeziarska's writing the notion "that races existed and were fundamentally different from one another...was an integral part of modern... culture"(Efron qtd. in Milanovich 1). The Melting Pot theorists wished to eliminate differences between groups in American society. Homogeneity was the ultimate goal similarly to that of the conformists. This assimilation theory also led to inequality.

The fusion of the races depended on the position a particular economic group had within American society. The Jewish immigrants were regarded as outsiders and their minority position was not considered as important as the position of the Anglo-Saxons. In *Salome of the Tenements* the lovers Sonya Vrunsky and John Manning have fooled themselves by creating an imaginary world for them to live in. Their dream of "equally melting" is shattered by reality. In the following passage the narrator explains the danger of this unjust fusion:

Sonya and Manning, tricked into matrimony, were oriental and the Anglo-Saxon trying to find a common language. The overemotional Ghetto struggling for its breath in the thin air of puritan restraint. An East Side savage forced suddenly into the strait-jacket of American civilization. Sonya was like the dynamite bomb and Manning the walls of tradition constantly menaced by threatening explosions. (132)

The exchange of cultural traits is not a mutual process. The Melting Pot appears to be another "strait-jacket" similar to the conformity proposed by the Americanization Movement. The emphasis on the explosive nature of this unequal cultural exchange expresses that this form of assimilation is unjust and therefore unsustainable. The personal development of Sonya is restricted by Puritan culture.

Within the process of assimilation the immigrant need is the full acceptance as a member of American society. This need originates through the feeling of dislocation and difference. The search for a new identity and a place within American society, were of vital importance to the free personal development of the newcomers. Their contribution to the process of transformation should therefore consider the personal development of the immigrant on an equal basis within the Melting Pot mix. This assimilation theory used the concept of race to promote fusion between different cultural communities. In this way Melting Pot theorists wanted to create national unity and abandon prejudice among the various

groups in the future. The equal immersion of different race into the melting pot became questionable because of the proportionate influence of the various groups. Some races, or cultural communities, could become a dominant ingredient in the American mix. This inequality would affect the common blending. The new American would therefore not become a “newly distinct type” but only a variation of an already existing group. Anglo-Saxon culture was the dominant ingredient in the Melting Pot mix and the effect of new cultures on this component would be reduced to the minimum because of its central position.

Some influential politicians of Yeziarska’s time, believed that the new American ‘mix’ had already come into existence. For example, in 1908 President Roosevelt claimed in one of his presidential speeches, that “the crucible in which all the new types are melted into one was shaped from 1776-1789, and our nationality was definitely fixed in all its essentials by the men of Washington’s day” (Gordon 122). The ideal of the Melting Pot was initially considered a democratic fusion but in reality the Anglo-Saxon Protestant was considered as the “final” American. This “type” had mutated since the English arrival on American shores. Consequently, would fusion continue, the newly arrived immigrants would be pushed in a marginal position and not be able to merge on an equal basis. The basis of the “American” blend had already come into existence. Similar to the pressures of the Americanization Movement, Eastern European Jews were forced to conform within the Melting Pot to an already existent community. The Melting Pot theory was an idealistic and democratic dream but reality was not working in its favor. As the previous example of *Salome of the Tenements* shows, the immigrant women acknowledge that this form of Americanization is not a natural process but one of acceptance. When Sonya finally finds mutual love with her millionaire Manning, this love does not bring the comfort she hoped for when she reflects on the relationship: “Am I one of them? Has our love made us alike? Will his people accept me...” (111). The almost submissive nature of Sonya towards the acceptance of the Anglo-Saxon community exposes the fear of submersion. In these passages of *Salome* Yeziarska addresses the difficulties of this pursued fusion of the “races” The main character is not able to merge into American society if she does not conform to the American pre-set rules. Newcomers were forced to mix American culture with their own, but were not able to blend their customs and traditions fairly into the existing “pot.”

This death-blow to the immigrant aspiration expresses the ambivalence felt by immigrants who eagerly wanted to fuse with American culture to create “a new race of men.” The Jewish attempt to

contribute was not met with mutual selflessness or like-mindedness by the Anglo-Saxon community. The immigrants' effort to fuse with the American community was not met with the same response. The integration of the immigrant was forced into the Anglo-Saxon mold. Immigrant assimilation was supervised and the Melting Pot preached for the "disappearance of divergent ethnic strains and cultures within the unity of American life" (Berkson 73). This quest for unity is found among the theorists of Anglo-Saxon conformity as well. The similarity between the two assimilation theories are represented in the unjust treatment of the new participants within American society. The immigrants were still expected to abide by the rules and conventions of an existing American society and this restricted their freedom of choice and personal development as well as equal treatment within the integration process.

Eastern European immigrants remained different and misunderstood in their need to escape their marginal position. As Yeziarska shows, the conditions that determine the power relation between newcomer and native remained unbalanced. This distortion is a result of the worth ascribed to the different elements that create the balance within American society. Plato and Hume related the acknowledgment of justice towards a person to their worth (Slote, Barry 148). If a certain group within society are not considered virtuous or worthy enough to contribute to the development of the American community, justice is not granted by the other groups. The Anglo-Saxons do not acknowledge the worth of the immigrants and this results in a disproportionate exchange of culture among these groups. The imaginative American pot might have envisioned the need of various groups in society to create an American unity but unfortunately this need proved limited. The majority position of the Anglo-Saxon protestant group determined the immigrants' worth within this melting process. This unjust assimilation process was described by Milton Gordon as "immersion in a subsocietal network of groups and institutions which was already fixed in essential outline with an Anglo-Saxon, general Protestant stamp" (127).

This adjustment created an ambivalent feeling among Yeziarska's heroines and they looked for a form of justice that could create an impartial understanding between the American-born and themselves. The notion of impartiality focuses on the maximization of a positive outcome for both parties involved. This process must be conducted fairly and with mutual consent. The use objectivity when determining worth within a society creates "an ethical judgment [that] should be one that does not reflect the particular

position of the person making it” (Harsany qtd. in Barry, *Treatise* 76). Worth is thus determined through consideration and not through prejudice or discrimination. Through her fiction Yeziarska tried to create mutual understanding by exploring the lives of her heroines. To her, and her heroines, recognition is the essence of justice. When this need of constructive recognition is fulfilled all other features of justice follow. When objective recognition exists people are able to freely and equally live their life. The Melting Pot theory that tried to secure mutual advantage failed to pass an impartial judgment upon the “outsider” communities. Their input was not valued and the recognition of the even worth of all cultures within American society was denied. This theory of assimilation, although based on the idea of democracy, failed to create a foundation on which all communities could harmoniously come together.

