ISSUES OF IDENTITY IN 21ST-CENTURY SELECTED AUSTRALIAN JEWISH FICTION: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON DERRIDA'S CONCEPT OF DIFFÉRANCE

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by

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ABSTRAK

Identiti Yahudi adalah prototaip enigma dan ketidakstabilan yang terkandung di dalam suatu pertanyaan tanpa jawapan, iaitu "Siapakah Yahudi itu?" Pada zaman pascamoden masa kini, jati diri ini semakin berubah dan tidak stabil. Faktor yang mempertingkatkan unsur menyerupai 'mozek' di dalam jati diri Yahudi adalah sifat *diaspora* bangsa ini yang berpanjangan sejak turun-temurun. Kumpulan diaspora Yahudi Anglofon adalah kumpulan yang paling besar dan berpengaruh. Untuk itu, tesis ini tertumpu kepada diaspora Yahudi Australia kerana mereka mewakili kumpulan Yahudi Anglofon yang bersifat kosmopolitan hasil gabungan ciri-ciri 'barat' iaitu dari Amerika Syarikat dan Britain serta timur melalui kedudukan Australia yang berhampiran dengan benua Asia. Kajian terdahulu pada asasnya bertumpu kepada konteks Amerika Syarikat iaitu membincang dan menganalisis identiti Yahudi dengan menyerlahkan ciri ingatan traumatik kaum tersebut dan kesannya terhadap pembentukan jati diri. Walau bagaimanapun, tumpuan kajian terdahulu berkisar pada beberapa perspektif tanpa mengambil kira pandangan teori nyahkonstruktif. Oleh itu kajian ini cuba menyahkonstruk ciri sosial-psikologi kontemporari jati diri Yahudi dengan menggunakan

teori *differance* oleh Derrida terhadap karya fiksyen terpilih yang terhasil melalui perspektif jati diri etno-agama yang berubah dalam latar belakang masyarakat Australia masa kini. Empat buah novel telah dipilih untuk kajian ini: *Dancing in the Dark* (2010) oleh Robyn Bavati, *I Am Max Lamm* (2013) karya Raphael Brous, *Man in the Corner* (2016) oleh Nathan Besser, dan novel hasil nukilan Lisa Birman yang bertajuk *How to Walk Away* (2015). Novel-novel ini didapati mewakili empat momen berbeza dari perspektif etno-agama (merangkumi amalan eksplisit dan implisit) yang mempengaruhi sosial-psikologi watak utama (Ditty, Max Lamm, David dan Otis) serta hubungan mereka dengan persekitaran sosial. Melalui pendekatan berorientasikan teks, analisis mengaplikasikan teori *differance* Derrida dengan cara mengesan unsur linguistik dan retorik yang seolah membongkarkan rahsia menerusi detik cerita dalam teks yang dipilih. Hasil kajian menunjukkan percubaan untuk menjawab soalan kontroversi, "Siapakah Yahudi itu?" masih menimbulkan masalah. Identiti Yahudi Australia dalam abad ke-21 merupakan satu proses hubung kait yang tidak stabil antara amalan etno-agama yang sentiasa berubah, dengan diri yang dipenuhi trauma dan sifat sosiopat yang terus berlegar dari satu perspektif ke perspektif yang bertentangan tanpa menemui satu jalan penyelesaian.

ISSUES OF IDENTITY IN

21st -CENTURY SELECTED AUSTRALIAN

JEWISH FICTION: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON

DERRIDA'S CONCEPT OF DIFFERANCE

ABSTRACT

Jewish identity is a prototype of enigma and instability rendered in the unanswered inquiry, "Who is the Jew?" With the postmodern impact, it is increasingly getting fluid and unstable. A factor that intensifies the Jewish identity mosaic nature is their prolonged diaspora. One of the largest and most influential groups is the Anglophone Jewish diaspora of which the Australian Jewish diaspora has been selected as the focus of the present thesis. Since it represents a cosmopolitan context amalgamating features of the West, the USA and the UK, and the east as being close to Asia. In previous literature, though scarce and basically in the American context, Jewish identity has been discussed and analyzed to highlight their traumatic memory and its consequences on the formation of identity. These attempts' focus has been on several perspectives, not deconstructive. The present study attempts to deconstruct, through différance, the representation of the contemporary social-psychological features of Jewish identity through their fiction within the overall 'fluid' ethno-religious identity perspective in the Australian context. This investigation is conducted based on four selected novels, Robyn Bavati's *Dancing in the Dark* (2010), Raphael Brous' *I Am Max Lamm* (2013), Nathan Besser's *Man in the Corner* (2016), and Lisa Birman's *How to Walk Away* (2015). These

