

Jewish Identity

Asserting one's identity is typical or natural for any marginalized community. Each ethnic group has its own set of beliefs, behaviours, custom, tradition and culture, and also practices it strictly to assert its identity. Stuart Hall offers two related ways of thinking about identity in his essay, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora". In the first way, he defines cultural identity "in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common". This concept, as he points out, "continues to be very powerful and creative force in emergent forms of representation amongst hitherto marginalized peoples" (111). This view of Stuart Hall supports the traditional Jewish culture of identifying themselves in terms of "one shared culture".

In the second way, Hall stresses that identities are not fixed but "subject to continuous 'play' of history, culture and power". From this perspective, identities are not "grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past". Instead "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past". Hall emphasizes the necessity of understanding different notions of identity. He says, "Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being'. It belongs to the future as

much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture” (112).

As with any other ethnic identity, Jewish identity is, in some degree a matter of claiming that identity, and being perceived by others. The Jews, in spite of their prolonged life in exile, maintain their identity. Throughout their Diaspora, the Jews tended to live in separate communities (ghetto life) in which they could practice their religion and culture. Despite different cultures, different experiences, different repressions, different governments, different freedom, the Jewish identity has managed to survive.

There are various aspects to the contemporary Jewish identity, as perceived by the younger and older generation in Richler’s novels.

1. Religious observance and beliefs.
2. Tie with Israel.
3. Compassion towards the community.
4. Alienation as an identity.

This chapter attempts to transpose these levels of identity to the particular quandary of the character in Richler’s novels.

The younger generation of Jews in Richler’s novels though adheres to the Jewish religion, culture and tradition, dissents to follow strictly the traditional Jewish culture. Their concept of identity slightly

differs from the older generation due to various socio, political and economic factors. The younger generation lives in the post-Holocaust world, awaiting the formation of Israel, as a nation. Though various factors have brought about a noticeable change in their notion of identity, they exhibit ministrations in preserving their identity. So, Stuart Hall's second position on identity stands apt in explaining the predicament of the younger generation in view of their identity.

The Jewish understanding of God has two foundations: One, God created the World and two, God intervenes in human affairs. *Sabbath* is the testimony of the first premise; the exodus is the testimony of the second. So, among the elder generation of the Jews in Richler's novels, the Jewish holidays and festivals gain more importance. Not only that, for people like Melech Adler and Jacob Goldenberg (SOSH), Simcha Kravitz (ADK) and for similar other first generation Jews in Canada, going to the synagogue, reading the Torah, praying, belief in God, eating *kosher* food and other religious observance and beliefs assert their religious identity.

In *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Melech insists his family to observe *Sabbath*. He says, "If a Jew buys things on *Sabbath*, he might as well go without a hat and if a Jew went without a hat, he might as well miss the evening prayer, and if a Jew missed the evening prayer . . . ". (SOSH 17). Melech, the eldest and the oldest of the Adler's family is

a typical example of a traditional Jew. As an orthodox son of a scribe, he observes *Sabbath* and insists that Jews should wear hat and attend synagogue regularly. He is very particular that a Jew should not shop on Jewish holidays. But, Jacob Goldenberg, though belongs to the older generation neither believes in forcing the people to attend synagogue nor observes *Sabbath*. He sets an example by being sincere in his observation of religious holidays and festivals. Once when one Garbor was reported to be working on *Sabbath*, Goldenberg only said that Garbor was so good to his children that he can not see them starve; so, in order to earn a living he must work. He saw beauty in everyman and was of the view that one's religious and cultural observances can be made flexible in order to support the humanity and to build humaneness in people. Whereas Melech's rigid dignity and inflexibility personify the ghetto values of the first generation Jews who live in Canada.

The second generation, though not as orthodox as Melech, are brought up with the faith that failing to observe their religious, cultural and traditional beliefs, they cease to be Jews. So the second generation of Jews, like Wolf, Max, Rory peel, Joshua observe religious and cultural activities only in the presence of their family and community, to satisfy the elder generation. Max Adler, who is forced to observe *Sabbath* by his father, plans to work on the *Sabbath* after

his father's death. Similarly, Wolf Adler in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, once when he takes Noah to the synagogue, tells Noah, "you can go without a hat. Eat ham. But not in front of Zeyda" (SOSH 102). He passes dirty comments at the Jewish laws, but he respects the feelings of those who follow it. He does not want to hurt the Jews who adhere to the laws. In fact he feels proud of the Jewish culture. He compares Jewish tradition with that of the gentiles and tells, "On the New Year's Eve, they drink to beat the band, we fast. It's healthy to fast. It cleans out the system" (SOSH 118).

Rory peel in *The Incomparable Atuk* observes *Sabbath* and other religious festivals only to satisfy his father. In fact, Rory peel is a character of double standards. He does not want to show the world that he religiously follows the Jewish laws. At the same time he wants the world to think that he loves the gentiles. But on the contrary when Atuk, the Eskimo wanted to marry his sister, he rejects him telling that he is not a Jew. Peel does not insist his children to follow the religion and culture as his father did to him.

