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London and the East End as Spectacles of Urban Tourism

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THE EXPLORATION OF European capitals during the modern period has often been associated with the figure of the flaneur, the observing city stroller, who drifted aimlessly through urban spaces. Alongside this increasingly commodified urban pastime emerged the exploration of ethnic neighborhoods that came to be known as slumming. To the largely male urban explorers, encountering the city became, in the words of Richard Sennett, a form of cosmopolitanism, the experience of diversity.¹ Urban strollers not only celebrated London as the empire's metonymic double but also debated its complicated social, cultural, and ethnic terrains. These differences fascinated writers who focused their curiosity eastward. Exploring and investigating the East End promised urban sociologists, social workers, and travelers something that was very different from London's West End leisure culture and the run-off-the-mill tours of historical sites.

Slumming in the East End operated as a cultural practice in a metropolitan city that brought cultures into contact and negotiated their boundaries, generating an engagement with and a rethinking of difference and modernity. At times, surveying the East End challenged individuals' identities and their understanding of social and ethnic differences.² This is true for not only the urban explorers of the British capital but also for the many Jews from the Continent as well as other foreigners who placed London's slums on their itineraries. While traveling separately, these individuals often refashioned the old realm of dangerous, uncivilized immigrants into a space that authenticated their self-understanding. Their

1. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge, 1977), 135–37.

2. Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, N.J., 2004), and Benjamin J. Lammers, "'Alien Dick Whittingtons': The National Imagination and the Jewish East End," *Jewish Culture and History* 1 (1998): 41–53.

collective narratives of London's immigrant quarters investigated and discussed the nature of the British capital, Europe, the contours of modernity, and Jewish identities. To them, this capital that embodied modernity not only threatened to level all difference into the harmony of citizenship but also became the site that allowed for the representation of the growing ethnic diversity.

Great Britain was not merely an isolated island but rather existed as an interconnected, multinational empire. Its capital London attracted and embraced many foreigners; rapid economic growth as well as an increasingly varied and expanding population altered the capital's appearance. In the 1840s, following a series of potato crop failures, a large number of Irish came to London. By 1851, the Irish—heavily concentrated in St. Giles, Whitechapel, and Southwark—made up 4.6 percent of London's population.³ In addition, around the year 1900, London became home to a number of very articulate and well-organized Indian societies that together with London's Irish nationalists and African Association helped to establish an anti-imperialist discourse in the city. Limehouse, due to its proximity to the docks, became one of the most cosmopolitan areas of the empire and came to inhabit a small but highly visible Chinese community of tradesmen, casual laborers, and transient sailors, which novelists like Sax Rohmer depicted as a menacing network of criminals. In simple numbers, however, Eastern European Jews quickly overtook many of the other immigrant communities of the empire's capital. Between 1881 and 1914, 120,000 to 150,000 Eastern European Jews settled permanently in Great Britain, and many of these immigrants moved into the districts of London that hitherto had been dominated by the Irish population.⁴

The mixture of poverty, unemployment, filth, prostitution, and crime that contemporaries have often associated with the immigrant quarters resulted in intense public scrutiny and an ever-expanding network of public and private reform organizations which battled to control and domesticate the influx of this massive immigration. As social workers and activists of philanthropic societies embarked upon their civilizing mission, they began to chart the ethnic, social, economic, and cultural make-up of the immigrant quarters. Initially these urban explorers reified imaginary

3. Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1979).

4. Jonathan Schneer, *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (New Haven, Conn., 1999), 184, 202; John Seed, "Limehouse Blues: Looking for Chinatown in the London Docks, 1900–40," *History Workshop Journal* 62.1 (2006): 58–85; Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002), 127.

boundaries between the capital's West and East Ends.⁵ Jack London, the American writer and traveler, ventured into the squalid landscape of the East End dressed as an out-of-work seaman. His disguise prepared him for his task and informed his readers of the cultural and social gulf he was aiming to overcome. He therefore initially cast the East End as inaccessible: "But O Cook, O Thomas Cook & Son, pathfinders and trail-clearers . . . unhesitatingly and instantly, with ease and celerity, could you send me to Darkest Africa or Innermost Thibet, but to the East End of London . . . you know not the way."⁶ Despite his obvious sympathies with the proletariat, London never overcame his own sense of cultural and individual superiority. The novelist witnessed a realm which warranted to be called "city of degradation" in which the "color of life is grey and drab," and everything is "helpless, hopeless, unrelieved and dirty."⁷ As he strolled through the Jewish East End, the gulf between the novelist and the observed appeared even wider. Instead of personal observation and communication, his travelogue on the Jewish immigrants relied on reports, newspapers articles, and other printed information.

Nativist anxieties about Jews and fear of the dilution of English racial identity further shaped attempts to map, alienate, and relegate the East End to the city's periphery. In his *Darkest England* (1890), the founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, described his unearthing of London's unknown realms within an extended analogy that linked the exploration of the sources of the Nile in Africa with the discovery of the causes of poverty and criminality in London.⁸ This extension of colonial discourses, as Anne McClintock argues, produced the East End as an "anachronistic space" that disallowed its inhabitants historical agency.⁹ Within this colonial perspective, exploring the East End became a journey backward in time. Yet this construction served not only to affirm and to create a dichotomy between the West End and East End but also revealed to the readers an exotic and unfamiliar realm of degradation. Insofar as reporters advertised their journeys to their diverse readers, they emphasized the

5. Felix Driver and David Gilbert, "'Heart of Empire?' Landscape, Space and Performance in Imperial London," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 16 (1998): 11–28.

6. Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (London, 1977), 11.

7. *Ibid.*, 94.

