



INTERNATIONAL

JOURNAL of HUMAN Studies

ULUSLARARASI İNSAN ÇALIŞMALARI DERGİSİ

ISSN: 2636-8641

Cilt/VOLUME 6 Sayı/ISSUE 11 Yıl/YEAR: 2023

Alındı/RECEIVED: 18-05-2023 – Kabul/ACCEPTED: 28-06-2023

Conceded Reconciliation: The Impact of Habitus on Ethnic Identity Formation in *Bread Givers* and *The Island Within*

Tavizle Ulaşılan Uzlaş: Bread Givers ve The Island Within Eserlerinde Habitusun Etnik Kimlik Üzerindeki Etkisi

Gamze KATI GÜMÜŞ¹

Abstract

The anti-Semitism of the 1920s affected the status of Jewish Americans as equal citizens in the United States. This paper examines the Jewish immigrant's journey from their ethnic habitus to Americanization in Anzia Yezierska's *Bread Givers* (1925/1999) and Ludwig Lewisohn's *The Island Within* (1928) that were published amidst the rising tensions of Anti-Semitism. Yezierska and Lewisohn demonstrate how the habitus of these two characters shape their identities as Jewish Americans. Bourdieu's sociological concept of habitus indicates that the character and the tastes of an individual are shaped in relation to the set structures of his habitus, which is internalized unconsciously. Sara

Öz

1920lerin Yahudi karşıtlığı Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde yaşayan Yahudi Amerikalıların eşit vatandaşlar olarak statülerini etkilemiştir. Bu makale, artan Yahudi karşıtlığının oluşturduğu gerginlik döneminde basılan Anzia Yezierska'nın *Bread Givers* (1925/1999) ve Ludwig Lewisohn'un *The Island Within* (1928) eserlerinde Yahudi göçmenin etnik habitusundan Amerikanlaşmaya giden yolculuğunu incelemektedir. Yezierska ve Lewisohn, ana karakterlerin habituslarının birer Yahudi Amerikalı olarak kimliklerini nasıl biçimlendirdiğini göstermektedirler. Bourdieu'nün sosyolojik habitus kavramı bir bireyin kişiliği ve zevklerinin habitusunun yerleşmiş yapılarıyla ilişkili olarak

¹ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Ankara Üniversitesi, Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı, gkati@ankara.edu.tr, Orcid: 0000-0002-6416-3218

Smolinsky in *Bread Givers* and Arthur Levy in *The Island Within* try to preserve their internalized Jewishness in a society that thought the unassimilable Jew was a menace to American values. This paper uses Pierre Bourdieu's discussion on the habitus as well as Jean Phinney's model of ethnic identity formation as its initial discussion and develops Phinney's model to elaborate on the final phase of the formation of Jewish characters in these works. According to Phinney's argument, the ethnic subject achieves reconciliation between the ethnic identity and the identity of the majority group. However, this paper argues that the main characters of the two novels--Sara and Arthur, reach a conceded reconciliation in the final phase of their ethnic identity formation, which allows them to exercise subjectivity and reclaim their identity against the deterministic aspect of habitus.

Keywords: Anzia Yeziarska, Ludwig Lewisohn, Habitus, Ethnic Identity, Jewish American

biçimlendirildiğine ve bu habitusun bilinç dışı bir biçimde içselleştirildiğine işaret eder. *Bread Givers* eserinden Sara Smolinsky ile *The Island Within* eserinden Arthur Levy, asimile olamayacağı düşünülen Yahudilerin Amerikan değerlerine bir tehdit olarak algılandığı bir toplumda içselleştirilmiş Yahudiliklerini korumaya çalışmaktadırlar. Bu makale Pierre Bourdieu'nün habitus üzerine görüşlerinin yanısıra Jean Phinney'nin etnik kimlik oluşumu modelini ilk tartışma noktası olarak almakta ve Phinney'nin modelini bu eserlerdeki Yahudi karakterlerin kimlik oluşumunun son evresi hakkında tartışmak için geliştirmektedir. Phinney'nin savına göre etnik özne, etnik kimliği ve çoğunluğu oluşturan grubun kimliği arasında bir uzlaşmaya varır. Fakat bu makalede Sara ve Arthur'un etnik kimlik oluşumlarının son evresinde, habitusun deterministik tavrına karşı özellikle hareket etmelerine ve kimliklerini geri kazanmalarına olanak sağlayan sekteye uğramış bir uzlaşmaya vardıkları öne sürülmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Anzia Yeziarska, Ludwig Lewisohn, Habitus, Etnik Kimlik, Yahudi Amerikalı

Introduction

Early twentieth century American society faced many challenges and transitions in terms of incoming immigration flows and the nativist attitude towards those newcomers. The nativists were influential in setting new immigration laws that barred or limited entry to some groups. The rising anti-Semitism of the 1920s not only led to immigration quotas for the Jewish in 1924 with the enactment of the Johnson-Reed Act, but also affected their status as equal citizens in the United States, for they were being denied entry to certain schools and social spaces on the ground of their Jewishness. This article will examine the Jewish immigrant's journey from their ethnic habitus to Americanization in Anzia Yeziarska's *Bread Givers* (1925/1999) and Ludwig Lewisohn's *The Island Within* (1928) that were

published amidst the rising tensions of Anti-Semitism. These texts discuss how the main characters try to preserve their internalized Jewishness in a society that thought the unassimilable Jew was a menace to American values. This work uses Pierre Bourdieu's discussion on the habitus as well as Jean Phinney's model of ethnic identity formation as its initial discussion and develops Phinney's model to elaborate on the final phase of the formation of Jewish characters in these works. According to Phinney's argument, the ethnic subject achieves reconciliation between the ethnic identity and the identity of the majority group. However, this paper argues that the main characters of the two novels- Sara and Arthur, reach a conceded reconciliation in the final phase of their ethnic identity formation.

