

**The Outsider Inside: Ideas of Jewishness  
in Contemporary Jewish, Postcolonial, and  
Palestinian Literature**

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## ABSTRACT

My thesis creates a comparative framework for understanding representations of Jewishness in Jewish, postcolonial, and Palestinian literature in response to particular historical events such as the Holocaust, the creation of the state of Israel, the first intifada, and the siege of Ramallah during the second intifada. Central to my study is the shift from Jewish identity in Europe before the creation of Jewish settlements in Palestine – as a minority identity in the Diaspora, facing discrimination and persecution in Europe, which culminated in the Holocaust – to Jewishness as Israeliness, defined in relation to the state of Israel, Zionism, and settler-colonialism.

My study contests ahistorical and decontextualised uses of Jewishness and each chapter proposes a different angle to engage with ideas of Jewishness in their specific historical context. I examine narrative fiction and travelogues, published between 1971 and 2008, by Jurek Becker, Anita Desai, David Grossman, Shulamith Hareven, Edgar Hilsenrath, Sahar Khalifeh, Caryl Phillips, Anton Shammas, Raja Shehadeh, and A. B. Yehoshua. Through these examples, I interrogate the political and stylistic reasons underlying the inclusion and appropriation of ideas of Jewishness in literature. I suggest that literature offers alternative models of Jewishness which question received notions of Jewish victimhood and powerlessness. By determining the ways in which ideas associated with Jewishness travel across different geographical locations and examining adaptations of these concepts in non-Jewish contexts, I illustrate the centrality of ideas of Jewishness in the construction and definition of identities for both Jewish and non-Jewish writers and readers and indicate the global ramifications of engaging with Jewishness for contemporary literature and culture.

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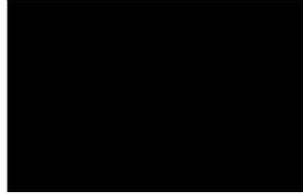
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## CANDIDATE DECLARATION

I hereby confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.



Isabelle Hesse

## INTRODUCTION

### Ideas of Jewishness in Literature

It is therefore the *idea* of the Jew that one forms for himself which would seem to determine history, not the 'historical fact' that produces the idea. (Sartre 1948: 16)

In his influential work *The Anti-Semite and the Jew* (1948), Jean-Paul Sartre – reflecting on anti-Semitic constructions of Jewishness – argues that society, rather than history, constructs the idea of the Jew, and that Jewishness as a social construct determines history. He foregrounds society's role in shaping history and stresses the fact that Jewishness is defined by the context in which it is used, disavowing the concept of 'eternal' Jewishness that remains fixed and unchanged throughout history. Moreover, Sartre's argument adds an important angle to received ideas of Jewishness as shaped by majority societies and their perceptions and positioning of Jews within their community: the possibility of Jewishness as reflecting on society from a minority point of view and influencing the creation of the majority's 'history.' This study focuses on the two defining moments for the idea of Jewishness in twentieth-century Jewish history: the Holocaust and the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine and extends the analysis of ideas of Jewishness in Jewish literature to include considerations of the ways in which these concepts are appropriated in postcolonial and Palestinian literature. Critical attention to ideas of Jewishness, and especially their representation in literature in relation to the Holocaust and Israel/Palestine, is generally limited to Jewish literature written after 1945.<sup>1</sup> Although there

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<sup>1</sup> Although the Holocaust and Israel play a major role in Jewish literature, there are of course other key themes like assimilation, secularism, and notions of home and diaspora. For a general overview of Jewish literature in the twentieth century, see Wisse's *The Modern Jewish Canon* (2003). For concerns pertinent to American-Jewish literature in the twentieth and twenty-first century, see Wirth-Nesher and Kramer's *The Cambridge Companion to American-Jewish Literature* (2003). Kerbel's *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Jewish Writers of the Twentieth Century* (2003) offers a good overview of themes and trends in American Jewish and British Jewish literature, and for a focus on Jewish literature written in English, see Stähler's edited collection *Anglophone Jewish Literature* (2007). For second and third generation Jewish writing in Europe, see *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Europe: A Guide* (2008), edited by Liska and Nolden. Obvious omissions in this brief summary of Jewish literatures are German-Jewish and Israeli Jewish literature, which will

is critical engagement with Israel's reliance on the image of victimhood generated by the Holocaust and the impact of settler-colonialism and the occupation of Palestine on Jewish diaspora and Israeli Jewish identity in Jewish literature, the most radical and refined evaluations are conducted from a historical or social point of view rather than from a literary perspective.<sup>2</sup> Even though the role of both the Holocaust and the creation of a Jewish state is examined as key for Jewish identity in Jewish literature, there has not been much in-depth examination of the development of ideas of Jewishness from the Holocaust up to the second Palestinian intifada in German-Jewish, Israeli Jewish, postcolonial,<sup>3</sup> and Palestinian literature.<sup>4</sup> This study creates a comparative framework for understanding representations of Jewishness in literature in response to particular historical events such as the Holocaust, the creation of the state of Israel, the first intifada, and the siege of Ramallah during the second intifada. This comparison is achieved through an extended and detailed examination of Jewish, postcolonial, and Palestinian literary uses of concepts associated with Jewishness that emerged out of the Holocaust and the creation of Israel, i.e. ideas related to Jewish powerlessness and power.

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be discussed in the course of this introduction and examined in more depth in the body of this study.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Boyarin and Boyarin's 'Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity' (1993), Rose's *The Question of Zion* (2005) and *The Last Resistance* (2007), Nimni's *The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics* (2003), Landy's *Jewish Identity and Palestinian Rights* (2011), and Silberstein's *The Postzionism Debates: Knowledge and Power in Israeli Culture* (1999) as well as his edited collection *Postzionism: A Reader* (2008). One of the few analyses of the effects of settler-colonialism on literary representations of Israeli Jewishness can be found in Gover's *Zionism: The Limits of Moral Discourse in Israeli Hebrew Fiction* (1994).

<sup>3</sup> Uses of the term 'postcolonial' are disputed widely, see for example McClintock's 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism"' (1992) and Shohat's 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial"' (1992). Following Young, who defines postcolonialism as 'attack[ing] the status quo of hegemonic economic imperialism, and the history of colonialism and imperialism but also signal[ing] an activist engagement with positive political positions and new forms of political identity' (2001: 58), I do not separate 'post' and 'colonial' since I want to stress this subversive quality of postcolonialism alongside the historical, economic, and political aftermaths of colonialism. However, for the purpose of this study, I also consider 'postcolonial' as a marketing category for contemporary literary works.

<sup>4</sup> A few notable exceptions are Chetty and Marcus's edited collection *Modernity, Culture and the Jew* (1998), which brings together different cultural perspectives on Jewishness, but leaves out the Palestinian angle, and Nochlin and Garb's edited collection *The Jew in the Text* (1995), which examines the presence of Jews and Jewishness in cultural artefacts, with a particular focus on negative representations of Jewishness.

Following Sartre, I focus on *ideas* of Jewishness, as the concept of 'idea' implies that although there is a correspondence with 'real' life, there is more importantly an element of appropriation and adaptation on the part of the authors who creatively engage with tropes associated with Jewishness, such as minority identity, diaspora,<sup>5</sup> and otherness. I use 'otherness' and 'other' here as denominators of perceived difference – rather than as philosophical or ethical concepts<sup>6</sup> – positioning the other as an oppositional category created by hegemonic powers to describe and delineate outside groups. Arif Dirlik, in his criticism of postcolonial epistemology, asserts the centrality of 'difference' to postcolonial studies:

Difference is important not just as a description of a situation, but more importantly because it shapes language, and therefore the meaning of identity (...). Difference and the negotiation of difference becomes crucial to the construction of identity and, by extension, of culture. (5)

I agree with Dirlik that an overemphasis on difference, and the concepts associated with it, such as hybridity and in-betweenness, can obscure the concerns of the formerly colonised people by favouring abstract solutions based on the reconciliation between their identity and the coloniser's identity, which distracts from the actual economic and social problems of the postcolonial state. However, I contend that there is a striking absence of discussions of *Jewish* difference in postcolonial studies, which tend to consider Jewishness either as a conflation with a monolithic Europe or as symptomatic of quintessential otherness and victimhood. Bryan Cheyette confirms that 'there is a strand in postcolonial theory which is unable to perceive Jews as anything other than as part of the majoritarian tradition'

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<sup>5</sup> Throughout this study I will capitalise the term 'Diaspora' to refer specifically to the Jewish experience of diaspora, and use the term 'diaspora' to denote the more general experience of dispersion.

<sup>6</sup> For a philosophical and ethical examination of the relationship between self and other see for example Lévinas's *Totality and Infinity* (1969), Derrida's *Acts of Literature* (1991), Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), Butler's *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), and Ahmed's *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (2000). Lévinas's notion of the 'other' has been central for informing my thinking about the relationship between self and other. However, his refusal to address the injustices inflicted on the Palestinians and to include them in his notion of otherness, thus removing them from moral and ethical demands, made his thinking unsuitable for the purpose of my project. For his view on the Palestinians and notions of the other, see his radio interview with Malka Shlomo in 1982, published in Hand's *The Levinas Reader* (1989).

(2000: 54). Jonathan Boyarin agrees with this analysis and insists that ‘the situation of the Jews after World War II bears striking similarities to the postcolonial situation, but (...) these similarities have been occluded by an unthinking association of Jews with a monolithic “Europe”’ (1994: 425). Hence, I believe that an investigation of the situation of Jewish difference in postcolonial literature needs to be mindful of Jewishness as between ‘Europe’ and its ‘others.’ Aligning Jewishness with the colonial and postcolonial experience is thus significant for identifying the ways in which twentieth and twenty-first century non-Jewish identity is imagined through literary representations of Jewishness between minority and majority and between Europe and the Middle East.

Central to my study is the shift from Jewish identity in Europe before 1948 – as a minority identity in the diaspora, facing discrimination and persecution in Europe, which culminated in the Holocaust – to Jewishness as Israeliness, defined in relation to the state of Israel, Zionism, and settler-colonialism. I consider Jewish identity as a means of questioning received ideas about powerlessness and power by juxtaposing notions of Jewishness associated with positions of minority with those derived from positions of majority or dominance. According to Aamir Mufti, Jewish minority identity can be understood as a historical model for modern ideas about minority identity:

In the question of the Jews’ status in modern culture and society, (...) what emerges is a set of paradigmatic narratives (...) concerned with the very question of minority existence, which are then disseminated globally in the emergence, under colonial and semicolonial conditions, of the forms of modern social, political, and cultural life. (2)

Mufti links the crisis of contemporary Muslim identity in India to problems of secularisation and minority identity in the Enlightenment, and suggests that this crisis needs to be understood in terms of the discourse surrounding the ‘Jewish’ question, which emerged during the Enlightenment period. Mufti consequently seeks to apply ideas linked to Jewish minority existence – his list includes assimilation, emancipation, minority rights, exile, and homelessness (2-3) – to the Indian Muslim context in order to locate these concerns as relevant to, and reflected in, their situation as a religious and

cultural minority in contemporary India. My study builds on Mufti's work in that it creates a comparative framework between Jewish identity and other minority identities. But instead of 'rethinking European selfhood (...) from positions marked by dilemmas, vulnerabilities, and ethical and critical possibilities of Jewishness-minority' (Mufti 7), I analyse Jewish selfhood and Jewish otherness not only through a European Jewish minority lens, comparing discourses of victimhood and powerlessness in relation to Jewish particularism during the nineteenth and twentieth century, but equally trace concepts of Jewish selfhood and otherness in relation to the creation of Israel, and settler-colonialism, from Palestinian and postcolonial perspectives inside and outside of Israel.

According to Cheyette, nineteenth-century perceptions of Jews as ambivalent figures result from their paradoxical social role: 'it is the proximity of Jews within the European imperial orbit that made them both a powerful "self" and a powerless "other," a key touchstone for the racial boundaries of European "culture" and the "Englishness" of modern English literature' (1993: 12). My thesis considers the relationship between the Jew as 'powerful self and powerless other' after the Holocaust and the inception of Israel and I show that a certain ambivalence has been carried over to the state of Israel and is reflected in its literary productions. I am particularly interested in the different ways in which the tension between selfhood and otherness is expressed in literature published between 1971 – following the Eichmann trial of 1961, which saw a pronounced change in Israel's attitude to the Holocaust survivors and freed the victims to speak about their experiences – and 2008, after the 2006 'Operation Summer Rains' in Gaza and the second intifada had crystallised the impasse that still constricts the peace process today.<sup>7</sup> The texts in this study only constitute a small selection of literature but they critically engage with ideas of Jewish

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<sup>7</sup> This impasse is summed up by Reinhart as follows: Israel 'cannot let Gaza go, if [they] want to keep the West Bank, as one third of the occupied Palestinian population inhabits Gaza. If Gaza became independent, its population would become the focus of the liberation struggle with free access to the West and the Arab world' (31). For a detailed discussion of the situation in Israel/Palestine since the so-called 'Road Map to Peace' see Said's *From Oslo to Iraq and the Roadmap* (2004) and Reinhart's *The Road Map to Nowhere* (2006).

minority and Jewishness as Israeli selfhood, offering snapshots of depictions of Jewishness in works published after the Holocaust. Reading these texts raises bigger questions about contemporary Jewish identity as they challenge received representations of Jewish victimhood and powerlessness originating from the Holocaust and question the uses of these concepts in Israel's self-perception as eternal victim, threatened by the neighbouring Arab states. I examine the ways in which the establishment of a Jewish nation-state has influenced notions of Jewishness prominent in the 'West' resulting from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conceptions of permanent Jewish marginalisation, positing Jewishness as intimately linked to victimhood and 'wandering.' Moreover, I analyse literary representations of Jewishness and its connotations of minority identity as challenges to Zionist hegemonic culture, not only in Jewish and Israeli Jewish texts but also in Palestinian and Israeli Palestinian literature.

By situating ideas of Jewishness in a Palestinian and postcolonial context, I delineate adaptations of diaspora and minority identity in relation to Jewishness, drawing on the European and Northern American understanding of the Holocaust as a paradigmatic instance of suffering but also the perception of the Jew as a 'cosmopolitan' figure. I demonstrate that in the twentieth and twenty-first century 'Jewishness' still plays a major role in the identity construction of subjugated groups; however, I contend that this construction has taken a 'colonial' turn. One expression of this colonial turn manifests itself in postcolonial fiction, where the figure of the Jew is becoming a recurrent trope in the works of writers like Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, and Zadie Smith.<sup>8</sup> The impulse to include Jewish characters can be explained through the parallels between the Jewish experience of discrimination and suffering and the domination of colonised people by European imperial powers.<sup>9</sup> Another manifestation of the

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<sup>8</sup> See Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* (1992), Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), Smith's *The Autograph Man* (2002), and Seth's *Two Lives* (2005). Other examples include Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988) and Phillips's *The Nature of Blood* (1997), which will be examined in more detail in chapter three of this study.

<sup>9</sup> Moore-Gilbert commends contemporary postcolonial diasporic writing for engaging with the figure of the Jew, however, he deplors that "The lack of engagement with the question

'colonial' turn can be identified in representations of Jewishness in Israeli Jewish, Israeli Palestinian, and Palestinian literature, not only by portraying the shift from colonised Jewish other in Nazi Europe<sup>10</sup> to settler-colonial self in Israel but also through conscious authorial choices to use ideas linked to Jewish minority identity to critically engage with Zionism and the occupation of Palestine and the concomitant image of the Israeli Jew as a coloniser and oppressor.

Literature is intimately linked to the political and social context in which it is produced, and this connection is especially true for literature that is critical of dominant ideologies, like postcolonial literature. Abdul JanMohamed draws attention to the 'lived' relationships which inform any act of writing, and as a result, the depiction of both self and other:

The writer, by unconsciously attempting to valorize the position of self and his group in the face of an antagonistic alterity, is most often unable to proceed beyond the limited (and limiting) *real* economic and socio-political interests of his class or group. (1983: 266)

The relationship between the aesthetic and the political has been central to postcolonial studies since the rise of the field in the 1980s, and as JanMohamed observes here, literature is often pressed into the service of a political agenda to the detriment of its aesthetic nature. Nevertheless, Deepika Bahri has noted that the aesthetic constitutes a 'powerful mode for engaging with otherness' (9)<sup>11</sup> and she argues that 'the intermeshing of sociopolitics with artistic and intellectual expression is seen as a distinctive and defining attribute of what we recognise as "postcolonial"' (11). I ask whether in the texts under consideration Jewishness functions only as a means to a (political or narrative) end, especially in the case of non-Jewish writers, or if these texts can be read 'postcolonially' in that their engagement

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of Palestine in contemporary postcolonial diasporic writing is perhaps the one shadow on its otherwise productive engagement with "the figure of the Jew." (2005: 115).

<sup>10</sup> It is also worth considering the ambivalent role of the Jews in North African colonies, where on one hand they are ostracised by the indigenous population, and later considered as belonging to the coloniser, but on the other hand, they are equally colonised by the French imperial powers. See for example Memmi's *Jews and Arabs* (1975), especially his chapter 'The Colonized Jew.'

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed analysis of literature as a creative way to encounter and engage ethically with otherness see Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* (2004), particularly chapter four: 'Inventive Language and the Literary Event.'

with Jewishness represents an 'intermeshing' of the social, political, artistic, and intellectual. As I suggested above, and as Cheyette confirms, even though writers rely on stereotypes about Jewishness to represent Jews, they 'actively construct them in relation to their own literary and political concerns' (1993: 268). My study analyses this act of 'active' construction on the part of Jewish, postcolonial, and Palestinian authors and interrogates the political and stylistic reasons underlying the inclusion of ideas of Jewishness in the texts under consideration. In keeping with Barbara Harlow, who points out that in the case of resistance literature 'narrative, unlike poetry perhaps, provides a more developed historical analysis of the circumstances of the economic, political and cultural domination and repression' (78), the focus of my thesis is on narrative fiction, including novellas and travelogues. The models of Jewishness I engage with need to be firmly situated and developed from within a historical, political, and social context, and thus the authors discussed in this study comply with Ian Watt's observation that 'the novelist's primary task is to convey the impression of fidelity to human experience' (13). More recently, Franco Moretti has described the benefits of reading narrative fiction, in the form of the novel, in the following way: 'the novel is for us a great anthropological force, which has turned reading into a pleasure and redefined the sense of reality, the meaning of individual existence, the perception of time and language' (ix). My work is concerned particularly with narrative as 'redefining a sense of reality,' by presenting a challenge to established ideas of Jewishness and attempting to advance alternative models of Jewishness that encompass concepts of Jewish victimhood and notions of Jewish selfhood, including the idea of the Jew in Israel as a coloniser of the Palestinian people and the German-Jew who attempts to reclaim a sense of selfhood in Germany, the nation of the 'perpetrators.'

The remaining part of this introduction will be devoted to two tasks: the first consists in giving a brief overview of key historical moments which have influenced current ideas of Jewishness, and the second constitutes an analysis of the position of the Jew and ideas of Jewishness in postcolonial

theory in order to locate my thesis at the nexus of Jewish, Israel/Palestine, and postcolonial studies.

## I

### **Between Emancipation and Assimilation**

As many thinkers have noted, most famously Hannah Arendt and Karl Marx, the emergence of the 'modern' Jewish question dates back to the Enlightenment.<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx, in his influential and controversial essay 'On the Jewish Question' (1844), argues that the problem of the Jews' emancipation<sup>13</sup> lay in their adherence to religion: 'Emancipation from religion is laid down as a condition, both to the Jew who wants to be emancipated politically and to the state which is to effect emancipation and is itself to be emancipated' (30). Marx identifies a universal conflict between the political state and civil society, a conflict which expresses itself through the state's demand that individual emancipation should be achieved through renouncing religion. He is very suspicious of the desire for, and indeed the possibility of, Jewish emancipation, and he dismisses political emancipation 'because you can be emancipated politically without renouncing Judaism completely and incontrovertibly, political emancipation itself is not *human* emancipation' (40). Through the example of the Jews in Germany, where 'the Jew finds himself in *religious* opposition to the state' (32), Marx presents political emancipation as individualistic and humanly impoverishing for civil society in general, since it entails renouncing private identity in favour of public persona. As Tom Rockmore notes, for Marx, political emancipation only constitutes a preliminary step towards realising human emancipation (50). In the course of political emancipation, religion is transformed into 'the essence of *difference*' (Marx 36), serving as an indicator to differentiate outsiders in the state. Mufti, commenting on Marx's

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<sup>12</sup> See also Mufti's *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (2007) and Bein's *The Jewish Question: Biography of a World Problem* (1990).

<sup>13</sup> Following Carlebach, who defines emancipation as an achievement of civil and political equality in an absolutist state' (9), I use the term 'emancipation' to describe the Jewish desire to obtain equal civil and political rights in European societies.

views, contends that emancipation '[stripped] the Jews of the possibility of having a distinct political identity that might become the basis for a struggle for rights, a distinctly Jewish political struggle, as Arendt puts it, alongside other oppressed peoples' (55). Emancipation thus equates with assimilation – which for the purpose of this study I will define as the integration into a majority society and the expectation to adopt the customs of said society – with an obliteration of 'difference' at the cost of individual cultural and religious heritage. Building on Marx's suspicion of assimilation, I interrogate the possibility of assimilation in post-war Germany but also question the extent to which the creation of a Jewish state has solved the problem of assimilation and examine the implications of conflating political identity with religion for Israel's non-Jewish citizens.

Arendt defines 'emancipation' in similar terms to Marx, highlighting the paradoxical nature of this concept for the Jewish people: 'Emancipation meant equality *and* privileges, the destruction of the old Jewish communal autonomy and the conscious preservation of the Jews as a separate group in society' (2004: 22). She explains that for Johann Gottfried Herder, who sees assimilation as 'a question of emancipation and thus of politics,' the Jewish question boiled down to the problem of incorporating another nation, rather than another religion, into the German nation (2007: 13). These statements reveal the tendency to associate the Jewish people with irremediable difference, which resulted in the construction of the Jews as religious and political outsiders in European Christian societies. Michael Bernstein stresses the cultural and social dimension of this otherness and its ramifications for Jewish assimilation: 'Jews could become full citizens precisely and only by ceasing in any significant sense to be or think of themselves as Jews' (26). The political and religious authorities during the Enlightenment corroborated the position of the Jews as outsiders inside European societies and attributed a distinct quality to them, whether religion, nationality, culture, or race, which made it impossible to integrate them fully into existing 'nations.'<sup>14</sup> Of course, this vision of the Jews does not

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<sup>14</sup> As many critics have noted, the concept of 'nation' is neither an unchanging nor a unified entity. Moreover, delineating the 'nation' by establishing certain criteria for membership

necessarily reflect the reality as many Jews assimilated and integrated into non-Jewish societies, as the example of the German Jews shows: the majority of the half million Jews living in the German Reich in 1871 saw their identities as dual, as both German and Jewish (Berger 91).<sup>15</sup> Again, this assessment of assimilation exemplifies the obliteration of Jewish ‘difference’ as a prerequisite for the integration of the Jews into the supposedly homogenous social space. Crucially, the Enlightenment crystallised the *perception* of the Jew as inherently other, as outsider in the imagination of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe.

Neil McMaster explains that the Jews were considered a threat to European unity because of their economic centrality to society and posits their similarity rather than their difference at the root of the threat embodied in Jewishness. However, he observes that the allegedly uniform body of society, and more specifically its boundaries, are challenged through ‘the Jew as a liminal, highly ambiguous being’ (2000: 73). The liminality of the Jews is not only embodied in their difference but also in their similarity, encompassed in their position as outsiders inside, simultaneously at the centre and at the periphery of the majority society. Cheyette advances a similar account of the Jews’ ambivalent position in European society as the reason for their construction as dangerous others. He compares the Jews’ location to the location of colonial subjects and consequently argues that unlike the colonial subjects, who were in the colonies, at the margins of empire, ‘in the late nineteenth century, Jews were simultaneously at the centre of the European metropolitan society and at the same time, banished

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has often been futile in that it is difficult to define qualities that take into account the diverse nature of a ‘nation.’ For a critical engagement with the rise of nations and nationalism see Hobsbawm’s *Nations and Nationalisms since 1780* (1990). Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983) offers an insight into the procedures nations use to create an image of themselves as political communities, which is particularly relevant for the colonial and postcolonial context.

<sup>15</sup> Another example are the French Jews who were the first to become equal citizens within a European state in 1791, following the French revolution (Carlebach 57). Nonetheless, for Arendt, ‘assimilation as a group phenomenon’ was restricted to Jewish intellectuals and was ‘granted them only as long as they were clearly distinguished exceptions from the Jewish masses’ (2004: 76, 83).

from its privileged sphere by a semitic discourse' (1993: 12).<sup>16</sup> Jewishness is intimately linked to the concept of the 'enemy from within' or the 'outsider inside,' an idea that gained prominence during the Enlightenment, when it became clear that although the Jews were part of the majority society, they were mostly unwilling to renounce their difference in order to be granted equal rights. This ambivalent conception of Jewishness within European societies informed Nazi ideology but as will become apparent in the following chapters, still has resonance in literary representations of Jewishness today. The paradox inherent in the description of the Jew as 'outsider inside' suggests an ambivalent position that builds on Enlightenment and anti-Semitic ideas about Jewishness. This description encompasses the image of the Jew as a powerless and wandering outsider before the creation of the Jewish state along with the subsequent transformation into part of the dominant group in Israel while the Israeli national discourse relied on ideas of victimhood and minority. Accordingly, the concept of 'outsider inside' stresses the continuing liminality of ideas of Jewishness in contemporary Western and Israeli culture but also has interesting parallels with the situation of the Israeli Palestinians within Israel and the ways in which they represent their position in relation to the majority society and 'Jewish' ideas of minority and ambivalence, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

### **The Jew in Nazi Ideology: Subhuman or Superhuman?**

The indeterminacy of the Jews, especially the idea of their indiscernible difference, constituted one of the main problems for the Nazi regime in their attempts to clearly define their enemy. Nazi representations of Jewishness relied heavily on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century portrayals of Jewishness. In the eighteenth century, following centuries of discrimination and persecution, the Jews were considered to be a religious and culturally distinct group. With the rise of scientific racism at the end of the eighteenth

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<sup>16</sup> Cheyette uses the term 'semitic' instead of 'anti-Semitic' or 'philo-Semitic' to avoid the connotations implied by both of these terms concerning the speaker's position towards Jewishness (1993: 8).

century, however, the Jews were defined primarily as a race, which meant that they 'would always remain Jews, locked into the hereditary destiny of their race' (McMaster 2001: 16). Saul Friedländer has identified racial anti-Semitism as the basis for the Nazi image of the Jew as 'steeped in *völkisch*-racist theories and imagery, focused on the danger inherent in the biological nature of the Jew, in the racial characteristics carried by Jewish blood' (1997: 6). But as Friedländer, among many, has rightly noted, there was another dimension to the threat ascribed to the Jews in Nazi Germany: they 'represented an active and deadly force in history, one that was bent on world domination and possibly destruction' (1997: 6).<sup>17</sup> This additional layer, transforming the more abstract risk of miscegenation into the very tangible threat of annihilation, necessitated the complete destruction of the Jewish 'race,' as it embodied a danger to not only the purity but to the very existence of the Aryan race. Unlike racism directed against black people, who were not thought to be a threat to the Aryan master race, 'as long as [they were] segregated within the colonial sphere' (McMaster 2001: 132), the Jew was situated within the host society, not contained within a remote colonial space. As Robert Wistrich observes, the Nazis created a myth of the Jews 'as a well-organised international power with clearly defined goals' and Hitler himself was obsessed with the 'imagined secret power' of the Jews (7, 15). Again, the danger of the Jew was encapsulated in his or her 'liminal ambiguity,' to use McMaster's phrase. Ideas of Jewishness as a projection of the fear of the instability of European societies is a recurrent motif, exemplified in McMaster's description of the Jews as a threat to the boundaries of group identity, and this perception is symptomatic of any and all constructions of otherness, as will be shown throughout my thesis, not only in relation to Jewish otherness, but also by aligning Jewish others with non-European others in the Palestinian and colonial context.

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<sup>17</sup> Other critics who advance this view include Wistrich in *Hitler and the Holocaust: How and Why the Holocaust Happened* (2001), Burrin in *Hitler and the Jews* (1994), and Burleigh and Wipperman in *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (1991).

## **Jewishness in Germany and Israel after the Holocaust**

After 1945, in Europe and the West, Jewish identity was understood first and foremost through the Holocaust. The most prominent image of Jewishness constructed through the Nazi genocide of the Jews, and reinforced by photographs of emaciated camp inmates circulated in the international media, was the idea of Jewish victimhood and the Jews as passive sufferers of Nazi atrocities, encompassed in the phrase that they were led to their deaths 'like lambs to the slaughter.'<sup>18</sup> These images generated an association between Jewishness, victimhood, and passivity in post-war Germany. The guilt of the German people for their complicity in the genocide, whether active or passive, led to the spread of philo-Semitism (Fulbrook 65), which the German-Jewish author Edgar Hilsenrath has identified as 'a kind of reverse anti-Semitism' (Reichelt), since it maintains the Jew as other and victim without leaving room for the Jews to define themselves beyond the images perpetuated by the Holocaust. The German Jews had been most avid in their assimilation to German culture since the founding of the German Reich in 1871. Through their ability to speak German, which in most cases was their main language, they considered themselves as part of the German nation (Berger 91). Despite this apparent integration, Mary Fulbrook has drawn attention to a common misconception in post-war Germany regarding the boundaries of the German nation, based on the fact that 'there was often little understanding or active memory of the fact that German "Jews" plucked out among from their midst were also "Germans"' (150). Therefore, German-Jewish writers were not only required to come to terms with ideas of themselves as subhuman others imposed by Nazism, and in some ways perpetuated by philo-Semitism, but they also had to reclaim a position for themselves within the German national discourse. My first chapter examines Edgar Hilsenrath's and Jurek Becker's representations of Jewishness after the Holocaust and outlines their critical engagement with the possibility of a hyphenated German-Jewish identity that exists independently but paradoxically also inclusive of the Holocaust.

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<sup>18</sup> As Segev points out, this formulation has been attributed to Abba Kovner (110).

Whereas Hilsenrath uses satire as a tool to subvert and blur the distinction between Nazi and Jew, perpetrator and victim, Becker analyses the implications of justice and revenge through portraying a Holocaust victim whose justification for avenging his treatment as subhuman other in the camps is evaluated through his son's eyes.

The establishment of the state of Israel was accelerated by the international prominence of the images of Jewish Holocaust victims, necessitating the creation of a refuge from anti-Semitism for the Jewish people. Esther Benbassa, in her perceptive monograph *Suffering as Identity: The Jewish Paradigm* (2010), traces the centrality of Jewish suffering in Israeli national discourse, and denounces victimhood as having been transformed into a 'quasi-religion': 'Over the years (...) the Holocaust itself has been erected into a new secular religion without a God, a self-sufficient religion' (2010: 106). She condemns the use of victimhood as a 'moral posture' (2010: 1) and explains the devastating consequences of casting the Jews as eternal victims in Israel: 'With Auschwitz as a backdrop, the Palestinians were assigned the role of merciless executioners of a people that had been victimised from time immemorial' (2010: 144). Shulamith Hareven joins Benbassa in critiquing the use of victimhood in Israel, emphatically stating that

Our uniqueness lies not in what others do to us, but in ourselves alone, in our selfhood, our character, our culture. The uniqueness of a Jew is not in his being a victim. It is in his being a Jew. (1995: 153)

This description explicitly links Jewishness with agency and being a subject, rather than an object, of history. Benbassa agrees with this assessment by pointing out that 'The history of the Jews was not a passive history, and the history of Jewish offensives and bravura does not start with Zionism' (2010: 43). As she rightly implies, the representation of the Jews as passive sufferers of history negates the entire Jewish history before the Holocaust and the creation of Israel. Moreover, it disavows the numerous incidents of resistance during World War II – perhaps most famously represented by the Jewish partisans in Eastern Europe, although resistance in the camps was

also not unheard of<sup>19</sup> – and negates, through its narrow focus on the Holocaust, any existence of Jewish identity and history outside of Israel, specifically the Jewish existence in the diaspora. This approach suggests that only in a Jewish state is the achievement of a full Jewish identity possible. In examining Jewish, postcolonial, and Palestinian representations of Jewish victimhood, I interrogate the ways in which the association between ‘Jew’ and ‘victim’ is critically engaged with, both outside and inside of Israel, from the perspective of the majority, the minority, and the outsider, with particular attention to the global ramifications of these ideas.<sup>20</sup>

### **From Jewish Other to Jewish Self: The Creation of the Jewish State**

A Jewish state was seen as a ‘normalisation’ of Jewish existence, since the Zionists considered the Jews to be the only nation without a homeland (Segev 34). Zionism, as an ideological movement advocating the creation of a Jewish homeland, originated in the late 1880s and, according to Colin Shindler, it aspired ‘to safeguard the existence of the Jewish people from physical extinction and persecution on the one hand, and assimilation and disintegration on the other’ (10). Hence, Israel is imagined as the national space where Jewish difference can be maintained at the same time as promising equal civil and political rights to the Jewish people without the accompanying requirement of renouncing their ‘Jewishness.’ Arendt agrees that Zionism is ‘the legitimate heir of assimilation’ (2007: 56) but she advocates a bi-national state in Palestine, which clashes with exclusive conceptions of Jewish nationalism. One of the reasons she sees the Zionist movement as failing is because of its inability to successfully combine

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<sup>19</sup> Films such as *Defiance* (2008) and *IngLOURIOUS BASTERDS* (2009), although not entirely based on historical facts, have raised awareness of Jewish resistance during the Second World War among metropolitan audiences. Academic overviews of resistance during the Holocaust can be found in Glass’s *Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust* (2004) and Rohrlich’s edited collection *Resisting the Holocaust* (1998).

<sup>20</sup> One recent example of the adoption of the ideas of Jewishness and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a narrative trope in British literature is Lewycka’s *We Are All Made of Glue* (2009). Another instance of this trend is exemplified in the 2011 Channel 4 TV series *The Promise*, which criticises British involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

nationalism and socialism (2007: 348).<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, she does not see Israel as 'solving' the problem of anti-Semitism: 'A Jewish national home that is not recognised and respected by its neighboring people is not a home but an illusion – until it becomes a battlefield' (2007: 235). The Zionists sought to construct a new Jewish identity that would be capable of facing potential 'battlefields': they created the idea of the new Jew, or the *sabra*, a strong pioneer who actively shaped his or her fate and was thus contrasted with the old Jew (Segev 514). Tom Segev asserts that in contrast to concepts associated with the new Jew, like a strong nation-building identity, 'the Holocaust came to be seen as a Jewish defeat. Its victims were censured for having let the Nazis murder them without fighting for their lives or at least for the right to "die with honor"' (109). As a result, the experience of the Holocaust survivors was excluded from the public sphere, while the Holocaust as an event was used to justify the creation of the state of Israel: the Holocaust became 'a cornerstone of the basic creed of the State of Israel and the policies of its government' (Segev 399).<sup>22</sup> As many critics have pointed out,<sup>23</sup> and as my thesis will confirm, the Diaspora and the Holocaust need to be acknowledged predominantly as real instances of human suffering, without however, reducing the whole of Jewish history to a 'vale of tears,' an attitude Benbassa has denounced as a 'lachrymose' approach to history (2010: 45). Zionism tried to create an Israeli Jewish identity that would replace earlier ideas about 'inferior' Jewishness associated with the pre-state Jewish existence, but paradoxically Zionism depended on these ideas as part of its founding myths. In chapter two, I examine the representation of these myths, and the contradictions inherent in them, in Israeli Jewish writing by examining works by Shulamith Hareven and David Grossman, who advocate an alternative Israeli identity based on and

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<sup>21</sup> Arendt thought that the 'Jewish Question' could only be solved if the Jewish nation became part of the Commonwealth or of a European state, which would then allow the Jews to 'look for a region to settle or actually hold on to Palestine' (2007: 133). She concluded that 'Any area of settlement outside of such a commonwealth and lacking its guarantees can only be a chimera or end in deportation to forced labor' (2007: 133).