novels represent four different moments of ethno-religious perspective (from explicit to implicit) which influences the social-psychological perspectives of the chief characters (Ditty, Lamm, David, and Otis) and their relationships with their social circles. Within the general text-oriented approach, the textual analysis is conducted through the application of Derrida's différance which is realized by tracing the linguistic and rhetorical elements of tell-tale moments in the selected texts. So, attempting to answer the controversial question, "Who is the Jew?" is still problematic. The 21st-century Australian Jewish identity 'is' an unsettled process of play between the fluid ethno-religious observation and the trauma-ridden and sociopath selves that continue hovering from one perspective to another without settlement.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the fluidity of Jewish identity contextualizing it within a historical and political dimension of diaspora. This is followed by brief accounts about the general Anglophone Jewish context and the specific Australian Jewish context. Then, the major identity issues in the Australian Jewish context to be tackled in the present thesis are explained. The chapter also includes the study's problem, objectives, significance, scope, and definitions of key terms.

1.2 Identity and its Fluidity

Recognition of the self basically results from differences between the self and the surrounding elements, that is comparing and contrasting it (the self) to similar elements in the context of its existence. Self/Other, Occident/Orient, West/ East among other binaries that make difference to be considered as the basic criteria/ indication for identity realization prove to blur today, in the post-post-modern era. The poles of these binaries shift their locations interchangeably and repeatedly leading indispensably to the increasing tendency of identity fluidity.

The question "who am I?" is the eternal question of identity, especially in the postmodern era. The enigmatic essence of identity or the inquiry about the self originates from the diverse components/ aspects of the "Self" such as, physical aspects, emotions, plans, hopes, social position, memories, spirituality (Lindholm, 2007). Steph Lawler (2019) explains " 'Identity' exists as a key question not only in academic research, but also in our social and personal lives. Who we are and how we came to be continues to be challenged and interrogated on individual and global scales." She highlights the multidimensional significance of academic studies in the field with a special reference to the 21st century fluid social-psychological identities.

Vignoles et al. (2011) explain the nature of identity as being stable (solid) or fluid. They show that the identities go through two kinds of changes in the processes of formation and development, namely the long-term development changes and the short-term-contextual fluctuations. It is clear that the first kind supports the stability and fixity of identity and the second corresponds to moment-to-moment fluid identity (which is a noticeable mark of modernity). Anthony Elliot (2011) provides a contemporary compelling account of identity fluidity to the extent that this epoch can be called the non-identity era

> The notion of identity is curiously puzzling; the lived experience of identity is mysteriously contradictory. The puzzle and contradiction of identity, both as idea and as reality, is easily demonstrated with reference to current social transformations of the early twenty-first century. [...] It is as if the freedom to explore and experiment with identities inaugurated by our 24/7 world of intensive globalization has led to its opposite – that is to say, a shift toward non-identity, or the attempt to close down on (and perhaps eradicate?) any existing identity. (p. xii)

Zygmunt Bauman (2000) has interestingly linked/ likened the state of identity fluidity to that of the matter to clarify the notion of current/ modern fluidity. He explains that, similar to the qualities of the fluid matter, contemporary identity is fluid in that it "cannot easily hold [its] shape [… and is] constantly ready (and prone) to change it; and so [...] it is the flow of time that counts, more than the space [it occupies]" (p. 2). This point highlights that fluid identity takes its features in the temporal and spatial dimensions, with the priority of the former over the latter.

In correspondence with the mentioned arguments, Aaron Tapper (2016) emphasizes the complex constructed structure of identity (particularly 21st-century Jewish identity), commenting that it is "a process shaped by cultures, value systems, histories, and narratives. Our identities relate to every aspect of our lives" (p. 2). He argues that 21st-century identity is an abstract idea being materialized, quoting Charles Taylor's statement, "contemporary identity formation is rooted in notions of authenticity existing in an individualized self" (p. 2). This "individualized self" corresponds to Winkler's intra-relational dialectic differences that shape contemporary identity.

Considering the Jewish identity, Rosner and Ruskay (2016) explain that the postmodern era is "a remarkable period of Jewish history [… in which] diaspora Jews enjoy unprecedented affluence, influence [...]" (p. 13); however, their identity/ies face more challenges that make it persistently and increasingly fluid, especially today, "Being Jewish means having a connection to a broadly defined group with certain characteristics or definitions" (p. 15) and "Jews of all groups understand that there is growing complexity in defining Jewishness, as a result of fragmentation and

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secularization, integration, and the establishment of Israel" (p. 17). The fluidity of identifying being a Jew/ Jewish is revealed/ proved through the diversity of terms used to describe it. Is it "belonging," "connection," "link," or "membership"? Each of which makes difference and reveals an attitude to the Jewish self, psychologically and socially,

> Jews is subject to profound questions of identity and meaning. Even the mere decision to use a term such as "belonging" rather than "connection" (as in "connected to Judaism"), "link" (as in "linked to the Jewish people"), "membership" (as in "member of the tribe"), or "attachment" (as in, "attached to Jews elsewhere") comes with a particular significance. Some people might not want to "belong" to the Jewish people but are willing to be linked to Judaism. Others might feel that "belonging" could mean that something has been forced upon them and would prefer the more voluntary sounding "attachment." (Rosner & Ruskay, 2016, p. 17)

Rosner and Ruskay attribute this fluidity to two engendered factors: ethnicity (or "sense of peoplehood" (p. 16)) and the psychological state of the Jews today which is basically linked to the previous pogroms, of which the Holocaust has been the most influential factor considered as the core of the Jewish transgenerational trauma in Cohn and Morrison (2017), and in the reviewed biographical accounts of Freadman (2007).

