RESEARCH PAPER

# Exploring Postmodern Approaches to Jewish Identity in Contemporary Europe through *The Finkler Question*

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**ABSTRACT**

This research article explores the depiction of Jewish identity in contemporary Europe as presented in Howard Jacobson's novel, *The Finkler Question*, using postmodern perspectives on Otherness, specificity, and alterity. By drawing on Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, the article examines the meta-narratives of Jewish identity and how identity is constructed in a fluid, postmodern era. The article critically evaluates Jacobson's position and whether *The Finkler Question* posits a postmodern Jewish identity. The article offers insights into the complex and multifaceted nature of Jewish identity in contemporary Europe by analysing the novel's portrayal of Jewish characters and their relationships and examining the broader socio-political context. Ultimately, the article demonstrates how postmodern perspectives can enhance our understanding of this important issue. The analysis shows that *The Finkler Question* reflects postmodern approaches to identity, with characters navigating complex and often contradictory identities. The novel presents a diverse range of Jewish characters, each with their own unique experiences and relationships to their cultural and religious identity. The article argues that the novel's focus on cultural rather than religious aspects of Jewish identity is evidence of a postmodern Jewish identity that embraces diversity and multiplicity. The article concludes that postmodern perspectives offer a valuable lens through which to examine Jewish identity in contemporary Europe and that works of literature such as *The Finkler Question* can provide important insights into this complex issue.

| **KEYWORDS** | Jewish Identity, Metanarratives, Otherness, Postmodernism |

## Introduction

This article critically analyses *The Finkler Question* (2010) by exploring the author's portrayal of Judaism and examining the novel's themes of identity and culture. The postmodern concepts of Otherness, specificity, and alterity are discussed as sources of identity, with a particular focus on the novel's depiction of Jewish identity crisis. Through a close examination of the events in the novel, such as the Otherness of Jews, the article provides a detailed analysis of the identity-related issues. The meta-narrative of Jewish identity is explored by drawing on Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), which offers identity's fluid and complex nature in a postmodern context. The article critically evaluates Jacobson's position to determine if it posits a postmodern Jewish identity and explores the potential conflict or compatibility between Jewish identity and postmodernity. Overall, this article provides a nuanced analysis of *The Finkler Question* that

sheds light on the complex interplay between Jewish identity, postmodernism, and contemporary European society.

Judaism has a long history of intellectual debate, but in the last fifty years, there has been a growing concern and attention to the issue of Jewish identity. Questions regarding what it means to be Jewish have been important since Biblical times. With the arrival of modernity in the 18th century, there was an unprecedented acceptance of Jews into European political and social culture, and each European Jewish community has been influenced by the society and culture in which it lives, resulting in an identity crisis. The contemporary European Jewish identity has been uniquely influenced by three key developments: the rise and fall of Communism, the Holocaust, and the increasing secularization of European society. Howard Jacobson's novel, *The Finkler Question* (2010), has become part of the debate about Judaism and European Jewish identity.

Howard Jacobson's novel, *The Finkler Question* (2010), explores the contemporary Jewish experience in the 21st century. The author takes a critical and ambivalent stance towards Judaism, as portrayed through his agnostic characters who do not firmly define their Jewish identity or beliefs. Jacobson provides a historical account of Judaism through the perspectives of his three main characters, each with their own unique way of dealing with Judaism and Jewish communities. The author challenges and deconstructs the foundations of Judaism, its loyalties and disloyalties, through his characters and their interactions. The novel addresses issues related to Jewish identity, culture, and life in contemporary England, with a postmodern and irreverent approach that humorously deals with ideological, psychological, and cultural challenges.

Judaism is one of the oldest of the Abrahamic religions, which also include Christianity and Islam, and their co-existence throughout history has been the subject of scholarly debate in the field of comparative religions. Many ancient nations have disappeared over time, leaving no trace behind, but the Jewish people have survived and existed as distinct communities in various countries, even without a homeland of their own. The issue of anti-Semitism still exists in contemporary literature, and the protagonist in *The Finkler Question* is also a target of such attacks, causing him to question his Jewish identity. This paper aims to critically analyse the novel and explore the identity-related problems faced by Jewish individuals, specifically by examining the experiences of the three main characters in the story.