In *Joshua Then and Now*, Rueben Shapiro reads the Bible to his grand children before they go to bed. He never took these observances very seriously when Joshua was young. Though Reuben was a voracious reader, he feels the need of the religion and realizes its value as he grows old. He imparts the value to his grandchildren

with the idea that they should not miss the religious practices in the busy, modern world. Though not orthodox, Reuben imbibes in Joshua, the habit of attending prayers regularly, when he was young. Joshua attended prayers only to attract the attention of his father. As a child, he was not taken proper care by either of the parents. So, Joshua thought that attending synagogue regularly will make his father happy and continued to do the same. But when he grew, he never cared for the prayers or *Sabbath*. Once when he was in a hotel among the gentiles, he refused to drink telling them that was *Sabbath*. This later surprised Joshua himself. His Jewishness is realized by him more when he is among the gentile crowd.

Whereas the third and the fourth generation Jews like Noah, Sholime, Jake, Duddy and Issac are neither interested in observing *Sabbath* nor any other religious beliefs. In *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Noah feels that God was created by man out of necessity. "I was wrong to worry about God, he thought. I don't believe in Him so He doesn't exist. My grandfather believes in Him so He does exist . . . In order to be liberated from God, one must forget Him. But can one forget" (SOSH 60). This is an illustration of the fact that the younger generation can neither relinquish their religion and tradition fully nor follow it strictly. Noah, after the death of his father, does not show any interest in observing *Shivah*, a seven-day mourning for the dead.

He shaves his beard and drinks at Panofskys' shop – things which are forbidden during *Shivah*. Moreover, he tells his grand father, “. . . I can't be something, or serve something. I no longer believe in. As it is well. . . I'm sort of between things. I was born a Jew but somewhere along the way . . . you can't go back Zeyda” (SOSH 34). Noah represents the younger generation. His conversation with his *Zeyda* is a proof that they no longer want to attach themselves to any of the religious and cultural observations to identify themselves or to be identified as Jews.

Similarly, Issac, the great grandson of Solomon Gursky is skeptical about *Sabbath* when he questions his father Henry about Moses' smoking at the *Sabbath* table. Yet another character Jake Hersh, in *St. Urbain's Horseman*, comes to Canada for the death of his father, where he feels that *Shivah* is no longer observed. He sees it an opportunity to meet friends and relatives. “The embarrassing thing is” Jake said, “It's like a family party. I am not grieving. I'm having a wonderful time” (SUHM 392). Jake likes that atmosphere being light. But Jake, like Joshua, wants to stick to his cultural identity when he is among the gentiles – a predicament which most of the younger generation Jews could not overcome. When Jake is stopped at the borders of Canada by the immigration officers, he asks them how long would the inquiry take. The officers say, “as long as it does”. For

which Jake tells, “The only reason why I ask, Sir, is today is Friday. I’m well, Jewish . . . our *Sabbath* begins at sundown and then it would be against the articles of my faith to travel” (SUHM 115).

But Jake’s father Izzy Hersh observes faithfully all the religious festivals like Passover, *Yom Kippur*, *Rosh Hashanah*. He wanted Jake to continue the same. Once Jake’s father sent him a parcel to England, in which he had kept a Jewish calendar, listing holidays to be observed, a skull cap and a prayer book. The dichotomy in identity between the elder and younger generation of Jews proves that the individual’s Jewish identity is a personal reflection on the nature of each Jew’s Journey; their schema of meaning extracted from their experiences.

Kashrut, the Jewish dietary laws, forms a part of the Jewish identity. Most of the elders and some of the younger generation Jews in the novels are shown to be eating only *kosher* food. It is prescribed by the Torah. It is a Jewish diet that includes vegetarian and non-vegetarian; methods of preparation and ways of eating it are also clearly stated in *Kashrut*. A *kosher* animal must be a ruminant and have split hooves. Most common fowls are *kosher*. In order to eat an animal or bird it must be slaughtered according to the Jewish law (*Shechita*). This slaughter is methodical, which reduces the blood pressure in the brain to zero immediately so that the animal loses

consciousness in a few seconds and dies in less than a minute. However, not all parts of the animal may be eaten. It is forbidden to cook or eat dairy products together with poultry.

Right from *Son of a Smaller Hero* to *Barney's Version*, Richler depicts here and there the characters who strictly stick to *kosher* foods. Melech family and other families portrayed in *Son of a Smaller Hero* eat only *kosher* food. In *A Choice of Enemies*, the Jewish emigrants in London invite mainly the Jews and serve only *kosher* food in their community parties. In *St. Urbain's Horseman*, Mrs. Hersh refuses to eat what her gentile daughter-in-law gives, telling, "It isn't *kosher*. I'm not allowed to eat butter with milk". In the novel *Solomon Gursky Was Here*, Henry Gursky, who lives at Yellowknife in the North-western territory, gets *kosher* meat from 'Montreal *Notre Dame de Grace kosher* Meat market' through air planes. He strictly observes almost all Jewish festivals and holidays, because he is like a religious head to the Eskimo community in Yellowknife. "His religious life governed not by the manial sun of the Beaufort Sea, but instead by a clock attuned to a saner schedule. A Southern Schedule" (SGWH 98). In *Joshua Then and Now*, Reuben instructs his son Joshua not to eat meat with milk. In *The Incomparable Atuk*, Rory's father Panofsky takes pride in Jewish dietary laws. He explains to Prof. Gore why and how their dietary laws are superior. In *Barney's Version*, Izzy tells Barney about

the importance of *Kashrut*. Though Barney's son's marriage with a gentile did not bother him, he was a bit anxious to know if the girl's family eats pork. The fact that the new generation of Jews undergo a process of preserving its essential character while still trying to accommodate itself to the modern world has kept Judaism a vital and vibrant rather than a static religion.

