

From Colonised to Coloniser: Reading the Figure of the Jew in Edgar Hilsenrath's *Der Nazi und der Friseur* and Jurek Becker's *Bronsteins Kinder*

Isabelle Hesse
University of York

Contrary to postcolonial literature, where the figure of the Jew plays a central role in works by authors such as Caryl Phillips, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, and Zadie Smith, in postcolonial theory Jewishness is a very elusive presence, or rather a tangible absence. In their foundational work *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin place resistance and “writing back” at the centre of their work; however, they do not link this “post-colonial” practice to the Jews’ cultural resistance to Nazism. Neither do they mention Israel (or the Middle East in general) and the role of Jewish literature in consolidating the emerging Jewish community in Palestine into a homogeneous nation. One explanation for the generally fleeting presence of the Jew in postcolonial theory is the time of publication. Postcolonial studies as a discipline emerged in the late 1980s, and in the early years focused on more conventional colonial cases and themes, laying the foundation for later criticism. However, it has to be noted that this peripheral position of the Jews is still predominant in postcolonial theory today.¹ Moreover, Israel is generally regarded as one of the cases that do not fit the postcolonial label neatly. On one hand, it could be argued that Israel can be analysed through a postcolonial lens as it uses many aspects of “postcolonial” mythology, such as describing the 1948 war as a “war of independence” and representing itself as a state that liberated itself from British domination (Rodinson 30; 65). This stance is confirmed by figures such as Menachem Begin, sixth Prime Minister of Israel and erstwhile fighter in the Zionist paramilitary group Irgun, who was adamant that “Our people is under foreign rule and there can only be one policy for an oppressed people: a struggle for liberation” (140). On the other hand, Israel still occupies Palestinian land and employs discriminatory practices against the Palestinians inside and outside of the Green Line, reminiscent of dominatory practices employed by European colonial powers. Consequently, even though Israel perceives itself as a postcolonial state in a temporal and spatial sense, the Palestinians still suffer from colonial domination. Israel is certainly not a straightforward postcolonial state, but nevertheless it is the state of a group of people that have suffered discrimination and persecution as Europe’s others, thus aligning it with the creation of settler-states in the United States and Australia by communities that had been victimised and persecuted in Europe.

In this essay, I demonstrate that the ambivalent position of the Jew between colonised and coloniser functions as a link between Jewish, Israel/Palestine, and postcolonial studies and puts these fields into a critical dialogue with each other. The novels under consideration focus on the history of European Jewish persecution as well as the creation of a Jewish nation-state to consider the links between Nazism, settler-colonialism, and Zionism, and they portray the “Jew” in a new light: as part of the hegemony and the dominant group in a Jewish state. Crucially, both Edgar Hilsenrath’s *Der Nazi und der Friseur* (1977; Eng. *The Nazi and the Barber*) and Jurek Becker’s *Bronsteins Kinder* (1982; Eng. *Bronstein’s Children*) critically engage with the shift from the Jew as “colonised” to “coloniser,” which questions prevailing geographical and ideological routes in postcolonial studies, tracing the move from Europe to the Middle East, and the transformation from persecuted and discriminated minority to achieving territorial control, political independence, and military power in Israel. As such, these novels can be read as indicative of the future of postcolonial studies, as well as *Jewish* postcolonial studies. Jenni Ramone argues that the future of postcolonial studies “may involve finding ways to erode the distinctions between the rigidly held positions of local and global, particular and universal, in order to illuminate the on-going impact of past and present cultural conflict and contact” (206). I posit the figure of the Jew as a means of moving beyond this distinction between the local and the global and above all to demonstrate the impact of past conflict (the discrimination against Jews in Europe) and present conflict (the situation in Israel/Palestine), establishing important links between European colonialism, Nazism, and the creation of a Jewish state in the Middle East. Ilan Pappé notes that although there is an examination of Zionism as an example of settler-colonialism, the Jews’ position as colonised in Europe is not central to the field of Jewish postcolonial studies:

[It] is much more concerned with the effect of the colonialist past on contemporary Israel, and less with its implications for the historical view of the Jews as the colonised or the victimised in the European chapter of history. (407)