Cultural Pluralism

Cultural Pluralism is described by Milton Gordon as an “appreciative view of the immigrant’s cultural heritage and of its distinctive usefulness both to himself and his adopted country” (139). Horace Kallen, who introduced the concept in a series of influential articles in *The Nation* in 1915, believed that democratic principles should be more explicitly included in the concept of assimilation. He envisioned the United States as a democracy, or federation, that should secure the continuation of different nationalities in American society (Biale, Galchinsky and Heschel). As David Biale explains in “The Melting Pot and Beyond: Jews and the Politics of American Identity” Kallen’s ideas reflected the “cultural reality of the immigrant period, when it was hard to imagine immigrants freely giving up or even inevitably losing their ethnic identities” (24). Even though Yeziarska’s main characters sometimes seem quite willing to shed their Old World ways, they also show feelings of loneliness when they leave their parental homes. Rachel Ravinsky in the short story “Children of Loneliness” fled her parental home to become a true *Americanerin*. The loneliness she feels turns her dream of transition into a nightmare:

I ran away from home burning for life,” she mused, “and all I’ve found is the loneliness of death.” A wave of self-pity weakened her almost to the point of tears. “I’m alone! I’m alone!” she moaned, crumpling into a heap. “Must it always be with me like this,” her soul cried in terror, “either to live among those who drag me down or in the awful isolation of a hall bedroom? Oh, I’ll die of

loneliness among these frozen, each-shut-in-himself Americans! It's one thing to break away, but, oh, the strength to go on alone! How can I ever do it? The love instinct is so strong in me; I cannot live without love, without people.

(Children of Loneliness 183)

Rachel sees herself as a “child of loneliness” who is stuck between a world she feels she doesn't belong to any longer, and a world she is unable to reach. Within the concept of cultural pluralism the immigrant is expected to choose a certain community or group to preserve the continuation of its cultural heritage. Rachel is unable to ally herself with either the Jewish community or the American. She left her parental home because she felt suffocated by its rules and traditions but the community she fled to shuts her out. Turning to either world leaves her suffering.

This marginality was presented by Robert E. Park in the early 1920s as the key feature in understanding the process of civilization: “It is in the mind of the marginal man that the conflicting cultures meet and fuse. It is, therefore, in the mind of the marginal man that the process of civilization is visibly going on...” (881). The marginal mind is not only important to study processes of society it also reflects the search of the immigrants for just treatment within their marginality. Rachel Ravinsky suffers because neither world can accept her for who she is. She cries for the lack of understanding from her family, and from the Americans who ignore her. Both groups are unable to recognize her worth. Rachel is stuck between two worlds but still willing to make a contribution to both her communities. The concept of cultural pluralism, however, deprives her of this choice. She must find her way in one of the cultures in order to preserve the “federation of nationalities” that should live together in harmony. This lack of consideration reduces the choices Rachel is able to make within American society. Rachel feels unjustly treated within this limited situation. Her rejection is the consequence of the inability of both her parents and the American community to impartially judge her situation and let her freely choose her allegiance in any form.

Exclusion by the Americans of the assimilating immigrants again exposes the natives' discrimination towards the immigrants, as well as their inability to understand the “other”. Consequently, the newcomers who wish to become part of American society, are separated from the Jewish group that wishes to maintain all their old world traditions, staying behind in the ghetto. This group discriminates its

“others” as well. Rachel’s father Yankev denounces every American trait that his daughter has adapted to: “His daughter’s insistence upon the use of a knife and fork spelled apostasy, Anti-Semitism and the aping of the Gentiles” (*Children of Loneliness* 179). Pressures from both groups to fully adapt to their way of living created an unjust situation for the immigrants who had trouble choosing, or living between two worlds. The marginal character was considered to be unfit for either cultural community because it did not live up to their standards of group membership. The democratic ideal of mutual advancement through protection of cultural heritage did not result in a harmonious and fair cooperation between the displaced immigrant and cultural communities. The injustice that appears to exist among these groups is rejected by Yezierska’s protagonists and they try to establish a new equilibrium within a democratic framework

Their alternative sense of justice is presented in the story of Hanneh Breineh called “The Fat of the Land”. Hanneh escapes the drudgery of the ghetto by working hard, and giving her children a good education. Her children grow up like Americans, and want their reluctant mother to live up to their adopted standards as well. Eventually Hanneh is “robbed of the last reason for her existence” (*Hungry Hearts* 129) when her children put her in a well-appointed retirement home: “But the most unbearable part of stifling life on Riverside Drive was being forced to eat in the public dining-room. No matter how hard she tried to learn polite table manners, she always found people staring at her, and her daughter rebuking her for eating with the wrong fork or guzzling the soup or staining the cloth” (*Hungry Hearts* 129). Hanneh Breineh is stuck between her old world ways and the new world of the “higher ups” and her educated children. Rebelling against her imposition she returns to the ghetto to find traditional food and brings her groceries back to the Riverside apartment. When she arrives she is again confronted with high-class rules that infuriate her. She feels violated by the manners of the doorman and utters: “You should sink into the earth with all your rules and brass buttons. Ain’t this America? Ain’t this a free country? Can’t I take up in my own house what I buy with my own money?” (131). Hanneh, feeling useless for not being able to connect to either world, cries out for justice. Her children have rejected her because she cannot assimilate as well as they have. The Americans “stare” at her and only see her as an “outsider.” Hanneh just wants the freedom to choose her own way of life and to create her own place in America. Sonya Vrunsky, who suffers comparable predicaments in *Salome of the Tenements*, calls this need “democratic understanding” (120). This understanding will eventually lead to a common recognition that will bridge all chasms

between the immigrant and the native born. And as the passage from “The Fat of the Land” shows, this understanding is required among all groups within American society.

This democratic understanding is explored in Yeziarska’s fiction as a form of justice that unites the concepts of justice as mutual advantage and justice as impartiality. If all participants within the experience of assimilation, including the natives, uphold democratic ideals, justice can be achieved. The basic rights that need to be respected are freedom and equality of all citizens. Freedom and equality serve as the basis on which reasonable decisions can be made, or actions can be conducted for the benefit of the entire community (Rawls 7). If mutual understanding and objectivity are added to these standards then an environment can be created in which immigrants are able to express themselves fully. This development of the individual should progress uniquely and the possibilities to do so should not be limited. The advancement of the individual within a democratic society ought to be attentive towards others and their growth must be met with sympathy and understanding. Only then can recognition be mutual.

This form of democratic consciousness is necessary within the experience of displacement. The immigrant contribution can only be included in the community’s development towards its optimal democratic goal if he or she is able to grow according to the democratic ideals that are strived after (Berkson 28). This democratic understanding creates a just environment that includes all participants in American society. Equality and freedom, mutuality and impartiality, and the unlimited possibilities to grow within a fair system of cooperation are the standards for *justice as democratic understanding*. The demand of the American-born that the immigrants commit themselves completely to the American Way disregarding all they have brought with them denounces this built towards understanding. On the other hand, newcomers should not be restricted to their original ethnic group either and solely function outside other groups as Kallen imagined with his cultural pluralism. The marginal immigrant women of Yeziarska’s stories want to choose their own path, make their own mistakes and create their own future.

