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**THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN NEW ZEALAND:  
A CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF ASSIMILATION**

**A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts in Geography  
at Massey University**

**By**

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**1971**

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## PREFACE

Numerous references have been made to the dearth of material on New Zealand's immigrant minority groups.<sup>1</sup> Although listing a bibliography of approximately 90 references on immigrants and immigration in New Zealand, Thomson and Trlin in their recently published Immigrants in New Zealand ventured the opinion that, "there are still serious gaps in our knowledge and that there is a definite need for further research on all aspects of immigration, immigrants, ethnic group adjustments, assimilation and so on".<sup>2</sup> With the exception of L.M. Goldman's The History of the Jews in New Zealand and R.A. Lochore's From Europe to New Zealand (which contains a section on the Jewish people) no specialist work has been completed on the Jewish people of New Zealand.

This thesis aims therefore to make a detailed study of the New Zealand Jewish community in its New Zealand environment for two purposes:

- a) as a contribution to the literature on the New Zealand Jewish community, and
- b) on a broader base, a contribution to the greater understanding of immigration, settlement and assimilation of racial and ethnic minority groups in New Zealand.

More specifically it is aimed to:

- i) examine the origins, growth and development of Jewish settlement in New Zealand
- ii) to describe similarities to, and differences from, New Zealand's spatial, demographic, social and economic norms in the Urban Areas of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch where 79 percent of the Jewish population reside. In other words, to examine the pattern of assimilation of Jewish people into New Zealand life and comment on one

of the central problems of contemporary Jewish life in New Zealand - the question of survival.

Three research techniques were utilised in this thesis, viz., primary and secondary source analysis; personal interviews, discussion and correspondence; and a questionnaire mailed to every Jewish household in an urban area.

Basic material was derived from New Zealand census records and additional information made available by the Department of Statistics, Lower Hutt, for the Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch Urban Areas from the 1966 census. Information obtained from the New Zealand Jewish Chronicle and various other Jewish magazine publications provided a graphic insight into the problems associated with the growth and development of the Jewish minority group and its adjustment to the host society. This was supplemented by the two works, previously recorded, on New Zealand Jewry and works referred to in the bibliography concerning minority Jewish communities further afield. Personal interviews were conducted primarily in connection with the preliminary stages of a questionnaire survey. It was hoped thereby to engender support from the Jewish leaders to ensure a satisfactory response to the questionnaire by those approached. (A full discussion of the questionnaire may be found in Appendix A). Correspondence received from members of the Jewish community has served a two-fold function in providing a valuable insight into reasons for the failure to return questionnaires and essential information on the present organisational activities of the community.

Two basic difficulties were associated with the collection of material. In New Zealand, respondents to the census question on religious professions have a statutory right to refuse to answer and personal

communication has indicated that a number of Jewish refugees from Nazi Europe have been so persecuted that religious affiliation has not always been disclosed. Also, there could well have been persons who, although Jews in origin and upbringing, may have refrained from filling in the religious section of the census on the grounds that they had abandoned the Hebrew faith. There are no methods known to the writer of ascertaining the numbers of Jews who chose to hide their Jewish identification at the 1966 census. It has been pointed out, however, that few Jews, no matter how irreligious or anti-religious would deny themselves this one opportunity of calling themselves "Jew" on a census.<sup>3</sup> Although the census data is not complete in this respect, it is the only statistical data available, and remains adequate for showing the relative distribution of New Zealand Jewry, general population trends, and the strength of Jewish persons in various occupations and industries.

Difficulties were associated with an initial lack of co-operation encountered by the writer from members of the New Zealand Jewish community. Permission to distribute a questionnaire among members of the Wellington Jewish community was withheld so that attention was necessarily concentrated on the Auckland community. As predicted by several Auckland Jews, response to the questionnaire was so poor and the controversy caused of such embarrassment that permission to attempt a further random sample among the Auckland community was withheld.

The approach adopted to the thesis is as follows:

a) a consideration of the origins of the group and the circumstances of migration as a prerequisite to an understanding of the needs, problems and behaviour of the Jews in New Zealand.

b) a study of the community's growth in New Zealand. This

is considered essential for a true appreciation of the process of assimilation.

e) an attempt to assess statistically in the socio-economic sphere the degree of integration of the Jewish community to the host society in the Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch Urban Areas, and the distribution of socio-economic characteristics within the Auckland Urban Area of the Jewish community itself.

d) the review of another form of adjustment illustrated by the religious, educational and voluntary associations of the community and the role of the Jewish press in the assimilation process.

In Chapter 1, the special significance of migration in the history of the Jewish people is considered in an attempt to provide some historical perspective for the thesis. Chapter 2 consists of a brief analysis of population change (growth and decline); the age, sex and economic composition of the Jewish population; and its distribution in space. Changes in these phenomena are studied and explanations sought to account for the degree of, and reasons for change. Statistical indices are developed where possible to compare Jewish and New Zealand population distributions.

The basic assumption behind Chapter 3 is that integration is not a "blanket process" but varies from place to place and from one socio-economic characteristic to another. Thus, the degree of adjustment is assessed in the Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch Urban Areas and in different localities in the Auckland Urban Area. The indices used are: spatial (locational), demographic (age-sex composition, marital status), and economic (occupational, industrial and income distributions). These indices were chosen for two main reasons, viz. their availability, and the fact that they represent significant variables of the socio-

economic basis of any population.

It is to be expected that group sentiments will be communicated and reinforced by social intercourse. Chapter 5 therefore investigates the role of Jewish religious, educational and voluntary organizations, and Chapter 6 the role of the Jewish press in the assimilation process. Chapter 7 provides a summary of the conclusions presented in the body of the thesis and considers evidence for and against the survival of the Jewish community in New Zealand.

The author wishes to take this opportunity to thank her supervisor Mr A.D. Trlin for his interest and guidance during the writing of this thesis, and also Mr E.C.R. Warr for his interest and help with the questionnaire survey. Grateful acknowledgement is made to Mr R. Nelson and the staff of the New Zealand Statistics Department (Lower Hutt) for the hours spent abstracting Hebrew statistical data from unpublished census material. Gratitude is extended to all those Jewish persons who so willingly gave their time and assistance when approached on certain matters. Finally, a vote of thanks is due to Miss J. Clewer for the typing of this thesis, and my husband for his constant help and encouragement.

#### Footnotes

1. For example:

Thompson, R., 1963, 16.

Harper, A.G. in an introduction to Lochore, R.A., 1951, 5.

2. Trlin, A.D. in Thomson, K.W. and Trlin, A.D. (ed.), 1970, 196.

3. Price, C.A., 1964, 7.