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of the misuses of the Holocaust and Jewish suffering, see Finkelstein's *The Holocaust Industry* (2000).

<sup>23</sup> See for example Boyarin and Boyarin's 'Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity' (1993), Rose's *The Question of Zion* (2005) and *The Last Resistance* (2007), Piterberg's *The Returns of Zionism* (2008), and Segev's *The Seventh Million* (1991).

inclusive of earlier ideas of Jewishness linked to the Diaspora and the Holocaust. Hareven achieves this challenge by creatively rewriting the Exodus story and questioning the reliance of Zionism on the Bible as advancing a heroic, and unified, past. Grossman uses a child narrator as a model for the ways in which Holocaust survivors should be treated in Israel and by imagining the child's great-uncle's resistance in the camps, Grossman contests the idea of the Jew as a passive sufferer of Nazi violence and persecution.

### **Zionism and the Palestinians**

As indicated above, one of the major problems in Israel is social tension between differently empowered groups, which transformed from the old Jew/new Jew binary in the early state years to a Ashkenazi Jew/Mizrahi Jew opposition with the arrival of Jewish immigrants from Arab countries (Segev 185),<sup>24</sup> and of course, the dichotomy between Israeli Jews and Palestinians both inside and outside of the Green Line. Shulamith Hareven agrees that 'the primary tension in Israel is not security tension. What generates the oppressive atmosphere is societal tension, or more accurately an array of societal tensions' (1995: 98). The Israeli Declaration of Independence of 1948 explicitly states that Israel will bestow equal rights on all of its inhabitants: 'The State of Israel (...) will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to *all* its inhabitants, irrespective of religion, race or sex' (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, my emphasis). However, the reality is very different. The establishment of a Jewish state in Israel in 1948 led to the creation of around 700,000 Palestinian refugees – half of Palestine's Arab population at the time – and their dispossession (Khalidi 21). The Palestinians remaining in Israel were placed under Israeli military rule until 1966, and the destruction of their infrastructure and the confiscation of their land resulted in the dependency of the majority of the Palestinians in

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<sup>24</sup> See also Piterberg's *The Returns of Zionism* (2008) and Alcalay's *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (1993).

Israel on the Israeli Jewish economy for employment.<sup>25</sup> Israel's definition of itself as a Jewish state excludes the Israeli Palestinians, not only on the basis of their ethnicity but also on account of their religion.<sup>26</sup> Oren Yiftachel criticises this ethnocentric drive by describing Israel as an 'ethnocracy' – a term denoting that the state of Israel is giving preferential treatment to its Jewish citizens – and is 'driven, first and foremost, by a sense of collective entitlement of the majority group to control "its" state and "its" homeland' (37). Of course, the ruling of the hegemony always happens at the expense and exclusion of non-hegemonic outside groups. Apart from the Israeli Palestinians, the Mizrahi Jews, who emigrated from Arab countries, similarly enjoy fewer privileges than Ashkenazi or European Jews, as they are Jewish in religion, but they are Arab in ethnicity.<sup>27</sup> The Palestinians living inside Israel are effectively second class citizens, or as Joseph Massad asserts 'third class citizens' (2006: 152), because they have fewer rights than the first class citizens, the Ashkenazi Jews, and the second class citizens, the Mizrahi Jews. Even though the Israeli Palestinians have equal civil and political rights they are significantly disadvantaged in terms of social and economic rights (Davis 55), which will be examined in more detail in chapter four by interrogating the boundaries of Israeliness envisioned by the Israeli Jewish writer A. B. Yehoshua in his novel *The Lover* (*HaMe'ahav* 1977; English translation 1978) and in the Israeli Palestinian author Anton Shammas's *Arabesques* (*Arabeskot* 1986; English translation 1988). Yehoshua's novel is

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<sup>25</sup> For a detailed analysis of the situation of the Israeli Palestinians see Darweish and Rigby's *Palestinians in Israel: Nationality and Citizenship* (1995). An early assessment of their position within Israel can be found in Zureik's *The Palestinians in Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism* (1979). Rouhana's *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State* (1997) offers a insightful analysis of the Israeli Palestinians' minority status within Israel.

<sup>26</sup> Shafir and Peled associate equal rights in Israel with Jewish ethnicity, which 'is a necessary condition for membership in the political community, and the contribution to the process of Zionist redemption is a measure of one's civic virtues' (125).

<sup>27</sup> An in-depth consideration of Mizrahi Jewish representations of Jewishness unfortunately lies outside of the scope of this thesis, although a comparative analysis of Arab Jewish and Palestinian depictions of Jewishness would certainly be productive in terms of examining Israeli Jewishness from non-hegemonic perspectives. Generally, Mizrahi Jews are perceived as being affiliated with the Jewish state rather than with the surrounding Arab nations. For an early example of this view see Herman's *Jewish Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective* (1977). Exceptions to this interpretation are Shenhav's *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (2006) and Shohat's *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (2006), which consider the Mizrahi Jews as being torn between Jewish religion and Arab culture.

the first in Modern Hebrew literature to represent a fully rounded Arab character. Although he engages with and recognises Palestinian national aspirations, he nevertheless maintains the boundaries of Israeliness as Jewishness, since his Arab character is relocated to the margins of Israeli Jewish society at the end of the novel. Shamma questions the division and distinction between Israeli Palestinian and Israeli Jew, not only by writing in Hebrew, but more importantly by blurring the identities of Israeli Palestinian and Israeli Jewish characters in his novel. Shamma advocates an Israeli identity that is de-judaised and consequently able to integrate its Jewish and non-Jewish citizens on an equal level in terms of rights and privileges.

Following the 1967 war, Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza, imposing a harsh military rule on the Palestinians living there. With the occupation Israel started to create 'facts on the ground,' i.e. to seize Palestinian land and build Jewish settlements on it to effectively annex this land to Israel and separate Palestinian villages from each other.<sup>28</sup> Although the International Court of Justice has declared the Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories illegal, as Beverley Milton-Edwards notes (122), Israel maintains these settlements, and more importantly, continues to build them, which makes an evacuation of Jewish settlers from the West Bank very problematic and thus a two-state nearly impossible.<sup>29</sup> The 1993 Oslo Accords promised the Palestinians more autonomy by dividing the West Bank into three areas – A, B, and C – and placing area A under the control and administration of the Palestinian Authority. But in fact, the Oslo Accords served to subordinate the achievement of a Palestinian state to the Zionist goal of retaining as much territory and control as possible. Both Palestinians living in the West Bank and those living in Gaza<sup>30</sup> face daily humiliation and

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<sup>28</sup> For a historical overview of the situation of the Palestinians in Israel and in the occupied territories since 1948 see for example Pappé's *A History of Modern Palestine* (2006) and his recent *The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinians in Israel* (2011).

<sup>29</sup> Abunimah's *One Country* (2006) and Tilley's *The One-State Solution* (2005) offer a detailed analysis of the obstacles to a two-state solution.

<sup>30</sup> Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon evacuated the Jewish settlements in Gaza in 2005, but as Reinhart has rightly asserted, this apparent concession was a strategic move to focus his efforts on the expansion of settlements in the West Bank. Crucially, Gaza is still under military rule: 'Israel has been forcing the Gaza strip into poverty and despair, in an attempt

violence from Israeli Jewish soldiers (Pappé 2006a: 244). Nevertheless, Israel continues to project an image of itself as a victim threatened by the surrounding hostile Arab nations to justify the state's violation of human rights.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the Palestinians in the West Bank are subjected to economic restrictions, along with restrictions of mobility, which can be aligned with colonial practices.<sup>32</sup> The latest in a number of measures to limit Palestinian mobility and quality of life in the West Bank is the Separation Wall that Israel began building on 16 June 2002. Noted Israeli Jewish critic Ilan Pappé has pointed out that the completion of the 750-kilometre wall will result in a lowering of the standard of living of almost half of the population in the West Bank, with many being left homeless or out of work due to the wall (2006a: 289). Allegedly, the wall is built to keep Palestinian 'terrorists' out of Israel and to safeguard Israel's security, but as many critics have asserted, the wall is a strategic move to annex Palestinian territory beyond the Green Line, the agreed border between Israel and the West Bank.<sup>33</sup>

As a result of these oppressive strategies, literary representations of the conflict, and especially of life in the occupied territories, usually focus on the 'affirmative stance in the face of the disadvantages imposed on the daily life of the individual, and of the negative publicity applied to the Palestinian cause' (Jayyusi 66). Unsurprisingly, the general tendency in Palestinian literature is to represent the Israeli Jews as an undifferentiated inhumane

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to break the Palestinians' spirit and force them into accepting prison life.' Internationally, the 'economic strangulation' of Gaza is represented as Israeli 'self-defence' to prevent Palestinian uprisings (Reinhart 31, 55, 59). Literature from Gaza will not be included in this study, since the only Jewish presence in Gaza are the Israeli military, which does not allow for a nuanced evaluation of Palestinian encounters with 'human' Jewishness due to the absence of civilians.

<sup>31</sup> For more information about Israel's violation of human rights see the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem ([www.btselem.org](http://www.btselem.org)) and the Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq ([www.alhaq.org](http://www.alhaq.org)). For human rights violations during the second intifada, see the Amnesty International Report *Broken Lives – A Year of Intifada* (2001).

<sup>32</sup> As Rubenberg, amongst others, points out, Israel controls exports and imports along with the movement of people between Gaza and the West Bank by means of permits, thus impeding economic development (48, 114). For an early analysis of the economic, social, and cultural consequences of colonialism in the case of Africa see Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), which also examines specific procedures employed to restrict mobility and development of the indigenous populations in the colonies.

<sup>33</sup> See for example Pappé's second edition of *A History of Modern Palestine* (2006) and Bhattacharyya's 'Globalizing Racism and Myths of the Other in the "War on Terror"' (2008).

mass which oppresses the Palestinian people, as Palestinian encounters with Israeli Jews are mainly in the form of settlers and soldiers.<sup>34</sup> In these accounts, Jewish victimhood only exists as an abstract concept used to justify the occupation of the Palestinian territories rather than being linked to individual human suffering. In chapter five, I examine depictions of Israeli Jews as settlers, soldiers, and civilians during the first and second intifadas in the works of two Palestinian authors, Sahar Khalifeh and Raja Shehadeh. This chapter opposes depictions of inhumane Jewishness in the forms of soldiers, reminiscent of JanMohamed's idea that literature is subordinated to political dogma, to attempts to represent and engage with individual Jews as human(e) beings. I map ideas of Jewishness related to Israeliness, and specifically Israeliness as linked to colonialism and oppression, in several of Khalifeh's and Shehadeh's works, to expand on representations and transformations of prevailing ideas of Jewishness from a non-hegemonic perspective.

## II

### **'Knotted Intersections of Histories': Racism and Discrimination**

As I have identified above, Jewish minority existence as a model for other dominated groups, and concepts associated with Jewishness like diaspora, exile, and belonging, can be usefully put into a comparative framework with experiences of colonial domination and European racism. This comparative stance serves not only to determine the parallels in constructing Jewish, colonial, and Palestinian others but also to illustrate the similarities in the methods authors in different geopolitical locations employ to resist hegemonic powers through literature. Most notably, the historical links between Nazism and colonialism have been determined by Aimé Césaire and Hannah Arendt. Césaire famously aligned the ideological procedures of

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<sup>34</sup> A good overview of the relationship between Israeli and Palestinian identities and the ways in which history and politics shape their interactions can be found in Abdel-Malek and Jacobson's edited collection *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in History and Literature* (1999). See also Jayyusi's introduction to her *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* (1992).

Nazism and colonialism by stating that Hitler ‘applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the “coolies” of India, and the “niggers” of Africa’ (36). In a similar vein, Arendt located the origins of Nazism in anti-Semitic and colonial discourses. She has described racism as ‘the main ideological weapon of imperialistic politics’ (2004: 210) and by drawing on the South African case, she identified racism as the foundation for imperialism, which ‘exploited [racism] as a major political idea’ (2004: 254). She situates racism not only as the basis of imperialism but also demonstrates its centrality to Nazism, foregrounding parallels between the ideological and political foundations of these doctrines: ‘Race-thinking (...) was the ever-present shadow accompanying the development of the comity of European nations, until it finally grew to be the powerful weapon for the destruction of those nations’ (2004: 214).

More often, the discrimination of the Jews has been examined in relation to black racism. Sartre, in his preface to Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), deplored the advent of racism after the French Revolution, which was founded on the values of ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’ (2004: lviii). Instead, Sartre stressed the fact that European society is still dominated by racism, describing the ‘slaves and monsters’ Europe needs to create in order to validate its own humanity: ‘dirty nigger, filthy Jew, dirty Arab’ (2004: lviii). Although not all of these others were subjected to direct European colonial rule, Sartre confirms their shared role as markers of difference for white ‘civilised’ Europe, an idea that is also key to postcolonial studies, which focuses on the construction of colonialism’s others and the relationship between coloniser and colonised.<sup>35</sup> Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), equally collocated the common ‘difference’ of black and Jewish people, but he concluded that:

The Jew can be unknown in his Jewishness. He is not wholly what he is. His actions, his behavior are the final determinant. He is a white man, and, apart from some rather debatable characteristics, he can sometimes go unnoticed. (2008: 87)

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<sup>35</sup> See for example some of the founding texts of postcolonial theory: Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965), and Said’s *Orientalism* (1978).

His comparison significantly differs from Sartre's. Even though he acknowledges the ideological similarities in black and Jewish racism, he considers the Jew as a 'white' man, who is not visibly different from white hegemonic society.<sup>36</sup>

In light of these connections, unsurprisingly, Paul Gilroy has called for an increased attention to the 'knotted intersections of histories' (78), illustrating the ideological, political, and economic analogies between different histories and the specific points at which their origins and methods coincide.<sup>37</sup> In trauma studies, academics and practitioners have engaged with the parallels between Jewish history and other histories, especially in considering the Holocaust as a paradigmatic case study because of the number of victims and the types of traumas it produced in its aftermath.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the Holocaust plays a key role in genocide studies, which often centres on the Holocaust as the quintessential modern genocide. Mark Levene has identified the Holocaust as a 'yardstick' for other genocides while at the same time being 'cordoned off' by a uniqueness discourse prohibiting comparisons with the Holocaust (2).<sup>39</sup> Michael Rothberg's recent *Multidirectional Memory: The Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009) builds on the idea of 'knotted intersections of histories' and applies it to memory studies. He critiques attempts to judge suffering and to put different types of traumas into competition with each other. As a result, he proposes that 'we consider memory as *multidirectional*: as subject to on-

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<sup>36</sup> Fanon describes the Jews in a very idealised way, especially in *Black Skin, White Masks*. He sees them as models for other oppressed groups; however, he does not acknowledge that the Jews' emergence from powerlessness by creating a Jewish state in Palestine resulted in the dispossession and oppression of the Palestinians.

<sup>37</sup> Gilroy is not the only one to note these connections. The United States have a long history of Black-Jewish relations, for an overview of their interactions across the centuries see Salzman's *Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States* (1997). The expression of this relationship in literature is examined in Budick's *Blacks and Jews in Literary Conversation* (1998) and Newton's *Facing Black and Jew: Literature as Public Space in Twentieth-Century America* (1999). A more recent account of Black-Jewish relations in the United States can be found in Sundquist's *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (2005).

<sup>38</sup> See for example Felman and Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) and LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001).

<sup>39</sup> A similar account is offered by Bloxham and Moses who describe 'genocide studies [as] part offspring, part uneasy junior partner to, the longer standing discipline Holocaust studies' (3). They acknowledge the centrality of the Holocaust to genocide studies but equally caution against a focus on the Holocaust at the exclusion of other genocides and they refuse the Holocaust as a 'unique' event (4).

going negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative' (2009: 3). Although memory studies as such does not play a major role in my study, I adopt Rothberg's idea of 'negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing' in the case of Jewishness. I contend that an adaptation of ideas of Jewishness by Jewish, postcolonial, and Palestinian authors is a productive framework to analyse the employment of 'Jewish' tropes like diaspora, belonging, and otherness in literature and to stress the fact that neither the Holocaust, colonialism, nor the Israeli-Palestinian conflict exist in a vacuum but emerged out of interconnected histories and ideologies. Nazism's roots can be found in colonialism, and the persecution of the Jews in Europe led to the establishment of the state of Israel, which in turn created a new group of others: the Palestinians. By linking ideas of Jewish otherness and minority to the postcolonial, but also to the Palestinian context, my thesis firmly aligns Europe's and Israel's others and consolidates the connections between the creation of different outsider groups.

### **Israel, Palestine, and Postcolonial Studies**

Israel/Palestine is generally regarded as one of the cases which does not fit the postcolonial label neatly.<sup>40</sup> The Jewish state has its origins in settler-colonialism<sup>41</sup> and as Nur Masalha has rightly pointed out, 'Zionism, like all European settler colonial movements, had to demonise and dehumanise the indigenous people in its path in order to legitimise their displacement and dispossession' (44). Israel cultivates an image of itself based on a mythology

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<sup>40</sup> See for example Massad's 'The "Post-Colonial" Colony: Time, Space, and Bodies in Israel/Palestine' (2000) and *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians* (2006) as well as Shohat's 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial"' (1992).

<sup>41</sup> For more information on the early Jewish settlers in Palestine see Shafir's *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (1996) and Bunton's *Colonial Land Policies in Palestine, 1917-1936* (2007). An early analysis of Israel as a settler-colonial state can be found in Rodinson's *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* (1973). The idea of Zionism as a settler-colonial movement is widely disputed, especially in Zionist circles (see Shindler's 2008 *A History of Modern Zionism*). Massad's 'The "Post-Colonial" Colony: Time, Space, and Bodies in Israel/Palestine' (2000) examines the relationship between Zionism and colonialism, and Pappé's *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006) similarly explicitly positions Zionism as a settler-colonial movement by examining the procedures employed by the Jewish settlers to dispossess and disperse the Palestinians in preparation for the creation of a Jewish state.

of postcoloniality, emphasising the 1948 war as a war of independence that liberated the Jews from the yoke of British imperialism. The idea of Israel as a 'postcolonial' state also suggests that its colonisation of Palestine transformed this 'third world' territory into the only 'democracy' in the Middle East, aligning the creation of the Jewish state with the 'civilising' mission of European imperial powers. However, Israel still occupies Palestinian land and employs colonial practices against the people living in the occupied territories, thus Palestine can certainly not be considered as *postcolonial* in a temporal or economic sense. Examining Israel/Palestine through a postcolonial lens offers useful insights into the similarities between Israel and other colonial powers and crucially, challenges Israeli exceptionalism but also its claims to 'postcoloniality.'<sup>42</sup> Most interestingly, the case of Israel/Palestine portrays the 'Jew' in a new light: as part of the hegemony and the dominant group in a Jewish state. I do not want to suggest that Jewish selfhood is only possible in Israel (a discussion of alternative models of Jewish identity will follow in the section 'Diaspora and the Jews') but my focus is on Israel/Palestine as the geographical location where the transition from Jewish other to Jewish self is effected according to Zionist ideology. Crucially, Israeli Jewish literature confirms the shift from 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.<sup>43</sup> In addition, it is indispensable to read Palestinian

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<sup>42</sup> The prominence of Israeli exceptionalism in European and North American societies, compounded by the Holocaust and ideas of Jewish victimhood, results in an unwillingness to address criticism to Israel for fear of being accused of anti-Semitism, which is also one of the reasons for the reluctance of postcolonial theory, and postcolonial studies in general, to address the issue of Israel/Palestine more directly and consistently. Recognising Israel/Palestine as a (post)colonial problematic would entail moving beyond a focus on the Holocaust to interrogate the involvement and complicity of Europe and the West in the founding of Israel and the continued support of a nation that violates human rights and oppresses another people.

<sup>43</sup> Israeli settler-colonialism can be situated within a tradition of groups that have been marginalised and victimised in Europe and decided to leave and settle outside of Europe, and subsequently became the dominant groups in their respective countries. In the case of Israel I am specifically interested in its self-portrayal as a persecuted minority, even after the creation of a Jewish state, representing itself as a victimised group while victimising others, and the unwillingness in European and North American societies to address the

literature in tandem with Israeli Jewish literature, since the Palestinian angle offers productive insights into representations of Jewishness as Israeliness – particularly the role of settler-colonialism in the construction of Israeli Jewish identity – from a non-hegemonic point of view.

Of course, Palestine has in some ways been central to postcolonial theory. The Palestinian critic and author Edward Said has written one of the foundational texts of postcolonial studies, namely *Orientalism* (1978), which was followed by a wealth of other critical work, like *The Question of Palestine* (1980). Barbara Harlow's seminal text *Resistance Literature* (1987) takes Palestine as its case study to establish claims about the place of literature in resistance. She expands on the Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani's notion of resistance poetry, elaborated in his study *Literature of the Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966*, to include literature in general, which leads her to the conclusion that 'literature (...) is presented as an arena of struggle' (2). Nevertheless, as Anna Bernard has pointed out, in postcolonial studies, Palestine is usually only mentioned as an exception (2010c: 3), when actually it fits the colonial mould in many ways. Palestine is not only occupied and colonised by another power but the procedures used against the Palestinian population inside and outside the Green Line are characteristic of settler-colonial movements. Elkins and Pedersen have identified one of these characteristics as the presence of 'pervasive inequalities, usually codified in law, between settler and indigenous population' (4), which is obvious in the case of the Palestinians living in Israel who are barred from equal Israeli citizenship rights. Through my work, I hope to put Palestine, and more specifically Israeli Palestinian and Palestinian literature, firmly on the map of postcolonial studies by elaborating on similarities between the Palestinian case and colonial and postcolonial subjects, especially in terms of colonisation, resistance, and their representation of hegemonic powers, which can be closely aligned with colonial and postcolonial practices of writing back to the centre. In addition, I want to show that reading Israeli Jewish literature through a

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Israeli occupation of Palestine in a colonial and postcolonial setting, for the reasons explained above.

postcolonial lens is valuable in terms of identity, nationalism,<sup>44</sup> and ambivalence, since Israel, although not a straightforward postcolonial state, is after all the state of a group of people that have suffered discrimination and persecution as Europe's others and perceives itself as having emerged out of an anti-colonial struggle against British imperialism.

### **Diaspora and the Jews**

In the context of diaspora studies, the Jewish diaspora plays a central role as it is seen as the precedent for postcolonial and other diasporas. Although diaspora was once specifically associated with the dispersal of the Jews, in contemporary culture it 'is now more likely to evoke a plethora of global movements and migrations' (Keown et al. 1). Yet the Jewish connotation that the term carries is particularly problematic in the Palestinian context, as it equates Jewish statelessness before the creation of a Jewish state with the Palestinian expulsion from their homeland resulting from the establishment of Israel in 1948. Moreover, as Patrick Williams notes, the term 'diaspora' does not convey adequately the complexity of the Palestinian problem, i.e. the millions of refugees in exile, and the Palestinians dispersed within their former homeland that is now occupied by Israel (84). Elaborating on the idea of the Jewish diaspora as a model for other diasporas, Anna Guttman links the concept of diaspora to notions of cosmopolitanism: 'the Jewish diaspora generally has been seen as the theoretical antecedent to the vision of the hybrid, cosmopolitan subject that is now the privileged instantiation of postmodern and (in some circles) postcolonial identity' (65). The dissolution of the diaspora as a Jewish event also reveals another danger: that of using the Jew as a figure of the globalised world. This concept is embodied most strongly in the idea of the Jew as a *Weltbürger*, a cosmopolitan figure, who is 'at home in the world.'

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<sup>44</sup> Cleary's *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State* (2002) makes a case for reading Palestinian and Israeli Jewish literature not only from a postcolonial perspective but also in conjunction with each other. A similar case is made in Bernard's 'Forms of Memory: Partition as a Literary Paradigm' (2010), urging readers of partition literature, which Israeli Jewish and Palestinian literature in certain ways can be seen as forming part of, to pay attention to the similarities in techniques and themes in these texts.

Timothy Brennan notes the prominent association of Jewishness with cosmopolitanism from the late nineteenth century onwards but foregrounds the negative connotations of this connection in Eastern Europe, which equated the Jews' rootlessness with non-belonging, and of course this equation also formed an integral part of Stalin's propagation of anti-Semitism (21). Jewish cosmopolitanism is firmly linked to ideas of perpetual Jewish marginalisation, embodied in the notion of the 'eternally wandering' Jew. Aligning tropes associated with Jewish identity and postcolonial identity is essential for both Jewish and postcolonial studies to open up new comparative frameworks that interrogate and develop the application of one set of critical tools to a different context. However, I do not see this comparison as resting on the facile idea of the Jew as a 'cosmopolitan' figure, who can easily travel between contexts and locations. Rather, I argue, as will be most obvious in chapter three, that the experience of the Jew as a minority is the most productive framework for comparison with majorities that have been dispossessed and marginalised as a result of colonialism and racism, along with the idea of the Jew as a liminal and ambiguous figure, an idea that changes according to the social, political, and historical context in which it is situated.

Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin offer a compelling reading of diaspora as an alternative to the nation-state, which avoids the erasure of cultural difference and instead embraces its diasporic and diverse nature, 'propos[ing] Diaspora as a theoretical and historical model to replace national self-determination' (711). They clearly oppose a Jewish identity linked to a Jewish homeland that perpetrates occupation and instead they posit diaspora as a moral alternative to living in Israel. According to them, 'Diaspora can teach us that it is possible for a people to maintain its distinctive culture, its difference, without controlling land, a fortiori without controlling other people or developing a need to dispossess them of their lands' (Boyarin and Boyarin 723). Their view of an alternative Jewish identity offers a critique of the Zionist idea that a Jewish state allows Jews to simultaneously maintain their difference and achieve political sovereignty, without acknowledging the consequences of the settler-colonial project for

the Palestinians, but also for the Jewish population in terms of security and anti-Semitism. In 1944, Hannah Arendt foreshadowed this split between Zionism and world Jewry: 'by their interpretation of Palestine in the future life of Jewish people, the Zionists shut themselves off from the destiny of the Jews all over the world' (2007: 361).

The concept of an alternative Jewish identity confirms this division and is taken up by David Landy's notion of a 'diasporist identity,' which is 'a Jewish sense of self, forwarded by Jews in the diaspora and often constructed *against* hegemonic Zionism' (41, my emphasis). Similar to Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, Landy imagines diaspora as an alternative to Israel. However, he explicitly disconnects the notion of diaspora from the concept of homeland, thus proposing diaspora as a political and ideological stance opposed to the Jewish homeland, which allows Jews to be critical of Israel and to question Israel as speaking for all Jews. Landy places 'diasporism' at the centre of this identity, not as a mythical exodus or as a scattering of passive victims, but as a conscious choice:

Diasporism asserts that the place for Jews is in the diaspora, and more than this, that the qualities of being a diaspora subject are elements of Jewish identity. These qualities include hybridity, universalism and rejection of nationalism while maintaining a sense of Jewish collectivity. (41)

Landy proposes a collective Jewish existence outside of Israel, which is bound by its common opposition to and rejection of Zionism, challenging the idea of Jewish life in the diaspora as inferior and passive. Boyarin and Boyarin attribute similar qualities to Jewishness as they see Jewish identity in the diaspora as refractory to conventional models of identity: 'Jewishness disrupts the very categories of identity because it is not national, not geographical, not religious, but all of these in dialectical tension with one another' (721). Although the Boyarins' observation dates from the 1990s, recent work on Diaspora Jewishness, like Landy's work, revisits their argument, which decentres the Israeli state as the focal point of Jewish identity. This account of diaspora is also captured in Ephraim Nimni's *The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics* (2003), which postulates post-Zionism as a challenge to Zionism's

assumption that 'security for persecuted minorities can be provided only by nation states in which these minorities become majorities' (6-7) and contests the political subordination of 'the interests and securities of Jewish communities to those of the State of Israel' (117). As these interpretations of Jewish identity outside of Israel affirm, ambivalence is pertinent to Jewish *diaspora* identity. Building on this assertion, I contend that the tension and ambivalence between minority and majority, powerlessness and power, is also present in Jewish and Palestinian literature from Israel/Palestine, which is not necessarily written from a diaspora vantage point. As a result, my study elucidates the internal tensions within Israel/Palestine in relation to the predominance of Jewish ethnicity over other ethnicities and the portrayal of this hierarchy, with its attendant discrimination, in literature.

### **Postcolonial Theory and the Jew**

Contrary to postcolonial literature, the figure of the Jew is a very elusive presence, or rather a tangible absence, in postcolonial theory. Of course, strictly speaking, the Jew does not neatly fit into the category of the 'colonial' nor the 'postcolonial' as the Jewish people were never directly colonised.<sup>45</sup> In their foundational work *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989) Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin try to define 'post-colonial' literatures, and as a result, they delineate areas worthy of critical inquiry in a postcolonial context: 'the literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka' (2). Their exhaustive list contains one blatant geographical blind spot: the Middle East, and consequently Israel/Palestine. Moreover, even though resistance and 'writing back' is at

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<sup>45</sup> A case can be made for Nazism as demonstrating ideological and practical similarities to settler-colonialism in their quest for territorial expansion, which would make the Jews colonial subjects: see for example Zimmerer 'Colonialism and the Holocaust – Towards an Archaeology of Genocide' (2008). This assessment is also confirmed in Mazower's monograph *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (2008), which makes a convincing link between the rise of Nazism and Germany's aspirations as a colonial power. In addition, before World War II, the Jews were in some ways seen as complicit with colonial and oriental practices in Germany. An elaboration of this argument can be found in Riebert's 'Subjects and Agents of Empire: German-Jews in Post-Colonial Perspective' (2009).

the centre of their work, they do not link this 'post-colonial' practice to the Jews' cultural resistance to Nazism.<sup>46</sup> Another major work in the field, Chrisman and Williams's reader *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory* (1993), brings together some of the best-known critics in the field like Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Edward Said, but Palestine only figures as an aside. Examples of this tendency can be found in Stuart Hall's essay 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' an essay that links the fate of the Palestinians to the Jewish diaspora (401) and in Aijaz Ahmad's critique of Said's *Orientalism*, where Palestine is used to put Said's essay in a geographical and political context (168, 170). Yet the figure of the Jew is completely absent from this collection, apart from an implied presence through an excerpt from Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*. Ania Loomba's introductory volume *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, published in 1998, a decade after Ashcroft et al.'s work, can be accused of the same oversight. Her work provides a brilliant overview and explanation of key themes and concerns in postcolonial studies, but she does not elaborate on the comparison between Jewish discrimination and colonial oppression.<sup>47</sup> One explanation for the generally fleeting presence of the Jew can certainly be found in the time of publication of these works. Postcolonial studies as a discipline emerged in the late 1980s, and in the early years focused on more mainstream colonial cases and themes, laying the foundation for later criticism.<sup>48</sup>

Yet, this location of the Jew, and Israel/Palestine, at the margins of the field, is still predominant in twenty-first-century postcolonial criticism.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> In 2002, they published a revised edition of this work, however, the list still remains the same, excluding Israel and Palestine.

<sup>47</sup> In her conclusion, Loomba refers to the Jews as a religious threat to Christianity in Europe and posits Jews and Muslims in early modern Europe as an example of the fallibility of racial distinctions but she does not investigate the legacies of this outsider status in the following centuries, let alone today.

<sup>48</sup> Notable exceptions to this tendency, as we have seen above, are Césaire and Fanon, and if we include less obvious 'postcolonial' thinkers, Arendt and Sartre.

<sup>49</sup> Young's monumental *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001) offers a nuanced introduction to postcolonialism, drawing comparisons between the Nazi regime and European imperialism and mentioning Palestine as an area of anti-colonial struggle. However, the work as a whole does not take the comparison between Nazism and colonialism further nor does it consider Palestine as a case study (although it includes many 'niche' postcolonial locations, like China and Latin America).

Jenni Ramone's 2011 monograph *Postcolonial Theories* offers an insightful discussion of 'postcolonial theories,' but only mentions the 'Jew' twice.<sup>50</sup> In the opening pages, she provides a 'Timeline of Key Events and Texts' with the disclaimer that this timeline presents 'some key historical events and important publications, plotting items covered within this book' (xiii). The timeline includes the Second World War, but the author fails to align the practices of Nazism and colonialism. 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). This lack of a historically grounded narration of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the context of postcolonial theory repeats the omissions of mainstream metropolitan media and culture by only including selective, up to date events, without analysing the history underlying these events and the connections between European colonialism, World War II, and the conflict in Israel/Palestine.<sup>51</sup>

There are already concepts at work in postcolonial studies that are relevant to the history of ideas of Jewishness without acknowledging it. In her introduction to *The Preoccupation of Postcolonial Studies*, one of the editors, Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, offers a useful insight into the concept of the 'margin,' which plays an important role in my situation of the Jew as an

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<sup>50</sup> The first instance occurs when the author describes the Algerian critic Albert Memmi's Jewish background and the second time the 'Jew' emerges in a quotation from Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, collocating the black diaspora and the Jewish diaspora, a comparison that the author does not expand further.

<sup>51</sup> A counterexample to this tendency can be found in Lazarus's *Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* (2004), which includes a detailed timeline of major events related to Israel/Palestine from the Balfour Declaration in 1917 up to the second intifada in 2000. Other books, which specifically engage with the future of postcolonial studies, for example *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (2005) and *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies* (2000), again do not mention the Jew as a postcolonial figure. In *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* Stein applies canonical thinkers to the case of Israel/Palestine and acknowledges the problems of a 'postcolonial' Israel, which suggests a straightforward and linear narrative (330). *The Preoccupation of Postcolonial Studies* features an article by Massad, who demonstrates the paradox of Israel as a postcolonial state – albeit without applying any postcolonial theory to the situation in Israel/Palestine – as even though the Israeli Jews might consider themselves as 'postcolonial,' the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation certainly see themselves as belonging to a colonial era.

ambivalent figure within postcolonial but also Israel/Palestine studies. Even though she does not explicitly connect this marginality to Jewishness, she explains that:

On the one hand, the margin can be conceived as the subject position – the excluded other that must be coaxed into the center through incorporation, inversion, hybridization, revolution.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, the margin can be conceived as the irreducible remainder – that which is necessarily excluded by every regime of power/knowledge, including that of the discourse of rights.<sup>53</sup> In other words, the margin can be conceived, not so much as that which is external to the power structure, but rather as its constitutive outside, an intimate alterity that marks the limit of power. (12-13)

Similar to colonial and postcolonial subjects, the Jew as a figure of modernity is situated at the margins of society, but in addition, Jewishness can be positioned at the nexus of the two ideas of the margin described above. Albert Paolini, following Zygmunt Bauman,<sup>54</sup> has argued that ‘modernity is a restless quest to overcome otherness and strangeness. In spite of the drive for order and certainty, it produces only difference and ambiguity’ (9). Although he does not explicitly link the notion of modernity to the figure of the Jew, considering the perception of the Jew as outsider and liminal figure across the centuries, the association between the Jew and modernity is discernible. On one hand he or she is an ‘excluded other’ – especially in European societies and later on in Nazi Germany – who has to be assimilated to the centre and made the same to maintain ‘order and certainty.’ On the other hand, the Jew’s refusal to completely assimilate transforms him or her into an ‘intimate alterity that marks the limit of power,’ producing ‘difference and ambiguity,’ in Paolini’s words. I am especially interested in the idea of Jewish difference as a manifestation of

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<sup>52</sup> The author here proposes several methods of remedying the otherness of the marginal subject, which are prominent in colonial and postcolonial studies, among them incorporation (or assimilation) and hybridisation. An interesting presence in this list is revolution, which can be read as the resistance of the colonial other to colonial occupation but oddly clashes with the idea of the other as ‘coaxed’ into the centre, since this suggests an absence of agency on the part of the colonial other.

<sup>53</sup> Arendt is adamant that human rights need to be distinguished from historical rights, i.e. citizenship (2004: 626). According to her, they should be defined as ‘a right to the human condition,’ (2004: 631), which is linked to belonging to a human community. Thus, the conflation of state and rights results in the exclusion of the marginal other from achieving equal rights to the ‘central’ subjects of the state.