The ability to consider all possibilities and contribute to society is incorporated in the vision of America. The ideology of individualism, where hard work guarantees certain rights and freedoms, is applicable to the heroines who show diligence towards their new society. An industrious member of society will get what they deserve by taking responsibility for the outcome of personal effort. In short story “The Miracle,” the only short story within Yeziarska’s work with a genuine happy ending, gives the

example of an American teacher who acknowledges the responsibility of one's personal actions. After witnessing the hard work of his Jewish student he opens up to her and acknowledges this eagerness is what American society needs. He tells her that she is "the heart, the creative pulse of America to be" (83). The Jewish heroine Sara Reisel receives this revelation as a miracle, something that she was waiting for to happen after all those years in America. Sara sees this miracle as the justice that her people needs because it represents the equal harmony between all cultures. America should embrace all immigrant effort of contribution to the making of its society regardless of their commitment to an ethnic group or religion. If the newcomers from Eastern Europe are recognized and understood in their personal choices, then they would finally gain the justice they deserved.

Jewish immigrants in Yezierska's fiction refuse to be pushed to solely conform to Anglo-Saxon and Protestant values, either in the Melting Pot or beyond, but they also reject the "Federation of Nationalities" where all different groups remain within their cultural boundaries. In their opinion, fair and gradually achieved assimilation must consist of "democratic understanding" that creates an open society where free will presides and that remains conscious of its diverse communities. A comparable idea on assimilation was developed by Isaac Berkson in 1920 who called his theory the "Community Theory"(106). Berkson argued that the worth of ethnic heritage can only be realized and appreciated if ethnic communities are allowed to perpetuate (43). The individual within each group remains subjected to all forces within society and rejects predestination which could eventually lead to the disintegration of the ethnic group. The cultural community can thrive or it can merge with other ethnic elements. The future, however, cannot and should not be determined (Berkson 108). Berkson believed that a democratic community will come into being if a spiritual American nationality is created: "The spiritualization of the purpose of nationality is the most important factor in the adjustment potentiality of groups to one another" (Berkson 102). Milton Gordon calls this concept identificational assimilation which describes the "taking on" of a sense of American people hood (70). The accreditation of an American identity by accepting and incorporating the fundamentals of American culture – in this case democratic ideals— could be seen as a form of "symbolic ethnicity" (Gans 579). The Jewish ghetto women in Yezierska's fiction can assume this symbolic ethnicity and become Americans by personal choice. But they also have the free and equal choice to value past traditions.

By adjusting to society they did not need to conform to any image but they could reformulate new forms of “Americanness.” In *Arrogant Beggar* Adele opens a Jewish diner after having lived through, and rejected the middle-class’ condescending ideology of health and hygiene which “robbed her of her soul” (86). She escapes the injustice of her teachers and lives freely in the ghetto. She finds herself in harmony with her choices and her new, but familiar, surroundings:

In spite of myself, it was the course of cooking and cleaning in the Training School that was the making of me. The knowledge of how to dye and paint and furnish a room—the meaning of order and cleanliness that I used to knock my head against the wall trying to learn—it was that everlasting fussiness over what I had thought nothing at all that enabled me to transform the dilapidated, three steps down from the sidewalk basement into “Muhmenkeh’s Coffee Shop” (126)

This passage reveals “democratic understanding” as a form of justice. Adele accepts the influence of American culture and embraces and infuses this newfound knowledge with her traditional background. Acknowledging the interdependence with others in American society Adele develops her character in a unique way and makes use of the alternative opportunities America has to offer. She finds justice within American society by being a composer of her own life and not as a performer of Anglo-Saxon culture (*Arrogant Beggar* 139). By fulfilling her own needs, Adele gains her just deserve: her own coffee shop where different cultures meet. It is created upon a mutual understanding and impartial treatment of both cultures because it appropriates different cultural traits of each community.

The ultimate achievement of this of justice as democratic understanding will be when Adele’s sympathy is met with an equal consideration of her American counterparts. The American native population will need to step into the immigrants’ shoes and understand the hope they have invested in this new land. They can help them reach the justices that they so eagerly seek. The native population will need to take an impartial stand towards the new immigrants and create an environment that would give them the opportunity to be of use to American society to create a mutual advantage among all groups involved. Democratic standards are the key ingredients to create this fair system of cooperation. Unfortunately the institutions of assimilation and education attribute additional virtues to become a good democratic citizen.

In the next section these pragmatic organizations will be explored in the light of the ideas on justice articulated by Yeziarska's heroines.

Pragmatists, Function and Worth

Justice is concerned with the “benefits and burdens of social cooperation” (Brighthouse 2). Justice results from agreements that create “mutual advantage, and on opportunities to make the world a better place” (Smitz 11). Within this framework of collective consideration the concepts of justice and democracy overlap. The social contract that guides democratic communities recognizes the importance of fair cooperation and mutual advancement because it rests on the consent of the governed. Educational practices within such a community must rest on this democratic consent as well. Spiritual democracy and political democracy should be safeguarded when a national character is attempted to be forged (Bourne 86). During the 1900s, democracy was viewed as an expression of the national consensus. The concept expressed freedom and equality cast in a “Judeo-Christian” mold. Its values represented commitment to “Anglo-Saxonism, a middle-class society, republicanism, and God’s true Protestant religion” (Carlson 5). These values were articulated by assimilation theories of that time, but “practiced” by different organizations trying to “uplift” the immigrant to their standards. These institutions worked to create “new Americans” and hoped to drive out “social evil.” They wished to guard the evolutionary process of Americans and their identity (Bender 7). “By the turn of the century there was... a scattering of social workers, reformers, teachers, all those “do-gooders”—selfless Yankees, earnest German Jews, a few Americanized immigrants from Eastern Europe—who established an elite of conscience on the East Side” (Howe 121).

Two groups of social workers are explored within Yezerksa’s fiction, the charity workers or philanthropists, and settlement workers. Charity and philanthropic organizations “emphasized the individual case of poverty” and considered it the responsibility of the upper class to help the needy (Davis 18). Settlement workers, on the other hand, “stressed the social and economic conditions that made the poor....[based] on the theory that the dependence of the classes on each other is reciprocal” (19). Even though the settlement house movement tried to distinguish itself from charity, it is often considered as a new stage within the evolution of charity work. The employees continued to come from privileged positions within society, having the time and money to concern themselves with the unfit, in order to

improve the welfare of American society (Bender 13). They believed that they contributed to the mutual advantage among immigrants and the native population and that their settlement work created a “better” and more just society through “social solidarity” (Le Grand 5). Settlement workers committed themselves to reform rather than relief by using a scientific framework to guide their accomplishments. They thereby distinguished themselves from traditional charity work.

The first American settlement house, the University Settlement House, was founded in 1886 and located at Elridge Street on the Lower East Side. Another well known reform institute in the same area was the Henry Street Settlement that was founded by Lillian Wald in 1893. These institutes were devoted to help the lower classes within a sociological framework. The social workers believed that by researching these communities scientifically and up-close they would have a better chance of succeeding than by almsgiving alone. This scientific framework for settlement work was strongly influenced by the ideas of John Dewey (1859-1952) who was a philosopher educator. Dewey had a pragmatist conception of science and he believed that “the truth of any assertion is to be evaluated from its practical consequences and its bearing on human interests” (Westbrook, *Democratic Hope* ix). Most of the social organizations saw research and education as the key instruments to becoming “an effective member of a democratic community” (Westbrook, *Dewey* 94). In her stories Yeziarska addressed the practices of these “do-good” associations and explored their methods and ideas against the reality of the immigrant experience. Her heroines articulate their ideas on justice when they are confronted with these educational institutions. The democratic and pragmatic concepts of Dewey within these organizations are explored as well as the gender role within the experience of displacement.