There is an essential Jewish identity shaped by the legacy of history and faith which bridges divergent cultures, politics and even beliefs. Jewish liturgy and politics has always been based around the triangle of the Land of Israel, the people of Israel and the book of Israel. Land of Israel is an inseparable part of the Jewish traditional identity.

According to Genesis 15 and 17, God had made a covenant with Abraham that the land of Canaan would be given to Abraham and his descendants. A sign, circumcision of every male child, had sealed this agreement. As the writers of the historical traditions of Israel expressed it, God had created the world, had delivered his people from bondage in Egypt and had given them the land of Canaan. Every Jew believes this and most of the expatriates in Richler's novels starting from Noah to his last protagonist Barney, in some way or other, associate themselves with their homeland. Their tie with Israel is exhibited in: Visiting or immigrating to Israel or living in Israel. To live

in the holy land or even to be buried there is always considered to be of high merit. Some show eagerness to know what is happening in Israel and some contribute to the formation of Israel.

A bunch of Richler's Jews who show interest in either visiting or emigrating to Israel are Chaim and Barney Larkin (TA), Bernie Altman (ADK), Karp (CE), Joey (SUHM), Carlos (JTN) and Yossel Pinsky (BV). They feel that an all encompassing Jewish life is much harder to create in the Diaspora. They believe that only life in Israel can be "a maximal Jewish life"; in Israel, one's personal and collective life can easily be permeated by Jewishness.

The elderly Chaim in *The Acrobats* wanders throughout the world only to reach the Promised Land. In a conversation with Barney, he says:

It's difficult to be a Jew in a foreign country. I imagine it must be the same in America. But you must be very successful and they wouldn't dare bother you. I'm saving up to go to Israel. Our land! A place where a Jew can go if he's in trouble, and be sure to find friends. Love, too, if that's what he needs. Especially if he feels he wants to begin his life over again with new ideas But I wish I had children to take with me! Or that I was a successful man with something to contribute. (TA 115)

Similarly, Barney Larkin, who had married a gentile wife, reflects Chaim's idea. He tells his people the same thing. "Go somewhere where you belong. Build up the country" (TA 115). He himself had thought about the possibility of getting on to his homeland. He once told Derek, his brother-in-law, that he was planning to take his children along with him to Israel. But he knew that it meant giving up his business—a business through which he struggled to prove himself to the gentiles. Though emigration to Israel is in his mind, at present he plans to contribute loads of cash every year. Bernie Altman, in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, a steward and Duddy's room mate at a hotel in Laurentian Mountains, tells Duddy that after his graduation from McGill he is planning to go to Israel. In *Barney's Version*, Yossel Pinsky, an Auschwitz survivor immigrates to Israel, as a *gendarme*—a police officer.

In *A Choice of Enemies*, Karp's concentration camp experience alienates him from the gentile society. He is a pathetic character whose survival is seen skeptical. He wanted to immigrate to Israel hoping to lead a new life among his community. But sadly, he continues to suffer the fate of an ironic character in Israel. Israelites refused to accept Karp; they mistrust him for having survived the Holocaust. Another character, who also fails in his attempt to reach his homeland, is Carlos in *Joshua Then and Now*. Carlos, a Jew

whose family had ostensibly been practicing Catholicism for hundreds of years since the inquisition of Spain, has respect for his Jewish roots. His family tradition taught him total loyalty and respect for his roots. He, therefore, chooses to redress the injustice inflicted on him by the gentile world. He attempts an active re-establishment of the severed bonds with his heritage and his people. His persistent study of Hebrew and Jewish history at the cost of great deprivation indicates his desire to reintegrate into Jewish culture; he takes pride in the fact that some Spanish name of the cities and villages are derived from the Hebrew. He also traces his origin back to the centuries. By becoming a Zionist, Carlos claims the right to his own state and seeks the contact with a free, independent Jewish community.

Remembering Carlos, Juanito, one of the *marranos* says, “I don’t think he ever ate in a restaurant or went to a movie, never marrying, saving to emigrate to the Promised Land” (JTN 395). He took up several jobs and had saved his salary for more than ten years. He bought a Hebrew dictionary and a grammar book. He subscribed to an Israeli newspaper, *Maariv* showing eagerness to know what’s happening in Israel. Unfortunately, in spite of Carlo’s determination to reach Israel, Israelis wouldn’t have him because his family hadn’t been Jewish for hundreds of years. His tireless preparations for immigration

to Israel signify his readiness to assume his responsibilities as a Jew, and to join his brothers.

Just like Carlos, Noah's friends in *Son of a Smaller Hero* show interest to gain knowledge about what's happening in Israel. They talk about irrigation problems in Israel and "make ideal son-in-laws" (SOSH 75). Noah feels guilty for not having participated in the fund raising speech for Israel. Also the St. Urbain's Horseman, Joey in his search to avenge Dr. Mengele visits Israel. He helps the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust in their war to establish the Jewish state. Thus one can observe from the novels, the all pervasive passion of Jewish attachment to their land.