Eastern and western European Jews of the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries introduced a Jewish nationalist perspective to the American novel. This nationalist perspective was both the result and the counter action of their ethnic identity formation in the New World. These immigrants went through different stages of ethnic identity formation in and outside their habitus, and I will focus on two texts written by Jewish American authors with different backgrounds in order to discuss these stages, and the effect of habitus on them. *Bread Givers* and *The Island Within* reflect on the differences between the generations of Jewish immigrant families. Furthermore, they demonstrate the growth of the characters as they try to break through their internalized environment and join the mainstream American national scene.

In the first part of this article, I will shortly mention the different attitudes of Jewish American authors of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries toward the subject of assimilation. I will then offer Yeziarska and Lewisohn's texts as end products of their own habitus. In this sense, the discussion on habitus by Pierre Bourdieu becomes helpful in the second part to look at the habitus of the characters created by both authors. In the third part of the article, the discussion will focus on how this habitus affects the ethnic identity formation of the Jewish immigrant in these novels.

Assimilation or Perseverance: The Jewish American Experience in Yeziarska and Lewisohn

The Jewish American literature was an arena of contemplation on assimilation at the turn of the nineteenth century. The Jewish immigrant literature of the period stresses the tension between the Jewish and American identities. Some of the renowned Jewish American authors like Abraham Cahan and Ludwig Lewisohn were against assimilation, and in their works characters who assume a complete American identity with little to no regard for their Jewishness were punished with despair, insanity or death. But characters who managed to accept the values of an American citizen with a complete preservation of their Jewishness were praised and rewarded with the promise of upcoming success. However, there were also other authors like Mary Antin and Samuel Ornitz, who were in favor of assimilation. For them, assimilation did not weaken the Jew in her American surroundings but empowered her. Assimilation, which was most certainly a defeat for Cahan and Lewisohn, rather became a sign of success for Antin and Ornitz. And yet, for authors such as Anzia Yeziarska, assimilation into American ways of life was not the main concern. In the works of Yeziarska, the struggle is mainly with the Jewish immigrant life in the ghetto and the riches of the American upper

class. And the reconciliation between these two classes and identities is more challenging than Antin's suggestion to reconcile the American and the Jewish within.

Anzia Yeziarska, a Polish Jewish immigrant who came to the US around age ten in the 1890s, moved with her family to the Lower East Side, the Jewish ghetto of New York. Her life story along with her struggle with her religious father resonate in her work, in which her characters try to fight the patriarchy of the Old World in order to have autonomy in an Americanized—and yet Jewish—social sphere. No matter how Americanized Yeziarska's characters become, their internalized Jewishness always betray them and limit them to a Jewish sphere in terms of upward mobility.

Born in Germany in 1882, Ludwig Lewisohn immigrated to the US with his family when he was eight years old; moved to Charleston in South Carolina and converted to Christianity as a child only to return to his Jewish belief later. The religious conversion of the Lewisohns led to a divergence in social sphere greater than many Jewish immigrants of the period. Even though Lewisohn was not familiar with the domestic work and hard labor Yeziarska had to perform before becoming an author, he was still having hardships in terms of adaptation. In his autobiographical work *Upstream: An American Chronicle* (1922), Lewisohn describes his inner struggle as a Jewish man in America, where there is no escape from one's Jewishness. For instance, when he receives rejections for a position from different universities, he understands that despite being an American, he will always be a Jew on exile:

... catching sight of myself in a mirror, noted with dull objectivity my dark hair, my melancholy eyes, my unmistakably Semitic nose... An outcast. ... A sentence arose in my mind which I have remembered and used ever since. So long as there is discrimination, there is exile. (Lewisohn, 1922, p. 123)

Lewisohn is reproachful about the Jew's exile. Being Jewish, however, is not only related to his Jewish identity, but it is also engraved on his body. His "Semitic nose," and his dark features give him away. Lewisohn remembers himself in the mirror, but in doing so he sees the split in his Americanized Jewish self. As he gazes at the mirror, the recognition of his physical Jewishness rather than his Americanness is distressful. It shatters his sense of identity as Jewish American and reflects on his identity only as Jewish. This breaking point is painstaking since he, as a child, viewed himself as more American than Jewish; "[i]f ever the child of immigrants embraced the faith of the folk among whom it came I was that child" (Lewisohn, 1922, p. 51). But he also believes that even though "Americanization means ... assimilation," there is not a homogenous American culture to assimilate into. Assimilation for him is "an empty concept, a mere cry of rage or tyranny," since there is "none such that can unite us" (Lewisohn, 1922, p. 235). It should be kept in mind that by 1920, Lewisohn had already become a Zionist, therefore his work was immensely under the influence of his belief for the Jewish immigrant's salvation through self-perseverance from assimilation.

In Yeziarska's work the Smolinsky family and their lives as Jewish immigrants are at the center of the book. Lewisohn's book, on the other hand, does not focus on one generation, but on multiple generations of the Levys. Even though these two novels end with characters that cannot sever ties with their Jewish background, they follow different paths in this pursuit, and the reconciliation they

reach at the end is disrupted to a certain degree based on how these characters perceive acculturation. In *Bread Givers* the struggle is mainly with the Jewish and the American societies rather than an inner struggle experienced by Sara. Lewisohn's main character Arthur on the other hand, has a continuous fight within himself. The differences in these struggles have different roots. First of all, Yeziarska has firsthand knowledge of immigration and adaptation to the mainstream American society in a predominantly Jewish habitus. The Jewish habitus she was grown in was the Lower East Side of Manhattan, which was home to many Jewish immigrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Hester Street, especially, was an enclave for Ashkenazi Jews who wanted to maintain the traditions they were accustomed to. Lewisohn is also an immigrant, but his American experience is quite different than Yeziarska's. Gender plays an important role in this difference, but religion and space have undeniably pivotal roles, too. Yeziarska was brought up in Lower East Side Manhattan, surrounded by immigrants and Jewish people, whereas Lewisohn was detached from his Jewish culture through assimilation, only to resurrect the Jew inside him with his return to Zionism years later. It is not a coincidence for the characters Sara and Arthur to follow different paths to chase their dreams, since Yeziarska and Lewisohn had led quiet different paths themselves. These differences indicate how critical some elements are in relation to ethnic identity formation in the fictional world of immigration in these two novels.

