

WHITENING DOMESTIC SPACES: ENACTING FEMALE ROLES IN ANZIA YEZIERSKA'S *THE LOST BEAUTIFULNESS*

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to give an accurate account of how female stereotypes around the concept of hygiene and domesticity in early 20thC North American context influenced newly arrived Eastern European immigrants. Located in New York's Lower East Side ghetto and determined by their Jewish background, these immigrants' arrival caused them a cultural shock to the point that they started shaping their identities according to the new standard of beauty and cleanliness related to the Americanness they were eager to perform. For this purpose, Anzia Yezierska's short story *The Lost Beautifulness* serves as a referent because it demonstrates the failure of Americanization as the prospective means through which the American Dream could be experienced, a credo which, according to the author, would only reinforce classist policies instead of cancelling them. To this effect, Yezierska depicts the actual consequences for these Jewish female immigrants after attempting to Americanize their private household spaces and maintain, thus, the standard of cleanliness necessary to validate their accurate adaptation to the American culture from their ghettoized and marginalized context.

Keywords: Americanization, Anzia Yezierska, female stereotypes, whitening, domesticity, American Dream

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es mostrar cómo los estereotipos de feminidad en relación a la higiene y al espacio doméstico influyeron a las mujeres inmigrantes recién llegadas de Europa del Este en el contexto norteamericano de principios del siglo XX. Establecidas en el gueto del Lower East Side de Nueva York y condicionadas por su pasado judío, estas mujeres comenzaron a dar forma a una nueva identidad de acuerdo con el estándar de belleza y limpieza requeridas para una Americanización eficaz y completa. Para este propósito, el relato corto de la autora Anzia Yezierska, *The Lost Beautifulness* sirve como referente literario que demuestra el fracaso de dicha Americanización como estrategia para alcanzar el

ideal del Sueño Americano ya que, según el testimonio de la autora, solo reforzaría las políticas clasistas en vez de cancelarlas. En un intento por validar su adaptación a la cultura americana desde los márgenes de la aceptación social, Yeziarska retrata las consecuencias fatales a las que se enfrentan las mujeres inmigrantes judías tras americanizar el espacio privado del hogar dentro del contexto del gueto neoyorquino.

Palabras clave: Americanización, Anzia Yeziarska, estereotipos femeninos, blancura, doméstico, Sueño Americano

1. American Femininity and Jewish Newcomers: An introduction

The spread of female stereotypes in early twentieth-century North American society influenced the experiences of women immigrants up to the point that they were only able to achieve a complete adaptation by complying with the gendered norms related to their social status. The arrival of Jewish immigrants belonging to the second migratory wave, which took place between 1880s and 1910s, was thoroughly monitored by charitable institutions in charge of safeguarding the prospective inhabitants, thus their influence determined most of the immigrants' first contact with the new territory: "Institutions of Americanization such as settlement houses, charity organizations, and vocational schools were quickly set up at the beginning of the mass immigration...enforcing social, cultural, and linguistic acculturation and purging the East European Jew of perceived ethnic traits" (Konzett 25). Among other purposes, this type of private institutions encouraged immigrants, located in New York's Lower East Side ghetto, to actively participate in the American labor dynamics by teaching courses on what they labeled as "domestic science" programs (Berch 39). These courses enabled newcomers to fulfil the standardized Victorian womanhood of the period, — "Whatever new roles were made available to Jewish women in America followed the patterns of gentile society...what we have come to know as the Victorian ideal of womanhood" (Baum, Hyman, and Michel 28)—, at the same time that they could contribute to the household income by working as servants for higher class employers.