8. William Booth, *Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890), in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c. 1880–1900*, ed. S. Ledger and R. Luckhurst (Oxford, 2000), 45–49.

9. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York, 1995), 40.

exotic nature of their discovery that was at once repellent and attractive. Similarly, the perceived threat posed by the impoverished and politicized working class of the East End at times restricted tourists' itineraries to the "safe" areas of London, such as the West End and the City. Baedeker's injunction "to avoid poor neighbourhoods after nightfall" remained unchanged from 1879 until after World War II.¹⁰ Yet such warnings equally advertised and sensationalized the region. By the 1890s, London's guidebooks not only directed visitors to shops, theaters, monuments, and churches but also mapped excursions to world-renowned philanthropic institutions located in the slums of the East End.¹¹

Members of the established Anglo-Jewish community also engaged in this practice and became apprehensive that the unsavory qualities of immigrants could become attached to them. The *Jewish Chronicle* feared that the immigrant community posed a danger for the Anglo-Jewish community.¹² Often, Tony Kushner suggests, members of the more affluent and established community simply silenced the presence of the Eastern European Jews in representations of the Anglo-Jewish community and its heritage.¹³ Yet the immigrant community was highly visible, and separation between West and East, rich and poor, and Jews and non-Jews proved to be much more tenuous than these portrayals, as well as existing scholarship, suggest.¹⁴ The encounter with the East End not only marked distance but displayed ambivalence that testified to existing desires and uncertainties of urban explorers.

To be sure, the observers who described the East End both held and described a privileged viewing position. Exploring served to articulate and promote a program to transform and acculturate the Eastern European Jews by extending philanthropic aid to immigrants. Their portrayals inevitably sensationalized the practice of exploring these unknown

10. K. Baedeker, *London and its Environs* (Leipzig, 1879), 64–65, and David Gilbert, "London in All Its Glory—or How to Enjoy London's Guidebook Representations of Imperial London," *Journal of Historical Geography* 25.3 (1999): 279–97, 279.

11. Koven, *Slumming*, 1.

12. "The Consolidation of the Community," *Jewish Chronicle*, January 22, 1886, 9.

13. Tony Kushner, "The End of the 'Anglo-Jewish Progress Show': Representations of the Jewish East End, 1887–1987," in *The Jewish Heritage in British History, Englishness and Jewishness*, ed. T. Kushner (London, 1992), 78.

14. David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840–1914* (New Haven, Conn., 1994); 259–378; Eugene Black, *The Social Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1880–1920* (London, 1989); and David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry 1841–1991* (Cambridge, 1994), 67–102.

territories and drew attention to their immigrant subcultures. Detailing the squalor of the Ghetto, the Anglo-Jewish press began to develop interests beyond the voyeuristic or philanthropic; already in 1880, newspapers reported on Yiddish theater. Despite denigrating Yiddish, the *Jewish Chronicle* found the play “curious to see.”¹⁵ Four years later, curiosity transformed itself into unreserved praise. To the visitor, a performance in Yiddish, which was “naturally unintelligible to an English audience,” made his visit worthwhile as the “vivid tins of the East.” It compared very favorably with the “uniform gray of English . . . life.”¹⁶ Charles Dickens, in his *Dictionary of London* (1888), similarly advertised the local markets’ Jewish culinary delights.¹⁷ Whereas in George Eliot’s novel, *Daniel Deronda*’s rambling of the East End left him rather “tired of the streets,” the Anglo-Jewish writer Israel Zangwill, in his *Children of the Ghetto* (1892), observed a few years later that despite its filth and squalor, the East End was a region where the “rose of romance blows yet a little longer in the raw air of English reality.”¹⁸

It became fashionable to go slumming on conducted tours of the toughest, roughest streets and taverns, especially after the serial murderer Jack the Ripper had made the slums notoriously famous. A drawing in the American *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* depicted a bus with an open deck filled with slummers amidst a bustling market scene.¹⁹ The guidebook *Through London by Omnibus* (1900) took the tourist on a voyage into the domestic orient of Whitechapel: “The great Jewish colony . . . A walk through this curious bazaar on a Sunday would give one sensations enough to last for some time. The motley crew speaking and shouting almost every human language, the diversity of the costume, the curious jumble of the goods for sale on the stalls, and smell of fried fish, garlic, and the like, make up an experience that requires to be gone through to be appreciated.”²⁰

15. “The Drama in Judisch-Deutsch,” *Jewish Chronicle*, March 26, 1880, 13.

16. “The Opera Season in Mile End,” *Jewish Chronicle*, January 4, 1884, 6. See also Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry 1841–1991*, 78.

17. Charles Dickens, *Dickens’s Dictionary of London 1888: An Unconventional Handbook* (Devon, 2001), 140. On the changing perception of London’s urban space in his novels, see Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (London, 1999), 77–86, 115–22.

18. George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. T. Cave (London, 1995), 382, and Israel Zangwill, *Children of the Ghetto: A Study of Peculiar People*, ed. M. Rochelson (Detroit, 1998), 61.

19. Richard Harding Davis, “The West and East Ends of London,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 88.524 (January 1894): 279–93.

20. C. Hodder, *Through London by Omnibus: A Chatty Guide to the Principal Sights of London* (London, ca. 1900), 63.

Yet exploring and writing about the East End provided men and women with an actual and imagined location where, with the approval of society, they could test prevailing norms about ethnicity, class, and gender relations. Revolting at times against their families and ideals of female domesticity, the urban environment allowed, for example, some of the New Women to experience freedom and a sense of public importance. These women initially justified their public role as an extension of their domestic duties and emerged in British society and elsewhere as spectators, engaged investigators, rent collectors, and journalists.

