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‘In Glasgow but not quite of it’? Eastern European Jewish immigrants in a provincial Jewish community from c.1890 to c.1945

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ABSTRACT. This article makes use of autobiographies and oral interviews in order to explore the lifestyles of the first generation of immigrants within one particular provincial Jewish community – the Gorbals in Glasgow – between 1890 and 1945. The experience of this generation of immigrants was characterised by diversity to an extent that was not true of the second generation. Thus, the community cannot be described in terms of either ‘assimilation’ or ‘separation’. Instead, an alternative description has been coined: ‘variegated acculturation’ in order to encompass the complexity of the lives of the immigrants.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article explores the lifestyles of the first generation of Jewish immigrants in the Gorbals district of Glasgow, between 1890 and 1945. It explores how they adapted to their new environment and sheds light on the wider issues of immigration and acculturation. The article introduces the concept of ‘variegated acculturation’ to encompass the complexity of the responses of the immigrants to their new environment. This case study contributes to the field of Jewish immigration but also to the broader historiography of immigration. Amongst existing studies of Jewish settlement in Britain in this period, two are of particular significance. David Feldman’s *Englishmen and Jews* draws attention to the self-identification of immigrants as ‘Jews’ and as members of other

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collectivities, most notably, 'workers'.¹ Jerry White's study of immigrant life in the Rothschild Buildings in the East End of London between 1887 and 1920 seeks, like this study, to reconstruct the lives of Eastern European immigrants in a particular neighbourhood through the medium of oral history.² However, our understanding of the acculturation of Jewish immigrants in the years after the First World War remains limited. This is arguably true of most immigrant communities in Scotland except the Irish.³

Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who settled in Glasgow between the late nineteenth century and the First World War are 'the first generation' of this study. They were not the first Jews to arrive in Glasgow, but they formed a distinct community in the Gorbals district (a mile and a half south of the city centre), and their arrival was a watershed in the development of the Jewish community in Britain. Between 120,000 and 150,000 East European Jews settled in Britain between 1881 and 1914.⁴ Most settled in the East End of London, but communities also developed in Birmingham, Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester.⁵ By 1901 there were small Jewish communities in the Scottish cities of Aberdeen, Dundee and Edinburgh, but the majority of Scottish Jews (81 per cent) lived in Glasgow.⁶ Census data record around 5,700 Jews in Glasgow in 1901, and around 9,000 in 1911.⁷ The first purpose-built synagogue in Scotland was opened in September 1879 in the Garnethill district of the city.⁸ By the early twentieth century there were 10 synagogues in Glasgow.

There is a rich and growing literature on the history of Glasgow Jews.⁹ Ben Braber offers an excellent broad chronological account of the impact of Jewish immigration on Scottish society, and the reaction of the established Jewish community to the new arrivals.¹⁰ William Kenefick explores relations between the Jewish and Irish communities, and Linda Fleming examines Jewish women in Glasgow c.1880–1950.¹¹ Both, like the present study, use oral history interviews to penetrate immigrant identity. The Gorbals had a distinctive mix of immigrants, from Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland, as well as Jews from Eastern Europe. As Feldman points out, historians of acculturation must determine what the Jewish minority were acculturating to, as particular national contexts were not homogeneous. The starting point for this study is the insight that Jews approached not a 'culture and society in general but particular collectivities and cultures within it'.¹²

This study will outline a phase of 'integration' in which immigrants accommodated their host culture while retaining a degree of cultural separation, particularly through ethnic associations and religious practices that displayed continuities with the communities that they had left

behind. This analysis draws on the insights offered by Oscar Handlin in his classic study of immigration to America. His argument that immigrant associations were a means of adapting to new surroundings that bound immigrants closer together and served to separate them from wider society is also relevant in Glasgow. There is no clear dichotomy between associations that served to integrate immigrants and those that enhanced their separation. Ethnically Jewish organisations were not always exclusive and separate Jewish branches existed within organisations of acculturation such as the British Legion or the Freemasons. An account of the acculturation of Jewish immigrants must also be sensitive to gender. Male and female immigrant experiences shared some common elements. However, the social lives of women were shaped by their domestic responsibilities, and were thus more firmly centred on home, family and tenement. Acculturation was a dynamic process that did not occur in a uniform manner: a more nuanced discussion of these processes is needed than that offered in the existing literature.

Sociologists at the University of Chicago developed an influential model for the adjustment of immigrants to their new homes. This paradigm of assimilation has been criticised for its determinist approach, outlining stages (a 'race relations cycle') leading to the inevitable incorporation of ethnic minorities into mainstream society. It has also been attacked for identifying assimilation with the eradication of all traces of ethnic distinctiveness.¹³ Richard Alba and Victor Nee defended the approach of the Chicago School, drawing attention to an early definition of assimilation which described it as: 'a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated into a common cultural life.'¹⁴ This non-prescriptive definition does undermine some of the criticisms of the Chicago School, but the assimilationist perspective nevertheless downplays both the type of relationship that a particular immigrant group wishes to form with their host society, and the barriers to assimilation created by the persistence of prejudice against them.

Influenced by the Chicago School, Handlin depicted immigration as a traumatic experience in which individuals are removed from the familiar and are forced to adjust to a strange environment: 'the immigrants lived in crisis because they were uprooted.'¹⁵ His analysis described in detail the process of settlement. His newly arrived immigrants seek out those from a similar background in order to overcome the adverse circumstances of their daily lives and to insure against disaster. Thus, the immigrants developed their own associational and cultural life, which did not resurrect the culture of their home countries, but constituted a step in their

adjustment to their new environment.¹⁶ For Handlin, the children of immigrants played a significant role in the process of adjustment ‘as mediator(s) between the culture of the home and the culture of the wider society in the United States’.¹⁷ Both of these insights are relevant to this current study.