Of course, the victimisation of the Jews in Nazi Germany has been discussed extensively in Jewish studies; however, its relation to colonialism has only been researched since the 1980s with a rise in academic work that established the need to consider the Holocaust in a comparative perspective. Unlike colonial others, the Jews occupy a less straightforwardly subjugated position. First of all, many Jews, especially in Germany, tried to assimilate and were not “visibly” other. Nevertheless, they were perceived as “outsiders inside,” which was also illustrated by their attitude vis-à-vis colonial practices. Leo Riegiert argues that “it is likely that many German Jews also actively—if not completely consciously—reproduced forms of precisely those exclusionary and discriminatory discourses used against them” (338). This complicity with orientalist and racist ideologies stands in contrast to the idea of the Jews as colonised others. Dirk Moses expands on this view of the Jew as a member of the “colonised” in Nazi Germany by

observing that “the Nazis regarded the Germans as an indigenous people who had been colonized by the Jews” (2008: 37). The ambivalent Jewish position towards and within Orientalism and colonialism demonstrates the liminality of the Jews within Europe, which I suggest at once facilitates and explains a certain “fascination” with Jewishness since the Enlightenment. I take this ambivalence in relation to colonial discourses as a starting point to consider the ambiguous status that the Jews have held in the German popular imagination since the Nazi period, positing them both as “colonised” and “coloniser,” victim and perpetrator, especially in post-war Germany and in relation to the state of Israel.

My focus is, moreover, on the ideological and political implications of this recent surge in comparisons between Nazism and colonialism,² which questions the uniqueness discourse that the Holocaust is still endowed with in both academic discourses and commemorative practices. Nevertheless, I argue that it is crucial to examine the Holocaust in a comparative perspective, not only to place the Nazi genocide in a historical context of discrimination and persecution, but equally to determine how Nazism’s processes of marginalisation and elimination are present, albeit in adapted forms, in the contemporary world. This comparative framework facilitates critical discussions about Israeli Jews as oppressors of the Palestinian people, Zionism as a settler-colonial ideology, the discourse of Jewish victimhood, and the centrality of the Holocaust within the Western imaginary. In light of these debates, I consider the ways in which the Jew as an ambiguous figure offers a political tool for German-Jewish writers to critically evaluate the (Jewish) use of victimhood in Germany and Israel. This theme is prominent in post-war Jewish writing from Germany as can be seen for example in Maxim Biller’s novel *Die Tochter* (*The Daughter*, 2000), which engages with ideas of victimhood in Germany and Israel through the relationship of the Israeli Jew Motti with his German wife Sophie, and their daughter Nurit. Contrary to Biller, in Becker’s and Hilsenrath’s novels the issue of gender is not discussed in detail, or in the case of Becker, represented in absentia through the character of Elle, the protagonist’s sister who is confined to a mental health institution and does not play a major role in the novel.³ Hilsenrath uses satire and the blurring of the boundaries between Nazi and Jew, perpetrator and victim, to engage with ideas of Jewishness after the Holocaust, whereas Becker focuses on the generational gap between a Holocaust survivor and his son to address the links between victimhood and justification. Both authors contest the distinction between victim and perpetrator and draw attention to the consequences of victimisation, not only for the victim but also for the perpetrator. However, they choose different trajectories for achieving this challenge: Becker narrates the more conventional transformation from victim into perpetrator, whereas Hilsenrath decides to portray a perpetrator who assumes the identity of one of his victims. The transformation of Jews from victims into perpetrators raises questions about victimhood and rights, and victimhood as a justification for turning into perpetrators, which also establishes clear

links with the Israeli context, as Becker himself confirms: “They are presuming rights there, which are not deductible from the past of the Jews. I described something similar on a personal level in *Bronstein’s Children*” (qtd. in Rock 2000b: 347). Both Becker’s and Hilsenrath’s novels can be read as a challenge to Zionism and settler-colonialism, and the political leadership’s uses of victimhood in its national discourse, which relied on ideas of marginality and wandering in the Jewish diaspora experience as well as images of Jewish passivity generated by the Holocaust to accelerate the creation of a sovereign Jewish state at the expense of the Palestinian people.