The term postmodernity refers to the cultural situation that exists after the modern era. It can describe an individual's response to a postmodern society, the state of a community that exists in a postmodern world, or a specific condition that is associated with postmodern civilization. According to literary critic Fredric Jameson, postmodernity can be seen as the cultural logic of late capitalism and some people view it as progress in response to modernity being viewed as an absolute failure that has led to catastrophic events such as Auschwitz.

**Literature Review**

The issue of Jewish identity has been a topic of scholarly interest for centuries, with debates over what constitutes Jewish identity and who can claim Jewish heritage. Modernity, which emerged in the 18th century, brought the unprecedented acceptance of Jews into European political and social culture but also resulted in an identity crisis for many Jews who struggled to reconcile their traditional religious and cultural identities with the secular world. In recent decades, the issue of Jewish identity has become more pressing as Jewish communities have become more diverse and the influence of secularization has

grown. *The Finkler Question* by Howard Jacobson addresses these complex issues through its exploration of the contemporary Jewish experience in 21st century Europe.

Postmodernism is a key concept that informs the analysis of *The Finkler Question*, and scholars have extensively studied postmodernism's impact on identity formation. Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) presents a theoretical framework for understanding identity's fluid and complex nature in a postmodern context. Lyotard argues that postmodernism challenges the traditional concept of identity as a fixed, stable entity by emphasizing the multiplicity of identities that individuals may possess. Lyotard's ideas have been widely debated and applied in literary and cultural studies, and they are particularly relevant for understanding the Jewish identity crisis portrayed in *The Finkler Question*.

Scholars have also explored the role of literature in shaping Jewish identity and culture. In her book *Writing Jewish Culture: Paradoxes in Ethnography* (2010), Andreas Kilcher examines the interplay between Jewish culture and literary production, arguing that Jewish writers have played a key role in shaping Jewish identity and culture. Kilcher's analysis provides insight into the complex relationship between literature and identity, and it highlights the significance of *The Finkler Question* as a literary work that engages with Jewish identity.

Another important aspect of Jewish identity that scholars have explored is the issue of Otherness. The concept of Otherness refers to the ways in which individuals or groups are perceived as different or alien from the dominant culture. In the context of Jewish identity, Otherness has been a pervasive theme in both historical and contemporary discourse. Scholars have examined how Jews have been portrayed as the Other throughout history, and how this has influenced Jewish identity formation. In *The Finkler Question*, Jacobson portrays Jews as the Other through the experiences of his characters, and he explores the impact of Otherness on Jewish identity in a postmodern context.

Finally, scholars have analyzed the relationship between Jewish identity and postmodernity, with some arguing that postmodernism has created a new form of Jewish identity that is fluid and multifaceted. In his book *Jewish Identity and Civilizational Crisis* (2014), Nathan Katz argues that postmodernity has created a new form of Jewish identity that is less tied to traditional religious and cultural practices, and more open to diverse forms of expression. Katz's analysis provides a useful framework for understanding the complex interplay between Jewish identity and postmodernity in *The Finkler Question*.

According to Eliade (1987), Judaism is the oldest of the three Abrahamic religions, along with Christianity and Islam. During the Middle Ages, Jewish people in Western Europe resided in small communities. In the 12th century, some Jewish moneylenders became wealthy due to the high interest rates they charged. As a result of their economic success, the Jewish people gained the support of the English royalty during the same century. Not only did the English kings receive funds on demand from the Jewish community, but some wealthy Jews also loaned money to them. For example, Aharon of Lincoln was a wealthy Jew who had lent fifteen thousand pounds at the time of his death in 1185, which was equivalent to three-quarters of England's annual treasury receipts. To safeguard financial records, Jewish and Christian officials were appointed. (Eliade, 1987, p. 184-185).

The literature review highlights the works of Hannah Arendt and Sigmund Freud in their respective books, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1973) and *The Future of an Illusion* (1989). Arendt's book analyzes the historical roots of totalitarianism, with a focus on Soviet

Communism and Nazism, and is divided into three parts that examine Anti-Semitism, Imperialism, and Totalitarianism. The first part delves into the origins of Anti-Semitism and Arendt's observations of how historians have approached the subject. The protagonist in the novel *The Finkler Question* is also a victim of an anti-Semitic attack, which leads him to question his identity.