Debating Dewey

When Yeziarska published her books she “knew she was writing against a swelling tide of American nativist sentiments and against the shallow interest of educated, wealthy Americans who descended from their “higher world” to look for specimens, statistics and charity cases in the Lower East Side” (Gelfant viii). She tried to communicate the democratic understanding that was needed for her people to succeed in order to fulfill their wish of becoming an American. She questioned Dewey’s democratic ideals which she cast in the often recurring narrative of the love-affair between the immigrant girl and the Anglo-Saxon

educated male. Yeziarska used “Dewey’s pragmatic social and philosophical concepts to articulate...the redefinition of democracy and its essential relation to the experience of immigration and ethnicity” (Konzett 22) to expose the imperfection of his progressive ideas. The almost obsessive interest in Dewey’s ideology stems not only from Yeziarska’s educational background, but is a result of the short intimate relationship between her and the philosopher in 1918. Although many critics assume that “when she fell out of love with him, she fell out of love with his ideas as well” (Dearborn 112), Yeziarska did not repudiate all of his notions in her fiction.

Dewey wanted to secure the concept of democracy within American society. In his opinion this notion stands for freedom (Westbrook, *Dewey* x). He viewed democracy as form of positive freedom that is realized only through self-realization. This personal development is created by “an active relationship between particular individual capacities and the particular environments that advanced the well-being of that individual” and on how “a person should fit in that society so as to maximize the development of his capacities”(Westbrook, *Dewey* 43). Dewey’s notion of self-realization is quite similar to the ideas that are found in the doctrine of democracy formulated by Isaac Berkson. Berkson’s democratic ideal consisted of “a progressive consideration of uniqueness, a multiplication of diverse possibilities, a growing consciousness of man’s interdependence.” (39). Both Dewey and Berkson appear to perceive a democratic American identity as a freely developed personality who uses the alternative possibilities of the particular American environment and who remains conscious of other participants within the community. Both theorists seem to confirm the need for Yeziarska’s “democratic understanding” within society because they consider diversity and mutual advantage as an important aspect within the structure of communal cooperation.

Dewey did, however, have reservations about heterogeneity. Robert Westbrook argues that Dewey was “worried about pluralism that threatened “harmony”” (*Dewey* 213). The philosopher did not prefer a ““full-flowering” of the individual...without regard to his participation in the group” (Archambault xxi). Group unity seemed the most important within personal growth. In an article published in 1897 Dewey, who believed education was the most effective tool for human growth, explained that teachers should protect national unity at all costs: “I believe that every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling; that he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social

order and the securing of the right social growth. I believe that in this way the teacher is always the prophet of the true God and the usherer of the true kingdom of God” (qtd. in Hickman and Alexander 235). In this statement Dewey glorified the position of the teacher. He gives authority to the knowledge expressed by them because this conveyed information must maintain a “proper social order.” The development of American society depended on the perseverance of educational unity and personal growth was only effective if it served social growth.

Dewey’s belief in authoritative information implies conformity to one specific knowledge, namely that of the teachers. Yeziarska rejected this notion and in her fiction the heroines condemn this form of authority as unjust. The injustice of the inability to fully “flower” is expressed through the anxiety of the native community who fear the dissolution of their so-called “harmony”. The educational community in Yeziarska’s stories adhere to Dewey’s pragmatic—or “practical”—truth finding. They want the immigrants to find a “functional” position within society. To them, this is an effective method of Americanization that would not threaten their status quo. This limited attitude towards the newcomers repressed the opportunity of self-realization. Dewey’s theory preached the liberties of equality of opportunity and of self-development, but social parameters restricted these freedoms in reality. Dewey believed that freedom only lay in virtuous action and therefore he “drew up a list of “cardinal virtues,” that he thought essential to a person’s worth to become a good democratic citizen. These qualities were; “wisdom (practical judgment), temperance (self control), courage and justice” (Westbrook, *Dewey* 47). The competence of immigrants to become “good” and “useful” democratic citizens lay in their ability to gain practical skills that could be used within American society.

Dewey’s ideas on integration revolved around the notion that human beings seek rest or equilibrium through the adjustment to their environment (Archambault xv). Education was the key instrument to achieve this stability according to pragmatic theorists. The learning process should therefore be designed to let pupils gain wisdom through a practical curriculum. Learning should not only consist of acquiring knowledge but of practical experience as well. Pragmatism envisioned the development of individual expression and social necessity in mutual cooperation (Archambault xxi). The need for immigrants in American society was generally measured in their practical use. The conception of pragmatists on justice was related to the ideas of Hume. He considered justice to be reached through an

obtained advantage that arose from the functionality of an individual for the benefit of a community (Barry, *Treatise* 147). The worth of a person was measured by his or her positive contribution to society.

Yeziarska described this need for functionality in the short story “How I found America.” The autobiographical I wants to contribute her ideas and thoughts on American society to her community in order to help society grow. However, her “usefulness” within American society is limited to her functionality as a “hand.” The self-development of immigrants is restricted by educational institutions, represented here by Mrs. Olney. The feeling of injustice that arises when immigrants are treated as solely practical entities is shown in the following passage:

Mrs. Olney stood abashed a moment. ‘Well my dear,’ she said deliberately, ‘what would you like to take up?’ ‘I got ideas how to make America better, only I don’t know how to say it out. Ain’t there a place I can learn?’ A startled woman stared at me. For a moment not a word came. Then she proceeded with the same kind smile. ‘It’s nice of you to want to help America, but I think the best way would be to learn a trade. That’s what this school is for, to help girls find themselves, and the best way to do so is to learn something useful.’ ‘Ain’t thoughts useful? Does America want only the work from my body, my hands? Ain’t thoughts that turn over the world?’ ‘Ah! But we don’t want to turn over the world.’ Her voice cooled.

(*Children of Loneliness* 121)

The guidance counselor does not believe that thoughts are important because they threaten the status quo. Mrs. Olney adheres to Dewey’s ethics of self-realization and to his “notion of “function”...on how a person *should* fit in that society” (Westbrook, *Dewey* 43). The realization of the main character that immigrants were only able to integrate within American society “to learn something useful” puts the ideological nature of American society into question. To her, “America” –considered as the ideal of freedom, equality and the pursuit of happiness—is the manifestation of thoughts that turned over the world. America’s educational institutions refuse the opportunity of change, thereby rejecting the promise of America. As newly arrived immigrant a trade is considered useful for the protagonist, but an intellectual

career is denied. The heroine feels unjustly treated because she cannot freely express her ideas and because she is deprived of her free choice of occupation.