Roden (2016), Luz (2003), and Ben Raphael (2002) attempt to encapsulate the major tendencies that shape Jewish identity in the postmodern era which are basically the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel. Moreover, these authors emphasize an overall tendency to shift the focus of identifying the Jewish identity from total reliance on the traumatic past to futurity. Considering Jewish literature, Budick (2007), Cheyette & Groß (2007), Brook (2006), Most (2006), and Burstein (2006) argue that

their literature reflect a wide variety of identity issues, for example, the portrayal of the Jewish communities' peculiarities, the image of the Jewish body, the position of Jewish women, and Jewish identity from a psychological angle. All these arguments, either in everyday life or in literature, highlight the fluidity of Jewish identity due to the ever-changing factors that are persistently shaping and reshaping it. As representing one of the largest and most influential groups of Jewish diaspora, the Anglophone Jewish literature is targeted in this thesis. It can be exploited to explore the image of the Jews' selves as being felt and lived by the Jews themselves (Meyers, 2011; Whitfield, 2008; Cheyette, 2007; La Vall, 2007; & Freadman, 2007). Besides, the deconstructive textual analysis is supposed to reveal the depths of identity attributes through the processes of meaning generation.

In light of the aforementioned points, contemporary Jewish identity is selected as the focus of this study due to two following major reasons. First, as argued before, it represents the fluidity of the current era due to a heritage of diaspora along with the tremendous changes in all aspects of today's life. Second, paradoxically the Jews of today are an influential minority (Tapper, 2016) regardless of the instability of their controversial identity.

Opening new dimensions of creative thinking and analysis, in the postmodern era, to break the conventionality and "becomes a greater force for change" (Williams, 2005, p. 153.) and being, as described by Nicholas Royle (2003), the theory/ project that identifies the current epoch of humanity, Derrida's deconstruction project is the

suggested theoretical framework to study contemporary identity issues, especially with regard to such a complex and controversial diasporic nation like the Jews. Derrida's axioms of deconstruction and the basics of identity are interlinked. Carolyn D'Cruz (2008) further explains:

> Identities, understandings of experience, and foundations of knowledge are fractured from the start, and in acknowledging the faulty logic of binary oppositions at the heart of all such origins, deconstruction aims to work with, rather than deny, the collisions and crises between and within all the oppositional predicates inhering in the articulation and elaboration of the emancipatory promise. (p. 5)

Dooley and Kavanagh (2007) support D'Cruz's views stating Derrida realizes that identity "is a complex web containing within itself multiple layers that cannot easily be unravelled" (p.2). Another important feature of identity emphasized by Derrida in correspondence with his deconstructionist terms is that "[t]he identity of a person or thing always conceals something from view [because] everything has a long and convoluted history that cannot be rendered fully present" (p. 3). Therefore, identity can never be considered "transparent"; it is composed of layers of embedded factors and elements that can never be fathomed because "no human being can fully recover the manifold layers of history that make up a life. Each of us is cut from our origins by time and what Derrida calls 'the catastrophe of memory,' " as asserted by Dooley and Kavanagh (2007, p. 3).

In addition, a significant factor that provides a direct link between Jewish identity and deconstruction is the fact that Derrida's Judaism has been projected into his philosophy. Dooley and Kavanagh (2007, p. 13) comment that the tragic experiences of "anti-Semitism" and the instability even among Jewish societies have been vividly reflected in Derrida's works "[s]ince his earlier work on Edmund Jabes and Emmanuel

Levinas to the texts on the shibboleth and circumcision, Jewish themes have always been at the foreground of Derrida's writing." They sum up these arguments stating, "[w]hile we traditionally approach the question of identity in terms of presence, plenitude and recollection, for Derrida identity is always haunted by the spectral traces of absence, loss and death" (p. 17).

As a result, this study is concerned basically with the deconstruction/ tracing of the traits of Jewish identity through their contemporary fiction. In the coming sections, the problem, objectives, contribution, and scope of the thesis have been clarified after briefly surveying the Jewish diaspora (basically from the historical and political perspectives) with specific reference to Anglophone diaspora as being the focus of the present thesis.

