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An application of cultural development and individual consciousness in Howard Jacobson's Kalooki Nights with special reference to Raymond Williams' concept of formations

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Abstract
This research article aims to critique the cultural development and individual consciousness and how they are challenged by subordinate groups in the novel *Kalooki Nights* by Howard Jacobson by detecting the occurrences from the novel. Also, the article aims to reveal how 'formations', an aspect of cultural process, increasingly influence cultural development and an individual's cultural consciousness. The research paper is segmented into the following parts; "Author's Introduction", "About the Novel", "Theoretical Approach", "Application of Williams' "Formations" - A Critique" and "Conclusion". The article concludes with the finding that the novel contends alternative and oppositional 'formations' that inform the Jewish diaspora of 1950s Crumpsall Park, Manchester.

Keywords: Cultural development, individual consciousness, incorporation, cultural Process, 'formations', and Holocaust

Introduction

Howard Jacobson, born in England in 1942, is a novelist celebrated for his wit, humour, and insightful examination of themes like Jewish identity, love, and human relationships. He received his education at Cambridge University and later taught at the University of Sydney for three years. Upon returning to England, he became a lecturer in English at Selwyn College. With a literary career spanning sixteen novels and eight non-fiction works, Howard Jacobson has established himself as a prolific and versatile writer. (British Council)

Howard Jacobson has made significant literary contributions, notably with *The Finkler Question* (2010). His most recent work, *Live a Little*, was published in 2019 (British Council). He has received *Bollinger Everyman Wodehouse Prize* two times. Additionally, he has received the prestigious *Jewish Quarterly-Wingate Prize*, considered the foremost literary honor in British Jewry. Notably, *The Finkler Question* has secured the coveted *Man Booker Prize* in 2010. (British Council)

About the Novel

In *Kalooki Nights*, the protagonist and narrator, Max Glickman, is a Jewish cartoonist who is brought up in Crumpsall Park, Manchester, during the 1950s. His childhood is influenced by his father, an unsuccessful pugalist, and his mother, who regularly organizes 'Kalooki' card games with her daughter. Throughout the narrative, Max reflects on his past and present, narrating failed marriages with Gentile wives, and with a Jewish wife.

The novel's plot develops as Max explores the life of Emanuel Eli Washinsky, who is referred as 'Manny' in the novel. Manny is Max's childhood Orthodox Jewish neighbor. Manny, haunted by a fixation on the Holocaust since childhood, commits a shocking act of gassing his parents, killing them. This disturbing incident is partially because of the scandalous affair between Manny's brother and Gentile woman.

Max's book "Five Thousand Years of Bitterness," is a caricatured history of the Jews. He co-authors it with Manny during their childhood, influenced by Lord Russell's historical account of the Holocaust. However, when Max finally publishes it, the work fails to receive the recognition he has hoped for.

Theoretical Approach

Cultural materialism is a theoretical perspective that highlights the significance of material and economic influences in moulding culture and society. According to John Jeyaraj Sekar, author of *Literary Critical Theories: Demystified and Simplified*, cultural materialism, "developed by Marvin Harris, … posits that material conditions, such as the availability of resources, technology, and economic systems, are the primary drivers of cultural change" (Sekar 436).

Raymond Williams (1921-1988) stands as a prominent Welsh cultural critic and theorist, recognised for his substantial contributions to the evolution of cultural studies. According to him, cultural materialism focuses on the reciprocal relationship between culture and the material aspects of life. This implies that cultural manifestations, including literature, art, and media, are not just abstract or symbolic representations of ideas or values; rather, they are outcomes shaped by distinct historical and social circumstances. Williams contends that

> cultural materialism provides a way of understanding the complex relationship between culture and power, and offers a means of challenging dominant cultural narratives and ideologies. By analysing the material conditions that give rise to cultural forms, cultural materialists can uncover the ways in which these forms are shaped by and in turn shape social structures and relations.
> (Sekar 442)

Williams contends that 'formations' "are most recognisable as conscious movements and tendencies (literary, artistic, philosophical or scientific) which can usually be readily discerned after their formative productions" (Williams 119). However, upon closer examination, these formations are

revealed to be expressions of broader social dynamics. They are open to more than formal institutions or their prescribed meanings and values; in fact, at times, they can diverge from them. This distinction is crucial for understanding intellectual and artistic life. In complex societies, formations, distinct from institutions, increasingly influence cultural development and individual consciousness.