First of these novels, *Bread Givers* starts with the financial difficulties in the Smolinsky household, as father Reb Smolinsky does not see worldly gain comparable to his spiritual work. Bessie, Mashah, Fania and the youngest daughter Sara—who is Yeziarska's chosen protagonist—work hard to make ends meet. Their mother Mrs. Smolinsky views her husband as the light of their home, which results in the positioning of Smolinsky women as the bread givers of the house. Yeziarska reflects the tension between the Old and New Worlds through the relationship of Reb Smolinsky with his daughters. Reb Smolinsky forces his older daughters into unhappy arranged marriages. Sara, the youngest of the four, runs away from her home seeing the destiny that awaits her. Struggling against the newly encountered world of “real Americans” (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 210), she works as an ironer and goes to college to become a teacher. The segregation she faces in the laundry and the college, and her inner struggle with her living situation in a different sphere than her internalized Lower East Side ghetto position her deeper into the sterilized oneness of otherness. After losing her mother and feeling the heaviness of the quickly arranged second marriage of her father, Sara finds herself in a difficult situation when her father sends a letter to the principal Hugo Seelig to remind Sara of her financial duties as a daughter. Anthropologist Karen Brodtkin points out this traditional expectation in her book *How Jews Became White* and says that unmarried daughters were expected to give their wages to their parents (1998, pp. 61-62). Although Sara refuses to meet the expectations of her father in this matter, the complaint letter of her father leads to the initiation of her relationship with Hugo Seelig. In the end, Sara and Hugo get romantically involved and Hugo, who is also a Polish Jewish immigrant, wins the consent of the traditional father Reb Smolinsky. The novel ends with conceded reconciliation; Sara finds happiness within the Jewish community, far from the WASP American community that ignores her. Although Sara initially believed that hard work, education and American clothes would

help her, she later faces the cold reality of discrimination when she realizes that her chances as a Jewess are limited to Hester Street.

While Sara tries to get her way in the Yankee world, the situation is not very different for Ludwig Lewisohn's Arthur, who also feels the loneliness of being a Jew in a bigger Christian world in *The Island Within*. Lewisohn's novel, which is composed of nine books, starts in Vilna in the year of 1840. Lewisohn goes back as far as the 11th century in the generation of the Levys throughout the novel. This genealogical tree of Jews, whose fate has been migration first from Poland to Russia and Germany and then to America, serves to ground the fictional narrative into history by giving dates, mentioning names of each branch of the family, and detailing every growth ring in its life span. *The Island Within* begins with Reb Mendel ben Reb Jizchock and his wife Braine's story, which forms the first book. In the second book, the story of their son Efraim and his children are told. Their already transitioning life between the Old World of origin and the New World in Germany is followed by another transition with Jacob's, the youngest of the five Levy children, immigration to America. Even though Lewisohn does not start to talk about Jacob's and his family's lives in the United States until book three, he focuses exclusively on their American life for the rest of the book. Jacob, who now sells furniture, settles down in New York with his wife Gertrude where they raise their children Arthur and Hazel. Jacob has already become an American citizen by 1891, and "his children, God willing, would be Americans" as well (Lewisohn, 1928, p. 94). This dream of Jacob becomes real when Arthur is accepted to Columbia University in 1910, because university education was mainly a privilege reserved for Protestant Americans until WWII. Moreover, in the 1920s the United States would introduce *numerus clausus* (a policy to restrict or ban the admission of Jewish students to colleges), and during this period, "Columbia's quota against Jews was well known" (Brodkin, 1998, p. 32). This exclusion was a branch of an earlier spatial segregation as "a growing number of resorts and public accommodations closed to Jews" in the late nineteenth century (Goldstein, 2006, p. 14). Although Arthur is admitted to Columbia a decade earlier than the passing of the *numerus clausus*; considering the publication date of the book, it becomes clear that Lewisohn is demonstrating what achievements can be accomplished by Jews if only segregation and discrimination were not a part of the American attitude towards the ethnic other. In the novel, Arthur successfully graduates from the university and becomes a psychoanalyst. The medical training of Arthur obviously carries him up in the social ladder of citizenship, increasing his worthiness of becoming American. It is also an influence of Sigmund Freud, whose psychoanalytic work shows its traces in Lewisohn's work. The two contemporary Jewish intellectuals were impressed by each other's work and "Freud was a well-known fan of Lewisohn, even writing promotional blurbs for his novels" (Sol, 2001, p. 226). Arthur starts to treat patients first in a hospital and then opens his own clinic since he cannot stand to see the way Jewish patients are treated by doctors, and the attendants who are "mostly Irish" (Lewisohn, 1928, p. 181). He marries Elizabeth Knight, a 'goy' (gentile), only to get divorced from her three years later. At the end of the novel, Arthur, who has struggled with his Jewish and American identities meets Reb Moshe almost in an act of *deus ex machina*. The novel ends with Arthur's visit to Romania to help the Jewish in need. He not only returns to his community but also this journey is a chance for him to discover the self within, which

was suppressed as a supposed prerequisite of Americanization.

These incidents in both novels highlight the importance of space and community in individual ethnic identity formation. In these two novels, spatial conflicts lead to the clash between the Old and New Worlds. Moreover, the performative nature of the American identity becomes an important aspect of their journey as the protagonists try to break through their Jewish habitus and become a member of the American circle.