The knowledge that these Deweyan institutions used to acculturate the immigrants, should have created multiple opportunities to develop students' capacities fully. Instead it limited their possibilities. The organizations used real-life frameworks to create useful citizens based on the Anglo-Saxon protestant middle class ideal. This was regarded as the proper guide-line for the integration of the newcomer. These institutes were termed "cultural comfort stations." (Davis 17) They expressed the hope of unifying American society by quickly assimilating foreign elements, limiting change. The heroine Adele Lidner in Yeziarska's *Arrogant Beggar* was told by her counselor to become a domestic servant. According to Miss Simons, this was the best option Adele had:

'You shouldn't hesitate, Adele.' Miss Simons's insistent voice kept on. 'A moment ago you said you wanted to do anything. Can't you trust me to counsel you for your good?' I—a servant? Even in our worst poverty in Poland none of our people had ever been servants. Tailors, storekeepers, but never a servant. Should I be the first to go down?... Somehow, her smile, her praise left me more lonely than ever before. I was going into something that was not me. (38)

Adele is forced to choose between two evils. If she rejects the vocational career that is offered to her she is condemned to poverty and if she accepts the role of domestic servant she rejects her individuality. Initially she chooses the latter that directs her to an increased feeling of difference and displacement among the American-born. At the end of the story Adele rejects the injustice of Anglo-Saxon conformity and prefers to live in poverty. She is deprived of income, but at least she able to live without restraint.

The dictations of Miss Simons compelled Adele to accept all knowledge and advice given to her. This led to the rejection of her cultural identity. If she would have been considered an equal and was accredited freedom of choice, Adele would never have chosen to become a servant. Justice is not served because Adele is culturally dominated and disregarded by her teachers as a free and equal person. In this situation of unequal power relations, concerning the acquisition of knowledge, there is no indication of the recognition of equality. In her commanding role Miss Simons reacts with bias and seems unable to express understanding towards her pupils. This limits the mutual advantage of the immigrant and the

American-born within American society. Adele, on the other hand, enters the settlement house unprejudiced looking for a way to develop herself in an American fashion. She wants to grow intellectually to attain a better position within American society. Instead she was unwillingly transformed into a “functional element” of the Anglo-Saxon world. She was deprived of her identity and forced to adjust her dreams of a better life. As the passage shows, the immigrant is stereotyped and perceived as a person who is incapable of making appropriate decisions. Miss Simons insists on the affirmation of the knowledge she holds, patronizing Adele. These civilizing procedures conducted by the social workers were not “subtle or hidden process[es]” (Berger 18). Unfortunately, these cultural dominant methods led to the restraint of the freedom and the abilities of the immigrants.

One of the obstacles that slowed down immigrant self-development were the virtuous conditions that were set by reformers to create good democratic citizens. Equality was clearly the onset of the Deweyan “cardinal virtues.” The educational methods were designed to maximize the abilities of its pupils and they were intended to foster equality of opportunity. However, the parameters that determined the value of these future democratic citizens exposed a difference of values between the immigrants and the teachers who preached these principles. This conflicting perception of good led to the reduction of the immigrants’ opportunities within American society. Freedom of choice was restricted and, in the case of Adele in *Arrogant Beggar*, the free choice of occupation was limited by prejudice. Adele’s feelings of injustice were invoked by abuse of power by social workers. This reveals that the ideas these advisers clung to were prejudiced and did not create a mutual understanding between both parties.

Anglo-Saxon protestant cultural values were preferred by teachers and social workers instead of a common, more equally shared ethics. This resulted in an unfair position of the immigrant, who was deprived of impartial sympathy that considered the interests of all those affected (Barry, *Treatise* 149). Yezierska did not disregard the entire content of the practices that reformers envisioned. She did believe that uniformity through education was possible. However, this should only be conducted in accordance with “an expression of the “consent of the governed,” namely the wishes of the newcomers” (Lissak 25). These wishes, however, were neglected within Deweyan theory and in many of the practices of teachers and social workers. The worth of immigrants were determined by their capacity to uphold the set

standards presented by these educators. These principles were used to form worthy and reasonable democratic citizens.

Reasonableness and Worth

The inequality that arose from moral restrictions on how an individual should ‘function’ within society, diminished the freedom of individual development. This injustice is visible in Yeziarska’s stories that explore the unfair systems of integration. Her main characters search for a society in which democracy and difference are no longer considered each other’s adversaries. This can be achieved if a society is arranged as a “fair system of social cooperation” (Rawls 4). This “most fundamental idea of justice”(5) implies that all participants in a particular society have to accept the proposed terms of cooperation. When there exist disagreement on the nature of the fundamental organization of society than the system will not be considered just. This idea is based on the concepts of reciprocity and mutuality. This implies that when everyone carries out their function as the recognized rules require they will benefit from the agreed upon standards. The rules of engagement are determined by the basic structure of society. This structure consists of the primary institutions within a democratic society which are recorded in the society’s constitution (Rawls 25). Rawls additionally argues that the codes of conduct within a social order that are derived from the basic structure should to be based on public justification. This indicates a pluralistic outcome based on reasonable consent. This reasonable pluralism is a moral conception based on alternative perceptions of “good” (73).

Yeziarska explains in her fiction that these conflicting conceptions between immigrants and natives are not considered reasonable but are used to discriminate. Pluralism is therefore limited. Homogeneity is promoted through a standard conception of “good” (Slote *Justice as a Virtue* 1.1) that excludes immigrants from just treatment. The acquisition of a “good” character was cast in terms of development and improvement. The reform institutions believed that their pupils would advance and evolve if they would comply to the set values of the middle-class Anglo-Saxon protestant. Educational instruction was used to reach the reasonableness and moral worth necessary to become a good democratic citizen. Schools, settlement houses, and philanthropic institutes engaged in the uplifting of immigrants and

lower classes, turning them into acculturated, English speaking, and well-mannered subjects (Soyer 186). These goals were cast in terms of common sense and morality.

Yeziarska's fiction exposes the injustice of this education setting by articulating the unfair situations of social conduct. In the short story "Soap and Water" the moral worth of the autobiographical heroine is expressed in cleanliness. The main character already "functions" within society by working in a laundrette, but strives to occupy a better position in the future. The protagonist attends a teachers college and her dean Miss Whiteside withholds her diploma because she determines her pupil unfit for the position as teacher. The heroine is denied self-development because of her unintentional appearance and hygienic methods: "She never looked into my eyes. She never perceived that I had a soul. She did not see how I longed for beauty and cleanliness. How I strained and struggled to lift myself from the dead toil and exhaustion that weighed me down. She could see nothing in people like me, except the dirt and the stains on the outside" (*Hungry Hearts* 101). The college community discriminates the heroine's uncleanliness throughout her college career. Her superiors refuse to grant her the diploma she slaved for. Even when she is accredited this diploma, she is unable to find a proper position in a clean society. Because the hygienic methods of the heroine are unintentional and determined by other cultural standards than her own, the treatment of Miss Whiteside towards the immigrant is determined by prejudice against difference.

