

Continuity and Change: The Jewish Experience in Winnipeg's North End, 1900 - 1914*

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Résumé

Pour les sociologues concernés par le phénomène de changement social, le processus de l'immigration et de l'affiliation ethnique continue de leur fournir des aperçus inappréciables dans le champ de la dynamique des relations sociales.

Le changement, tel que plaidé par des idéologues libéraux fut incorporé à un modèle dit "modèle de diffusion" et par lequel on pouvait prédire que des immigrants, au contact d'un processus industriel permanent seraient assimilés au sein de la culture nationale prédominante. L'assimilation devint donc un thème familier. D'après Oscar Handlin, l'immigration est un phénomène de déracinement d'un environnement et de traditions auxquels les gens sont habitués et qui se trouvent projetés dans un milieu et un mode de vie qui leur est sinon étrange voire curieux.

De nos jours, l'assimilation a donné lieu à la naissance d'idéologies nouvelles axées sur des thèmes tels que: le "multiculturalisme", le "pluralisme", etc. . . . appuyant l'idée selon laquelle la pérennité de la culture se poursuit comme étant le thème dominant de toute interaction sociale.

Selon William Ogburn: ". . . Il y a assurément de la résistance qui s'oppose au changement comme tout réformateur moderne pourrait en témoigner".

De nos jours, les théoriciens de la sociologie admettent de plus en plus le fait que "changement" et "continuité" ou en d'autres termes "classe" et "ethnité" peuvent et doivent exister de façon simultanée.

D'un point de vue très général et radical, Daniel Chirot dira que: "Il

*Paper presented to the 14th Annual Northern Great Plains History Conference — October 11 - 13th, 1979. University of Winnipeg.

n'est pas juste de dire que le développement met un terme aux divisions ethniques . . .”

Dans ce document, l'auteur se penchera sur l'analyse des processus du changement et de la continuité et mettra l'accent sur ces problèmes en prenant à titre d'exemple une communauté bien précise afin d'illustrer l'élaboration de son étude: la classe des travailleurs de la communauté juive du Winnipeg's North End.

For social scientists concerned with the phenomenon of social change, the process of immigration and ethnic affiliation continues to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of social relationships. Generally, two dominant themes have emerged focusing upon change and continuity as explanatory models for immigrant behaviour. Change, as advocated by liberal ideologists, was incorporated into a 'diffusion' model, a model which predicted that immigrants, upon contact with an ongoing industrial process would eventually be assimilated into the dominant national culture. Assimilation, therefore, became a familiar theme. One writer stated emphatically: "Traditional societal habits and customs seldom fitted into the patterns of industrial life, and they had to be discredited as hindrances to progress". As a result, it was incumbent upon the nation state as Guttman pointed out,¹ to regularly absorb and transform "new groups of pre-industrial peoples". A defender of this position, Oscar Handlin in *The Uprooted* saw the immigrant plight in this way:

Emigration took these people out of traditional, accustomed environments and replanted them in strange ground, among strangers, where strange manners prevailed. The customary modes of behaviour were no longer adequate, for the problems of life were new and different. With old ties snapped, men faced the enormous compulsion of working out new relationships, new meanings to their lives, often under harsh and hostile circumstances.²

The assimilatory theme was staunchly advanced by Marxists as well, asserting that class was far more relevant to a capitalist, industrial society than narrow parochial concerns. However, the policy of assimilation and the hopes for homogenization of North America's diverse population have now been called into question as ethnic cohesiveness and ethnic cultures continue to flourish and some even to grow. Today, assimilation has given way to new themes such as 'multi-culturalism', 'pluralism', etc., giving support to a growing body of evidence that continuity of culture continues as a dominant theme of all social interaction. In his work on culture lag, William Ogburn notes that: "The persistence of culture at times appears

so strong that it seems as though culture actually resists change. There certainly is resistance to change, as any modern reformer will testify".³

Patterns of continuity among immigrant ethnic groups became particularly clear with the growth and emphasis upon social history. Since then, the ordinary working people, the immigrant and his community of interaction has gained status. This intense investigation has brought into clear focus the patterns of continuity of life styles, social relationships and structures often more reminiscent of the old than of the new. For Gutman, "An analytic model that distinguishes between culture and society reveals that even in a period of radical economic change powerful social continuities and adaptations continued to shape the historical behaviour of diverse working class behaviour".⁴ And, although one cannot deny E. P. Thompson's contention that "there is no such thing as economic growth which is not, at the same time growth or change of a culture", it was also Thompson who cautioned that "we should not assume any automatic, or overdirect correspondence between the dynamic of economic growth and the dynamic of social or cultural life".⁵

Today, social theorists are more and more recognizing that both themes — change and continuity — that is class and ethnicity, can and do exist simultaneously. Therefore, an analysis of any society must necessarily account not only for stability and continuity, but also for conflict and change, that is, the transformation of a society and its culture. Both sets of relationships must be dealt with for both continuity and change are but two facets of an ongoing social process. This duality was more recently elaborated by Daniel Chirot in his book *Social Change in the Twentieth Century*. Analyzing conflicts, particularly ethnic and national conflicts, from a global perspective and using a radical mode, Chirot finds that: "It is not correct to state that development [change] ends ethnic divisions, not as long as there exists a culturally based division of labor in which certain culturally defined groups continue to occupy only certain economic positions."⁶

From a Canadian perspective, this dual theme of continuity and change was strongly expressed by Marsden and Harvey in a new study, *Fragile Federation; Social Change in Canada*. They conclude that:

. . . Marx has provided us with an analysis of the emergence of industrial capitalism societies and the significance of class conflict in social change. Still, as we have seen in our analysis of social change in Canada, to focus on the dynamics of class relations alone is to lose much of the complexity and dynamic richness of social change in this nation. Canadians have class interests, that is not denied. We do suggest however, that in many instances interests of region or interest of language or

ethnicity are more directly relevant to people, are more likely to form the basic identity of group consciousness of people, and, as such, are more likely to operate as the principle catalyst of change.⁷

With processes of change and continuity as our theme, this paper will focus in upon one immigrant ethnic community so that we can more readily examine these dual processes in interaction. While this duality was general to all immigrant communities, it is our contention that the Jewish community in Winnipeg's north end — the working class community — has provided a microcosm which more clearly demonstrates these dual patterns. While there were powerful forces within this community that sought to maintain continuity with the past, there was also a growing element that sought to change and redirect it to the new. Essentially, by studying one particular group, by revealing the nature of a given part, as Handlin has pointed out, perhaps we will be better equipped to "throw light upon the essence of the whole".⁸ Furthermore, by studying the Jewish community, Robert E. Park, an American sociologist, found that the Jews everywhere "tend to be more sensitive to the trends in the larger society than others and that as a result they often anticipate the general cultural patterns of the future".⁹ A parallel to the Canadian scene can similarly be drawn. By studying the Jewish community in Winnipeg's north end, one can learn a "lesson not only about Jews but also about the nature of Canada itself".¹⁰ Second only to the Anglo Saxons, the Jewish community during the first two decades of this century was not only instrumental in shaping Winnipeg's multi-ethnic character, but played a dominant role in developing the unique qualities that have become characteristic to the north end of Winnipeg. The scope of this paper is confined to the period 1900 - 1920 as the period of intense Jewish immigration to the north end of Winnipeg, the period when Jewish communal life was crystallized and its structures determined. By 1920 the essential patterns had been established and thereafter provided the community with its tone and character.

This paper will examine two areas of interaction: Jewish cultural life and the effects of the public schools as the prime socialization agent of social change. These areas have been selected because they clearly expose the interrelationship between the dual processes of change and continuity. A brief review of Winnipeg's north end, as a ghetto community, will be undertaken. This is essential, since social relationships, Parks noted, have, as well, a spatial dimension and are 'inevitably correlated'.

In Winnipeg of 1902, one observer worried about the tide of 'foreigners' inundating the city, consequently disturbing the "homogeneity of Canada's population" strongly urged that "they had best be shoved into ghettos like Winnipeg's North End".¹¹ By the turn of the century, Winnipeg's north end ghetto was operational and rapidly acquiring a distinctiveness since recognized throughout Canada. Since each area in the city was "suited for some functions better than any other",¹² the north end became the repository of the 'poor and the homeless', the 'alien and the foreigner'. And, as if the medieval walls were in place, the ghetto swallowed up its inhabitants, walled them off from the larger community and forgot them, 'the strangers within our gates'.

The main physical barrier to the north end was the C.P.R. tracks. For many 'north-enders', the C.P.R. subway became the barrier separating them from the rest of the city. This isolation was not only a physical fact but became a symbolic class barrier that separated the 'north-end working class' from the 'rich south-enders'. This division was frequently stressed in the Jewish community. In several articles, Hestrin, the editor of *The Israelite Press* called for 'peace' and for unity amongst the Jewish community.

First, there exists a subway which divides us into two parts, south end and north end. We did not build it but the mighty C.P.R. did and not for this purpose, that Winnipeg should be divided. But see how we are divided — the south end from the north end Jews when we meet together.¹³

This north-south split produced a situation whereby those on "the wrong side of the tracks grew up in complete awareness of how the other half lived".¹⁴ By its very nature, the ghetto effectively walled off, controlled and limited class interaction. For many, the isolation of the immigrant working class was complete, the ghetto became their total experience, their total reality. In this way, Winnipeg's elites were able to create their life styles without scrutiny, without guilt, while the ghetto dwellers had virtually no points of reference whereby they could compare their life styles to others. For Gray, this isolation was clear. "Those in the North End Ghetto know no more about life among the Anglo-Saxon rich than the latter did about life among the ghetto poor".¹⁵

In essence, "Winnipeg became two distinct cities" as Tom Peterson pointed out.¹⁶ The ghetto became a city within a city. Although inextricably tied to the metropol, by the turn of the century the ghetto was evolving its own institutions and structures that went beyond merely the geographic. Now it was a multi-dimensional community organized along

religious, cultural, economic, political, social and educational lines. More often, these were the replicas of organizations and institutions that they had transported with them.

Isolated from the mainstream of society, faced with a hostile environment, unable to speak the language or to comprehend the dominant Anglo-Saxon, Protestant mores, immigrants found a haven in this enforced isolation, "a refuge among their own kind".¹⁷ It was here in the ghetto that their traditions, their culture and their life-styles again came alive. Forming their own distinctive enclaves within the ghetto community, the immigrants of the north end sought to recreate their own habitat. Bound together by a common geography, the East European immigrants again found their own country-men, their *landsmen*. These often included the Jews fleeing from Czarist pogroms, the Mennonites — also fleeing from persecution, the Poles, the Russians, the Galicians and the Ukrainians.