Between Worlds: Habitus and A Jewish American Path towards Americanization

The importance of space in *Bread Givers* shows itself not only through the challenges of the Old and New Worlds but also through the changing settings of the book's three parts which are named "Hester Street," "Between Two Worlds," and "The New World." The same spatial transition occurs in *The Island Within*, when generations of the Levys immigrate from Poland to Russia, to Germany, to the US, and back to Romania; which offers an interlude to the never-ending diaspora of the Jew at least for the Levys with the return of Arthur to Eastern Europe. Since the space plays a pivotal role for these characters, it will be helpful to look at the habitus as an important contributor to the formation of identity before advancing into the spatial transitions of the novels.

In his book *Distinction*, Pierre Bourdieu seeks to explain human behavior in accordance with the habitus the person lives in, showing the interaction between the agent and the habitus. He argues that taste "functions as a sort of social orientation, a 'sense of one's place', guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position" (1979/1984, p. 466). Therefore, according to him, a person and his taste are cultivated under the impact of the habitus he lives in. The habitus allows a child to absorb the values of his family, leading him to unconsciously acknowledge the culture of that specific household. Bourdieu argues that habitus inevitably shapes a person for the act of acquisition happens unconsciously. Therefore, habitus becomes a deterministic aspect in Bourdieu's theory. In immigrant literatures, this deterministic value of the habitus shapes the immigrant's self-identity construction in regard to his acquired ethnic and adopted American cultures. I argue that the role of the habitus is utterly essential in immigrant and ethnic groups, since the first-generation immigrants generally experience a disruption in their habitus and the second generation goes through a transition and adaptation process that is quite different than their parents. Last but not least, the age and gender of the first-generation immigrant play an important role in this process. All members of the Smolinsky family are born outside the United States, however, Smolinsky children go through a rather easier adaptation to American values, whereas Reb Smolinsky and his wife are not that receptive to the same process. One reason for that is the exposure of the children to another habitus at an early developmental stage. This early exposure makes the acquisition of another culture easier for children like Sara and her sisters, who become more accustomed to American culture when compared to their parents. The connection of Arthur's family to their roots, on the other hand, is almost broken by the time he is born. When his father Jacob immigrates to America at the age of

eighteen, he “perceived the soft brilliance of an American landscape and in some way claimed the earth and country as his own” (Lewisohn, 1928, p. 92). His coming to America at a young age, and his following marriage to the native-born Jewish Gertrude does explain the distance the couple has towards their Judaist ancestry. The couple’s children Arthur and Hazel feel the cultural distance to the Old World as they question their Jewishness. As Arthur wonders continuously as a young man, “[w]ere Jews his own kind? ...Who are our own kind?” (Lewisohn, 1928, pp. 132-133). Even at a young age, Arthur questions his Jewishness for it has been a distant and unmentioned part of his identity due to the choice made by his parents.

When Bourdieu’s concept of how habitus molds the individual into certain characteristics within a given structure is applied to the identity construction of a child, it is seen that the child’s development is affected by those invisible structures to a certain degree. Anthony King argues that Bourdieu’s habitus “comprises perceptual structures and embodied dispositions which organize the way individuals see the world and act in it” (2000, p. 423). In this manner, the construction of identity begins at the habitus of the child, where he or she is exposed to the transmittable characteristics of the family and community. However, the will of the child in this construction process affects the impact of these exposures on the identity. The child either accepts the traditional identity norms of his/her family or refuses them to create a new identity. The habitus acts as an invisible force in the everyday life of the child. It is up to the child to become aware of the invisibility of the habitus because it is engraved in every aspect of her living zone. This awareness offers the child a chance to break through her habitus and experience another life. One of the aspects that are engraved into the everyday life in the Smolinsky household is Judaism. As a prominent theme in the novel, religion becomes a significant part of the habitus in which Sara and her sisters grow up. The religious books of Reb Smolinsky crowd the house, and the whole Smolinsky household is ruled according to the doctrines of Judaism. The Levy household, on the other hand, is the complete opposite with its barren and forgetful approach to Judaism since there is “in the house no visible symbol of religion and of race” (Lewisohn, 1928, p. 103). In Sara’s habitus Judaism is an unquestioned reality; Arthur, on the other hand, grows up to step into a Christian milieu which is presented as the lack of a Jewish influence on him at a young age.

Judaism like other monotheistic religions has been restrictive against women in different cultures throughout long ages. Ideas of purity, obedience to the patriarchal family and the tendency to protect the outcomes of the male world have been in the center of radical religious lives. In such religion-centered cultures, women’s existence is formed and evaluated in relation to men. The world Yeziarska creates in Lower East Side has such a culture, demanding the authority of man and the obedience from the woman as an ordinance of Judaism. However, the interpretation of Judaism in *Bread Givers* changes according to the radically religious father from the Old World and the Americanized daughter of the New World. The mobility of generations between these two worlds offers them different insights on the perception of Judaism. While Reb Smolinsky points to Torah to say, “only through a man has a woman an existence,” and shows, “olden times” as an example, his daughter Sara opposes him showing America as her evidence (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 137). She says, “I’m not from the old country. I’m American!” (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 138). The youngest daughter

of the Smolinsky family declares her newly acquired identity and uses it as a shelter to protect herself from the impact of the Old World. In the book, Russia and the life based on Judaism represent the Old World fathers, who want to keep traditions alive as they sense that their daughters are getting further away into the New World on their way to Americanization.