Despite the changing levels of observance of Judaism, Jews maintain their financial commitment to Israel. Not only the protagonists, but also the Villains, Crooks, Silly, money-minded and even petty characters contribute to the formation of Israel. They are the Jews who live outside Israel. But support people in Israel to build a nation of their own.

In *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Adler's family had contributed orange tree saplings to identify their tie with their land. "An Israeli flag hung behind the desk. There was also a portrait of Weitzmann, and a framed certificate which proclaimed that 'Melech Adler and family' had paid for the planting of forty orange trees in Israel" (SOSH 57). Boy

Wonder in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, though not an observant Jew, contributes money to the 'Jewish National Fund'. Similarly, Linda's father does not object to her playing midnight roulette game if ten percent of each win went into the 'Jewish National Fund'. When Duddy asks for financial assistance from Mr. Cohen, he refuses lending money and tells Duddy that he would rather give money if Duddy planned to plant trees in Israel. "I'll give you the fare with pleasure" (ADK 265). He further adds, "The more money I make, the better care I take of my own, then I'm able to contribute to our hospital, the building of Israel and other worthy causes" (ADK 265). Also Lennie, Duddy's Doctor- brother did not show happiness over the land which Duddy had bought, and his plan to develop the land in Canada. He tells Duddy, "I'll tell you something. I wouldn't want a lake here if they give it to me on a silver platter. Why develop things for them? Now Israel. That something else. There _____" (ADK 307). Even Lennie is interested in buying a land but not anywhere outside Israel because he does not belong anywhere outside Israel.

Rory Peel in *The Incomparable Atuk* and Barney in *Barney's Version* volunteer for the fund raising for the "United Jewish Appeal". Shalinsky in *Cocksure* does intellectual contribution through his journal *Jewish Thought* and manages monetary contribution from the readers in London. In *St. Urban's Horseman*, Duddy appears as a successful

businessman who contributes a huge sum of money to Israel. Bernard Gursky in *Solomon Gursky was Here*, despite his crooked business mind, funds the refugees. “There was a bronze plaque testifying that even more forest paid for by Mr. Bernard had been planted in Israel. Zion, soon to be gursky-green from shore to shore” (SGWH 120-121).

Land becomes a symbol of identity for them. Duddy’s pursuit for land is the outcome of his *zeyda’s* longing for a homeland. His words, “A man without land is nobody” drives Duddy Crazy for land. Duddy’s *zeyda* like biblical Moses, knew that the land which was promised by God to Israel was the spiritual goal of the Jewish people. Moses knew that when confronted with difficulties of acquiring the land, some people might retreat and rationalize their reluctance by disparaging the land. So Moses said, “Only if you are ready to climb mountains, will you be able to truly see what the land is like”. Duddy did that. He literally climbed the Laurentian Mountains and saw the land. He was ready to ‘sacrifice’ anything for it. He sacrificed his sleep, food, friends, youth and even honesty for the land. One cannot say Duddy had misinterpreted his *zeyda’s* words; he fulfilled his *zeyda’s* dream in his own way.

The variety of Richler’s characters, despite their differences in beliefs, morals, faith and economical status contribute to Israel. They

believe in the formation of Israel because only their land would give them a strong national identity. For them, a nation without Land is like a soul without a body.

Being Jewish is not something one can do alone. It means identifying with the group—to be a Jew is to identify with the other Jews. Moreover essential to Jewish living is the collective mentality. Such a mentality is best facilitated in a collective environment, in a community, in a ghetto atmosphere. Even though Richler's creations differ in their approaches, attitudes and solutions most of them share a common goal: to provide a continuing sense of faith, meaning and identity for the fellow Jews. Having a Jewish mother, marrying a Jew, seeking out a Jewish friend, compassion towards fellow Jews, ready to help Jews all over the world are the different parameters with which a Jew identifies himself / herself. The modern Jews of Richler do not attach much importance in identifying themselves with the first two categories. According to them, it is a narrow way of identifying themselves, although, they collectively practice the compassion towards the community. But their relationships with the gentiles remain almost identical in all the novels.

In *The Acrobats*, Barney Larkin who had come to Spain at the time of Fiesta accidentally met Chaim at his bar 'Mocombo'. In his conversation with Chaim, he feels that Chaim holds some sort of

advantage over him. But that does not irritate him, (as he usually feels with the gentiles) because he recognizes Chaim is a Jew. “Suddenly Barney felt this is another Jew and he wanted to reach out and grab him. There were so many things they could talk about—pogroms, wars, regimes, prospects, the others, how hard it was” (TA 114). One could see the visible difference in Barney’s behaviour when he meets Chaim. He shows Chaim his children’s photograph and speaks about his family, which he had never done with any other characters in the novel. He immediately gives money to Chaim as he would do to his brother because Chaim had sold out his bar and about to leave Spain. He insists that Chaim should take the money to resume his trip to Israel.

So also Sonny Winkleman and his other Leftist friends in London invite mostly the Jews to the weekend party. Norman price is the exception. Still Budd Graves at one party comments at Norman “. . . there is something not *kosher* about Norman” because he brings Ernst, a German and his girl friend Sally to the party. In spite of Norman being popular among the group, his friend Charlie gains more importance. He resembled the Jews. His second name, Lawson made them think that it had been possibly derived from Leibovitch, a name Russian Jews carried before the pogrom.