From a meagre beginning of 21 in 1881, the Jewish community quickly grew, absorbing the streams of pogrom victims, so that by 1911 it constituted the second largest ethnic group in the city. By 1912, the north end had gathered together 60% of all Germans, 86% of all Ukrainians, 84% of all Jews in Winnipeg.¹⁸ Mr. Smiler a newly arrived immigrant, recalled this tremendous diversity within the north end and the familiar continuation of relations well established in the old country:

When the Jewish immigrant came to Western Canada, he found a strange world. He found his old neighbor, the Russian or Ukrainian peasant in their familiar clothing driving a pair of oxen. He found their familiar straw covered huts with the brick bake-ovens. It did not take long for the Jew to recognize that his Russian or Ukrainian or German was more important to him than his English. The Russian or Ukrainian or German looked to the Jewish storekeeper or peddler for it was the Jew who was able to discuss their daily needs in their language. The Jew, therefore, sought to reside in those areas where the language was familiar. In Winnipeg, these factors were clearly recognizable. The Winnipeg Jewish street was so much Jewish that one thinks it could be Lituania or in the Ukraine. The Jewish community remained ingrained with the spirit of the "old home".¹⁹

For the Jews, the ghetto was a familiar habitat, extending back into Jewish history to 1084 in Germany. Since then it has played a vital role in Jewish experience for "no medieval institution moulded the Jew more than the ghetto".²⁰ As an institution, the ghetto was all encompassing, regulating and controlling the social, cultural and religious life of its members. In Winnipeg's north end, the Jew again experienced the intimate, informal spontaneous relationships, the strong kinship ties that had been the basis of earlier ghetto life. Essentially, it is this kind of

milieux that Breton, in his work on “Institutional Completeness” found essential for the newly arrived immigrant whose initial need is to “reconstruct his inter-personal field”.²¹ It was here in the ghetto that group solidarity was re-established. As Gutman stressed: “Strong familial and kin ties made possible the transmission and adaptation of European working class cultural patterns and beliefs to industrializing America”.²² While Jews came with the expectation that their ghetto experience was a relic of the past, instead they found that they had replaced one ghetto for another. The medieval ghetto had indeed been left behind in the old country, only to appear again in the new world.

Finally, it was in the ghetto that the immigrant was first introduced and ‘fitted’ into a capitalist social structure — a process that wrought tremendous painful adjustments for the first generation of proletariats to industrialization. Of peasant background (in 1907, 85% of East Europeans were rural)²³ the largest proportion of East Europeans were transplanted from a pre-industrial society, bringing with them experiences unsuited to the demands of an industrial production.

Due to specific socio-historic experiences, the Jews often showed greater flexibility and more diverse skills than their East European neighbors, having been involved in and experienced with the growth of Europe’s industrialization, urbanization and migration processes. Although some Jews came prepared and did become farmers, the vast majority of Jews flocked into the cities prepared to make a living at whatever occupations were open to them. The overwhelming majority were firmly entrenched within the working class and were occupied in many diverse pursuits, primarily in light industry. They found work as painters, tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, tinsmiths, hat makers, furriers, and, of course, as factory workers, particularly in the needle trade industry. The unskilled found their way into heavy industry and worked as track layers, hydro linemen, in slaughter houses, on the railway and in construction.²⁴ Others, within the lower middle class, turned to petty trade and became peddlars and the storekeepers and operated family clothing shops. Over time, there developed a reciprocal relationship between social class, ethnicity and the community in which these elements interacted. This community in Winnipeg was the north end, the symbolic home of the working class, where the East European immigrant became predominant.

Jewish Culture in Winnipeg’s North End

The whole of my life was centred within the cultural and educational work . . . Every young person who participated in such organizations, spiritually benefitted from it

and became imbued with the love of . . . art, drama and song. The influence of the Reading Hall was extraordinary and left indelible impressions on those who participated in its cultural treasury.²⁵

This was the assessment of one immigrant who grew up in the cultural milieu of Winnipeg's north end working class. Contrary to middle class, Anglo-Saxon stereotypes, which depicted the immigrant as 'uncultured', suffering from cultural deprivation (as depicted by the *Manitoba Free Press*, April 1, 1892), many of the north end inhabitants enjoyed a culture that displayed a vitality, a vigor and a variety which provided them with both spiritual and intellectual stimulation. Although most suffered from material deprivation, the immigrants brought with them an extensive cultural heritage of ancient traditions, a heritage at times far older and richer than the one they encountered upon arrival. In their homes and through the numerous voluntary cultural organizations that they founded, their culture was given expression. Here in the north end, the immigrant found again an environment not unfamiliar to that of the old home where they could interact with their own kind, where they were able to speak their own language, where they could feel comfortable in their 'old country' dress and where they had a set of common values and behaviour patterns to guide them. From their cultural heritage, they derived a dignity, a sense of belonging and a sense of continuity not accorded them by the dominant community.

While Ogburn argued that cultures — that is the continuation of patterns of thought and behaviour passed on from one generation to the next — tend toward the static even though non-material cultural, i.e. technology, is rapidly changing, in a more recent study Raymond Williams found that a society at any given historic period contains not only the dominant culture — which Marx refers to as "the ruling ideas of the ruling class" — but simultaneously exhibits both 'residual' and 'emergent' cultures". 'Residual' culture, according to Williams, is that culture which maintains the heritage of a 'previous social formation', one which continues to affect the thought and behaviour patterns of a segment of contemporary society.²⁶ Others have found that turning to the past or to the 'residual' for inspiration is more frequent than we suppose. For "under rapidly changing national conditions, intellectuals frequently search the past for suggestive ideas to solutions of new problems".²⁷ However utilized, persistence and continuation of 'residual cultures' continue to have an input into all societies. 'Emergent' culture is defined by Williams as either 'alternative' or 'oppositional' to the dominant culture stream.

While the 'alternative' stream seeks to find different life styles, isolated from the larger society, i.e. the hippie subculture, the 'oppositional' culture contends that this can only be achieved by radically changing the society, i.e. Marxists, and the New Left. In this larger framework of Williams, continuity and change are constantly interacting and interrelating. Culture, in this way, is seen as a continuing on-going process.