On the other hand, Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) delves into the subject of religion and its role in explaining the world, providing order in society, and offering comfort and happiness. He believes that reason is the key to uncovering truth and that humans are ruled by irrational forces embedded in sexuality. Freud argues that when individuals are free from theistic beliefs, they will view life from a different perspective, accept its reality, and shift their focus to material things and life on earth. Jacobson's work in the postmodern era raises questions about Judaism, its purpose, and the understanding of 21st century Jews.

MacDonald's (1998) book, *The Culture of Critique*, provides a theoretical analysis and review of data on the trend among highly influential, Jewish-dominated intellectual movements to provide critical perspectives on a gentile culture that align with the interests of Jewish identity. This book explores the experiences of Jewish people in the 20th century, which is considered a significant period in Jewish history. Despite facing tragedies in the past, Jewish people became prosperous and achieved positions of influence in the Western world when given an independent land. The book celebrates the achievements of Jewish intellectuals such as Kafka, Marx, Einstein, and Freud, who are praised by both Jewish and non-Jewish philosophers.

The condition of Jews in the past was poor due to a lack of an independent state, which limited their ability to prosper. However, history has shown that when given their own land, Jews have thrived and achieved success in business, particularly in Western countries. Jewish intellectuals such as Kafka, Marx, Einstein, and Freud are highly regarded and praised by non-Jewish philosophers of their time. This is exemplified in Jacobson's *Kalooki Nights* (2006), which focuses on the life of Maxie Glickman, an aging and unsuccessful cartoonist. The novel explores the challenges of living in two cultures and portrays what Glickman refers to as "the emotional politics of being Jewish" (Jacobson, 2006, p. 125).

In *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007), Chabon presents an alternate history of the Jewish people and their state, imagining that they had settled in Alaska instead of Israel. Chabon portrays a different way of life and identity for the Jewish people in this alternate reality. Chabon also critiques the current state of Israel, describing Jerusalem as a city of violence and unrest. He argues that Israel is not the true homeland of the Jewish people. Instead, Chabon suggests that if they had settled in Alaska on a 60-year lease, they would have faced many difficulties and likely strained relationships with the Alaskan people. Ultimately, when the lease expired, they would have been forced to confront the same problems they faced before and would not have been able to renew their lease.

Overall, the literature on Jewish identity and postmodernism provides a rich context for analyzing *The Finkler Question*. By drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Lyotard's concept of the postmodern condition and examining the role of literature in shaping Jewish identity, scholars have deepened our understanding of the complex issues raised by the novel. The concept of Otherness and the relationship between Jewish identity and postmodernity are particularly relevant for understanding the novel's themes, and they offer insight into the contemporary Jewish experience in 21st century Europe.

**Theoretical Framework**

Postmodernism is a term that encompasses various approaches across a range of fields that emerged in the 1980s. Due to its broad scope, it is often considered a movement. According to the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* (1993), postmodernism can be defined as "an umbrella term used to describe the visual arts, dance, music, film, theatre, philosophy, criticism, historiography, theology, and anything up-to-date in culture in general" (p. 356). This term refers to a specific era characterized by the emergence of technology and the proliferation of cultural diversity, which led to new methods of representation. During this era, a number of literary intellectuals pioneered new genres and modes of communication to articulate the novelty and innovation of postmodern culture.

Andreas Huyssen (1984) observed the emergence of postmodernism as a trend, which gained increasing momentum and became a significant force that sparked numerous debates. This movement, encompassing various fields of culture, including literature, represents a departure from modernism. Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* is a recent addition to the ongoing discussion on postmodernism, and its rise to academic prominence in the 1980s has fuelled debates regarding its definition and relationship to modernism. Hal Foster (1983) argues that postmodernism seeks to deconstruct or rewrite modernism, whereas Peter Barry (2002) notes that postmodernism employs fragmentation with a tone of exhilaration and liberation, in contrast to modernism's lamentation and nostalgia for a lost era. Moreover, postmodern philosophers connect low art and high art, while modernists oppose their mixture. Jacobson, in *The Finkler Question*, successfully presents the combination of these two art forms in contemporary Europe by showcasing the Jewish population's challenge to the principles of modernism.