In *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, Duddy has no love or emotion for anybody in his business of acquiring land. Yvette, a French Canadian girl who helps him in his business has all hopes that Duddy would marry her. But Friar, a director-friend of Duddy tells her at a party that Duddy would not marry her because he is a Jew. Similarly, Duddy is portrayed as a person who has no feelings for anybody but for the family and community. It is strange for a boy like Duddy to be emotional; what binds him to his community is the feeling that he is a Jew. Duddy is not an ardent follower of religion and culture; but like many other Jews, it lies in his subconscious mind. Similarly, Cohen offers Duddy right advice at the crucial moment not because of his personal love for Duddy but because he loved to see him flourish in his business with the gentile world. Also Jerry Dingleman, the Boy Wonder of St. Urbain Street is approached by all the Jews who need help. Once Boy Wonder tells Max Kravitz, “you are a Jew and whenever you go, others Jews will help you . . . why, you could turn up tomorrow in Kansas City or Rome or well may be not Tokyo. But my point is, other Jews there will lend a helping hand. You’re sort of international” (ADK 208). The same Boy wonder in *Barney’s Version* helps Barney’s father Izzy in getting a inspector job in the detective wing.

Panofsky in *Son of a Smaller Hero* is a liberal Jew, who detaches himself much from the tradition but he never missed a chance of helping a Jew. When Sholime broke his shop he didn't want to turn him down to the police because Sholime is the son of traditional Jew, Melech Adler. Also Panofsky didn't want to give the gentiles a chance to add one shade more to their myth about the Jews that they are greedy and materialistic. In *Cocksure*, Shalinsky emphasizes what most of Richler's characters feel in the novels, "It is nice to be with the crowd".

In *St. Urbain's Horseman*, Mrs. Hersh tells her gentile daughter-in-law Nancy, how compassionate Jews are. She insists staying at her son's place till he gets out of the case filed against him at Old Bailey court. She says, "I'd stay here and stick by you for as long as I was needed. I'll stay, you can count on it. You married into a Jewish family, doll, and we stick together you know. In a crisis we always stick together. Many outstanding sociologists have observed that" (SUHM 44). When Mrs. Hersh says that, her cultural pride surprises and at the same time irritates Nancy. Jake, in his search for Joey finds out that Joey had deserted his wives in keeping track of Dr. Mengele. So he voluntarily gives financial assistance to Joey's wives. Unfortunately Jake gets into trouble for the same compassion he had shown to Harry, an ignoble character. There is no common point of

interest between them except they both are Jews. Lou Kaplan, a film producer lends a helping hand by offering a movie project to Jake to lift him out of his awkward situation. So also Duddy gives him a cheque for a huge sum to help him out of his financial and professional stress.

In *Joshua Then and Now*, Juanito, a fisherman in Ibiza, “an undisputed king of water front”, on discovering that Joshua is a Jew, immediately becomes very friendly. Excited Juanito introduces him to Carlos. He asks both of them to speak to each other in Jewish. Joshua who was not very conscious of being a Jew, thought “You’re not my brother. I’m not your keeper”. Yet so reluctantly wishes Carlos “*Shema Yisrael*”. But when Joshua recognized the meaning in the greetings Carlos offered in turn, “*Adonai Elohainu, Adonai echad*”, unbidden tears welled in his eyes. Joshua started to think that he is getting overwhelmed by Jews recently. First, the Freiberg’s and now Carlos. At one point when Carlos advised Joshua not to frequent the brothel in Spain, he gets annoyed and feels, everywhere he goes, there are other Jews to advise him. Even then he is touched by Carlos, and slowly starts enjoying being a Jew. When he was in Canada, he very rarely realized his Jewishness but his experiences in Spain made him understand how his people had suffered and his apprehension of the same brings in him respect and regard and compassion for fellow Jews. Similarly, in *Barney’s Version*, Yossel

Pinsky, an Auschwitz survivor takes Barney into his cheese business to offer Barney financial support when he gets financially stranded in France.

It is obvious that most of the Jewish characters in the novels, wherever they go, are either shown compassion or they are compassionate towards the fellow Jews. But the irony is that many of Richler's protagonists are refused help by their own uncles. This forms one of the *leitmotifs* in the novels.

Jake, in *St. Urbain's Horseman*, with the idea of becoming a film director, wanted to move to New York to make movies. Initially he needed some money to go out of Canada. None of his four uncles were ready to help him; instead they insulted him. When Jake asked for just 250 dollars, Uncle Sam said, "Money, Ach you've got your health, its worth a million. I envy you to be your age" (SUHM 105). He subtly refused to lend money telling that'll create tensions and bad feelings between them. The sign behind Uncle Jack's desk in his office, reflected his cynical attitude towards people. It read "ALI BABA WAS A FORTUNATE MAN. INDEED – He Only Had 40 Thieves To Deal With" (SUHM 105). Obviously Uncle Jack also said no. So Jake tried Uncle Lou. He was too a pervert to understand Jake. Only Uncle Abe was left. But Jake had no intention of asking uncle Abe for

money because he is always scornful. Even Herky, his brother-in-law refused to help him.