The application of domestic sciences within the urban context meant for ghettoized Jewish women to establish contact with upper classes as they had been trained to serve and accomplish household chores as a means of livelihood: "when the supply of servants shifted from native-born to immigrant, housewives began to confront domestics who had scarcely any idea of how to approach their work. Backgrounds of poverty and deprivation had provided little preparation for the

performance of domestic duties according to American standards” (Matthews 96). With the purpose of implementing behavioral stereotypes around the concepts of cleanliness, hygiene, external appearance, and nutritional habits, charitable institutions intended to Americanize Jewish immigrant mothers without this implying their social acceptance in the public realm or their recognition as American individuals. As a consequence, exclusion would increase, since they could not either escape from their poverty or enjoy the privileges the benefactresses and the American ladies held. However, despite the Lower East Side being regarded as a space of “fierce congestion, a place in which the bodily pressures of other people, their motions and smells and noises, seemed always to be assaulting one” (Howe 67), some Eastern European women found ways to achieve a quick adaptation within their tenements by applying socially accepted improvements to their kitchens through affordable whiteness and cleanliness.

Accomplishing domestic tasks, however, did not only imply the acceptance of class hierarchy in terms of social privileges, but also increased the stigmatization of poverty in terms of dirtiness (Berger 19). The longer the low-classes’ stigma of dirt remained attached to the context of the Lower East Side, the less likely the newly-arrived women’s dreams of upward mobility became. As Ronit Berger rightly explains: “These women do not identify themselves as a ‘dirty’ people but clean the actual dirt of their surroundings (the markers of their poverty) in order to gain a more respectable identity in their new American world” (27). Likewise, Yeziarska’s characters struggle so as not to be identified as uncleaned by assimilating to the standards of beauty associated with household care, which was the only space where they could have the authority of manipulating. Or so it seemed so far.

Parallel to the changeable status of the identity of the early twentieth-century Jewish newcomers, open to the new environmental conditionings, the need for a role model to fulfill Americanness began to gain importance among the elitist circles that controlled the consumption market. By acquiring “whiteness by cosmetic means” (Simpson 105), Jewish women could demonstrate their successful adaptation without leaving the private space. Thanks to literary records produced at the time, such as those written by the Polish-born American writer Anzia Yeziarska, it is possible to gather an exhaustive account of how female immigrants acquired their Americanization by purchasing American femininity, as it is the case of Hanneh Hayyeh in Yeziarska’s short story *The Lost Beautifulness*. In the story, she transforms the white paint she purchases into a symbolic path towards Americanization. and, consequently, enters the consumption market realm as a desiring individual in search of other consumers’ validation.

At that time, the Victorian archetype started to be displayed as a way to distinguish proper American women from what was considered “greenhorn,” (Levinson, *Exiles* 53), a term coined to refer to recently-arrived immigrants from Europe. By erasing any discriminatory feature, the archetype allowed ghettoized women to pass themselves off as Americans, a privilege that at the time Yeziarska wrote her novels meant recognition and visibility in the public sphere. As Glenn points out:

While middle-class Victorians argued that woman’s moral and domestic responsibilities should take precedent over any income-producing role, eastern European Jews...thought it perfectly proper for women to help earn a living while the men pursued a life of religious scholarship. (11)

Advertised as a quick and efficient way to acquire Americanness, Victorian femininity became so appealing because it allowed immigrants to be recognized as equals to their middle- and upper-class counterparts. This female type became preferred over the work-oriented female ideal that Eastern European women had been performing until they arrived in America, the “Golden Country” (Yeziarska, *Lost* 58), strongly influenced by socialist and hard-working ethics (Antler 74).

2. *The Lost Beautifulness and the purchase of Americanness*

As earlier mentioned, Anzia Yeziarska gave an exhaustive account of how the North American standards of femininity influenced the newcomers and what the actual consequences of such influence were. Throughout her literary production, Yeziarska sets out the difficulties a Jewish woman had to face when adapting to new cultural customs, especially in terms of gender roles assigned to them: “They (women writers) are trapped between the mythical construction of an America they cannot attain as immigrants and the quotidian realities they have to cope with in the New World as females” (Zaborowska 28). Institutions such as the Social Betterment Society, portrayed in the short story “The Free Vacation House,” or the Home for the Working Girls, depicted in her novel *Arrogant Beggar*, act as a prism through which her characters reflect themselves at the same time that they look for recognition by attempting to learn from the benefactresses’ reflections. The feminine ideal was, thus, widespread throughout New York’s Lower East Side ghetto by charitable entities whose main purpose was to teach female immigrants to enlarge their experiences within the domestic space. Perceived as an apparently accurate means to achieve the recognition of their individuality, Americanization is genuinely portrayed as a process of self-erasure rather than an enriching experience: “Yeziarska experienced firsthand the severe

policies and politics of Americanization and assimilation as practiced in the late nineteenth century” (Konzett 604).