The postmodern discussion began with Lyotard's publication of *The Postmodern Condition* in 1979, making him one of the most influential theorists of postmodern philosophy. He viewed postmodernism as a battle with the ideological, theoretical, and cultural union and criticized the notion of Enlightenment as the foundation of modernism. Lyotard opposed the modern notion of unity and objectivity, challenging the cultural meta-narrative that pervades it. This opposition laid the groundwork for the theory of meta-narratives, which will be applied to the selected text in the analysis part of this article.

Lyotard argues that knowledge has become a tool of empowerment and a necessary product in society. However, he claims that grand narratives, which were once considered the main pillars of modern philosophy, no longer benefit humanity. Instead, local or mini-narratives have replaced grand narratives, providing a system of knowledge that is better suited to explain current conditions than the simplified philosophies of grand narratives. Lyotard suggests that present culture does not create a unifying outcome on knowledge, which eliminates the need for political or cultural hierarchy such as Marxism and modernism. He believes that postmodernism values temporary and local knowledge over grand narratives, asserting that "the grand narrative has lost its credibility" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 37).

In the academic world, Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) marked the beginning of the postmodern movement, which was further developed by cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard and critic Fredric Jameson. While there are many postmodern critics and theorists, this research focuses specifically on Lyotard's perspective and applies it to the analysis of *The Finkler Question*. Lyotard defines post-modernity as a rejection of meta-theory and meta-narrative, opposing modernism and its use of grand narratives to legitimize scientific discourse.

Besides Lyotard's ideas, this article also draws on multiple theoretical perspectives to explore the themes of identity, belonging, and the role of religion in modern Jewish life. One important framework for understanding these issues is postmodernism, which challenges traditional concepts of fixed identity and emphasizes the fluidity and complexity of cultural identity. In this context, the works of Jacobson and Chabon can be seen as reflecting postmodern sensibilities, as they both question and deconstruct established notions of Jewish identity and community. By doing so, they invite readers to consider the diverse ways in which Jewish people can express their identity and belong to multiple communities.

Another important theoretical framework is critical theory, which seeks to understand how power dynamics operate within society and how they affect individuals and groups. In the case of Jewish identity, critical theory can help to reveal how historical forces such as anti-Semitism have shaped Jewish experiences and how ongoing power imbalances continue to affect contemporary Jewish life. By examining the anti-Semitic attack in *The Finkler Question* and the themes of anti-Semitism, imperialism, and totalitarianism in Arendt's work, this article seeks to illuminate the ways in which power and oppression intersect with Jewish identity and belonging.

One more perspective that informs this article is the psychoanalytic theory, particularly the work of Sigmund Freud. Freud's theories about the human psyche, the role of religion in society, and the nature of human desires can shed light on the complex interplay between Jewish identity and the broader cultural context. Specifically, Freud's emphasis on the irrational and unconscious aspects of human experience can help to explain the persistence of anti-Semitism and other forms of prejudice, as well as the challenges of navigating multiple cultural identities and allegiances.

An alternate framework is cultural studies, which examines the role of culture in shaping social, political, and economic structures. In the case of Jewish identity, cultural studies can illuminate the ways in which cultural artefacts such as literature, film, and humour reflect and shape Jewish experiences. By analyzing the works of Jacobson and Chabon, this article seeks to reveal how cultural texts can both reflect and challenge dominant cultural narratives about Jewish identity and belonging.

Finally, this article draws on theories of religious studies to explore the changing role of religion in modern Jewish life. Specifically, the work of Freud and others can help to illuminate the complex relationship between religion, identity, and belonging, as well as the challenges and opportunities of reimagining religious traditions for contemporary contexts. By exploring the themes of religion, secularism, and Jewish identity in the works of Jacobson, Chabon, and Arendt, this article seeks to contribute to broader conversations about the role of religion in shaping individual and collective identities in contemporary society.

## Jewish Identity and Doubt in *The Finkler Question*

In this section, the aim is to analyze *The Finkler Question* by utilizing postmodern theories of identity and Lyotard's concept of postmodernity from *The Postmodern Condition* (1984). The main topic of the novel is the current state of Jewish identity in England and its relation to other identities. Therefore, this analysis starts by scrutinizing the representation of identity in the primary texts, and then moves on to discuss the failure of meta-narratives in contemporary Jewish culture. Additionally, this section examines Howard Jacobson's portrayal of the crisis of Jewish identity and its construction and evaluates whether it can be positioned as postmodern. Towards the end of this section, other postmodern themes

will be explored to assess how the piece of writing can be viewed through postmodern perspectives.