The rather secular habitus of Arthur and his family lead him to question his parents, and his own relationship to Judaism. When talking about conversion to Christianity as a way out of the discriminatory attitude of the US, he says that “[p]erhaps the requirement of lying about religion and being sprinkled with a little water isn’t the worst kind” (Lewisohn, 1928, p. 170). However, he realizes that the farther he is removed from that Jewish habitus—either by his secular upbringing or the attitudes of the anti-Semites—the more isolated he gets. In their household forgetting is the main problem, his father Jacob later in his life confesses that

[i]n the early years here I chust forgot everything ent your dear mudder—*her* mudder had already forgotten—ent so ve told you nothing. ... Vy did ve forget so? Maybe because America used to say: Dis is no place vere ancestors count. Only individooal vorth. ... Vell, I’m glet to see my son remembering. I hear of odder young people remembering. My cheneration tried to pull down de house of Israel; maybe yours vill build it up again... (Lewisohn, 1928, p. 348)

Forgetting becomes a prerequisite of Americanization for the generation of Jacob. Even though Jacob’s use of non-standard English demonstrates a defiance of assimilation in terms of language, the obliteration of Jewish culture from Jacob’s household in his earlier years in America shows how he as a first-generation immigrant moved away from Judaism. He situates the younger generation in contrast to the forgetfulness of older generations since the young Jews according to Jacob are getting re-acquainted with the Jewish religion and culture. In this sense, the need to return to the origins, as far as Israel, is a return to the initial state of belonging and remembrance. The return of immigrant Jacob’s children to the house of Israel symbolizes how the scattered population of Jews can return to their promised land if the memory of the Jew within is preserved. According to Judaism, Jacob, or Israel with his God-given name, is the patriarch of Israelites. In Genesis 49:7, Jacob addresses his sons Simeon and Levi and says that he “will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel” (New International Version, 2011). But Levi’s descendants remain loyal to Moses and win his blessing even though they inherit no land from him (Guzik, 2018, para. 23). The sons of Israel are later cursed by God in Leviticus 26:33 to be scattered “among the heathen, ... Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins” (New International Version, 2011). Jacob’s descendants forget their promise to follow God’s orders, and they are cursed with being scattered among people and being devoured under their power; “[y]ou will perish among the nations; the land of your enemies will devour you” (New International Version, 2011, Genesis 26:38). The prophecy fulfills itself in the novel as now the first landless Levi son, Jacob, laments his forgetful attitude towards his belief and feels the hope of the rebuilding of the House of Israel, after their people have been devoured by the gentile population of America. The promised land of the US turns out not to be “their” promised land, and salvation lies in a return to the original habitus. As Lewisohn contemplates in the introductory part of book two; “[t]he

Jews ... furnish the classical example of migration, because nowhere have they yet found the rest of either the tolerance or land” (1928, p. 41). This points to a never-ending search for the Jew as well as for Arthur, with no hope of settlement in a protective ancestral habitus and no hope of belonging. America fails in its promise to the huddled masses of Jewish descent. As seen, the novel is “dealing explicitly with Jewish Americans’ need to return to a strong identification with the Jewish people” (Chametzky, Felstiner, Flanzbaum & Hellerstein, 2001, p. 344). Howe, in a similar vein, argues that early American Zionism “kept insisting that nowhere in the gentile world, not even in America, could the Jews find comfort or security” (1976, p. 206). This is the same message Lewisohn gives to his readers, assimilation to a full degree is a trap, the complete loss of the Jewish habitus is a loss of self that leads to destruction.

Even though habitus plays an essential role in identity construction of the immigrant, Bourdieu’s strict habitus borderlines do not apply to my argument here. Bourdieu suggests that habitus is internalized and embedded in the minds of the individuals living in a particular habitus (1972/1995, p. 86). Thus, individuals do not perceive the habitus for their identities are constructed unaware of its restraints. In Bourdieu’s perception of the habitus, “the habitus ensures that the individual will inevitably act according to the logic of the situation” (King, 2000, p. 423). Therefore, they do not perceive their habitus as a separate entity and adopt its values automatically. In this context, the habitus has always been there, and the individuals have always been a part of it, stuck in a situation that leaves no room for them to recognize the restraints imposed by the structures of the habitus. However, critics argue against the inexorable nature of Bourdieu’s habitus concept, stating that social change would be impossible if habitus was unconsciously internalized. Anthony King, for instance, gives a clear explanation for this argument by explaining that individuals would not get out of the borders of social norms and have social mobility if they behaved according to the “objective structural conditions” of their habitus (2000, p. 427). Sherry Ortner also argues against Bourdieu’s idea of internalized habitus, which leaves out the “intentional subject” (1996, p. 11). However, Bourdieu’s concept of the doxa as learned beliefs within a field is bound to the determinism of the habitus, because doxa is formed by the structures in the habitus (1972/1995, pp. 165-166). Bourdieu argues that doxa is unquestionable and each agent of the said habitus “tacitly accords by the mere fact of acting in accord with social convention (*Outline* 169). In this situation, it can be said that the deterministic value of the habitus and doxa sees individuals as passive agents who do not try to pursue progressive ways.

In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu also states how habitus both shapes the individuals and is shaped by them concurrently. Different capitals play an important role in this two-way creation: social capital, symbolic capital and cultural capital. According to Bourdieu, social capital occurs between individuals and groups generally with an economic benefit; symbolic capital is about the class and status of a person in a particular culture and lastly cultural capital is not related to economic means but to social mobility through education, appearance, etc. Especially cultural capital can be the outcome of the habitus, as habitus is seen as a sculptor shaping the individual and providing the necessary aspects for the preservation of it. This theory suggests that habitus and the capital it provides to the individual lead to a system of classification. Bourdieu discusses how cultural consumption and taste mark a

habitus, and the difference of taste occurs between rich and poor; educated and uneducated; bourgeois, petit-bourgeois, middle and working classes. His ideas become illuminating when applied to the immigrant child's domestic, cultural and economic habitus and the young immigrant's compliance with it.