<sup>54</sup> See Bauman’s *Modernity and Ambivalence* (1993).

the 'limit of power,' not only in Jewish writing but also in Palestinian representations of the Jews and their position within Israeli national discourse. Specifically I am considering the limits of the power of Jewish victimhood and marginality in a Palestinian and Israeli Palestinian context.

My thesis demonstrates that the idea of the Jew functions as a link between Jewish, Israel/Palestine, and postcolonial studies to put these fields into a critical dialogue with each other. It focuses on the history of European Jewish persecution as well as the creation of a Jewish nation-state as key to consider the links between Nazism, colonialism, and Zionism but also to indicate the future of postcolonial studies, as well as *Jewish* postcolonial studies. Ilan Pappé notes that although there is an examination of Zionism as an example of settler-colonialism, Jewish persecution 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. (2011b: 407)

I suggest that postcolonial literature is already modelling the ways in which postcolonial and Jewish studies can productively be brought together, as will be most obvious in chapter three, which proposes a dialectical approach to ideas of Jewishness and exemplifies the critical reciprocity generated by juxtaposing different minority experiences. Generally, critics agree that the future of postcolonial studies is situated firmly within, and has to critically engage with, the 'global.' Jenni Ramone argues that the future '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). Through my thesis, I want to posit the figure of the Jew and its uses in postcolonial literature as consequential for the future of postcolonial studies. Jewishness presents a challenge to historical essentialism as it traces the move from marginalised and persecuted other in Europe to dominant self in Israel, subverting not only the typical geographical trajectory of the colonised but also the ideological transformation from subjugated to subjugator. As such, Jewishness contests the equation between race and dominance in

colonialism as it demonstrates that 'white' people can also form part of the colonised. Jewishness can productively be read as connecting ideas of minority and majority by having not only moved from one situation to the other but also through the use of the discourse of victimhood and powerlessness in Israel. In addition, a close analysis of the reasons underlying the inclusion of the figure of the Jew, not only in a 'proper' postcolonial context, but also in relation to Israel and Palestine is crucial in order to determine Ramone's relation between 'past and present conflict and contact,' establishing an important link between European colonialism, Nazism, and the creation of a Jewish state in the Middle East by occupying the Palestinian land. Jewishness can be seen not only as a connecting piece but essentially as a key factor in the construction of other identities through its location within discourses of dominance and persecution, analogous to colonial and postcolonial concepts which influence the identity formation of both coloniser and colonised. Although there is a danger for postcolonial literature and theory to exacerbate Enlightenment ideas of Jewish ambivalence, I want to suggest that examining Jewishness as both 'colonised' and 'coloniser' and especially as connecting ideas of powerlessness and dominance is a productive framework not only to consider Israel and Palestine but also to rethink received notions of the trajectory from colonial to postcolonial.

The Holocaust and the creation of Israel, and the accompanying tension between powerlessness and power, play an important role in the first part of this study, which engages with writing set in Germany and in Israel/Palestine. Chapter one considers German-Jewish representations of Jewish victimhood and minority identity after World War II. Both Edgar Hilsenrath's *The Nazi and the Barber* (1971; *Der Nazi und der Friseur* 1977) and Jurek Becker's *Bronstein's Children* (*Bronsteins Kinder* 1982, English translation 1999) represent the struggle and the problems of reappropriating a hyphenated German-Jewish identity after the Holocaust. Hilsenrath blurs the distinctions between Nazi and Jew through his protagonist Max Schulz, who is in turn an Aryan, a Nazi, a Jew, and a Zionist and thus questions accepted representations of victims and perpetrators.

Becker's novel focuses on revenge by interrogating the justification of former Jewish camp inmates, who capture a camp guard and torture him. This chapter also considers the changing role of the Holocaust for second generation East Germans by discussing the generational conflict between a Holocaust survivor and his son. Both novels offer a critical assessment of the categories of victims and perpetrators and challenge the conflation between Jewishness and victimhood in Germany, a criticism that can be extrapolated to the Israeli context as their novels suggest.

The perception of the Jews as victims is equally central to chapter two, which analyses the foundational myths of Zionism, specifically the Holocaust, the Exodus myth, and the Jewish diaspora experience. David Grossman's *See Under Love (Ayien Erech: Ahavah, 1986; English translation 1989)* criticises the Israeli state's attitude towards the Holocaust victims in the 1950s, who were reduced to the image of weak sufferers, opposed to the new Israelis. His child narrator Momik is used to represent an alternative model of encountering and engaging with the survivors and their personal narratives of the Holocaust. Shulamith Hareven's *Thirst: The Desert Trilogy (Tzimaon, 1996; English translation 1996)* also engages with individual experiences rather than collective justification. Her creative rewriting of the Bible questions official Zionist versions of the past and disavows the continuity between the Israeli present and a unified Jewish biblical past. Both authors propose an aesthetic engagement with the foundational myths of Zionism and offer alternatives to Zionist depictions of Jewish identity to advocate an Israeli Jewish identity that is inclusive of earlier ideas of Jewishness. Consequently, they consider the Diaspora and the Holocaust as integral parts of Israeli Jewish identity, not as 'mythical' events but as instances of human suffering.

The third chapter traces the inclusion of Jewish minority identity, diaspora, and Jewish suffering in postcolonial literature. Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay (1988)* and Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood (1997)* position the Holocaust as a paradigmatic instance of suffering for Europe to demonstrate the predicament of victims of racism and colonialism at the hands of European powers. Both authors borrow elements of the

Jewish minority condition in Europe before 1945, specifically the idea of marginalisation and deracination, in order to interrogate tropes associated with colonial and postcolonial Indian Muslim identity and Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jewish identity in post-independence Israel. The novels rework ubiquitous concepts such as home, belonging, and exile, which are considered to have their origin in the Jewish 'condition' – as a result of the stereotypical view of the Jews as a 'homeless' and 'wandering' people – in a postcolonial context to illustrate the ways in which Jewish tropes are used to create comparative frameworks for other minorities' suffering. Crucially though, examining Jewishness from a postcolonial angle also draws attention to the similarities between postcolonial nation-formation and the creation of a Jewish homeland, especially in terms of creating myths to consolidate the budding national community, and the reliance on a liberation struggle to facilitate the emergence of a nation, opening up a critical dialogue between postcolonial and Jewish postcolonial studies, extending the comparative focus between these two fields beyond notions of diaspora and migration, to include nationalism and settler-colonialism.

The fourth chapter moves back to Israel and situates the Israeli Jewish writer Yehoshua's *The Lover* alongside the Israeli Palestinian Shammas's *Arabesques* to consider ideas of Jewishness in works that attempt to represent a Palestinian and a Jewish character respectively and to investigate the boundaries of Israeliness proposed by Yehoshua and Shammas in their fiction. While Yehoshua recognises the Palestinian right to self-determination, he refuses a full inclusion of Israeli Palestinians in the Israeli national discourse, since he equates Israeliness with Jewishness. Shammas challenges this exclusionary view of the Israeli national space by writing in Hebrew and including an Israeli Jewish character, who is a thinly veiled version of Yehoshua, in his novel. This confrontation of Israeli Jewish and Israeli Palestinian views about Israeli identity and the Israeli Jewish discrimination against Israeli Palestinians living inside Israel contests ideas of victimhood and minority identity in Israeli Jewish culture and their use in Israel's security discourse, and situates the Israeli Palestinians as second-

class citizens excluded from fully belonging to the Israeli political and cultural sphere.

The last chapter turns to the Palestinian context and examines encounters with Jewishness as Israeliness in Raja Shehadeh's *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank* (1982), *The Sealed Room: Selections from the Diary of a Palestinian Living Under Israeli Occupation* (1992) and *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (2008), and Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns* (*Al-Sabbar* 1976; English translation 1985) and *The End of Spring* (*Rabi' Harr: RiHlat al-sabr wa al sabbar* 2004; English translation 2008). Both authors critically engage with Jewishness and the Jewish history of suffering and they represent encounters with humane Jewishness, which deviates from the tendency to represent the enemy exclusively as 'antagonistic alterity,' in Abdul JanMohamed's words. Nevertheless, the authors insist that any coexistence between Israeli Jews and Palestinians needs to be preceded by the end of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Moreover, Israel needs to recognise its role in perpetrating injustices against the Palestinian people since the creation of the Israeli state, which is why Khalifeh and Shehadeh in general refuse to imagine and engage with the Israeli Jew as settler and soldier, representatives of the Israeli government that oppresses them.

The literary texts included in this study establish Jewishness as a heterogeneous concept that changes according to the social and political context in which it is located. However, my study contests dehistoricised ideas of Jewishness and considers the decontextualisation of the figure of the Jew as problematic. Every chapter proposes a different angle to engage with ideas of Jewishness, but all of them stress the fact that contemporary ideas about Jewishness combine elements of both minority and majority, other and self, and through this liminality, Jewishness can be considered as an identity to construct and to evaluate other identities, whether Jewish or non-Jewish.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **The Complexities of Victimhood: Ambiguous Jewishness in German-Jewish Holocaust Literature**

#### **Victims and Perpetrators in Post-War Germany**

Germany is still known first and foremost as the country that perpetrated the Holocaust, and even the third generation of Germans feel they have to come to terms with the German past as 'Nazis.' Omer Bartov elucidates the complicated relationship between the categories of 'Nazi' and 'Jew' in the early post-war years in West Germany: "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). The Nazi was believed to be inside every German, and perceived as a threat similar to the Jews during World War II. 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, which occurred in both West and East Germany. Thus, after the Holocaust, the Jews in Germany were still primarily defined through their victimhood<sup>1</sup> and opposed in their quintessential, and essentially passive, victimisation to the Nazi as the active embodiment of evil. Although the German Jews considered their identities to be both German and Jewish, when they returned to Germany they were not seen as part of the German nation, but rather, their identities were predominately defined as victims of the Nazis, and by extension, of Germany. Just as the Nazi was fixed in his position of evil, so was the Jew entangled with ideas of victimhood, reifying the Nazi-Jew, perpetrator-victim binary advocated by Nazi ideology. Jews in post-war Germany had to come to terms with Germany as a nation of 'perpetrators,'

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that while this perception prevails in both East and West Germany, in the East German national discourse the Holocaust was repressed as incompatible with the official anti-fascist nature of the state, which will be discussed in more detail in the second part of this chapter.

as well as the restrictive equation between Jewishness and victimhood. In addition, they had to reclaim access to a German culture and nation that delineated its boundaries through the exclusion of the Jews, who were not perceived to be German, or indeed as desiring to be German.

The tension between recovering a Jewish identity and reconciling this identity, as far as possible, with German culture, is reflected and re-examined in many of the literary productions of the German Jews after the Holocaust.<sup>2</sup> By focusing on two novels published in the 1970s and 1980s respectively – Edgar Hilsenrath’s *Der Nazi und der Friseur* (1977; *The Nazi and the Barber*, 1971) and Jurek Becker’s *Bronsteins Kinder* (1986; *Bronstein’s Children*, 1999) – I deliberately choose not to engage with the works written in the more immediate post-war years that allowed these authors to work through their experiences of the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> Rather I consider their more critical engagements with the Holocaust and Jewish victimhood, particularly the capacity of literature to contest the clear-cut categories of victim and perpetrator that allow the authors to propose an ambiguous Jewish identity poised between Jewishness and Germanness. In Hilsenrath’s case, this creative engagement, which could be more adequately described as a creative challenge, is achieved by means of satire and the blurring of the boundaries between Nazi and Jew, perpetrator and victim, in pre-war and post-war Germany. Satire as a political and narrative tool to magnify and ridicule certain qualities enables the blurring of differences by facilitating the inversion of received ideas of Nazi and Jew and as a self-reflexive means to comment on the instability of any identity.<sup>4</sup> Becker uses the generational gap between a Holocaust survivor and his son to address the links between victimhood and justification, and sets his novel in East Germany, the self-proclaimed ‘anti-fascist’ state. Both authors contest the distinction between victim and perpetrator and the consequences of

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<sup>2</sup> See for example O’Dochartaigh’s edited collection *Jews in German Literature Since 1945: German-Jewish Literature?* (2000).

<sup>3</sup> For Hilsenrath, this ‘working through’ was achieved in his first novel *Nacht* (1964; *Night* 1966), whereas Becker’s earlier ‘Holocaust novels’ are *Jakob der Lügner* (1969; *Jacob the Liar* 1990) and *Der Boxer* (1976; *The Boxer* 2002).

<sup>4</sup> The blurring of boundaries is certainly risky, as the German publication history of *Der Nazi und der Friseur* confirms. In the United States, the novel was well received by the American press, although it was ignored by the *New York Times* (Braun 175).

victimisation, not only for the victim but also for the victimiser. 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. Another reason for a focus on their later works, and indeed, the reason for pairing these authors, is their position as secular Jews, who see Jewishness as heritage and a cultural category rather than a religious or ethnic denomination. Both refuse the idea of Jewishness as a physical characteristic visible from outside and investigate the ways in which Jewishness is constructed through, and in opposition to, anti-Semitism and later on, philo-Semitism. Furthermore, their works can be read as a challenge to Zionism 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.

Hilsenrath's *Der Nazi und der Friseur* focuses on the Nazi Max Schulz, who assumes his Jewish childhood friend's identity after World War II in order to escape punishment for his crimes as a camp guard. He subsequently becomes a Zionist and moves to Israel. Through his protagonist, the author contests the distinction between perpetrator and victim, Nazi and Jew, suggesting that anyone can be a perpetrator. He challenges the equation between German and Nazi at the same time that he questions the Nazis' definition of Jewishness as visible from outside through his use of satire. In discussing the role of ambiguity in the relationship between self and other, Esther Benbassa argues that:

The ambiguousness of the figure of the other as a socio-cultural construct reflects the ambiguousness of the one who produces it. The reason is that the other is always another self: a mirror, and at the same time a foil. (2004: x)

I contend that the character Max functions both as a 'mirror' and as a 'foil' for Hilsenrath himself as the character's ambiguous reasons for adopting Jewish identity, in turn opportunistic and humanistic, and his ambiguity

towards the categories of German, Jew, and Zionist, reflect the author's own position in relation to reductive ideas about Germanness, Jewishness and even Israeliness and the possibility of hyphenated identities. In his novel, Jurek Becker exhibits a similar anti-essentialist stance in relation to the role of the Holocaust and victimhood in post-war Jewish identity formation in East Germany. His novel *Bronsteins Kinder*, usually considered part of his Holocaust 'trilogy,'<sup>5</sup> follows three Jewish Holocaust survivors in East Berlin who capture a former Nazi camp guard and try to make him confess his crimes through torture. The events are narrated from the perspective of Hans, the eighteen-year old son of one of the survivors. The generational conflict, and the choice of having an 'outsider,' a non-Holocaust survivor, as the narrator, allows Becker to achieve a distance similar to the satirical detachment of Hilsenrath's novel. He examines the role of the Holocaust in the lives of second generation German Jews, and specifically in 1970s East Germany, where the novel is set. The transformation of Jews from victims into perpetrators raises questions about victimhood and rights, and victimhood as a justification for turning into victimisers, 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).

The links between Jewish victimhood, Germany, and Israel can be situated within recent debates about the comparability of the Holocaust to other genocides and attempts to link colonialism and the Holocaust.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Rock's 'Creating Memory in the Search for Identity: The Holocaust Fiction of Jurek Becker' (2003) and Brown's 'Jurek Becker's Holocaust Fiction: A Father and a Son Survive' (1989).

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of scholars who use a comparative approach see Moses's 'The Holocaust and Genocide' (2004) and Stone's *Histories of the Holocaust* (2010) (particularly chapter five: 'Genocide, the Holocaust and the History of Colonialism'). Since the late 1990s, with the publication of Zantop's *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770-1870* (1997), German colonialism has been acknowledged as playing a significant role in Nazi ideology. Hitler's vision of *Lebensraum* is presented as comparable to territorial conquests in colonialism and the racial policies of Nazism are aligned with colonial visions of race. At the forefront of this comparative project between Nazism and colonialism is Zimmerer, who links colonialism and Nazism by showing the similarities in their uses of the concepts of 'space and race,' situating the German colonial genocide of the Herero people in Namibia alongside the extermination of the Jews during World War II. See for example his articles 'The Birth of the Ostland out of the Spirit of Colonialism: A

However, in comparison to colonial others, the Jews occupied a less straightforwardly subjugated position. First of all, many Jews, especially in Germany, tried to assimilate<sup>7</sup> and were not 'visibly' other. Nevertheless, they were perceived as 'outsiders inside,' which also manifested itself in their attitude vis-à-vis colonial practices. Leo Riegert argues that before World War II the Jews were often complicit, albeit not necessarily knowingly, in Orientalist and colonial practices: '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 discriminatory 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 again demonstrates the liminality of the Jews within Europe, which I suggest at once facilitates and explains the 'fascination' with Jewishness, and the ambiguity associated with it. I am interested in the situation of the Jews within colonial discourses as an example and a confirmation of the ambiguous status that the Jews held in the German popular imagination since the Enlightenment period and in Nazi ideology, positing them both as 'coloniser' and 'colonised,' victimisers and victimised.

My focus is, moreover, on the ideological and political implications of this recent surge in comparisons between Nazism and colonialism, which questions the uniqueness discourse that the Holocaust is still endowed with by certain academics, disciplines, and institutions. I do not want to claim in any way that the suffering of the Jewish victims during the Holocaust is negligible. Nevertheless, I believe that it is crucial to examine the Holocaust in a comparative perspective, not only to place the Nazi genocide in a

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Postcolonial Perspective on the Nazi Policy of Conquest and Extermination' (2005) and 'Colonialism and the Holocaust – Towards an Archaeology of Genocide' (2008).

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of early encounters between Jews and German culture see Sorkin's *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (1987). An account of constructions of Germanness and the Jews' position within German national discourse since the founding of the German Reich in 1871 is offered in Berger's *Germany* (2004).

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 opens up critical debates about Israeli Jews as victimisers 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. I consider the ways in which Hilsenrath and Becker engage with these ideas in their novels and how the Jew as an ambiguous figure offers a political tool that enables a critical evaluation of victimhood in Germany and Israel. Literature as an ambiguous medium open to different interpretations contests Jewishness as a clearly defined identity category and confirms the ambiguity of the Jew as situated between minority and majority. Rather than examining 'the Jew' as an abstract concept, both authors pay attention to the Jew as an individual and use the instability of the figure of the Jew as a means to refute Jewish exceptionalism.

### **Good Jews and Bad Germans? Satire, Humanism, and Opportunism**

Edgar Hilsenrath's *Der Nazi und der Friseur* was refused by over 60 publishers in Germany before being first published in the United States in 1971 in English translation. Helmut Braun elucidates the reasons underlying the publisher's refusal to print Hilsenrath's novel:

Everyone agreed that dealing with the Shoah in the form of a very angry and pitch-black satire, which was written exclusively from the perpetrator's perspective, was completely inappropriate and therefore unacceptable. (190)<sup>8</sup>

Hilsenrath departs from the canon of Holocaust literature in two significant ways: he represents the Holocaust exclusively from the perpetrator's perspective and he uses the form of satire to approach a topic as sensitive as the Holocaust.<sup>9</sup> He subverts conventions related to the depictions of Nazi

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<sup>8</sup> All translations from works published in German are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>9</sup> Adequate representations of the Holocaust are widely disputed. Langer's *The Holocaust and Literary Imagination* (1975) considers appropriate aesthetic methods for representing the Holocaust in literature. Rothberg's *Traumatic Realism* (2000) engages with the opposition between realistic and anti-realistic approaches to representing the Holocaust in

perpetrators, as he is the first German Holocaust survivor who represents the Holocaust exclusively from the perpetrator's perspective, but he also repudiates 'the image of the Jew after 1945 as a taboo or icon' (Braun 195) by satirising not only the Aryan/Nazi but also the Jew. Dustin Griffin has noted that satire always exhibits a 'fascination with folly, imaginative excitement or ambivalence' (51). Hilsenrath's novel certainly reveals a fascination with ambivalence in that he portrays the Holocaust from the perpetrator's perspective and through his inconclusive protagonist, who is in turn a German, a Nazi, a Jew, and a Zionist.

Why would a Jew, and a Holocaust survivor, want to write about the Holocaust from a Nazi's perspective? Hilsenrath has explained that:

I wanted to tell the story of National Socialism from two perspectives, the perspective of the Nazi and the perspective of the Jew. So I had the idea of creating a person that is both, Nazi and Jew. (personal interview)

By combining these two 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 post-war Germany. 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). 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 after 1945. His character Max's motivation for becoming a Jew fluctuates between opportunism and humanism, as on one hand he becomes a Jew after World War II in order to escape punishment for his Nazi crimes, but on the other hand he immerses himself in Jewish history and culture. Both humanism and opportunism are satirically magnified to criticise post-war German philo-Semitism as well as the idea of the German people as *Mitläufer*, followers, who cannot be blamed for their deeds.

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literature. More recently, Kaplan has investigated the ethics of aesthetic 'pleasure' in relation to Holocaust art broadly speaking in his *Unwanted Beauty: Aesthetic Pleasure in Holocaust Representation* (2007).

Opposing a humanist reading of Max's desire for convergence to an opportunistic approach reflects the difficulty of defining post-war German-Jewish identity in the light of images of the 'good' Jew contrasted with the 'bad' German and the possibility of combining Jewishness with Germanness. By ridiculing ideas of Jewishness and Germanness as clear-cut and diametrically opposed, Hilsenrath is able to separate the signifiers 'Jew' and 'German' from the stereotypes of victim and perpetrator they have been conflated with since 1945.

The challenge to the reductive categories of Nazi, German, and Jew is not only achieved through satire but also through Hilsenrath's protagonist Max Schulz, who combines Germanness and Jewishness by becoming 'the Nazi who lived as a Jew.'<sup>10</sup> From the beginning of the novel, the author insists on the impossibility of distinguishing between Jew and Aryan through their physical appearance, as Max is portrayed as embodying the caricature of the Jew and his Jewish friend Itzig resembles the prototype of the Aryan:

My friend Itzig was blond and blue-eyed, had a straight nose and finely shaped lips and teeth. I, on the other hand, Max Schulz, illegitimate though pure Aryan son of Minna Schulz, had black hair, frog eyes, a hooked nose, bulbous lips and bad teeth. (*The Nazi Who Lived as a Jew [NWL]*], 31-2)

By inverting the physical attributes of Aryan and Jew, Hilsenrath satirises the idea of pure-bloodedness and the accompanying 'greatness' as visible from the outside, describing one of the Nazis' biggest fears: the impossibility of distinguishing between Nazi and Jew. According to Cheyette, the threat emanating from the Jews was based on the inability to define them rather than the stereotypes associated with them (1993: 270). The difficulty of defining the Jew, to restrict him or her to a category, results in a destabilisation of the self's identity, who is defined in opposition to this other. Thus Hilsenrath reveals not only the constructed nature of Jewishness but also the ways in which this constructedness reinforces the artificiality of

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<sup>10</sup> This is the title under which the second edition of Hilsenrath's novel was published in the United States in 1977, which was not approved by the author (Braun 201). It is also worth noting here that the subtitle of the first edition 'A Tale of Vengeance' was added by the publisher and Hilsenrath himself insists that the novel is not about an act of revenge (personal interview).

Germanness.

Although the seven books that the novel is divided into are narrated exclusively from Max's perspective as a first person narrator, in the second book, when he returns to Berlin after the war, he uses a third person omniscient narrator. He situates himself as an outside observer to his encounter with Frau Holle,<sup>11</sup> a German war widow, foregrounding the fact that he is a Nazi in hiding and between identities, before assuming Itzig's identity to escape prosecution by the post-war German authorities.<sup>12</sup> He would prefer to be a Jew since the Germans have lost the war: 'Max Schulz! If you are going to have a second life, you should live it as a Jew. After all...we lost the war. The Jews won it' (*NWLJ*, 149). He does not consider what the Jews have 'won,' disregarding the number of Jewish deaths and the survivors' trauma after the Holocaust. Max's wish to become Itzig could be interpreted as a desire to identify with the victim, to experience the post-Holocaust era from the other's perspective, reflecting German philo-Semitism after the Holocaust. However, Max's motives are represented in this case as opportunistic rather than humanistic as he is assuming the role or identity that promises to have the greatest benefit for him. His adoption of victimhood constitutes a criticism of German opportunism during the Nazi regime, especially the *Mitläufer*, the followers, who joined the Nazi party for personal gain and advancement. Max's 'victimhood' also questions the idea of the German people as 'victims' of the Nazis, or at least the attempts to equate their post-war suffering to Jewish suffering during World War II. Stefan Berger notes that after 1945 there was an increased German unwillingness to accept their role as perpetrators of the Nazi regime and instead they 'reinvented Germany as victim of Hitler and the Nazis' (170). A similar idea is advanced by Gershom Scholem, while commenting on the Eichmann trial:

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<sup>11</sup> Frau Holle is a famous character from Grimm's fairy tales (known as Mother Hulda in English) but in his novel *Hilsenrath* radically subverts her benevolent nature by portraying her as greedy and anti-Semitic.

<sup>12</sup> *Hilsenrath's* story could be read as an imaginative counterfactual narrative. But after his novel was published, he met someone who showed him a 1948 news story from *The Jewish Echo* relating the story of a Gestapo Official pretending to be a Jew and a former camp inmate (Braun 171).

In the strict sense two nations, not one, were the victims: the Jewish people, whose millions were murdered, and the Germans who became a nation of murderers when it allowed the Nazi doctrine to gain power over it. (299)

Scholem's description of the German people as 'a nation of murderers' exemplifies the widespread post-war conflation of Germans with perpetrators of the Holocaust.

Hilsenrath further questions the idea of Jewishness as an external marker of difference by describing the measures that his protagonist takes to disguise his Nazi past and to fit into his new Jewish identity as Itzig Finkelstein. Max sees Jewishness only as a physical characteristic, easily adoptable even by a Nazi, the polar opposite of the Jew, exemplified in his SS tattoo being replaced with an Auschwitz number and the fact that he gets a circumcision. The author is contesting nineteenth- and twentieth-century racial discourses about Jewishness, one of whose key principles McMaster has determined as the fixity of the borders between superior and inferior races: 'The Other could never, even with the greatest will, cross over the symbolic boundary line, since differences were indelibly stamped into the body' (2001: 6). Hilsenrath satirises the concept of a Jewish 'essence' through Max's encounter with the post-war Jewish authorities in Berlin. They immediately conclude that he must be a Jew because of his physical appearance, but more importantly he tells the reader that: 'I could read their thoughts. (...) He was in Auschwitz! He's mad! No wonder!' (*NWLJ*, 163). This attitude reduces Jewishness to the experience of the Holocaust, obliterating the rest of Jewish history, as Benbassa has observed: 'after the genocide, the entire Jewish past was now cast as a vale of tears with, at the end of it, the Final Solution' (2010: 45). The Jews are represented as passive sufferers, spectators of their own history, and in turn reduced to an ahistorical presence because they exist as an abstract concept – the eternal victim – rather than as real people who have participated in and shaped their own history.

### **From Victim to Settler: The Nazi Who Lived as a Zionist**

Max boards a ship to Palestine, aptly named *Exitus*, to help build the new Jewish homeland. He 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' (*NWLJ*, 225). This wish to move beyond the identity of passive sufferer and to contribute to 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. Max pretends that his transformation from Nazi to Jew is complete and that he is now replacing his friend Itzig: 'I, Itzig Finkelstein, or the mass-murderer Max Schulz (...) am going to Palestine. Because I am now you' (*NWLJ*, 200). The fourth book, which narrates Max's journey to Palestine,<sup>13</sup> begins with an imagined conversation between Max and Itzig, where Max speaks of himself and his crimes in the third person, distancing himself from killing the Finkelsteins but also attempting to convince himself that he is no longer the Max Schulz who murdered his friends.

Gabriel Piterberg has pointed out that for the Zionist settlers, 'the land, too, was condemned to exile as long as there was no Jewish sovereignty over it: it lacked any meaningful or authentic history, awaiting its own redemption with the return of the Jews' (94). Hilsenrath disputes the notion of coming home and the new Jewish homeland as a refuge for the Jewish people because first of all a Nazi is able to enter the 'Promised Land,' representing a potential danger in the form of the enemy from within, and secondly, there is already a people inhabiting the 'Jewish' land.<sup>14</sup> He illustrates that the innocence related to victimhood is only an illusion and

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<sup>13</sup> The passage on the ship can be read as a metaphor to reflect Max's movement from one identity to another, suggesting that in between there is a period of transition and adaptation, symbolised by the voyage on the sea. It also recalls the concept of *aliyah*, the return, or literally the ascent, of the Jewish people to their ancient land in order to redeem it from its 'empty' existence.

<sup>14</sup> 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). For Hilsenrath, there is a clear difference between Diaspora Jews and Israeli Jews as he explicitly disconnects these two identities, and implicitly refuses a Jewish identity that is linked to Zionism and settler-colonialism.

cannot be maintained in the face of building a new state on a land already occupied by the Palestinian people, which 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 asserts 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' (2005: 120). The *Exitus* serves as means for Hilsenrath to establish an ideological connection with 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 Segev notes, this incident renewed European empathy for the Jewish victims and their suffering (131). Even though the Jews are intent on leaving the image of themselves as victims behind, the Holocaust is still too prominent in people's minds to relinquish the idea of the Jew as 'eternal' victim. The swiftness with which the Jews transformed themselves from being a persecuted minority in Europe to becoming a dominant majority in Israel, has resulted, according to Hannan Hever, 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' (1990: 265).

Max not only identifies 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 ideology. He even infiltrates the core of Jewish society in Palestine/Israel when he becomes a Zionist, linking his sense of selfhood to Jewish dominance rather than victimhood. But Max also includes Chaim Finkelstein,<sup>15</sup> Itzig's father, in his fabricated identity. He creates a local society for the prevention of cruelty to animals, like Chaim had done in Germany, which shows that he wants to

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<sup>15</sup> In Hebrew 'chaim' (חיים) means life, so Max's appropriation of Chaim's identity also confirms his desire to create a new (Jewish) life for himself.

appropriate every aspect of Chaim's 'Jewishness.'<sup>16</sup> Chaim's Jewish identity in pre-Nazi Germany is linked to a potential identity in Israel, a recreation of a European way of life, attempting to combine a pre-state identity with an Israeli Jewish identity. Max considers becoming the owner of a barbershop, following in Chaim's footsteps, and he is adamant that: 'The shop has to be on a corner, since "The Man of the World," my father's salon, was also on a corner' (*NWLJ*, 294). Max wishes to position himself within a Jewish tradition of barbershops, conflating his identity with Itzig's, and striving to become like 'his father.' The barber shop Max eventually takes over is indeed located on a corner and he calls it 'Man of the World,' which confirms the idea of the Jew as gentleman, as being at ease in the world, and purporting a sophisticated self, ironically though a cosmopolitan behaviour that is despised by the 'new' Jews in Israel. Meira Weiss explains this opposition between intellectual and physical activity as motivated by 'a "return" to Zion, nature, and to the body. Agriculture, land, territory, and military power were seen as an antidote to what was perceived as the passivity and spirituality of the Jews and Judaism in the diaspora' (1).

Despite his opportunism, which situates 'Jewishness' as a masking mechanism for Max's activities as a Nazi camp guard, his identification with Chaim can be interpreted as a wish to emulate his friend's father, whom he admired as a child and still upholds as a model. The recreation of the Finkelsteins' lives in Israel could be seen as an intention to recreate an innocent era of childhood/young adulthood when the categories of Nazi and Jew were not as clear-cut and mutually exclusive. Read in this light, Max's identity theft could be interpreted as a tribute to them, in order to allow them to live on through him. But on the other hand, his ruthless embodiment of 'Jewishness' is further proof of his unscrupulousness: he steals Itzig's personal history, as well as his father's. These contrasting interpretations, humanistic and opportunistic, highlight the novel's general ambiguity as well as the inability to define Max and his motives. The

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<sup>16</sup> A former Nazi caring for animals has parallels with Hitler's alleged vegetarianism, a propaganda move to represent him as more 'human' and to prove 'his incapacity to kill' (Fromm 404).

uncertainty about Max's identity has resulted in one critic choosing to read the novel as a survivor fantasy. Bernard Malkmus argues that Max Schulz is actually the Jew Itzig Finkelstein who has assumed the identity of the perpetrator as a defence mechanism against the trauma of having been persecuted and dehumanised (215). Hilsenrath creates this tension to interrogate the possibility of returning to a pre-Nazi era, as this past is forever tainted by the extermination of the Jews, as well as to insist on the difficulty, or even impossibility, to find the essence of Jewishness and define a Jewish identity. Moreover, he demonstrates that victimhood is not always innocent but is often manipulated for personal and political reasons, echoing Diane Enns's advice that 'we need to be wary of assuming that all victims are equally and purely innocent' (90).

### **Reflections of Nazism and Zionism and the Impossibility of Justice**

Whereas Max's transformation from Nazi to Jew is used to question German-Jewish relationships, Max's transition from Nazi to Jew to Zionist functions as a means to flag up similarities between the exclusionary beliefs upon which Nazism and Zionism are founded. These parallels are confirmed by Max's desire to conflate his Nazi self with his Zionist self and through a number of mirror scenes, both literal and figurative. The mirror scenes can be seen as distancing Max from his singular self by reflecting and aligning the different identities that he adopts. When Max joins the Nazi party, he paints swastikas on the mirrors of the Finkelsteins' barber salon in Wieshalle, a manifestation of his desire to define himself exclusively in terms of Nazism. In Israel, Max/Itzig also looks into the mirror and tries to find the essence of his personality among the many different faces. He tells himself: 'Itzig Finkelstein. There's no Jew who looks like that. It's a caricature. But everyone believes it' (*NWLJ*, 186).<sup>17</sup> Max is more 'Jewish' looking than Itzig, perhaps because he is impersonating 'constructed'

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<sup>17</sup> The German original does not use 'Karikatur' (the German word for 'caricature') but 'Zerrbild' (*Der Nazi und der Friseur [NF]*, 228) which means 'distorted image,' a more fitting term in Max's case as his vision of himself is distorted and difficult to reduce to one single identity.

Jewishness. He seems to be afraid of losing his old identity and to become what other people see in him. In Palestine, this mirror scene is paralleled by Max/Itzig looking into the mirror while fervently telling his customers about the new Jewish state:

[He s]aw two giant frog eyes, saw a curl of hair flop over [his] forehead, and the mustache, talked louder and louder, intoxicated by [his] own voice...which...sounded very much like...or exactly like...the voice on the Mount of Olives behind the altar. (*NWLJ*, 301)

The reference to the 'frog eyes,' one of the physical attributes that characterised Max as a youth, suggests that these speeches revive his identity as Max Schulz but also illustrates that his identity is defined and confirmed by other people's perceptions. He compares his voice to Hitler's when he gave a speech on the Mount of Olives<sup>18</sup> in his hometown, which impressed the young Max to the extent that he joined the Nazi party as a way to emerge out of powerlessness. This wish to move from powerlessness to power can be compared to Piterberg's critical reading of the Zionist view that 'the return of the Jewish nation to the land of Israel, overcoming its docile passivity in exile, could alone allow it to rejoin the history of civilised peoples' (95).

When Max hides from the Russian liberation army in the Polish woods, after fleeing the camp where he worked as a guard, he meets Veronja, an old woman reminiscent of the witches in Grimms' fairy tales. When he tells her that he is starved, she replies 'So *Übermenschen* don't last any longer than ordinary folk' (*NWLJ*, 127).<sup>19</sup> She clarifies that he is no longer a member of the master race but that he is now an *Untermensch*, an other. She tortures him and colonises every part of him, attacking him physically, sexually, and mentally, illustrating a desire to possess him

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<sup>18</sup> The Mount of Olives is also a contested place between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. At the foot of the Mount of Olives is Jerusalem's Jewish cemetery, a sacred place for the Jews, whereas the Mount itself forms part of East Jerusalem, where many of Jerusalem's Palestinian population live and which was annexed by Israel in 1967. The restoration of the cemetery after its recapture by Israel after the 1967 war has been described by Benvenisti as a colonising drive: 'a reflection of Israeli Jewish aspirations to establish a presence in East Jerusalem' (241).