1.3 Background of the Study

1.3.1 What is Diaspora?

Etymologically**,** the term is of Greek origin that means "something to do with scattering and dispersal" (Kenny, 2013, p. 22). It technically refers to the world created by migration. Besides, as there are negative implications of diaspora like loss and homesickness, according to Kral (2009), there is an increasing awareness of its positive connotations chiefly "self-reinvention" (p. 11). Diaspora, today, is a term of a variety of indications, Kral (2009) argues, including academia, journalism, politics, among others. The classic diaspora, according to Weingrod and Levy (2009), or the forced displacement/ "victim diaspora," according to Cohen (2008), include nations

such as the Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Africans and Palestinians. Another temporal classification of diaspora is that of today, the new diaspora, which, Cohen (2008) explains, refers to the migration of people around the world due to wars, injustice, or the quest for better living standards. With this brief overview on diaspora, the following section aims to zoom in on the focal diasporic nation in this study – the Jews.

1.3.2 The Jews: A Diasporic Nation (A Survey from Ancient Times to the 20th century)

Supporting Shulvass (1971), Safran (2005) and Rutland (2005) show that the Jews are a prototype of diasporic people due to a history of four thousand years of migration and displacement. Kevin Kenny (2013) summarizes the supposed roots of Jewish diasporic history since the days of the Prophet Abraham when he migrated from Babylonia to Canaan since the Jews are descendants of his successors. Then, due to the famine, they were driven to Egypt. They settled there but were persecuted by the Pharaohs. Subsequently, God sent Moses who migrated with them to Canaan. Kenny concludes that since then, "the familiar cycle of migration, suffering, and return" (p. 20) has been a distinctive feature of the history of the Jews.

Whereas Shulvass' (1971) focus has been on the Westward migration of Poland and Lithuania Jews during the 17th and 18th centuries and Kenny (2013) surveys the whole Jewish story without thorough details, Rubinstein et al. (2002) provide a detailed account of Jewish history since 1750. During the period between the two extremes of Jewish settlements, Rubenstein et al. argue that the dominant features of the Jews

during the Middle Ages were religiosity, agriculture without any remarkable contributions in the economic or scientific fields, and exiled social life. It was the period between the medieval and modern world which marked their movement to more urban areas and consequently their shift to business, chiefly as usurers. In fact, the Jewish migration movements continued in their areas of diaspora, with more focus on their movements in Europe. Their situation, after that, fluctuated according to the attitudes of the rulers of the countries to which they migrated. However, one major factor that guaranteed their security in these countries was being "the backbone of the small mercantile class" (p. 10). Another factor that affected the settlement of the Jews in their European diaspora was the conflict between Catholics and Protestants, with the latter showing more tolerance toward the Jews.

In the modern ages, beginning from the enlightenment, the Jews experienced a sharp advance in their position in the European societies due to the drastic structural changes that these societies underwent such as the Western emancipation movements, the French Revolution (with its slogan, liberty, fraternity, and equality), and the Industrial Revolution. Their initiated process of assimilation was not welcomed by all Jews. The Sephardi Jews, who lived in "Western and south-eastern Europe," (Rubenstein et al., 2002, p.18) were more open to assimilation than the Ashkenazi Jews, of Eastern Europe. However, within this gained space of freedom, they continued isolating themselves, practicing their rituals, language, and other distinctive activities to the extent that their communities became like some miniature governments inside the countries where they lived. Their religiosity was still vivid,

and the society was more patriarchal. Women folk (who were not fully educated) were prepared to be housewives. This situation of in-betweenness (between assimilation and isolation) did not continue. As the Jews acquired more rights and left their shielded ghettos, they started to liberate their religious teachings; therefore, there were calls to reform Judaism that was, thus, ultimately divided into mainly orthodox and secular denominations.

Lloyd P. Gartner (2001) provides an account of Jewish history highlighting the tragic fate of the Jews in Europe and celebrating the founding of the state of Israel on the occupied territories of Palestine in 1948. As suggested by Gartner (2001) and Lupovitch (2010), the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century marked a sharp change in Jewish history. It was a period of economic and cultural growth. Their state was typically described by a speech, though hostile, of the German preacher Adolf Stoecker (1879) that the Jews controlled the economic and press centers along with the heated competition to attend the establishments of high education. The speech was not meant to praise them but to highlight the rising danger of the Jewish power in Europe and the world as hostility towards them increased in what they, the Jews, termed as 'anti-Semitism' which, according to Lupovitch (2010, p. 181), "was coined by the German sociologist Wilhelm Marr in 1879" and indicated racial and political dimensions of the relationship between the Jews and *Other* nations.

Generally, identity is a complex and controversial issue including overlapping multidimensional perspectives: historical, cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic, political, social, and psychological, among others. This complexity is intensified by

the controversial enigmatic nature of the Jewish identity, which is the focus of this study. This undecidable nature of Jewish identity results from a long heritage of diaspora and persecution. The fate of the Jews has been displacement on the land and inability to settle, especially in the West.