The Nazi who became a Zionist: Victims, Perpetrators, and the Impossibility of Justice

In *Der Nazi und der Friseur* the challenge to the reductive categories of Nazi, German, and Jew, as well as perpetrator and victim, is achieved through the protagonist’s changing identities, as Max Schulz is in turn an Aryan, a Nazi, a Jew, and a Zionist. By combining these contrasting perspectives within the same character, Hilsenrath questions the artificial binary created between Nazi and Jew during the Nazi regime but also the opposition of German and Jew in West Germany. Even today, Germany is still known first and foremost as the country that perpetrated the Holocaust and even the third generation of Germans since World War II were socialised into a form of Holocaust commemoration that stresses their cultural, if not familial, ties to the figure of the Nazi who was cast in ahistorical terms as a pariah. Omer Bartov elucidates the complicated relationship between the categories of “Nazi” and “Jew” in post-war Germany, especially in the West: “This elusive type (‘the Nazi’), rarely represented with any degree of sympathy, retains a complex relationship with his predecessor, ‘the Jew.’ Serving as a metaphor for ‘the Nazi in us,’ it inverts the discredited notion of ‘the Jew within us’” (115). Accompanying the conflation of German and Nazi was a rise in philo-Semitism, a benevolent “embracing” of the Jews, albeit not as “Germans” but as outsiders that had been victimised by the Nazis. Thus, after the Holocaust, the Jews in West Germany were still primarily defined through their victimhood and opposed in their quintessential, and essentially passive, victimisation to the Nazi as the active embodiment of evil. By challenging ideas of Jewishness and Germanness as clear-cut and diametrically opposed essences, Hilsenrath is able to separate the signifiers “Jew” and “German” from the stereotypes of victim and perpetrator they have been conflated with in post-Holocaust Western discourse. Satire constitutes an excellent tool for this purpose since it situates the satirist in close proximity to his subject at the same time that it creates a certain distance, which allows Hilsenrath to portray both Nazi and Jew in an exaggerated manner, contesting the idea of an easy rapprochement between Germanness and Jewishness in West German culture after the Holocaust. As Helmut Braun has rightly pointed out, in this way Hilsenrath “demonstrates the

interchangeability of the seemingly incompatible—Jew and Aryan, falsehood and truth” (195).

Hilsenrath’s character Max’s motivation for becoming a Jew fluctuates between opportunism and humanism, as on one hand he adopts his Jewish friend Itzig Finkelstein’s identity in order to escape punishment for his Nazi crimes, but on the other hand he immerses himself in Jewish history and culture. He boards a ship to Palestine to help build the new Jewish homeland and insists on the importance of a new life, which is based on the idea of a strong Jewish self: “We ... don’t want to be sheep anymore. Never again will we let ourselves simply be carried off to the slaughterhouse” (*The Nazi Who Lived as a Jew* [NWLJ] 225). This wish to move beyond the identity of passive sufferer and to actively shape history confirms Zionism’s mission of “appl[ying] the universal principle of self-determination to the Jews” (Taub 23) by building a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine. The fictitious name of the ship that takes Max to Palestine, the *Exitus*, clearly references the *Exodus*, a ship carrying illegal immigrants to Palestine in 1947 that was sent back to France. The Jewish passengers were kept aboard for three weeks, which prompted journalists to describe their “prison” as a “floating Auschwitz.” As Tom Segev notes, this incident renewed European empathy for the Jewish victims and their suffering (131). Even though the Jews were intent on leaving the image of themselves as victims behind, the Holocaust was too prominent in people’s minds to relinquish the idea of the Jew as “eternal” victim. This conception is still prominent today, as the swiftness with which the Jews transformed themselves from being a persecuted minority in Europe to becoming a dominant majority in Israel, has resulted, as Hannan Hever notes, in “Israel, though behaving like a nation of rulers and conquerors, still rel[ying] heavily on the argumentation and rhetoric of a minority struggling for its very existence” (265). Moreover, Hilsenrath illustrates that the innocence related to victimhood is only an illusion. The fact that this innocence cannot be maintained in the face of building a new state on a land already inhabited by the Palestinian people is encapsulated in the image of Max standing on the railing of the ship full of hope and armed with a machine gun. Jacqueline Rose confirms this position, but also suggests that “political Zionism was [never] naïve or blind or innocent. [...] It was aware, from early on, both of the miraculous dimension of its own ambitions and of the likely cost” (120).

Max infiltrates the core of Jewish society in Mandate Palestine by identifying not only with Itzig Finkelstein as a person but also with the larger Jewish community in Israel, whose values should be completely opposed to the values he had been indoctrinated with as a Nazi but which are portrayed as similar in their exclusionary tendencies. When discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Max adopts a self-justifying and defensive stance reminiscent of the Israeli state. He is adamant that the Jews have been very welcoming towards the Palestinians but that their hospitality has been refused: “We did not drive them out. On the contrary. We had painted our benches bluish-white. We wanted them to sit down next to us. Most of them did not want to” (NWLJ 349-50).