Handlin stressed ethnic ties within immigrant communities, but later interpretations have criticised any treatment of ethnic groups as homogeneous.¹⁸ Panikos Panayi points to the variety of ways in which ethnic groups maintained their identity: residence and marriage patterns, ethnic organisations, religion and philanthropy. The relative significance of these activities varied between groups: religion was particularly important to Jews, for example.¹⁹ To some extent, integration can be measured by the relative significance of these factors in the lives of the immigrants as, for example, geographical concentration decreases and intermarriage increases as a group integrates into the host society.²⁰

John Berry identifies four basic acculturation strategies adopted by immigrant groups: assimilation, integration, marginalisation and separation. ‘When individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures the Assimilation strategy is defined. In contrast, when the non-dominant group places a value on holding onto their original culture, and at the same time wishes to avoid interaction with others, then the Separation alternative is defined.’²¹ Marginalisation denotes a state in which the specified group loses contact with their own culture and that of mainstream society as a result of discrimination or withdrawal. Finally, integration involves a desire to maintain the traditional culture of the group in question while accommodating the dominant culture.²² It results in participation in a wider social network and daily interaction with other groups.²³ This influential typology places agency at the centre of its explanations and is therefore valuable for this discussion. Although ‘integration’ would be the most appropriate term to describe the acculturation strategy of the Jewish community in the Gorbals, it does not reflect the range of practices that they adopted in their dealings with the host community. The concept of ‘variegated acculturation’, introduced here, reflects this diversity of responses. It describes the phase in which immigrants resided within an ethnic enclave with its own ethnic associations but also maintained formal and informal contact with outsiders. This article will outline both the immigrants’ vision of integration and the means through which they sought to achieve it.

Todd Endelman argued that in Britain, Eastern European immigrants remained a ‘foreign colony’ within wider society.²⁴ Braber set Glasgow Jews apart as a case study of integration, which he defined ‘as a process

through which a group of people becomes part of a society without necessarily losing their original identity and characteristics, and during which the major society itself undergoes changes by absorbing the minority'.²⁵ Although a good description of the general process by which immigrants were absorbed into Scottish society, this ignores some crucial differences between the experiences of the first and second generations. The first generation both aspired to and achieved a form of integration while retaining their own associational life and maintaining distance from their non-Jewish neighbours. Their experiences were characterised by a diversity not evident in the second generation. In this phase of variegated acculturation individuals developed their own responses, as their desire to maintain some social separation in order to avoid intermarriage conflicted with the urge to 'fit in' to their new environment through selective adaptation. 'They welcomed opportunities to become English, but according to their lights, without being coerced to sacrifice their self-respect, religious passion, or native tongue.'²⁶

This piece is based on a collection of 15 oral history interviews conducted by the author with elderly members of the Jewish community in Glasgow. The interviewees were selected through both personal contacts and Jewish Care Scotland, which provides a variety of welfare services, including social activities for elderly members of the Jewish community. In the discussion below, common Jewish surnames have been used as pseudonyms to protect the identity of the respondents, many of whom in fact have anglicised surnames. The interviews have been supplemented by material from the autobiographies of Chaim Bermant, Evelyn Cowan, Harry Diamond and Ralph Glasser, which provide a window on the life of the Jewish Gorbals between the wars.²⁷ There are some methodological difficulties with this approach. We are reliant on second-hand accounts of first-generation migrants: the immigrants speak to us, if at all, through their children. This study is sensitive to the possibility of intentional and unintentional misrepresentation by some respondents, and their accounts are studied alongside the autobiographies of first-generation migrants, and the existing secondary literature.

2. 'A STRONG WHIFF OF HOME': THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE GORBALS

After the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 conditions for Jews within the tsarist empire deteriorated, resulting in the emigration of large numbers of Russian Jews.²⁸ Endelman argues against a direct link between persecution and Jewish emigration: 'the most fundamental cause of emigration from Eastern Europe was the failure of the Jewish economy

to grow as rapidly as the Jewish population.²⁹ A Jewish tailor in Leeds in 1898 differed:

Not only was religious persecution the direct cause of the emigration of large numbers of Russian Jews, but indirectly it is responsible for the emigration of the great majority of them. To take myself for an example, I did not leave my native country because I was expelled either for political or religious reasons; but nearly every day brought me news of fresh expulsions, of new *ukases* [edicts] against the people of my race, and I was asking myself, Where is this going to stop? Whose turn will be next? And I decided to leave the country where I could get neither justice nor mercy. I certainly have not come to live in English fogs for the mere pleasure of it. My case is typical of most Jewish immigrants...³⁰

Jewish migration was part of a general pattern of migration from Eastern Europe during the nineteenth century, to which economic and political motivations contributed. Thousands of political refugees left Poland after the unsuccessful revolts against tsarist rule of 1831 and 1863, and some settled in Britain.³¹ A much larger group of economic migrants left Poland in the second half of the nineteenth century, mainly landless peasants.³² Although this suggests that Jewish and non-Jewish motivations for emigration from Eastern Europe were similarly diverse, there were differences: the (predominantly Catholic) Lithuanians who settled in Lanarkshire, Ayrshire, Fife and West Lothian after the 1870s, for example, were actively recruited into specific industries, which was not generally true of Jewish immigrants.³³

The arrival of these migrants in Britain provoked hostility from the non-Jewish population, but also had a dramatic impact on the established Jewish community. Manchester and Leeds were the largest provincial communities in this period: at an estimated 15,000, the Jewish population of Glasgow was considerably smaller.³⁴ Along with Aberdeen, Dundee and Edinburgh, Glasgow was one of the four largest cities in early nineteenth-century Scotland.³⁵ It was the most significant manufacturing centre in the country, a centre for textiles production, engineering and shipbuilding, with a diverse industrial economy.³⁶ As J. J. Smyth points out, 'in comparison with other cities, Glasgow had a very low proportion of professional and middle class occupations. It was manufacturing which predominated with almost seven out of ten workers of both sexes employed in this sector.'³⁷