Since the ancient times, this diaspora is accompanied by a religious hatred due to that the Orthodox Christians accused the Jews of crucifying Jesus (Yaajnaseni, 2020; Abulafia, 2002; & Sloyan, n.d.). They were suspected and always exiled in ghettos which provided them with a privacy to practice their religious rituals and separated them from the people (mainly the Christians) of the larger host society. However, according to Rubenstein et al. (2002), these societies kept them because of their -the Jews- constant financial contribution that supported these countries' economy. However, pogroms and displacement were frequently imposed on them whenever the rulers of the host societies changed. This attitude reached its zenith during World War II (WWII) when Hitler decided to burn them alive in the concentration camps as the final solution to get rid of their evil. These two factors: the historical and the political tinged with the religious, create a collective attitude among the diasporic Jews of instability, and rejection.

Gartner (2001) argues that the impact of 'anti-Semitism' on the Jews themselves was nevertheless positive because the hostility towards them revived and intensified their sense of unity. Moreover, the continuous Jewish diaspora and the persecution against the Jews accompanying it (like the pogroms in Russia of the nineteenth century) led to the establishment of Zionism (1897) by its godfather, Theodor Herzl (1860-1904),

which called for the establishment of the Jewish state on the land of Palestine.

Although not the first pogrom, a major turning point in Jewish history in the mid-twentieth century was the Holocaust. From the perspective of Gartner (2001), during World War II, Germany led by Hitler was about to win after invading vast areas of Europe. Hitler's and the German hostility towards the Jews initiated the preparations for the 'Final Solution' for the Jews. This solution was to conduct massive destruction of the Jews in what was called concentration camps or what is known today as the Holocaust. It was stated that the German drove massive numbers of the Jews from around Europe and burned them alive in these camps or furnaces to get rid of their 'evil.'

The Holocaust has been of great significance for the Jews, both in their everyday life and in their writings, (Cohn & Morrison, 2017; Kaisar, 2010; & Freadman, 2004 & 2007) to the extent that anyone who casts doubts on it is considered anti-Semitic by the Jews, and especially the Zionists, to urge the previous pleas for a 'Final Solution,' here, from a different perspective, for their diaspora and to establish a stable homeland for them demanding Great Britain to fulfill Balfour Declaration (1917). The waves of migration to Palestine started early in the 1930s. Here, the US politically interfered "to pass [UN] Resolution 181 that gave Jews the right of a state in Palestine. The (1948) war erupted and a Zionist State was established and named 'Israel' " (Saleh, 2005, p. 162).

The war was called the War of Independence by the Zionists and the Catastrophe/ Disaster/ AlNakbah by the Palestinians and all Arabs and Muslims. The establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine; however, does not mean that the Jewish diaspora ends. Groups of migrants continue living and settling where their forefathers used to live around the world, for example, in America, Canada, South America, Britain, France, Russia, South Africa, and Australia.

1.3.3 Anglophone Jewish Diaspora

Considering the tumultuous background of the Jewish nation, and to narrow down the temporal and spatial dimensions of Jewish diaspora, the focus of the present study is on the 21st-century Jewish identity traits in their Anglophone diasporic literature. This context is selected due to that "[t]wenty-first-century Jews trace their origins back thousands of years, [… as they] have lived in widespread places through their history" (Tapper, 2016, p. 2). These factors shape their identities. Before delving deep into the details of the thesis, it is important to give a brief overview of the Anglophone Jewish diaspora.

The Jewish diaspora is scattered around the world. The present study zooms in on one of the biggest and most influential groups, namely, the Anglophone Jewish diasporic group. Adam Mendelsohn (2007) describes it as an influential cultural, religious and social group which stretches through the commonwealth countries to the USA and is marked by extreme transformations in their contemporary history. He then provides a historical account of its emergence. He explains that, in the 1840s, the Jews migrated in substantial numbers to "English-speaking societies across the globe" (p. 178). Due

to the expansion of the Jewish population in the two main Anglophone countries, England and the United States, the Jews stretched their destinations to the newly born communities under the British crown, "Australia, Canada, South Africa, and the British Caribbean" (pp. 178-179).

Regardless of the vast oceans and distances between these scattered communities, Mendelsohn explains that the Anglophone Jews have shared the same language and focused on trade. These common features create strong ties among them. These factors led to the creation of "a distinct English-speaking Jewish diaspora" (p. 179) that is described by Jonathan Sarna (2006) as "the largest and most culturally creative Jewish diaspora in the world" (p. 217). Accordingly, the focus of the current study is on the Australian context which provides similar circumstances of assimilation to the open American context and the conservative British context. These factors are crucial in shaping Australian Jewish identity and making the Australian Jewish context a peculiar representative of the major features of these two significant contexts of Western Anglophone Jewish diaspora. Besides, the geographical closeness to Asia bestows the Australian context with a cosmopolitan touch.