Application of Williams' "Formations" - A Critique

Max, the protagonist of the novel, spends his childhood in Crumpsall Park, North Manchester in the 1950s. Outwardly, he is grateful to his father 'for the Jew-free start' that he has given him (Jacobson 70). Jack Glickman, the father of the novel's protagonist, advocates for the abandonment of the term 'Jew' in its entirety, encompassing the broader implications tied to Jewish identity, ancestry, and tradition. Instead, he believes that a secular way of life which comprises socialism, Bundism, trade unionism, international brotherhoodism, atheism, and pugalism would save the Jews from their conventions. Jack Glickman's attitudes towards Judaism are complex, characterised by the rejection of orthodox practices and a desire for assimilation into mainstream society. He disregards Orthodox Jews as outdated and disconnected from the modern world. This is probably because Jack's generation, most of them, are the children of anarchist or trade unionist Jewish families, inheriting the legacy of the Jewish strikes in 1880s London and the revolutionary fervour that swept through Poland, Lithuania, Russia, and even reached Novoropissik, the place Max's forefathers originate from, by the 1890s. Moreover, the narrator's grandfather is involved in the Great Boot Strike of 1889 in the East End of London, where thousands of Jewish journeymen protest against the exploitative 'sweating system', a "method of exploiting labor by supplying materials to workers and paying by the piece for work done on those materials in the workers' homes or in small workshops" ("sweating system"). The strike is regarded as a significant moment of resistance against unjust labour practices, with Max's grandfather portraying it vividly to his family members as a pivotal event in their family history.

Max's father even expresses his angst to his mother, 'How do you expect him to grow up in a world free of all that shtetl rubbish if you won't stop reminding him of it? Kalooki, kalooki, night and day kalooki! We live in Crumpsall in the twentieth century, not Kalooki in the Middle Ages' (Jacobson 16). His aspiration for his son to succeed in the secular realm reflects his aspiration for Jewish assimilation and acceptance within broader society. Todd M. Endelman in *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* records as follows

> A further demographic consequence of the war was the permanent settlement of fifty to sixty thousand Central European Jews in Britain. In the long term, however, they did not strengthen the community demographically. Coming from a milieu in which drift, defection, and indifference were advanced, many of them took advantage of British tolerance to shed the minimal Jewish ties and interests they retained. To a greater extent than British-born Jews, they kept their distance from communal bodies and gave their children little Jewish upbringing.
> (Endelman 231)

Jack's pugilistic admirations mark the tensions between tradition and modernity, as well as the intergenerational dynamics within immigrant Jewish communities striving for acceptance and success in the new cultural landscape of Crumpsall Park. As mentioned in the novel, Barney Ross's, a boxer of Jewish lineage, journey from aspiring rabbi to world champion boxer embodies a narrative of overcoming obstacles and forging one's own path, which resonates with Max's father's ideals of self-determination and empowerment. Moreover, his father develops "a kind of muscular Zionism of the mind, without the necessity of actually establishing a Zionist state" (Jacobson 18). But Max, on the contrary, has an ambivalent understanding of boxing, despite his father's enthusiasm, and it stems from his artistic pursuits and concerns about physical injury. While he acknowledges the discipline and skill involved in boxing, he ultimately chooses to prioritise his artistic endeavours in caricature over the physical demands of the sport.