The Jewish 'community' of Glasgow was divided between the Gorbals and the more prosperous Garnethill area in the centre of the city. The Jewish community grew slowly between the first recorded settlement in 1812 and 1823 when the first synagogue in the city was consecrated.³⁸ By 1879, when the synagogue at Garnethill opened, there were less than a thousand Jews in Glasgow, most of whom lived in or around the city centre.³⁹ Kenneth Collins has pointed out that, although it is sometimes

mistakenly assumed that before 1880 the Glasgow community was mainly of Central European origin, in fact most were from Russian-ruled Poland.⁴⁰ The Jews in Garnethill and those in the Gorbals had the same origins and the differences between the two communities are best explained by the cumulative impact of acculturation on the older community in Garnethill.⁴¹ The Jewish migrants to Glasgow that form the subject of this study predominantly settled in the Gorbals, which by the 1880s had acquired a distinctively Jewish character.⁴² The Gorbals Jewish community was working class, religiously orthodox and spoke Yiddish,⁴³ while Garnethill was middle class, assimilated and its religious practices were modified to appear less ‘alien’.⁴⁴ The relationship between the two communities was fraught, and in 1906 there was a formal split between them when the Garnethill leadership pulled out of the city’s United Synagogue Council.⁴⁵ Outside these formal arrangements, there was little daily interaction between the two Jewish communities.⁴⁶

Bermant describes how it felt to move from the small Latvian village of Barovke to Glasgow in 1937 in his autobiography:

... the Gorbals, somehow, was less intimidating than other parts of the town for it reminded me vaguely of Dvinsk. There were Yiddish posters on the hoardings, Hebrew lettering on the shops, Jewish names, Jewish faces, Jewish butchers, Jewish bakers with Jewish bread, and Jewish grocers with barrels of herring in the doorway. The herrings in particular brought a strong whiff of home. One heard Yiddish in the streets – more so, in fact, than English – and one encountered figures who would not have been put of place in Barovke.⁴⁷

The 1901 census shows that the Jews living in the Gorbals came from several countries but the majority of the foreign-born were from the Russian Empire.⁴⁸ By the 1930s, the Jewish community there numbered 7–8,000. The census data do not tell us which parts of the Russian Empire the immigrants came from, but anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority came from Lithuania.⁴⁹

The Gorbals housed industrial workers in four-storey tenements.⁵⁰ In the later nineteenth century the district was ‘a byword for overcrowding, poverty and crime’.⁵¹ However, the reputation of the area obscures both variations in quality of the housing stock and its social diversity. There were many small apartments of only one or two rooms and large parts of the district were squalid, but more affluent enclaves such as Abbotsford Place continued to be middle class long after the First World War.⁵²

Jewish immigrants came to the Gorbals because it was cheap, and to join an expanding Jewish community which offered them support.⁵³ They rapidly created a rich associational life.⁵⁴ This extended beyond the various synagogues to encompass the Workers’ Circle, the Jewish Institute in South Portland Street – which hosted a range of social activities – and youth groups such as the Jewish Lads’ Brigade (JLB), which aimed to

instil some British patriotism.⁵⁵ Stephan Wendehorst describes the Workers' Circle as 'the most prominent representative of the Bundist legacy in Britain'.⁵⁶ The Bund was a Jewish socialist party founded in September 1897. It aimed to defend the rights of Jewish workers and combat anti-Semitism, but rejected religion: its ideology was revolutionary and internationalist.⁵⁷ The immigrants who created the Workers' Circle in Britain retained these goals, but membership of its 20 branches encompassed a variety of political perspectives, including Zionism. Both Branch 9 in London and Division 8 in Glasgow fell under Communist control.⁵⁸

Before the Jews, the Gorbals already hosted migrants from Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland.⁵⁹ Highlanders had come as a result of recurring famines, the Clearances in the early nineteenth century, and the failure of the potato crop in 1846. Many were temporary migrants.⁶⁰ Irish-Catholic immigration greatly increased during the Famine of the 1840s, but fell off subsequently.⁶¹ In fact, during the years 1876–1881, 83 per cent of Irish immigrants to Scotland came from the north of Ireland.⁶² The growth of the militant, sectarian Protestant Orange movement in Glasgow and the resultant escalation of tensions between Protestant and Catholic, was partly a result of this, principally Protestant, migration.⁶³ The Gorbals was an Irish-Catholic stronghold but also housed Protestants.⁶⁴ The hostility to Irish-Catholic immigrants and their concentration in separate neighbourhoods forged an identity that was retained by their descendants well into the twentieth century.⁶⁵ By contrast, Thomas Devine has argued that 'the urban Highland community had a much weaker collective identity than the migrant Irish'.⁶⁶ Although most urban Highland migrants were Gaelic speaking and had their own churches and societies, the absence of prejudice facilitated their assimilation.⁶⁷

Thus, Jews joined the existing immigrant groups in the area. Although the interviewees did not always have precise information about the arrival of their parents in Britain, most of the parents of my respondents arrived in Glasgow between 1890 and 1914.

3. LANGUAGE, LITERACY AND MAKING A LIVING

The family backgrounds of the respondents interviewed for this study were varied. Of the 15 interviewees, 10 had parents who were both immigrants from Eastern Europe: Mrs Abrahams, Mrs Adler, Mr and Mrs Danzig, Mr Cowan, Mrs Friedlander, Mr Goodman, Mr Levy, Mrs Rosenberg and Mr Zuckerman. The parents of the respondents came from various parts of the Russian Empire including Latvia, Ukraine and Lithuania. Of the respondents, five had one parent who was a

Russian immigrant, and one who was British-born Jewish: Mrs Cohen, Mrs Greenberg, Mrs Laski, Mr Lipman and Mr Sacks. In one case, Mrs Laski, the interviewee had a Russian-born father and a non-Jewish mother. One would assume that the experiences of respondents with two Eastern European parents would differ from others in the sample, not least in terms of ability to communicate with those outside their own community.