In the short story *The Lost Beautifulness*, published in the compilation *Hungry Hearts* in 1920, the author depicts Hanneh Hayyeh's desire to renovate her kitchen so as to exemplify the extent to which the standards of cleanliness affected Jewish women's tastes. As this research below demonstrates, Hanneh's yearning for being recognized as American by the elitist social circles, personified in Mrs. Preston's character, actually perpetuates classist discourses and supports assimilation as the only alternative to achieve a successful adaptation.

In addition to the imitation of Victorian femininity, which stressed the invisibility of women in the public realm due to its orientation toward domestic tasks, Eastern European women had to comply with other responsibilities. Owing to their husbands' dedication to the study of the Torah in the synagogue, these women were forced to earn a living outdoors as well: “In Eastern Europe women had, as an extension of their domestic responsibilities, two traditional functions: helping to support their families, and transmitting certain elements of Jewish culture” (Baum, Hyman and Michel 120). According to this argument, the frequency with which Jewish women occupied posts in Eastern Europe would have encouraged them, once on American soil, to continue fulfilling their duties both inside and outside of the domestic space. However, as it is thoroughly explained in Glenn's (1990) research, the majority of these women had to leave their family businesses and take part as wage earners in factories located on the outskirts so that they could accrue better salaries. This, however, was not always the case. Unable to adapt themselves to the new factorial routine and accomplish their motherly duties simultaneously, a large number of Lower East Side women confined their experiences to the privacy of the household context, which implied the reduction of family incomes. Furthermore, the financial need disrupted the family bonds because the daughters or, in the more Americanized cases, the fathers had to earn a living by working at the emerging factories. Accordingly, the charitable companies' help targeted ghettoized mothers now that they could not experience the influence of Americanization in the public sphere. As Elizabeth Ewen explains,

Social workers focused on mothers precisely because of this. They were concerned because these women were not subject to a daily infusion of American values, and feared their influence on the first generation of “real” Americans, the children. Caught in the margins between old and new, immigrant mothers posed a threat to assimilation. (94)

Entangled between what Jane Burstein describes as “two models of womanhood,”—“the ‘true woman’ who defined herself domestically in pious, submissive service to her family, and the ‘mother in Israel,’ whose strength preserved the home and whose home preserved Judaism” (Burstein 50)—, Jewish mothers underwent the process of assimilation determined by their confinement. The adoption of the Victorian type, therefore, led to a destabilization that only could be solved, firstly, by placing the ghettoized mothers inside the private space, where they could transfer their remaining Jewish values and be in charge of household chores. Secondly, by letting their children participate in the urban working dynamics, as it is the case of Hanneh Hayyeh’s son, Aby, who enrolled in the American army.

The stereotyping discourses based on Victorian femininity achieved to gain access inside the lower classes’ sphere not only through the benefactresses’ influence but also by serving inside the upper-class domestic contexts: “Another component of the reformer’s dogged commitment to domestic training for immigrant girls was the possibility of inculcating middle-class values of “proper” womanhood in the immigrant girl who worked as a domestic in a German Jewish household” (Sinkoff 583). Likewise, Yeziarska demonstrates such inculcation when depicting Hanneh’s initial longing for whitening her kitchen after receiving Mrs. Preston’s influence: “By day and by night it burned on me the picture—my kitchen shining all white like yours, till I couldn’t rest till I done it” (Yeziarska, *Lost* 35).