In the coming paragraphs, the focus shifts to briefly describe this ethno-religious group in the Australian diaspora. The ethno-religious peculiarity as a distinctive feature of the Australian Jews is highlighted by Creese (2019a & b), Graham & Markus (2018), and roughly by Rutland (2005). Moreover, these details are accompanied by accounts of one important cultural aspect of the Jewish diaspora, i.e., literature, as being the focal aspect of the present thesis along with a quick overview

of the main writers of whose literary production the novels for the scrutinizing analysis have been selected.

1.3.3(a) Australian Jews

Early in the previous century, according to Rutland (2005), Australian Jews had been different from those in America and Europe. They were, in their early stages/ years of migration, more conservative (following a British lifestyle), and confined themselves within their close Jewish community away from the currents of change overseas. At first, and due to the geographical remote position of Australia, the Jewish community was fossilized and resembled the British regarding their lifestyle. The scene changed when more migrations to Australia and the refugees from the Holocaust led to inject the Australian Jews with new and vivid trends which significantly participated in merging them more in the society and with the general tendencies in the world.

After WW II, Australian Jewry underwent a process of complete transformation in all life aspects. In religion, their tendency to be both paradoxically conservative and assimilated changed to more varieties of religious perspectives, "[m]any survivors rejected their religious upbringing after the Shoah [the Holocaust]. For them, God had died in Auschwitz. Yet, some of their children and grandchildren have returned to a more religious life" (Rutland, 2005, p. 95). Besides, these transformations, especially in religion and education, had changed the Jewish identity and questioned the extent of the assimilation processes in shaping their identity/ identities.

Rutland repeatedly emphasizes that the Australian Jews have succeeded in solving the difficult equation, maintaining their religious peculiarity and assimilating into the Australian society. She concludes

> Australian Jewry has, since 1945, been enriched by new waves of immigrants who have changed an isolated Anglo-Jewish community to a pluralist religious and ethnic group that is fully integrated into the general society. The community continues to attract immigrants, and is today the tenth largest in the Jewish diaspora. Its members enjoy full acceptance, despite the increase of antisemitism in recent years. Although located at the edge of the Jewish world, it is perceived to be a model for other Jewish communities in the diaspora, as well as for ethnic communities in Australia. (p. 162)

A point to be highlighted here is that the "difference" hinted at by Rutland has been between Australian Jews and other main Anglophone groups: the American and the British. The American Jews are marked by high degrees of assimilation due to more space/ openness to practice their lives and activities whereas the British, as known, are more conservative, thus making it difficult to assimilate unlike the American Jews. The Australian Jews are paradoxically marked by the openness to assimilate and the conservatism to keep their peculiarity, especially the religious aspect despite their great variety of denominations.

1.3.3(b) Australian Jewish Literature

Elisa Morera de La Vall (2007) explains that although Jewish writing shares some common features with the Australian mainstream, they keep other distinctive features that mark their works as Jewish; for example, "the way they transmit the pain of exile and the nostalgia for a home forever lost" (p. 176). However, today, La Vall asserts

that Australian Jewish literature has witnessed more variety and complexity. Australian Jewish literature, as a part of the overall perspective of the Anglophone Jewish literature, reflects a wide variety of identity issues; of which the psychological depths are remarkable (Budick, 2007 & Horowitz, 2002) within the social-psychological perspective (Tapper, 2016 & Herman, 1989) that can be tackled within the ethno-religious Jewish identity in the Australian context (Creese 2019a & b). As such, Australian Jewish literature provides a valuable corpus to explore Jewish identity holistically.

Accordingly, Robyn Bavati, Raphael Brous, Nathan Besser and Lisa Birman are the Australian Jewish authors whose works have been selected to be analyzed. They are selected because they represent the young generation of Jewish writers and their works, namely Bavati's *Dancing in the Dark* (2010), Brous' *I Am Max Lamm* (2011), Besser's *Man in the Corner* (2016), and Birman's *How To Walk Away* (2015) are supposed to reflect the postmodern perspective of Australian Jewish identity with more focus on the social-psychological depths of its ethno-religious vantage point.

It is due here to provide plot summaries of the four novels to reflect their backgrounds before proceeding with further arguments.

In *Dancing in the Dark* (2010), Ditty (Yehudit) Cohen lives a strictly religious life with her Haredi family. She spends her life between the school, the synagogue, and the family chores. One day, she secretly watches a ballet show on a hidden TV in her friend's mother's bedroom. It is hidden because luxuries such as TV and the Internet

are prohibited in their Haredi community and considered a devilish influence. Ditty is fascinated by the ballet show and wishes to join a ballet training school to improve her already excellent gymnastic skills and pursue her dream. Her wish is blindly rejected by her parents. So, she tells her parents lies and invents ruses of work after school and she secretly joins the ballet school in the International Theater. This double life leads to harsh choices for Ditty, between religious commitment to her family and community, on one side, and her personal dream, on the other. She tries to give up her dream for her community, but she fails, especially since her progress has been remarkable. Finally, on discovering her secret, her father gives her the chance to choose between her family and ballet. She selects the second.