As elsewhere in Britain, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe rarely spoke English when they arrived in Glasgow.⁶⁸ The levels of proficiency in spoken English that they subsequently achieved varied considerably. Three respondents, Mrs Abrahams and Mr and Mrs Danzig, describe their parents speaking ‘broken English’, while Mrs Cohen said that her mother’s English was so good that she could sometimes be mistaken for a native speaker.⁶⁹ Levels of literacy were lower. In the case of Mrs Abrahams, Mrs Friedlander and Mr and Mrs Danzig, neither parent could read or write English, although the father of Mrs Abrahams eventually learnt to read his name, and Mr Friedlander’s father learnt to sign his.⁷⁰ Of the respondents whose parents could read and write in English, only two, Mrs Laski and Mr Sacks, said that their fathers had no problems with literacy.⁷¹ The other respondents generally reported quite low levels of literacy. Having a British-born spouse did not necessarily make the immigrant parent any more literate, as Mrs Greenberg’s father never learnt to read English.⁷²

Problems with literacy were not a barrier to employment or business opportunities in an area with so many Jewish enterprises. Mr Zuckerman’s mother ran a Jewish grocery, but when she started she could not read or write English. Her children taught her to write a shortened form of her surname so that she could sign for herself rather than putting a cross. This abbreviated version was subsequently adopted as the family name.⁷³ Speaking of the experience of the first generation of immigrants in Glasgow, Mr Zuckerman said ‘They did not need any English because they lived in segregated areas. So they would only speak Yiddish and the children taught the parents English.’⁷⁴ Fleming mentions a woman from Lithuania who made her living as a travelling draper notwithstanding limited English. To her Scottish customers she was ‘Jeannie the Jew’.⁷⁵ The children of immigrants were usually bilingual as, whatever the level of English of their parents, they generally spoke Yiddish at home. Only four respondents, Mrs Abrahams, Mrs Adler, Mrs Clark and Mr Lipman, said that their parents could read or write, or read and write, Yiddish.⁷⁶

Fleming found that the earliest example of a language class for immigrants in Glasgow was in 1892. However, she questions their utility for

women who were not literate in their own language. Most Yiddish-speaking mothers seem to have learnt English informally from their children or neighbours or, if they served in shops, through the customers they dealt with: they therefore acquired Scottish dialect rather than standard English.⁷⁷ White describes the education of parents by their children in the Rothschild Buildings in the East End of London as ‘one of the great motors of change in the Buildings during our period, the first prerequisite in transforming the immigrants into English subjects’.⁷⁸ While obviously important, its effectiveness should not be exaggerated. Mr Cowan describes the difficulties he experienced in attempting to teach his father to read and write English:

He could not read or write. We, as youngsters, tried to teach him how to write. We tried to teach him how to write so that he could sign his name. We tried to teach him, but it’s difficult teaching a person as a youngster... He never went to school. There was no school wherever he was.⁷⁹

Mr Cowan’s father never got beyond being able to sign his name.

The persistence of Yiddish in the home is demonstrated by the report of a local head teacher in 1930 that Jewish children were still entering school unable to speak English.⁸⁰ There was a gender dimension to the language barrier. Mr Levy describes his mother’s experience of arrival in Scotland. ‘Her brother was already established here. She got off the boat, and she was more or less whipped into clothing factories, which was a room and a few machines. She didnae have the chance to learn English because of being a peasant from the villages of Lithuania.’⁸¹ By contrast, Mrs Cohen’s mother, who first went to Leeds, was able to attend some English classes for immigrants there. They were disrupted by the First World War and the demands of domestic life. Her spoken English was good and her reading reasonable, but Mrs Cohen felt that marriage and a lack of confidence prevented her mother completing her formal study of English.⁸² Mrs Abrahams also explains the differences between the level of English of her parents in terms of their gender roles: ‘My father spoke better English than my mother. She was too busy bringing up a family like most of them. My father, because he was out inevitably spoke a little better.’⁸³

4. THE LEGACY OF *DER HEIM*: CULTURAL BARRIERS TO INTEGRATION

Cultural distance is harder to investigate and quantify than linguistic ability. The communities that immigrants came from and the city that they migrated to were very different places. Social and cultural differences could take many years to adjust to, particularly when newcomers lacked a

rudimentary knowledge of their new home. Mrs Freidlander's parents came as a couple to Glasgow from their village near Kiev. They spoke no English, and had limited understanding of what awaited them.

One of my aunts came here first, and I don't know how they connected with each other from Glasgow to Russia, don't even ask me, but they did. My mother and father had lived in a farming village. So every building was white, and my aunt said that she lived in a *schwarze* [i.e. black] building. So when my mother arrived out of the station she thought that there was only going to be one black building and all the rest white. So confusion started there.⁸⁴

Some aspects of the culture that immigrants brought with them were inexplicable to the next generation. On Mrs Friedlander's first menstruation, her mother slapped her face in accordance with Ashkenazic tradition:

I grew up with an old-fashioned habit-formed mother. I don't know how to talk about this to you. Well, my mother, there were a lot of superstitions, which I thought was part of being Yiddish, and one of them was, when you reached a certain age and...I don't need to go any further, do I? I came home frightened and got a smack in the face. That was part of the superstition, I didn't know...I'm bleeding, I came home, and I got smacked...I was brought up in this way. Nothing was explained.⁸⁵

The lack of first-hand accounts makes it extremely difficult to discuss the feelings of the immigrants towards their new homes or the places that they had left behind in any depth. Many seem to have felt ambivalent about their place of origin. For Mrs Greenberg's father, one particular object, a cushion, became associated with his homeland, and it seems to have been an important element in his strategy for dealing with the trauma of migration. Mrs Greenberg said that her father took this cushion everywhere he went:

And my father, his wee cushion. We were told that was the only thing that he brought with him when he came from Lithuania, a small cushion, because he couldn't sleep on a *Goyshke* [i.e. non-Jewish] cushion, according to him. So his cushion was packed in the hamper as well [i.e. when the family went on holiday].⁸⁶

Immigrants came to Britain bearing a mental legacy of anti-Semitism. The extent and character of anti-Semitism in Britain, and its precise impact on Jewish behaviour, are subjects of debate, but it certainly played a central role in the history of Jews in this country.⁸⁷ Glasgow has been depicted as having a relatively low level of anti-Semitism.⁸⁸ Collins found this to be true of Glasgow as a whole and of the Gorbals in particular, where the social conditions made the lack of inter-ethnic tensions particularly remarkable.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, anti-Semitism did manifest itself in the lives of individuals in the city.⁹⁰ In addition, the responses of immigrants were shaped by the legacy of their experience in their homelands, regardless of the actual level of anti-Semitism in Scottish society.