<sup>19</sup> In the English translation, their conversation stops there but in the German edition, Max explains that he does not know if *Übermenschen* last longer than *Untermenschen* since he has never been one of the latter and Veronja emphatically states that 'you are one now' (*NF*, 149).

completely, or at least what is left of him. Max explains that ‘I was there to be tortured. Nothing more. Veronja wanted to tell me something’ (*NWLJ*, 136). Jennifer Taylor identifies this moment as marking the start of Max’s transformation from self to other (442) and thus initiating his transition from Nazi perpetrator to Jewish victim. This scene is paralleled with a forest scene in Israel, where Max’s car breaks down while driving through the Forest of the Six Million Souls.<sup>20</sup> He blames the trees for his breakdown, but then he enters into an imagined conversation with them, initiating his transition back from Jew to Aryan, which mirrors, and reverses, his transformation in the Polish woods. Despite his own pretence that he is a Jew, he acknowledges that the trees, standing in for the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, do not regard him as a real victim: ‘You cannot fool them. Even though you are circumcised. They know exactly who you are’ (*NWLJ*, 354). He believes that they despise him for pretending to be a Jew but above all that they are disgusted by his attempt to hide behind the victims. Ironically, the act of hiding behind the Holocaust and using it as a deflection for criticism is exactly what the Israeli state has rightly been accused of and which Idith Zertal sums up as follows: ‘Auschwitz – as the embodiment of the total, ultimate evil – was, and still is summoned up for military and security issues and political dilemmas which Israeli society has refused to confront, resolve, and pay the price for’ (4).

Hilsenrath uses satirical exaggeration to make the connection between the larger projects of Nazism and Zionism explicit. Max explains that:

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

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<sup>20</sup> The English translation adds the word ‘souls’ to the German name of the forest, which reads: ‘Wald der 6 Millionen’ (*NF*, 432), linking the victims’ souls explicitly to the Israeli soil. This connection between land and people reflects the Zionist idea that ‘Palestine was occupied by “strangers” and had to be repossessed’ (Pappé 2006b: 11), not only as a geographical location but equally as a physical entity. Ironically, the forest itself is a symbol of Israel’s occupation of Palestine as forestation was a common practice to colonise Palestinian land and to disguise places where the Israeli authorities had erased Palestinian villages in preparation for independence. Pappé notes that: ‘The true mission of the JNF (...) has been to conceal these visible remnants of Palestine not only by the trees it has planted over them, but also by the narratives it has created to deny their existence’ (2006b: 227-28).

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)

He compares the Final Solution, which exterminated human 'zeroes,' to the Zionist endeavour of a historical return to the Promised Land. 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 intentions of erasing any trace that they existed from history.<sup>21</sup> 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). In this way, Hilsenrath effectively positions Nazism and Zionist settler-colonialism side by side and criticises the ways in which the Jews have turned into victimisers after having been victimised themselves. Enns asserts that 'if any act of violence can be excused by the perpetrator as a response to an earlier violation, then violence ceases to be a moral issue at all' (45), which mirrors international treatment of Israel as exempt from acting morally since they use the Holocaust as an embodiment of victimhood as a political and ideological justification for not adhering to internal and humanitarian law. Norman Finkelstein concurs with the assessment of the Holocaust as an 'ideological weapon' and asserts that 'through its deployment, one of the world's most formidable military powers, with a horrendous human rights record, has cast itself as a "victim" state, and the most successful ethnic group in the United States has likewise acquired victim status' (2003: 3). Generally Israel represents itself as a state of 'innocent victims,' who 'by virtue of their suffering, become moral beacons' (Bouris 42), even if today victimhood in Israel is mostly 'inherited' by the second and third generations.

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<sup>21</sup> The Jewish philosopher Fackenheim sees Jewish survival as resistance to Nazism: 'Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish' (84), which has become known as the 614<sup>th</sup> commandment of the Torah.

The problems of victimhood and justice become even more poignant when Max eventually confesses his crimes to a judge, aptly named Wolfgang Richter.<sup>22</sup> 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 only one newspaper reports about his death: '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 important, Max tells his story to Richter. It seems as if his Nazi self can no longer be suppressed and wants to be acknowledged for what it is and for what it has done. 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 speech 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' (Braun 195). Both statements suggest that the death penalty cannot make up for the number of victims that have been killed or harmed. Gershom Scholem, in discussing Eichmann's death sentence,<sup>23</sup> confirms the impossibility of justice: 'There can be no possible proportion between this crime and its punishment' (299).

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<sup>22</sup> 'Richter' is the German word for 'judge.'

<sup>23</sup> The character Max Schulz, and specifically his defence and his sentence, 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 to 1965 (163-65), four years after the trial.

Hilsenrath chooses to let Max continue his life as Itzig Finkelstein since people do not believe that he is an ex-Nazi. 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 *Mitläufer* or guilty of remaining passive bystanders even though they knew about the crimes that the Nazis were committing against the Jewish people. However, the German nation as a whole is still haunted by the association of the German with the Nazi 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. Hilsenrath's decision to let Max die nonetheless could be explained through the fact that reconciling Germanness and Jewishness is utopian in that it would hide the polar opposition of Jew and Nazi that existed from 1933 onwards. Max's death deconstructs the possibility of a Jewish essence that can be transplanted, as throughout the novel Hilsenrath has refused to define Jewishness as linked to the body. Moreover, his death can be read as a warning against the misuses of victimhood and against an identity that attempts to include both aspects of victim and victimiser, which is one of the main problems Israeli Jewish identity faces today.

### **Jewishness, Victimhood, and Philo-Semitism in East Germany**

Jurek Becker, like Hilsenrath, considers himself an atheist. In an article entitled 'Mein Judentum' ('My Jewishness'), he explains that when asked about his ancestry, he replies that 'my parents were Jews' (1992a: 15). He admits 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. (1992a: 19)

He does not see Jewishness as an ethnic or religious identity but as a conscious choice of belonging to a social or historical community. As the description of his ancestry shows, Becker does not primarily define himself as Jewish. In fact, it was only when he moved to West Berlin in 1977 that he was confronted with his Jewishness through a number of encounters with anti-Semitism:

Suddenly I'm forced to feel like a Jew, an identity that did not play a role in the GDR. I haven't started feeling like a Jew because there is a strong presence of Jewishness, but because unfortunately, I am frequently the object of anti-Semitic comments. (1992b: 53)

For Becker, Jewishness is a characteristic imposed from outside and constitutes an additional identity, positioned alongside a national identity. This idea of a dual identity aligns with Bernard Lazare's nineteenth-century argument for a coexistence of Jewish nationalism and Jewish emancipation. Lazare advocated emancipation – which he distinguished from assimilation as fighting for your civil rights *as a Jew* rather than sacrificing Jewishness for political citizenships – as a prerequisite for nationalism (178). Lazare's, and by extension Becker's, approach to Jewishness as coexisting with a civil or national identity plays a central role in *Bronsteins Kinder*. The protagonist Hans is not specifically aware of his Jewish identity: he feels above all German. He is only confronted with Jewishness and the victimhood associated with it when he hits a young man at the swimming pool. When Hans reluctantly apologises for his behaviour, the other youth replies that 'If 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 in Germany after the war.<sup>24</sup> 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 still 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

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<sup>24</sup> Becker has noted that in the West, philo-Semitism has become a national doctrine and although he agrees that its consequences are less dangerous for Jews than anti-Semitism, he links these two phenomena through their similar treatment of the Jews as victims (Birnbaum 292).

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 'The 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). Hans is angry that he is treated differently; he does not want to be singled out because he is Jewish and he refuses the sympathy he receives for other people's suffering. Moreover, this encounter proves to Hans that his Jewishness is inescapable, which adds to his anger. In contrast to the victimhood discourse in Israel, Hans as a second generation 'survivor' refuses the identification with transferred victimhood.

The novel is set in East Germany, whose approach to commemorating the Holocaust differed significantly from West Germany. Gilad Margalit observes that 'the official GDR remembrance concentrated on the heroic struggle of the fighters against fascism' (33). Jewishness's association with passive victimhood resulted in the construction of the Jews as contrasted with the GDR's foundational myth as a communist state fighting against fascism. This self-perception also resulted in the GDR's opposition to Israel, which according to Thomas Fox manifested itself in an equation between Nazism and Zionism: '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). As a result, Jewishness was generally repressed since it constituted an uncomfortable reminder not only of the Nazi past, but also of Zionism and Israel as 'successors' of Nazism. Unsurprisingly, Hans identifies himself primarily as German. Early on he notes that 'contrary to your assumption, I am not circumcised, I had no superior motive for hitting that fellow, only inferior ones' (BC, 38). However, his narrative, set in May 1974, reveals that his father's death plays a central role in his German-Jewish identity formation, since he reflects on the two weeks leading up to his father's death in August 1973, which confronted him

with the implications of being Jewish after the Holocaust. The father's decision to kidnap a former camp guard does not only have consequences for his own identity, but also forces Hans to come to terms with his father's past and his own Jewish background, and to consider the ways in which it can be reconciled with his German identity.

The inexorable association of Jewishness and victimhood, and the idea that victimhood entitles one to privileges, leads Hans to ask the pivotal question of the novel: 'Is it legitimate for someone who was beaten up when he was thirty to hit back when he is sixty?' (BC, 33). Victimhood is questioned as a reason for revenge and victimising other people, and interrogated as concomitant with special rights or entitlement as a result of being a victim. Hannah Arendt, in dismissing the scapegoat theory often used to explain why the Jews became the Nazis' main victims, equally cautions against victimhood as an excuse: one 'does not simply cease to be coresponsible because [one] became the victim of the world's injustice and cruelty' (2004: 14). She draws attention to the responsibilities of victimhood and the moral implications towards other people that are not necessarily eclipsed through the state of victimhood. Hans also alludes to the problems of defining victimhood, a frequent concern in post-war Germany, where both Jews and Germans were identified as victims, satirised in *Der Nazi und der Friseur*. 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 viewpoint, albeit mediated by Hans's voice and vision. I consider Becker's novel as a critique of the conflation of victimhood and Jewishness in East Germany but I also situate the idea of former victims turning into victimisers in the Israeli-Palestinian context, a transformation which Mahmood Mamdani has explained in relation to the 1994 Rwandan genocide as emanating from the feeling that one might become a victim again (2001: 233). Becker himself described the Jews in the Middle East in 1977 as 'Herrenmenschen' (members of the 'master race') (1992a: 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. (2003: 166)

The former camp inmates who become the victimisers of the former perpetrator and use their victimhood as a reason for administering their own justice, a format found in many conventional revenge fantasies, enables Becker to examine the ambiguous relationship between Jewish identity as victim and Jewish identity as victimiser and the reliance on vigilantism and the Holocaust to divorce victimhood from responsibility.

Hans's father Arno refuses to define himself exclusively as a victim and he wants to separate his Jewishness from victimhood: he 'loathed being regarded as a victim' (*BC*, 41). He rejects the passivity associated with victimhood and even questions the existence of Jewishness – and by extension its conflation with victimhood – demonstrating that he sees his identity as German, rather than Jewish, and that he does not want to be defined primarily through the Holocaust. One of his theories purports that 'Jews [are] an invention; whether a good one or a bad one was debatable, but it was certainly a successful one' (*BC*, 37-38). Arno testifies to the successful construction of the Jew as 'enemy' throughout the ages, and particularly the destructive 'success' of the Nazis in creating the Jews as the quintessential enemy of the Third Reich. This provocative proposition confirms the difficulty of defining Jewishness, which has been variously identified as religious, ethnic, and cultural difference. It also recalls Jean-Paul Sartre's famous statement that 'If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him' (1948: 13). Both observations establish the constructed nature of Jewishness and exemplify Becker's notion that Jewishness is an artificial creation, whether fabricated internally as a communal feeling of belonging or imposed from the outside to determine difference.<sup>25</sup> Crucially,

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<sup>25</sup> Both Becker's father Max and Edgar Hilsenrath agree that anti-Semitism and Nazism played a key role in defining their identity as Jews. Hilsenrath points out that 'The Nazis transformed me into a proper Jew' (Seidler) and Becker quotes his father as having said that 'If anti-Semitism didn't exist – do you think I would have felt Jewish even for a second?' (1992: 17).

however, Becker also situates Jewishness as a conscious choice and implicit in this choice is the ability to refuse to identify oneself as Jewish. Hans, following his father, insists 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). While Hans's father criticises anti-Semitism and the Holocaust as the exclusive prism through which Jewish identity is viewed, for Hans victimhood is only related to the precise moment of the event which created the victim. This temporality 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.

### **The Return of the Repressed: The Victims Who Became Perpetrators**

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 communist state. In addition, Hans's observation undermines his earlier idea of victimhood as limited in time and stopping as soon as the event that created the victim is over. The word 'mask' illustrates that Arno, Rotstein, and Kwart have successfully repressed the trauma of the camps for thirty years but now that they are presented with an opportunity to take revenge, it resurfaces. Hans, however, as an outsider, finds it difficult to reconcile his father's behaviour towards the prisoner with his usual persona: 'Father had always seemed to me a level-headed person, fanatically logical; all through my childhood I had to listen to his insisting that cool reason is more useful than hot blood' (*BC*, 19). Hans's description of his father's character and the

separation between reason and revenge can be read as Becker's own criticism of psychological interpretations of victimhood as an excuse for exercising retribution. Arno justifies their act of administering justice by questioning the East German justice system's efficacy, 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. This sense of Jewish ethical superiority also has an uneasy resonance with Israel's exceptionalism and its use of the Holocaust to deflect criticism. The need for former camp inmates to resort to vigilantism challenges one of the key foundations of the GDR: its opposition to fascism. Mary Fulbrook has identified the GDR as contrasting itself with the Federal Republic by insisting that they not only brought to trial all Nazis but more importantly, that they did not tolerate any Nazis living in their midst (49). By introducing Arnold Heppner, who has been living in the GDR for thirty years without being detected, Becker refutes what Fulbrook has described as the GDR's self-perception of 'ha[ving] truly broken with the past and exorcised all ghosts of Nazism' (49). He confirms the impossibility of a clean and quick break with the past, when the Holocaust is not only looming large within international media and culture but also in the midst of German society in the form of former camp inmates and Nazi perpetrators.

Hans, upon first meeting the prisoner, is surprised that 'All the monstrousness was perfectly camouflaged in the camp guard's face' (*BC*, 16). This impossibility of visually identifying 'evil' recalls Hannah Arendt's description of Adolf Eichmann at his trial in Jerusalem: 'everybody could see that this man was not a "monster," but it was difficult indeed not to suspect that he was a clown' (2006: 54). She has been widely criticised for coining the phrase 'the banality of evil,'<sup>26</sup> which many have interpreted as downplaying the atrocities of Nazism, when in fact she expressed the mundane and petty considerations that motivated many Nazi perpetrators. Moreover, the invisibility of 'evil' explains why the former camp inmates interrogate and torture the former camp guard to make him confess: their

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<sup>26</sup> Arendt's assessment of Eichmann is criticised for example in Cesarani's *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (2004).

trauma needs to be confirmed by the perpetrator's confession, especially in a state like the GDR, where historians considered anti-Semitism to be 'a distraction for the masses' (Fox 21), instead focusing on fascism and the threats it embodied for communism, which allowed them to repress their own complicity in the extermination of the Jews. In a small way, the Jewish Holocaust survivors' role reversal in this re-enactment of the camp situation can be read as a retrospective reclaiming of a position of Jewish dominance rather than subordination in the camps. Becker has explained that he was intrigued by the perceived lack of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust and the absence of revenge stories in post-war Germany, which is why he thought about this story: 'I wanted to bring to life a story, which I thought was very probable, but which to my knowledge, never happened' (Birnbaum 287).<sup>27</sup> His novel can thus be read as an attempt to dispel the myth of the Jews as passive sufferers of the Holocaust, and to retrospectively resist the Holocaust, even though he does not approve of the methods of this resistance. Instead the author uses his characters' behaviour, based on vigilantism and revenge, to reveal larger issues about victimhood, innocence, and justification in Germany and Israel, and the implications for the Holocaust as an image of paramount suffering in the Western imaginary. His criticism moves beyond the GDR's anti-Zionist propaganda by not drawing facile parallels between Nazism and Zionism but instead engaging with the implications of conflating Jewishness with victimhood and attributing special rights to erstwhile victims.

Hans condemns the former camp inmates' act of administering their own justice: '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 does not see it as their 'right' to reciprocate the treatment that the Nazis inflicted on them and he does not consider victimhood as a justification for becoming

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<sup>27</sup> In Palestine/Israel, the Holocaust survivor and partisan fighter Abba Kovner created a 'revenge' movement (*Nakam*), whose goal was to kill six million Germans. Segev explains that for Kovner, 'revenge was a holy obligation that would redeem and purify the Jewish people' (142), which also explains the number of German victims needed to avenge the Jewish deaths in Nazi Germany. More recent revenge fantasies include Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds* (2009) and Zwick's *Defiance* (2008).

a victimiser. In addition, 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 victimiser will result in a loss of their humanity, illustrating that a repression of the Nazi past results in a repression of human behaviour. 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 'You 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 victimiser. Although Arno, Kwart, and Rotstein have repressed the trauma and the memory of the Holocaust 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 'His 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. Although Hans does not agree with his father's actions, he also initially does not want to help the prisoner to escape because he feels that he lacks the necessary knowledge to judge the situation adequately. Only during a second visit is Hans upset by Arnold's dehumanised state: 'suddenly I was furious at how brutally they had chained him up: like some wild beast that can't be allowed so much as an inch of movement' (*BC*, 83). The idea of the prisoner as a chained 'beast' moves Hans more than his previous perception of him, as smelly and dirty; it seems as if he needs this last act of dehumanisation to feel empathy with the prisoner. As a result, Hans unsuccessfully tries to reason with his father and his friends. When he asks Kwart how he envisions the end of the

kidnapping, the latter replies that 'you should think hard about whose side you're on. If you can answer that, it will take care of a lot of questions' (*BC*, 118). Hans, who throughout the novel felt more German than Jewish, is here directly confronted with the idea of his Jewishness and with the notion that he belongs to the Jewish people as a whole. Kwart argues that they are acting in his name too and protecting him by taking revenge on the guard, exemplifying the existential threat that the imprisoned guard sums up as follows: 'They still feel trapped; they think that our kind are waiting for a chance to shove them back into a concentration camp' (*BC*, 85). A former Nazi articulating the perceived threat to Jews promoted by post-Holocaust Zionism condemns this menace as ridiculous but equally questions the efficacy of the German de-Nazification process, the failure of which Arnold's presence in East Germany confirms.

Hans feels the need to act but justifies his intervention through a need to help his father, rather than the camp guard. However, he believes that his father and the camp guard can only be released, 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 firmly links the Jew and the Nazi, the victimiser and the victim, and contests the clear-cut distinction between these two categories after World War II. 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. 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' (2002: 37). Victims are transformed into victimisers 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 victimiser 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 victimiser. This authorial choice can be aligned with Hilsenrath's decision to let Max die at the end of his novel, confirming the impossibility of combining the identities of victim and victimiser. In Becker's novel, the former Nazi is freed, which proves the futility of justice and revenge to compensate for the deaths of the (Jewish) victims of the Holocaust, also apparent in the failure of the judge to find an adequate punishment for Max Schulz. Russell Brown reads Arnold Heppner's liberation as 'a figurative act of closing with the past' (207). While this reading is certainly correct, I would contend that through the liberation of Arnold in combination with 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. In this light, Hans's father's death can also be considered as contradicting the uniqueness discourse of the Holocaust and suggests that 'Never again' should not only be applied to the Jewish people but should be valid for every Holocaust victim.

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 as 'exaggerated and false' (2007: 19).<sup>28</sup> In an interview with Paul O'Doherty and Colin Riordan in 1995, Becker acknowledged that he found 'the Jewish need for an impregnable fortress (...) compellingly obvious' (16). David Rock links Becker's support for a Jewish state to his visit to Israel in 1989 during the first intifada<sup>29</sup> and

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<sup>28</sup> 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.'

<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, the first intifada, when Becker changed his opinion about Israel, has been identified by many critics, such as Reinhart, as marking 'a substantial change in Israeli public opinion.' Contrary to Becker, Israeli society realised the consequences of its

to his reading of Philip Roth's *The Counterlife*, 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 *Bronsteins Kinder*. Without wanting to draw easy parallels between the Holocaust and the situation in Israel, and despite the author's choice to modify his opinion, I want to maintain that in his novel, Becker provides the critical tools for the reader to align these two situations and to draw their own conclusions. Throughout *Bronsteins Kinder*, vigilantism and victimhood are conflated in East Germany but the author also provides many scenes that could equally be applied to the Israeli context. Kwart's description of their justice as administered in the name of the Jewish people as a whole, illustrated by their act of revenge as not being motivated by knowing the guard personally, can be interpreted as 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. Virginia Tilley confirms that in some circles in Israel, there is strong opposition to the continued occupation of the West Bank, albeit for self-serving reasons, since it is perceived as increasing the threat of a Palestinian attack and 'corrod[ing] Israel's "national soul"' (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 another population. Of course, exacting revenge should not be conflated with the oppression of a group of people who is not responsible for the suffering of the Jews, but Becker demonstrates 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 Palestine can be aligned with

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occupation of the Palestinian territories and 'many could no longer accept the occupation on moral grounds; others were unwilling to pay its economic and human cost' (7).

Albert Memmi's warning against colonisation as harming the coloniser as much as the colonised: The coloniser 'cannot help but approve discrimination and the codification of injustice, he will be delighted at police tortures and if necessity arises, will become convinced of the necessity of massacres' (99-100).

The contradiction of Hans's initial belief in victimhood as temporarily limited by his father's act of revenge can be aligned with Israel's self-perception as 'eternal' victim to deflect criticism. This conflation of Israel and victimhood is expressed through Auschwitz as a metonym for the Holocaust, which according to Zertal, 'has become over the years Israel's main reference in its relations with a world defined repeatedly as anti-Semitic and forever hostile' (4). The novel represents a challenge to Israel's manipulation of Jewish victimhood perpetuated by the Holocaust to gain international support and to commit actions deemed illegal by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, i.e. continuing to build and expand settlements in the West Bank to separate 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: victims 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 the society that reduces victims to their victimhood. This conflation engenders a silence in German society, and European and Western societies more generally, that ignores the suffering of the Palestinians for fear of being accused of anti-Semitism.

## **Conclusion**

Hilsenrath and Becker contest the conflation of Jewishness with victimhood perpetuated by the Holocaust and describe the implications this association has for Jewish people returning to Germany, many of whom were trying to reclaim an identity within a German culture that should be divorced from its

relation to Nazism. Both authors use a blurring of the distinction between victim and perpetrator, Jew and Nazi – in many ways reminiscent of received ideas about Jewishness between outsider and insider and travelling between categories – to question the artificial separation of these two signifiers in post-war Germany as well as the clear-cut distinction between good and evil and innocent and guilty. Crucially, they extend the problems of conflating Jewishness with victimhood in a German context marked by the Holocaust and the Nazi regime to its ‘consequences’: the creation of the state of Israel and the occupation of Palestine. They condemn the repercussions of misusing victimhood in relation to a population that did not victimise the Jews in Europe, stressing the ramifications of the Holocaust in the Middle East. Moreover, their novels engage with the implications that occupying another population has for Jewish identity formation, especially an identity that still heavily relies on the discourse of minority and persecution. They 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 the West 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.

The Holocaust and its connotations of victimhood in an Israeli setting will also be examined in the next chapter, which engages with the foundational myths of the Jewish state and specifically the role of the Holocaust and the Bible in shaping Israel’s emerging national discourse. I trace the ways in which two leftist writers, Shulamith Hareven and David Grossman, represent the transition from persecuted minority to territorial and militarised majority in Palestine/Israel and the creative tools they use to depict the social tensions between different groups in Israel to map out the development of ideas linked to Jewish minority and majority in Israel after 1948.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Rewriting the Foundations of Israel: The Bible, the Holocaust and the Occupation of Palestine in Shulamith Hareven's *Thirst: The Desert Trilogy* and David Grossman's *See Under: Love***

#### **The Foundations of Israel**

For the nation qua predominant form of modern community lacks immediate unity. It is not merely a given, but a habitat one has to seek and affirm as one's proper home through rational effort. (Pheng Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 242)

In discussing the role of literature in postcolonial nation formation, Pheng Cheah foregrounds the creation of nations as artefacts based on a constructed communal identity and validated by a 'rational effort,' expressed in literary engagements with nation-formation. The Jewish nation – which might be termed 'postcolonial' in that Israel sees its independence as emerging from an anti-colonial struggle against the British and the 'hostile' indigenous population that led to the independence of the Jewish people – similarly necessitated myths to consolidate its emergence as a national community and to justify the Jewish people's claims, not only to a homeland, but more specifically, to a homeland on the territory of ancient Israel. The main 'historical' text that was used for this purpose was the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Its function was to determine the location and the boundaries of the Jewish homeland as well as to confirm the idea of the Jew as persecuted and 'eternal wanderers' through the Exodus myth. In political Zionism, the biblical exodus from Egypt to escape slavery was valorised as an example of Jewish agency as it represented the Jews as conquerors and nation builders. According to Gabriel Piterberg, the foundational myth of Israel expresses itself in three ways: 'the negation of exile, the return to the land of Israel and the return to history' (94). In this chapter, I consider Shulamith Hareven's

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<sup>1</sup> Masalha condemns uses of the Bible that posit it as "history" rather than theology' (16).

*Thirst: The Desert Trilogy* (Tzimaon, 1996; English translation 1996) and David Grossman's *See Under: Love* (*Ayien Erech: Ahavah*, 1986; English translation 1989) as examples of literature that does not confirm but rather contests the unity of the emerging nation retrospectively in order to draw attention to the tensions and inequalities between different ethnic, social, and religious groups in contemporary Israel/Palestine.

The need for a Jewish state<sup>2</sup> became particularly poignant after World War II, and the experience of the Holocaust, which, as indicated in the general introduction, the Zionists constructed as a paradigmatic example of Jewish powerlessness and victimhood. Piterberg describes Zionist ideology as purporting that '[o]nly nations that occupy the soil of their homeland, and establish political sovereignty over it, are capable of shaping their own destiny and so entering history' (95). As a result, the establishment of the new Jewish state was concomitant with building an identity that contradicted the concept of the Jew as a diasporic wanderer and passive sufferer, relegated to the identity of the 'old Jew.' Contrasting with this identity, the new Jew would be able to withstand and avert suffering and persecution. Oz Almog describes the Zionist vision of this identity as the 'healthy Hebrew rooted (...) deep in the pioneer ethos' even before World War II.<sup>3</sup> The 'new' Israelis were opposed to the 'old Jew' as an embodiment of passivity and weakness, most obviously expressed by the images circulated in the international media after 1945 of emaciated camp inmates. The new Jewish state, on the other hand, had to be associated with a new Jewish identity that was completely different from Jewish identity in exile,

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<sup>2</sup> Zionist ideology proclaimed Israel as the only nation without a homeland since the destruction of the first temple in 586 BCE, which is narrated in the Bible in the Book of Jeremiah. The Babylonian conquest of Canaan also resulted in the expulsion of the Israelites.

<sup>3</sup> Benbassa discerns a strong link between the new Jew and his land: 'the sabra, the native, was supposed to become one with its landscapes, fauna, flora, smells and history' (2004: 40), which stresses the fact that the new Jew embodied the new homeland but also confirms what Braverman has noted in relation to forestation: 'through the performance of planting, the "rootless cosmopolitan" Jew from the cities of Europe would be transformed into a physical laborer who experiences an intimate connection to the land. The labor involved in the act of planting thus heals and naturalizes the Jew while at the same time normalizing him or her into a new national identity' (77). 'Normalisation' is achieved not only by inhabiting the land as an abstract collective entity but equally by working the land on a personal and physical level.

which, as Yael Zerubavel observes, came to be seen in Zionist collective memory as ‘a long, dark period of suffering and persecution. Jewish life in exile constituted a recurrent history of oppression, punctuated by periodic pogroms and expulsions, of fragile existence imbued with fear and humiliation’ (18). Although there was a strong focus on the Holocaust as a unique instance of Jewish persecution and suffering in the early post-independence years, the Holocaust survivors were not fully integrated into the Israeli national space unless they shed their ‘old’ ways and adopted the new heroic identity of the *sabra*.<sup>4</sup> This demand for a break with the past situates Israeliness as an identity independent of Jewishness, specifically the Jewish existence in exile. Terry Eagleton, in discussing nationalism and political emancipation, acknowledges the need for a negative collective identity in order to create the distinctive culture necessary for independence: ‘That negative collective identity, however, is bound over a period of time to generate a positive particular culture, without which political emancipation is probably impossible’ (37). Crucial to his analysis of nationalism and collective identity are the temporal limitations of this negative identity, which Zionism ignored by perpetuating the collective identity of the Jews as victims, as well as its opposite – the Jew as a strong and healthy labourer – after this negative identity was no longer necessary for political emancipation.<sup>5</sup>

Hareven and Grossman contest the idea of Israeliness as independent of earlier ideas of Jewishness and instead insist that Israeli Jewish identity must be firmly grounded in notions related to the Diaspora and the Holocaust, such as exile, wandering, persecution, and powerlessness. They reinstate these events as major defining moments for Jewish identity before

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, in many ways, Israel was a haven for the victims of Nazi persecution. One critic goes as far as saying that ‘fighting for and building a new Jewish state afforded survivors a sense of accomplishment and heroism to counterbalance their feelings of powerlessness during the Holocaust’ (Hass 76).

<sup>5</sup> Critics like Landy, Boyarin and Boyarin, and Nimni advocate a collective identity that promotes a Jewish identity based on diaspora and constructed in opposition to Zionism as a territorial, and conquering, ideology. See Landy’s *Jewish Identity and Palestinian Rights* (2011), Boyarin and Boyarin’s ‘Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity’ (1993), and Nimni’s *The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics* (2003).

1948 and confirm the importance of this history for a complete Israeli Jewish identity. In her non-fiction, Hareven posits diaspora and migration as identifying the character of the Israeli nation, when she defines Israel as 'a collection of people most of whom have undergone an uprooting' (1995: 107) and notes that as a result 'most of the inhabitants cannot point to a normal sense of continuity in their lives' (1995: 100). By revisiting the exodus from Egypt and the arrival in Canaan in her novellas, Hareven relates the perspectives of outsiders and peoples oppressed by the Hebrews to detach the Exodus myth from its exclusive focus on nation building and to interrogate the consequences of this colonial drive for individuals and minority groups. Many critics of her trilogy have noted that the novellas can be read in the 'ancient Jewish midrashic tradition of retelling the sacred text in ways that creatively accommodate the shifting paradigms and perceptions of the present' (Omer-Sherman 38). In line with Omer-Sherman's reading of Hareven's novellas, I agree that her rewriting of the Exodus myth through marginal perspectives allows the reader to consider her trilogy as a critique of contemporary Israel. Crucially, I would add that her novellas need to be examined alongside her non-fiction to engage with her fiction as a critique of Israel's ever-present security discourse that is used to justify the violation of human rights and the occupation of Palestinian territories in the name of creating an allegedly safe haven for the Jewish collective. Moreover, I analyse Hareven's critique of the Bible as a 'historical' text absolving the colonisation of other peoples, especially in her second novella, which relates the Hebrew people's attack on Gibeon from the perspective of the Gibeonites. I suggest that this retelling of the book of Joshua from the role of the victims not only criticises Israel's occupation of Palestine but equally cautions against the moral consequences of the occupation for Israeli Jews through the emphasis on the individual experience of conquest and colonialism.

Grossman's *See Under: Love* takes a similarly individualising approach to the foundational myths of Israel by relating the protagonist Momik's experience of the role of the Holocaust and its victims in 1950s Israel. The author not only rejects the Israeli Jewish attitude towards the

survivors, but he also contests the idea of the Holocaust victims as passive sufferers. These challenges are achieved by juxtaposing Momik as a child narrator who engages with the Holocaust survivors as human beings with Momik the adult writer who imagines his great-uncle's encounter with a Nazi in the camps and the alternative history of the Polish-Jewish writer Bruno Schulz. Momik considers the experience of the Holocaust as composed of individual traumas, denigrated by Zionist ideology in the early state-building years, rather than the Holocaust as a collective trauma promoted by Israel to accelerate the creation of a Jewish state, which has been transformed into the quintessential instance of Jewish victimhood to justify Israel's security discourse.

Both novels can be situated within a tradition of Hebrew writing emerging in the 1950s that is increasingly critical of Zionism from within the Zionist discourse. They offer 'counter-histories of other places, other times, and other Jews' and as a result they create 'a Hebrew fiction responsible not to the reaffirmation of Zionist ideology, but to the unhampered and oftentimes severely critical investigation of the nation's history and culture' (Shaked 2000: 229-30). Grossman's and Hareven's works constitute a move away from the state-building and early independence realist traditions of writing and they offer alternative models of Israeli Jewish identity positioning Diaspora notions of Jewishness alongside the Zionist model for a new Jewish identity. Both authors can be described as 'activist-writers' as they are critical of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories and highlight the moral consequences of occupying another people in their non-fiction. Their political positions can be aligned with the Israeli left, which is celebrated within Western media for its 'radical' position in relation to the Israeli state.<sup>6</sup> Hareven and Grossman are exemplary in their attempts to encounter and understand Palestinians and their national aspirations, as

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<sup>6</sup> A recent example of this trend is a profile of David Grossman in the *New Yorker*, where the author, George Packer, describes Grossman as a 'liberal Zionist,' which foregrounds Grossman's critical stance towards the Israeli state but nevertheless, situates this criticism within the confines of the Zionist discourse. Grossman is rightly praised for organising demonstrations in the Sheik Jarrah neighbourhood, where Jewish families are taking over Palestinian houses; however, his opinion on the Palestinian right of return is not mentioned. The limits of Grossman's (and Hareven's) concessions will be discussed in more detail throughout this chapter.

documented in their non-fiction.<sup>7</sup> Both writers demand that Israel leaves the Palestinian territories and show an understanding of the hardships of the Palestinians living under occupation. Grossman advocates an active engagement with the other side, condemning the prevailing attitude among Israeli Jewish society that purports that 'it is possible to continue on in this way for years. That over the years the "fabric of life" (mutual acquaintance, economic links, and so on) will overcome enmity' (1988: 214). He explains that: 'When we wish to ignore someone, some other person, or thousands of people, we set up a sort of "block" in our souls. A closed-off area, fencing in all the problems we do not wish to touch' (1988: 40). In many ways, both novels suggest that an overemphasis on intangible ideas of Jewish victimhood exclude not only a historical view of Israeli identity and its origins in the diaspora but equally prevent Israeli Jews from identifying with the Palestinians and to engage with their own role within the conflict. To challenge Israel's victimhood discourse both authors focus on the Jewish minority experience in exile to remind Israeli Jews of their own positions as outsiders before 1948 but also to criticise the ways in which, as a majority, they perpetrate exclusion, discrimination, and occupation vis-à-vis the Palestinians.