The injustice that is described in this passage lays bare the shallowness and discrimination displayed by educational institutions. The "soul", or individuality of the immigrants is disregarded as well as their hopes and dreams. The ideas of the newcomers on personal development and occupational positions were not accepted by educators such as Miss Whiteside. They considered themselves to be "the better element" in American society and wanted the immigrants to accept a scenario "in which the "helpless" and ignorant lower classes acknowledged the qualifications of the elite and accepted its hegemony in society." (Lissak 19). Here Deweyan principles are articulated within the framework of a "general social unity" secured by an elite. The problem of integration is interpreted within a socioeconomic framework that was not necessarily intended to economically uplift the lower classes. The primary intention was to fortify the social conduct of the higher classes by teaching their ideas and codes of conduct to the "other half."

When educational organizations limit the opportunities of the immigrant that were promised by the democratic ideal of America an inequality in power relations occurs. The immigrant is not perceived as an equal and is considered unfit to make rational decisions. Within her unjust situation Yeziarska's main character in "Soap and Water" concludes about her superior that: "Personally, she didn't give a hang if I was clean or dirty. She was merely one of the agents of clean society, delegated to judge who is fit..." (102). The agent of a clean society is not held responsible for the injustices that occurred in this story, but the reasoning that dictates the institutes. In this context "Yeziarska challenges philanthropic and assimilationist discourses that place the immigrant in the position of a lesser American." (Konzett 9). She does not, however, reject the entire pragmatist approach of Deweyan democratic theory that is implemented in these organizations of reform. She only lays bare and rejects the injustice of the precepts that determine reasonableness and worth.

Although the heroine of "Soap and Water" rejects the middle-class Anglo-American protestant values as unjust prerequisites for functionality within American society, she does try to articulate a condition that creates usefulness. The immigrant student displays democratic understanding by not personally blaming Miss Whiteside for the injustice that has occurred. She displays empathy by understanding, and recognizing the position of her teacher. Unfortunately, her instructor doesn't provide the same courtesy. This reinforces the unbalanced power relation, and the unequal treatment within the native-immigrant relationship. Yeziarska's characters display their idea of justice as democratic understanding to foster impartiality and mutual advancement. The highlighted injustice through the rejection of the immigrants' equality of opportunity in education was used by Yeziarska to encourage her notion of justice. By letting her heroines display equal understanding she addresses the lack of reciprocity and mutuality.

Without these fair terms of cooperation immigrants were unable to advance within American society and maximize their development. It is evident within Yeziarska's articulation of justice as democratic understanding that cooperative interchange and personal autonomy are perceived to be of essence. The individual immigrant wants to develop "a healthy autonomy, but derive[s] meaning also from identifying with a relationship, group, or even [a] national[ity]" (Boucoulalas and Henschke 135) So too do Yeziarska's protagonists. They wish to be part of the American democracy and the condition of

autonomy within this perceived unity is necessary for a just relationship between the immigrant and their host society. With the opportunity of an increasing number of opportunities the immigrants should be able to protect their individuality within American society and contribute their value to their new environment. In “Mostly About Myself” Yeziarska pleaded for multiple opportunities to develop unrestrictedly. The autobiographical I recognizes the necessity of this independence within the unity of American society:

Yes, I make demands – not in arrogance, but in all humility, I demand—driven by my desire to give. I want to give not only that which I am, but that which I might be if I only had the chance. I want to give to American not the immigrant you see before you—starved, stunted, resentful on the verge of hysteria from repression. I want to give a new kind of immigrant, full grown in mind and body—loving, serving, upholding America.

(Children of Loneliness 142)

While articulating the need for preservation of ideas that originally created America, Yeziarska’s heroine protests against the repression of the development of the newcomers. The projection of rigid values upon immigrants leads to exclusion and displacement. The immigrant is left “starved, stunted and resentful.” Alienation from the American ideal is indirectly caused by the set of principles that determined the “reasonableness” of a democratic citizen.

The immigrant was unable to love America, and this became an obstacle within their process of identificational assimilation (Gordon 71). The use of reasonableness and worth as a requirement for a good democratic citizen did not only articulate the outsider position of the immigrant, but it also withheld them from properly integrating within American society. Yeziarska exposed that justice was not served if moral values blur and restrict the process of self-realization. Impartiality and mutual advancement based on reciprocity are repressed by the differing conceptions of justice. A balance of proportion within a community cannot occur when through “conflicting conceptions of the good, citizens cannot agree on a comprehensive doctrine to specify an idea of moral” (Rawls 73). The concept of deservedness cannot be reached by the consent of the governed and this creates an uneven power relation between society’s participants. The criteria of ethics should remain restricted to basic liberties that are written down in the

American Constitution. When dealing with difference these liberties should be upheld according to the autobiographical I in “Mostly about Myself.” This will eventually lead to like-mindedness and democratic understanding.

The institutions for social benefit of the “other half” had difficulty making impartial judgments and creating like-mindedness. Although they did have the intention to reach “community, communication and consensus”(Lissak 15) as well as a “*spirit of true friendliness*” (Carlson 93), they were not “able to avoid the extremes of bigotry and hatred on the one hand, and sentimentality and condescension on the other” (Davis 85). The negative, or the overtly-positive attitudes towards difference reveals the inability of the reformers to create an unified community and reach a consensus through effective communication. The different conceptions of worth that were present in reformists’ actions created a site where “meanings are (mis)read, or signs misappropriated” (Bhabba 155). The essentialist notions conveyed through moral prerequisites did not uphold the American promises that had lured so many immigrants to the American shores. The hybrid situation that was created left the immigrant feeling different and unaccepted. This enhanced their inability to pursue their personal dreams. However, this did not stop the immigrants from searching for justice while trying to find a balance between two worlds.

New and Old World Expectations

The feeling of hybridity and difference did not just arise when immigrant women tried to find stability in public institutions, but also within personal relationships. In her fiction Yeziarska examined the injustice of the “cardinal virtue” of temperance. This principle specifically acted as a requirement for women to be accepted within American society. This judgment was cast by Yeziarska in the love-affair narrative between the Oriental woman and the Anglo-Saxon man, and in the narrative of struggle between the New World daughter and Old World father. The attitudes of these male characters towards the female protagonists represent the injustice of forced self-restraint. The personality of Dewey served as a role model for the limitations of the Anglo-Saxon world and Yeziarska depicted men like him as “unemotional and cold, almost sterile” (Wilentz xiii). These American men initially symbolized the hope of American ideals. But in reality they soon turned out to represent the “the deep-going fundamental difference in our aims, our ideals, our principles and convictions” (xvi).