Along with many Jewish and non-Jewish explorers, Beatrice Potter, the social investigator and critic of unguarded capitalism, supplied her cousin, the urban sociologist Charles Booth, with information. Potter, who observed the Jews of Whitechapel in the late 1880s, worked at the purpose-built worker's dwellings, the Katherine Buildings. She wrote case histories of tenants, recording the details of their employment, illnesses, marriages, and offspring. Equipped with this intimate perspective on the immigrant community, Potter took on the job of describing the Jews for the first volume of sociological exploration of the London's working class in *Life and Labour* (1886–1903).

Her contributions to this path-breaking study reflect unease about British society. She captured a population that seemed unfazed by the ills that otherwise had become associated with London as the modern Babylon. She discovered virtues in Eastern European Jews that many commentators felt were wanting in London's population. Besides Jews' trained intellects, they appeared thrifty, ambitious, and industrious. Yet she also believed they exhibited "physical self-control and mental endurance." Potter thought that the Jewish tradition aptly prepared them for their life. "Obedience toward parents, self-devotion for children, in the chastity of the girl, in the support and protection of the wife" had become welded to the basic Jewish family values.²¹

Not without jealousy, Potter portrayed gender relations in a positive light, in which "the maternity of women" is sacred and men refrain from degrading women to the position of workers.²² Yet in the end, the stereotypical view of Jews as relentless capitalists, who were inclined to undersell their competitors and were devoid of morals, overshadowed these positive features. The Jewish immigrant, according to Potter, displayed an "enlight-

21. Beatrice Potter, "The Jewish Community," in *A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840–1940*, ed. D. Englander (Leicester, 1994), 140. See also Royden J. Harrison, *The Life and Times of Sidney and Beatrice Webb: 1858–1905: The Formative Years* (London, 2000), 143–69.

22. Potter, "The Jewish Community," 140.

ened selfishness, seeking employment or profit with an absolute mobility of body and mind."²³ Potter's meshing of virtues and vices appeared in Booth's taxonomy as a list of contradictions. For Booth, Jews were neither rough nor respectable but rather clean in person and dirty in habits, noisy yet sober, and not endowed with the visual signs of respectable domesticity but nevertheless clearly private and home-centered.²⁴

Potter's contributions to Booth's large social investigation, despite her positive portrayal of the family and gender relations, remained detached and strove toward a level of scientific objectivity. Her authority rested not simply on her observations and strolls but gained credibility as she culled insights from pertinent literature about the Jews, including the *Jewish Chronicle*, and Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler.²⁵ At one point Potter masqueraded as a seamstress in an East End tailor shop and so supplemented her information with firsthand impressions. Within the more intimate relations, rigid boundaries became less visible. Without the pretext of a detached social investigator, her urban explorer's voice shifted to the first-person singular. Potter found support and encouragement, despite her failings at sewing, in the community of women. Within these narrated encounters, detachment and social superiority fade as Potter's voice displays her critical perspective on gender relations in Britain. Her perception is suffused with sympathy and envy when she notes that there are "a happy lot of people . . . men and women mixing together in a free and easy manner." Working during the day, the "seamstresses nevertheless brim with frank enjoyment." They sought the "multitudinous excitements of the East End . . . while their feelings unburden themselves in the pleasure of promiscuous love-making." Instead of moralizing, Potter views this as indicative of their lives in "the Garden of Eden of uncivilized life."²⁶

23. *Ibid.*, 141.

24. Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992), 36. See also David F. Schloss, "The Jew as Workman," *The Nineteenth Century* 29 (1891): 99–108. The *Jewish Chronicle* singled out Potter for her attempt to provide a "fair picture of Jewish life and labour in the East End." See "Life and Labour in East London," *Jewish Chronicle*, April 19, 1889, 7.

25. Beatrice Webb, *The Diary of Beatrice Webb: Volume 1: Glitter Around and Darkness Within, 1875–1892*, ed. N. And J. MacKenzie (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), 250, 266. She also thanked Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler for his information on religious and charitable organization in the East End. See Beatrice Potter, "The Jewish Community," Charles Booth, ed. *Labour and Life of the People*, 1st series: *Poverty*, vol. 1: *East London* (London, 1889), 564–90, here 564.

26. "Pages from a Work-Girl's Diary," *Nineteenth Century* 25 (September 1888): 301–314, here 311. See also Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian*

Inasmuch as the exploration of the East End let Potter discover a shared common ground, her social work, her contribution to Booth, and her article crafted a new role for her within the British society. Indeed, such engagement in the East End helped to launch her public career just as firsthand professional experiences gave credence to the public voices of other women. Women like her who were active in the East End aimed to differentiate themselves from other curious visitors who had become the subject of public criticism. For example, *Punch* (1884) published "In Slummibus," an ironic visual satire depicting a clergyman surrounded by two attractive young women presumably carrying literature to distribute to the poor.²⁷ Helen Bosanquet, the secretary of the London Charity Organization Society, distanced her investigation *Rich and Poor* (1896) too from the many middle-class travelers who came to explore the "unknown region" of the East End as "modern knight-errant[s]." Bosanquet sought to put some space between her and the misery-seeking middle-class women who went to the slums asking to be shown titillating cases of unmitigated desolation. Too often these philanthropic adventurers were entirely ignorant of the East End. Instead of poverty as an educational spectacle and object of philanthropic generosity, Bosanquet argued for a closer interface between those who give and those who receive, a view that was also promoted among Jewish social workers.²⁸

The emphasis on closer exchanges illustrates how the overcoming of a social and cultural gulf had become part of charitable work. Perhaps because of the perceived danger of blurring boundaries between social classes, the *Jewish Chronicle* believed that it was a mistake to visit immigrants in class disguise, pointing especially to Jewish women who frequented the East End as social workers and philanthropists. The emphasis on attire sought to reaffirm existing social distinctions.²⁹ For

Streets: Women, Representation, and the City (Ithaca, N.Y., 1995), 191–92; and Koven, *Slumming*, 156.