Max here addresses the possibility of coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians by describing this conflict as a fight over a bench, but the image of the bench also recalls Nazi policies which decreed that certain benches were only for the use of Aryan people (Burleigh and Wipperman 87). Hilsenrath uses this metaphor to conjecture the consequences for the Palestinian people living as a minority within a Jewish state, expressed through the colour of the bench. Although they have equal civil and political rights, they do not have the same social and economic rights. Furthermore, the depiction of the conflict as a struggle about a bench reduces the situation in Israel/ Palestine⁴ to a fight over space, without acknowledging the history of the conflict, the power imbalance between both sides, and international involvement in the situation in the Middle East, reproducing and challenging European and North American perceptions of the conflict. The parallels between Nazism and Zionist settler-colonialism are even further emphasised when Max compares the Final Solution to the creation of the state of Israel:

Two thousand years of exile for us are nothing. Nothing more than 2 years might be for you: because we understand how to knock off zeroes ... even if there are several zeroes. ... what the Nazis could do, we also can do. Only a little differently. They knock off human zeroes. We knock off the zeroes of time. (NWLJ 176)

In a typical moment of satirical exaggeration, Max compares the Nazi project, whose aim it was to exterminate human “zeroes” to the Zionist endeavour of a historical return to the Promised Land.⁵ Despite all their suffering, the Jews are still present as a people and will now destroy the “zeroes” of time, and return to their homeland as if no time had passed, defying the Nazis and their intention to erase any trace that the Jews existed from history. But defying the zeroes of time also implies that the Jewish “homeland” has been awaiting their return, and the resulting redemption, for 2000 years as “a land without people.” Gabriel Piterberg has identified this idea as embodying two forms of denial: on one hand it denies the whole Jewish experience in exile and on the other hand it denies the existence of Palestine as a national community without Jewish sovereignty (94). Hilsenrath criticises how the Jews have turned into perpetrators after having been victimised themselves and in this way condemns international treatment of Israel as exempt from acting morally, since Israel’s political leadership uses the Holocaust, an embodiment of victimhood, as a political and ideological justification for not adhering to internal and humanitarian law. As Jacqueline Rose observes, there is a persistent paradox in Israel’s use of the rhetoric of a minority while having achieved military and territorial control: “although it is one of the most powerful nations in the world today, Israel still chooses to present itself as eternally on the defensive, as though weakness were a weapon, and vulnerability its greatest strength” (xiii).

The problems of victimhood and justice become even more poignant when Max eventually confesses his crimes to a judge, aptly named Wolfgang Richter.⁶ His confession is not triggered by a desire

to be purged from his sins but by a need for attention. Allegedly Max Schulz died in the Polish woods but Max deplores that “just one paper had carried a report of my death. No others. It wasn’t important enough” (*NWLJ* 364). To prove that his existence as a Nazi was indeed pivotal, Max tells his story to Richter. It seems as if his Nazi self can no longer be suppressed. He confesses that he killed the Finkelsteins because he wanted to purge himself of having known them and having been “one of them,” a part of their community: “He cannot deny that he has known the Jews, because they know his name. But they were not his friends. He could never admit that. They were just Jews” (*NWLJ* 360). On one hand, this explanation could be interpreted as an excuse for why he killed them but on the other hand, it shows that Max had to convince himself that they were “just” Jews in order to detach himself from the act of killing his best friend and his substitute family. Richter’s exaggerated verdict is death by hanging, six million times, once for each Jewish victim of the Holocaust. But even Max acknowledges that this is unjust since he can only die once: “My death will be just one death. One death for ten thousand deaths” (*NWLJ* 373). In compliance with Max’s statement, Braun notes that in Hilsenrath’s novel “the crimes of his Max Schulz, because of their monstrosity, evade any earthly jurisdiction, even the death penalty is not an adequate compensation” (195). Both statements suggest that the death penalty cannot make up for the number of victims that have been killed or harmed, which is also confirmed by Gershom Scholem assessment of Eichmann’s death sentence:⁷ “There can be no possible proportion between this crime and its punishment” (299).