**Critique of Identity Crisis in *The Finkler Question***

This section will critically examine how *The Finkler* Question portrays the crisis of Jewish identity in England, drawing on postmodern theories of identity and Lyotard's construction of postmodernity in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984). The novel depicts the struggles of its three main characters — Julian Treslove, Sam Finkler, and Libor Sevcik — as they confront their Jewishness and negotiate their relationships with each other and with non-Jewish society. However, the novel also raises questions about the validity and usefulness of identity as a concept, as well as the dangers of essentializing and homogenizing groups of people based on their cultural or religious affiliations.

One of the primary critiques of identity in *The Finkler Question* is that it can be a source of division and exclusion rather than unity and inclusivity. For example, Sam Finkler's commitment to Zionism and his belief in the importance of a Jewish state leads him to dismiss and even denigrate non-Jewish cultures, such as African or Arab cultures. Similarly, Julian Treslove's obsession with Jewishness and his attempts to "pass" as Jewish highlight the ways in which identity can be a tool for social climbing and self-aggrandizement rather than a genuine expression of belonging. Furthermore, Libor Sevcik's experience of anti-Semitism and his own conflicted feelings about his Jewish identity suggest that identity can be imposed upon individuals rather than chosen or embraced freely.

In addition to these concerns about the limitations of identity, *The Finkler Question* also challenges the idea that there is a singular or essential Jewish identity that can be defined or represented. Instead, the novel portrays a diverse range of Jewish experiences and perspectives, from Libor's memories of pre-war Prague to Sam's contemporary activism in Israel. Moreover, the novel complicates the idea of Jewish identity by exploring the intersections of Jewishness with other aspects of identity, such as gender, class, and sexuality. Overall, the novel suggests that identity is a complex and multifaceted concept that cannot be reduced to simplistic or monolithic categories.

In Herman's (1988) understanding, Jewish identity can be divided into two categories: identification and identity. The former deals with individuals recognizing themselves as part of a Jewish core, while the latter delves into what it means to be Jewish in a person's life (p. 2). Howard Jacobson's novel, *The Finkler Question*, published in 2010 and the winner of the Booker Prize that year, explores contemporary Jewish culture in Britain from various angles and perspectives. By allowing readers to immerse themselves in the Jewish society of London through its characters and experiences, *The Finkler Question* successfully mirrors the pluralism of Jewish culture in postmodern society.

The novel's significant postmodern quality is its rejection of the customs of established systems. This approach is in line with postmodernism, which celebrates cultural divergences and brings them to the forefront. *The Finkler Question* exemplifies the de-centering and declining of postmodern beliefs by embracing the multiplicity of society, gender, and sexual orientation as elements of the heterogeneity of the world. The novel's characters represent a range of contemporary cultures and sub-cultures through their experiences, reflecting the disintegration that is commonly associated with postmodern art forms. The opening lines of the novel, "He should have seen it coming. His life had been one mishap after another. So he should have been prepared for this one" (p. 1), set the tone for the story.

The protagonist of the novel, Treslove, is an unspectacular and dissatisfied BBC worker, while Sam Finkler, a renowned Jewish philosopher, writer, and television personality, is his old-school friend. Despite their different lives and an itchy liaison, the two have remained close, along with their former teacher, Libor Sevick. At the beginning of the novel, it is revealed that both Finkler and Libor have recently been widowed, while Treslove, due to his numerous failed relationships, is referred to as an honorary third widower. The narrative begins when the three main characters dine at Libor's impressive London residence and reminisce about a time before they had children, before the devastation of division, and before they had loved and lost. Later that night, as Treslove is on his way home, he is attacked outside an old shop, causing him to question his identity and who he is. The writer explores the Jewishness of the characters throughout the narrative by comparing and contrasting their experiences.

According to Burszta (2004), individuals are constantly challenged by new experiences and situations, making it nearly impossible to achieve similarity, consistency, or stability in their lives. This phenomenon is evident in the diversity of Jewish characters and their lives in the novel. Lifton (1993), a prominent postmodern identity theorist, describes this continuously changing identity as allowing for a "self of many possibilities" (p. 5), although it is not without confusion and danger. He argues that the older version of personal identity, which suggests inner stability and sameness, was derived from a traditional culture with intact relationships to symbols and institutions, which is no longer the case in the late twentieth century.