27. *Punch*, May 3, 1884, 210, and Koven, *Slumming*, 14–15, 187.

28. Helen Bosanquet, *Rich and Poor* (London, 1896), 5, 7. Recognizing the importance of visitation, the Jewish Board of Guardians created in 1879 a Ladies Visiting Sub-Committee. On this, see "A Visiting Committee of Ladies," *Jewish Chronicle*, March 28, 1879, 4.

29. See "Fashion and Philanthropy," *Jewish Chronicle*, June 6, 1902, 21, and Rickie Burman, "Middle-Class Anglo-Jewish Lady Philanthropist and Eastern European Jewish Women: The First National Conference of Jewish Women, 1902," in *Women, Migration and Empire*, ed. J. Grant (Stroke-on-Trent, 1996), 123–49. On Jewish women's work in the East End, see Lara V. Marks, *Model Mothers: Jewish Mothers and Maternity Provision in East London, 1870–1959* (Oxford, 1994); Susan L. Tananbaum, "Generations of Change: The Anglicization of Rus-

different reasons, the social statistician Herbert Spencer distrusted the reliability of information gathered through slumming and urged Potter to stop her explorations. To him, the disguised participatory observation represented a flawed process since “the experiences which you thus gain are misleading experiences; for what you think and feel under such conditions are unlike what is felt and thought by those whose experiences you would describe.”³⁰

These critical voices were mindful of the fact that the encounter called into question established norms and practices. Indeed, Potter’s envious description of the innocence of sexual pleasure point in this direction. She delighted in the “simplicity of their sorrows and of their joys” and realized that she could act differently in the East End: “Ah! What would the conventional West End acquaintance say to two young women smoking and talking in the bed, sitting, working.”³¹ Roaming of the East End, however, provided not just a liberating experience for Potter but also positioned her as a critic of anti-Semitism. With her contribution to Booth, she confronted anti-Semitic portrayals of the East End. While Arnold White found the Jews destitute foreigners who lived in conditions that resembled those of “animals,” Potter was worried about how Jews would respond to her article and noted in her diary that she felt “uncomfortable every time I see dear kind Jews—they been overwhelmingly kind to me.”³² The comment clearly illustrates the extent to which Potter’s objects of investigation had started to create a sense of intimacy and responsibility.

Among the touring observers of the East End at the turn of the century were also many foreigners who responded to London’s slums by questioning the capital’s pivotal role as the center of modern civilization. The Portuguese historian Oliveira Martins, who took a guided tour through the East End, published a travelogue within a larger work on London for a series edited by Joseph Jacobs entitled *As Others See Us* (1891). Jacobs, the Anglo-Jewish historian, folklorist, and scholar, was cognizant of the confluence of self-awareness and perception by others. He therefore argued that publishing narratives of “foreign spectacles” acquired a “na-

sian-Jewish Immigrant Women in London, 1880–1939” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1991); Susan L. Tananbaum, “Philanthropy and Identity: Gender and Ethnicity in London,” *Journal of Social History* 30 (1997): 937–61.

30. Koven, *Slumming*, 13.

31. Webb, *The Diary of Beatrice Webb*, May 13, 1887, 250 and 208.

32. Harrison, *The Life and Times of Sidney and Beatrice Webb: 1858–1905: The Formative Years*, 151, and Arnold White, “The Invasion of Pauper Foreigners,” *Nineteenth Century* 23 (March 1888): 414–22.

tional importance," since these narratives would inform the British public about existing misperceptions about itself by unraveling the prevalent self-centeredness.³³

The Portuguese traveler began his journey in Southampton but primarily roamed London's landscape. Upon entering the city, Martins crossed Clapham Junction and felt as if he was entering "the belly of the great monster of the world." This made a "powerful" but not "agreeable" impression, especially when the sun "inhumanely expose[d] the misery of the poor quarters."³⁴ The visit to the East End on a late Friday night substantiated this first impression, when his guide, a detective, portrayed the East End as a dangerous place avoided by London residents after dark.³⁵

Indian travelers to London, too, invariably gazed at the colonizers. Like the Portuguese city stroller, these Indian travelers criticized the pervasive discourse of progress and commented on the poverty, homelessness, and social differences they witnessed. The East End's poverty and squalor—where "men and women [are] living in a chronic state of emaciation, till they can hardly be recognized as human"—appalled the editor of the *Indian Spectator* in Bombay. According to him, such conditions were unknown in India.³⁶

Jewish authors around the turn of the century echoed this bleak assessment when they seized on the ills of Whitechapel. Jacob Lestschinsky, the Russian-born pioneer in sociology, economics, and demography, who served as a delegate at the Sixth Zionist Congress in Basel, investigated Jewish workers in Whitechapel. In his *Der Yidisber Arbeter in London* (1907), he described London's impressive bridges and towers as well as the poverty of the Jewish working class.³⁷ Literary representations of London's East End invoked a similar image. Sholem Aleichem, who resided in London in 1905, described the East End in his *The Letters of Menakhem-Mendel and Shyne-Shyndl and Motel, the Cantor's Son*. This book

33. Oliveira Martins, *The England of Today*, trans. C. J. Wildey (London, 1896), ii–iii. See also Joseph Jacobs, ed., *As Others See Us*, 2 vols. (London, 1896).