Hilsenrath chooses to let Max continue his life as Itzig Finkelstein, suggesting that the discursive parallels between Nazism and Zionism need to live on. In him, Nazi and Jew, murderer and victim, are united. Hence, the judge’s inability to find an adequate punishment for Max echoes the dilemma of attributing guilt to the German people as a whole. Of course, most of them were not active perpetrators of the Holocaust but many were followers and bystanders with varying degrees of knowledge about the crimes committed in the name of all Germans. However, Germany is still haunted by the association of the German with the Nazi, and the implication that the German nation as a whole was complicit with the Nazi genocide, and thus faces the problem of creating a German identity independent, but paradoxically also inclusive, of the Holocaust. Eventually Max has a heart attack and he requests a Jewish heart, indicating that even though he has all the external markers of Jewishness, a Jewish heart, as the symbol of Jewish essence, would be the final proof of his Jewishness. If we take Max as a symbol of the parallels between Nazism and Zionism, the inability to transplant “Jewishness” into this context confirms Hilsenrath’s own view of Israeliness as separated from Jewishness.⁸ However, the rejection of the Jewish heart can also be read as a warning against the misuses of victimhood and against an identity that attempts to include both aspects of victim and perpetrator, which is one of the main problems that Israeli Jewish identity faces today.

The Holocaust Victims who Became Perpetrators: Enacting Jewish Revenge Phantasies in the German Democratic Republic

Jurek Becker's novel *Bronsteins Kinder* is set in the German Democratic Republic, the self-proclaimed "anti-fascist state," whose approach to commemorating the Holocaust differed significantly from West Germany. Gilad Margalit observes that the focus of the GDR was not primarily on remembering the Holocaust but on memorialising the "heroic struggle against fascism" and as a result, "the slaughtered Jews were considered passive victims of Nazism; hence, only second-grade victims, like the German population that had suffered from the war and fascism" (33). Jewishness was generally repressed since it constituted an uncomfortable reminder not only of the Nazi past, but also of Zionism as an ideology that did not align with the state's official discourse. The GDR encountered Israel with hostility, following the Soviet Union's opposition to the Jewish state in the Middle East, and thus Zionism was regularly used in conjunction with Nazism, as Thomas Fox notes: "The Arab-Israeli conflicts and Israeli conquests constituted important aspects of the official East German discourse on the Holocaust, and the actions of the 'Zionist Aggressor-State Israel' found regular comparison with the Nazis" (13).⁹ Jurek Becker himself did not see Jewishness as an ethnic or religious identity but as a conscious choice of belonging to a social or historical community. In an article entitled "Mein Judentum" ("My Jewishness"), he admitted that "Even today, I'm not sure which characteristics make a person appear Jewish ... The characteristics that identify a person as part of the Jews seem to me completely arbitrary, apart from one exception: if a person *wants* to belong to the Jews" (1992: 19). As the description of his ancestry shows, Becker does not primarily define himself as Jewish. Similarly, his protagonist Hans is not specifically aware of his Jewish identity: he feels above all German, which can partly be explained due to the negative image of Jewishness in the GDR but also through a sense of pride in refusing special treatment. However, the novel also suggests that Jewishness is inescapable when Hans hits a young man at the swimming pool. Hans reluctantly apologises for his behaviour, but the other youth replies that "[i]f I had known about [your Jewishness], I wouldn't have bothered you, of course" (*Bronstein's Children* [BC], 37). This scene demonstrates the prevalence of philo-Semitism not only in West Germany but also in East Germany after the Holocaust. Hans, as a Jew, is entitled to a special treatment, even thirty years after the Holocaust, and even though he himself is not a Holocaust survivor. Jewishness is posited as a synonym for persecution, and even by association, Hans belongs to a group of people who have suffered and are therefore above social conventions and laws applicable to "normal" society. The idea of being exempt from having to adhere to received norms can be explained in relation to Enns's observation that "[t]he Holocaust victim of Nazi Germany ... symbolises absolute victimhood—pure innocence—for us today" (50), but it also illustrates a fear

predominant since 1945: the fear of offending Jewish people and being accused of anti-Semitism, which results in a “stifl[ing] of moral judgment and promotes a complicit silence” (Enns 52).

In Becker’s novel, the engagement with victimhood is brought to the fore by contrasting Hans’s perspective as the narrator with his father’s point of view, albeit mediated by Hans’s voice. Becker’s novel cannot only be read as a critique of the conflation of victimhood and Jewishness in East Germany but the idea of former victims turning into perpetrators can equally be applied to the Israeli-Palestinian context. Becker himself described the Jews in the Middle East in 1977 as “Herrenmenschen” (members of the “master race”) (1992: 19), drawing explicit parallels between Nazism and Zionism as a settler-colonial ideology. Sander Gilman, in his biography of Jurek Becker, explains that when Becker went to Israel in 1984:

He found it extremely difficult to converse with people. [...] As he met self-identified Jews and saw the wide range of their identities, Jurek realized that being Jewish was a lot more than being “a victim of fascism” or (in the anti-Zionist rhetoric of the GDR) an aggressor; it was a complicated and nuanced identity, which might even incorporate him. (166)

By the 1990s, Becker had revised his opinions concerning the Jewish state, which he had previously accused of claiming rights that were not justifiable through the past of the Jews. He considered his earlier comments on Jewish behaviour in the Middle East “exaggerated and false” (2007: 19).¹⁰ David Rock links Becker’s support for a Jewish state to his visit to Israel in 1989 during the first intifada, which led the author to dismiss the Palestinian right to self-determination as guided by prejudice and emotion rather than intellectual rigour (2000a: 157). Yet Becker did not withdraw the comparison he made between the collective situation in Israel, which assumes rights on the basis of the Holocaust, and the occurrence of this stance on a “personal” level, expressed in his novel. By choosing the format of the conventional revenge fantasy to trace the trajectory of former victims who become perpetrators and use their victimhood as a reason for administering their own justice, Becker is able to examine the ambiguous relationship between Jewish identity as victim and Jewish identity as perpetrator.

Since Hans was not raised as a Jew, it comes as a surprise to him to be confronted with the Holocaust when he discovers a former Nazi camp guard imprisoned in the family’s cabin: “I had believed that after thirty years they could live like normal people, and then suddenly that room: as if for thirty years they had merely been waiting for a chance like this; as if, behaving normally, they had only been wearing masks” (BC 18). Hans’s encounter with the Nazi guard can be read as a return of the repressed, positioning his ignorance about the Holocaust as an allegory for the East German state’s reluctance to engage with the Nazi genocide that plays a crucial part in its history, and indeed the creation of the GDR. His father Arno justifies their act of administering justice by questioning the efficacy of the East German justice system, since he is convinced that they live “in an inferior country, surrounded by

second-rate people" (*BC* 66), where the camp guard would be punished, but not for the right reasons. Of course on one hand this statement refers to the differences between East and West Germany but on the other hand it can be read as implying a sense of Jewish ethical superiority that resonates uneasily with Israel's exceptionalism and its use of the Holocaust to deflect criticism. Hans does not believe that former camp inmates are entitled to reciprocate the treatment that the Nazis inflicted on them and he does not consider victimhood as a justification for becoming a perpetrator: "They had lain claim to a right to which no one is entitled, not even they. And even if he were my father a hundred times over, how could I approve of former victims seizing their former torturers?" (*BC* 23). He cautions against the moral consequences of vigilantism, which usually breeds more injustice: "If you assume the role of judges of this man ... then you are not only breaking the law ..." (*BC* 67). The ellipsis reveals that their breach of the law is not Hans's main concern, but that becoming a perpetrator will result in a loss of their humanity. Paulo Freire has argued that: "dehumanization ... marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also ... those who have stolen it" (26). Hans notices that his father is looking poorly as a result of the kidnapping and points out that "[y]ou and your friends have taken on a load with that man that you can't carry. ... You're doing yourselves in and don't even realize it" (*BC* 110). Rather than the more common depiction of victimhood as a burden, Becker portrays the perils of becoming a perpetrator. Although Arno, Kwart, and Rotstein have repressed their traumatic memories for thirty years, the encounter with the Nazi camp guard brings their feelings of powerlessness and inferiority back to the surface.

Their treatment of the prisoner can be aligned with the treatment of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis. Hans, upon first meeting Arnold Heppner, comments on his unpleasant smell and the fact that "[h]is shirt, once white, was stiff with spilled food" (*BC* 15). The prisoner has been reduced to his basic physical needs and is no longer represented as a human being but closer to an animal. Hans unsuccessfully tries to reason with his father and his friends. Eventually, he feels the need to act but justifies his intervention through a desire to help his father, rather than the camp guard. He believes that his father and the camp guard can only be saved, or one could even say redeemed, together, which is supported by the similarity of their first names, Arno and Arnold: "After all my hesitation I was now firmly convinced that he and the camp guard could only be saved together" (*BC* 256). Hans's comment contests the clear-cut distinction between victims and perpetrators in the post-Holocaust era. Crucially, this connection serves to elucidate the fact that neither Jew nor Nazi/ German is completely innocent or completely evil, blurring the accepted division between victims and perpetrators by turning a victim into a perpetrator. Mahmoud Mamdani has cautioned that "without recognition and subversion of limits, without an institutional transformation leading to a transformation of identities, every pursuit of justice will tend towards revenge" (37).