Whatever their feelings about their new home, only a small number of immigrants seem to have felt enough for what they had left behind to go back. In his autobiography Glasser describes how the family of his friend returned to Lithuania in the 1920s. His father was motivated by the desire to help build a workers' state.⁹¹ The grandparents of Mrs Abrahams returned to Lithuania after only weeks in Glasgow 'because it was a dreadful country, and nobody was *frum* [i.e. religiously observant] enough for them'.⁹² Clearly, ideological differences existed within the community. There was no broad trend of return to Eastern Europe for religious reasons, but some immigrants did go back for political ones. After the Revolution of February 1917 many Russian Jewish anarchists and socialists in Britain sought to return. An element of compulsion was introduced by the Anglo-Russian Military Convention of July 1917 which required Russian men living in Britain aged between 18 and 41 years to choose between conscription into the British army or returning to Russia for military service.⁹³ According to Kadish the immigrant community in Britain lost 'the radical cream of the Ghetto' as a result.⁹⁴ He located a list of applications for return to Russia under the Convention, which included 500 from Glasgow,⁹⁵ but, as Braber points out, the number that actually left is unknown.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, if male immigrants who were uncommitted to living in Britain had an opportunity to go home, one may assume that those who remained had some commitment to their new life.

A useful parallel can be drawn with non-Jewish Lithuanian immigrants to Scotland. Murdoch Rogers said that, 'Lithuanians established a community with a strong ethnic identity where their language and culture was preserved almost intact.'⁹⁷ As with the Jewish migrants, they were subject to animosity and negative stereotyping from both the trade unions and the local press.⁹⁸ They were split between an apolitical majority and an actively socialist minority. Some scholars have pointed out that the Jewish experience shares some similarities with that of the Muslim community.⁹⁹

A consideration of the distinctiveness of the immigrant experience raises several questions. What sort of relationship did the immigrants want with their non-Jewish neighbours? To what extent did they get it, and how far did language act as a barrier to integration? In her autobiography Evelyn Cowan describes the Jewish community, as Endelman did, as a separate society:

In the 1929–30s era, the Jewish people who lived in the Gorbals of Glasgow were a tight little community. Very few of us lived outside that district. We had our own synagogues, our own meeting places, dance halls, and especially our own type of food-shops. Congregating exclusively with our own kind, we hardly knew Christian people.¹⁰⁰

In order to examine this claim, we need to consider how the first generation of immigrants interacted with their non-Jewish neighbours, and reconstruct their patterns of socialisation.

5. 'A SOCIETY UNTO ITSELF'? SEPARATION AND INTEGRATION:
THE MALE EXPERIENCE

Patterns of sociability were gendered. Outside the workplace, the most obvious arena in which men mixed was the public house, of which there were 130 in the Gorbals during the 1930s.¹⁰¹ However, with the single exception of Mrs Friedlander's father, the fathers of the respondents did not frequent pubs and they generally drank in moderation at home.¹⁰² Mrs Friedlander said that her father drank to fit in with his workmates as he '...wanted to be one of the British boys'.¹⁰³ For both men and women, the home was the site of much of their social interaction with friends and extended family. However, the male members of the Jewish community also spent their free time in the community's own institutions. For some this meant the synagogue. The son of one of the Rothschild Buildings immigrants recalled that his father 'never went to entertainment at all. He didn't go anywhere. His entertainment was the synagogue.'¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Mr Sacks said that, '*Shul* [i.e. synagogue] was my father's life.'¹⁰⁵

The synagogue performed different functions for individuals. Bermant, who arrived in Glasgow from Latvia when he was eight years old, recalled that, 'During my first year in Scotland I was in Glasgow but not quite of it.'¹⁰⁶ This is a good description of the 'structure of feeling' of a migrant who has yet to adjust to their new environment. It raises the question how common this feeling was amongst the immigrants, and also how many of them ever overcame it. During this initial year, Bermant spent a great deal of time in the synagogue because it reminded him of home. 'I was familiar with every tune, for the fathers of Glasgow were the sons of places like Barovke...'¹⁰⁷ It is evident from his description of the synagogue that a small group of men from the community did, in fact, attend daily, using it as a social club as much as a place of worship.¹⁰⁸ Amongst the congregation were 'five or six Yiddish-speaking elders, amongst them my uncle, who came out of habit and belief...'¹⁰⁹ The maintenance of a pattern of behaviour from their previous lives suggests a limited adjustment to their new environment, which was untypical.

More commonly, Jewish men in the Gorbals would attend the Glasgow branch of the Workers' Circle. It was part friendly society, part socialist and trade union meeting place, and also a forum for discussion.¹¹⁰ As one of its leaders put it, 'The Circle as a whole was not only concerned with rates of benefits but it had an eye on the eventual abolition of poverty,

a more equitable system of society and a new social order.’¹¹¹ Thus, the Workers’ Circle did not just provide mutual aid, it also organised political meetings, sometimes in Yiddish.¹¹²

The Glasgow branch of the Workers’ Circle Friendly Society was formed in 1912 in the Gorbals. Although membership figures for the inter-war years are not available, Braber estimates that it must have numbered several hundred.¹¹³ There was considerable growth in membership after 1918, which required the acquisition of club premises and then, in 1934, a move to larger premises in the former public library.¹¹⁴ The Glasgow branch reflected a range of political views in its programme. While the Socialist Zionist movement *Poale Zion* held meetings at the Workers’ Circle, William Gallacher, later a Communist member of parliament, gave a lecture in January 1935 condemning Zionism on the grounds that it had ‘no proletarian content’.¹¹⁵ Despite its Eastern European origins and its significance in the lives of Jewish immigrants, the Workers’ Circle was not an exclusively Jewish organisation. Non-Jews joined the Workers’ Circle either because of their political sympathies, or simply to go dancing on Sundays.¹¹⁶

Glasser highlights the importance of the Workers’ Circle to Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe:

At the Workers’ Circle, over a bakery in Oxford Street near Gorbals Cross, at almost any hour, in clouds of throat-catching cigarette smoke, men sat and reshaped society, as children tirelessly experiment with plasticine or clay. The Circle was a social and political club, union supported, a gathering place for immigrant Jews. It had three rooms and a little kitchen. Two small rooms were for quiet study, committee meetings, English classes, cards; the large room, starkly white-washed, served as a drawing room and open debating chamber, an indoor version of the piazza or village square.... [the men] found consolation, a spiritual refuge from the struggle with the day-to-day world, a place to recharge their dreams.¹¹⁷

Mrs Laski brings out its significance in the daily lives of those who frequented it in less idealistic terms.