34. Martins, *The England of Today*, 252.

35. *Ibid.*, 252.

36. Behramji Malabari, *The Indian Eye on English Life, or Rambles of a Pilgrim Reformer* (Westminster, 1895), 80, cited after Antoinette Burton, "Making a Spectacle of Empire: Indian Travellers in Fin-De-Siècle London," *History Workshop Journal* 42 (1996): 127–46, 134.

37. Jacob Lestschinsky, *Der Yidisber Arbeter in London* (Vilna, 1907), 3–9. See also Eduard Bernstein, "Einige Bemerkungen über die Jüdische Einwanderung in England," in *Jüdische Statistik*, ed. A. Nossig (Berlin, 1903), 344–66, and Georg Halpern, "Die jüdische Einwanderer-Bevölkerung Londons," *ibid.*, 322–35.

recounts the experiences of the narrator, a mischievous and observant boy, who emigrates with his family from Russia to America. En route, they stop in London, depicted as a bustling metropolitan city that lets Pinye exclaim, "London! England! Disraeli! Buckle! History! Civilization!" The identification of London with the Western European ideal of progress, however, is quickly challenged by Brokkeh, who asserts "You call this a city? . . . It's hell on earth!" In the end, Brokkeh prays for London to go up in flames and yells, "God Almighty! When will we get to America?"³⁸

Within Britain as well, the presence of the immigrants unsettled certainties about the capital. Representations of the East End became much more conflicted and politicized as the status of the immigrants became a highly contested issue in public debates. To be sure, the British public sympathized with the plight of Eastern European Jews, but calls for restricting their immigration abounded. What had been largely a social problem gradually transformed into a more pointed exploration of cultural and racial differences. Traveling to investigate causes and forms of the Eastern European mass migration acquired a very concrete political function. The British politician and member of the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration William Evans-Gordon, who was elected to Parliament in 1900 for the constituency of Stepney, visited both the East End and the Pale of Settlement in Russia in 1902.³⁹ He collected information on the social and political conditions of the Jews and deliberated on the causes of migration. Evans-Gordon's report on his extended journey stressed the foreign character of the immigrants, and his social exploration became an exercise that located the presence of foreign elements—"a Hebrew colony," he wrote, "in British society."⁴⁰

Evans-Gordon's travels served to legitimize his racist political voice. By describing the East End as a "colony," he rhetorically translated non-Jewish inhabitants of these areas into foreign territory. He depicted a process of foreign encroachment that left parishes without congregations, overtook schools by Jewish pupils, and contributed to the weakening of the observance of Sunday as a day of rest.⁴¹ Strolling through the East End, the slums appeared to him very much like a Russian town in the Pale of Settlements.⁴² Even though the residents there are hardly distin-

38. Sholem Aleichem, *The Letters of Menakhem-Mendl, Shayne-Sheyndl and Motl, the Cantor's Son*, trans. H. Halkin (New Haven, Conn., 2002), 231, 232, 235.

39. William Evans-Gordon, *The Alien Immigrant* (London, 1903).

40. *Ibid.*, 7–8.

41. *Ibid.*, 9, 13, 33–47.

42. *Ibid.*, 10.

guishable from the East End's non-Jewish residents, Evans-Gordon's ideological texts framed the otherwise elusive quality of the immigrants' alien character by subtitled images of them with words like "foreign" and "alien."⁴³

During the heated debate leading up to the Aliens Act in 1905, which severely restricted immigration, Evans-Gordon was not alone in providing an anxious public with a nativist perusal of the situation. The journalist Olive Christian Malvery, an Indian woman who went to London to train as a singer, described her eight years of working undercover as a barmaid, sweatshop operative, flower-seller, and organ grinder in *The Soul Market* (1906). She became intimately familiar with the "lost tribes" of London as she penetrated the metropolitan slums.⁴⁴ Her concept of Britishness incorporated British India, the Scottish Celtic fringe, the United States, and Cockney London but left no room for Jews as evidenced by her two-part series entitled "The Alien Question" published in *Pearson's Magazine* (1905). Malvery also felt compelled to gain "knowledge" of these "strangers within our gates."⁴⁵ At the end of her journey, she could not enter Russia, as revolutionary terror and Japanese spies barred her from entering the country.⁴⁶ Instead, she turned to studying southern Italians in order to facilitate her introduction into the world of Eastern European immigrants.⁴⁷ After studying them in their "native" countries in the first installment, she proceeded to assess alien immigrants in England in a second article. In contrast to her other articles of investigative journalism, she did not become an observant flaneur and did not establish a friendly and informal relationship with the immigrants. And, unlike many of the other investigative journalists, gender did not forge a bond between her and the Jewish immigrant women. Like Jack London before her, she based her writings less on her own findings and came prepared, and culturally barricaded, with official credentials, letters of introduction, and two cameras to capture images of the natives.

Notwithstanding the hostility engendered by the intensifying debates over immigration, the increasing visibility of the East End altered its posi-

43. *Ibid.*, 17, 40.

44. Olive Christian Malvery, *The Soul Market with Which Is Included the Heart of Things*, 4th ed. (London, 1907), 309. See also the excellent article by Judith R. Walkowitz, "The Indian Woman, the Flower Girl and the Jew: Photojournalism in Edwardian England," *Victorian Studies* 42 (1998–2000): 3–47.

45. Olive Christian Malvery, "The Alien Question. I: The Foreign Immigrant at Home," *Pearson's Magazine* 19 (January–June 1905): 354–65, here 354.

46. *Ibid.*, 363.

