

<b>Institution:</b> Queen Mary University of London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Revealing East London's Immigrant History Through Literature		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2009-2018		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Nadia Valman	Reader in English	Jan 2007-Present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Dr Valman has drawn from her research on immigration to and from London's East End to produce interactive resources and events benefitting cultural institutions, communities, and public understanding at a local, national and international level. At a time when immigration is widely represented as a recent, problematic phenomenon, these activities - which directly involved more than 6,800 people of all ages and backgrounds - challenged participants' perception of migration and stimulated imaginative engagement with past lives. Through guided walks, an innovative app, and workshops, Valman has brought new visitors to east London and enhanced local understanding of cultural, religious and architectural heritage. Valman also collaborated with two museums, enabling them to extend their mission to new and more diverse audiences. She developed resources for teaching GCSE history that have been recommended to teachers by the OCR exam board, and created new pedagogical approaches to teaching local history, which have augmented teaching provision in seven secondary schools.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>Valman's research over the last 10 years has established the central role London's East End migrant writers played in the history of urban literature [3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4]. Through thick description of specific sites, their literatures and histories, Valman shows how texts interpret the experience of migration and has developed methodologies for enriching understanding of place and population on both local and global scales.</p> <p>She conducted pioneering research on the first immigrant novel in Britain, Israel Zangwill's <i>Children of the Ghetto</i> (1892), an innovative combination of urban ethnography, social satire and spiritual quest set in the Jewish community of Spitalfields, east London [3.2, 3.3]. Valman's work uncovers the struggles enacted at key local sites, such as the school, synagogue and workplace. The East End has repeatedly served as a key site for narrating the myth of immigrant social mobility and Valman's research provides insight into how those narratives continue to shape British understanding of immigrant identities [3.1, 3.2, 3.4].</p> <p>Valman's distinctive interdisciplinary approach, bringing together literature and cultural geography, is also evident in her published work on the Victorian novelist and social activist Margaret Harkness, who wrote about London's rural migrant workers [3.6]. One of Valman's key findings was that the novelists studied represent place through the motif of walking, an aspect reflected in her public engagement strategies, which use walking as a way to engage audiences with the contemporary relevance of historical writing [3.3, 3.5, 3.6].</p> <p>The usefulness of Valman's innovative methodology [3.3], developed as a site-specific set of activities and digital resources with much broader implications, has been commended by teachers, curators, and members of the public. Resource users have said that it opens up questions around migration, place, memory, and lived experiences of historical change, which are directly applicable to contemporary debates about, for example, the Windrush generation, the global migration crisis, or the meaning of Britishness.</p>		

### 3. References to the research

- [3.1] Valman, N., & Bar-Yosef, E. (2009). Between the East End and East Africa: Rethinking 'the Jew' in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture. In Bar-Yosef, E., & Valman, N. (Eds.). *The 'Jew' in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Culture: Between the East End and East Africa* (pp. 1-27). Palgrave.
- [3.2] Valman, N. (2009). The East End *Bildungsroman* from Israel Zangwill to Monica Ali. *Wasafiri*, 24(1), 3-8. [doi.org/10.1080/02690050802588968](https://doi.org/10.1080/02690050802588968)
- [3.3] Valman, N. (2015). Walking Victorian Spitalfields with Israel Zangwill. *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 2015(21). <https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.755>
- [3.4] Valman, N. (2016). Jewish fictions. In Boxall, P., & Cheyette, B. (Eds.). *Oxford History of the Novel in English Vol 7 British and Irish Fiction since 1940* (pp. 347-367). OUP.
- [3.5] Valman, N. (2016). *Zangwill's Spitalfields*. Free downloadable walking tour produced in collaboration with the Jewish Museum. Available: <http://zangwillspitalfields.org.uk>
- [3.6] Valman, N. (2018). Walking Margaret Harkness's London. In Janssen, F., & Robertson, L. (Eds.). *Authorship and Activism: Margaret Harkness and Writing Social Engagement, 1883–1921* (pp. 57-73). Manchester University Press.

#### Evidence of the quality of research

- [EQR.3.3-6] Valman, N. [PI]. (2014-2015). The Literary East End [MD140000]. *British Academy*. Mid-Career Fellowship. GBP93,037.
- [EQR.3.3-6] Valman [PI]. (2019-2020). Literary East London [RF-2019-275\1]. *Leverhulme Trust*. Research Fellowship. GBP54,883.

### 4. Details of the impact

Valman's research has benefited three groups: a) museums and their audiences; b) east London residents and visitors; and c) secondary school students and teachers. Through walks, self-led (via a digital application for mobile phones) and in guided groups, public performances, workshops, the creation of teaching materials, and production of content for a museum exhibition, Valman has pioneered participatory forms of learning that changed perceptions of migrants.