Did my father go to the Workers’ Circle?! My father lived in the Workers’ Circle when he wasn’t working! The men... We lived in a two room and kitchen... So after his work, when he came and had his meal... They needed something. They didn’t have televisions... My father went to the Workers’ Circle in the evenings, and he would meet all his friends, and they all played cards in the Workers’ Circle. It was a place for the *Yiddisher* men to meet.¹¹⁸

The Workers’ Circle seems to have been at the centre of the social lives of many men of her father’s generation. As with the synagogue, it performed a variety of functions. Mr Levy also emphasises the social side.

It was a social club, but it was called the Workers’ Circle. It was political in a sense. They were Labour Party minded. It was not that they went up and had meetings up there and discussed Socialism... It was a club for the working Jewish people. A place where they could go and have a game of cards and a game of snooker and a cup of tea... They had theatre

shows sometimes. They had the Jewish theatre sometimes who used to come and my mother could understand that because it was in Yiddish.¹¹⁹

This account somewhat misrepresents the Workers' Circle's activities, which did include organising political meetings, as we saw above. It does make clear, however, that the organisation played a significant social role, and that membership was not confined to those with strongly held political views.

Mr Lipman's father was also a regular attendee at the Workers' Circle, but he had little interest in politics, and did not belong to any political party.¹²⁰ He could also be classed as religiously observant and attended the synagogue on every Sabbath. This suggests that participation in the Workers' Circle was compatible with religious Orthodoxy. Mr Levy's father, another Workers' Circle member, was by contrast a socialist with strong political views and extremely sceptical about religion, although he still attended synagogue.¹²¹ Mrs Greenberg's father was very devout, went to synagogue every Saturday, and also prayed at home regularly. However, this did not prevent him from attending the Workers' Circle because besides being religious, 'He was a union man, thinking about workers' rights and all that.'¹²² Similarly, Mrs Laski's father was a trade unionist as well as being religiously observant. He was one of the founders of the Jewish tailors' union in Glasgow and a Labour Party supporter.¹²³

Many men seem to have divided their time between the Workers' Circle and the synagogue, and the Workers' Circle could accommodate a range of attitudes towards Judaism and politics through an acknowledgement of the basic requirements of religious observance. Mr Levy's description clarifies how this worked in practice: 'The Workers' Circle was more or less a Labour Party. They weren't religious as such, although it was a Jewish organisation and they kept to the Jewish holidays and customs, but religion didn't come into it at all. Religion wasn't even mentioned at the Workers' Circle.'¹²⁴ There was considerable variation in the political views of the immigrants. Not all of the parents of the respondents were involved with the Workers' Circle, and some were apolitical.

The associational life of immigrant men was not entirely confined within their own community, as some belonged to the British Legion or the Freemasons.¹²⁵ The Glasgow Jewish Branch of the British Legion was created in 1925 and by the 1930s it organised an annual memorial service attended by Jewish and non-Jewish servicemen from all over Scotland.¹²⁶ Two of the fathers of the respondents, those of Mr Lipman and Mr Sacks, were members of the British Legion.¹²⁷ Jewish involvement in Freemasonry was part of the general attempt to participate in the associational life of the British middle classes during the nineteenth century, and can thus be seen as a measure of acculturation to Scottish society.¹²⁸

A separate Jewish lodge, Lodge Montefiore, had been created in the nineteenth century.¹²⁹ Although one would not necessarily expect Gorbals residents to be members of a Masonic lodge, Mrs Adler's and Mr Danzig's fathers were Freemasons.¹³⁰ As Mr Danzig says, his father was still unable to read and write: 'He joined a Masonic Lodge in 1925. I've got his papers here. He didn't even sign his name, he just put a cross.'¹³¹ Once again, it is worth noting that language and literacy proved to be less of an obstacle to participation in wider society than one would imagine.

6. 'A SOCIETY UNTO ITSELF'? SEPARATION AND INTEGRATION: THE FEMALE EXPERIENCE

The experiences of women overlapped with those of men to some extent, as they also attended synagogue, the Workers' Circle and other Jewish institutions. However, their social life was shaped by their domestic responsibilities, and centred on the home, the family and the tenement. Shopping offered an additional arena for socialising with both Jewish and non-Jewish neighbours. Cooking was sometimes a communal experience, particularly as Jewish bakeries in the district allowed their ovens to be used by their customers for *cholent*, the stew cooked on the Sabbath. Mrs Laski explains how this worked:

Your mothers used to do all the mixing up of the sponge cake and the biscuits and such like and take them round to *Callenders* the bakers. Everybody took their *cholents* round to the ovens. That was a known thing in the Gorbals. You took everything to *Callenders*... It was a sort of meeting place as well.¹³²

Mrs Adler said that, 'All Jewish people used to put their *cholent* in the bakers' ovens.'¹³³ Although this was not in fact universal, it was evidently very common in the Gorbals during this period.¹³⁴

Such communal practices reinforced the cohesiveness of the Jewish community. The extent of social mixing was determined by the composition of particular tenements and streets. Mrs Adler spent much of her time within her extended family circle, and also happened to live in tenements that were solely occupied by Jewish residents. As a result, she seems to have been one of the least 'integrated' of all the respondents interviewed. She had no non-Jewish friends as a child and apart from her time at school had very little contact with people outside the Jewish community.¹³⁵ Relations between Jewish residents of the Gorbals and their non-Jewish neighbours are not easy to characterise as, although they were often quite friendly, they also involved a certain degree of social distance.