47. *Ibid.*, 365.

tion on the mental map of some Londoners and other explorers including upper-class Jews. In the year of the Aliens Act, the Anglo-Jewish newspaper featured an article which described the Great Synagogue of the East End as a remarkable place of learning that forged links with the immigrants' past. The paper deemed this house of worship unlike any other synagogue in the kingdom and idealized Yiddish as a language with a soul, richer in phrases and idioms than many others. It was deemed "untranslatable" and the language of "the natural speech of a quick-witted, imaginative, and yet simple-minded, people; the mirror of a vehement-natured and pre-eminently reverential family."⁴⁸ The newspaper also sought to revise the public perception of Whitechapel and endorsed lectures that pursued the "task of unveiling the East End to the West." These lectures would provide a more romanticized image to underline the inhabitant's piety, charity, thrift, and energy. Indeed, the paper exulted now "virtues and idealism" as well as an "intense feeling of brotherhood" in the East End.⁴⁹

Other commentators too began revisiting the East End and its culture as their description of the city glorified London's historical, cultural, and imperial variety, confidence, and majesty. While the debates about immigration restriction raged, the celebrations of London's cosmopolitan nature began to envelope the East End. In his prologue to *Living London* (1901–1903), a three-volume edited collection that celebrated every conceivable aspect of contemporary London, George Sims, the London journalist, playwright, social reformer, and city writer, elaborated on the purpose of his enterprise. To him, this publication sought "to present for the first time to the English-speaking public a complete and comprehensive survey of the myriad human atoms which make up this ever-changing kaleidoscope, the mightiest capital the world has ever seen."⁵⁰

Fragmentation, difference, and change became the central features in Sims's work on London, which the *Jewish Chronicle* positively reviewed.⁵¹ Sims, who also authored *How the Poor Live* (1883), published in 1905 a

48. "The Machzike Hadass and the New Arrangement," *Jewish Chronicle*, February 24, 1905, 18, and Halitvack, "The Soul of Yiddish," *Jewish Chronicle*, September 22, 1905, 27.

49. "The Ghetto Intime," *Jewish Chronicle*, March 2, 1906, 7. See also Halitvack, "The Soul of Yiddish," 27.

50. George R. Sims, ed., *Living London* (London, 1903). For a fuller discussion of London as modern Babylon, see Peter Ackroyd, *London: The Biography* (London, 2000), 573–81, and Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven, Conn., 2000).

51. "London's 'City of Refuge,'" *Jewish Chronicle*, July 20, 1906, 42.

whole series of exploration of the East End in the *Strand Magazine* that later appeared also as *Off the Track in London* (1911). Two years after the Aliens Act, the popular *Strand Magazine* in 1907 asked a “group of representative men” which was the “most interesting London Street?” The answers invariably varied, but Sims was fascinated by the Mile End Road as an emblem of London’s multicultural nature, a street “packed with pages from the Book of Life written in many European tongues.” In Mile End, “Asia jostles Europe and the dominant Oriental note carries you back to the Picture Bible of your childhood.” For Sims, the local landscape with “Abraham and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Aaron and Miriam, the bearded Patriarchs, and the children of Israel” was a realm of milk and honey, a space that nevertheless promised its inhabitants “a golden harvest.” To this powerful biblical imagery, the author added a portrayal of the Sabbath, when a “brightly-dressed crowd of young Jewesses promenades with Oriental colors in their raiment, and Parisian *coiffures*.”⁵²

With Sims’s publication, an urban sociology that had defined social crisis and public health threat now celebrated the cultural diversity of the capital. A wide gulf emerged between Booth’s meticulous scientific study and Sims’s Orientalist enchantment. This new tendency gained more currency after World War I as part of an attempt to represent the British capital as a world city. At the same time, exploring the East End emerged as an antipode to the prescribed tours of established travel guides. The writers of the interwar period showed a desire to distinguish themselves from the burgeoning field of mass tourism. Their shared concern for literature, travel writing, and sociological exploration made them critical of established patterns of travel. They created their own narratives and tested various strategies in representing the city. London’s East End appeared here as a much-needed diversion from London’s otherwise slightly numbing landscape.

Impressed and inspired by Jack London’s *People of the Abyss*, Orwell’s *Down and Out in Paris and London* presents a thinly fictionalized account of the time he spent “slumming” in Paris and London. To his regret, “everything was so much cleaner and quieter and drearier” in London compared to Paris. He “missed the scream of the trams, and the noisy, festering life of the back streets, and the armed men clattering through the squares.” Within the fairly well-ordered and monotonous city of London, Orwell found it interesting to watch the crowds of the East End. Against the

52. Rick Allen, ed., *The Moving Pageant: A Literary Sourcebook on London Street-Life, 1700–1914* (London, 1998), 217–20.

leveled orderliness of the “land of the tea urn,” his discerning Orientalist gaze discovered the beauty of the women of the East End: “The East London women are pretty (it is the mixture of blood, perhaps), and Limehouse was sprinkled with Orientals—Chinamen, Ghittagonian lascars, Dravidians selling silk scarves, even a few Sikhs, come goodness knows how. Here and there were street meetings.”⁵³

Orwell was not alone in his eroticization and enthusiasm for the East End; other major publications about London presented the immigrant quarters as an essential element of the British capital. St. John Adcock compiled a coffee-table book with the simple title *Beautiful London* (1926–27). The subtitle announced the celebration of “The World’s Greatest City Described by its Best Writers and Pictured by its Finest Photographers.” Opening with an aerial view of the Thames as broad sunlight illuminated London, the three-volume work incorporated foreigners into the city’s urban canvas and unapologetically announced the benefits London derived from their presence, rejecting the idea that they posed a menacing danger.⁵⁴ Within the representation of the urban pageant, Jules Isaac likened the East End to a “painter’s paradise” and an “oriental bazaar,” where the names over “shops are richly cosmopolitan, the wares are shouted in English or broken English, or Yiddish.”⁵⁵