In *I Am Max Lamm* (2011), Max Lamm starts his life with great expectations in sports, arts, and oratory. Due to his excellence in tennis, he gets a grant to professionally play tennis and pursue his academic studies in law in New York. However, a scandalous sexual tape of Lamm has been recorded by a tennis trainee and spread virtually around the world. It turns all Lamm's promising future plans into a chain of destruction. After losing his grant and reputation, he escapes to London. But he accidentally murders a Pakistani boy, Malik Massawi. He hides in Hyde Park and considers it as an exile among the vagrants. During these hard times, he is involved in another sexual affair with Kelly Wesson, the daughter of a renowned American senator, who happens to be on a visit to London. Lamm discovers Mr. Wesson's homosexual affairs and takes photos of the senator in a shameful position. So, Mr. Wesson calls the police accusing Lamm of theft. The police arrest him. On the way to the station, protests against the murder of Massawi are taking place. By accident, the protesters stop the police car

that carries Lamm, and he is released by the leader of the protesters, Massawi's cousin.

In *Man in the Corner* (2016), David Sachs lives a simple monotonous life with his wife and two children. On discovering that his wife used to be a prostitute, he develops hydrocephalus, a sudden build-up of fluids in the brain. Later, this leads him to make several unbalanced decisions. He sells his business and is involved in the crime of identity-theft, with the enigmatic Ben Strbic. David has to assume the identity of a rich man, H. H. Green, who has disappeared for a long time, and regularly withdraw certain amounts from Green's bank account. David gets to know about Green from Green's journals. Reading these journals causes David to realize his mistake and recognize that Ben is a criminal. Impulsively, David throws all Green's documents into the sea, murders Ben, confesses the truth to his wife, and finally sells his house to repay Green's stolen money.

In *How To Walk Away* (2015), Otis is a multi-complex personality. He is a history teacher. His wife, Cat, is an expert at researching family trees. They love each other, but have their own hidden sufferings that separate them emotionally. Cat suffers from feelings of guilt at indirectly causing her brother Thomas' death during a storm. So, whenever there is a storm, she locks herself in the closet and does not allow Otis in. Meanwhile, he has a number of obsessive-compulsive disorders (OCDs). The roots of these OCDs are not clarified in the story. He tries to reduce his anxiety by counting and numbering things into five and by walking around and reciting names of people from different origins. His participation in the Afghanistan war provides him with the

life of discipline he seeks; however, the bloody scenes on the front lines intensify his disorders. When he returns home safe, he wishes that he could have lost something to appease his feeling of guilt. His wish is fulfilled when he has an accident that costs him his left arm. Finally, Cat opens up the closet to him, and together they try to walk away from their traumas by being open to each other and by avoiding to be imprisoned in the anxieties of the past.

In these texts, on the one hand, it is noticeable that Robyn Bavati, with her Haredi upbringing and unfulfilled passion for ballet, and Raphael Brous, with autobiographical touches in the character of Max Lamm, aim at representing their generation's perspective of the unanswered question/ problem: "Who is the Jew?" They achieve this end by providing moments of bewilderment, through Ditty and Lamm, between a heavy ethno-religious heritage which shapes how they should look at themselves, how they ought to behave and how others, within the closer Jewish circles or the wider non-Jewish ones, consider them. On the other hand, Nathan Besser and Lisa Birman, through David and Otis, provide a wider perspective of assimilation and a deeper social-psychological angle that, although reflecting painful experiences and profound awareness of their major characters' *silent/silenced* Jewishness, indirectly attempt to suggest solutions of how to overcome the Jewish trauma-ridden identity.

According to the accounts above about the selected authors and their novels, the scarcity of previous studies on the authors and their novels justifies the need for further studies in the field of the 21st-century Jewish fiction (Zepp, et al., 2020; Levy

& Schachter, 2015; Brauner & Stähler, 2014; Amis, 2013; Rosenfeld, 2008; and Stähler, 2007).

Therefore, as it is evident through the aforementioned arguments, diaspora, down the ages, marks the Jewish identity formation and, thus, leads to the complexity of the debatable question "What/Who is the Jew?" This is also due to the complexity of the issue of identity in general and the instability of the implications of the words "Jew," "Jewish" and "Jewish literature." Contemporary Jewish identity with the deep accumulated heritage of centuries and its fluidity between the margin and the center proves to be a typical representation of post-structuralist and postmodernist theoretical arguments, and thus, to be a fertile field to apply the current trends of the deconstruction project since it is a crossing-border between post-structuralism and postmodernism. The above introductory background is supposed to capture (in a nutshell) the divergent existing literature about Jewish diaspora and its influence on the formation of their identity. Thereafter, the scope has been narrowed down to shed more light on the focal contexts and texts in the present thesis as it is to be elaborated later.