Likewise, Duddy worked for sometime in his Uncle Benjy's garment factory. But he was not appreciated for revealing the fraudulent activities that were going on in the factory. Instead he was chucked out with an accusation that he misbehaved with a girl working in the factory. Recalling how Uncle Benjy scorned him, Duddy complains bitterly. He tells Benjy, that he treated Duddy like dirt but he wanted Benjy to like him. Also in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, Wolf was not offered any help by his brothers to set up a business on his own. But they wanted to use Wolf's death for their profits. Noah was offered a job by Uncle Max not that he was compassionate but for political gains. He wanted to use the belief that Wolf died for Torah, for his electoral campaign.

There are many Jewish identities and even more legitimate ways of expressing these identities. Sociologists stress the necessity of searching one's past in order to build one's identity, in understanding one's self. The Exodus experience, fundamental to the understanding of Judaism forms the base for the building of a collective Jewish identity. Experience of anti-Semitism, the memory of the past and Holocaust sought to create an enduring collective identity. The main cause of their alienation is their experiences of Holocaust and anti-

Semitism. Jean Paul Sartre suggested in *Anti-Semite and Jew* that Jewish identity “is neither national nor international, neither religious nor ethnic, nor political; it is a quasi historical community” (143). He argues that the Jewish experience of anti-Semitism preserves—even creates the sense of Jewish community. In his most extreme statement of this view, he wrote that it is the anti-Semite who creates the Jew.

Hannah Arendt, in her book *Jewish Identity*, repeatedly asserted a principle of claiming Jewish identity in the face of anti-Semitism that if one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself only as a Jew, not as a German or English or French or as a world citizen, not as an upholder of the Rights of Man or whatever. The hatred of Jew is unique because it is a hatred that has never been defined and properly augmented by arguments.

According to economic and political circumstances, anti-Semitism was born under circumstances where the immediate causes suited to reawaken ancient prejudices. In Richler’s novels Jews are no longer cloistered in concentration camps; no longer are chains stretched at the ends of the streets on which they live, no longer separate dwelling quarters are erected for them, but around them, a hostile atmosphere has been created, an atmosphere of distrust, of latent hatreds, of unavowed and thus all the more powerful prejudices—a ghetto more terrible than one when one might escape

by rebellion or exile. Even when this animosity is dissembled, the Jew is all aware of it. Hence forward he feels a resistance; he has the impression of a wall erected between him and those in whose midst he lives.

The anti-Semitism that was openly disseminated by the fascist movement in Quebec instilled a sense of insecurity and alienation among the Canadian Jews. The English Canadians took tremendous economic advantage of the Jews, whereas the French-Canadians treated them like second-rate citizens. In Richler's work, *St. Urban Street* is presented as a microcosm of mutual prejudice and racial animosity between the Jews and the gentiles. Most of Richler's protagonists grew up in St. Urbain Street where their childhood was ingrained with anti-Semitic incidents. Their youth was permeated with the notion that they were chosen as victims because they were Jewish. They were brought up in a world where the stories of pogroms and persecutions told by their parents and grandparents commingled with everyday experiences of anti-Semitism. "The Jewish children on St. Urbain Street were brought up on the precept 'scratch the best goy and you find the worst anti-Semite'" (*Assimilation and Assertion* 85).

Noah Adler, the protagonist in *Son of a Smaller Hero* experiences anti-Jewish feelings from the time when he goes to play with his friends along the beach. The sign board on the beach "THIS

BEACH IS RESTRICTED TO GENTILES” excited Noah and he decided to hang around until the beach was deserted, to steal the sign. He not only stole the sign but also planted another sign that read: “THIS BEACH IS RESTRICTED TO LITVAKS”. But when he grew, he was not so agile as he was once. He tried philosophizing the situation by telling that it is human tendency to exploit others, which is universal and it becomes impossible to discriminate between the victims and the victimizers. When Noah answers to the question of Miriam, if it worried him being a Jew, he says, “No. I don’t. The guy who wants to get into a restricted golf course or hotel and the other guy who won’t let him in are really brothers They could switch places just like that” (SOSH 66). Though Noah doesn’t object to the existence of discrimination towards Jews, he feels that Jews equally do not observe the rules of fair-play either.

Samuel Panofsky, a friend of Melech Adler thinks that the Jews are exploited all over the world. In his interior monologue during Wolf’s funeral he feels “. . . we discovered cures and it dint help and we made for them philosophies and they chased us away” (SOSH 151). Whereas Melech, during the same funeral thinks, “who burned down by me the office? A Goy’s office the police protect. But a Jew’s. . .” (SOSH 150). The irony is his son Shloime had started the fire in his office. But Melech’s past experiences of Holocaust and anti-Semitism

is so deep in him that he could only think of a gentiles hand in his loss and not his people.

In *Cocksure* Mortimer was mistakenly identified for a Jew by one Shalinisky. Mortimer's unintentional witty remark on that: ". . . and where in the hell he ever got the idea I was Jewish I'll never know", invited not the anticipated laughter but a nervy silence from his close chum Hyman—a Jew. Being a Jew, he took that for an anti-Semitic remark and never wanted to compromise on that, in spite of his wife's explanation that Mortimer didn't mean to offend him. This incident reminded him of his army days in Holland. He recollected how, when a major called for volunteer, he came forward to lead a recon into the forest. When he stepped forward he could hear one of his officers telling, "They are all the same. Pushy" (CS 18). Had he not been the first to volunteer, they would have put him down for a coward. So either way Hyman feels a Jew is insulted. He rejects Mortimer's friendship telling, "They're all the same, *goys*, what do I need'em for?" (CS 18).