Victims are transformed into perpetrators because they still operate within the same Manichean discourse that victimised them and as a result their “revenge” is considered adequate by a society that validates the inversion, rather than the subversion, of binaries.

When Hans liberates the prisoner, his previous assessment of the reciprocal relationship between victim and perpetrator becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, since he finds his father in the cabin—dead—and next to him the guard, who adamantly tries to convince Hans that he did not kill Arno. Although Hans’s father’s death was due to natural causes, the decision to let him die at the end of the novel indicates that Becker considers his character’s death preferable to continuing life as a former victim who has become a perpetrator. This authorial choice can be aligned with Max’s death at the end of *Hilsenrath’s* novel, suggesting that the categories of victim and perpetrator are too simplistic to understand the complexity of human behaviour. In Becker’s novel, the former Nazi is freed, which indicates that gaining justice generally and attaining it through revenge specifically, are inadequate as a means of compensation for the Holocaust. This failure is likewise expressed in the judge’s inability to find an adequate punishment for Max Schulz. Russell Brown reads Arnold Heppner’s release as “a figurative act of closing with the past” (207). While Arnold’s liberation and Arno’s death symbolise closure on a personal level, as Hans does not condone his father’s actions and consciously chooses not to become a perpetrator, the fact that the former Nazi is not tried for his crimes challenges the notion of closure on a collective level, since justice is not served. Moreover, through the liberation of Arnold as well as Arno’s death, and the consequences this death has for vigilantism and revenge, Becker implicitly opens another avenue: that of the future of victimhood and justification in Israel. Read in this light, the death of Hans’s father can also be considered as contradicting the uniqueness discourse of the Holocaust and suggests that “Never Again” should not only include Holocaust victims but pertain to all forms of victimisation.

Although Becker subsequently revised his critical stance towards Israel and certainly does not equate Nazism and Zionism, the text allows the extension of the socio-political context of the GDR to the Middle East. Kwart’s description of their justice as administered in the name of the Jewish people as a whole, illustrated by their act of revenge not being motivated by knowing the guard personally, can be interpreted as a critique of Zionism’s claim to speak in the name of all Jews. This challenge was certainly implicit in Becker’s early criticism of Israel and his own refusal to identify himself as Jewish. There is a sizeable and growing opposition to the occupation of the Palestinian territories in Israel, and much of it is based on a rejection of the injustices committed against the Palestinians. However, some people also oppose the occupation of the territories for self-serving reasons, since there is a worry that it “corrodes Israel’s ‘national soul’” (Tilley 167). Hence, the increasing burden of having to imprison the guard can similarly be applied to the Israeli state, which, by occupying the Palestinian territories, has to address the moral consequences of

colonising others. Of course, exacting revenge should not be conflated with the oppression of a group of people that is not responsible for the suffering of the Jews, but Becker's novel suggests the added burden that nation-building, and specifically nation-building on a territory already inhabited by another population, engendered for Jewish identity, both inside and outside of Israel. In many ways, the problems facing Jewish majority identity and its role within the occupation of the Palestinian territories can be aligned with Albert Memmi's warning against colonisation as harming the coloniser as much as the colonised since the coloniser "cannot help but approve discrimination and the codification of injustice" (99).

Hans contradicts traditional notions of victimhood in general and of Holocaust victimhood in particular, which conceptualises victimhood as extending into the present and the future when he states that "I am not the son of a victim of Fascism. [...] By the time I was born, he had long ceased to be a victim" (*BC* 41). This description of victimhood contradicts general perceptions of victimhood, and especially victimhood associated with the Holocaust, where past victimhood seems to stretch into the present and the future. However, the temporality of victimhood is contradicted by Hans's father's act of revenge and can be aligned with Israel's self-perception as "eternal" victim to deflect criticism. In a Jewish-postcolonial context Becker's novel can be read as challenging Israel's collective claim that Holocaust victimhood extends into the present and that the Palestinians seek to perpetrate another Jewish genocide. This political instrumentalisation of Holocaust memory serves to gain international support for actions deemed illegal by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242. By disregarding this resolution and continuing to build and expand settlements in the West Bank, Israel increasingly prevents Palestinian villages from forming a coherent geographical, and geopolitical, mass. Becker insists "that there shouldn't be a licence for self-justice, when someone was a victim, and there shouldn't be a claim for uncritical support" (qtd. in Rock 2000b: 347), which is exactly what his novel establishes: those who have been victimised in the past are not exempt from acting morally and certainly not beyond criticism. In this way, Becker's novel cautions against the misuses of victimhood, not only by the victims themselves, but also by a society that reduces victims to their victimhood.