In *Salome of the Tenements* Sonya's affair with the Anglo-Saxon character John Manning begins with this hope but quickly results in disappointment. The following passages will be an outline of their relationship and how these restricted roles of women create an unjust situation for Sonya. Initially Sonya is in awe of her future philanthropist husband and submits to his ideal of American society: "Now, her enthusiasm for Manning and all that belonged to him was the culmination of her erratic ambitions. With the ardor of an adolescent convert Sonya had made of Manning the ideal of what she aspired to be"(84). Sonya projects all her immigrant hopes in the representation of Manning. Manning, who wanted to achieve the "conscious organization of the intellectual and moral life of the people" (Davis 8), represents the combination of progressive notions and traditionalism of the wealthy middle-class. After her initial eagerness to become everything Manning represents, Sonya is corrected in her over-emotional reactions and desires towards the Anglo-Saxon world: "Manning put her gently from him with almost paternal patience. "I am sure you are glad now, that you came down like a sensible girl," he said, with affectionate tolerance. "You will find very soon, my dear, that you can adjust yourself to the form of society in which you have to live"" (131). Only through adjustment to the Anglo-Saxon virtue of self-restraint Sonya would be able to be part of Manning's circle. The immigrant heroine, however, believes in the American creed of unity out of diversity: *E Pluribus Unum* — "Out of Many, One" (Lissak 13).

Sonya tries to hold on to the diversity she and Manning represent, but her faith slowly crumbles. Without her trust in the union between her and her Anglo-Saxon husband Sonya leaves her millionaire lover: "I, a living breathing human, tied up for life to a cold mummy like him? I stay with a man I hate and despise, under one roof? No—not all the marriage rites in the world, not all the dead pride of Manning's virtuous ancestry that never knew divorce, can keep me in this prison a moment longer! (153)" Sonya is expected to "fulfill the ready-made narrative of woman's acculturation" (Zaborowska 7) of her host society. She becomes demoralized through this cultural dominance and feels she has no breath left to express her emotions and desires. This passages show that Sonya rejects the constraints that are projected upon her. After leaving the high-class Anglo-Saxon world she flees back to the ghetto she once belonged to. She could not live up to the temperance that was prerequisite for her acceptance within her husband's world. It was not in her nature to subdue emotions and Sonya was unable to reject her inherited outbursts. Manning, representing the emotional heritage of America, is depicted as someone who does not adhere to

the true American ideals. He clings to his ancestral traditions and is not receptive to novelty or change within his personal sphere. The characteristic of “Americanness” (Wald 112), that promotes constant change, is not recognized by Manning as just. Instead he creates a prison out of his own world that contains rules everyone needed to abide by. A participant of his social community is only considered reasonable and capable of functioning if they uphold his moral standards. Sonya tries to break free of Manning’s restraint and returns to the Lower East Side.

Yeziarska’s ghetto, however, was a similar prison. In the hybrid community of the ghetto Jewish women were confronted by their oppressive fathers because of their difference as females and as “Americanerins” (Zaborowska 14). Irving Howe argued that for women “Jewish tradition enforced a combination of social inferiority and business activity” (265). These women had to economically and domestically provide for their husband and children. They were not expected to voice opinions, or to protest against these traditions. The short story “Children of Loneliness” and the novel *Bread Givers* give good examples of how this situation could not survive amongst Jewish women in America. Many of them aspired to become New Women. This role model represent an “independent, energetic, well educated, and generally well-to-do... new woman [who] found herself freed by technological change and increasing affluence” (Rosenberg 25). This role model attracted—mostly young— women who lived in the Lower East Side. They tried to achieve this feminine goal by talking, dressing, and acting like middle-class Anglo-Saxon women. This turned them into “Ghetto Girls” (Prell 21).

The stereotype “Ghetto Girl” was considered to be the bodily manifestation of excessive Americanization. She “was garish, excessively made up, too interested in her appearance, and too uncultivated to dress smartly. Her vulgarity embarrassed the Jews” (Prell 23). Although this was an extreme image, Yeziarska did use this stereotype in her fiction. She described these flashy women as eager and strong-willed. Their consumerist attitudes and drive for beauty are present in almost all Yeziarska’s stories. Commodities such as dresses and flowered hats were tools to become more “American” (Stubbs xxxii). Yeziarska initially introduced these girls as merely ignorant and wanting, but during their experiences they grow, learn, and adjust their goals within American society. They too seek justice in the form of recognition and inclusion by their communities. They hope for mutual understanding and equality

within their personal relationships. These women, who live between two worlds, aspire to have free choices and become independent through education and personal income.

In “Children of Loneliness” the “Ghetto Girl” Rachel eagerly wants her parents to Americanize like her. She rebels against the Old World ways of her father and against the dirt and poverty of the ghetto. She hopes for understanding from her father, but he responds with contempt and condemns Rachel: “ ‘*Pfui* on all your American colleges! *Pfui* on the morals of America! No respect for old age. No fear for God. Stepping with your feet on all the laws of the holy Torah. A fire should burn out the whole new generation. They should sink into the earth, like Korah’ ”(*Children of Loneliness* 179). Yankev Ravinsky, Rachel’s father, rejects his daughter for her difference. He denounces her and her generation. He accuses them of being rebels like Korah. This was a biblical rebel who revolted against the authority of Moses and Aaron (Jastrow *Korah*). Ravinsky, who raised his daughter traditionally, wants her to pass on these traditions to the next generation to preserve the Jewish identity. He is afraid her Jewishness will vanish because of her eager and garish Americanization. He feels he has the right to criticize Rachel because daughters were traditionally regarded as family possession (Rosenberg 5). The autonomy displayed by educated and working daughters was perceived as a threat to the control of the family (Prell 29). Rachel tries to find understanding from her father for her autonomy but remains an outcast within her family.

Sara Smolinsky, the youngest daughter in *Bread Givers* also tries to escape the control of her family by educating herself and by earning wages to support her own livelihood. She rebels against her father’s wishes of marriage because she wants to determine her own choices. When she announces this desire of free choice to her father, he tells her that a woman’s place is either at her father’s home or with a husband: “ ‘They ought to put you in a madhouse till you’re cured of your crazy nonsense!’...But now he saw the hardness in my eyes. And suddenly his whole face saddened with the hurt of a wounded martyr, suffering for his righteousness. ... ‘Now, when I begin to have a little use from you, you want to run away and live for yourself?’ ”(137). Sara is condemned by her father for choosing self-realization instead of a servile position at home. Sara believes in a different morality than her father. He believes that his way of life remains the only way within American society. Jewish communities were historically accustomed to a minority position and “always vulnerable to the whims of the hostile majority” (Baile 17). Reb Smolinsky

tries to protect his cultural values against the penetration of American culture. By reinforcing his authority Sara's father hopes that she will subdue.

Sara does not succumb to her father's wishes and only sees him as a victim of his own beliefs. Throughout the story she looks for understanding of her double difference. Sara is looked upon as an outsider, because of her femininity, as well as her immigrant status. This understanding was hard to find, as the example shows. Her Old World father only displays understanding for his own beliefs. He leaves no room for change. The promise of America was not found by Sara in the suffocating ghetto. She leaves and tries her luck elsewhere. Discriminated within her old ghetto home and at college campus, Sara's world becomes a site of difference and displacement while she struggles against cultural dominance. Just as Rachel and Sonya, she lives alone, unhappy, and deprived of familiarity and understanding. These "Ghetto Girls" all felt the "shame, pain, embarrassment, and rage created by the stereotyped image of an autonomous and desiring Jewish woman." (Prell 57). They experience the treatment they receive as unjust and are repressed by the expectations and traditions that weigh on their shoulders from both worlds. In search of self-development Rachel, Sonya, and Sara eventually experience fulfillment and justice when they themselves start to express compassion and understanding.