Publications like these represented London as a bustling metropolis distinguished not just by its political and economic powers but also by its internal cultural and ethnic diversity. The authors inscribed the East End into their mapping of London at a time when Jewish travelers sought tangible markers of Jewish vitality within the modern world. Jewish travelogues propagated models of cosmopolitan identities that embraced and promoted the metropolitan’s cultural and ethnic pluralism. Inasmuch as these writers aided in the creation and visibility of Jewish cultural spaces, their encounters with Eastern European Jews went beyond either paternalistic disdain or the simple fascination and glorification. Rather, these encounters allowed them to connect their otherwise tenuous and mobile lives and to assert their link to Judaism by locating it in concrete spaces.

For example, the German Jewish sociologist Norbert Einstein was embarrassed to be chauffeured in a motorcar and lectured by his friend about the East End. To counter the perspective of the privileged city

53. George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London, 2003), 143.

54. Frederick Arthur Mackenzie, “Foreign London,” in *Wonderful London: The World’s Greatest City Described by its Best Writers and Pictured by its Finest Photographers*, 3 vols., ed. J. Adcock (London, 1926–27), 3:1011–23.

55. J. Isaac, “In Jewry,” in *Wonderful London*, 3:796–808, here 801.

stroller, Einstein relied on the poetry of the Yiddish sweatshop poet Morris Rosenfeld and distanced himself from other German Jews who had spoken about their visit to the East End in the same fashion as they described their excitement over the breakfast in an English hotel.⁵⁶

Yet when Einstein explored the working-class gentile neighborhood of Shoreditch, he discovered an inability to bridge the social and cultural gap and fell into reciting German poets. He was more at ease with Jewish poverty.⁵⁷ With all of its difficulties and contrasts, the East End appeared as a realm of intimate social relations that markedly differed from the mass-consuming working class in other metropolitan neighborhoods.⁵⁸ He felt that the East End streets were saturated with Jewish destinies; its inhabitants lived their lives as Jews. Women, however, tested his perception of a cohesive and self-sufficient community and thriving culture. Following a widely shared perception of Jewish authenticity of the early twentieth century, he believed that women were particularly receptive to change as they frequented the teahouses of London's West End on Saturdays and slowly drifted out of the world of Whitechapel.⁵⁹

In contrast to these idling women, Einstein saw the observance of the Sabbath as a ritual that lifted the old men of the East End temporarily out of their mundane world. Yet they too crossed the "walls of Whitechapel" and placed their lives into an intersection of here and there without reconciling the two halves.⁶⁰ Despite the encroaching changes, Einstein believed that the differences would remain. Neither the creation of a Jewish homeland nor the philanthropy of the established Anglo-Jewish community, Einstein opined, would resolve this tension inherent among the Jews in the East End, who, for Einstein, represented a higher and still vital Jewish culture.⁶¹

Einstein's intense encounter reassured him that a Jewish renewal was feasible.⁶² What allowed him to assert the possibility of Jewish life outside Zionist aspirations attracted also the roving reporter and socialist Egon Erwin Kisch. Kisch had become a celebrity in Berlin, Prague, and Vienna in the twenties and thirties among those to the left of mainstream social democrats. Like Jack London, he dressed down for his visit to the East

56. Norbert Einstein, "Tagebuchblätter aus Whitechapel," *Der Jude* 3.4 (1918): 169–80, 169.

57. *Ibid.*, 171.

58. *Ibid.*, 178.

59. *Ibid.*, 172, 175

60. *Ibid.*, 173.

61. *Ibid.*, 175.

62. *Ibid.*, 178.

End. He reported on the homelessness of Whitechapel and described a night in an asylum for the poor. Kisch presents his narrative through the eyes of an observant bystander, but the class differences between the disguised journalist and the poverty-stricken workers remained. He does not narrate on the internal thoughts of the poor but rather stages his report within a list of metaphors that are intended to make the observed accessible to his learned readers.⁶³

Kisch believed that unlike other metropolitan cities, London offered few points of orientation with its dense traffic, yet the sound of foreign languages clearly demarcated the East End.⁶⁴ It is in the midst of squalor and poverty that Kisch found a literary café in the East End called the “New-Yorker Restaurant,” where Yiddish publishers and scholars commingled with theater directors as well as a poet writing Yiddish verses that rhymed with English words. Along with this eclectic mix of Jewish intellectuals, the café was home to British journalists who reported on the happenings in the Whitechapel ghetto for the major metropolitan newspapers. With the café as a place of encounter, Kisch inscribed a transnational space into the fabric of London. For him, the café represented the mixing of the “world historical restlessness of Judaism with the nervous homelessness of the Bohemian.”⁶⁵

The celebration of the cosmopolitanism encapsulated in Kisch’s portrayal of the literary café resonates with the perception of London as an imperial city that also shaped other travelogues. During the 1920s, the often reprinted and translated travel writer Paul Cohen-Portheim contributed to the growing interest in the Orient for the self-fashioning of Jews in Weimar Germany with his work *Asia as Educator* (1920). An experienced city observer, Cohen-Portheim had previously celebrated Paris as the European cultural capital in his *The Spirit of Paris* (1937). In his preface to his *The Spirit of London* (1935), Raymond Mortimer, the British literary art critic and newspaper editor, hailed Cohen-Portheim as a true European who was equally at home in several European metropolitan centers.⁶⁶ In Cohen-Portheim’s narrative, the image of a homogeneous London overtaken by foreigners is replaced by the idea of London as a “huge patchwork quilt,” which, as he laments, makes it a worthwhile destination in a world that is increasingly becoming uniform.⁶⁷

63. Egon Kisch, “Unter den Obdachlosen von Whitechapel,” in *Der rasende Reporter: Hetzjagd durch die Zeit. Wagnisse in aller Welt, Kriminalistisches Reisebuch* (Berlin, 1986), 7–12.