The protagonist in the novel experiences an identity crisis after being mugged by a woman who calls him a "Jew." Treslove, who is not Jewish, takes this incident as an opportunity to explore all aspects of Jewishness, including his relationship with Jewish people, his friends, the women he has been sleeping with, and his two sons. He questions his identity and discusses it with his friend Libor, stating that he never heard the word "Jew" growing up, nor did he ever meet a Jew in his father's company, shop, or home. Treslove faces difficulty in discovering his identity because he does not have any relatives to ask about his background. This issue reflects the larger postmodern culture in Europe, where individuals have more liberty to choose their identity than in the past. Inherited, recognized, and primeval forms of identity are being replaced by self-constructed identities, which are not only possible but also compulsory (Berger, 1979).

Jewish identity has been a significant issue in the academic world since World War II, and questions about what it means to be Jewish have been discussed since the Biblical era (Stern, 1994). Although the concept of ethnic Jewish identities is relatively new, Jewish philosophers and thinkers throughout history have been trying to find answers to these questions.

Throughout the narrative, Julian Treslove explores various aspects of Jewishness through discussions with other characters, including his sons. In one such conversation, Alfredo and Rodolfo discuss their uncle Sam Finkler's search for identity and Treslove's recent decision to identify as Jewish. The conversation leads Rodolfo to question his own identity, to which his mother responds that being Jewish is determined by maternal lineage. Despite their mothers' denial of being Jewish, Treslove's sons continue to search for their own identity, with Alfredo pointing out that if someone can be a quarter Indian or a tenth Chinese, then they can also be Jewish. Howard Jacobson uses these characters to illustrate the discomfort that contemporary Jewish people feel with their Jewishness, as they have multiple identities and may not have a clear sense of their origins due to the lack of relatives in their lives. (Jacobson, 2010).

Treslove, the protagonist in Jacobson's novel, struggles to identify himself and often wonders how to determine a person's identity. Despite having Jewish friends, Treslove has never been able to feel a sense of belonging to any particular group or religion. The complexities of Jewish identity make it difficult to study, as Judaism encompasses religion, culture, ethnicity, and psychology, as well as reactions to prejudice and connections to Israel. Many individuals with Jewish parents choose to identify themselves as non-Jewish or adopt a figurative recognition of their heritage in Diaspora contexts, particularly in Western countries (Dershowitz, 1997).

The creation of the State of Israel and its dealings with others have also impacted contemporary Jewish identity, as seen through the characters of Finkler and Sivick in *The Finkler Question*. Finkler is ashamed of Israel's actions and runs a group called Ashamed Jews, while Sivick is pro-Israeli and defends her actions and relation to Palestine. Korcaz (1969) suggests that a Jew's attitude towards Israel can help to understand their significance and behavior regarding Jewishness. After spending decades in the Diaspora, Jews considered Israel as a utopian ideal and reconstructed their identity in comparison to the modern state. Some Jews migrated to Israel to support its cause and preserve their national identity, while others established links with Israel from their homelands.

In summary, the portrayal of Jewish identity in *The Finkler Question* highlights the complexity of this concept and how it is influenced by various factors such as culture, ethnicity, religion, history, and political views. The book also depicts the impact of anti-Semitism on the formation of Jewish identity throughout history. The characters in the novel have different attitudes towards Israel and the connection between Jewish identity and the state of Israel. Additionally, the character of Julian Treslove raises questions about the nature of identity and the difficulties of defining oneself. Overall, the novel presents a thought-provoking exploration of Jewish identity and its various dimensions.

**The postmodern critique of meta-narratives and *The Finkler Question***

*The Finkler Question* explores various aspects and perspectives of contemporary Jewish society in London. Through its diverse characters, Jacobson skilfully portrays the complex issues of identity and culture that arise when living among other communities. Despite its humorous tone, the novel is a significant representation of the challenges faced by contemporary Jewish society as a whole. In the novel, Jacobson introduces a postmodern paradigm shift in the context of religion, which is akin to Lyotard's theory of meta-narratives. Jacobson unequivocally argues that religion, as a meta-narrative, has failed in the postmodern era. Lyotard, in his book *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), shares a similar viewpoint as:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodernism as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. The obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, to the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functions, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, and its great goal. It is dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on (p. 24).