At the end of *Salome of the Tenements* Sonya forgives her millionaire John Manning for his misunderstandings and for his rigidity. She sympathizes with him because he eventually shows his emotions and humanity to her. Rachel accepts her hybridity and acknowledges the fulfillment her parents experience from hanging on to old traditions. She reconciles with the painful longing for both worlds and by understanding that her loneliness is present among all children of her generation, she reaches out to them and confidently continues her search for self-development. In the final chapter of *Bread Givers* Sara reconciles with her father after years of struggle and heartache. She learns to accept his traditionalism and eventually invites his Old World back into her home:

Then suddenly the pathos of this lonely old man pierced me. In a world where all is changed, he alone remained unchanged—as tragically isolate as the rocks. All that he had left of life was his fanatical adherence to his traditions. It was within my power to keep lighted the flickering candle of his life from him.

Could I deny him this poor service? Unconsciously, my hand reached out for his. (296)

Although Sara still feels the shadow of generations upon her shoulders, she reconciles herself with the old traditions and begins her life anew. By displaying understanding and giving and receiving understanding and sympathy the heroines in Yeziarska's fiction articulate a sense of justice.

This fair cooperation of inclusion among all participants in American society is perceived as necessary by the immigrant women in Yeziarska's stories. By displaying democratic understanding, they are able to break free from their patriarchal repression. This justice of understanding and inclusion reveals the immigrant women's fruitful attempt to live between two worlds. It creates a platform for mutuality that strives for democratic inclusion of all participant within American society. The double otherness of being both immigrant and female forced these heroines to build this "bridge of understanding." This bridge was built to create consensus between the foreign born and the Anglo-Saxon, but also between the Old World and the New. By rejecting the paradigms of both these communities the immigrant women in Yeziarska's fiction protest against the unjust moral restrictions set by both traditions. The consent of these governed women did not lie in restrictions, but in the understanding of difference. Individual choice and self-development should foster capacities and not restrict them by the limitation of possibilities within American society. By displaying sympathy for the conflicting perceptions of good within both worlds, these immigrant women redefine Dewey's intended social democracy into a democracy of inclusion. Through the rejection of essentialist notions of education and temperance, Yeziarska's heroines found strength in the virtues of courage and justice. They displayed courage by opening up to foreign cultures and to constant change. They recognized democratic understanding and inclusion as the key element to maintain justice and thus contributed to "a world still in the making".

Towards the Ideal America

Fiction has the potential to contribute to the notions of justice within society. Yeziarska's realistic representation of Eastern European Jewish life in American society in the early decades of the 20th century provides the opportunity to explore immigrant visions of fairness. The concept of justice is explored by Yeziarska's protagonists within their experience of difference and displacement. Her female immigrants express a feeling of discontent regarding the restrictions of self-development that are displayed in public life as well as in the privacy of their homes. These Jewish women from who came to the "Promised Land" to leave exclusion, suppression and deprivation behind resist any notion of authority. They endure the hard life of the ghetto and try to reconcile their American dreams with the reality they come to live in. These heroines do so by articulating a sense of fairness that promotes autonomy within the aspired harmony of American society. The element that, in their opinion, can unite all Americans is the democratic inclusion and acceptance of diversity: *E Pluribus Unum* (Lissak 13). This form of understanding will create a balance between the American community and the immigrants and secure mutual advantage and a just environment in the future.

The cultural dominance Yeziarska's heroines feel is perceived as the ultimate injustice that had to be overcome. By writing about immigrant life from firsthand experience, Yeziarska tried to let her heroines articulate a vision of fair cooperation within the experience of integration as an alternative to the assimilation theories of that time. Yeziarska's protagonists recognize the necessity of adjusting to a common culture, but total conformity to the Anglo-Saxon culture is not the ideal that these immigrant women envision. They do not perceive American cultural identity as consisting of a single and essential culture. These immigrant women view the American character as being in constant transition. This "Americanness" articulates the acceptance of difference and diversity that Yeziarska expressed. Justice within assimilation is found through acceptance of autonomy and through the recognition of the need for identification with a type of American nationality (Boucouvalas and Henschke 135).

Yeziarska's heroines believe that they have cultural values to offer to their newfound society. They felt that there existed a duty of justice towards them by the American community because they are able to contribute to the transformative nature of American society. The limitation of this contribution by

moral parameters set by discriminative elements within society led to the restriction of freedom and equality. The hypocrisy displayed by institutions of assimilation, as well as within the different assimilation theories, created an unbalanced situation between the immigrant and the American-born. Yeziarska exposed this pretense of democratic values through the narrative of the love-affair between the wanting immigrant woman and the unaffected Anglo-Saxon man. Through this story she showed the impossibility of the Melting Pot, cultural imperialism of Anglo-Saxon conformity to reduce the feeling of “in-between” among these immigrant women. The empowerment of Yeziarska’s heroines does not lie in matrimony or adjustment to an essentialist identity (Colkin 154), but in their ability to find meaning in the constantly changing nature of American culture.

The meaning Yeziarska’s immigrants seek within their marginal position is found in this recognition. By displaying sympathy towards individual autonomy and to uphold freedom and equality within a democratic environment difference and displacement are replaced by a positive notion of diversity. The Community Theory by Berkson is the closest example of an assimilation theory that respects these ideas of justice. The unique development of the individual within American society must not be restricted by limiting opportunities and Yeziarska’s fiction exposes this rejection of patriarchal and imperialistic discourses. When diversity is recognized within the unity of American society, then justice will prevail within American society.

The fair conduct that was articulated within the framework of assimilation is a *justive as democratic understanding* that promotes recognition and inclusion. This form of justice is comparable to the notion of identificational assimilation that refers to the acquirement of an American identity based on a sense of people-hood of the immigrant’s host society (Gordon 71). Participants in American society should be given the right to freely choose the traditions they do, or do not, wish to cherish. The adjustment to American society should be created by the loyalty towards a sense of American character that can be found in the basic liberties of democracy described in the Constitution. An impartial understanding of individual free choice within a society of equal opportunity is seen by Yeziarska’s heroines as the key ingredient of an American “symbolic identity” (Gans 579).

The confrontation with conformity resulted in the acceptance and understanding of difference amongst the Jewish immigrant women in Yeziarska’s stories. Yeziarska explored notions of justice that

were based on mutuality and equality. By respecting and understanding uniqueness, personal choice, and the diverse possibilities within American society, Yeziarska articulated a new form of fairness through her fiction. She concluded that morality should only be measured against the notions of justice and that an alternative form of fairness could be created by keeping faith in the American creed of *E Pluribus Unum*. By understanding her situation and the world she lived in and by accepting her difference and diversity within American society, Yeziarska gave meaning to her work. She started to build a “bridge of understanding” and justice between her people and the American-born that would lead to the further realization of an ideal America.

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