Perhaps the evolution of Jewish culture can illustrate best this dynamic relationship between culture and society, between continuity and change. For by the 18th century, the feudal economic order was giving way to the first stages of capitalism. Europe was experiencing "an age of rationalism", an intense intellectual activity, producing a new prodigious Renaissance".²⁸ Jews were not to get caught up in this ferment until the mid 18th century when Jews were being slowly ushered into the intellectual and aesthetic life of the European world. This initial impetus gave rise in the 19th century to the Haskalah movement (Enlightenment), a cultural renaissance that for the first time introduced secularism into Jewish thought. As a middle class movement, the Haskalah had a "profound and enduring impact on the life and times of their people and their civilization".²⁹ One of its important aspects was its emphasis on spreading education and enlightenment to the Jewish masses enmeshed in the superstitions and parochialism of the ghetto. Thereby, secular Jewish culture and education, with Hebrew as its language of expression, came into existence. It was this movement that paved the way for socialist thought in Jewish life toward the end of the 19th century. Now unfettered by religious and parochial traditionalism, large numbers of Jews embraced socialism as the panacea for all their social ills. Yiddish, as opposed to Hebrew, became not only the cultural vehicle of the vast majority of Jews, but for the first time, the language of instruction. Its strongest adherents were in East Europe. The culture that was subsequently developed was rich and vibrant, expressing the centuries of pain and suffering of the ordinary labouring Jews. Moreover, this cultural renaissance — a dramatic departure from the hegemony of religious orthodoxy — was a synthesis between class and ethnicity, between the continuation of Judaism and radicalism. This synthesis became, thereafter, the basis of Jewish socialist thought throughout North America. It was this cultural baggage — the old and the new — the orthodox, the secular, and the radical — which was brought to Winnipeg's North End. It was these two strains — change and continuity — that was most distinctive in the culture of Winnipeg's Jewish community.

However, it was not continuity maintaining or preserving the old that became problematical to this first generation of immigrants, but its very opposite. Their greatest perceived challenge was how to adjust to changes of the new socio-economic conditions. Toward this goal, their cultural organizations played a decisive role. It was within these organizations that the immigrants were first introduced to and linked with the larger community. It was here that they confronted numerous problems such as unemployment, poverty, overcrowding, sickness, discrimination, prejudice, etc. and it was here that they evolved their own solutions. The North End proliferated with numerous mutual aid societies, self-help organizations, i.e. Hebrew Sick Benefit Association. Whether these were affiliated with their synagogues or through cultural, secular organizations through the numerous 'landsmanschaften', i.e. Kiever, Babrover, Nikoliever, etc., organizational life became a vital component of Jewish life, both as a necessary adaptation to new economic conditions, as well as the continuation of their historic identity.

In this milieu, numbers of synagogues, Jewish schools, theatres and halls began to make their appearance soon after the turn of the century. Winnipeg's landscape slowly began to change, exhibiting the variety of architecture, both in form and in content, that was peculiar to the people of the North End. As Hershfield recalled: "The area abounded in synagogues and shtebelach (small private)". The attachment to a particular Shule was described nostalgically in this way:

This nostalgia of attachment lingers with me to this day, and as I pass frequently this corner, unforgettable memories come to mind . . . The Adas Yeshurun Synagogue was like home to me. On my way to and from school, I would go in and warm myself at the stove . . . and often on Saturday afternoons I would sit on the bench outside with the men, warming ourselves in the late afternoon sun. I would listen to their stories and tales of 'der alter heim' (the old country), of their difficulties in the shtetle (village), of how they 'geganvet dem grenitz' (smuggled across the border) . . . and always the complaint that their children were not following in the ways of their elders.³⁰

Increasingly, the religious elements felt threatened with the growth of the socialist movement and with the influx and influence in North America of Jewish radicals after the failure of the 1905 Russian Revolution. From then on, the Jewish community was infused with an ideological dimension that often shattered its earlier monolithic character. Thereafter, both the 'left' and the 'right' sought to gain influence within the community. Each faction vied with each other in establishing their own drama groups,

*Landsmanchaften — organizations based on the towns or cities of the immigrant's origin.

libraries, literary circles, choirs, dance groups, newspapers, parochial schools, etc. with the result that culture in one form or another reached into almost every home and heart in the north end.

The Jewish community was divided into three major streams, streams that were endemic to their European experience. From the Biblical era, religion was carried forward as a dominant stream bringing with it the continuity of the past, while Zionism and socialism, the two major ideologies, developed toward the end of the 19th century. Within each division, there were further emergent cultures. The religious stream began to evolve into orthodox and reform minded elements, the latter eventually emerging with the Conservatives. The Zionists were divided into the labor or socialist-Zionists, i.e. the Poale Zion and Socialist Territorialists, and the General Zionists. The latter became the dominant wing, while the Mizrahi came to express the religious aspect of Zionism. Similarly, Jewish socialists had their divisions. Here were to be found the revolutionary Marxists (Internationalists), the Moderates (Nationalists) and the Anarchists. For a time all three factions were united within the Arbeiter Ring (Workmen's Circle). Each division quickly developed its own culture, its own sphere of influence, its class affiliates and its schools. For example, the religious community founded the Talmud Torah in 1907. It was also backed by the General Zionist community. The Labour Zionists organized the Jewish Radical School in May, 1914. It was renamed the I. L. Peretz School in 1915, the name it retains today, while Marxists founded the Arbeiter Ring Shule in 1921, later named the Liberty Temple.

Within a very short time, Winnipeg's Jewish community became renowned throughout North America as a 'cultural oasis' providing an example and a leadership to all of Canada. Rabbi Chiel's recollections of Winnipeg maintained that: "It was a Yiddishe Shtot (Jewish city) unlike any that I had contact with in the United States".³¹ Jewish newspapers, at first *The Israelite Press*, and later *The Jewish Post* proudly announced the various activities that were being offered. The response of Winnipeg's Jewry was an overwhelming enthusiasm with reports of 400 - 600 people attending lectures, concerts, operas, etc. The period between 1908 - 1920 was a time of intense socio-political, cultural, educational and religious activity, responding to the needs of the tremendous influx of immigrants and the ferment within the country at this time.