When Treslove experiences an identity crisis, he begins to question his Jewish identity, having been surrounded by Jewish friends since childhood. Despite his struggles, he comes to the realization that it is difficult to define Jewish identity, as religion as a meta-narrative has failed. In addition, there are numerous ways of being Jewish that cannot be

definitively claimed or rejected. Treslove notes that "There are as many ways of being Jewish as there are Jews, probably more, as most Jews have a dozen ways of being Jewish each" (Jacobson, 2010, p. 120).

Jacobson's position supports Lyotard's argument of scepticism towards meta-narratives in the context of postmodern societies, as he presents the contemporary state of Jewish religious beliefs and practices through his narrative. Jacobson suggests that in the 21st century, individuals have the freedom to determine their own religious beliefs and where they stand on them, without the strict rules that were present in modernity. This is exemplified in the protagonist's questioning of his Jewish identity and his conversation with Finkler's wife Tyler, in which he expresses this sentiment as:

There are as many ways of being Jewish as there are Jews, probably more, as most of the Jews have dozen ways of being Jewish each (Jacobson, 2010, p. 120 )

So you are both ashamed.

Yes, but of different things. He is because he is a Jew; I am because he is not.

And Children?

They are at university, they are old enough to make up their own minds but I have not brought them up Jewish (Jacobson, 2010, p. 121).

Lyotard argues that modernity is characterized by the use of metanarratives in Western societies. These metanarratives represent a philosophy of history in which history is seen as a significant and directed process of narrative. However, for Lyotard, these narratives can take on different structures, and he identifies two forms: the narrative of emancipation and the speculative narrative. Both of these grand narratives involve the idea of progress through reason, politics, and ethics. These two narratives have been important in modern philosophy and have contributed to the West's self-realization and absolute recognition of modernity.

Lyotard's view is that postmodernism represents a loss of belief in metanarratives. The idea of history as a purposeful and directed process has been abandoned, following Nietzsche's proclamation of the "death of God" and the decline of religious values and progress. Lyotard argues that postmodernity is not about abandoning the project of modernity, but about the "liquidation" of that project. This realization has led to a fundamental suspicion in European (if not Western) consciousness that universal history does not necessarily move towards improvement or have a universal purpose, as Kant had believed. (Lyotard, 1992, p. 51)

Lyotard argues that the rejection of grand political or religious ideologies that aim to unify society as a whole is a result of their failure to fulfil their promises. Modernity has seen the collapse of such plans due to the excesses of wars, totalitarianism, fascism, and genocide. Thus, any attempt to totalize or order modern hypotheses based on Enlightenment assumptions is no longer trustworthy. According to Lyotard, the failure of these metanarratives is due to their universality, which represses the diversity of language games and local narratives by attempting to impose a totalizing pattern on them. Lyotard further asserts that new technological expansions have also contributed to the failure of metanarratives. The pervasive use of the internet, email, TV, and cellular phones makes it increasingly difficult to maintain coherent control. As a result, social interaction and the practice of modern religious values become more challenging in the present postmodern

world. These changes may lead to the devolution of power structures. As Lyotard notes in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984):

> Knowledge in the form of an informational commodity indispensable to productive power is already and will continue to be, a major perhaps the major stake in the worldwide competition for power. It is conceivable that the nation-states will one-day fight for control of information, just as they battled in the past for control over territory, and afterwards for control of access to and exploitation of raw materials and cheap labour (p. 5).

Lyotard argues that metanarratives, or overarching narratives that serve to legitimize, are no longer reliable. Jacobson's portrayal of postmodern Jewish perspectives on religion reflects this idea, as everyone has their own unique approach to religion and there is no singular entity or pattern by which to judge one's religion. As Treslove puts it, "Jewish people are uncomfortable with the idea of their Jewishness somehow binds them to all other Jews irrespective of colour, creed or character" (Jacobson, 2010, p. 196). In his work, Jacobson presents contemporary Jewish life in England from a postmodern perspective, exploring the issues faced by Jewish people in the postmodern era. He delves into the issue of the religion of Diaspora, where Jews are integrated with other people of the world and have faced identity and religious issues. One of the Jewish characters in *The Finkler Question* expresses the multiplicity of religion, stating "This religion is too old for me. Yours is a tough religion" (Jacobson, 2010, p. 197).