However, friendships could develop between immigrant Jewish women and their non-Jewish neighbours. Mr Goldman described the

close relationship of his mother with a non-Jewish woman who lived nearby:

My mother actually got on very well with people. I don't really know how it started, but there was a Miss Stewart, and she very often saw my mother. They became very friendly, and this Miss Stewart used to invite her in for tea. My mother had a lot of contact with Scottish people even though she couldn't speak English very well. She was very well known.¹³⁶

Mrs Cohen's mother also developed a friendship with one of her non-Jewish neighbours in the tenement, Mrs Campbell. Her relations with other neighbours were good, but Mrs Campbell was the only one with whom she exchanged visits at home. The two families got to know each other quite well.¹³⁷ In contrast, both Mrs Danzig and Mr Sacks said that, despite maintaining good relations with non-Jewish neighbours and shopkeepers, their mothers had limited contact with non-Jewish residents of the Gorbals.¹³⁸ Some immigrant women did not even seem to have had this limited interaction, as the following account from Mrs Friedlander demonstrates. This passage also highlights just how strange and hostile their surroundings could appear to immigrant women, even years after they arrived in Scotland:

My mother was just a housewife, and she was always nervous about going out. She only went shopping. She didn't socialise, and there was always this fear of the police until she was here for a number of years, and then she would say to me, 'If anything happens go to a policeman,' but when she arrived here she was afraid of the uniform.¹³⁹

These accounts demonstrate considerable variation in the degree of interaction between immigrant women and their non-Jewish neighbours. They also suggest that language did not act as an insurmountable barrier to social mixing. It is thus important not to exaggerate the isolation of immigrant women from the wider community. However, some immigrant women clearly experienced an ongoing struggle with their new environment, and also consciously distanced themselves from their non-Jewish neighbours because of the widespread fear of intermarriage.

7. THE *BEITZIMMER*, THE *GOYIM* AND THE SPECTRE OF
'MARRYING OUT'

Alongside the examples of friendly relations between Jews and non-Jews cited above, some quite derogatory attitudes towards non-Jews also existed. This was particularly true of those characterised as *beitzimmer* (a term used to describe 'rough' or 'common' non-Jewish people).¹⁴⁰ As Mr Levy puts it: 'We lived in a world of our own, the Jewish people. There was the

Jewish people and the Goyim. If they were really bad Goyim, they were *beitzimmers*. We kept ourselves together because we had no choice.¹⁴¹ As Mrs Cohen makes clear, the Jewish community saw themselves as distinct from, and superior to, those people that they classified as belonging to this group: ‘Most of the Jewish people thought of themselves as middle-class although they were really more working-class, and most of them were very poor. They were middle-class in that they were more respectable in the way they dressed and they didn’t drink heavily or get into gang fights to the same degree. So they would look at the middle-class and say “They’re not *beitzimmer*.” So they would want to identify themselves with these type of people [i.e. middle-class people].¹⁴² There is a clear class element to the term. It denotes a perceived division between the Jewish community and some other Gorbals residents, perhaps corresponding to the divide between the ‘rough’ and the ‘respectable’ working class in British society, but also constituting a marker of ethnic division.

The quest for ‘respectability’ and identification with the middle class manifested itself in various ways, most notably in the desire to leave the Gorbals itself. Glasser describes the drive to ‘escape the ghetto’ felt by his generation in the inter-war years.¹⁴³ Bermant says that, by the outbreak of the Second World War, the suburb of Giffnock five miles southwest of the city centre had become ‘the local Jerusalem’.¹⁴⁴ After the war, the Jewish population continued to leave for the southern suburbs of Glasgow, leaving a remnant of the old immigrant population in the Gorbals.¹⁴⁵ Bermant’s own sojourn in the Gorbals was fairly brief, as the family moved to the Battlefield district three miles from the city centre on the south side of the city not long after their arrival in Glasgow.¹⁴⁶ Collins points out that ‘the major drift southwards from the Gorbals’ can in fact be dated from the early 1930s.¹⁴⁷ The exodus of the Jewish population from the Gorbals was part of a broader redistribution of the population of Glasgow during the inter-war years: the result of a housing policy that aimed to move people from the old inner-city areas to new local authority housing schemes.¹⁴⁸ The 15 respondents all left the Gorbals between 1934 and 1951 and although they cite a variety of reasons, they generally expressed a desire for better housing. Mrs Greenberg’s family was the first to move away in 1934, but her explanation is typical of the other responses. She said that the family left: ‘To better ourselves. We were getting a house with a bathroom, hot water and a garden.’¹⁴⁹ There was clearly an element of social aspiration involved in the decision to leave the community for both Jewish and non-Jewish residents.

Although attitudes towards associating with non-Jewish people varied, the spectre of intermarriage hung over the Gorbals. For the first

generation of immigrants, interaction between Jews and non-Jews was always intended to preclude any sexual relations and intermarriage between the two groups. For Orthodox Jews, it is taboo to marry a non-Jewish person, and considerable pressure was exerted on the second generation to remain within the faith. Indeed, it was common for parents to ‘sit *shiva*’ (go into mourning) for children who married out of the faith during the period covered by this article.

In some cases, the fear of intermarriage manifested itself in reluctance to allow contact between children and their non-Jewish contemporaries. Mrs Abrahams remembered that her father forbade her from seeing her closest friend solely because she was not Jewish:

I got ready to go out, and my father said, ‘Where are you going?’ I said, ‘I’m going to meet [Peggy].’ He said, ‘Oh no, you’re not.’ I said, ‘Why not?’ He said, ‘Because she’s not Yiddish, you’re not going.’ I said, ‘But she’s my best friend.’ ‘No, you’re not going.’ And he was such a quiet, mild man, and he was insistent that I wouldn’t go. So there you are.¹⁵⁰

Her mother also sought to prevent her from mixing with non-Jewish contemporaries, even if this meant limiting her educational opportunities. ‘I asked to go to Art College. My mother said no, too many *Goyim* [i.e. non-Jews] there, and that’s how life was.’¹⁵¹ Although such attitudes were not universal, there was a general reluctance to allow social mixing on the part of the Jewish community.