Hilsenrath and Becker's creative challenge to reductive categories of victims and perpetrators provides a means for readers not only to critically engage with their own perceptions of Jewishness after World War II but also to examine the "consequences" of the Holocaust in the Middle East: the creation of the state of Israel and the occupation of the Palestinian territories. They situate the Holocaust and the establishment of a Jewish state in a historical context of racism and discrimination and stress the links between Nazism, settler-colonialism, and Zionism. Both novelists advocate the need for Israel to address its role as a coloniser of the Palestinian people and to refrain from using the Holocaust and its prominent association with victimhood in Europe and North America to maintain international

support and deflect criticism. However, Becker's revision of his position vis-à-vis Israel also constitutes a haunting example of the power that the Holocaust and its (Jewish) victims still holds in the European imaginary and the dangers of making clear-cut distinctions between which side is more "justified" in their claims to the land without acknowledging the obvious power imbalance. Nevertheless, both novels situate the Jews and their history of persecution in Europe as well as nation-building in Palestine in close proximity to colonialism and postcolonialism, thus offering creative accounts of the figure of the Jew as a critical tool to engage with both discourses of the colonial and the postcolonial.

Notes

1. Jenni Ramone's 2011 monograph *Postcolonial Theories*, for example, only mentions the "Jew" twice. In the opening pages, she provides a "Timeline of Key Events and Texts" with the disclaimer that it presents "some key historical events and important publications, plotting items covered within this book" (xiii). The timeline includes World War II, but the author fails to align the practices of Nazism and colonialism. Instead the war only seems to function as a temporal and economic marker for the decline of colonial powers and for its effect on Europe, rather than its more far-reaching consequences in the Middle East. This suspicion is confirmed by the fact that there is no mention of the creation of Israel, even though the author chooses to include the information that the Israeli troops pulled out of Gaza in 2005 and intensified their blockade of Gaza in 2007 (xvii).

2. For an overview of scholars who use a comparative approach, see Moses's "The Holocaust and Genocide" (2004), Stone's *Histories of the Holocaust* (2010) (particularly chapter five: "Genocide, the Holocaust and the History of Colonialism") and Zimmerer's "The Birth of the Ostland out of the Spirit of Colonialism: A Postcolonial Perspective on the Nazi Policy of Conquest and Extermination" (2005) and "Colonialism and the Holocaust—Towards an Archaeology of Genocide" (2008).

3. Of course, victimhood is implicitly gendered in its association with weakness and helplessness, and thus with traditional notions of femininity.

4. In this article, I use the term Israel/ Palestine to refer to the geopolitical entity of the state of Israel as well as the Palestinian territories that came under Israeli rule in 1967: the West Bank and East Jerusalem as well as the Gaza Strip, which although officially governed by Hamas since 2007, is still under Israeli siege.

5. Comparisons between Nazism and Zionism have also been made by scholars such as Joseph Massad. See for example his article "The Last of the Semites," which sparked so much controversy upon

publication that it was withdrawn and then re-published again. For a less controversial assessment of the relationship between Zionism and Nazism, see Francis Nicosia's *Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany* (2008).

6. "Richter" is the German word for "judge."

7. The character Max Schulz, and specifically his defence and the sentence imposed by the judge, seems to be inspired by the Eichmann trial but Hilsenrath insists that his book was written before the Eichmann trial (personal interview). However, in Helmut Braun's unofficial biography, the writing of *Der Nazi und der Friseur* is dated 1965 (163-65), four years after the trial.

8. After World War II, Hilsenrath escaped to Palestine but he soon left since he was disappointed with the Jewish community there: "I wanted to live among my people, the Jews. But I was among Israelis" (Braun 195). Hilsenrath explicitly disconnects diaspora Jewish identity from Israeli identity and thus implicitly refuses a Jewish identity that is defined in light of Zionism and settler-colonialism.

9. In his novel, Hilsenrath similarly juxtaposes Nazism and Zionism in terms of their colonialist tendencies; however, he does not suggest that these two discourses can simply be equated.

10. In an interview with André Glasmacher in *Jüdische Allgemeine*, Becker's second wife Christine has explained that one of Becker's reasons for revising his essay was the fact that Israeli Holocaust survivors had told him that they were offended by the term "Herrenmenschen."

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