### **Political Zionism and the Exodus Myth: Utopia and Conquest**

The biblical Exodus myth plays a paramount role in the construction of Israeli Jewish identity. Allon Gal considers it as an important event imbued with 'social-ethical values of universal significance' and points out that '[t]he modern national trend of return to the Land of Israel persistently explicated and elevated the Exodus story to a noble, major ethno-symbol' (2007: 223). The progression from slavery to independence and from discrimination to dominance served as a 'historical' precedent for the national project the

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<sup>7</sup> See Hareven's essays 'Portrait of a Terrorist,' 'Reflections in a Dark Mirror,' 'Four Bus Stops Away,' and 'Eyeless in Gaza' in *The Vocabulary of Peace* (1995) and Grossman's *The Yellow Wind* (1988). Interestingly, Hareven's non-fiction advances ideas and ideals that are more Zionist than her fiction, while for Grossman the reverse is true, since in many ways his novel *See Under: Love* is more loyal to the Zionist discourse than his non-fictional essays in *The Yellow Wind*.

political Zionists envisioned. The Exodus myth confirmed the idea that a Jewish homeland with Jewish political sovereignty provided a refuge from anti-Semitism and persecution and 'normalised' the existence of the Jewish nation among other territorial nations. Nur Masalha, amongst others, identifies Zionism's similarities with European, and I would add North American and postcolonial, nation building through the practice of inventing tradition, which entails

Using collective memory selectively by manipulating bits of the religious past, suppressing some and elevating and mobilising others in an entirely functional way and for political purposes; thus mobilised collective memory is not necessarily authentic but rather useful politically. (2)

The Exodus myth was not only transformed into a historical source for the creation of a Jewish nation and homeland,<sup>8</sup> but Zionism also linked the forty years of wandering in the desert to the Jewish existence in exile. Political Zionism focused on the exodus as a collective nation-building exercise, and as Masalha observes, even though the leaders of political Zionism were generally secular or atheistic, they insisted on the doctrine of the 'Chosen People' and the covenant between God and the Hebrew people. The idea of the 'Chosen People' was used to justify the location of the Jewish state and to gain international support for a cause that was at basis a 'secular, settler-colonialist movement, with non-religious and frequently anti-religious dispositions' (Masalha 1-2). Although Hareven is critical of Israel's occupation of Palestine and Zionism, she is reluctant to describe Zionism as a colonial project. She refutes this term as too general and thus concludes that it 'is inane to apply the concepts of one period to another period' (1995: 194). Nevertheless, she expresses similar concerns to Masalha about the role of the Bible in the state-building years and the consequences of using theology as history to support the occupation of the Palestinian territories in contemporary Israel. She criticises political Zionism's manipulation of biblical myths and she urges that:

What we must defend ourselves against is not myth itself, which is an inseparable part of our constitution; rather, we

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<sup>8</sup> Shapira notes that the Exodus functioned both as a testimony to and as a blueprint for the emergence of the Hebrews as a collective (11).

must learn how not to be victims of the manipulations of myth, how to preclude myth from being forced on us as individuals or populations. (1995: 20)

Hareven's solution to the manipulation of myth for political purposes is her own creative alteration of the Exodus story in her collection of novellas *Thirst: The Desert Trilogy*. In an essay entitled 'Israel: The First Forty Years', she contends that 'we behave as though only the plural exists, completely oblivious to the fact that the plural is made up of a great many singulars' (1995: 109). To counteract this tendency, in her novellas she portrays the many singulars that constitute the plural and the individual experiences underlying the exodus from Egypt, the wandering in the desert, and the arrival in Canaan. Hareven's work can thus be situated firmly within the discourse of counter-memory, which Zerubavel has described as 'challeng[ing] (...) hegemony by offering a divergent commemorative narrative representing the views of marginalised individuals or groups within society' (11).

All of Hareven's novellas highlight the personal experiences of the exodus, describing the suffering, the hopes, and the fears of specific characters. The protagonist of the first part of the trilogy, entitled *The Miracle Hater* (1983; English translation 1988), is Eshkar, a marginalised shepherd, from whose perspective the exodus from Egypt is narrated. Very early on, the reader witnesses his disillusionment, as he explains that 'he no longer believed that there was such a place as Egypt. There was no Ancestral Land either. It was all fairy tales' (*Thirst*, 19). Apart from describing the experience of wandering as very disheartening, this observation – specifically the description of Egypt and the ancestral land as 'fairy tales' – can be read as Hareven's critique of the use of the Bible as factual history in the state-building years to delineate the future Israeli state and to justify the occupation of another population. In addition, Hareven represents the Hebrew people as far from being a unified nation, which questions Michael Walzer's idea of the covenant as 'a founding act, creating alongside the old association of tribes a new nation composed of willing members' (76). Even towards the end of the first novella, after years of wandering, she describes the Hebrews as 'turning into a shameless mob, like the first castaways who

had left Egypt long before them. They were all castaways now' (*Thirst*, 44). The insistence on the Hebrew people as 'castaways,' a term that carries connotations of outsider status and strangeness, confirms the individuality and marginality of the individuals that emerge out of the desert, contrary to the Zionist portrayal of this wandering as creating a unified and moral nation. Read in the light of the establishment of Israel, this term foreshadows the failure of the Jewish homeland to solve the 'Jewish Question' and to create a state that offers a space of belonging for all Jews. Bernard Lazare for example, as Gabriel Piterberg notes, 'wished to strive for a pluralistic society, in which it was perfectly feasible to have a nation within a nation, even a state within a state' (12). As discussed in relation to Jurek Becker's view of Jewishness, Lazare advocated a dual identity, situating his Jewishness as a cultural identity alongside French as a national and political denomination, thus effectively demonstrating the possibility of emancipation without complete assimilation. As a result, he did not consider a Jewish demographic and ethnic majority as necessary but believed that the Jewish people were capable of living in a plural and diverse society that accepted them as Jews.

The possibility to create a space for the diversity of the Hebrew people is located within the desert, which is initially associated with liberation in Hareven's novellas:

An immense freedom, vast beyond human measure, hung over everything. The days had no rules and the laws of nature themselves seemed suspended. (...) There were no masters and no slaves. There was only the desert which held no threat. (*Thirst*, 16)

Hareven suggests that the Hebrews see the desert as a space without hierarchy, without masters or slaves, but as her trilogy unfolds, the reader realises that this utopia cannot be maintained. She depicts innocence and equality as comfortably coexisting with the desire for conquest. This naïve belief can be situated in the context of Jewish state building in Palestine, which exclusively focused on the idea of creating a safe homeland for the Jews without acknowledging the ramifications of colonising Palestine for the Palestinian people and the implications for the safety of the Jewish

collective. Hannah Arendt had already cautioned against the consequences of forcefully establishing a Jewish homeland on a land inhabited by another people in 1944: 'even a Jewish majority in Palestine (...) would not sustainably change a situation in which Jews must either ask protection from an outside power against their neighbors or come to a working agreement with their neighbors' (2007: 344). In a similar vein, Edward Said has criticised Michael Walzer for ignoring the heritage of conquest and colonialism conferred upon the Jewish people by adopting the Exodus myth as a precedent for their newly created nation. He contends that 'Walzer uses the rhetoric of contemporary liberation movements to highlight certain aspects of Old Testament history and to mute and minimize others' (2001: 165-66). Indeed, for Walzer, the desert is primarily utopian in that it is a revolutionary space: 'The Israelites do not, as is sometimes said, go wandering in the wilderness; the Exodus is a journey forward – not only in time and in space. It is a march towards a goal, a moral progress, a transformation' (12). Contrary to Walzer, Hareven's story refuses a linear narrative. Her tale is very circular, and the people resent their hardship: 'There was no purpose to their lives. It simply was not Egypt. They had exchanged hard labor for freedom. Slavery was over but nothing else had taken its place' (*Thirst*, 20). It is made clear that since the author chooses to leave God out of the first part of her trilogy, along with the covenant between him and the Hebrew people, there are no laws to govern them, and thus they are not transformed into 'moral beings.' Masalha observes that even though 'the Bible was not the only "justification" [for Zionism], it certainly was the most powerful one, without which political Zionism was only another conquering European ideology' (15). Through the absence of God, Hareven contradicts the idea of Israel as given by God and hence challenges the divine justification for occupying Palestine, which was not only used by political Zionism but in its messianic form is driving fundamentalist groups like Gush Emunim to justify the presence of Jewish settlements in the West Bank in biblical and religious terms.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of the settlers' worldview see Lustick's *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (1988) and more recently Taub's *The Settlers and the Struggle*

In the Bible, the people are united by a leader, Moses, who functions as God's mouthpiece and gives their wandering a purpose. F. F. Bruce sees Moses as essential for the formation of the nation of ancient Israel to the extent that 'if he did not exist, he would have to be invented to account for the rise and the progress of the nation of Israel' (14). Whereas the biblical narrative describes minor imperfections of Moses as a leader, such as his 'slow speech,'<sup>10</sup> in Hareven's novellas Moses's leadership qualities are explicitly questioned. Hareven envisions a scenario similar to the one that Bruce has identified as detrimental to Hebrew nation building, not by extracting Moses from her story but by removing God as his moral support. Consequently, Moses is unable to rally and motivate the people. In this way, Hareven's novella contradicts the idea of the corporate personality defined by Henry Robinson Wheeler, who contends that in ancient Israel 'the whole group, including its past, present, and future members, might function as a single individual through any one of those members conceived as representative of it' (25). For Wheeler, corporate identity extends over time, including all members of the Israeli nation as a Chosen People, effectively creating a link between the ancient biblical past and the present, which the political Zionists were so intent on establishing. As a result of this vision, one single individual is able to embody the entire nation. In the Bible, this *pars pro toto* becomes obvious in the focus on Moses as an agent of liberation for the Hebrew people and their reliance on him as a guide and God's messenger. In Hareven's first novella, by contrast, Eshkar functions as an alternative, or as an additional, 'Moses.' When Moses produces water from a stone and two women are unable to reach it, unlike Eshkar, Moses is oblivious to their suffering: 'Moses and his escort passed by without seeing them' (*Thirst*, 38). Nevertheless, Hareven does not position Eshkar as an alternative leader; rather, he occupies the position of marginal observer. He leaves the Hebrews for a while and he reaches the Promised Land before

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*over the Meaning of Zionism* (2010). The settlers and their relationship with the Palestinians and their land will be examined in more detail in chapter five of this study.

<sup>10</sup> In Exodus 4:10, Moses says to God: 'I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.'

they do but 'he had told no one that he had already been to the Ancestral Land' (*Thirst*, 60). Eshkar's journey confirms the circular movement of their wandering and contests the idea of linearity and progression from bondage to independence. Although Eshkar's experience of wandering fits in with the wandering of the Hebrew nation as a whole, Hareven deconstructs the idea of the corporate personality, since the part cannot stand for the whole and represent its diversity, which she also accuses contemporary Israeli politics of advocating. Instead, by juxtaposing Eshkar and Moses, she suggests that a collective can only be adequately represented by focusing on the many different individuals that constitute a community.

### **The Bible and Colonialism: The Gibeonites and Palestine**

In her second novella, entitled *Prophet* (1989; English translation 1990), Hareven engages in more depth with the Bible as a tool for colonialism and the idea of the ancestral land as empty. Masalha points out that 'for the Zionist settler (...) the indigenous people earmarked for dispossession are usually invisible. They are simultaneously divested of their human and national reality and classed as marginal nonentity' (44). Hareven not only makes one of the indigenous people, the Gibeonites, visible but she narrates their aspirations and their feelings, representing them as fully rounded human beings afraid of the impending Hebrew attack. In relation to the Zionist depiction of Palestine as empty, Piterberg observes that:

What is denied by the settler society is not the mere presence of Arabs in Palestine, but rather the fact that their presence and resistance were consequential to the institutional dynamics and collective identity of the settler community and later nation-state. (64)

This is exactly the rhetoric that Hareven questions throughout her trilogy and particularly in her second novella. Although her narrative is largely faithful to the Bible, she chooses to recount the Hebrew people's conquests from the perspective of the outsider and the subjugated. Hence she challenges Walzer's assertion that 'it follows from a covenant of this sort that the individuals who commit themselves are moral equals' (84). Instead,

through the Gibeonites, she demonstrates that, as Edward Said has noted, 'if like the Canaanites you don't happen to qualify for membership, you are excluded from moral concern' (2001: 177). This exclusion from the national community can be aligned with the position of the Palestinians inside and outside of the Green Line, who are barred from the Israeli national discourse on ethnic and religious grounds.<sup>11</sup>

The Gibeonites live under the constant threat of an attack from the Hebrews and they predict that 'A people [would] come upon us from the desert. There would be war. There would be a siege' (*Thirst*, 66). The idea of the siege not only links this event to the occupation of the Palestinian territories in 1967 but also recalls the 1948 war. This connection is confirmed by the arrival of refugees from Ai, a city already destroyed by the Hebrews, which can be compared to the expulsion of around 700,000 Palestinians from their villages and homes in 1948. Yael Feldman notes that Hareven not only wanted her Israeli readers to empathise with otherness but more specifically with an aspect of their own identity that is other than themselves. Consequently, she 'put them in the uncomfortable position of reading about themselves (at least in the generic sense – biblical ancestry being an integral part of Israeli identity) – identifying Israel with the besieged Gibeon' (163-64). However, I would suggest that Hareven specifically compares Gibeon to Palestine, and particularly to the occupied territories, which is implicit throughout her second novella in the description of the Gibeonites' situation. Early on, Hivai expresses the feeling that 'Gibeon suddenly seemed wide open, insubstantial, an illusion more than a city' (*Thirst*, 71), sitting uneasily alongside the idea of a disappearing Palestine, an imaginary homeland for displaced Palestinians, both abroad and within their own country. Hence, Hareven puts the Israeli Jews in the uncomfortable position of reading about themselves as Hebrew colonisers, drawing parallels between the violent biblical conquest and the consequences of Israeli Jewish violence against the Palestinian people and the conquest of their land.

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<sup>11</sup> Their situation will be discussed in more detail in chapters four and five, which focus on Israeli Palestinian and Palestinian depictions of Jewishness respectively.

In this novella, the focus is on Hivai, a prophet who has lost his ability to prophesy, which Ranen Omer-Sherman has read as a comment on the 'moral paralysis' of Israeli Jewish culture (52), but it also allows Hareven to refute the absolute authority conferred on the prophets in the Bible. Hivai is part of a group of Gibeonites, who leave Gibeon to reason with the Hebrews:

With heads held high they would visit the Hebrew camp and speak with dignity; soon the Hebrew god would flee back to the desert he had come from and show his face no more in the land of men. (*Thirst*, 96)

This ruse stresses the fact that the Gibeonites are not just background actors in a story centred on the Hebrews. Instead this scene illustrates that their actions are consequential for the Hebrews, since as a result of their intervention their city escapes unscathed: 'There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle' (Joshua 11:19). Nevertheless, the Gibeonites are captured by the Hebrews. Hivai deconstructs the idea of the Hebrew people as heroic fighters, commenting that: 'What fools their captors were. Why, they didn't even know how to start a fire' (*Thirst*, 96). In a comic turn of events, they are represented as accidental colonisers rather than as capable conquerors, illustrating the arbitrary nature of the Hebrew attacks. Representing this conquest as unintended allows Hareven to draw comparisons with contemporary Israel. She does not consider conquest with a cause as condonable, but instead she draws attention to the self-delusion of the early Zionists, whose honourable but futile intentions are confirmed by Jacqueline Rose: 'Zionism (...) was not meant to be violent. It was not meant to be the bearer of injustice toward an indigenous people' (2005: 122). Hareven thus exposes the Zionist illusion that it is possible to build a nation without violence and occupation. However, contrary to the prevailing denunciation of conquest in her second novella, in her non-fiction she shows a pronounced empathy for Zionism as a movement that 'saved' the Jewish people:

It is possible to call the awful stress of saving people from the inferno and bringing them to Israel, in spite of the inhabitants of that land at that time, a form of colonialism. But this concept is multifaceted, and in today's terms, many nations

may be retrospectively thought to have been more or less enlightened colonialists. (1995: 194)

The disjunction between her fiction and her non-fiction can be explained through her reluctance to consider Zionism as a colonial project. As a result, her apologetic stance for Jewish exceptionalism in the wake of the Holocaust in her non-fiction sits uneasily with her attempt to situate Israeli state building within larger discourses of nationalism and colonialism, advocating the idea that Israel is a state like any other. The essay thus exhibits the problems of critically evaluating Israel as a settler-colonial movement from within the confines of a Zionist discourse.

### **After Childhood: Alternative Israels**

The third part of Hareven's trilogy, entitled *After Childhood* (1994; English translation in 1996),<sup>12</sup> proposes an alternative standpoint to the Hebrew complicity exposed in *Prophet*. She relates the lives of the Hebrews after they have arrived in Canaan, but unlike the people surrounding Joshua, they live a quiet life, away from conquest and killing. The title implies a process of maturation and leading a life governed by more rational decisions. The passing of childhood also suggests a loss of innocence and hopefulness, pointing towards a sense of resignation, which is an underlying current in Hareven's last novella. By juxtaposing the conquests of the Hebrews in her second novella and the alternative existence that they choose in the third novella, albeit at the expense of a feeling of security, Hareven considers contemporary Israeli Jewish identity as caught between either being identified as the occupier of the Palestinian people or as the eternal victim, without leaving room for an identity outside of these contrasting categories. This stale-mate that Israeli Jewish identity faces as a result of the occupation of the Palestinian territories is also criticised in her non-fiction: 'No scale of possibilities, no prospect of culture, no choice of identity – except to be either murderers, the murdered, or both. As though Israel has no other identity. As though this were the essence of being Israeli' (1995: 116).

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<sup>12</sup> Whereas the other two novellas have been published individually in English, *After Childhood* was first published as part of this trilogy (The Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature: <http://www.ithl.org.il/>).

*After Childhood* opens with Salu, a young man, whose father Abraham attempted to kill him, a clear rewriting of the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. Hareven again takes God out of the picture: 'They had no prophets, they had no kings, God was no longer with them as in the great days of the great desert' (*Thirst*, 133). Abraham's sacrifice is difficult for the rest of the village to understand without divine presence and as a result they consider it abnormal and cruel, and interpret it as a 'barbaric' act that an 'inferior' people would commit: 'Only a madman would sacrifice his own son like the boors of the land' (*Thirst*, 134). The villagers are afraid of Abraham and his family who are considered to be outsiders. Nevertheless, they help Salu and marry him to a woman from another tribe. Similar to Moses, Salu experiences an in-betweenness, feeling part of both the Hittites and the Hebrews. He used to spend his time with the Hittites, since 'they had long ago stopped thinking of him as a Hebrew' (*Thirst*, 158) and have accepted him as one of their own. However, since he brought his wife home, he is torn between the two tribes: 'In the Hittite camp, he longed for home. At home he missed the Hittites' (*Thirst*, 159). Apart from demonstrating the diversity of the Hebrew nation and indicating the multitude of identities that contemporary Israeli society consists of, this in-between position is also reminiscent of descriptions of the state of exile, most prominently put forward by Edward Said. In his *Reflections on Exile* (2000), he explains that 'most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that (...) is contrapuntal' (186). Said considers exile, and being between two cultures, as an ethically superior position, which allows the exile to critically engage with both the majority and the minority culture. This stance can be aligned with Hareven's own view of the Levant as 'the opposite of all aggressive, crass single-mindedness. It is the color-blind pluralism that sees no racial, ethnic, or religious differences' (1995: 82). Hareven sees Levantism as a form of pluralism, a position transcending difference and offering multiple perspectives on Israeli identity.<sup>13</sup> In a counter-memorial move, as argued by

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<sup>13</sup> The attempt to replace Jewish monolithism with a more inclusive concept can also be

Zertal, by leaving out the Bible, Hareven indicates that there might have been a possibility of a plural Israeli society, encompassing Israeli Jews and Palestinians on equal levels and eliminating the discrimination against Jews from Arabic and African countries.<sup>14</sup>

Hareven portrays the Hebrews as questioning God's abilities along with their reason for being in Canaan: 'They felt wasted and bitter. They knew that God had broken his promise. The land was bad; it had not yielded to them' (*Thirst*, 161). Hareven proposes an alternative history here, specifically an alternative geographical history. God's absence illustrates that without the Bible, the land of Canaan is just 'bad land' and does not carry any significance for the Hebrews. This reading challenges the use of the bible in political Zionism, since, as indicated above, in the state-building years its adherents were mostly non-religious. The sentence 'it had not yielded to them' also implies that the land itself resists 'blooming,' opposing the colonising force of the Hebrews. Omer-Sherman reads *After Childhood*, and specifically the depiction of the Hebrews as a quiet, peace-loving, community as 'a plea for a transcendence of the violent biblical reality, urgently underscoring the need to discover post-exilic arts of living in the present that transcend all forms of violent martyrdom' (55). I would disagree with Omer-Sherman. Hareven is not advocating a move beyond martyrdom, which implies a conscious choice of the individual, but instead she is urging individual Israelis to transcend victimhood as a collective identity imposed by the state, as pointed out in her essay 'Identity: Victim': 'If I am the sole and eternal victim, then I create around and within myself (...) an inability to see anyone who is not me' (1995: 151). In this sense, Hareven's novel is not exclusively post-exilic since she insists on the need to rework the past, specifically myths related to exile and victimhood, in order to improve the present. Her account of individual experiences of the process

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found in Alcalay's description of Levantism in *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (1993). Jacqueline Kahanoff famously saw 'Levantism' as Israel's only hope to integrate itself into a peaceful Middle East: 'Israel cannot expect to march on isolated to the end of times ... In stopping the fear of its Levantization, Israel might open a path toward future regional peace' (qtd. in Hochberg 52).

<sup>14</sup> African Jews still face racial discrimination in Israel as recent protests in South Tel Aviv against African migrant workers show. See for example Lee, Zarchin, and Kubovich's 'Protesters attack Israeli of Ethiopian origin in rally against African migrants.'

of ancient Israeli nation formation allows Hareven to draw attention to contemporary Israel's pluralism and the many different social and ethnic groups that the Israeli nation is composed of. Her pluralism contests the Zionist vision of a Jewish national home with a Jewish majority but can be read as coexisting, for Hareven, with an alternative Zionist identity that promotes a Jewish state, albeit not at the expense of Israeli Palestinians and Palestinians. By focusing on Jewishness as linked to wandering and diaspora, she advocates a Jewish identity that is historically grounded, however, not exclusively in the biblical experience of the exodus, which promotes power and nationhood, but instead equally valorises the Jewish experience in exile and acknowledges the influence of diaspora, marginality, and powerlessness on contemporary ideas of Israeli Jewishness.

### **The Holocaust in 1950s Israel: The Old Jew/New Jew Binary in *See Under: Love***

Like Hareven's novellas, Grossman's *See Under: Love* can be situated in the tradition of 'countermemory,' representing disenfranchised characters excluded from Israeli collective memory. His novel is narrated from the perspective of Momik, a writer who looks back at his own childhood, and specifically the moment when his great-uncle Anshel Wasserman, a former camp inmate, comes to live with him and his parents. As a child narrator, Momik's point of view is as marginalised as Eshkar's and Hivai's, and it foreshadows his great-uncle Wasserman's and the Jewish writer Bruno Schulz's positions as Jews under the Nazi regime. In many ways, the presence of the child narrator can be interpreted as a mediator between the old and the new Jews in the novel but also as an intermediary between the reader and the Holocaust. In relation to Holocaust literature, Irving Howe has pointed out that

Writers keep a wary distance. They know or sense that their subject cannot be met full face. It must be taken on a tangent, with extreme wariness, through strategies of indirection and circuitous narratives that leave untouched the central horror – that leave it untouched but always invoke or evoke it as a hovering shadow. (194)

Momik can certainly be seen as a device for tangentially approaching the Holocaust, but his innocence and ignorance of the event stand in stark contrast to the reader's abundance of knowledge about the Holocaust. Following Jean-François Lyotard, Idith Zertal contends that the state of Israel was supposed to provide relief from the inability to talk about the Holocaust and 'to create a space and an echo-chamber for [the Holocaust survivors'] lives and their stories' (57). Tom Segev agrees with this assessment but highlights the fact that although Israel as a state provided the survivors with the possibility of being alive, and no longer being 'dead to the world,' the survivors found it difficult to adapt their 'old' identity to the new Israeli identity, which required them to abandon their diaspora selves (157-58). In his novel, Grossman tries to achieve what the Israeli state failed to do in the 1950s: he presents the mad and incoherent survivors with a space in which they are allowed to be faithful to their recollections of the Holocaust, in order to reclaim an identity as a self without denying their past. Momik's parents, even though they are Holocaust survivors themselves, exemplify the prevailing attitude to Holocaust victims in the early post-independence years, before the Eichmann trial of 1961 had freed its victims to speak about their experiences in public. They refuse to tell Momik about the genocide and only refer to the Holocaust as 'Over There' (*See Under: Love [SUL]*, 50). In his collection of essays *Writing in the Dark: Essays on Literature and Politics*, Grossman explains that the spatial marker 'there' – contrary to the temporal marker 'then' – 'suggests that somewhere out there, in the distance, the thing that happened is still occurring, constantly growing stronger alongside our daily lives' (2009: 70). Apart from fitting into existing representational categories of the Holocaust as a 'dark shadow,' Grossman's description of the Holocaust as inextricably linked to Israeli identity precludes any sense of closure, and positions the Holocaust as an eternal presence within Israeli national discourse. This haunting quality of the Holocaust can be situated within the Zionist discourse, which promotes Israel as the only place that can prevent another Holocaust from happening.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Post-Zionism challenges the Zionist assumption of the Jewish state as a safe place for the

As a result of relocating individual experiences of the Holocaust to an 'undesirable' old Jewish identity, in 1950s Israel, the Holocaust can only be encountered as a 'stranger.' There is a certain amount of knowledge about the event but it is a selective knowledge, which does not fully accept the Holocaust as causing individual suffering. Sara Ahmed insists that "the stranger" is produced through knowledge, rather than as a failure of knowledge' (16). Although 'strangeness' indicates an element of the unfamiliar, Ahmed asserts that to recognise someone as strange requires a conscious identification based on knowledge. In Grossman's novel, the Holocaust as other is thus produced through a 'holy' knowledge, which transforms it into a symbol, removing it from time and space, echoed in its description as 'Over There.' Momik is represented as the only character in the novel who can attempt to relieve the event of its otherness because he was born after the creation of the Israeli state. Fulfilling the role of a conventional child character, he possesses an innocence and ignorance that mirrors the innocence and ignorance of the Israeli Jews who have been encouraged to forget the Holocaust, and the Jewish existence in the diaspora through the promotion of the new Jew/old Jew binary and the emphasis on the *sabra* as the new Israeli identity. But Momik is unable to engage with this event until he has found out more about the Nazi Beast, which he believes is necessary to release his parents and the other Holocaust survivors from their suffering:

Over There everyone is covered in a very thin layer of glass that keeps them motionless, and you can't touch them and they're sort of alive but sort of not, and there's only one person in the whole world who can save them and that's Momik. (*SUL*, 50)

The metaphorical depiction of the Holocaust survivors as separated from the outside world by a layer of glass criticises their reified position as quintessential victims opposed to the new Jews rather than considering them as individual human beings who have suffered under the Nazis.

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Jewish people today. See Nimni's edited collection *The Challenge of Post-Zionism: Alternatives to Israeli Fundamentalist Politics* (2003). Nimni argues that: 'At the outset of the twenty-first century, Jews *qua* Jews are more physically endangered in Israel than in any other part of the world' (7).

Momik's quest to find out more about the Nazi Beast leads him to learn about his own past and the event that has shaped his parents and neighbours, but he also discovers a 'hidden face' of his own identity. He tries to lure the Nazi Beast out of its hiding place by using his imagination and his detective skills, capturing different animals, because his neighbour Bella has told him that 'the Nazi Beast could come out of any kind of animal if it got the right care and nourishment' (*SUL*, 13). For Momik, 'real' Jewishness resides within the Holocaust survivors and he believes that by imitating them, he will be able to provoke the beast: 'there were so many things to find out about how to be a real Jew, about how to have the kind of expression a Jew has, and to give off the exact same smell, like Grandfather for instance' (*SUL*, 69). The fact that Momik does not know what constitutes a Jew, and seems unaware of his own Jewish identity, illustrates that he has been unable to accept Jewishness as a part of his own identity because his parents have not shared their experience of the camps with him.<sup>16</sup> Eventually, he takes his great-uncle and the other Holocaust survivors down to the cellar to provoke the Beast to come out of the captive animals he keeps there. He hopes that a number of Jews might be 'enough to make the Beast think it was worth coming out' (*SUL*, 81). Ironically, this last attempt succeeds, if only partially, and certainly not in the way that Momik anticipated. The Nazi Beast does not emerge out of the animals but it rears its head inside Momik who begins to feel contempt for the Holocaust victims and their inability to overcome the trauma of their past. He blames them for their weakness, subscribing to the idea of the old Jew as a burden for the new Israeli Jewish identity: 'This poor bunch of crazy Jews (...) stuck to him and ruined everything, his whole life they ruined' (*SUL*, 83). Momik succumbs to the view of the old Jew as a stigma to the new Israeli identity, and exhibits a desire to move beyond the 'old' Jewish experience of the Holocaust.

Momik could also be read as a manifestation of Grossman's own nostalgia for an innocent past and a present where Israel does not exist. In

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<sup>16</sup> Momik's inability to access his own past can be linked to Hirsch's notion of 'postmemory', which she defines as children growing up with the previous generation's experiences as 'traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated' (22).

his non-fiction, Grossman has described the situation in Israel/Palestine as a 'national and personal defect' which 'many (...) have become so used to (...) that [they] find it difficult to even believe in any other existence' (2009: 116). This counterfactual desire is embodied in the Bruno Schulz section of the novel. The Polish-Jewish writer was killed during the Holocaust but in *See Under: Love*, Momik imagines that he escaped his death and continued his life among a shoal of salmon. Bruno's existence is described as a liberating singularity: 'even the dual was too plural for you, and the truly crucial things had to be said in the singular' (*SUL*, 165). The idea of a singular identity disconnected from the pressures of being defined in relation to others advocates an existence independent of a nation and of history. Grossman's vision of an alternative, diasporic identity can be aligned with models of Jewish diaspora identities as critical stances towards Israel and Zionism, as advanced by Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, and David Landy. In this sense, Grossman's novel confirms diaspora, even if only on an imaginative level, as 'a positive resource in the necessary rethinking of models of polity in the current erosion and questioning of the modern nation-state system and ideal' (Boyarin and Boyarin 2002: 5).

### **The Transformative Power of Stories: Literature, Humanity, and Resistance**

It is only as an adult writer that Momik comes to terms with the Holocaust as part of his Jewish identity and history, when he decides to write down his own and his great-uncle's stories, illustrating the importance of the creative act, of writing, as a means to engage with otherness. He realises that accepting the Holocaust as part of his identity can only be achieved by engaging with the Jewish Holocaust victims' alleged lack of resistance to the Nazis in the camps.<sup>17</sup> As a result, he imagines travelling back in time with his great-uncle Anshel. Grossman resorts to magical realism to 'transcend boundaries' of time and space. Christopher Warnes, in examining magical

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<sup>17</sup> Grossman has explained that 'as I grew up, I became increasingly aware that I could not truly understand my life in Israel, as a man, as a father, as a writer, as an Israeli, as a Jew, until I wrote about my un-lived life, *over there*, in the Holocaust' (2009: 75).

realism as a response to colonial violence and the othering that accompanies colonisation, identifies it as ‘an attempt to escape from the violence, epistemic or actual, of rational truth’s “grasp on things” by calling into question post-Enlightenment certainties about what is real and what is not’ (152). Grossman uses magical realism to contradict the ‘truth’ of the old Jew as a passive sufferer by showing one specific instance of resistance in the camps, and thus creates an avenue for the Holocaust survivors in the novel to reclaim their identities as fictional selves.<sup>18</sup> In this way, the Nazis are defied retrospectively because their aim was to preclude any possibility of witnessing and to erase the Jews from history. In his essay ‘The Desire to be Gisella’ (2006), Grossman asserts that:

When we know the Other from within – even if the Other is our enemy – we can never again be completely indifferent to him. (...) It becomes difficult for us to completely deny him or cancel him out as ‘not human.’ (2009: 52)

This recommendation can be read as extending Grossman’s earlier consideration of the dangers of sealing oneself off from the problems of the conflict and creating an insurmountable block as a result.<sup>19</sup> Although this comment is clearly made in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in *See Under: Love*, Grossman examines the ways in which the enemy can be encountered, by imagining several meetings between a Nazi and a Jew in a concentration camp. This imaginative act can be aligned with Ahmed’s conception of ‘the subject’s existence [which] cannot be separated from the others who are encountered’ (7), positing the meeting between ‘self’ and ‘stranger’ as key for identity formation. Without wanting to suggest that these two situations can be conflated, I contend that the Wasserman section in Grossman’s novel contains important recommendations for encountering Palestinians inside and outside of the Green Line and that by showing the possibility of encountering a Nazi, the embodiment of evil in a Jewish setting, as a human being, Grossman reprimands his fellow Israelis for refusing to engage with the Palestinians and their suffering.

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<sup>18</sup> For a study of the use of magical realism in Holocaust Literature, see Adams’s *Magic Realism and Holocaust Literature: Troping the Traumatic Real* (2011).

<sup>19</sup> The problems of refusing to encounter the other side also lie at the heart of Shehadeh’s diary *The Sealed Room*, which will be discussed in chapter five.

The encounter between the Jew, Anshel Wasserman and the Nazi, Neigel,<sup>20</sup> is precipitated upon the Jew's inability to die. This indestructability represents the Nazis' worst nightmare as David Engel, amongst others, has pointed out that their success depended on the elimination of all the Jews to save Germany as well as humanity as a whole (16). For Gershon Shaked Wasserman embodies 'the eternal Jew', 'poised above life and death, who cannot be defeated by the Holocaust, pain and death' (1989: 318). Although there is certainly an element of invincibility in the way in which this character is represented, contrary to Shaked, I would contend that Wasserman symbolically stands for all the Jewish people that resisted the Nazis during World War II, rather than embodying a Jewish essence that survives the Holocaust. Of course, as one character, Wasserman cannot adequately represent the diverse manifestations of Jewish resistance but describing him as the 'eternal' Jew removes him from the specific political and historical context that makes his individual resistance so powerful. Neigel and Wasserman enter into a reverse Scheherazade relationship: in exchange for telling him a story every evening, Neigel attempts to kill Wasserman. By engaging with a Jew and his story, Neigel wants to challenge what he believes to be Wasserman's opinion about him: 'a Nazi could never be a good writer. They don't feel anything' (*SUL*, 197).<sup>21</sup> Neigel links the ability to feel empathy to the ability to write, illustrating that writing requires a certain imaginative act that allows the writer to imagine others and their feelings. Wasserman agrees reluctantly to Neigel's request because 'if [he] knew how a man like Neigel could be turned into a murderer, perhaps [he] would try to turn him around and reform him' (*SUL*, 205). Grossman has explained that one of his main concerns in *See Under: Love* was to investigate the reasons underlying people's transformations into

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<sup>20</sup> Throughout the novel Neigel is only referred to by his surname. The reader only finds out that his first name is Kurt in the Encyclopaedia, when a conversation between him and his wife is related.

<sup>21</sup> The Hebrew reads *אלה שכאן לא יודים להרגיש כלום* (*Ayien Erech: 'Ahavah'*, 181, my emphasis), which translates as 'They don't *know* how to feel anything.' This statement can be read as either an innate inability to feel empathy or, controversially, it can be seen as a temporary absence of knowledge about fellow feeling, which can be remedied. For the purpose of this chapter, I will adopt the latter interpretation. All translations from Hebrew are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

murderers, expressed in his essay 'Individual Language and Mass Language': 'What must I kill within me to be capable of killing another person or people?' (2009: 77). He suggests that what is lost is something essentially human, which I contend is the ability to identify with others, following Dominick LaCapra who argues that 'empathy (...) recognizes and respects the alterity or "otherness" of the other' (143). Grossman's comment could also be situated within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since he reformulates his statement and asks: 'Am I myself, consciously, or unconsciously, actively or passively, through indifference or with mute acceptance, collaborating at this very moment with some process that is destined to wreak havoc on another human being or another group of people' (2009: 77-78). Grossman implicitly juxtaposes the distance created by the Nazis to enable them to ignore and perpetrate the suffering of the Jews with the Israeli Jewish refusal to address the suffering and the rights of the Palestinians that results in their complicity with the occupation of Palestine.