In this short story, the author clearly depicts the impossibility for Jewish immigrants to fulfill the American Dream through Americanizing their experiences. From the beginning, Hanneh Hayyeh, a Jewish woman who economically supports her family by cleaning an upper-class woman’s house, concentrated her efforts on adjusting her kitchen to the standard of cleanliness typical of the elitist taste. Her longing to imitate Mrs. Preston’s kitchen leads her to whiten her kitchen’s walls so as to go beyond social class borders:

Ever since she first began to wash the fine silks and linens for Mrs. Preston, years ago, it had been Hanneh Hayyeh’s ambition to have a white-painted kitchen exactly like that in the old Stuyvesant Square mansion. Now her own kitchen was a dream come true. (31)

Furthermore, her son’s imminent arrival from the front encouraged her to decisively carry out that enterprise so that he could invite prominent individuals and be proud of his family’s status: “I want him to be able to invite even the President from America to his home and not shame himself” (31). Although Hanneh’s purpose appears related to her son’s comfort, she is actually attempting to narrow the social-class distance, which eventually would validate the premises *The Grove. Working Papers on English Studies* 26 (2019): 9-26. ISSN: 2386-5431.

of the American Dream she attempts to fulfil. Melanie Levinson makes reference to this aspect when she explains how the longing to imitate American archetypes implies Yeziarska's characters' gaining access to the middle and upper classes:

Her heroines keenly feel their “difference” and while each long “to become an American: to look and dress with the assurance of the native born,” they equate achieving that status with breaking into the white, middle-to upper-middle class Christian sphere. (5)

The transit toward this new experience, however, would only be achieved if Hanneh were able to afford it, which subsequently explains her failure. Despite Jake Safransky's warnings, — “You know nothing from holding tight to a dollar and saving a penny to a penny like poor people should” (Yeziarska, *Lost* 31)—, Hanneh decides to save the money she earns to whiten her kitchen. According to Yeziarska, Jewish male characters whose adaptation has not taken place yet, as it happens with Jake Safransky, perceived Americanization as a potential threat so they feel the need to steadily watch over their female partners to prevent their families from going bankrupt, yet again unveiling the paternalism with which ghettoized women were regarded. Her husband's distinction between the position that Hanneh occupies in the class hierarchy—the low class—, and the status she is pretending to belong to—the more Americanized one, or middle class—locates Hanneh on an undefined middle ground, which strengthens her vulnerability. If the acts of an individual, such as Hanneh's, do not fulfil the expectations placed upon their social status, then the individual's drive becomes a temporary enactment of an unreal identity. Instead of accepting her inability to change her status, Hanneh's frustrated attempt to represent the American Dream eventually favors the maintenance of class differences. Her husband's argumentation serves as a reminder to Hanneh of the limitations of her social aspirations, pointing out that their not owning the house also increases their vulnerability in comparison with Mrs. Preston or even the landlord's privileges: “Yah, but it ain't your house. It's the landlord's” (31). Hanneh's desire is shown as a perishable illusion, probably generated by the influence of the American Dream, against whose realization the assimilative discourses operated.

Furthermore, the fact that their flat belongs to an American individual increases Hanneh's helplessness to the point that she eventually understands the private space that has sheltered her experience—her kitchen—as a place which only an already-adapted and more socially respected character—the landlord—takes benefit from. In this context, poverty emphasizes these characters' lack of authority when they endeavor to manipulate private spaces they do not completely own. As well as Hanneh does not have legitimacy to manipulate a more privileged individual's property without adverse consequences, the ghettoized women's

attempt to perform Americanness without economic incomes to financially support its maintenance also leads to failure. Hanneh represents a tension between the Lower East Side inhabitants, for whom saving meant acquiring the maximum by spending the minimum, and the high-class standards of beauty only affordable by steady economic incomes.