#### Collaborated with museums to enhance cultural migrant heritage preservation

##### *Zangwill's Spitalfields (2016)*

In collaboration with the Jewish Museum, Valman wrote and produced a free smartphone app, *Zangwill's Spitalfields*, which provides a multimedia walking tour of east London's Jewish immigrant history using sites in Zangwill's novel [3.5]. Drawing on her existing research [3.1, 3.2], Valman conducted additional research for the app in collaboration with curators at the Jewish Museum, London. She wrote the content, designed the interface, sourced and edited archival recordings of oral histories, and directed the production of the app by the Society of Digital Artists (SoDA). The app provided the company with economic benefits and enhanced their research and development of smartphone technology.

Valman's app creates an immersive experience and promotes deeper engagement with Britain's migrant history [3.3, 3.5]. It uses a collage of digital media to narrate the past and bring it into dialogue with present-day discussion about gentrification, protest, and marginalized lives [3.3, 3.5]. Drawing on Victorian narrated text, oral history recordings, and digitized artefacts from the Museum and other archives, Valman's commentary highlights the diversity and complexity of immigrant experience. It makes these resources accessible to those who may not enter the museum itself and encourages embodied explorations of sites in east London that retain traces of the Victorian past, as well as those of more recent migrant lives. The Director spoke to the benefit to the Museum, as '[t]his partnership enabled the Jewish Museum to explore for the first time the potential of digital technology to make use of spaces of Jewish history beyond the walls of the museum' [5.1].

The Museums Journal called it 'a beautifully descriptive audio guide' whose 'observations are particularly pertinent, highlighting that arguments around immigration have changed little since the 1880s' [5.2]. Users found listening to the text, commentary, and sound in the locations an emotionally engaging way to learn about the history of Jewish immigration. The material changed their understanding of the challenges faced by contemporary newcomers to London: 'It made me think about the parallels between what happened a hundred years ago, the tales of immigration, and how we're going through the same thing now' [5.4].

For several local residents, the app brought a new awareness of local history. Out of hundreds of users surveyed, 40% were aged 20-40, a hard-to-reach group for the Museum. 90% were not Jewish and none had visited the Jewish Museum [5.4].

In 2016-19, the app was showcased at seven literature festivals and conferences across the UK and Europe with a total of 290 participants. Its launch was featured in blog posts for the Migration Museum Project ([3 August 2016](#)), Spitalfields Life ([28 June 2016](#)), and The Culture Capital Exchange ([4 April 2017](#)), and was covered by the Jewish News ([1 July 2016](#)), and East London Advertiser ([1 Sept 2016](#)). Valman was interviewed by the Jewish Chronicle ([7 July 2016](#)) and Tel Aviv Review podcast ([23 January 2017](#)).

As of December 2020, the app has been downloaded 4367 times, and 1,700 new users engaged with the website version. The app has had both national and international reach: it was downloaded by users from the UK (36%), China (33%), US (24%), as well as Israel, Japan, Australia and Germany (source: iTunes Connect Analytics, Google Play Analytics). The website was accessed from across the world, including the UK (50%), US (26%), Italy (4%), and Austria, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Norway, India, and Russia (Source: Google Analytics).

#### *Migrant Literature Walks (October–November 2017, March–April 2018)*

Expanding from the Jewish histories of Spitalfields to a wider range of experiences of migration in East London, in 2017-18 Valman produced eight free guided walks exploring London through the eyes of migrants from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. The work was conducted in collaboration with the Migration Museum Project (MMP) [5.5]. Valman used her research on migrants' experience of displacement, expectation, belonging, and change in London [3.2, 3.4] to engage members of the public in group discussion, and to address aspects of London's migration history not covered in the Museum's exhibitions.

The walks were all fully booked; 156 people participated from a wide range of ages and ethnic backgrounds. The walks helped MMP raise awareness of its current exhibition and wider mission amongst a range of Londoners, many of migrant ancestry [5.5, 5.6]. Participants discovered new literary texts and reflected on experiences of migration. They were empowered to imagine London's forgotten history as a city long inhabited by migrants [5.6].

80% of participants had not heard of MMP, but were strongly motivated to visit after the walk [5.6]. MMP commented that the walks 'have been a huge success, in their own right, but also in promoting our project to those we might not otherwise have reached' [5.5]. Valman's research continued to play a significant role for MMP, which drew on it for their subsequent exhibition [Room to Breathe](#) (Nov 2018-June 2019) and invited Valman to contribute an essay on 'The Bedsit' [5.10].