Besides the original cast of Wasserman's most famous story, *The Children of the Heart*, he gradually introduces more Jewish characters into his stories, among them the Holocaust survivors Momik encountered in his childhood. This inclusion serves to describe their lives as fictional heroes before they became 'mad' survivors and to counteract their exclusive representation as passive sufferers.<sup>22</sup> According to Wasserman, Neigel's main problem is that he 'never leave[s] the confines of [his] own skin' (*SUL*, 232).<sup>23</sup> He is trying to teach Neigel ways to imagine the other, in this case the Jewish camp inmates' daily suffering under the Nazis. Wasserman, and by extension Momik and Grossman, tries to bring the Nazi as other into the realm of the human(e) self through storytelling as a creative act, in the way that Grossman has described in his non-fiction as 'allow[ing] the enemy to be an Other' (2009: 53). Gil Anidjar describes the enemy as an abstract

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<sup>22</sup> In the last part of the novel, written in the form of an encyclopaedia, all of the survivors have their own entries, which narrate their life stories and their achievements before World War II.

<sup>23</sup> The Hebrew translates as Neigel not *daring* to go outside of his limits and his skin: שאינך מדין לצאת חוץ לגדרך ולעורך (*Ayien Erech: 'Ahavah'*, 211, my emphasis).

concept, which is not 'always human' but always associated with conflict and the 'permanent possibility of war' (3, 80), whereas the other is interpreted in Lévinasian terms as a neighbour or prochain, who precedes the subject (3). This idea suggests that unlike the 'enemy,' the 'other' can be encountered and understood as a person and thus be brought into the realm of the self because he is not outside categories of self and other by being perceived as a stereotypical abstract concept. Considering the Nazi as 'other' rather than as 'enemy' implies that there are certain aspects of his personality that can be related to other people's experience.

The act of storytelling can be aligned with Derek Attridge's concept of 'creative reading,' an attempt to make sense of and respond to otherness, which 'involves the shifting of ingrained modes of understanding in order to take account of that which was systematically excluded by them' (79, 123). In 'Individual Language and Mass Language' Grossman has pointed out that 'Reading – literature – restores our dignity and our primal faces, our human faces, the ones that existed before they were blurred and erased among the masses' (2009: 84), agreeing with Attridge that the creative act of reading promotes encounters with otherness. While Wasserman is able to gradually reacquire part of his identity as a self, the reader witnesses Neigel emerging out of the 'totality' and showing his 'primal face' by listening to Wasserman's stories about otherness. He becomes increasingly human by rediscovering his compassion and his ability to imagine a world beyond the Nazi camps. Wasserman defines humanity as making conscious choices, such as not to hate and not to kill: 'No decision, Herr Neigel, is permanently valid (...). It is incumbent upon you to reaffirm your decision each day, every time you kill another person in the camp' (*SUL*, 332). Even though Neigel's attachment to Wasserman makes it impossible for him to kill on an individual level, his efficiency in running the camp is still exemplary, as he has requested another gas-chamber to be installed to accelerate the process of exterminating the Jews, negating Wasserman's definition of humanity as a continuing evaluation of one's decisions.<sup>24</sup> Neigel claims that 'he was not

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<sup>24</sup> This negation ties in with Arendt's view of what Wasserman terms 'humanity' as a rather 'optimistic view of human nature,' as it 'presupposes an independent human faculty (...)

personally responsible for what happened, that he was only following orders from the “Big Machine” (*SUL*, 306). In his novel, Grossman uses this image to caution against the dangers of the language and ideology of the masses, which result in the oppression of the individual, along with the individual’s personal responsibility for their actions, as he later confirms in his non-fiction: ‘it is convenient for us, where the burden of personal responsibility is concerned, to become part of a crowd with no identity, seemingly free from responsibility and absolved of blame’ (2009: 79). Grossman’s view of responsibility resonates with Hareven’s criticism of the Israeli public and the Israeli state, which deny their responsibility in the conflict by hiding behind the security discourse, and with her denunciation of Israeli Jewish complicity with the occupation of Palestine. However, Grossman qualifies Israel’s responsibility: ‘Israel must accept its *partial* responsibility for the refugee problem, alongside the Arab countries that created the problem in 1948’ (2009: 100). Although the Arab countries undeniably played a role in the creation of this problem, as did the United Kingdom, Europe, and North America, it is Israel who has perpetuated this problem for the last six decades and refuses to grant the refugees the right of return. Grossman himself opposes this demand since ‘accepting [it] would be a dangerous move for Israel as a Jewish state, and as a political entity’ (2009: 100). Although he is sympathetic to Palestinians and their suffering, he wishes to maintain Israel as a Jewish state, exhibiting the limits of the concessions he is willing to make to the Palestinian side.

Momik, as the ‘writer’ of Wasserman’s story, confesses that he and Wasserman have lost narrative control over the character Neigel:

He has cleverly and subtly taken advantage of our distaste for him in order to expand the terrain of his personality, the *Lebensraum* of his limited, posterlike existence within us, and to annex more and more character traits, levels of depths, biographical details and logical considerations. (*SUL*, 240)

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that judges in full spontaneity every deed and intent anew whenever the occasion arises’ (2003: 141). Under Nazism, the ‘independent human faculty’ was suppressed by obedience and thus, Neigel lacks what Arendt identifies as ‘spontaneity’ to resist the orders from above and to examine his actions objectively.

Momik's use of the Nazi jargon demonstrates that he wants to reclaim power over his fictional creation, aligning storytelling with the expansion of territory. This expansionist urge contests Zionism as an exceptional movement, situating it within the larger discourse of settler-colonial practices. Neigel has moved beyond the one-dimensional Nazi Momik wanted to represent and is exhibiting human traits.<sup>25</sup> Momik interrupts Wasserman's narrative and foregrounds his own voice as the writer and editor of 'The Complete Encyclopedia of Kazik's Life.' He provides the reader with details of different concepts and characters by means of entries ordered according to the Hebrew alphabet. This intervention could be read as Momik representing Israel and the new Jew, who need to speak for and edit the old Jew's narrative and maintain control over the Holocaust and its uses. A more positive reading would consider Momik as projecting a better Israel based on values like responsibility, defined in the encyclopaedia. However, although there are two entries for 'mercy' and each one of them refers to 'compassion' (*SUL*, 355, 444), there is no record for compassion, suggesting that the ability to feel empathy for the other is lacking as much in 1980s Israel, represented by the adult Momik, as it was in 1950s Israel. This connection between different historical periods allows Grossman to denounce the human cost of Israel's 'security' wars for individuals<sup>26</sup> and the ways in which the image of itself as eternally threatened that Israel projects makes it impossible to engage with the 'enemy.' Although Grossman does not believe that literature can change the world, he is convinced that 'it can offer different ways to live in it' (2009: 82). By stressing the possibility of encountering the Nazi as human, Grossman argues that engaging with the Palestinians as human beings should be achievable, and indeed paramount,

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<sup>25</sup> The idea of a fictional character getting out of hand will be examined in more detail in chapter four, which discusses Shammass's *Arabesques* as imagining an Israeli Jewish character and situates the writer-subject relationship in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a power struggle.

<sup>26</sup> The 1982 Lebanon war was the first war that did not receive general support from the Israeli Jewish public and Pappé even describes it as 'Israel['s...] Vietnam' (2006a: 220). In his latest novel, *To the End of the Land* (2003; English translation 2010), Grossman examines the psychological consequences of the compulsory military service in the occupied territories, not only for the soldiers themselves, but also for their families. This novel is of course overshadowed by Grossman's loss of his own son, who died in the second Lebanon war in 2006.

for the general Israeli Jewish public, not only for the solution of the conflict but equally to avoid becoming indifferent to the other side by not considering them as human beings. He explains that for him a 'literary approach' to the conflict is 'an act of redefining ourselves as human beings in a situation whose essence and methodology consist entirely of dehumanization' (2009: 57).

## **Conclusion**

Both Hareven and Grossman's novels recount untold or counterfactual stories critical of Zionism, and contest the exclusionary social structures that Israel has been build on and continues to reify. They engage with ideas of Jewishness linked to the Diaspora and the Holocaust and posit exile, wandering, and otherness as essential elements of Jewish history, the exclusion of which results in an incomplete and dehistoricised Israeli Jewish identity. Hareven uses the image of the biblical Hebrew coloniser as a pedagogical tool to illustrate the suffering of the Palestinians in Israel and the Israeli public's role in the continued occupation of Palestine. Grossman on the other hand focuses on ideas of Jewish victimhood under the Nazi regime and dispels the myth of the Jew as a weak and passive sufferer through Wasserman's assertive role in his encounter with Neigel. Wasserman's ability to sustain a prolonged engagement with the other's story and his views of the 'enemy' enables Grossman to recommend a better understanding between Israelis and Palestinians. However, despite their liberal views and their willingness to engage with the Palestinians and their suffering under Israeli occupation in their fiction, both novelists' position in their non-fiction is closer to mainstream Israeli leftist attitudes. Hareven's criticism of Zionism does not encompass its nature as a colonial project and Grossman refuses to grant the Palestinians the right of return. In *The Yellow Wind* (1988), Grossman discusses this issue sympathetically when he notes that 'even if the problem of the refugees living under Israeli rule is solved, the bitterness of more than a million brothers in the Arab countries (...) will remain' (10). But a decade later, in his essay 'Point of no Return,' Grossman

shirks away from Israeli responsibility for the Palestinian refugees and insists on the Jewish character of the state of Israel. This disparity between their fiction and their non-fiction suggests that they see their novels as more depoliticised and use them as allegorical tools for the reader to discern their challenges to the Israeli state, albeit still operating within the acceptable limits imposed by a Zionist discourse. Fiction allows them to experiment with alternative visions of Israel, which cannot be read as proofs of their political positions because of their imagined nature. Nevertheless, both novels offer a creative account of the other histories Israel could have had. They advocate an Israeli Jewish identity that is mindful of its situation within Jewish history in the Diaspora and independent of a Jewish state. Moreover, they insist on the need to accept contemporary Israeli society as plural and the different visions of nationality and inclusivity these identities have.

The focus on Jewish identity as minority is continued in the next chapter, which engages with postcolonial adaptations of ideas of (Jewish) wandering, exile, and otherness to create a comparative framework for the suffering of other minority identities. Anita Desai and Caryl Phillips use the Holocaust, as a ubiquitous event in the European and Western imaginary, to illustrate other types of marginalisation and discrimination in the contexts of racism and colonialism, situating the Holocaust within a global discourse of exclusion and marginality.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Colonising Jewishness? Minority, Exile, and Belonging in Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* and Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood***

#### **Between Europe and Its Others: The Jew in Postcolonial Literature**

In postcolonial literature, the figure of the Jew – with his or her connotations of ambiguity and cosmopolitanism – is becoming a recurrent trope, aligning experiences of the colonial and the postcolonial with ideas of Jewishness. Aamir Mufti sums up the position of the Jew within the modern Western imagination as ‘both the threat of particularism confronting the secularization and universalizing state and the figure of universal exchange that serves as a marker for the uprootedness and abstraction of bourgeois culture’ (39). On one hand, the Jew can be seen as the outsider par excellence, disrupting hegemonic social orders and refusing to be assimilated into ‘universalizing states.’ On the other hand, the Jew paradoxically becomes a ‘figure of universal exchange,’ indicating the ‘transferable’ nature of the Jewish condition and the ways in which the Jewish experience serves as a universalising and encompassing model for other subjugated groups. Implicit in the idea of ‘exchange’ is the possibility of reciprocity and the ways in which Jewishness is shaped by being applied to and appropriated in other contexts. In this chapter, I consider the uses of ideas of Jewishness in postcolonial literature along with the political reasons underlying this inclusion. I am particularly interested in the limits of this applicability, or rather the conditions that need to be in place for applying Jewishness to other contexts, especially in relation to the Holocaust, which still looms large within European society as a unique catastrophe that should not be situated within a comparative framework. As a result, the Holocaust as an instance of Jewish suffering is either not included in postcolonial literature or not deemed appropriate as a direct point of comparison for the experience of the marginalisation and suffering of

colonial subjects.<sup>1</sup> One of the few exceptions is Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* (1988) and Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood* (1997). They include Jewish characters and their experience of World War II in their novels to posit the Holocaust as a paradigmatic instance of (Jewish) suffering for other minority groups to demonstrate the predicament of colonial subjects at the hands of European colonialism. In this way, the European genocide serves as a comparative framework, or rather as a point of entry, to apprehend the suffering of non-European victims of colonisation, as well as placing Nazism and colonialism within global systems of discriminatory and exclusionary practices. Although both novels use the Holocaust as a European event to illustrate colonial suffering to a Western audience, they refuse the Eurocentric view that considers the Holocaust as a uniquely European catastrophe. Instead they trace the similarities between Jewish discrimination and persecution under the Nazis and instances of racial and religious discrimination in early modern Europe and twentieth-century India and Israel.

Bryan Cheyette notes that the Jews' role within racial discourses is frequently reduced to 'either archetypal victims or exemplary Europeans' (2000: 54). On one hand they are perceived as part of the European majority tradition, complicit with orientalist practices, but on the other hand they are reduced to marginality and eternal victimhood, especially victimhood conflated with the Holocaust. Jonathan Boyarin, in discussing Western ideas of Jewishness after World War II, draws attention to 'the obliteration of Otherness through the method of empathy' (1994: 434), since rather than offering a nuanced portrayal of the diverse manifestations of Jewishness in Europe and North America after 1945, in Western discourses the Jews are perceived first and foremost as Holocaust victims at the exclusion of other aspects of their identity. Both critics stress the need to move beyond the association of Jews with majority Europe and establishing their minority status, albeit not exclusively as a synonym for victimhood, but as a key aspect for comparisons with the colonial and the postcolonial condition.

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<sup>1</sup> One example of a critical response that deems non-Jewish writers' appropriation of the Holocaust in their novels as inappropriate is Mantel's review of Phillips's *The Nature of Blood*, which will be discussed in more detail in the second part of this chapter.

Michael Rothberg's recent *Multidirectional Memory: The Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009) offers a seductive account of the possibilities of memory and the potential dialogues it could create between different forms of suffering. He situates the Holocaust within broader discourses of decolonisation and civil rights movements, using the genocide as a focal point to analyse other types of persecution. He suggests that:

A model of multidirectional memory allows for the perception of the power differentials that tend to cluster around memory competition, but it also locates that competition within a larger spiral of memory, in which even hostile invocations of memory can provide vehicles for further, countervailing commemorative acts. (2009: 11)

However, although the concept of multidirectional memory works in theory, in practice it is often unable to transcend the 'memory competition' between antagonistic groups, the most prominent example being the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the Holocaust is still perceived as a validation of exclusive Jewish rights to national and territorial sovereignty in Western culture, overriding the Palestinian claims to a national homeland. Moreover, I contend that Rothberg's focus on the Holocaust as a European event risks a reduction of Jewishness to the Holocaust, and hence passivity and victimhood. Accordingly, this model precludes productive possibilities offered by thinking through the colonial and the postcolonial in light of ideas of Jewishness circulated in the Western imaginary before 1945 as well as Jewishness as a hegemonic identity in Israel after 1948. The risk of conflating the Jews with the experience of the Holocaust can be avoided by situating Jewishness in a historical context, an approach proposed by Aamir Mufti in his study *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (2007). Based on the Enlightenment figure of the Jew as resistant to processes of emancipation and assimilation, he offers a model of Jewishness that can be utilised as a critical framework to assess the situation of the Muslim minority in India. His aim is 'to locate the troubled and recurring question of Jewish emancipation-assimilation as an early, and *exemplary*, instance of the crisis of minority' (7). In this chapter, I follow Mufti's historical approach to the idea of Jewishness but I extend his analytical method to include non-Western minorities. I interrogate the ways

in which other disempowered and dispossessed communities contest ideas of Jewish minority as conflated with the Holocaust and victimhood, and as shaping and informing 'postcolonial' ideas of Jewishness in relation to Israel and the occupation of Palestine.

Phillips's and Desai's novels are linked by their comparative perspective on Jewishness, the Holocaust, and postcoloniality but they differ in their strategies for representing the Holocaust. Phillips focuses on the first-hand experience of the genocide through the character of Eva Stern who is deported to Bergen-Belsen. His novel describes varying types of Jewish otherness that emerge out of specific social and historical conditions, illustrating that the idea of Jewishness as quintessential minority is an abstract concept composed of specific instances of individual minority identity shaped by a particular context. Desai's eponymous Baumgartner only experiences the Holocaust from a distance, through his mother's letters, and by being interned in a detention camp in India, which does not compare to the experience of the Jews' persecution in Nazi Germany. Contrary to Phillips, Desai only implies the historical origins of Jewish minority identity and the stereotypes of eternal otherness by exiling Baumgartner from Germany during World War II. Nevertheless, Desai similarly resists the easy link between Baumgartner's alienation and his Jewishness, disrupting the clichéd view of the 'wandering Jew,' and deconstructing Baumgartner's otherness into specific instances of alienation linked to particular historical and social contexts. At times, however, especially in relation to Baumgartner's death, Jewishness functions as a European narrative trope to examine colonial suffering, as Desai admitted in an interview: 'I had to find a way to generalise [Baumgartner's] isolation and one way of doing it was to make him a Jew' (qtd. in Bliss 522). Whereas Desai exclusively uses Jewishness as minority, linked to exile and deracination, Phillips also engages with the creation of Israel and the exclusionary social hierarchies that the founding of the Jewish state resulted in.

By situating the 'Jew' as a representative of the European minority condition in a (post)colonial setting – whether in India or Palestine/Israel – Desai and Phillips affirm the historical links between Jewish minority

identity and postcolonial identity in their novels. Collocating ideas of Jewish otherness and minority with the experience of colonialism and racism consolidates the connections between the construction of different 'outsider' groups at the hands of dominant ideologies. Jewishness functions as a means to confirm the universal nature of conditions such as exile and belonging while preserving the political and historical specificity of the minority groups under discussion. Apart from using Jewishness as a model for non-Jewish minorities, the authors tease out the impact of other marginalised groups to comment on the Jewish experience. They propose what I would term a dialectical approach to minority identity, following Antonio Gramsci who in his own intellectual development posits the notion of dialogue as essential for the formation of critical opinions: 'I have to engage in a dialogue, be dialectical, to arrive at some intellectual stimulation' (1973: 193). I advocate a critical dialogue that focuses not only on the influence of Jewishness on non-Jewish identities but similarly aligns the situation in Israel with the problems of majority and minority formation in postcolonial states, as indispensable for offering a model to bridge the theoretical gap between postcolonial and Jewish studies. In Desai's case this dialectical approach is achieved by depicting Baumgartner's incarceration in a British detention camp in India and his experience of partition violence in Calcutta. Phillips's novel examines the influences of colonialism on Jewishness in relation to the creation of Israel and the establishment of a Jewish hegemony excluding non-European minorities. In this way, I suggest that Desai and Phillips extend Mufti's conception of Jewish identity as an analytical method for other minorities by combining metropolitan and marginal uses of Jewishness and considering the Jew as a figure of universal exchange who not only serves as a model for other contexts but is also shaped by being situated in a comparative discourse with the colonial and postcolonial condition.

### **'Accepting but Not Accepted': Alienation, Race, and Belonging**

The structure of Desai's novel moves between recounting a single day in Baumgartner's life – the day of his death – and flashbacks to his youth in Germany and his arrival in colonial India, indicating the parallels between Baumgartner's inability to belong in Germany and in India. As a child, Baumgartner's feeling of difference is not derived from his Jewishness, at least not consciously. Desai describes his unease at being torn between his father and his mother: 'Hugo skittered back and forth between the apartment and his father's showroom, the staircase in between a place of perilous choice, the no man's land where he might be summoned and drawn by either' (*Baumgartner's Bombay [BB]*, 26). Baumgartner's indecisiveness between his father's public and his mother's private spaces can be read allegorically as showing his inability to find a place for himself both in his home and in his community. The in-between location of the staircase is represented as a desirable space, where Baumgartner does not have to decide on a fixed definition of his identity. Edward Said has distinguished between 'filiation,' the culture to which one is bound by birth, nationality, profession, and 'affiliation': the 'system acquired (...) by social and political conviction, economic and historical circumstances' (1991: 25). Baumgartner is torn between his filiation, the Jewish culture he is born into, and his affiliation, the German culture he is surrounded by, which in Nazi Germany act as diametrically opposed identities. As a result, this intermediate space is described as a threatening 'no man's land,' exemplifying the dangers that this 'unbelonging' and fluidity entail. Said's view of exile resonates with this idea of a 'no man's land,' as even though he sees exile as a position of privilege for the intellectual, he also describes it as a 'median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old' (2000b: 49).

Baumgartner's preference for in-between spaces is confirmed when he stops in Venice on his way to India. Choosing Venice as a setting recalls another famous Jewish character: Shakespeare's Shylock. Desai rehearses historical representations of Venice by describing a Jewish quarter, reminiscent of the Jewish ghettos existing in Renaissance Venice, linking

Baumgartner and Shylock. Besides foreshadowing Baumgartner's eventual failure to be integrated into any society, this intertextual reference can be considered as reclaiming Shylock, who has been misappropriated by anti-Semitic, and especially Nazi, discourse (Shapiro 228). After an initial unsuccessful attempt to find the Jewish quarter, Baumgartner does not follow in Shylock's steps but imagines a place for himself in the fictional Venice of his mind. Venice becomes the perfect place for Baumgartner: 'Venice was the East and yet it was Europe too; it was that magic boundary where the two met and blended, and for those seven days Hugo had been part of their union' (*BB*, 63). He can fit into this imaginary realm for a short while but this in-between space cannot offer him a permanent identity as he is not both of the East and the West but distinctly European. Cheyette suggests that Desai does not use Venice's foreignness as an easy solution to bridge India and Europe in Baumgartner's identity (2000: 69). Indeed, the divide between Europe and India is not simply overcome by situating Venice as an 'in-between' space, thus refusing the common postcolonial view of the potential of hybridity.<sup>2</sup> As the novel progresses, Desai demonstrates that Baumgartner's 'in-betweenness' is derived from his own position as a marginalised Jew who travels to India as a European tourist, recalling eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel writers, who fulfilled the metropolis's 'obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and other continually to itself' (Pratt 6). But as Elaine Ho observes, this move from the European centre to the non-European periphery also reflects 'the classic colonialist pattern of the dispossessed displaced from the metropolis to the margins' (56). Baumgartner increasingly becomes the 'dispossessed,' acting as a representative of marginalised people across the world. At the same time, he can be read as a representative of the European centre, and the colonial power associated with it. In this context, his increasing

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<sup>2</sup> The most famous advocate of the in-between space, produced by hybridity, is Bhabha, who identifies hybridity as 'the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal' (154). For a critical engagement with the development of Bhabha's notion of hybridity, see Young's *White Mythologies* (1990), especially pp.48-51. For a discussion of Bhabha's attempts to think beyond the binary, and the problems of hybridity for postcolonial studies, see pp.130-140 and pp.185-203 of Moore-Gilbert's *Postcolonial Theory* (1997).

degeneration foreshadows the collapse of European colonial powers after World War II.

In school, Hugo deliberately distances himself from the other children and seems to relish his difference and the ensuing isolation. Even when he is transferred to an all-Jewish school, he is perceived as an outsider, which allows Desai to disconnect his alienation from his Jewishness. In an interview, Desai has claimed that 'Hugo is not a representative of the Jewish race (...) but of the human race' (qtd. in Bliss 523). Despite Desai's insistence on this separation, Hugo's father gasses himself in 1939, as a result of having been to Dachau. This act not only echoes but also pre-empts the Nazis' final solution<sup>3</sup> and consciously connects the father's death to his Jewishness. His father's death is the only experience of the concentration camps for Baumgartner as he leaves Germany before the outbreak of the war. His mother is later deported to the concentration camp and although her letters are censored, they imply her predicament. Baumgartner experiences this suffering from a distance, which makes it easier for him to continue living in an imagined reality. After his father's death, however, Hugo's self-inflicted alienation becomes meaningless as he is confronted with an enforced isolation. He is deprived of a space in-between as he only has his mother left, who increasingly represses the real world, practising the *Totschweigentaktik* (playing dead): 'At times, it is best (...) to stay quietly in one place, so that no one notices (...) till things become better again (*BB*, 54). Baumgartner needs to adopt the role of husband and provider for his mother and above all, embody the 'voice of reason,' unsuccessfully trying to convince his mother to come with him to India to escape persecution from the Nazis.

When Baumgartner immigrates to India, he does not blame the Nazis for his forced expulsion from Germany and his being turned into a 'Jew' but Germany as a country, or more accurately, the Nazis conflated with a contaminated version of Germany: 'In Germany, he (...) had been aware of others thinking of him as a Jew but not done so himself. In ejecting him,

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<sup>3</sup> The implementation of the final solution was decided on 20 January 1942 at the Wannsee conference. For its role within Nazi extermination policies, see Longerich's *The Wannsee Conference in the Development of the 'Final Solution'* (2000).

Germany had taught him to regard himself as one.' (BB, 62). Desai suggests that Baumgartner only accepts Jewishness as part of his identity when he becomes the 'wandering Jew,' thus linking his Jewish identity to the condition of exile. Nico Israel makes a useful distinction between 'exile,' which implies a 'coherent subject or author and a more circumscribed, limited conception of place and home' and 'diaspora,' which 'aims to account for a hybridity or performativity that troubles such notions of cultural dominance, location and identity' (3). Israel sees exile as a more narrow, limited, and limiting conception of displacement, whereas diaspora includes a creative element which defies categories of belonging. Baumgartner can certainly be considered as an 'exilic' other in that he has a 'limited conception of place.' His identity is very much linked to the idea of 'home,' both belonging and homeland, specifically the German homeland embodied in his mother. Emigrating forces him to define his identity in relation to the only category that he has left: 'Jewishness.' As the novel progresses, Baumgartner, or at least his 'Jewishness,' increasingly becomes a 'diasporic' other that troubles 'notions of (...) identity'. Desai deliberately describes him as a disruptive force, not only to hegemonic powers and history but also to clear-cut categories of identity. In Germany Baumgartner could be read as defying belonging because he did not identify himself as opposed to the Aryans nor did he see himself as part of the Jewish community. In Venice, he positions himself between the East and the West, even though as a German Jew he is clearly European, and thus Western. In India, Baumgartner does not fit comfortably into the category of European tourist but on the other hand he also never achieves the status of 'native,' which locates him within Said's category of exile as 'median state,' as he cannot separate himself completely from his old identity neither can he fully adopt a new one.

Ironically, in India Baumgartner is too white to belong whereas in Germany he was too 'black': 'In Germany, he had been dark – his darkness had marked him the Jew, *der Jude*. In India, he was fair – and that marked him the *firanghi*' (BB, 20). According to Anne McClintock, the social hierarchies encoded in nineteenth-century race discourse were based on 'minute shadings of difference' (54). In her description of Baumgartner's

difference, Desai exposes the contradictions inherent in concepts of whiteness propagated by race theorists and draws attention to the ambivalence of Jewishness as a racial category. Moreover, this description allows her to link Jewish marginalisation to black racism, illustrating the fact that black and Jewish people were both outsiders in Nazi Germany, and as Sander Gilman notes, they were 'associated not merely because they were both "outsiders" but because qualities ascribed to one became the means of defining the difference of the other' (1985: 35). Despite his inability to fit in, Baumgartner is very intent on creating a home in India, as he promised his mother he would do so: 'He had to succeed in [making a place for himself] if the dream of bringing his mother to India and making a home for her was to be turned into a reality' (*BB*, 93-94). Desai is using home as a colonial concept, as Baumgartner wants to create a home at the periphery, to mirror his home at the centre. Susheila Nasta has defined home 'not necessarily where one belongs but the place where one starts from' (1), which can be applied to Baumgartner's idea of belonging. But recent postcolonial criticism has adopted a more critical stance towards the idea of 'home,' stressing the ideological implications of the 'motherland' as 'illusory haven which both beckoned and betrayed many of Britain's imperial subjects before and after independence' (Nasta 1). By collocating Baumgartner's attempts to overcome his exilic and wandering state with the colonial and postcolonial condition of uprooting, Desai illustrates the parallels between conceptions of belonging and exile in Jewish diaspora and postcolonial studies. Moreover, the idea of an 'illusory' home is not only applicable to imperial subjects and 'wandering Jews' but Desai's critique could equally be related to the Israeli context, especially in the context of the creation of Israel and its inability to solve the 'Jewish Question' as Hannah Arendt amongst others had predicted.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Arendt's *The Jewish Writings* (2007), especially her essays 'The Political Organisation of the Jewish People' and 'Zionism Reconsidered.' Her assessment of Israel as a solution to anti-Semitism foreshadowed the problems of occupying another people's territory at the same time as seeking to establish a secure homeland.

### **His War Was Not Their War: Jewish and (Post)Colonial Minorities**

During World War II, Baumgartner is taken to a detention camp, as the British Empire, which India forms part of, is at war with Germany. In the camp, which functions as a space of British control and imprisonment within India, the British authorities do not differentiate between Nazis and Jews. For them, the inmates are all members of the German race, who represent the enemy. As in Germany, Baumgartner can be considered as 'the enemy within' as he is not recognisable as such and the colonial authorities need his passport to verify his 'Germanness.' Their ignorance about the German-Jewish conflict can be read as symptomatic of their local ignorance of India. Britain, as the major world power at the time, situated Hindus and Muslims as 'inescapably separate and mutually incompatible' religions, disregarding nuanced cultural and ethnic distinctions between different communities in India (Khan 20). In both cases, the minority group is simply incorporated in the term designating the majority, obliterating not only the conflict between them but also the different communities that exist alongside, and independent of, the majority.

Baumgartner, despite his initial exasperation, adapts to life in the camp quickly. Paradoxically, 'captivity had provided him with an escape from the fate of those in Germany, and safety from the anarchy of the world outside' (*BB*, 131). He neither has to contemplate what would have happened to him in Germany, nor does he have to think about his future as a *firanghi* in India. For Baumgartner, the whole experience has 'a certain romance' (*BB*, 109), linking it to his time in Venice, when he enjoyed the in-betweenness that he had inscribed onto the Italian city in an orientalist fashion. As he is deprived of communicating with his mother, Baumgartner feels torn between wanting information about the Jews' fate in Germany and a desire to preserve the illusion of the 'paradisaal' Germany of his childhood:

It was as if his mind were trying to construct a wall against history, a wall behind which he could crouch and hide, holding him to a desperate wish that Germany was still what he had known as a child and that in that dream-country his mother continued to live the life they had lived together. (*BB*, 118)

Baumgartner's illusion acts as a protective shield to overwrite history and to create an 'imagined' reality, following Salman Rushdie's concept of the fictionalisation of homelands in exile: 'we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; (...) we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind' (10). Although Rushdie identifies the lost homeland as imaginary, in Baumgartner's case, the camp as an actual space becomes 'of the mind' as he inscribes it with his visions of Germany. Rosemary George sees this imaginative act as a political statement: 'Homes are not neutral places. Imagining a home is as political an act as imagining a nation' (6). A German Jew who imagines Germany as his homeland defies the Nazi idea of the eternally wandering Jew, belonging nowhere and having no homeland of his own. Baumgartner's imaginative act moves beyond a limited conception of the exilic Jew as attempting to create a space of belonging as it becomes an act of political rebellion against the Nazis, even if only from a distance. However, his superimposition of India with Germany is motivated above all by his need to anchor his sense of self, which has lost its last point of reference with the increasing certainty about his mother's death. Baumgartner can only relate his exilic self to home as a place that has been inscribed by his imagination, already made clear during his stay in Venice but which now has become inevitable, as Germany as a homeland seems to be irremediably lost to him.

Baumgartner extends his imaginary homeland beyond the camp, when he sees a blonde young woman outside the camp, who reminds him of Germany: 'He had not known women like her in Germany, he had never lived in the German countryside, and yet she seemed to embody his German childhood – at least he chose to see her as such an embodiment' (*BB*, 127). Baumgartner's act of inscription functions psychologically and politically: the stranger is imbued with his memories of a lost past and she comes to represent his sense of *Heimat*, ironically by embodying the Nazi stereotype of the healthy Aryan woman. Although this longing for a 'Nazi' ideal could be read as excluding Baumgartner even further from Germanness, I would suggest that this imaginative act serves to reclaim values and images that

have been tainted by being appropriated by the Nazis. Hence Baumgartner's inclusion of the 'Aryan' woman in his vision of a homeland contributes to the subversiveness of the 'wandering Jew' who creates a space of belonging for himself. The idea of home as an 'innocent' Germany is transplanted onto the camp and inscribed onto a stranger, illustrating the difficulty of defining 'Germany' and 'German,' opposing the idea of the German as Nazi to the concept of German as a civic identity, linked to a specific territory. As a result, the uncertainty about German identity accentuates the ambiguous identity of the Jews, who are supposed to be defined in opposition to Germanness, echoing Edgar Hilsenrath's challenge to definitions of Germanness discussed in chapter one. However, Baumgartner's attempts to recreate a lost past and to resurrect a childhood by conflating India with a Germany that at the time appeared suffocating and narrow to him, are condemned as futile, since the Nazi occupation has destroyed the Germany of his childhood.

Upon returning to Calcutta after World War II, Baumgartner articulates the European view of India as 'chaotic:' 'The city made the interment camp seem privileged, an area of order and comfort.' (*BB*, 162). This description exemplifies Desai's strategy 'to experience India through the character, Hugo Baumgartner' (qtd. in Bliss 527). Moreover, the 'chaos' stresses that Calcutta is now in the middle of decolonisation and partition. Partition has been compared to the Holocaust in that its violence is 'non-narratable' in an Indian setting (Pandey 45). Using a German Jew who escaped the Holocaust as a witness to the violence of partition positions a member of one victimised minority as a suitable 'narrator' for the suffering of another minority, thus circumventing the 'unnarratability' of partition violence. Mufti asserts that one of the central claims of the novel, conveyed by linking Jewish minority identity with the Indian Muslim minority experience, is that 'the Indian holocaust is a proper setting for mourning the European genocide' (255). But, as shown above, the novel also uses the experience of the Holocaust to situate the 'European genocide' as a proper setting to understand the suffering of the Indian people, especially the predicament of the Muslim minority. Positioning Baumgartner as a witness

to his Muslim friend's fate allows Desai to draw clear parallels between Baumgartner's marginalisation in Germany and the persecution of the Muslims during partition. Habibullah's description of the violence in India – 'Every night they set some Muslim house on fire, stab some Muslim in the street, rob him too. (...) All Muslims should leave' (BB, 168) – resonates with Baumgartner's depiction of *Reichskristallnacht* in Germany: 'It sounded as if the house, the whole street were being evacuated' (BB, 42). Nevertheless, Baumgartner finds it difficult to feel empathy with his Muslim friend, as he is too concerned with mourning his mother to link his fate to their fate: 'His war was not their war. And they had had their own war. War within war within war. Everyone engaged in a separate war, and each war opposed to another war' (BB, 173). Here, Baumgartner, as a European, is used as a key for European, and Western, audiences to apprehend the suffering of the Muslim minority, placing him inside the partition violence and experiencing the riots. Baumgartner does not define his identity as Jewish and consequently fails to connect his people's persecution in Germany and the suffering of the Muslim population in India. Baumgartner's inability to empathise with the victims of partition violence can also be interpreted as Desai's awareness of the dangers of making 'simple' comparisons between two types of suffering. Although Baumgartner is primarily used for his position as a Jew to illustrate the human condition of isolation, he also functions as a representative of Europe as a colonising power. The structure of Desai's novel could be read as aligning with Eurocentrism as partition only plays a minor role with the majority of the narrative devoted to Baumgartner's alienation. However, the self-centred view of her protagonist, together with his reluctance to be involved in 'their' war, equally serves as a way of criticising the European belief that these wars are separate and have nothing in common, ignoring the fact that European colonialism played a key role in partition violence by creating difference.<sup>5</sup>

Anita Desai's epigraph 'In my beginning is my end,' taken from T.S. Eliot's 'East Coker,' explicitly links Baumgartner's death to his Jewishness.

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the ways in which British colonial rule imposed ideas of difference through the caste system in India, see for example Dirks's *Castes of the Mind* (2001).