Once Hanneh finally manages to whiten her kitchen, she culminates by announcing the renewal among her neighbors so that they can witness how she has succeeded in narrowing class boundaries. Eager to be publicly recognized for overcoming social stereotypes, she decides to turn her kitchen into a shop window whose whiteness strongly deserves to be displayed. In this way, not only does Hanneh publicize it among the neighbors but also requests Mrs. Preston's presence. Only when an already-Americanized individual—Mrs. Preston—validates the low-class characters' access to Americanness—Hanneh's—, is the adaptation perceived as accurately fulfilled: "I'll back up a shtrudel cake... They will all want to come to get a taste of the cake and then they'll give a look on Mrs. Preston" (36). Likewise the improvement of the kitchen's facilities, the lady's presence becomes an acquisition of which Hanneh takes advantage in her desire to have her new social status and identity recognized. By gathering both her neighbors and Mrs. Preston, Hanneh pretends to be acknowledged as someone who has managed to overcome class barriers by working hard to reach her goals, thus supporting the plausibility of the discourse of the American Dream. Hanneh's determination to assign Mrs. Preston as the legitimate authority that she needs to get the longed-for recognition once more confirms her actual vulnerability. Like Hanneh, early twentieth-century Jewish women relied on how they were understood socially by individuals like Mrs. Preston to get rid of their social invisibility: "You make the lowest nobody feel he's somebody" (35). In this way, when Mrs. Preston refers to Hanneh as an artist by concretely admiring her labor as laundress, the American lady actually is expressing the limitations of Hanneh's social status, even after having witnessed the kitchen's whitening: "'You are not a 'nobody', Hanneh Hayyeh. You are an artist—an artist laundress'" (35). Although her being perceived as an artist validates her access to the elitist American society, Hanneh's identity is as well determined by her domestic duties in both Mrs. Preston's and her own kitchen.

In this short story, Yeziarska merges cleanliness and beauty to show how Americanization influenced myriad lifestyles and managed to turn abstract perceptions into unaffordable consumer goods: "As the century wore on and there were increasing class differences between mistress and maid—and eventually ethnic and racial differences as well—women who worked as domestics were increasingly likely to be excluded from the benefits of domesticity they provided

for others” (Mathews 32). Hanneh’s absorption of elitist standards eventually becomes frustrated after introducing them within the context of the Lower East Side, an unsuitable space to support upper-class stereotypical comforts. Aware of the impossibility of hiding class differences, Jake warns his wife again about the inconvenience of pretending to play other social status’ roles: “It only dreams itself in you how to make yourself for an American and lay in every penny you got on fixing out the house like the rich” (Yeziarska, *Lost* 31). Yet again, paternalistic discourses coming from male figures, — “male adversaries” (Zierler 88)—, arise to infantilize female characters when they undertake the journey towards social acceptance by imitating the American Ladies’ domestic layout.

Yeziarska presents Mrs. Preston as the main source from whom Hanneh quenches her thirst of the codes of beauty and behavior typical of the American credo: “The hungry-eyed, ghetto woman drank in thirstily the beauty and goodness that radiated from Mrs. Preston’s person” (Yeziarska, *Lost* 34). In addition, Mrs. Preston also triggers Hanneh’s desire for performing the abstract realization of the term *democracy*, which, according to the lady, reflects the American inhabitants’ willingness to eradicate social exclusion:

It is to bring together the people on top who got everything and the people on the bottom who got nothing. She’s been telling me about a new word—democracy. It got me on fire. Democracy means that everybody in America is going to be with everybody alike. (32)

By referring to this term, Mrs. Preston gives Hanneh the tools with which she has been instilled to understand how the American society works. Presuming that Mrs. Preston is right, everything that takes place in the short story can be justified in terms of equality and justice. Hanneh accepts Mrs. Preston’s *democracy* and pursues her happiness in an attempt to eradicate class differences by whitening her kitchen. However, after some time, she realizes that the *democracy* Mrs. Preston talks about is not based on intercultural exchange but rather on economic resources: “Through consumption women could appropriate different identities. Despite the prevailing racist images within advertising of the period, transformation through consumption seemed to bypass the more reified hierarchies within evolutionary theory or eugenics” (Patterson 19). The reification Patterson refers to, instead, gradually undermines Hanneh’s aspirations as it highlights her lack of agency when attempting to overcome class boundaries. In the meantime, Hanneh continually refers to the need of being recognized by Mrs. Preston so that she can see herself as a validated individual, which, on the contrary, actually denotes the low classes’ illegitimacy in naming their experience: “When I see myself around the house how I fixed it up with my own hands, I forget I’m only a nobody. It makes me feel I’m also a person like Mrs. Preston” (Yeziarska,

Lost 32). As for Hanneh, achieving the status of *person* would mean the fulfillment of what the American Dream represents—the deserved outcome after struggling for her validation.