Mrs Greenberg distinguished her family from the other Jewish families in the district: ‘I know that there were Jewish people, if you mentioned such and such a person they would say, “They weren’t Jewish, don’t have anything to do with them,” and so on. We were a very tolerant family to anybody, though.’¹⁵² However, she follows this assertion of her family’s ‘tolerance’ with a description of her father’s intolerance of non-Jewish suitors: ‘And once I remember going out with a non-Jewish fellow and my father was annoyed with me, and he said to me, “Why are you going out with that non-Jewish fellow?” I said, “It’s just a date. You meet somebody at the dancing, and you go out with them and that.” He said, “Well, I don’t like it. I prefer you to go out with *Yiddisher* boys. I don’t care if he’s black, white or yellow. As long as he’s *Yiddish*, I don’t care about colour.” Fortunately, I married a *Yiddisher* fellow.’¹⁵³ To take a further example, as a result of both parental pressure and her own religious beliefs, Mrs Adler never even considered dating non-Jewish boys as a teenager. As she put it: ‘What was the point? My parents would have murdered me!’¹⁵⁴

Mrs Laski’s account of the attitude of her father towards his children ‘marrying out’ is particularly notable given his own choice of spouse, and indicates just how resilient this attitude was. Mrs Laski’s mother was a

non-Jewish Glaswegian woman: she and her husband were married against the express wishes of both sets of parents.¹⁵⁵ Mrs Laski also cited other examples of Jewish men of her father's generation marrying non-Jewish women, one of whom lived in her tenement, although she adds that it was still unusual at this time.¹⁵⁶ In fact, the number of mixed marriages in Glasgow was on the increase by the 1930s, so Mrs Laski's parents were part of an emerging trend.¹⁵⁷ Despite having married a non-Jewish woman himself, her father sought to prevent his own children from doing the same thing. When Mrs Laski's sister married a non-Jewish man he would not initially allow her to visit the family home, and appeared to never really reconcile himself to his daughter's choice of husband, although he did not go as far as sitting *shiva* for her.¹⁵⁸

8. FROM GREENBERG TO GREEN

The process of 'variegated acculturation' is perfectly illustrated by a consideration of the family names that the immigrants chose to use. Common Jewish surnames have been used as pseudonyms throughout this article. In reality, several of the interviewees have anglicised surnames, adopted after arrival in Britain. This either entailed a shortening of the original (e.g. from Greenberg to Green), or the adoption of an English approximation (e.g. Kranz to Craig). Of the families of the respondents, six retained their original surname. The remainder were altered after arrival in this country, although the circumstances were not always clear. Immigration officials were sometimes held responsible. Harry Diamond offers a typical account in his autobiography: 'My father's family name was Chatzkind, not Diamond. That came from the fascia board of a shop at their port of entry to Britain. An immigration officer who couldn't understand what they were saying bestowed the name on them. My father couldn't tell me what port it was.'¹⁵⁹

However, the fathers of two of the respondents chose to alter their surnames themselves, and both adopted very typical British names.¹⁶⁰ This fact is not remarkable in itself, and again it is difficult to ascertain the precise motivation. It could be an attempt to 'fit in' or, alternatively, a means of reducing anti-Semitism towards the family. The families who changed their names were not necessarily those who seemed most attracted to British culture. It was noted above that Mrs Friedlander's father was unusual in being a regular visitor to the local pubs. This desire to 'fit in' with his environment did not extend to altering his surname, however, even though many of his contemporaries chose to change theirs. Individuals seemed to be governed by contradictory impulses that led to diverse responses to migration: not only lacking any

consistent pattern, but even any internal consistency in particular individuals.

9. CONCLUSION: *CHOLENT* POT OR MELTING POT?

The Jewish community of the Gorbals cannot be described in terms of either ‘assimilation’ or ‘separation’. Existing definitions of ‘integration’ do not encompass the particular acculturation strategy adopted by this group of immigrants. The concept of ‘variegated acculturation’ has been coined here to describe a particular stage in the development of this immigrant community. This term indicates the diversity of immigrant responses, which were shaped by the circumstances that they encountered on their arrival in Britain. They defined themselves in relation to the community they lived in, and their self-image was created as a response to their perception of the social divisions within this community. This experience was not in any way unified, although the Jewish community was essentially able to act as a collectivity due to a shared ethnic and religious identity. This is consistent with the sociological insight that ‘community provides not so much a model, but more an expedient medium for the expression of very diverse interests and aspirations’.¹⁶¹

The Jewish immigrant community was divided in terms of gender, politics and attitudes towards their non-Jewish neighbours, although the immigrants shared a more-or-less universal aversion to intermarriage. Between c.1890 and c.1945 it was neither a melting pot in which there was unrestricted association between those of different ethnicities, nor a *cholent* pot (i.e. a totally separate community). It contained elements of both, as it was a transitional community in which the immigrants were able to enact a version of the lives that they had left behind that sustained them both materially and spiritually while they adjusted to their new lives; however, they were also subject to external influences that pointed to the eventual dissolution of the community itself, and to the much closer integration of the second generation into Scottish society. During the course of this discussion some comparisons have been made that are suggestive of the need for further research in this area. The analysis offered here could also be applied to other immigrant communities that sought to maintain a similar balance between ethnic distinctiveness and the culture of the host community.

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FRENCH AND GERMAN ABSTRACTS

«A Glasgow, mais pas tout à fait»? Les immigrants d'Europe de l'Est dans une communauté juive provinciale de 1890 à 1945 environ

Cet article repose sur une série d'autobiographies et d'interviews qui permettent d'explorer les modes de vie de la première génération d'un groupe d'immigrants juifs, ici au sein d'une communauté juive provinciale – quartier des Gorbals à Glasgow – entre 1890 et 1945. L'expérience vécue par cette première génération d'immigrants se caractérise par une grande diversité, contrairement à ce que connut la seconde génération. Ainsi, ni le terme d'«assimilation» ni celui de «séparation» ne peuvent s'appliquer à cette communauté. Il a fallu forger une autre expression qui corresponde à la diversité des expériences que ces immigrants traversèrent: c'est une «acculturation panachée» qui permet de tenir compte de la complexité des parcours de vie.

„In aber nicht ganz aus Glasgow“? Osteuropäische jüdische Einwanderer in einer jüdischen Gemeinde von ca. 1890 bis ca. 1945

Dieser Beitrag nutzt Autobiographien und Zeitzeugeninterviews, um die Lebensweise der ersten Generation von Einwanderern in einer einzelnen jüdischen Gemeinde – Gorbals in Glasgow – zwischen 1890 und 1945 zu untersuchen. Die Erfahrungen dieser Einwanderergeneration waren in einem Maße unterschiedlich geprägt, wie es in der zweiten Generation nicht mehr gegeben war. Diese jüdische Gemeinde lässt sich daher mit den Begriffen „Assimilation“ oder „Abspaltung“ nicht fassen. Stattdessen wird als alternative Beschreibung der Begriff der „vielfältigen Akkulturation“ verwendet, um die komplexe Lebenswelt der Einwanderer einzufangen.