Several examples can perhaps best indicate this cultural vitality within the Jewish community. Among its greatest cultural achievements, drama

reached the hearts of the immigrant Jew more deeply than any other cultural expression. Here they combined both laughter and tears, education and entertainment, a continuation of old themes while introducing the new. Here on stage one could choose historic themes, comedies of Jewish life with a 'real folk spirit', the estrangement of the newcomer in the new country, families breaking up and children turning from their parents as well as "the senseless scramble for money".³²

Jewish theatre was introduced in Winnipeg for the first time in 1902, beginning with amateurs. The Yiddish Drama Group was first organized by the Poale Zion in 1906, staging numerous plays with "social content" for a large appreciative audience. Later, Jewish theatre incorporated both amateurs and professionals, eventually the very finest Jewish theatre companies were imported from the United States. By 1917, popular demand had increased to the point where a building was purchased on Selkirk Avenue. The Queen's Theatre was to provide Winnipeggers with "good Jewish theatre".³³ The magic of the hours spent here was recalled by one young admirer:

The Queen's Theatre . . . what a delightful place it was. It brought the world of make believe and fantasy to people daily absorbed in their labors and in their problems. Depicted on the stage were various facets of Jewish life . . . But the plays always left a sense of promise and hope for the future . . . It was because of their efforts (promoters of the theatre) that people were able to see such renowned Jewish actors as Shilkraut, Adler, Schwartz, Moishe Oysher, Grossman, Molly Picon and the like.³⁴

In the political life of the community, renowned personalities from Europe and America were frequent guests in Winnipeg. These included, for example, anarchists Rudolph Rocker and Emma Goldman. In his autobiography *The London Years*, Rocker later described the Jewish audience of 1913: "There was a good intelligent Jewish public in Winnipeg, and I felt very happy among them. I stayed in Winnipeg a whole month. I delivered twelve lectures there, on social subjects, economic questions and literary themes. The discussions that followed were extremely interesting".³⁵ Indeed, it was not an uncommon occurrence for discussions to grow heated particularly amongst the growing radical community. Views were strongly held and defended. One labor Zionist lecture in 1906, by Bella Pevsner of New York, indicated the ferment, the vitality and the strong idealism of all radicals — Jews included. The discussion became so argumentative between extremists and moderates that "the lady fainted in the middle of her lecture, and thankfully recovered just in time to finish her speech".³⁶

In time, a new culture was being created, side by side with the traditional. For the first time in Jewish experience, a vigorous secular culture was being created by the immigrant worker himself, a culture which mirrored his pain and his degradation as he was first introduced into the industrial work place in North America. The degradation of the factory system, where Jews were prominent, was eloquently depicted by four Jewish proletarian writers living in the United States who became renowned throughout the world, their poems translated into other languages, as well. Wherever Yiddish was spoken, workers gained inspiration and courage from their militancy. These poets were Morris Rosenfeld (1862 - 1932); David Edelstadt (1886 - 1892); Joseph Bovshover (1872 - 1915) and Morris Winchevsky, the father of Jewish socialism (1856 - 1915). Many of their works were put to music and became the basis for the numerous secular and radical choirs that were emerging throughout North America. Many of these songs and poems were recited and sung here in Winnipeg by Jewish workers, by their children in their homes, in their schools and on the stage as they are today. Besides these working class poets, there were Jewish writers, dramatists, journalists, all attempting to weave together a realistic portrayal of the new Jewish immigrant working class in North America. Many were frequent guests in Winnipeg. The period 1915 - 1918 was a particularly exciting time for Winnipeg Jewry when they played host to the author Sholem Asch in 1915 and in 1918, the dramatist Peretz Hirshbein in 1917 and Dr. Chaim Zhitlovsky in 1915, 1916 and 1917.³⁷

Cultural activities were not confined solely to the organizational spheres. There were numerous holidays to be observed in the homes. In this way European cultural patterns and beliefs were transmitted and adapted to the new country. Religious holidays abounded — Rosh Hoshonah, Yom Kippur, Passover, and so on. Besides, each family had its own special days — birthdays, weddings, funerals, Bar Mitzvahs, each with special foods, traditions, customs, songs and prayers that have transcended throughout Jewish history. As Mrs. Dorfman recalled: “It was one big Mishpocha (Family): a simcha [celebration] in one home meant an invitation to all”,³⁸ and reiterated by Hershfield: “The people in the area were like one big family. They knew each others business and participated in their simchas (celebrations) and their sorrows”.³⁹

Culture, then, in whatever form, was an integral component in the lives of the North End Jewish Community in Winnipeg. While culture for one segment was determined to establish as closely as possible that which they

experienced in the old country, for another segment — for secularist, for radicals — continuity had to make way for change. In a synthesis of the old and the new, the immigrant — through his work experience, through economic necessity, through the influence of the socialist movement — began to change himself as well as his culture, thereby adding a rich, vital, creative dimension to a materially impoverished existence.

The Impetus for Change — The Public School as a Prime Socialization Agent for the Immigrant

I was enrolled in the Strathcona School, the English public school which was the closest to our home. I clearly recall my father meeting with the school principal — a tall dark man with a dark wide moustache — whose name, I learned soon enough was Mr. Sisler.

“What is the boy’s name?” “Sheppy or Shaftel.” “There is no English name like this. We will give him an English name.” “No sir, my son must be called by his Jewish name.” “Well, all right, we will call him Shatly.”⁴⁰

In this way, the Jewish immigrant child was first introduced into the public school system. Similarly, for their parents, this was one of their first associations with and introduction to the institutions of the new country. Perhaps, of even greater significance, was the resultant confrontation between the immigrant and the dominant society.