Mrs. Preston appears as a legitimate means through which the term *democracy* finds expression. However, her belonging to a more privileged social status turns her discourse on equality into an opportunistic strategy by which Hanneh's enterprise—whitening her kitchen—temporarily is granted as part of the American democratic agenda. As far as discursive legitimacy is concerned, Glenn sharply distinguishes between the terms *modernity* and *Americanization* to confirm that the latter enhances class hierarchy by discriminating against some individuals depending on the effectiveness with which they adopt the American identity. By contrast, she refers to *modernity* as an alternative credo that rather encompasses broadly strategic attitudes for ghettoized women: “opportunities denied or limited by the traditional boundaries of Jewish life in the Old World: political participation, education, freedom of movement and choice of residence, and secular as opposed to theocratic concept of authority and status” (3). In this respect, the *modernity* Glenn refers to is related to the New Woman's agenda, which precisely strives for what she enumerates, in opposition to the theocratic authority associated with Judaism. Just as the early twentieth-century discourses on female stereotypes had the purpose of creating easily recognizable archetypes,—such as the Gibson Girl, the Flapper or the emasculated New Woman type, among others (Patterson, 2008)—, the Jewish tradition also confined women's behavioral codes within a pre-fixed standard. As well as Glenn's *modernity* and *Americanization* can be regarded as strategic discourses shaped with the purpose of instructing stereotypes among the Lower East Side inhabitants, the characters' Jewish background also determined the way women have to deal with their daily routines.

In this context, however, Americanization discourses addressed to monitor recently-arrived immigrants finally resulted in discursive fallacies that facilitated their adaptation without overcoming class boundaries. Therefore, the female newcomers from Eastern Europe undertook the search for an American identity under the influence of such discourses whose only aim was to control their experiences. Either by setting Americanizing patterns or by encouraging them to actively participate in educational programs on hygiene, Americanization implied their leaving their cultural background behind: “cleanliness became something more than a way to prevent epidemics and make cities livable—it became a route to citizenship, to becoming American” (Hoy 87). Furthermore, Mrs. Preston's *democracy* seems to have also been shaped according to a class stereotyping strategy since it claims the eradication of class boundaries by precisely

reproducing those actions that help perpetuate the discrimination: "It is tempting to read the ambiguity around the "shop for the beautiful" as evidence of Yeziarska's subliminal awareness of the repressive aspects of Americanization through consumption" (Goldsmith 40). The efficacy of Mrs. Preston's *democracy* will thus remain inexistent as long as Hanneh is unable to achieve upward mobility even after having purchased whiteness.

Already-Americanized women held a privileged position and acted as role models for the ghettoized women because their successful adaptation prevented them from being pointed at for their European accent, their non-English language, or their religious customs (which, in this context, are relevant in terms of oppression). Yeziarska's characters, like Hanneh, develop an intersectional experience, which denotes the uselessness of the concept "American New Woman" to accurately represent the actual Jewish immigrant women's lives: "Yeziarska...appropriates the New Woman ideology, but ultimately redefines it as well; she empowered, working-class variant of New Jewish Womanhood" (Ungar 84). Despite both female groups understood their roles as wives as an extension of what sexual inequality represented at the time, the Lower East Side women's experience became harsher due to their geographical exclusion. In addition, they contributed, and sometimes even took charge, to the household sustenance by working as street peddlers, like Muhmenkeh in *Arrogant Beggar*, or by completing domestic tasks in high-class mansions, as is the case of Hanneh Hayeh.