64. Egon Kisch, “Streifzug durch das dunkle London,” *ibid.*, 183–89.

65. Egon Kisch, “Jiddisches Literaturcafé,” *ibid.* 258–61.

66. Paul Cohen-Portheim, *The Spirit of London* (London, 1935), v.

67. *Ibid.*, 112.

Within this embrace of cultural diversity, the East End, which had been the object of fierce public concerns about urban masses, foreigners, health hazards, and, above all, poverty, had become a spectacle. To Cohen-Portheim, Petticoat Lane was “teeming, swarming, screeching, and bellowing on its market-day.” Whitechapel was for him not only one of the most “surprising of the countless and ever-varied London districts” but also the most “picturesque ghetto of Western Europe” as “all inscriptions are in Hebrew or Yiddish, [and] the old inhabitants retain their dress of Russia and Poland, while the younger are gaudily elegant, and all are immensely busy and boisterous.”⁶⁸ Cohen-Portheim claimed that Whitechapel boasted one of the most intriguing and bustling markets, with its “screaming salesmen, loud-speakers, gramophones, old Jews with side-curls and young ones in gaudy scarves, ready to conquer the Western World,” as well as its Hindus, Indians, blacks and all “sorts of jugglers, acrobats, musicians, and vendors of patent medicines.”⁶⁹

The depoliticalization of the immigrant issue in conjunction with Eastern European upward mobility created the possibility for this sort of highly stylized travelogue. Limiting immigration after 1905, the Aliens Act and a rise in Jews’ social status rapidly transformed the East End during the interwar period as increasing numbers of Eastern European Jews moved toward the north.⁷⁰ In 1928, the *Jewish Chronicle* observed the disappearance of the East End as a distinct Jewish enclave while Thomas Burke, in his *The Real East End* (1932), wrote that all those seeking poverty and crime in the East End would be truly disappointed.⁷¹ In 1937, the American journalist William Zukerman aptly captured this transformation: “What goes under the name of the East End is actually no longer a geographical area, but a psychological concept.”⁷² The imaginary quality of the East End and its fluidity, however, made other authors continue to view it as a dangerous place. Horace Thorogood’s *East of Aldgate* (1935) still expressed fear that Jews were a “creeping flood from Aldgate, Commercial Road, and Whitechapel,” who “flourish[ed] best on

68. *Ibid.*, 32.

69. *Ibid.*, 47.

70. David Cesarani, “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Suburbs: Social Change in Anglo-Jewry between the Wars, 1914–1945,” *Jewish Culture and History* 1.1 (1998): 5–26.

71. “Jewish Migration,” *Jewish Chronicle*, August 17, 1928, 5, and Thomas Burke, *The Real East End* (London, 1932), 2.

72. William Zukerman, *The Jew in Revolt: The Modern Jew in the World Crisis* (London, 1937), 66. See also Friedel Motulsky, “Jüdische Jugend im Londoner Eastend,” *Der Morgen* 12.12 (1937): 559–63.

the decay of their host, like malignant bacilli in the blood."⁷³ This portrayal echoed the campaign of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) in the East End, which climaxed in the Battle of Cable Street in 1936, where Jews and non-Jews blocked the route of the projected march.⁷⁴

Metropolitan centers functioned as spaces of national and imperial wealth and strength. They often too became associated with greed, unguarded capitalism, poverty, and social unrest and have been berated for the destruction of more organic and authentic cultures. Cities occupied, then, a central location in the formation of antimodern discourses.⁷⁵ Yet urban sociology, city strolling, and tourism brought also into contact different cultures and circulated information across a wide, diverse range of national and international readers. It was within these interstices of the encounter with the East End that travelers and writers asserted their own view of the metropolitan center.

The narratives that the East End incited reflect different attempts to read the city and map its inhabitants. By strolling, Jews and other travelers defined a space in which they could explore social, cultural, gender, and racial classifications. Racism, anti-Semitism, anxieties, and dissent about the conditions and values of Western societies surfaced along with musings about the possibility of progress and the impact of industrialization.

The different Jewish visions of the East End reflected and partook of this larger process that came not only to challenge but also to reformulate the representation of the slums. For some, the slums were not spaces of squalor and poverty but instead exotic, ethnic enclaves, offering moving pictures of an immigrant community slowly transforming itself. The vanishing image of poverty and crime allowed some urban authors to view the East End as a vital thread in the fabric of London's metropolitan reputation. Narratives about the city propagated models of identity that contended with and embraced the capital's cultural and ethnic pluralism. Along these lines, the vitality of the East End permitted Jewish city strollers to weave a more positive Jewish presence onto the fabric of European cultures. Jewish tourists and travelers found in London a place to locate and anchor their otherwise tenuous and mobile lives. As a result, the engagement of these Jewish travelers with the immigrant quarters marked an appeal to transnational geographies of belonging.

73. Horace Thorogood, *East of Aldgate* (London, 1925), 83–84.

74. Tony Kushner and Nadia Valman, eds., *Remembering Cable Street: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Society* (London, 2000).

75. Carl Schorske, "The Idea of the City in European Thought: Voltaire to Spengler," in *The Historian and the City*, ed. O. Handlin and J. Burchard (Boston, 1963), 95–114.