In fact, the long heritage of diaspora has a tremendous influence in shaping the Jewish self today. Within the Australian context, the Jews, here, represent a moment always in-between: between their ethno-religious identity and their being Australian citizens, between their historical, intellectual, and genealogical attachment to the West; Europe and America, and their geographical closeness to Asia with its diverse contexts. These circumstances create a distinguishable social-psychological perspective for these Jews

that is reflected in their literature, specifically fiction. Therefore, this thesis attempts to dissect this social-psychological identity perspective of the Australian Jews, as an ethno-religious group within the whole Australian society, through 21st-century novels written by young authors to investigate how the new generation portrays their diasporic Jewish identity in this peculiar spot of the world and, of course, of the Jewish diaspora.

The selection of the identity variables in this study is based on the common observed Jewish identity perspective in the Australian context which is the ethno-religious (Creese, 2019 a & b, graham & Markus, 2018; Rutland 2005 & 2010). Creese (2019 a & b) explain that this identity perspective is not solid to be identified with a clear-cut definition; it is pluralistic and can be tackled fluidly from isolation and orthodoxy to assimilation and secularism. This fluidity of the ethno-religious Jewish perspective will be explained in detail through Landau's model (2015) and Elazar's model (1995). So, the ethno-religious variable is a line within the overall concept of identity and it is fluid because it is represented along a continuum from one extreme to another. The social-psychological Jewish identity perspective is selected in light of the recommended identity tendency by (Herman, 1989; Horowitz, 2002; Budick, 2007; and Tapper, 2016). Also, through reading the selected texts and their reviews, the social-psychological perspective is vivid. Like the ethno-religious, it is fluid because the psychological traumas and the social influences differ according to the character's ethno-religious moment and the surrounding circumstances. The next section is to elaborate these two identity variables and the adopted models

1.4 Issues of Identity

Depending on a quick view on some canonical references of identity issues (Tapper, 2016; Lurcza, 2014; Elliot, 2011; Lindholm, 2007; Sedikides & Gregg, 2007; Hall 1996; Breakwell, 1986; among others), the intricacy of identity formation and its studies are evident. The diverse external and internal factors that shape one's identity are interactive and changeable. In this regard, it is crucial to indicate that the contemporary identity processes tend to be more fluid due to the incredible fluctuations and changes in all life fields. The focus of this thesis requires a model of identity that comprehensively combines the individuals' psychological world and their interaction with the social context, as an indicative contemporary Jewish identity perspective (Tapper, 2016; & Herman, 1989), within the ethno-religious context of the Australian Jews.

1.4.1 Ethno-religious Identity

The fluidity of Jewish identity in general and in the postmodern era specifically makes it difficult, if not impossible, to categorize/ narrow its scope down to one aspect or another. However, for clarity, Jewish identity, in this study, is tackled generally from an overall ethno-religious perspective because the diasporic Jews are an ethnic minority. This ethnicity is strongly entangled with their religious *Selves* (Jewishness/ Jewish self), although this religiosity is, itself, fluid in terms of its indication along a continuum from ultra-orthodoxy to secularism. Within the Australian context, the Australian Jews paradoxically smoothly assimilate within their Australianness yet preserve their Jewishness too. It is not diluted in the national currents. Historically, Himmelfarb (2009) explains Shaye J. D. Cohen's arguments about the everlasting

religious impact on the Jewish identity which adds an important dimension to the ethnic identity perspective. Besides, Himmelfarb also elaborates David Goodblatt's attempt to define Jewish national identity which he marks as a challenging task "in distinguishing between ethnicity and national identity" (Himmelfarb, 2009, p. 68). From another angle, according to L. Gumilev (1967, as cited in Arakelova, 2010, pp. 1-2), the ethno-religious identity formation is enigmatic, indeterminate, and is equally applicable to a variety of fields such as the language, traditions, and history, among others.

Landau (2015) and Elazar (1995) provide two models to describe the different divisions of the Jews in their communities according to the extent of observing their Jewishness. Landau's model categorizes the Australian Jews (as an example of all Jews in diaspora) basically in terms of their ethnicity whereas Elazar's model targets the ethno-religious perspective of the American Jews and is applied by Creese (2019b) to the Australian Jewish context. To the researcher, the two models together provide a holistic insight about the fluid ethno-religious identity perspective of the Australian Jews. Landau (2015) divides them into three categories as follows: core, middle, and periphery. Elazar's (1995) circular divisions assign a letter, A, B, C, and D, from inside to outside, corresponding, in elaboration, to Landau's (2015) three sections. These models correspond to the continuum adopted in the present study of the fluid ethno-religious Australian Jewish perspective. The core, or circle A, meets the ultra-orthodox isolated community, and the periphery, circle D, the secular assimilated individuals. However, all these groups observe their Jewishness differently each moment along the continuum. That is, they cling to their Judaism, but each from a