3. Unattainable Americanness and Class Boundaries: A conclusion

After witnessing how the Americanized women enjoyed a more privileged status, the Eastern European Jewish immigrants prioritized their struggle for equality in terms of class, giving visibility to social exclusion by displaying a broadly inclusive discontent: "The narratives suggest that for Jews the barriers were being constructed and conceived of more in class terms" (Rottenberg 791). The culture shock that Yeziarska sets forth shows the difficulties of understanding between Americanized and ghettoized characters, even though they might have shared some structural oppression as women. The solution that the author suggests first involves the acknowledgement of a lack of recognition of the latter in the public space. Once they become aware of their invisibility in terms of social significance, ghettoized women seek a new identity status to avoid assimilating, and consequently discriminatory, policies. Excluded from the public sphere, the Jewish women in Yeziarska's work attempt to imitate the female ideal to acquire the longed-for recognized identity and gain admission into society's visual scope.

At first sight, Hanneh's investment in whitening her kitchen does not imply a cancellation of the American Dream, as long as it is the result of her efforts. However, the American individualistic credo and the consequences of carrying out Americanization without the means to support it financially provoke Hanneh's inevitable failure. Douglas J. Goldstein referred to this failure by arguing that its real purpose involved increasing class barriers:

Yeziarska depicts how something as seemingly innocuous as beauty actually reinforces hierarchies of race, class and gender, marginalizing immigrants who fervently believe in American ideals of democracy and justice but who do not have the means to look or dress like their social betters. (46)

Some days after Hanneh purposely displays her kitchen's whitening in front of Mr. Rosenblatt, the German-born American landlord, he warns her that her rent needs to be increased due to the improvements made in the flat. The new amount she has to pay becomes unaffordable for her. By arguing, "That don't concern me. If you can't pay, somebody else will. I got to look out for myself. In America everybody looks out for himself" (Yeziarska, *Lost* 37), Mr. Rosenblatt personifies the individualism supported by the discourse of Americanization, since his owning the flat directly implies legitimacy to manipulate his property according to his will. Paradoxically, he performs the American Dream as well by displaying a successfully Americanized adaptation, thus confirming that both discourses only collapse when Americanization cannot be supported financially. Therefore, Yeziarska demonstrates that any individual is able to perform the American Dream in New York as long as they can afford the cost of maintaining what social mobility and acquisition of beauty might demand.

When Hanneh compares the landlord to the Russian czar,—“The dogs! The blood-sucking landlords! They are the new czars from America!” (38)—, she points out the level of authority both of them share and how it is exercised conveniently upon more vulnerable individuals, such as tenants like herself. Mr. Rosenblatt's legal right to decide the price of the flat directly affects Hanneh's longing for class equality because that means she will remain subordinate to her landlord's whims as long as she lives there. Yeziarska's main characters usually need to witness the actual magnitude of their exclusion so as to undertake a process of disassociation from the standard Americanness they initially intended to perform. Aware of the increase in rent, Hanneh informs Mrs. Preston about the incident with the landlord in an attempt to seek for an American individual's validation and give credit to her version of justice. However, far from judging Mr. Rosenblatt's attitude, Mrs. Preston persuades Hanneh to accept a check so that she temporarily can afford the rental payments. In this way, like the landlord's

resolution, Mrs. Preston's participates in the maintenance of a society in which both individualism and paternalism act as the cornerstone of class differences. "You want to give me hush money to swallow down an unrightness that burns my flesh? I want justice" (39). The justice Hanneh claims is apparently challenged by Americanization and individualism, which also hinders her realization of the American Dream. When she discerns Mrs. Preston's actual intention, she makes reference to the discourse on democracy, which the lady previously used to encourage the kitchen's whitening: "You always made-believe to me that you're only for democracy" (40). Despite becoming aware of Mrs. Preston's unattainable discourse, Hanneh insists on pursuing justice in an effort to fulfil the American Dream she still believes in.

Mrs. Preston's act of charity, however, endorses the idea that poverty is the result of unsuitable individuals whose dreams of equality cannot be achieved as long as they continue applying inefficient methods for its accomplishment. As Stephen Pimpare explains, "If we believe that there is truly equality of opportunity in America, then any inequality of outcomes must be a problem of individual failure, and government interference is inappropriate favoritism" (Pimpare 35). Therefore, Hanneh's effort has not been enough to attain Mrs. Preston's democracy due to her lack of training on the American individualism (Tocqueville 884). According to this argument, her ineffectiveness would be the cause of her frustrated attempt to materialize equality, not the fact of an inexistent American Dream, as W. H. Auden clarifies in his introduction to Yeziarska's autobiography: "here (America) the poor man was not, as such, a man, but a person in a state of poverty from which, if he were a real man, he would presently extricate himself" (Yeziarska, *Red Ribbon* 13).