At the turn of the century, the fundamental problem facing the Anglo-Saxon community was how to maintain its hegemony over the growing ‘foreign’ population, how to inculcate the newcomer with the appropriate values and beliefs in becoming “Canadianized”. Although numerous community leaders expressed these fears, it was J. W. Sparling — a north end school principal, who enlarged these fears into “the great national danger, for there is danger and it is national”. For Sparling, the choices were clear. “Either to educate and elevate the incoming multitude or they will surely drag us and our children down to their lower level. We must see to it that the civilization and ideals of southeastern Europe are not transplanted to and perpetuated on our virgin soil”.⁴¹ The great hope then, the agency for assimilating and unifying this diversified mass was the public school system. “Manitoba, at the cost of a severe struggle”, Morton argued, “had established a common or national school system partly in anticipation of the need of unifying a diverse population.”⁴²

Unity was undoubtedly a very real concern, but one that was not as readily acknowledged was the imperative for an industrializing society to discipline, to control and to mold the growing immigrant labor force. To this extent, Shatly and many thousands were stripped of their identity and

resocialized into a future industrial labor force. This was one of the primary functions of the school system.

Notwithstanding all difficulties facing immigrant children, school enrollment between 1900 and 1923 increased 200% from 7,500 to 22,000, from 119 teachers in 1900 to 527 in 1913. By 1915, 10,000 out of 22,488 Winnipeg school children were housed in the north end. As a result, north end schools were outrageously over-crowded. Strathcona School, built to accommodate 500 - 600 elementary students, had enrolled 900 in 1908.

In three years, from 1905 - 1908, Sisler wrote, the whole ethnic composition of the school had changed from a predominantly English speaking student body to an east European, speaking Yiddish, German, Ukrainian, Russian, Hungarian and Polish. Within a short span, the new names such as Greenberg, Goldberg, Timorchick, Shmelnitsky and Semchyshyn, (those endings with "skis", "ovitches" and "bergs") began to replace the McLaughlin's and Thistlewaite's and MacTavish's, etc.⁴³

The Jews, Sisler found, were the first to take advantage of the schools.⁴⁴ Despite the initial impulse to send their children to work, Jewish parents quickly seized the opportunity for free public education. This impulse for education amongst the Jews "has been second in importance only to their search for livelihood".⁴⁵

For the first time in Jewish experience, all levels of education were made available to them, although discrimination and prejudice were always present. As a result, attendance of Jewish children in the public school system was close to 100% and illiteracy was almost non-existent.⁴⁶

Immigrant children found numerous problems awaiting them in the public schools. Many of them stemmed from the homes and reflected, in many instances, the ambivalent attitudes of many immigrants towards the re-socializing, assimilatory processes of the public schools. As a result, many were over-age upon entering school and "under-motivated, bewildered and defeated by a new language and a new way of life, uprooted and rebellious."⁴⁷

In re-socializing the immigrant child, questioning authority was obviously the first hurdle to be overcome. One teacher described her efforts to establish 'proper' authority in this way:

... it was a bad school. There were some bad boys in it. The first day in school, I looked the class over and I knew I had to be fierce. They wouldn't get me, no sirree. That first morning I went into the drawer and I got out this big leather strap. . . . I never smiled once, I looked fierce all the time. Fierce. I wanted them to know that was what and that I was boss. I wasn't going to take any nonsense off of them.⁴⁸

Others were more understanding and many early pioneers recalled with fond memories their first teachers who were almost all Anglo-Saxons. Listening to their stories, one can see how quickly and how effectively this socialization process became rooted, a process that often wrought inalterable tensions and conflicts between parents and their children. One story showed clearly some of the tensions that arose out of the school experience:

We must have been hard to put up with, because we admired them (teachers) so much that we wanted to be close to them. We walked around at recess hanging on to their skirts and sleeves. We stood as close to them as we could get when we went up to the desk to have our spelling marked. We wanted so badly to please them. Most of them were very good to us. We wanted to be like them and we were ashamed of our parents and grandparents.⁴⁹

This 'culture conflict' between parents and children was often of a subtle nature, displayed in a variety of forms. As the primary agent for weaning the child away from the home and into the dominant society, the teacher and the principal became the role model for immigrant children to emulate. It was their language, their mannerisms, their dress, their way of looking at the world that became the necessary requisite, the ultimate goal of entering into their society.

Some insights into this process can be gleaned from oral interviews. Although there were few Anglo Saxons in Aberdeen School, one young immigrant found that 'they' always sat apart from us "for they always felt superior to us. They were the example". In dealing with the problem of lice, the teacher would invariably point to the 'English kids' and say, "They keep their hair clean, why can't you? Nobody wanted to know about us immigrant kids and about where we came from. We were all the same to them. We began to develop a feeling that our parents were of lower status. We began to feel ashamed of our parents, of our Jewishness."⁵⁰

Another area of culture conflict generated by the school system which was painful especially to the Jews, was in the field of sport. In his book *Peaceful Invasion*, Mr. Sisler repeatedly emphasized the importance of sport for it provided not only good physical exercise, muscular coordination and self-control, but also it was a "means for employing the leisure time of boys, girls and young men and women". Not only was the socialization process a 9 to 4 routine, but had to be extended so that regimentation of the young was doubly enforced. Soccer, lacrosse, baseball, softball, basketball, hockey, and volleyball were all part of the

sports program. One incident stood out clearly in Mr. Sisler's recollections:

I remember two boys who were not allowed by their parents to ride on a street car or do any work with their hands on Saturday. As most of our games were played on that day, this restriction would apparently keep them out of the games. The boys made no objection to walking long distances to the games, and when it was pointed out to the father that soccer was played with the feet and using the hands was contrary to the rules, there was no further objection. The boys developed into good players and used to rise early and walk a mile or two in order to be on the field in time to begin play.⁵¹

Traditionally, Jews had had little encounter with sports, placing their main emphasis on 'learning'. Here in this new environment, there were strange physical games that had little relation to past experiences. The sons, however, were quickly attracted to the vigorous activities that were being offered. Many rebelled against their parents' attempts to ameliorate or circumvent the conflict. Often, as Chiel found, the conflict was "heightened and the generation gap was rarely overcome and often led to serious emotional dislocations within families."⁵²

Here is how Hershfield attempted to deal with this problem:

As I grew older, I became a member of our football team at school. The games were played on Saturday mornings. This created a problem which I solved in this manner. I would bring my football shoes with me to the synagogue and hide them outside under the wooden sidewalk. At *lai-ening* time (reading of the Torah) I would disappear from the synagogue and run off to play football. In the afternoon, I would get quite a lecture from my father.⁵³

In their attempts to create a feeling of harmony and friendliness amongst their diverse student body, Winnipeg's north end school principals generally displayed an insensitivity for the conflicts they were creating. Their greatest imperative was to regiment the child into accepting 'voluntarily' the values and life styles of the greater society. Military drill was another feature of regimentation, one that was particularly offensive to the thousands of Jewish parents fleeing military conscription in the Old Country.

In time, the public school presence was an increasingly pervasive influence in the life of the immigrant community, a new experience for most North End immigrant people of East European descent. As Woodsworth reported in 1910, the schools were becoming "the rallying point for all kinds of social activities",⁵⁴ enlarging its function into those areas traditionally confined to the home. Cooking, sewing and manual training had already been introduced into the school curriculum, while school grounds were opened as playgrounds for the surrounding community. Industrial training was not overlooked and reformers and educators, i.e.

Woodworth and Sisler, early campaigned for technical training. By 1913, free technical training was being offered at night school.⁵⁵

Similarly, adult socialization within the public school system was not overlooked. By 1907, evening classes or 'night school' had been established with ten English classes. As it grew in popularity, six more classes were added.⁵⁶ Of this number, twelve were to be found in the north end. These classes were publicized in the local press and by distributing handbills in various languages. Night classes were offered in most of the north end schools and were open to those fourteen years of age and over, on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 7:30 to 9:30.⁵⁷ Classes were free and after the first year, Woodsworth reported that 400 immigrants were being instructed in English, the results were "very gratifying".⁵⁸ Most were men, but as Sisler found there were a "fair number of old girls and a few married women. It was not uncommon for a girl 10 or 12 years old to bring her mother to school, sit beside her for the whole evening and help with difficulties in the lesson".⁵⁹ Everybody from infant to the aged, was shown new ways to behave, taught new skills, regimented into new social patterns.

However, while the public schools continued as a persistent impetus for change, immigrant communities — the Jewish community without exception — developed their own unique countervailing influences. In a reality that divided the immigrant child between two contrasting worlds, many youngsters returned to their familiar cultural environment after school, to their ethnic halls and their ethnic schools. "Going to cheder" was a well known expression amongst north end Jewish youngsters. Whether it was in a classroom situation, in music, art and dance, etc., young people were furnished with a social activity that attempted not only to perpetuate their cultural heritage but also to balance the assimilatory trends of the public school. It was in this sphere that parental influence attempted to balance rapid change with cultural continuity.

Ethnic activity for the immigrant child served another social function. Peer group influence had become a fact of urban life as young people were largely left to their own devices during a good portion of the day. Gangs of youth, often defined by ethnic affiliation, roamed the streets in search of adventure and loot, many times defending the honor of their particular group. As Gray pointed out, there was little respect for private property amidst a group who did not have any or were unlikely to acquire any. In a

society that was rapidly generating a thirst for commodity production, Gray found that:

We all learned early there was little point in asking our parents to buy us something we yearned for, whether it was a bag of marbles or a coaster sleigh. Mostly the yearning led to thoughts of where and how the desired objects could be pinched . . . Surely a thin line divided the Phil Newfelds (a boy arrested for petty thievery) from the Jimmy Grays of Winnipeg . . . in the raids we staged on the fruit wagons and junkmen's carts . . . we were just plain lucky not to be caught. That enabled time to help us to outgrow our criminal tendencies by diverting our attention in another direction.⁶⁰

One wonders whether these 'criminal tendencies' that Gray assumed to be inherent, might perhaps have been the result of social injustices within their environment. Perhaps in a small way they were expressing the needs of the vast majority of society, how best to redistribute society's wealth more equitably.

Moreover, the growth of peer group influence indicated the changing nature of the family structure under capitalism.⁶¹ Traditionally children had been nurtured in a communal atmosphere, never separated from the adult community or from the rural pastoral economy. With the development of the factory system, economic life was now separated from family life, fathers were removed from the home for the largest portion of the day, and children, in this new social setting, had no assigned roles. They were at a loss as to their social purpose. Children, as a result, roamed the streets, a situation not peculiar to one group but general to the whole community. It was primarily in an effort to rectify this situation that compulsory education was introduced in 1916.