Max's parents are caught between two worlds: the Jewish modernity they sought to embrace in cities like Manchester and Liverpool, and the historical traumas of their heritage that they sought to distance themselves from. Max's mother too, like his father, is brought into the modernity prevalent during the 1950s Crampsall Park. When she thinks it is good for Max to have Manny's friendship, she suggests that he could swap comics with him, thinking that Manny, like any other teenager of Crumpsall Park would read comics, influenced by the ideals of American and British societies. But Manny swaps him a copy of Lord Russell of Liverpool's "The Scourge of the Swastika: A Short History of Nazi War Crimes", a book that stands as a testimony of the historicised past of the Jewish experience. Later in the novel, it is revealed that Manny and Max co-author a book titled "Five Thousand Years of Bitterness", "a comic-book history of the sufferings of the Jewish people over the last five millennia" (Jacobson 33). This act of Max consuming Jewish history is a 'formation' that directly opposes his parent's outwardly non-Jewish attitudes conditioned by the socio-political factors from their past. The book becomes significant as it serves as a vital part of the connection between the Jewish past and present. Manny employs the book as a selected representation of the past to validate the current Jewish situation and to suggest pathways for its future. Also, 'Manny remains … a significant influence on Max's view of the world'(Antene 92). Later in his life, Max realises that his parents has "made a lie of the Jewish modernity they'd been cultivating in Manchester and Liverpool; threw them back … to a world from which it was essential they could believe they had escaped" (Jacobson 117) and is shocked when he reads it for the first time that "the murder by Germans of over five million European Jews constitutes the greatest crime in world history" (Jacobson 5). Max recounts a conversation with his father who refrains him from pressuring him into undergoing the traditional Jewish ritual 'bar mitzvah'. His father wants to ensure that Max understands and appreciates his decision to abstain from the ritual, believing it is done in Max's best interest. Also, Max's father expresses concern about individuals who, decades later, still harboured feelings of shame for participating in rituals they didn't genuinely believe in, simply to appease their parents. Hence, his father wants to spare Max from such feelings of regret or obligation and encourages him to prioritise his beliefs and convictions over

conforming to societal or familial expectations, indicating that true fulfilment comes from thinking for oneself. “I was never bar mitzvah’d. My father wouldn’t hear of it. ‘You become a man when you’ve performed a manly action,’ was the beginning and the end of the subject for him” (Jacobson 121). Max acknowledges his father’s perspective but also reveals his conflicted feelings towards the ritual; that he actually would have liked to have a bar mitzvah, revealing his newly found admiration towards the Jewish norms, values, and beliefs, which vary from the ideologies of his father. Max recollects his realisation as follows: “After which I could hardly say, could I, that for myself I was thinking I’d have liked a bar mitzvah” (Jacobson 133).

In one of the instances, Max reflects on his father's fears and contradictions regarding their Jewish identity and relationships with non-Jews. Despite his father's outwardly secular and assimilated lifestyle, he still harbours deep-seated anxieties about interfaith relationships. His father's fear, as Max interprets it, revolves around the idea of assimilation and the loss of Jewish identity. Despite being irreligious and secularized, the father secretly holds onto a sense of Jewish identity, continuity, and heritage. He may have desired for his children to assimilate into mainstream society, but he is paradoxically anxious about them, especially his daughter, forming connections with non-Jews, fearing that it would dilute or erase their Jewish identity. Max’s perception of his father's conflicting attitudes furthers him in his ‘formation’ of Jewish identity, informed by the historicised Jewish past, and greatly varying from the expectations of his family. Max suggests that his father's contradictions and anxieties stem from a complex interplay of personal history, cultural expectations, and internalized prejudices because Max is well-informed on how his friends, who hail from orthodox Jewish families, are reading on Jewish history, especially the Holocaust, and encourages him to read about Jewish history and the Holocaust.

Max recollects how his Jewish friends of his age are well informed of their Jewish past as follows

> They were all reading. Every Jew I knew. All swallowing bile. Even Errol Tobias who could have passed as a member of the Einsatzgruppen himself. All storing up their rage. The only person I knew who wasn’t by his fourteenth birthday an expert on the Holocaust (whether or not we called it by that name yet) was me. But I had enough bile in me already. And what I didn’t know I could imagine.
> (Jacobson 202)

In many instances, Max’s father expresses his anti-Zionistic attitudes, influenced by his American and British ideals, which he expects the family members to inherit. But this does not stop his wife from conducting a charity event, in the pretext of organising Max’s barmitzvah, in favour of Zionism. Many other characters, like Errol, who imports wines from Israel, express their support and love for the state of Israel throughout the novel. Endelman in *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000,* observes that the opposition to Zionism gradually diminished as the support for the State of Israel and Holocaust remembrance became integral to Anglo-Jewish identity (Endelman 229).

Conclusion

The novel depicts a Jewish society set in 1950s Crumpsall Park, Manchester that seeks to distance itself from the historical trauma of its heritage, identity, ancestry, and tradition. On the other hand, the novel contends and offers alternative and oppositional ‘formations’ that pave way for contestation and negotiation by subordinate groups in the cultural development and formation of individual consciousness of the Jewish diaspora.

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