The walks further engaged new audiences in migrant stories through discussions broadcast on major media outlets, e.g. Valman's interview on BBC Radio London for the Robert Elms Show ([3 Oct 2017](#)), and further work with heritage organisations. Valman delivered the 2017 annual public lecture at the Jewish Museum and a talk for the 2018 Refugee Tales Walk. In 2018, she was invited to join the Advisory Board for a major HLF-funded project, 'House of Life', and opened Willesden Jewish Cemetery as a public heritage site in 2020. She advised on interpretation panels, website content and event programming. In June 2019, Valman led a guided introduction to *Zangwill's Spitalfields* for curators from European Jewish museums. Their

enthusiastic response led to plans for Jewish literature apps in Frankfurt and Krakow based on Valman's model.

### Increased cultural participation and public interest in east London in the research through events and workshops

#### *The Great Yiddish Parade (2017-18)*

In 2017 and 2018, Valman drew further on her research on Israel Zangwill and Margaret Harkness's documentation of east London street protest and oratory [3.3, 3.5, 3.6] to produce large-scale events and workshops for residents in east London, enabling cultural participation for groups who may not usually visit museums and enriching provision of local history teaching. Valman produced a script for a costumed re-enactment (19 Nov 2017) of an 1889 march by Jewish immigrant tailors in Whitechapel. The march drew on the music, Yiddish anthems and oratory of the Victorian East End. The event involved 20 musicians and singers and was attended by 50 participants (the maximum allowed by the local authority), including people with ancestral roots in east London and 150 passers-by. The band and choir, which was developed for the parade, continue to perform, offering further engagement with these historical materials.

The recreation of a little-known aspect of east London history significantly enriched participants' sense of connection to local heritage and awareness of the agency of immigrants from the past. A local resident in her 20s said 'I knew nothing at all about Yiddish or the history of protest. I really enjoyed today.' Another participant, in his 50s, felt reconnected to family origins in the area: 'It was very moving to be where I knew that my great, great grandfather had been over a hundred years ago, on these streets.' One of the performers noted the inclusivity of the event, and that it had enabled broad local cultural participation: 'The parade was a wonderful mixture of people of different ages and backgrounds' [5.8].



Figure 1: Photograph of the Great Yiddish Parade. Copyright [2017] by Nadia Valman.

Valman was interviewed about the event on BBC Radio 3's Free Thinking ([21 Nov 2017](#)). The parade was covered by the Being Human Festival blog ([2 Nov 2017](#)), Spitalfields Life blog ([23 Nov 2017](#)) and the Jewish Chronicle ([24 Nov 2017](#)).

### Provided learning resources to schools and OCR exam board through workshops and the App

Valman hosted workshops on Protest in Victorian Whitechapel for Year 7 students in seven east London schools in November 2017 and September 2018, followed by a school parade on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2018, 240 students participated. Students utilised case studies drawn from Valman's research [3.3, 3.5, 3.6], learned Yiddish songs, designed placards, wrote interviews and speeches, and composed chants and new verses in home languages [5.9]. Around 96% of students were first or second-generation immigrants, however, prior to working with Valman, the curriculum did not include the area's long immigrant history and pupils had little awareness of it [5.7, 5.9].

In evaluations, teachers and students said that the fun workshops enabled students to connect with historical events. They became better able to understand how current political protest is linked to the past, particularly the continuities of social inequality and political agency in the East End [5.7, 5.9]. The workshops also encouraged further civic engagement for the students through the creative use of slogans and placard design to help articulate protest more persuasively. In the longer term, Year 7 teachers affirmed that sharing workshop resources enabled them to develop new approaches to history teaching through the use of drama, creative writing, and analysis of primary sources [5.9].

*Zangwill's Spitalfields* was selected for inclusion in the free online teaching resource on Urban Environments provided by the OCR exam board for the History 'A' GCSE syllabus. Chapter 6 focuses on *Zangwill's Spitalfields* and uses the app to engage students with questions about the dynamics of assimilation, based on sources from the app and Valman's commentary [5.3].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[5.1] [Testimonial] Zangwill's Spitalfields: Jewish Museum, London, Dec 2016

[5.2] [Review] Zangwill's Spitalfields by [Museums Journal](#), 1 Oct 2016

[5.3] [Exam papers] Zangwill's Spitalfields, the subject of chapter 6 in OCR Teacher's guide for GCSE History A (Explaining the Modern World), Urban Environments: Patterns of Migration – Spitalfields <https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/538133-spitalfields.pdf>

[5.4] [Feedback] User evaluations of Zangwill's Spitalfields app, Dec 2016

[5.5] [Testimonial] Migration Museum Project, Nov 2017

[5.6] [Feedback] Participant evaluations of Migrant Literature Walks, Oct-Nov 2017

[5.7] [Testimonial] Humanities teacher, Isaac Newton Academy, Nov 2017

[5.8] [Feedback] Evaluations of The Great Yiddish Parade by participants and audience, Nov 2017

[5.9] [Film] documenting Victorian Protest workshops and parade, Sept 2018

[5.10] [Portfolio] Migration Museum Project, brochure for exhibition, Room to Breathe, 2018