Here is how Hershfield described these Jewish gangs:

The boys growing up in this area were under the influence of gangs of Jewish youths, who were tough, vicious, mischievous and trouble seeking. From this area came the future leaders of our community in business and professions. But this area also spawned professional fighters, narcotic peddlars, boys like H. A. who joined Detroit's notorious Purple Gang and was shot to death while holding up a drugstore, or A. S., who was in the same room when Bugsy Segal was murdered in Los Vegas. Since I was much younger than the average member of the gang, I became a hanger-on(er). I recall accompanying them to the Grand Opera House, corner Jarvis and Main Street next to Miller's Book Store, and there participating in pelling of eggs and tomatoes from the gallery on the people sitting below. When we attended the Queen's Theatre, we rolled pop bottles down the sloping wooden floors, just as a most crucial moment was being depicted on the stage.⁶²

In this chaotic situation, parents, ethnic communities and the public schools often found that their goals were similar, to plan and to schedule every moment of the child's day. To this end, their efforts have been successful.

In summation, the public school system, for many immigrants, was a new experience, an experience traditionally reserved for the elites. Though education was always present, universal schooling to the extent that was advanced at the turn of the century in the new country was a new phenomenon. This phenomenon was clearly more evident in the urban centres where the need for unifying and ‘Canadianizing’ a population of such diverse languages and cultures was of greatest concern. Moreover, it was in the urban centres that the need for a literate, disciplined labor force was becoming urgent. For Braverman, “Reading and figuring are, apart from all their other meanings, the elementary attributes of a manageable population”.⁶³ At the same time, Braverman pointed out:

. . . What the child must learn is no longer adaptation to the slow round of seasonal labor in an immediately natural environment, but rather adaptation to a speedy and intricate social machinery which is not adjusted to social humanity in general, let alone to the individual, but dictates the rounds of production, consumption, survival, and amusement. . . . In school, the child and the adolescent practise what they will be called upon to do as adults; the conformity to routines, the manner in which they will be expected to snatch from the fast-moving machinery their needs and wants.⁶⁴

As a result, whereas the occupational expectations in a non-industrialized society was toward continuity — one generation following closely the patterns laid down by past generations, in an industrialized society, new avenues were opened up for the second generation immigrant. Generational patterns were often disrupted, bringing into the family both tension and conflict. Indeed, Adele Wiseman’s central theme in *The Sacrifice* revolves upon this ‘generation gap’.

Specific to the Jewish experience, schools provided not only intellectual stimulation but also the means whereby they could become integrated into the economic, political life of the community, areas that had formally been denied to them. In this aspect there was no equivocation; universal schooling and unilingualism were strongly advocated so that Jewish children upon entering the schools were mentally prepared for the school environment. However, integration for the Jews did not mean obliteration. Their desire to safeguard their culture, their religion and their traditions provided the impetus for the parallel formation of Jewish schools and a relatively autonomous community life.

Conclusion

During this period under investigation, Winnipeg developed into an industrial capitalist society with all the corresponding social ills characteristic of North American urban existence. Winnipeg’s haphazard

spatial growth spawned several segregated districts, with the north end as the symbolic ghetto for the working class immigrant.

Within this reality, immigrant communities, Jews included, established as closely as possible the lifestyles, behavior patterns, institutions and cultural forms which were familiar and which they had transported to the new country. Through this continuation, they found a security and comradeship, the communal ties, the mutual aid that were often reminiscent of the old. Here, they were to find the dignity that was not accessible to them in the larger environment.

However, the North End did not exist in a vacuum. Immigrants not only had to interact outside their work places, but within the North End, in the public schools where the process of 'Canadianizing the foreigner' began to make inroads. In the work place, in the schools, immigrants were gradually forced to adapt to new situations, behavior patterns, work habits and skills. In this industrializing process, many Jews found it increasingly difficult to maintain their religious purity, their dietary practices, their Sabbath in the traditional ways. Many began to recognize that their economic interests were of more immediate concern than their religious interests. Over time, a modifying process began. Building upon their past, Jews, as they had done numerous times before, began to change themselves, as well as their culture. In this way, the old and the new coalesced into the formation of what Park defined as a "cultural hybrid". While the Jews became integrated into their larger society, they were never willing to break with their past and their traditions.

This 'culture lag'* that Ogburn observed as characteristic of all rapidly changing societies, has now been recognized as having served a dual function, a defense mechanism for both the immigrants and for the larger society. For the immigrants, 'culture lag', or the continuation of past patterns of behavior and thought, was a defense against too rapid change, the depersonalized, atomistic relationships that were demoralizing to a newly arrived minority group. Culture lag also enabled the immigrants to retain some measure of control over their lives and those of their children, and the perpetuation of their cultural heritage. For the larger society, culture lag allowed the immigrant community some means of cultural expression,

**Culture Lag* — a concept defined by anthropologist William F. Ogburn in which one part or phrase of a culture lags behind another, i.e. rate of accumulation of material culture, i.e. economics, technology, etc. as opposed to the non-material, thereby causing tension and conflict in a society undergoing rapid change.

thereby preventing excess tensions and “placing too heavy a strain on society”. In this way, societies undergoing rapid change have maintained a greater degree of stability and cohesion.

Further, Handlin’s thesis of discontinuity has been argued from the point of view that the immigrants exchanged their identity, accepting a state of uprootedness in order to gain freedom. We agree with Handlin that many immigrants and Jews especially, did, indeed, come to the new country to gain freedom. Of this there can be no doubt. We would, however, argue that freedom for the Jews meant precisely the right to self-identity and the continuation of their cultural heritage, whether expressed in religious, Zionist or socialist terms.

From our study of the Jewish community in Winnipeg’s north end, we can conclude that freedom was a dominant theme of Jewish migration but identity was never a commodity of exchange. As we have indicated, Jewish culture underwent a process of change reflecting the needs of a changing society, but these changes always maintained its link to the past. As a result, Jewish institutions, Jewish consciousness, “the sense of mutual belongingness” has remained strong over time.

While the pendulum has swung between conflict and change on the one hand and continuity on the other, historians have made little attempt to bring both elements into a systematic whole. The study of the Winnipeg Jewish community has been an attempt in this direction.

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