The deterministic aspect of the habitus is challenged to a degree in these novels. Although Bourdieu's concept of habitus is highly enlightening in showing the structured nature of the individual's surrounding cultural systems, King and Ortner are also right since the intentional subject plays an important role in the process of acculturation. If habitus had borders as strict as Bourdieu argues, then we would not have seen Sara outside the Hester Street. In fact, her escape from her father is an attempt to run away from the Old World. She, as an active agent, challenges her father, their habitus and status as immigrants. This conflict of the old and new habitus reemerges as she argues with her father just before leaving home. While Reb Smolinsky mourns over their coming to "this wild America" where there is "no respect for fathers," Sara remembers her father's disparaging behavior towards his wife and daughters (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 135). She understands that her father still tries to live according to the traditions of the Old World. However, she is not a part of that world anymore and she questions her father's paternal authority: "Should I let him crush me as he crushed them? No. This is America, where children are people" (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 135). Therefore, she claims her identity as she rejects the Old World of her father and moves on to create herself a new habitus in the "airless gloom" (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 163) of her new room. This new room is not better than her old one; in fact, it has more spatial boundaries than the previous one. However, the possibility of having 'a room of her own' is Sara's declaration of independence in the New World.

Although Bourdieu offers environment as a means for the acquisition of finer tastes, the scholars criticizing the determinism of his theory also point to the use of it as a means to blend into another class (like Sara does), providing the individual with social mobility. Although Sara has succeeded in becoming a teacher and gaining her economic freedom, her father's existence still hovers on her like a shadow. As she walks away from her father's house after telling him that he is welcome to move in with her, Sara notes "the fading chant" of Reb Smolinsky (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 297). However, even this act of physical distance cannot prevent her from feeling the pressure of the Old World her father represents; "[b]ut I felt the shadow still there, over me. It wasn't just my father, but the generations who made my father whose weight was still upon me" (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 297). Metaphorically, she can never escape her past, her ancestors, her Jewish habitus on Hester Street no matter how hard she tries to leave them behind and assimilate into the American ways. The shadow of the past will haunt her for the communal past is engraved into her individual identity.

In a similar vein to Sara, Arthur also escapes from the internalized habitus. His internalized habitus, however, lacks the traditional values of the Old World, therefore, he chooses to go back to the original habitus of the Jew. He realizes that those who try to run away from their Jewish identity and habitus in order to be accepted by the mainstream Americans, lack the notion of happiness that accompanies belonging to a community. In the book, the effort of the Jews to obliterate their identity

just to be granted the right to Americanization is “an unhuman effort” that only leads to self-hatred (Nilsen, 1983, pp. 66-67). When Arthur’s Arab-looking Jewish architect friend Victor Goldmann commits suicide, Arthur declares that the reason was “self-disgust.” Victor “was trying to shout down his Jewish soul,” who believed that success lay in becoming “an Anglo-American gentleman” (1928, p. 301). Assimilation is inhuman, it is only “mimicry” (1928, p. 301) for Arthur. The Jewish habitus in Lewisohn’s novel is a safe haven, and the Jewish children that leave behind that safety to assume an all-American identity face destruction as a result of culture loss.

The Formation of Jewish American Identity in *Yezierska* and Lewisohn

As a collectively formed phenomenon, identity is not self-produced. It is the result of the collaboration between the self and the habitus. A renown ethnic identity formation model belongs to Jean Phinney, who claims that there are three stages of ethnic identity formation. According to Phinney, in the first stage ethnicity is “not salient” and “the individual, typically a child or young adolescent, accepts the values and attitudes present in his or her environment” (Phinney, 1996, p. 143). This stage is quite similar to Bourdieu’s perception of an internalized habitus, where the child embodies the values of his family, since he had been subjected to its influence since his birth. In the second stage, the individual becomes “deeply interested in knowing more about their group” (Phinney, 1996, p. 143). And this leads to the next and final stage in Phinney’s model, where “minority individuals develop a secure, confident sense of themselves as members of their group” (Phinney, 1996, p. 143). Phinney argues that in this last stage the individual does not have any anger towards the majority. In other words, the individual achieves reconciliation as an ethnic subject with a peaceful attitude towards the dominant group. It is suggested that in this third stage of Phinney’s model, “individuals have explored their ethnic group membership and are clear as to the meaning of ethnicity in their life” (French, Seidman, Allen, Aber, 2006, p. 2). According to Phinney’s argument, the subject may overcome two difficulties of minor vs. major culture clash. Chávez and Guido-DiBritto consider this conclusion “helpful in identifying very real triggers for consciousness and in outlining threats to ethnic self-concept” but “missing a discussion of the critical and positive aspect of immersion into one’s own culture” (1999, p. 43). In my point of view, the last stage of Phinney’s model is problematic since the ethnic subject does not generally reach a reconciliation in the New World where he needs to connect that ethnic identity to the newly acquired national identity.

Phinney’s model is explanatory about the developmental stages. However, her model is based on an achieved sense of self while in most cases the final stage requires a conceded reconciliation. I argue that in *Bread Givers* and *The Island Within* the members of Jewish ethnicity go through five stages of the identity formation process. The first stage of the identity formation process I suggest is very similar to Phinney’s initial stage. In this phase, the individual is unaware of his identity as the habitus (and the ethnic culture it brings with it) is internalized. The identity is taken for granted; it has always been there. For instance, Jewish people surround Sara on Hester Street. She is not exposed to other habitus yet. When her elder sister Mashah, who is interested in the American way of life, comes to

their house with a new toothbrush, a towel and soap rather than handing her wages to her father; Sara responds just like other family members. She thinks that Mashah has “no heart, no feelings,” and is not a dutiful daughter (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 6). Sara blames her sister for being arrogant but does not acknowledge that the reason underneath is her own upbringing as a dutiful Jewish daughter. Arthur, on the other hand, looks more specifically into his internalized ancestry. In Lewisohn’s novel, memory and blood become almost synonymous with instinct. When contemplating on Goyims and Yehudims, Arthur “continued to search his memory for other and outward visible methods by which his consciousness of being Jews had crept into his sister’s mind and into his own” (Lewisohn, 1928, pp. 104-105). Jewish identity is internalized for Arthur, and he tries to figure out a memory to understand how he already has this knowledge of who he is. This supports the idea that the first stage is the outcome of a collective past, where memories of identity and knowledge of the self within a community are embedded in the ethnic subject’s life. The collective past brings forth an archive and this archive becomes an inseparable part of the cultural habitus. Derrida and Prenowitz argue that “the concept of the archive ... shelters itself from this memory which it shelters: which comes down to saying also that it forgets it” (1995, p. 9). The family archive is lost as the characters happen to forget their Jewish background. Thus, remembrance and forgetting together form the basis for the Levys’ Jewish familial archive. Lewisohn implies that cultural heritage is part of this archive, in which the forgotten familiar becomes the unknown/unfamiliar. It is “the voice of the blood” (Lewisohn, 1928, p. 105), and the “spiritual heritage” (Lewisohn, 1928, p. 343). For Arthur, the *unheimlich* is within him and yet outside his body; it is the forgotten memories he shares with his kinsmen.