Richler, in *Cocksure* speaks about the wound of the racial discrimination directed not only towards the Jews but also towards the Africans. He ridicules the attitude of the whites for having assumed the role of the guardians of the rights of the Africans. In an argument with an African, one Miss Ryerson speaks with a built-in authority that

“we decent, God fearing people of British Origin want to support you—” (CS 13). The African growls and replies “The English are an insult to humanity. The quicker they are liquidated, the better” (CS 13).

The anti-Semitic intimidation continues to affect the life of Jews in Canada. In *St. Urbain's Horseman*, CBC didn't buy Duddy's idea for a TV Quiz-game because of the prevailing discrimination. Duddy read in the papers that somebody was going to publish a Canadian Social Register and it was announced that there would be no Jews in it. So Duddy was inspired to do something for his people. So he published “The Canadian Jewish Who's who”. The sense of being excluded from the general society on the account of being Jewish has not subsided in spite of the seeming change of attitude within Canadian society towards Jews after the Holocaust.

The negative attitude of the Canadian government towards the Jews is illustrated clearly in *Joshua Then and Now*. The Canadian government under the leadership of Mackenzie King refused to show any humanistic compassion for the suffering Jews. King's anti-Jewish sentiments along with his admiration for Hitler strengthened the racial bias and so he viewed the Jews as an unwanted element in the Canadian society.

In *Joshua Then and Now*, the young Jewish men under the leadership of Joshua Shapiro, the founder of Mackenzie kind society,

celebrate the annual day to display their anger against the late Prime Minister. In the celebrations, they denounce the Prime Minister's anti-Semitic bias in the 1920s. William Lyon Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister of Joshua's boyhood had openly expressed his hostility towards the Jews. Joshua calls him "Mean-spirited, cunning, somewhat demented and a hypocrite on a grand scale". King purchased an adjoining land to his Kingsmere estate in order to prevent "a sale to Jews who have a desire to get in at Kingsmere" (JTN 161). He felt the Jews would ruin the whole place "possibly by opening a *kosher* delicatessen". Moreover he expressed his support to Hitler in his mission of cleansing Germany *Judenfrei*. Not only Joshua, but the whole Jewish community witnessed the hypocrisy of King when he paid tribute to the suffering of the European Jewry during the war. The anger of Joshua to defer king's racist politics pushed him to establish Mackenzie King Memorial Society. Each year they honour people with trophy or award. One year King Memorial Hooker award was offered to two prostitutes—one for the English and one for the French speaking. Joshua's reaction to King's anti-Semitic feelings was so intense that he went to the extent of expressing his anger openly in a society that still carried with it the racist politics.

In *A Choice of Enemies*, Hornstein and Karp are outmembered by gentiles and isolated from other Jews. Unlike Joshua, they are

unable to react vengefully and effectively to the filthy treatment of the gentiles. They feel that their oppressors stand forcefully against them. Karp, in his attempt to become friendly with Norman, stoops down to run errands to gain his recognition. On the contrary, Hornstein demands respect from his co-pilots. One day when he tried to justify that in proportion to the population of Canada, there were more Jews than gentiles in the armed forces, the gentile pilots showed their rejection by leaving Hornstein alone at the table. When explaining his hatred towards Hornstein, Norman admits to “avoiding him like the plague”. Norman’s and other pilots’ hatred for Hornstein is not for his intellectual superiority or moral values but it is the spontaneous, involuntary aspect of the gentile reaction towards the Jew.

In *Barney’s Version*, the fact that Barney’s father Izzy remained a detective inspector for nine years without being promoted is a fine example of the anti-Jewish feelings permeating every aspect of Canadian social, political and economic life. When he was finally promoted to the position of Inspector, he was accused of not passing his shooting exams. “You know, I was sincere. They hated me like hell” (BV 50) says Izzy. His problems on the force were endless. When he was interviewed for his promotions, he was asked a question, “How the Jews are Smarter?” Izzy made use of this opportunity to retaliate. He replied that he had two answers to that question. One, he said “we’ve

been kicked around for two thousand years. We are not more smarter, we're more alert". In his second answer, he tells a story about a Jew and an Irishman. The Irishman asks the Jew, how come you're Smarter? The Jew says, "Well, we eat a certain kind of fish, in fact I've got one right here. The Irishman wanted the fish. The Jew promised to give it but for ten bucks. The Irishman accepted. Then the Irishman looked at it and realized that it was not a fish but a herring. He says, "That's a herring". The Jew says "You see you're getting smarter already" (50).