On one hand, the novel challenges this notion as Baumgartner's inability to belong starts before the rise of Nazism and continues when he is in India, far away from the anti-Semites. Desai's perception of Baumgartner's Jewishness as a way to generalise suffering and victimisation crystallises when Baumgartner is killed by the Aryan Kurt. She insists that 'I had to have [death] catch up with him in the end, and it seemed right and justified in the Greek sense if that death would be death by a Nazi, by a German' (qtd. in Jussawalla and Dasenbrock 176). Desai's reference to Greek tragedy can be interpreted as an attempt to situate her novel inside the larger framework of classical tragedies and to provide an adequate setting for the Holocaust as a 'modern' tragedy.<sup>6</sup> According to Desai, Baumgartner had to be killed because he had escaped the fate that was 'reserved' for him in Germany, and she insists that 'the reason for his sadness throughout the book is this death that he escaped' (qtd. in Jussawalla and Dasenbrock 176). Since emigrating from Germany, Baumgartner had been haunted by the past, or more precisely by the present that he escaped, and that he fears will eventually catch up with him: 'Alongside the train was always the shadow of the past, of elsewhere, of what had been and could never be abandoned (...) In the darkness, it continues to chase the train, chase Baumgartner' (*BB*, 89). This 'dark shape,' embodied in Kurt, eventually kills him and thus makes sure that his 'fate' indeed catches up with him. Through Baumgartner's death, Desai confirms 'imaginary homelands' as transient and criticises his attempts to inscribe India with his German memories.<sup>7</sup> In addition, a German murdering a Jew echoes the cyclical narrative of the novel, foreshadowed in the quotation from Eliot. Desai has explained that Eliot's cyclical notion of time 'is very, very Indian - the conviction that life doesn't come to an end, merely one episode does end and then there are other episodes to follow' (qtd. in Bliss 530), which contradicts the fatalistic importance imposed on Baumgartner's death by having 'fate' catch up with him. Positioning Jewishness as the

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<sup>6</sup> This intention was already hinted at through her use of Venice as a setting, situating her novel within the Shakespearean tradition of tragedies.

<sup>7</sup> Desai's decision to let his 'German' fate catch up with Baumgartner also aligns his death with the situation in post-war Germany, which Desai sees as still haunted by the memory of the Holocaust: 'The Germans now, even the younger generation, are aware that they haven't escaped the consequences' (qtd. in Jussawalla and Dasenbrock 177).

reason for his death might make it seem that Desai considers Jewish identity and the Holocaust as unique. Nevertheless, as Cheyette notes, 'by re-enacting the Holocaust in India, in the guise of the murderous Kurt, Desai shows just how marginal this European history is in a postcolonial context' (2000: 270). Desai places Baumgartner and his alienation as an 'episode' inside the history of marginalisation and suffering, decentring the Holocaust as a unique instance of suffering. Similarly, this position of the Holocaust disputes the Eurocentric vantage point that privileges European suffering over the suffering of the former British colonial subjects in India. The Holocaust is presented as part of a history of persecution, locating its origins in racism and colonialism, but also indicating that the processes of discrimination and exclusion implemented during the Holocaust continue in different forms in the post-World War II world.

### **The Nature of Blood: Kinship and Difference**

Similar to Anita Desai, Caryl Phillips connects racism, colonialism, and Nazism as exclusionary ideologies and traces the legacies of these practices, specifically the consequences of the victimisation of the Jews during World War II. He uses minority identity as a means to disrupt European hegemonic history, which positions Europe as solely responsible for 'progressive historical change' (Shohat and Stam 2). Phillips offers alternative modes of representing the past in his novel, exemplified by the use of different genres of writing: memories, definitions, and medical records, which both complement and disrupt 'history' by shifting between seemingly 'official' and individual voices, at the same time as illustrating that 'history' is composed of different instances of personal memory. According to Katie Birat, 'Phillips's purpose is not to re-write history, but to re-examine its roots in memory' (202). However, I argue that Phillips's novel does try to re-write a history that he himself has described as 'the prison from which Europeans often speak, and in which they would confine black people' (2000: 121). In exhibiting the parallels between different experiences of otherness, from fifteenth-century Italy to present-day Israel, and

demonstrating the ways in which they built and depend on each other, Phillips suggests that one's own past can only be preserved by relating it to other pasts. No history exists in a vacuum but comes into existence through past histories, which act as catalysts for present events.

Apart from looking at Jewish identity as minority identity, Phillips also engages with the creation of the state of Israel, and implicitly the occupation of Palestine, considering Jewish identity both as a minority and a majority identity. Whereas Desai's references to the historical origins of Jewish marginalisation are implied, Phillips firmly situates Jewish minority identities in a historical context by drawing comparisons between the marginalisation of the Jews and the marginalisation of other minorities. Phillips offers an interconnected history of minority identities, which is supported by the structure of his novel. His main narrative voices are Jewish with an unnamed African general's story embedded within the Jewish narratives of minority and exile. The absence of chapter headings and the fact that different sections are only marked by new paragraphs supports the plot parallels between different narrative voices. The narrative fragments of the novel serve to mirror, extend, and analyse oppositions and affinities between different others. Throughout the novel, Phillips deconstructs Jewish marginality into specific categories of difference, related to the social contexts that produce these differences, and thus refutes the notion of an 'eternal' anti-Semitism existing outside of time and space.<sup>8</sup> In this way, Phillips avoids the dangers of placing the Holocaust inside a 'uniqueness discourse', which according to Rothberg 'potentially creates a hierarchy of suffering' (2009: 9).

Phillips's main character Eva has been described as a 'composite victim' who neatly fits into conventional descriptions of Holocaust sufferers in testimonies (Mantel 39). Phillips's description of the camps and his representation of his protagonist Eva's post-Holocaust trauma is indeed reminiscent of established Holocaust narratives, such as Primo Levi's *If This is a Man* and Elie Wiesel's *Night*. It is also true that Eva's experience is

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<sup>8</sup> Margot Stern, one of Phillips's characters, voices this 'eternal' persecution as follows: 'in spite of everything that we have lost, they still hate us, and they will always hate us' (*The Nature of Blood [NB]*, 88).

related in a very recognisable manner to indicate the universality of her suffering. Nevertheless, I would suggest that this approach is part of Phillips's strategy not to 'lay claim to other people's suffering', which he has been accused of by the same critic (Mantel 40) and that it allows the author to distance himself from this experience at the same time as delineating the similarities with other types of suffering. Phillips has identified with Jewish identity since childhood, as Jews were the only minority who were discussed in terms of exploitation and racialism in 1970s Britain. After seeing a documentary about Anne Frank, Phillips reflected that 'If white people could do that to white people, then what the hell would they do to me?' (2000: 54, 67). Under closer scrutiny, Eva's 'conventional' narrative can be read as an extension of Anne Frank's story by imagining the ways in which her life would have continued if she had survived World War II. Moreover, the familiar account of the camps allows Phillips to draw parallels between the transports to the East and the immigration of African Jews to Israel. Eva describes the people in the trains as being 'packed like livestock' (*The Nature of Blood [NB]*, 168), which mirrors the Ethiopian Jew Malka's description of their being 'stored like thinning cattle' (*NB*, 200)<sup>9</sup> at the Israeli embassy in Ethiopia before they embark on their journey to the 'Promised Land.'<sup>10</sup> By aligning these experiences through their similar descriptions, Phillips cautions against the dangers of social and cultural hierarchies, encompassed in various forms of discrimination and persecution.

The situation of the Jews in Nazi Germany, described in the main narrative by Eva Stern, a German Jew, is reflected by the exclusion of the Italian Jews in fifteenth-century Portobuffole. This parallel confirms the historical roots of Jewish difference but at the same time shows the distinct reasons underlying these forms of marginalisation. Three of the Portobuffolean Jews are accused of murdering a Christian boy and repeating

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<sup>9</sup> Both descriptions are also reminiscent of descriptions of African slaves' conditions, which have often been compared to cattle or livestock.

<sup>10</sup> One of the central myths of the Ethiopian Jews was the story of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt. Consequently, the hardships of the journey from Ethiopia to Israel were perceived as a re-living of the original exodus (Ben-Ezer 109-10).

the offence their people has committed against Jesus. Phillips traces the medieval roots of religious anti-Semitism by enacting the stereotypical accusation of the 'blood libel' or the act of killing gentile children at Passover (McMaster 2001: 90). Although the Jews are relocated to the periphery of Christian society, they are perceived as a very acute threat. A Senate legislation of 1394 required all Jews to wear 'a clearly visible yellow circle the size of a loaf' (Ravid 182), which formed the basis for the use of the David's Star in Nazi Germany (Dunelm 22). This artificial marker of Jewishness illustrates that their difference, supposedly contained in their blood,<sup>11</sup> needs to be made 'visible,' linking medieval anti-Semitism with nineteenth- and twentieth-century race theories. At the same time as foreshadowing the fate of the German Jews, the Portobuffolean Jews also exemplify Jewish particularity as religious difference. Their increasing isolation – 'these Jews arrived as foreigners, and foreigners they remained' (*NB*, 52) – predicts the ghettoization of the Jews in Venice that the black African general witnesses. Phillips's story is based on historical evidence as the Jewish encyclopaedia mentions three Jews who were burned in Venice in 1480,<sup>12</sup> the year in which Phillips's story is set. In the novel too, the Jews are sentenced to death, stressing the powerlessness of the ostracised minority against the majority. This scene anticipates the Jews' fate in the concentration camps, where 'Destiny is a movement of the hand' (*NB*, 163), empowering one person as a representative of Nazi society to determine the life and death of the Jews during the selections.

The Jews in Portobuffole remain true to their faith until the end and refuse to convert to Christianity: 'They are not our masters. We must obey

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<sup>11</sup> Through the idea of blood, Phillips not only investigates the reasons for minorities' exclusion from society but equally engages with the consequences this exclusion has for their idea of 'belonging.' In addition, his novel allows him to deconstruct the 'nature' of blood by demonstrating its futility as a marker of difference and elucidating the shared histories of his marginalised subjects. Although Desai agrees with Phillips's view of blood as 'deeply ambiguous,' her novel insists on the divisions rather than the bonds that blood creates, adopting a more conventional view of blood as a marker of difference. Nevertheless, Desai explains Baumgartner's attraction to Kurt through blood: 'ask your blood why it is so, only the blood knows' (*BB*, 152). Blood is positioned as a sign of kinship, which Baumgartner initially refuses but later his acceptance of Kurt as a fellow foreigner, and his failure to acknowledge him as an offspring of Nazism, leads to his death.

<sup>12</sup> This entry can be found under 'Blood Accusation' in the Jewish encyclopaedia: [jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3408-blood-accusation#anchor4](http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3408-blood-accusation#anchor4)

only God' (*NB*, 182), thus rejecting 'assimilation' to the Christian faith and maintaining their religious difference.<sup>13</sup> Phillips compares the refusal of religious assimilation with the increasing number of German Jews who commit suicide in order to escape the Nazis: 'By utilizing these and other procedures, one remained master of life and death' (*NB*, 66). The German Jews consider suicide as a way of remaining master of their fate, whereas the Italian Jews see religious perseverance as a means to remain loyal to their faith. They are burned at the stake, foreshadowing the Holocaust and the crematoria in the Nazi death camps. But even though Phillips links these two situations, he is very careful to draw out the differences between both cases, as the Italian Jews are the victims of religious anti-Semitism, whereas the Nazis' anti-Semitism is motivated by the fear of racial impurity and the infiltration of the Aryan 'master' race. The representation of Jews as religious enemies, who are unable to assimilate to the Christian faith and customs, confirms them as a minority presence at the periphery of society. However, Phillips stresses the fact that in Germany it is the fear of racial miscegenation that situates the Jews as a danger at the centre of majority society, whose 'purity,' and standing as a 'superior' race, is threatened by the intermingling of majority and minority, Aryan and Jew.

### **Anne Frank and Othello Revisited: The Illusion of Belonging**

After the Holocaust, Eva Stern moves to Britain, where she is unable to fit in. Phillips attributes her alienation to her Holocaust trauma rather than seeing it exclusively as a result of her Jewishness. Whereas Baumgartner tried to inscribe his memories of Germany onto India to create a space of belonging, Eva retreats into a fictitious world, where she imagines that her mother is still alive. When she realises her delusion, she seeks refuge in the idea of marriage as a means to validate her re-entry into European society. Phillips leaves it unclear whether Eva imagines a British soldier's advances or

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<sup>13</sup> As discussed in the general introduction to this study in relation to thinkers like Arendt and Marx, assimilation is unable to solve the Jewish Question, as confirmed by Mufti, who argues that assimilation engenders a cycle of never-ending attempts of 'merging with the dominant culture and society' (138).

whether he deceives her on purpose. She chooses exile in the hope of starting a new life but her hopes are shattered when she finds out that Gerry is married with a child. Eva is increasingly haunted by the memories of the concentration camp, which eventually leads her to commit suicide in order to be reunited with her family: 'I am tired. I want to come home' (*NB*, 199). Both Desai and Phillips use death as a plot device to end the life of the 'wandering' Jew and they position death as caused by the Holocaust. Thus, they both draw on the archetype of the Jewish Holocaust victim to demonstrate the consequences of alienation and exile. In Desai's case, death is presented as fate catching up with the Jewish other whereas Phillips insists that Eva's suicide is a result of the atrocities she has witnessed and experienced, which allows her to achieve tragic agency in her death.

In addition to Anne Frank's story, Phillips also uses Othello's story as an intertext. He describes the fate of an unnamed black African general, who comes to Venice to help fight the Turks, situating his story as a 'prequel' to *Othello*. When the general moves to Venice, he is convinced that he will be moving from being a peripheral other to becoming a metropolitan self: 'I had moved from the edge of the world to the centre' (*NB*, 107), demonstrating the divide between the colonial centre and the periphery, and the equation of the centre with civilisation. For Baumgartner, Venice represented an in-between space, where the East meets the West, but for the African general, sixteenth-century Venice is the centre of Western civilisation, where he can rise to the top of the social hierarchy:

I, a man born of royal blood, a mighty warrior, yet a man who, at one time, could view himself only as a poor slave, had been summoned to serve this state, to lead the Venetian army, to stand at the very centre of the empire. (*NB*, 108-109)

Phillips here moves from Shakespeare's language to nineteenth-century imperial discourse, linking Othello's story with the fate of his own ancestors as black slaves and colonised subjects. Venice appears to contain a liberating quality for both the African general and Baumgartner: it offers them the opportunity to reinvent themselves and define their identities independent of their past. Both men inscribe their reality, an imagined reality, onto Venice and construct it as a space of potential transformation, most

importantly as the location that facilitates their emergence out of marginalisation and powerlessness. However, the general is soon confronted with the darker side of Venice upon discovering the Jewish ghettos. Phillips provides a 'definition' of ghetto, reminiscent of an entry in an encyclopaedia, which asserts that the ghetto was invented in Venice in the sixteenth century. This confined space, reserved for Jews, not only provides a historical link with the ghettos of World War II but also with the African American 'ghettos,' and confirms that Venetian society needs to keep its others at the periphery of their civilisation. As the African general tries to become a full member of Venetian society, he is sent off to Cyprus, illustrating that even the distinctive black other cannot be tolerated in the midst of European society if he tries to rise above his station. This relocation to the margins can be aligned with Jewish marginalisation in European societies, and especially the deportations of the Jews from the Third Reich, who despite being made 'visible' by wearing the Star of David were still considered to be a threat to the majority. In this way, Phillips collocates the exclusionary racial practices of sixteenth-century white Europe with Nazi policies in the twentieth century.

Ironically, it is the act of trying to penetrate the core of white society by marrying a Venetian woman that leads to the general's forced exile to Cyprus. He feels doubly alienated, as he is also separated from his wife and child in Africa. He is reprimanded by a voice, which seems to be another African addressing him as 'brother':

An African river bears no resemblance to a Venetian canal.  
Only the strongest spirit can hold both together. Only the most  
powerful heart can endure the pulse of two such disparate  
life-forces. (*NB*, 183)

The voice encourages him not to betray his origins by becoming a white person but to use his military strength to convince the Venetian authorities of his qualities while remaining faithful to his African identity. Like Baumgartner, he experiences the paradigmatic (Jewish) condition of exile: he is left without a family or a homeland and thus his identity is separated from its roots as it is only defined by being racially different from white Venetian society. In this way, Phillips transplants the idea of wandering and

uprooting to a non-Jewish context, situating it within larger discourses of migration and diaspora. Significantly neither Desai nor Phillips resorts to the postcolonial trope of hybridity as a solution for identity conflicts. Robert Young sees hybridity as intimately linked to subversion, and to 'creating new spaces' (1995: 25) but rather than positing this critical stance as emanating from their hybridity, Phillips and Desai stress their characters' challenge to majority societies as closely linked to their minority status, expressed in their inability to fit into clear-cut categories. In this respect, they can be seen as following Anjali Prabhu, who criticises hybridity as an easy solution to binary thinking, to impart agency on the subaltern and to situate the hybrid person as a 'restructuring and destabilizing' force (1) by refuting hybridity as a self-evident space of agency and belonging.

### **Promised Lands? Jewish Identities in Israel**

Eva's uncle Stephan serves to imagine an alternative, albeit equally isolating, story for Eva, and by extension Anne Frank. Stephan can be read as a male, adult version of Anne Frank, who escapes the first-hand experience of the Holocaust but is nevertheless traumatised by the fate of his family. He left Germany before the outbreak of the war to help build the Jewish homeland in Palestine. The opening of Phillips's novel relates Stephan's work in the British detention camps in Cyprus after World War II, which places the Israel-Palestinian conflict in the context of British colonial history and supports Phillips's view of the conflict in the Middle East 'as an attempt to resolve British colonial ineptitude' (qtd. in Goldman 90).<sup>14</sup> As in Desai's novel, where the description of the British camp in India draws attention to British colonial power, the refugee camps in Cyprus foreground British colonial involvement in Palestine and its disastrous consequences for the Palestinians. In Phillips's novel, Cyprus takes on the qualities of Baumgartner's Venice: it is an in-between space, where Europe meets Africa

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<sup>14</sup> In addition, Phillips's novel can be read as a criticism of Britain's focus on World War II as a moment of victory and as exemplifying the country's role as the 'champion of freedom' (Darwin 39) rather than engaging with its involvement in imperialism and the long-term consequences of colonialism for the former colonial subjects.

and the West meets the East. Significantly, it is here that the unnamed African is eventually able to prove his military skills and his standing as a general, overcoming the idea of himself as racially inferior. Stephan, however, feels unable to integrate himself into the 'new' Jewish society, despite trying to reconnect with his ancestral land, contrasting his social exclusion with the African general's military achievement. He exhibits the attitude of a Holocaust survivor, as he is haunted by the fate of his family: 'Memory. That untidy room with unpredictable visiting hours. I am forever being thrust through the door into that untidy room' (*NB*, 11). In his constant harking back to a lost past, Stephan fits into the mould of the old Jew, which Oz Almog has identified as being linked to exile and diaspora and opposed to the new heroic Israeli identity (87). He finds a companion in Malka, an Ethiopian Jew, who is equally disillusioned with the 'Promised Land,' as she and her family are treated as second-class citizens in Israel, but she makes a careful distinction: 'This Holy Land did not deceive us. The people did' (*NB*, 209). She supports the idea of a Jewish homeland but she does not approve of the ways in which it has been put into practice, founding Israel on exclusionary social categories – old Jew and new Jew – and later the extension of this binary into an Israeli Jew/Israeli Arab opposition. In Malka, the marginalisation of the other characters in the novel is collocated as she is both part of a Jewish and a racial minority (as well as a being a woman), combining the African general's experience as black racial other with the Jewish experience of religious and cultural difference and unbelonging. Situating Malka at the intersection of different forms of exclusion, traced throughout the novel, allows Phillips to connect seemingly dissimilar minorities and to conclude that the processes of discrimination continue, albeit in adapted forms, in the contemporary world.

Malka and her disappointment with Israel as the Promised Land, but also his other characters' isolation allow Phillips to caution against the problems of belonging, or as Bénédicte Ledent argues, he evokes the dangers of forsaking exile in favour of 'an elusive sense of belonging' (140). Stephan is appalled at Israel's policy of 'importing' Jews to maintain a demographic majority but, nevertheless, he subscribes to the idea of the

African Jews as inferior, 'primitive' people, echoing European descriptions of colonial others: 'Dragging these people from their primitive world into this one, and in such a fashion, was not a policy with which he agreed' (*NB*, 212). His racial stereotyping negates the idea of Israel as a haven for *all* Jews and moreover, Phillips shows that any form of belonging always results in the majority creating a social, racial, or ethnic hierarchy, which necessarily excludes the minority. Ledent points out that '[h]owever reassuring for the individual, a feeling of attachment may prove destructive in the long term, as it tends to petrify biases and turn former victims of racism into racists' (140). Israel's attempt to create a sense of belonging for its European Jewish inhabitants is destructive in many ways, as it is reliant on maintaining a Jewish demographic majority as well as a Jewish cultural and linguistic hegemony, excluding Arab Jews and Israeli Palestinians from belonging fully in the predominantly Jewish state, and locating Palestinians outside of Israel's national sphere. Phillips has described his novel as being 'about Europe's obsession with homogeneity, and her inability to deal with heterogeneity that is – in fact – her natural condition' (qtd. in Ledent 193). His novel addresses varying categories of difference – cultural, racial, religious – and puts the different characters' suffering and victimisation into a comparative framework, which contests the idea of a monolithic, hegemonic European-centred history. Phillips's reworking of postcolonial ideas about exile and belonging confirms that these concepts are interconnected but not necessarily polar opposites as he advocates a model of identity that transcends belonging to one single place. His view of 'exile' could be described more accurately as 'diaspora' in Nico Israel's sense, as it moves beyond a 'limited conception of place.' Hence, he is able to offer a nuanced view of exile and unbelonging as part of the Jewish experience but not restricted to the stereotypical image of the wandering Jew. Rather, he situates it within larger discourses of marginalisation and deracination, an experience not limited to the Jewish people but also crucial to the colonial and postcolonial condition.

## Conclusion

In Phillips's novel his Jewish characters – although the same holds true for his non-Jewish character – can be accused of functioning as archetypes of Jewish victimhood to portray a prism of Jewish alienation and isolation across time and space. Consequently, his characters occasionally appear to be too universalised, indeed akin to snapshots, to combine different instances of marginalisation into a global portrait of discrimination and persecution. Nevertheless, he carefully redefines every instance of (Jewish) minority in relation to the historical, political, and geographical conditions that create this minority. His ideas of Jewishness are not only situated in relation to victimhood but are also linked to 'modern' Jewishness in Israel/Palestine. He illustrates the problems of creating a homogenous Israeli majority identity after 1945 through his characters Stephan and Malka who are primarily identified as victimised others, excluded from the majority community. In addition, Phillips's frame narrative implies the suffering of yet another non-European community as a consequence of a European catastrophe: the Palestinians. Although he does not give a voice to the Palestinians, he identifies the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a point of convergence for the interconnected marginalised histories depicted in his novel, implying the suffering of the Palestinians in their silence and absence.<sup>15</sup> Equally implied is Israel's role as an occupier of the Palestinians and the problems the occupation generates for contemporary Israeli Jewish identity, which still relies on images of Jewishness related to victimhood to justify the violation of human rights in order to safeguard the supposedly threatened existence of Israel.

Desai's novel proposes a more limited engagement with Jewishness, since she solely focuses on ideas associated with Jewish minority identity such as victimhood and exile. Apart from the circumstances of

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<sup>15</sup> Bart Moore-Gilbert, for example, has criticised Phillips for not discussing the Palestinian question in his novel (2005:115). Phillips's choice not to represent the Palestinians could be explained through his affinity with the Jews and the discrimination they suffered. In an essay entitled 'In the Ghetto,' published as part of his collection *The European Tribe* (2000), Phillips notes that 'as a child, in what seemed to me a hostile country, the Jews were the only minority group discussed with reference to exploitation and racialism, and for that reason, I naturally identified with them' (54). In many ways, the absence of the Palestinians in his novel mirrors British, and international treatment, of the question of Palestine.

Baumgartner's death, she is careful not to conflate his Jewishness with his alienation and to deconstruct his marginalisation into specific instances of otherness produced by a particular political and social context. Baumgartner's role as a representative of Europe allows her to reciprocate Eurocentric perceptions of partition as a marginal event in relation to European history, divorced from British imperialism. His Jewishness not only functions as a 'familiar' mode of alienation and deracination to approach partition and decolonisation from a Western perspective but it equally serves as a means to stress the ways in which Nazism brought home colonialism, as described by Aimé Césaire and Hannah Arendt. Desai and Phillips's approach consciously considers Jewishness as both of Europe and contesting European traditions, an ambivalence that allows them to delineate the suffering of other minorities, situating Jewishness within global discourses of discrimination and persecution. In addition, the figure of the Jew functions as a means to caution against the problems of independence and statehood, not only in its Enlightenment manifestation as resistant to assimilation, but also as an embodiment of Jewish hegemony in Israel. The position of the Jew as both outside and inside, minority and majority, offers a dialectical approach to (postcolonial) state formation based on exclusionary hierarchies and the problems this practice engenders, from the perspective of both 'colonised' and 'coloniser.'

In the next chapter, I examine the cultural and political hierarchies in Israel that exclude the Palestinians living inside the Green Line. I focus on the ways in which the Israeli Palestinian writer Anton Shammas uses his position as a minority writer to challenge the status quo of Israel as a Jewish state. Through his representation of Israeli Jewishness, especially in comparison with the Israeli writer A. B. Yehoshua's portrayal of Arabness, he demonstrates the critical potential of a non-Jewish minority perspective as offering alternatives to official Israeli discourses by refuting received ideas about Israeli Jewish hegemony.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **'Within the Bounds of the Permissible': The Boundaries of Israeliness in A. B. Yehoshua's *The Lover* and Anton Shammas's *Arabesques***

#### **Israeli Palestinian Citizens and Israeliness**

'Do you hate us very much?'  
'Hate who?'  
'Us, the Israelis.'  
'We are Israelis too.'  
'No...I mean the Jews.' (A. B. Yehoshua, *The Lover*, 186)

This conversation between Dafi, an Israeli Jewish girl, and Na'im, a Palestinian boy living inside the Green Line, stresses the difficulty of delineating the boundaries of 'Israeliness.' Implicit in their conceptions of Israeliness is the problem of determining the location of the Israeli Palestinians<sup>1</sup> within a cultural and political sphere that is conceived of as essentially 'Jewish' by the Israeli state and the majority of its Israeli Jewish citizens. The exchange between Dafi and Na'im foreshadows an extended discussion between the Israeli Jewish writer A. B. Yehoshua and the Israeli Palestinian author Anton Shammas about the position of the Israeli Palestinians within the Jewish state. On 13 September 1985, in a *Kol Ha'Ir* editorial, Shammas condemned Israel for its exclusionary policies vis-à-vis Israeli Palestinians, who do not benefit from the same rights as Jewish citizens.<sup>2</sup> As a result, he advocates a new culturally and politically de-judaised Israeli identity, encompassing both its Jewish and its non-Jewish citizens on an equal level. His goal is to 'un-Jew the Hebrew language...to

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<sup>1</sup> The term Israeli Palestinians has been used since the 1967 war to reflect the increasing support of the Palestinians in Israel for the Palestinians inside the territories (Smooha 398). I use the term to draw attention to the geographical location of the identity of Palestinians living inside Israel. Moreover, I want to illustrate a possible tension in their identities as Palestinians *within* the Israeli state, without however suggesting that their identity formation happens exclusively in relation or opposition to Israel, Zionism, and Jewishness.

<sup>2</sup> Davis distinguishes between 'democratic citizenship,' which allows (Jewish) individuals 'access to the civil, political, social, and economic resources of the state, including (...) the right of abode' and 'passport citizenship,' giving Israeli Palestinian citizens equal civil and political rights but not social and economic rights (55).

make it more Israeli and less Jewish, to bring it back to its semantic origins, back to its place. This is a parallel to what [he] think[s] the state should be' (qtd. in Kimmerling 223). Shamma's argument was anticipated in Yehoshua's 1977 novel *The Lover* through his Israeli Palestinian character Na'im, who questions the ethnocentricity of the Israeli state. However, this fictional position is not Yehoshua's political position. In 1986, in response to Shamma's demand for the inclusion of Israeli Palestinians in the Jewish state, Yehoshua suggested that:

If you want your full identity, if you want to live in a country that has an independent Palestinian personality, that possesses an original Palestinian culture, rise up, take your belongings, and move 100 metres to the east, to the independent Palestinian state that will lie beside Israel. (qtd. in Grossman 2003: 250)

Yehoshua conflates belonging and citizenship with ideological commitment and consequently contends that an Israeli Palestinian identity cannot be realised in a Jewish state. Implicit in this statement is the idea that adhering to Zionism as a set of ethno-national beliefs is a prerequisite for forming a deep and meaningful link with the land of Israel. However, Palestinians in Israel, or rather Israeli Palestinians, are part of Palestinian as well as Israeli society, both on a cultural and a political level, and many see their identity as dual. Although debates surrounding Palestinian presence in the Israeli national discourse were already prevalent in the 1970s,<sup>3</sup> the discussion between Yehoshua and Shamma only took place in 1985. Shamma's editorial was in all likelihood triggered by an amendment to the Basic Law governing the elections to the Knesset, passed on 31 July 1985.<sup>4</sup> Even today, Israeli Palestinians are still prevented from achieving full rights as citizens, as the existence of Adalah, the Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel,

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<sup>3</sup> The question arose with the occupation of the Palestinian territories and was due to two major changes: on one hand, in 1966, the Palestinians inside Israel were no longer under strict military rule (Litan and Kop 20) and on the other hand the occupation increased their identification with the Palestinians outside the Green Line, which in turn transformed the Israeli Palestinians into a potential threat to Israeli-Jewish identity (Peleg and Waxman 10, 28).

<sup>4</sup> Shafir and Peled have identified this amendment as formalising the exclusion of Palestinian citizens from 'attending to the common good' (126-27). In terms of political participation, the current eighteenth Knesset has 13 Arab and Druze members (Koren 124), which is not representative of the around 1.5 million Palestinians living inside Israel today (Pappé 2011a: 9).

confirms. On 10 October 2010, for example, there was an amendment to the Citizenship Law of 1958, which 'requires all persons seeking to naturalize via the naturalization process and Israeli citizens applying for their first ID cards to declare loyalty to Israel as a "Jewish, Zionist, and democratic state"' ("The New Loyalty Oath Bill"), associating citizenship rights with adhering to Zionist values. In the case of the Israeli Palestinians, this amendment asks them to uphold the very values that exclude them from becoming equal members of the state of Israel.

Yehoshua's first full-length novel *The Lover* examines the implications of including Israeli Palestinians as full citizens of the Israeli state as he perceives them as a cultural and demographic threat to Israel as a Jewish state with a Jewish majority. Nevertheless, his novel is the first major work in Modern Hebrew literature which does not exclusively represent the Arab as a one-dimensional stereotypical figure, but as 'fully rounded and [in a] realistic fashion' (Ramras-Rauch 140). The inclusion of an Israeli Palestinian character and Yehoshua's effort to imagine the feelings and the opinions of a character in a different identitarian location to himself indicate a cautious attempt to encounter and engage with the Palestinian minority in Israel. However, as I will show, it does not contradict but rather reinforces Yehoshua's conception of Israeliness as a religious and cultural identity based on Jewishness. He sees "Israeli" [as] the authentic, complete, and consummate word for the concept 'Jewish'! Israeliness is the total, perfect, and original Judaism' (qtd. in Grossman 2003: 253). He refuses to countenance the granting of 'democratic citizenship,' as Uri Davis has termed it, to Israeli Palestinians, which would transform them into equal members of the Israeli state. This reluctance to allow an Israeli Palestinian to enter the political centre of Israeli Jewish society is closely linked to the cultural exclusivity of the Jewish state, expressed for example through the operation of Hebrew literature as 'an authoritative interpretation of real life (...) with the expectation that it remain loyal to the Zionist vision' (Gover 1). Gover explains that Zionism as an ethno-national movement cannot accommodate Palestinians in a discourse that is founded on the 'absence' of the indigenous population in Palestine:

What cannot occur is the recognition of a moral other in whose gaze the Jew would find him- or herself suddenly objectified as a Jew (...). Instead of a Jewish morality to which the Arab must but can never conform, there would be an Arab morality (...) in the light of which it would be the Jew who would lack the right to claim, without question, moral substance and the corresponding capacity to sustain a morally significant identity. (32)

Gover is referring to the Palestinians outside of the Green Line here, but his statement is equally applicable to the Israeli Palestinians. Although Yehoshua's novel exhibits tentative attempts to engage with the Palestinians inside Israel, he nevertheless refuses to position his character Na'im as a manifestation of an 'Arab morality,' confirming Zionism's exclusionary views of Israeli identity in his work.

An Israeli Palestinian who comes closer to challenging Zionism and Israel's exclusivity as a Jewish state, as an individual embodying an 'Arab morality,' is Anton Shammas, whose novel *Arabesques* (1986; English translation 1988) can be read as an attempt to creatively refashion the exclusivity of Israeliness established by the Israeli majority and reified in Yehoshua's novel. Shammas writes in Hebrew, the language that was revived to give the new Jewish state a linguistic identity, subverting the link between Modern Hebrew literature and Zionism. Hebrew is not only considered to be the language of the coloniser but more importantly as a colonising force itself, as Yasir Suleiman notes: 'the Arabs (...) see Hebrew as the language of the foreign body that has been forcibly implanted in their midst, one that continues to occupy Arab lands' (141). In this light, Shammas's choice to write in Hebrew can be interpreted as an act of resistance to the colonial linguistic occupation, since he uses the language of the coloniser to criticise the exclusionary political practices of the colonising state. He further 'un-Jews' the Israeli state by representing Israeli Jewish and Israeli Palestinian identities as ambiguous, and more importantly, as overlapping, which allows him to contest the exclusion of the Palestinians from full citizenship on the basis of supposedly clear-cut national and ethnic distinctions. Through his representation of an Israeli-Jewish author – a thinly veiled allusion to Yehoshua – he reciprocates Yehoshua's inclusion of

an Arab character in his novel and criticises his portrayal of Israeli Palestinians by demonstrating how offensive his description is. Shamas challenges the idea of a monolithic Israeli identity based on a limited conception of Jewishness by offering a heterogeneous portrait of contemporary Israel that comprises both its majority and its minority identities, using 'Jewish' literature, and by extension culture, to subvert Israel's political exclusivism from within.

### **Prejudices, Power, and the Plurality of Israeliness**

Yehoshua's novel is narrated from the perspective of each of his six main characters, showing their different viewpoints through interior monologues and the characters' limited descriptions of events and dialogues. The main protagonist Adam stands in as the prototypical 'Israeli' and also, as his name suggests, for mankind, specifically hegemonic masculinity.<sup>5</sup> By means of the search for his wife's lover Gabriel, he tries to recover Israeliness as a heroic identity, reminiscent of the idea of the *sabra*,<sup>6</sup> whose morality had been undermined by the occupation of the Palestinian territories in 1967, as well as the 1973 war, which confirmed the declining heroism and the waning military prowess of the early state-building years. The older generation is depicted through Veducha, Gabriel's grandmother, who has been described as representing Zionism and the 'once youthful pioneering spirit, now drifting into decline' (Cohen 57). Adam's daughter Dafi embodies a new generation of Israelis critical of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. Her rapprochement with Na'im, the Israeli Palestinian character, constitutes part of the 'solution' that Yehoshua envisions for the conflict, which I examine in more detail later in this section. Yehoshua advocates the idea of Israel as a Jewish state, at the same time that he supports the national claims of the Palestinians, a tension that is also present in the relationships between his Israeli Jewish characters and Na'im. These

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<sup>5</sup> In the bible, Adam is of course the name of the first man. In Hebrew 'adam' (אָדָם) means 'man, human.'