The second stage is the encounter with the outside world. In this stage the individual breaks through his habitus and is exposed to other habitus and cultures. This leads the ethnic member to question himself and his group as he questions the difference between him as a minority subject and the dominant other. The real breakthrough for Sara is her decision to leave her home as she identifies herself as an American. This leads her to encounter the world outside the conventional boundaries of her Jewish community. On the surface, Sara is eager to explore this newly found habitus, but her encounter with white Americans and their indifference to her construct an individuality that contradicts the communal Jewish life she lived on Hester Street. She describes herself “like a lost ghost. I was nothing and nobody Even in college, I had not escaped from the ghetto” (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, pp. 219-220). The ghetto; in this case, the cultural signifiers of her Jewishness inscribed to her inner-self and outer manners, betray her in college, revealing to everyone who she is under her American clothes. The Jewess is declined entry to a white middle-class American community which leads her to question her identity as a discriminated Jew. Arthur, on the other hand, struggles through this encounter and questions himself as to who he and his family are. In high school he becomes aware of “the sound of his name” and his father’s “foreign accent” and this “awareness [becomes] acute and painful” (Lewisohn, 1928, p. 115). He questions himself, the name Levy—the monumental reminiscent of centuries of Jewishness, and his father’s accent. Sara does not ask questions since she already knows the answers, but Arthur questions his Jewishness because even though he knows it is in his blood, at this point in his life Judaism has not been as prominent in his life as it has been in Sara’s life.

When the individual finds answers to questions about his ethnic identity, he moves towards the third stage where he fights the majority's discriminatory system and embraces his ethnic identity. He asks and learns more about his ethnic group and tends to explain everything regarding his ethnic identity. This third stage works partially in Yeziarska's novel, as Sara's fight against the system is not necessarily presented as the fight of a Jewish woman, but as the fight of a woman in a new place. Sara fights against her boss (1925/1999, p. 166), fights for more meat in the restaurant (1925/1999, p. 169), and fights with teachers and the girls at the laundry (1925/1999, p. 180) not because she is Jewish but because she is a woman unaware of the rules of her new American precincts. And yet, Yeziarska offers these hardships as incidents experienced by immigrant women; because of the limitations of the Old World patriarchy dominating the habitus of Jewish women's lives. It is this patriarchy that turns this situation into a handicap for Sara; she fails to understand the individual ways of America as a woman, for her existence in the household was needed merely to support her father's Rabbinical studies. Likewise, Lewisohn artfully places his character into the fight against the system as Arthur tries to make meaning of his Jewishness. His education at Columbia gives Arthur the chance to learn more about his ethnic identity. His physiognomy is described as "unmistakably Jewish" (1928, p. 125), he questions if Jews are his own kind (1928, p. 132), avoids taking German classes in order to prevent his past from catching up with him (1928, p. 134), and ends up taking an anthropology class from a Jewish professor (1928, p. 154). The university education serves as a preparatory ground for Arthur before his fight against the racial subjugation of Jewish patients at the Hospital for the Insane on Drew's Point. He starts to embrace his Jewishness as he tries to help the Jewish patients who are abused by the Irish attendants. Arthur understands that the high percentage of mentally ill among "his people" would receive a bad treatment from Americans and Americanized ethnicities within the hospital (Lewisohn, 1928, p. 182). In other words, race becomes a crucial element in Lewisohn's narrative. Schuchalter asserts that in *The Island Within* "[r]ace' is the prime mover of the plot, determining which paths the characters will take in constructing their lives" (2007, p. 14). Consequently, Arthur develops a sense of belonging to the Jewish race as his story moves towards inner inquisitions.

The fourth stage of the model is an awareness that brings more questions. The hyper-conscious state of ethnic awareness results in another self-questioning. In this phase the ethnic subject meditates on whether he is discriminating himself by learning who he is and highlighting his ethnicity. Sara is conscious of her ethnicity and fails to leave behind the audibly remarkable sign of her Jewishness: the vernacular that is reminiscent of her initial habitus. When she becomes a teacher, her embarrassment upon pronouncing the word "sing" with a Jewish vernacular acts as a reminder of her identity. She questions how she was discriminated because of these outward signs that cannot be suppressed. As a Jewish woman running away from the Old World towards the New, and discriminating herself from both, she is left rootless in "a hard and prejudiced world which kept her always a stranger" (Wilentz, 1991-1992, p. 34). As a psychoanalyst, Arthur steps forward in this stage. He muses that a Jew needs to act less like a Jew in order not to discriminate himself from the Gentiles: "Wasn't it a self-stultification, since one had to and did in the end live Jewishly, to live Jewishly on as poor and stripped and ignorant a basis as possible? Why? So as not to emphasize one's Jewishness in the eyes of the

purely theoretical *Goyim*” (Lewisohn, 1928, p. 320). Arthur experiences his emphasized Jewishness especially when he discusses with Joe and makes decisions about his and his son John’s lives together with his gentile wife Elizabeth.