Each of Richler's characters has his own way of reacting to anti-Semitism. Izzy was poignant, pungent and assertive. Whereas Solomon in *Solomon Gursky was Here* has a style in reacting to the anti-Jewish feelings. He is subtle but strong in his reaction. Solomon comes to know that St.Adele is restricted to Jews. The sign board "No Jews or Dogs" on the beach, as well as in the hotel in Laurentian drives him to buy that hotel overnight so that he could remove the sign board as well as the pain it had caused in the minds of the Jews. He does that with panache that one fine morning he astonishes every gentile and Jew in the Laurentians with the purchase of the hotel. Solomon believed strongly that economic empowerment of Jews will be a solution to their discrimination. But ironically in spite of his money,

and power, Bernard Gursky could not get into the senate, because he is a Jew.

In *St. Urbain's Horseman*, the children were forbidden to play in the Fletcher Field. The French Canadians had made the life tough for the Jews of Montreal. They attacked the Jews of Montreal. They attacked the Jewish shops and painted *Swastikas* on the windows. But when Joey came back to St. Urbain Street, as a full grown man, Jake and his friends took him to the Fletcher field. Joey fought with the French Canadian boys. He also taught Jack and others that they should not only defend themselves but should also know how to give back. Ironically Joey's fight with French Canadian boys and his search of Dr. Mengle to avenge the atrocities done against them, instill in St. Urbain Jews not an admiration but only hatred and fear.

In the older generation, Richler identifies "the East European pattern of submissive behaviour towards the anti-Semitism practiced in the reality of Jewish life in Canada". This is because their early experience of anti-Jewish feelings, rumours and myths had created in them vulnerability, isolation, fear for physical safety and insecurity.

An illustration of passive Jewish response to anti-Semitism can be found in Melech Adler and Jenny in *Son of a Smaller Hero*, uncle Abe and other elders in, *St. Urbain's Horseman*, Blumberg in *The Acrobats*. Jenny says, "This isn't our country". She had not bought

furniture for their house owing to the fear of rootlessness—what if they have to run again? Uncle Abe tells Jake “we could be shoveled into a furnace, as far as French Canadians are concerned” (SUHM 404). He recalls the days when he was young. Those were the days the young men were hiding in the woods. He was one of the first of his generation to go to McGill. But it was not a pleasure to be a Jew boy on the campus in that time. He had come across a lot of humiliating sign boards that read, “No Jews, No Dogs”(404). But now, he feels, the situation is better. He does not want the younger generation to make it worse by reacting to anti-Semitic feelings. He feels his children do not face the same discrimination he faced. He is also of the idea that the discrimination receded with time and so why should one unnecessarily create problems. The submissiveness has taken the Jewishness in Abe. Jake thinks that uncle able was more Jewish when the discrimination was also more. But Abe feels that in all probability only appeasement and submissiveness will bring security for their community. Similarly Melech (SOSH) could not openly confess that he doubted the gentiles for the fire accident but could only cry secretly. In *The Acrobats* Blumberg does not react very vengefully towards Andre, for the death of his daughter. His Holocaust experience had created in him the fear that the reaction towards gentiles will only end up in annihilation of their race.

In *St. Urbain's Horseman*, though Jake is not submissive against the oppressors, it is the Holocaust which has shattered the sense of protection and security of his existence in the gentile world. He develops compulsive fear of another Holocaust and his imagination threatens him with nightmares that his own children being murdered by the Nazis. The vulnerability of the Jewish population during the Second World War, the helplessness of the victims taken to the gas chambers and the merciless killings of the children constantly communicates to Jake the weakness and defenselessness of his community. Even his happy marriage to a gentile woman cannot dispel the feeling of otherness. In spite of his happy home, he says, "all the same I've managed to remain an alienated Jew" (SUHM 14). The feelings of insecurity fear and loneliness are still in Jake and Joshua. In *Joshua Then and Now*, Mueller takes advantage of Joshua's vulnerability and manages to intensify Joshua's deeply embedded anxiety. The above illustrations prove the fact that even if they go out of St. Urbain Street one cannot take the St. Urbain Street out of them.

In contrast to European Jewry's submission to the anti-Semitism, "the modern dialectic of the Jewish response" to anti-Semitism can be seen in the younger generation like Noah, Jake, Joey, Joshua, Duddy, Solomon and Hyman. They wanted to avenge their oppressors. Hyman and Shalinsky, in fact choose Mortimer, the gentile

protagonist of *Cocksure* for their victim. Their paranoid fear and mistrust of the gentiles make them behave rudely to Mortimer. Shalinsky corners him telling him that he is a Jew but refuses to accept his Jewish identity. This drives him to the verge of frustration. Hyman takes secret pleasure in accusing Mortimer for an anti-Semite. Both Hyman and Shalinsky, in a way, depict the 'reverse discrimination' against the gentiles. They derive satisfaction of having taken revenge against the community that once tried to eliminate their race from the world.

The Jewish expatriates, who were exiled by McCarthyism elicit false evidence about the gentile protagonist Norman Price for being an informer and ostracize him from their community. In a grotesque reversal of traditional role of submissive Jews and dominating gentiles, the Jewish expatriates prosecute Norman, the way the American government prosecuted them.

The elder generation who had experienced the Holocaust transfers the memory of the past to the younger generation. This is one of the formative components of the Jewish consciousness. The need to transmit their history and Holocaust experience is always there in the Jewish consciousness. This act of transferring the memory of past instills in them the consciousness of being a Jew. Richler says history plays the major role in the alienation of the Jews. The memory

of the past and the fervour of not wanting to forget their history alienate them from the gentile world.