According to Barry (2002), for Lyotard, the narrative provides a personal and fundamental view of the world, in contrast to the objective knowledge of the material world provided by science. Personal "stories" exist within us and are continuously modified based on experience. Narratives, whether individual or common, are important but are effectively subjective and imperfect. Grand narratives, which Lyotard considers to be at risk, hold many truths but are false impressions that encourage the engulfing of dissimilarities, resistance, and multiplicity. The narrative of *The Finkler Question* holds a similar stance, disapproving of everything based on grand narratives. The anti-authoritarianism in the novel is evident as almost all the characters have the same tone throughout the narrative, resisting power and authority in various forms such as legal, academic, religious, or political. For instance, Treslove's son, Rodolfo, represents rebellious youth, violently opposing everything with an authoritative tone and anything that binds him to follow rules. His hollow adversary allows him to commit many wicked mischiefs.

Lyotard's concept of knowledge hierarchy is replaced by a flat network of areas of inquiry, as explained in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984). This idea is reflected in Jacobson's novel through the characters of Haphzibah and Treslove, who resist blind compromises and challenge commanding authorities. The novel demonstrates Lyotard's notion that consensus is no longer a reliable value, as characters rebel against totality and strive to critique metanarratives. Haphzibah serves as a representative for the novel's resistance to grand narratives, while Finkler's narrow-mindedness is presented in various ways, despite his solid ethics. His devotion to Jewishness does not benefit him, and *The Finkler Question's* satire on religion also extends to other Jewish issues. Jacobson criticizes all grand narratives equally, as the postmodern narrative is non-discriminatory and embraces diversity.

In conclusion, *The Finkler Question* offers a complex and multifaceted narrative that reflects the postmodern condition and its rejection of grand narratives. Through its characters and their diverse experiences, the novel provides a commentary on Jewish identity, history, and culture, as well as broader issues of modern society. Jacobson's use of language, structure, and genre creates a playful and thought-provoking text that invites readers to engage with its themes and draw their own conclusions. Overall, the novel offers

a rich exploration of postmodernism and its impact on our understanding of knowledge, identity, and society.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this article has analyzed the issues of Jewish identity in the contemporary world and how it is affected by globalization and postmodernity. While Jewish people have struggled to maintain their separate identity in the Diaspora, the efforts made through literature and culture are now facing challenges due to cultural mixture and other reasons. Stuart Hall's concept of identity as a "moveable feast" highlights the dynamic nature of identity in postmodern societies (Hall, 1990). The impact of industrial and technological progress, such as electronic media, has resulted in people rethinking their associations and moving beyond boundaries. In light of this analysis, it is evident that Jewish identity is facing paradigm shifts and the future of the Jewish community in the Diaspora remains a critical issue.

Jacobson's *The Finkler Question* explores the complexities and challenges of Jewish identity in contemporary society through a multi-voiced reflection on the cultural side of Jewishness. Treslove's pursuit of Jewishness in the novel is focused more on cultural identity than religious exploration, with his friend Sam Finkler serving as a representative Jew. While the novel takes a comic approach to the subject matter, it also tackles serious issues such as anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. Ultimately, the novel highlights the difficulties of defining and preserving cultural identity in a globalized world, where boundaries are constantly shifting and identity is fluid

Jacobson's exploration of Jewishness in *The Finkler Question* is not limited to religious beliefs but also encompasses cultural and identity issues. Through the character of Treslove, Jacobson portrays the uncertainty and confusion surrounding Jewish identity, which is a theme that resonates with many individuals in multicultural societies. The use of "Otherness" as a source of identity is also a recurring theme in the novel. Jacobson emphasizes the concept of "us" versus "them" through the frequent use of these pronouns by the Jewish characters. This highlights the importance of community and belonging in Jewish identity, as well as the potential for exclusion of those who do not belong to the group. The novel's refusal to conform to traditional norms and its celebration of cultural differences are also in line with postmodernist ideals. Jacobson challenges the notion of a singular, fixed identity by embracing the multiplicity of customs, sexual orientations, and identities in modern society. Overall, the novel offers a complex and nuanced exploration of Jewish identity in the contemporary world, which is informed by cultural, social, and political factors. Through the character of Treslove and his interactions with the Jewish community, Jacobson offers a compelling reflection on the meaning and significance of Jewishness today.

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