The final stage of the model I propose is a conceded reconciliation unlike Phinney’s ethnic identity achievement. At this final phase the subject acknowledges his circumstances as an ethnic group member. He understands that he ‘had to’ discriminate himself because of the majority’s pressure as the hegemonic power. This self-discrimination only serves to underline the differences more and labels the individual with a highly intensified etiquette as the other. The individual sees this and accepts who he is. He has (at least) two identities: ethnic and national. He can be both an ethnic group member and an American; but the dominant majority may not see him as both. This is why I call this final stage as conceded reconciliation. The ethnic identity is formed but its acquisition generally results with a fault line in the national identity. The reconciliation itself becomes deconstructive in the sense that it reaffirms their difference from American natives as the ethnic other, problematizing their sense of belonging. This is visible both in Sara’s and Arthur’s cases. Sara manages to become a “teacherin” and accomplishes her American dream of becoming “a person among people” (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 237). Her Jewish identity is more problematic when compared to the newly acquired identity of the “Americanerin” (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 255). Sara, like Arthur, cannot sever her ties with her Jewish identity, but unlike Arthur her relationship with Jewishness at the end is on a love-hate basis. She wants to “tear the roots of [her] father out of [her] flesh and bones, force [her] heart and brain to blot him out of [her] soul” (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 274). But then she understands that she and her father are one: “How could I have hated him and tried to blot him out of my life? Can I hate my arm, my hand that is part of me? Can a tree hate the roots from which it sprang?” (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 286). Sara reaches the conceded reconciliation at this time in her story. Hugo acts as the mediator for the reconciliation, but the weight and the shadow of Reb Smolinsky and “generations who made [her] father” disrupts this reconciliation (Yeziarska, 1925/1999, p. 297). She becomes the burden bearer as her ideal to become an American and the weight of generations of Jews on her back clash in the end. She is both, and she is none. While Sara struggles against her identities, Arthur needs to make a decision as an American scientist and a Jewish kinsman. He resurrects the Jew within, but in order to complete the resurrection he needs to go to Romania leaving his American habitus behind. His transformation follows a long path from Israeli to European and American national identities.

Conclusion

In *Religion, Culture and Politics in the Twentieth-Century United States* (2007), Mark Hulsether argues that subsequent generations of the first wave immigrants underwent a differentiation in their cultural values to escape the panoptical gaze of the mainstream community (109). However, this attitude of the mainstream Christians also led people of minority and ethnic groups to hold on to their culture and to reconstruct their identities without the restraints of the hegemonic mainstream. For Jewish Americans, it became important to preserve cultural values such as Yiddish language and Jewish rituals.

This anthropological process of challenging the mainstream, submitting to it, and then reclaiming the diasporic culture demonstrates itself on various levels in *Bread Givers* and *The Island Within*. As discussed, the authenticity factor of the ethnic group shapes a person from the beginning of his life since he is born into those webs of culture. But people are not essentially what their former generations are. Members of an ethnic group are made from the same clay, they are shaped on the same potter's wheel, but they may turn out in different shapes. Sara and Arthur differ from each other, and they also differ from their parents; they transform into unique end products of their habitus as they move along their Americanization journey. Sara realizes that she will always be a Jew on Hester Street though an American inside. Arthur, on the other hand, realizes that the only way for a Jew to remain pure is to escape from his Americanized self and the American habitus. They both reach a conceded reconciliation as they are caught between the Old and New Worlds, stuck in a never-ending clash between their Jewish and American identities.

References

- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste* (R. Nice, Trans.). Harvard UP. (Original work published 1979)
- Bourdieu, P. (1995). *Outline of a theory of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge UP. (Original work published 1972)
- Brodkin, K. (1998). *How Jews became white folks: and what that says about race in America*. Rutgers UP.
- Chametzky, J., Felstiner, J., Flanzbaum, H., Hellerstein, K. (Eds.). (2001). *Jewish American literature: a Norton anthology*. W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Chávez, A. F. & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1999). Racial and ethnic identity and development. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 84, 39-47.
- Derrida, J. & Prenowitz, E. (1995). Archive fever: a Freudian impression. *Diacritics*, 25 (2), 9-63.
- French, S. E., Seidman, E., Allen L., Aber, J. L. (2006). The development of ethnic identity during adolescence. *Developmental Psychology*, 42 (1), 1-10.
- Goldstein, E. L. (2006). *The price of whiteness: Jews, race, and American identity*. Princeton UP.
- Guzik, D. (2018). *Genesis 49 – the blessing of the sons of Jacob*. Retrieved from <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-49/>, on December 16, 2022.
- Howe, I. (1976). *World of our fathers*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Hulsether, M. (2007). *Religion, culture and politics in the twentieth-century United States*. Columbia UP.
- King, A. (2000). Thinking with Bourdieu against Bourdieu: a 'practical' critique of the habitus. *Sociological Theory*, 18 (3), 417-433.
- Lewisohn, L. (1922). *Up stream: an American chronicle*. Boni and Liveright Publishers.
- Lewisohn, L. (1928). *The island within*. Harper & Brothers.
- New International Version (2011). Bible.com. Retrieved from <https://www.bible.com/bible/111/GEN.49.NIV>, on March 1, 2023.
- Nilsen, H. N. (1983). Jewish nationalism: a reading of Ludwig Lewisohn's *the island within*. *American Studies Scandinavia*, 15, 59-68.
- Phinney, J. S. (1996). Understanding ethnic diversity: the role of ethnic identity. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 40 (2), 143-152.
- Schuchalter, J. (2007). Modernism and modernity: the “case” of Mr. Lewisohn. *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, 26, 3-20.
- Sol, A. (2001). Longings and renunciations: attitudes towards intermarriage in early twentieth century Jewish American novels. *American Jewish History*, 89 (2), 215-230.
- Ortner, S. B. (1996). *Making gender: the politics and erotics of culture*. Beacon Press.
- Wilentz, G. (1991-1992). Cultural mediation and the immigrant's daughter: Anzia Yeziarska's *bread givers*. *MELUS*, 17 (3), 33-41.
- Yeziarska, A. (1999). *Bread givers*. Persea Books. (Original work published 1925)