Yet Hanneh's pursuit of justice becomes much more insistent as she tackles the issue of democracy and how it supports liberty from an individualistic perspective. Goldstein interpreted her insistence by making reference to her need to turn equality into a broadly reachable experience for any ghettoized partner:

She associates her own ability to pursue and attain her passion for beauty as synonymous with the spread of democracy. Central to Hanneh's...conception of democracy is the notion that all people will be able to afford beauty, that tasteful accoutrements will no longer be the province solely of the wealthy. (47)

Her carrying on the enterprise for justice has to do with the steady belief that encouraged thousands of immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century to depart from their homelands in search of a place in which differences did not imply exclusion or poverty: "You was always telling me that the lowest nobody got

something to give to America. And that's what I got to give to America—the last breath in my body for justice” (Yeziarska, *Lost* 39).

The inexistent justice Hanneh envisions, which she finds unreachable, is a consequence of legitimizing the apparently inclusive discourse of the Americanization. According to this discourse, Hanneh is authorized to enforce her right to freely reform her flat without that implying the landlord's amending the price any time she makes an improvement. However, the public administration that processes the case resolves that Mr. Rosenblatt is legally authorized to freely manipulate his property as well: “The judge said the same as Mrs. Preston said: the landlord has the right to raise our rent or put us out” (40). The resolution, then, emphasizes the lack of relevance that Hanneh's formerly cultural solidarity has when dealing with individualistic American institutions. The network of power she encounters is woven continuously not just by the official institutions in charge of guaranteeing liberty and justice but also by individuals, such as Mr. Rosenblatt, whose arrival dates back from decades before the Eastern European wave took place.

The disappointment which Yeziarska's characters suffer, especially after attempting ineffectively to pass themselves off as Americans, usually make them realize the potential of their Jewish background at the same time that it encourages them to go back to the Lower East Side to live by their cultural difference. Ellen Gollub defines Hanneh's role as that of a spokesperson whose incidence in the New York experience is an example of how assimilation affects Jewish immigrants' lives negatively: “Hanneh Hayyeh might well be speaking for all these women to whom this home is not home. She destroys her kitchen rather than leave it, sadly to learn that it was her own soul she had killed” (59).

Nevertheless, Hanneh Hayyeh's story does not end like that. In addition to what Gollub states, the last scene turns itself into a more complex ironic display. By showing how Hanneh's family vacates their flat and waits for their son's arrival at the doorstep, Yeziarska dismantles the discourse of the American Dream from the symbolic paradox the scene represents: While there are low-class individuals fighting in the First World War to protect the ideal America purportedly stands for, there are other ones who are being excluded by the same ideal for which their children risk their lives, as is the case of Hanneh and her son, Aby:

Is this already America? What for was my Aby fighting? Was it then only a dream—all these millions people from all lands and from all times, wishing and hoping and praying that America is? Did I wake myself from my dreaming to see myself back in the black times of Russia under the czar? (Yeziarska, *Lost* 41)

The generational gap between both relatives highlights the difficulties that Eastern European immigrants underwent to successfully adapt to the new territory. Unlike her son's more effective adaptation, Hanneh's intention of gathering both her routine in Delancey Street and the American high-class archetype of cleanliness results in an eventual eviction. Since the Americanization of her kitchen comes from an elitist stereotype that she cannot afford permanently, it consequently involves the compliance with exclusionary and classist principles that have been the cause of her frustration.

By appealing to an aspiration whose realization cannot be fulfilled inside a ghettoized context, Yeziarska displays characters like Hanneh as representatives of those Jewish women whose adaptation revealed the incoherencies of the American Dream. Americanization, then, became a double-edged strategy inherently useless for lower classes whose economic income prevented them from maintaining the desired American status.

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