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis of the *sabra* see Almog's *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (2000).

encounters can be considered as reflecting current perceptions of Israeli Palestinians in Israeli society but they can equally be read as a comment on Yehoshua's own conception of a new Israeli identity as exclusively Jewish and the position of the Israeli Palestinians within this identity. Veducha's attitude towards Na'im manifests suspicions about the Israeli Palestinians as a cultural, demographic, and existential threat to the Jewish state. These suspicions culminate in Adam's choice to relocate Na'im to the periphery of Israeliness, which in turn corroborates Yehoshua's own position and confirms the impossibility of even imagining an Arab morality to evaluate the exclusivity of the Israeli national discourse as a Zionist writer.

Adam's explicit need to stereotype the other, and to define his identity in opposition to 'inferior' identities, such as the Palestinian workers in his garage and Gabriel as a Diaspora Jew, reveals a deep uncertainty about his own identity and his position within Israeli society. In this way, Yehoshua's character and his distinction between different Jewish identities in Israel undermines what Boas Evron has criticised as the Zionist 'assumption that all the Jews in the world constitute a single entity' (63). Adam's prejudices allow Yehoshua to question Israeli Jewish, and specifically Ashkenazi or European Jewish, attitudes towards other Israeli and Jewish identities. Ironically, however, Yehoshua, who is from a Sephardi background, has been accused by Yitzak Laor of a fear of 'ethnic heterogeneity,' which manifests itself in his call for the 'Israelization' of the Palestinians in Israel: 'We, as Jews in the state, face a real problem, and it is how to work toward achieving the Israelization of the Arabs' (qtd. in Laor 134). Although Yehoshua embraces intra-Jewish pluralism, he is unable to accept broader forms of pluralism, especially the centrality of non-Jewish identities in a Jewish state. Despite showing Adam's prejudiced attitude towards other, non-Ashkenazi identities, Yehoshua proposes a more nuanced encounter between Israeli Palestinians and Israeli Jews through Adam's relationship with Na'im. He portrays Na'im as a fully rounded character with a voice in his novel and allows him to influence and critically engage with his (Jewish) surroundings, moving beyond positing him simply as a foil for his Israeli Jewish protagonists. This representation of Na'im

constitutes a departure from Yehoshua's depiction of Arab characters as narrative tools to support the main Israeli Jewish characters in his earlier short story 'Facing the Forests' (1963). Yehoshua's previous portrayals of Arab characters can be situated alongside Amos Oz's fictionalisation of Arabs in his works, where 'the Arab is internalized in the Israeli, and (...) becomes the focus of libidinal dreams and fantasies' (Ramras-Rauch 148).<sup>7</sup> Na'im can certainly be read as a catalyst for Adam's search for his wife's lover, and he becomes the subject of Dafi's libidinal fantasies, but contrary to Oz's characters, he is also able to undermine Adam's views of Arabs and respond to Dafi's imagined version of himself. Their first encounter leads Adam to reflect on Na'im's experience: 'The little Arab, my employee, what's he thinking about? What's his business? Where's he from? What's happening to him here?' (*Lover*, 127). He starts considering Na'im as a human being with feelings and aspirations beyond a worker or a tool in his garage, which challenges the artificial distance he has created between them through his stereotypical views of Arabs. Nevertheless, Na'im is still objectified, and he comments that 'They played with me like I was a toy' (*Lover*, 166), indicating a more benevolent, albeit still patronising, objectification as a subordinate family member.

Na'im, despite apparently accepting his role within the family, asserts his superiority by demonstrating his knowledge of Israeli Jews, which is starkly contrasted with their lack of information about the Palestinians: 'I see they really know nothing about us, they don't know that we learn a lot of things about them' (*Lover*, 165). In the context of the colonial encounter, Timothy Brennan discusses the disparity in knowledge between colonised and coloniser, since 'one knows the other and the other sees in the one only a closed book' (3). He clarifies that for the coloniser the colonised is a mystery, whereas the subjugated person has procured intelligence about the adversary in order to subvert the colonial structure from within, a strategy that is also apparent in Na'im's knowledge about Israeli Jews, even if his resistance is not necessarily conscious. The Israeli Jews' attitude towards

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<sup>7</sup> This psychological use of Arab characters is most obvious in Oz's *My Michael* (1972) as well as in his short story 'The Nomad and the Viper' (1963).

and their lack of factual knowledge about Israeli Palestinians can be compared to Oriental practices of constructing the 'Orient' exclusively as an oppositional category to the 'West,' which Edward Said has condemned as transforming the 'Orient' into an ahistorical concept that is only defined in relation to the 'West' (2003: 5). Yehoshua himself can be situated within this Orientalist discourse, as he is part of the colonising majority and tries to represent the inside life of an Arab character based on his ideas about 'Arabness' and in opposition to his own Israeli identity. In retrospect, however, Yehoshua concedes that:

If you would ask me to do again the same thing, to describe an Arab character today, I would not be able to do it anymore. As Shamma's novel makes clear, they are becoming so special, so complicated, so unique in their existence that I would not be able to speak on behalf of them as I did in *The Lover*. (qtd. in Horn 74)

Twelve years after having published *The Lover*, Yehoshua admits his inability to represent Arabs accurately, exhibiting his Orientalist worldview encompassed in his patronisingly formulated surprise that Arab characters have become too 'complex.' Nevertheless, he does not address the problems inherent in an Israeli Jew speaking for an Israeli Palestinian at *any* time.

The need to dominate the colonised manifests itself most prominently through Adam, as the Israeli patriarch, who needs to control other people to counterbalance the increasing loss of power over his family, especially his daughter Dafi. This feeling of impotence leads Adam to compensate in other areas by taking a lover of his own: 'Once again there is someone in my power. Once it was Gabriel, once an Arab boy, now it's a girl. People put themselves so willingly into your hands' (*Lover*, 259). His desire for power and control can be aligned with Yaron Ezrahi's observation that the creation of the state of Israel resulted in the 'transformation of the Jew from a member of a disempowered and vulnerable religious minority into an armed citizen-soldier of a sovereign state governed by a Jewish majority' (175). Security, and being part of a majority, is paramount for Israeli Jewish identity, which becomes apparent in Adam's domination of his family and friends. None of the people Adam exercises power over is a 'pure' Israeli, but instead they all have hyphenated identities: Gabriel is a European Jew, Na'im

is an Israeli Palestinian, and his lover Tali's mother is half-Jewish. On one hand, their 'impure' identities can be interpreted as Adam's desire to encounter and incorporate the plurality of Israeli identities, but on the other hand, and more convincingly, it confirms the majority identity's drive to dominate minority identities. If one reads Adam as representative of the Israeli state, his domination can be juxtaposed with the Ashkenazi Jewish desire to maintain a hegemonic position vis-à-vis Israeli Palestinians and Arab Jews.

Despite Adam's attempts at domination, his daughter Dafi openly challenges Zionist discourse, specifically the dispossession and displacement of the Palestinian people:

Why [do] you say that they were right, I mean the people of the Second Aliya, thinking that was the only choice, after so many sufferings, how can you say there wasn't another choice and that was the only choice? (*Lover*, 250)

Dafi questions the settler-colonial basis of the Zionist quest to recover the 'ancient' Jewish homeland when it was already inhabited by another people, as well as Jewish suffering as overwriting other people's suffering. Through Dafi's position as representative of a new Israeli generation, Yehoshua interrogates the idea of Palestine as an inevitable choice for the new Jewish homeland. Crystal Bartolovich defines the imagining of alternative histories as 'critical counterfactualism' (64). At the heart of this principle lies the idea of 'recapturing the memory of this transformative desire – and countering the forces that continue to refuse it' (66). Considered in a counterfactual light, Dafi's critique illustrates that the creation of the Jewish homeland eclipsed other possible solutions for the 'Jewish Question,' an idea that I have already discussed in chapter two in relation to Shulamith Hareven's *Thirst: The Desert Trilogy*. A similar account of alternative pasts is presented in Jacqueline Rose's *The Question of Zion*. She cites Gershom Scholem as explaining that 'I do not believe (...) that there is such a thing as a "solution to the Jewish Question" in the sense of a normalisation of the Jews, and I certainly do not think this question can be solved in Palestine"' (55).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> In her monograph, Rose offers a useful overview of Jewish dissent since the 1880s. For a socialist view on dissent see Matzpen: [www.matzpen.org/index.asp](http://www.matzpen.org/index.asp).

Scholem's statement predicted that the 'normalisation' of the Jewish people in Palestine would not solve the 'Jewish Question,' which aligns with Hannah Arendt's critique of the Jewish state, discussed in the general introduction to this study. Read in the context of Jewish dissent, Adam's domination of his lover Tali can be seen as substitute domination for the daughter he has lost control of – exemplified in his description of Tali as looking up to him 'in submission, in love' (*Lover*, 254) – along with the new generation of Israeli Jews, a generation which challenges the Zionist roots of Israel's identity and disputes the moral validity of the domination of the Palestinian people.

### **The 'Enemy Within': The Limits of Israeli-Palestinian Coexistence**

Veducha's and Adam's attitudes towards Na'im, and Israeli Palestinians in general, allow Yehoshua to engage with debates prominent in the 1970s, which are still current today, regarding the loyalty of Palestinians residing within the Jewish state. Their representations of Israeli Palestinianness sit comfortably within conventional representations of the other in Hebrew literature loyal to Zionism, where the Arab 'only exists in the formlessness of a nonsubject assimilated to the generally negative category of *other than us* and its concomitant moralistic evaluation – *unable to be us*' (Gover 29). Veducha suspects Na'im of being a 'terrorist,' when she examines 'his trousers to make sure there were no bombs or hashish in them' (*Lover*, 223-4). The association between Na'im and Palestinian terrorism is not surprising since the novel is set in 1973, following the rise of Palestinian armed resistance, most notably the formation of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in 1967. The PFLP's activities culminated in a series of hijackings in September 1970, but the most notorious attack was committed by Black September, a militant group who killed 11 Israeli athletes at the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich (Sayigh 147, 210). Yehoshua also positions Na'im as an outside commentator, to foreground the Jews', or rather the Israeli Jews', responsibility in their allegedly 'precarious' situation in the Middle East, suggesting that their actions create the very security situation they are constantly striving to prevent: 'They're

getting themselves killed again and when they get themselves killed we have to shrink and lower our voices and mind not to laugh even at some joke that's got nothing to do with them' (*Lover*, 121). Na'im stresses the fact that even though the Palestinians are not directly involved in the 1973 war, they are perceived as responsible for its outcome because other Arab nations are attempting to 'eliminate' Israel. This link between Palestine and the surrounding Arab states confirms the perception of Palestinians inside Israel as representing a potential danger, not only to the existence of Israel as a state but also to the 'purity' of Israeli identity. Although Yehoshua clearly distances himself from this position, and I do not want to suggest that he perceives Palestinians in Israel as terrorists, this representation of the Palestinians' allegiances as questionable can be linked to his insistence on Israel as a *Jewish* state in order for it to remain a 'safe haven' for its Jewish inhabitants. Yehoshua's uncertainty about the Israeli Palestinians' loyalty also expresses itself through Adam, who admonishes his Arab workers during the war that 'You should really be fighting for us, you should've been called up too' (*Lover*, 126). However, in Israel non-Jewish citizens are prohibited from serving in the military service, which is tied to social benefits.<sup>9</sup> Compelling Palestinian citizens of Israel to fight in the army has important ideological and moral implications for both Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinians. For the Israeli Jews, it would mean allowing the 'enemy' to infiltrate their defence against said enemy. For the Israeli Palestinians, military service might entail serving in the occupied territories against other Palestinians. However, completing the army service would also provide the Palestinians with access to more social rights, thus bringing them closer to becoming equal citizens of the state.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Exceptions are Israeli Druze men which are required to serve in the army despite not being Jewish citizens of Israel (Gal 1986: 30). According to a recent article by Khalife', published on the *Electronic Intifada* blog on 4 July 2012, a new draft Knesset law could make the military service compulsory for Palestinians in Israel [electronicintifada.net/content/knesset-moves-force-national-service-palestinians-israel/11458](http://electronicintifada.net/content/knesset-moves-force-national-service-palestinians-israel/11458)

<sup>10</sup> Of course, one important right that the Palestinians would still be lacking is the right of return, unlike the Jews, whose Law of Return allows any Jew to move to Israel and become a full citizen on the basis of his or her Jewishness. Kook has claimed that through this law 'the inherent connection between the State of Israel, as a legal entity, and the Jewish people of the world' is exemplified and maintained and that 'it remains until today the primary

In general though, Na'im is represented as 'benevolent' and it is no coincidence that in Hebrew 'na'im' (נעים) means 'pleasant.' The longer he stays with Veducha, the more acculturated he becomes: 'They didn't realize I was an Arab, nobody does these days, not Jews anyway. Only the Arabs are still not quite sure about me' (*Lover*, 242). His Israelisation could be read as Yehoshua's masking mechanism for the enemy within, reflecting Israeli Jewish concerns about the Israeli Palestinians' loyalties to the Palestinian nation as a whole. Nevertheless, Na'im's acculturation is not described at the expense of his Palestinian nationalism, as he explains: 'There are some people I feel drawn to. Arabs from the occupied territories, real Palestinians' (*Lover*, 242). The tension between Na'im's identity as a Palestinian and his affinity to Israeli culture expresses itself in his reluctance to address the conflict between Palestine and Israel: 'the main thing is to have none of that endless chattering about the rotten conflict that'll go on forever' (*Lover*, 121). On one hand, this refusal alludes to the Israeli Palestinians as being on the periphery of the Palestinian liberation struggle, as their aspirations are not regarded as paramount,<sup>11</sup> while being second-class citizens in the state of Israel, which erases them from both national agendas. On the other hand, Na'im's refusal to acknowledge the hostilities between Israeli Jews and Palestinians demonstrates that some Israeli Palestinians consider themselves as part of Israeli Jewish culture and society while supporting the Palestinians in the occupied territories. Yehoshua's choice to portray Na'im's pessimism in relation to the conflict can be interpreted as his comment on the impossibility of a solution, since both sides are 'chattering' instead of actively trying to solve the conflict. Through Na'im, Yehoshua accuses the Palestinian side of not contributing to a resolution of the conflict, but in addition, and more importantly, it confirms Yehoshua's own difficulty in trying to find, or even imagine, a solution to the conflict.

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symbol of Israel as a Jewish state' (275). Another important exclusion is economic, since the Palestinians only have restricted access to resources such as land and water.

<sup>11</sup> In 1974, Fatah published a policy document, which states that 'the liberation of the occupied territories had priority over the dream of redeeming Palestine as a whole' (Pappé 2006a: 216). While the liberation of the Palestinian territories was classified as a 'priority,' the Israeli Palestinians and their objective of achieving more equality inside Israel was not considered a pressing concern.

The only fictional solution that Yehoshua is able to conceive is the depiction of Dafi and Na'im's libidinal relationship. From the beginning, their encounters are marked by stereotypes, which take the form of patronising descriptions of the other person. Na'im explains to the reader that '[it l]ooks like this is the first time she's spoken to an Arab about things like this' (*Lover*, 165) and a few pages later Dafi concedes that 'This little Arab really took my fancy' (*Lover*, 167). However, from very early on, there is a pronounced discrepancy in their respective motives for wanting to engage with the other. Whereas for Na'im Dafi is initially not linked to a moment of resistance but rather to a sense of curiosity – embodying his romantic ideals and aspirations to Jewishness – Dafi sees in Na'im a means to revolt against her father and to demonstrate the new generation's ability to enter into a dialogue with the 'enemy.' Their separate accounts of their encounters culminate in Dafi and Na'im's alternating but overlapping description of the day they have sex. Unsurprisingly, their first individual impressions of that specific day are marked by misunderstandings. Na'im explains that 'she doesn't understand anything. She never will understand' (*Lover*, 333), when Dafi is convinced that she comprehends Na'im's feelings: 'the poor schmuck is in love with me, I know' (*Lover*, 333). Both entertain violent thoughts about kissing the other person, clearly aware of this act as overstepping boundaries and constituting, for both of them, the ultimate revolution against Israeli Jewish hegemony and patriarchy. In this sense their sexual act could be interpreted as Na'im's infiltration of the Jewish 'colonial' society. Yosefa Loshitzky confirms this reading by observing that 'there is a tendency in Hebrew literature, much as in colonial discourse, to associate the other (...) with sexual potency and virility' (2000: 53). But on the other hand, their relationship indicates the potential for a possible coexistence between Jews and Palestinians in Israel, which represents the rather sentimental outlook of the Zionist left, as represented by Yehoshua and Oz. In the context of nineteenth-century Latin American literature, Doris Sommer has identified erotic relationships as 'the opportunity (rhetorical and otherwise) to bind together heterodox constituencies' (14). In the case of Israel/Palestine, however, the union between Na'im, the Palestinian, and

Dafi, the female new generation, can be read as moving beyond reconciling 'heterodox' differences and instead encompassing 'a consolidation of a coalition of minorities against the dominance of the Israeli man' (Loshitzky 2001: 161). Considered in the context of Bartolovich's concept of counterfactualism, Yehoshua's romantic allegory can be interpreted as a defiant stance against Ashkenazi hegemony, suggesting a revolutionary potential achieved by a 'coalition of minorities.'

Nevertheless, portraying a relationship between an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian does not lead Yehoshua to make any narrative concessions in relation to the Palestinians' position within the Israeli national space. The novel ends with Adam, as the Israeli Jewish patriarch, discovering Na'im's and Dafi's act of defiance and taking Na'im back to his village, accentuating the need to exclude the Palestinian from the Israeli Jewish sphere and to restore the boundaries between Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinians. Joe Cleary has read the separation between two lovers from opposing sides in partition novels from Northern Ireland as 'a sign of imaginative failure,' arguing that there is an 'unwillingness or inability to imagine a transformed social order' which is connected to an incapacity to imagine that the solution 'would require not just a modification of attitude on the part of the communities involved but substantive transformation of the existing structures of state power' (115). Ultimately, Yehoshua's inability to imagine a solution to the conflict that diverts from maintaining Israel as an ethnic Jewish state and includes Israeli Palestinians on an equal level confirms Brennan's argument about the discrepant knowledge between the coloniser and the colonised regarding the colonial situation *as* colonial. Yehoshua's choice to relocate Na'im to the periphery and to represent his desire to become Jewish as the only possibility to temporarily enter the centre of Israeli society can be aligned with Fredric Jameson's critique of the 'valorisation' of 'radical otherness' since 'the essential operation is that of differentiation' (77). In Yehoshua's case, 'camouflaging' the Israeli Palestinian as a Jew did not suffice to determine that he is 'other than' the

Israeli Jews,<sup>12</sup> which is why he had to physically remove Na'im from the Israeli national space. While Dafi, as a representative of a new *Jewish* generation critical of Zionism, is allowed to remain within the centre of Israeli society, albeit put back into place by Israeli paternalism, Yehoshua explicitly refuses Na'im's representation as an 'Arab morality' able to question Jewish superiority, confirming Gover's argument that in Hebrew fiction loyal to Zionism a focus on an 'Arab morality' would result in the Arab 'not (...) merely *deserving* of respect but [he] would suddenly be the *measure* of respect' (31).

### **An Authorial Arabesque: Israeli Palestinian Narrative Resistance**

Anton Shammas's novel can be seen as responding to and reciprocating Yehoshua's depictions of Israeli Palestinians as 'enemies within' and as a threat to the Jewish nature of the Israeli state. Furthermore, he specifically engages with the failed libidinal relationship between Dafi and Na'im as a solution to the conflict. His choice to write in Hebrew allows Shammas to situate himself at the centre of Israeli identity, society, and literature, by using the language of the Israeli state. Shammas is not the only Israeli Palestinian author to write in Hebrew. Atallah Mansour is among Shammas's predecessors, and another more recent example is Sayed Kashua. Kashua focuses on the daily injustices inflicted on Israeli Palestinians and the inequality between the Jewish and the non-Jewish citizens of Israel in his novel *Dancing Arabs* (2002; English translation 2004). His protagonist shows a clear affinity with Jewish culture and would prefer not to be an Arab, similar to Na'im in Yehoshua's novel, which stresses the problems and pitfalls of assimilation: losing one's own culture and a sense of one's identity. *Arabesques* engages with Israeli Palestinian identity in more subtle

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<sup>12</sup> It is telling that it is Na'im's similarity, rather than his difference which necessitates his territorial relocation away from the centre of Israeliness. Without wanting to conflate two situations that are shaped by different historical and political backgrounds, I nevertheless want to draw attention here to the similarities between perceptions of Israeli Palestinians as threatening the boundaries of the Israeli national community through their affinities and Chetty and McMaster's descriptions of the Jews as outsiders inside European societies, whose boundaries were also threatened by the Jews' similarities to rather than their differences from European majorities.

ways by blurring the narratives and identities of Israeli Jewish and Israeli Palestinian characters to situate Israeli Palestinians at the nexus of Israeli Jewish and Palestinian culture and to illustrate the problems of achieving full citizen rights as a non-Jewish citizen in a Jewish state. Shamma's novel parallels Yehoshua's representation of an Arab character by portraying an Israeli Jewish character. This narrative ploy enables the author to address Israeli Jewish perceptions of Palestinians but also to reciprocate the 'coloniser's' representation of Israeli Palestinians as objects, as exemplified in Yehoshua's portrayal of Na'im. Shamma's subversion of the power dynamic between writer and subject, and by extension between coloniser and colonised, is achieved by portraying the coloniser not only in the language used to describe the colonised but equally by inverting images related to linguistic and narrative dominance. In this way he exhibits the power and possibilities that Ashcroft et al. have attributed to writing back to the centre: it enables the subjugated to 'take hold of the marginality imposed on [them] and make hybridity and syncreticity the source of literary and cultural redefinition' (77). Shamma is using his 'hybrid' position as an Israeli Palestinian writing in Hebrew to contest the majority's limited and limiting conception of Israeliness and the conflation of Hebrew literature with Zionist values.

*Arabesques* moves between 'The Tale' where the first-person narrator is a younger Anton<sup>13</sup> and 'The Teller' which follows the adult narrator on his journey to Iowa to participate in the prestigious International Writers' Program. 'The Tale' narrates Anton's childhood in Palestine as well as the stories he has heard from his family about Palestinian life before 1948, especially the 1936 Palestinian revolt against British occupation. 'The Teller' focuses on Anton's relationship with the Israeli Jewish writer, Yehoshua Bar-On, another participant in the Writers' Program, who is writing a novel about Anton. The arabesque-like structure of different but intertwined story lines – Shamma writes about Yehoshua Bar-On who writes about Anton – at first glance seems to confirm that the

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<sup>13</sup> Hereafter, I will refer to the character Anton Shamma as 'Anton' and designate the author of the novel as 'Shamma' to distinguish between the two.

author is removed from his pedestal and his position becomes available to the reader, as argued by Linda Hutcheon in relation to metafictional writing (xvi). However, a closer look reveals that Shammas complicates the relationship between author and narrative, moving beyond the conception of narrative as a linear development, as he deliberately obscures the distinction between subject and object in his narrative. Considered in the context of Israel/Palestine and the domination of the Israeli Palestinian minority, the narrative structure could be read as a comment on the problems of domination, which always encounters resistance and is unable to maintain an unquestioned majority-minority relationship. Successful hegemonies, according to Antonio Gramsci, necessitate 'that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised' (1971: 161). This view of hegemony is clearly not applicable to Israel's treatment of Palestinians as second-class citizens in Israel. At the heart of Shammas's novel lies his critical stance towards Israeli Jewish hegemonic dominance in the cultural and political realm. He denounces the inferior position of Palestinians inside Israel in terms of equal rights, which is achieved above all through his infiltration of the Israeli Jewish cultural sphere by writing a novel in Hebrew and representing an Israeli Jewish character from a subjugated perspective. As an embodiment of an 'Arab morality' he thus 'un-Jews' the Israeli hegemony on a linguistic and cultural level to exemplify the 'un-Jewing' of the political sphere he advocates.

### **An Israeli-Arab Schizophrenia: The Blurred Boundaries of Israeliness**

Shammas's main vehicle for criticising Israeli Jewish hegemony and its treatment of the Israeli Palestinians is his depiction of the Israeli Jewish character Yehoshua Bar-On, who is immediately, but ironically, dissociated from A. B. Yehoshua, when Bar-On himself insists that:

Nor is [my Arab] A. B. Yehoshua's adolescent Lover. He speaks and writes excellent Hebrew, but within the bounds of the permissible. For there must be some areas that are out of bounds for him, so nobody will accuse me of producing a stereotype in reverse, the virtuous Arab. (*Arabesques*, 91)

This act of emphatic dissociation achieves of course the reverse: it consolidates the link between the fictional Bar-On and Yehoshua, his real life counterpart. Shammaas uses this opportunity to voice his own criticism of Yehoshua's *The Lover*, accusing the writer of representing his Arab character Na'im as too virtuous, the reverse of the stereotype of the primitive, dangerous Arab. This laboured valorisation of Na'im, as mentioned before, results in a reification of his difference and the distinction between Israeli Jew and Israeli Palestinian, which is exactly what Shammaas contests in his novel. Bar-On explains in *Arabesques* that 'there has to be an Arab this time, as some sort of solution to some sort of silence' (*Arabesques*, 92), an allusion to Yehoshua's short story 'Facing the forests.' In this story, the mute unnamed Arab man first serves as a confirmation of the silence that oppresses the Israeli Jewish protagonist while living at an observation post, a silence he initially longed for in order to write his book and to 'scrape together his crumbled existence' ('Forests,' 86). The Arab character subsequently becomes a tool to remedy the protagonist's anxieties about this silence as symbolising the uncertain future of Israeli Jewish identity, by burning the forest so that the protagonist is able to escape:

A short while passes and then a smile spreads over his face. He starts counting the flames. The Arab is setting the forest on fire at its four corner, then takes a firebrand and rushes through the trees like an evil spirit, setting fire to the rest. ('Forests,' 112)

Shammaas condemns Yehoshua's use of Na'im as a narrative tool rather than as a fully integrated character. His criticism has to be qualified, however, as all the major characters in *The Lover*, as discussed above, and as Joseph Cohen affirms, represent 'symbols for the author's political and social concerns' (57). In his novel, Shammaas comments on Yehoshua's use of Na'im by positioning Anton as Bar-On's 'Na'im,' the subject of Bar-On's novel. Bar-On patronisingly specifies that his novel will be about an 'educated Arab,' insisting that he will not use the stereotype of the Arab as primitive and backward, to which Anton replies: 'I don't think of myself as what you people call "an educated Arab". I'm just another "intellectual," as you call your educated Jews' (*Arabesques*, 137). This assessment of 'intellectuality'

demonstrates the offensiveness of the idea of the educated Arab through the comparison with the educated Jew. In positioning himself as an Israeli Palestinian within the Israeli Jewish tradition of writing in Hebrew, Shamma separates intellectuality from its Jewish connotations. Moreover, by taking the 'Jewish' intellectual's place,<sup>14</sup> he confirms the fact that the Israeli Palestinians now occupy the position of minority in relation to the Jewish majority in Israel, illustrating that the sovereignty of the Jews has resulted in the colonisation of another non-European people: the Palestinians.

Shamma illustrates the difficulty of policing the cultural boundaries of Israeliness in order to preserve a 'pure' identity by blurring the distinction between who writes and who is written about, between subject and object. The interlacing narrative structure is aligned with the process of majority and minority identity formation and definition, which is not a clear, linear development but enveloped in a constant struggle for dominance and power. For Arif Dirlik, difference 'is important not just as a description of a situation, but more importantly because it shapes language, and therefore, the meaning of identity: every representation of the self carries upon it a trace of the "other"' (5). By representing Israeli Jewish and Israeli Palestinian identities as not easily distinguishable, Shamma takes away the difference necessary to create a meaningful identity, at least for the coloniser, who needs clearly delineated boundaries to distinguish his identity from the colonised's identity. Albert Memmi has identified three major ideological foundations to the difference that lies at the basis of colonial racism: 'the gulf between the culture of the colonist and the colonised,' the 'exploitation of these differences for the benefit of the colonist' and 'the use of these supposed differences as standards of absolute fact' (115). Shamma can certainly be seen as deconstructing both the 'cultural gulf' between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority

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<sup>14</sup> In an interview with *Haaretz Magazine*, published in 2000, Edward Said famously stated that he was 'the last Jewish intellectual' (2004c: 458), similarly collapsing the distinction between Jew and Palestinian. For a discussion of this provocative statement, see for example Cheyette's 'A Glorious Achievement: Edward Said and the Last Jewish Intellectual' (2012).

and interrogating the 'supposed differences' between Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinians in his novel through a blurring of the differences between these two categories. Shammaš bridges this gulf by situating himself firmly within the hegemonic space of Hebrew language and literature from which he should be excluded as an Israeli Palestinian.

Two writers at the International Writers' Program, Bjørg and Bert, reflect on the blurred identities of Israeli Jew and Israeli Palestinian. Bjørg comments that 'They haven't decided yet who is the ventriloquist of whom' (*Arabesques*, 145). The comparison with ventriloquism reciprocates the metropolitan view of the conflict as balanced, criticised by Moshé Machover amongst others. In addition, it introduces the idea of an 'indissoluble bond' between the two sides, which is an overly sentimental stance, taken towards a conflict that is at the basis an opposition between the hegemony and the minority it discriminates.<sup>15</sup> However, the image of ventriloquism also indicates a potential for subversion, as it is not necessarily the Israeli state, or Bar-On, that is playing the active part, but there is also a possibility for Anton to occupy this position. Anton decides to mislead Bar-On in order to reverse the situation between Bar-On as subject and himself as object: 'I'll prepare an imaginary autobiography for him, a tale convincing enough to shield me from his critical eye' (*Arabesques*, 137). By positioning Bar-On as Anton's 'Na'im,' Shammaš contests the idea of the Israeli Jew as the ventriloquist who can control the situation. Instead the Israeli Jew is positioned as a reader and listener, since Anton writes his story to his Israeli Jewish lover Shlomith: 'The letters had proved to be an absolution of sorts' (*Arabesques*, 95). He explains that he cannot reciprocate Bar-On's use of him as a subject of his novel, and thus by extension Yehoshua's use of Na'im in *The Lover*:

He will never put himself at my mercy, because he is off limits for me, beyond the limits of my life and my writing. A restricted zone of sorts. (*Arabesques*, 136)

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<sup>15</sup> For a reading that examines the cultural connections between Israeli and Palestinian literature, see Brenner's *Inextricably Bonded: Israeli Arab and Jewish Writers Re-Visioning Culture* (2003).

The phrase 'restricted zone' can be aligned with Bar-On's earlier description of Hebrew as a restricted zone, which he wanted to exclude his character Anton from, otherwise 'he might get out of my control. And who knows how an Arab behaves in a restricted zone?' (*Arabesques*, 99). Shamma's ironically exemplifies the ways in which he has invaded both 'restricted' zones: using the Israeli Jewish language and representing a Jewish subject in his novel.

The fact that the protagonist feels the need to be absolved by his Israeli Jewish lover anticipates Yehoshua's ambivalent feelings about representing Arabs, expressed in 1996:

On one hand, I feel so guilty because of what we have done to them in the last years that, if I would try to describe them, I would immediately try to make concessions because of my guilt. On the other hand, I am so angry about their stubbornness and their refusal to progress towards peace. (qtd. in Horn 75)

In 1977, when Israel had been occupying the Palestinian territories for ten years, Yehoshua did not see guilt as interfering with his ability to depict a Palestinian inside Israel. His later anger confirms that for him the Palestinians have become 'too complex,' since after the first intifada and the failed Oslo Accords, they are no longer happily contained within their geographically segregated area controlled by Israel while the Israeli Palestinians are becoming more adamant in advocating equal civil and political rights. Apart from anticipating Yehoshua's feelings of guilt, Anton's relationship with Shlomith can be seen as a reinterpretation of the relationship between Dafi and Na'im in order to reject the conclusion that Yehoshua chose for this 'romance-across-the-divide.' The fictional Bar-On sees their encounter as 'a love that from the start is pregnant with the seed of its own self-destruction' (*Arabesques*, 93). Indeed, they are represented as 'star-crossed lovers,' especially when Shlomith's husband discovers their relationship: 'the secret, so terrible in its beauty was gone, and the world reverted to its former state of "Hebrew, Arabic and Death"' (*Arabesques*, 95).<sup>16</sup> This exaggerated description of the separation between Shlomith and

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<sup>16</sup> 'Hebrew, Arabic, and Death' is a line taken from the Israeli Jewish poet Amichai's 'Seven Laments for the Fallen of the War' (1976). In his poem, as in Shamma's statement, the

Anton, and the suggestion that only in death their union seems possible, links this relationship to Yehoshua's vision of the relationship between Dafi and Na'im. Shamma dismisses the separation between them as a simple solution tailored to avoid imagining the political consequences of a relationship between an Israeli Palestinian and an Israeli Jew, aligning with Cleary's interpretation of the failure of partition romances as a narrative refusal to radically reshape political structures from within.

Bert, a Dutch writer, takes the idea of ventriloquism and the image of the puppet and the puppet master a step further by saying that 'Bar-On and [Anton] constitute a schizophrenia, two faces of a single person' (*Arabesques*, 145). This comparison describes Bar-On and Anton as two different versions of the same person, two different personalities of an 'Israeli-Arab schizophrenia' and situates both the Israeli Jew and the Israeli Palestinian on a similar level, but equips them with different points of view. Using international writers as commentators of the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians allows Shamma throughout his novel to challenge metropolitan views of the conflict as 'balanced' and 'inextricably bound,' which do not acknowledge the situation as based on the unlawful occupation of Palestine and its people. In addition, Shamma criticises international actors' passivity in that they only discuss the situation instead of putting measures into action to solve it. The paradox of using the metaphor of schizophrenia, simultaneously carrying connotations of equivocation and equality, is not only used to condemn ambivalent and divided international opinions but also as a tool to consolidate the blurring of boundaries and differences between the 'two faces': Israel and Palestine. This uncertainty about clearly delineated identities is illustrated early on when Anton is mistaken for a Jewish writer and is echoed when Rick, one of the organisers of the Writers' Program, insists on referring to him as 'Palestinian.' This confusion stresses the fact that Jews and Palestinians cannot be distinguished by obvious physical markers, which was already suggested in *The Lover* when Na'im is mistaken for a Jew. The artificial

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juxtaposition of 'Hebrew,' 'Arabic,' and 'Death' suggests that the only bond between Israel and Palestine is the deaths both sides suffer because of the conflict.

physical distinction, along with language as a means to reify the boundaries between Jews and non-Jews, demonstrates that Israel as a Jewish state is based on constructed ethnic and linguistic differences, echoing Edgar Hilsenrath's critique of definitions of Jewishness in Nazi Germany in chapter one. Bar-On secretly calls Anton 'my Jew' (*Arabesques*, 80), as a patronising display of power conveyed by the possessive pronoun 'my.' Associating an Israeli Palestinian with pre-state ideas of Jewishness accentuates the Israeli Palestinians' position as a minority group within Israel and establishes a direct link between the exclusion and persecution of Jewish minorities in Europe and the Israeli Jewish political and cultural discrimination against the Palestinian minority in Israel. Bar-On believes that Anton would be offended by this term because he is a 'proud Palestinian-Arab-Israeli' (*Arabesques*, 80) and in the Hebrew original it is made quite clear that by calling Anton 'his Jew,' Bar-On eclipses the Arab and Palestinian aspects of his identity.<sup>17</sup> Bar-On's hierarchy of identities, describing Anton as primarily Palestinian, followed by Arab and then by Israeli,<sup>18</sup> is his attempt to categorise Anton's allegiances and to maintain power over his character, as well as to maintain the boundaries between himself and the Israeli Palestinian. It can also be read as Shamma's criticism of Yehoshua's concerns about Israeli Palestinian loyalties towards the Palestinian people and to the Arab nations, and their representation as 'enemies within.'

### **Israeli, Palestinian, and Israeli-Palestinian: Conflicting National Identities**

Shamma complicates the relationship between majority and minority, Israeli Jew and Israeli Palestinian, by introducing a Palestinian character, nicknamed Paco after the Paco Rabanne perfume he is wearing. Bar-On's uneasiness about the blurred boundaries between his and Anton's identity

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<sup>17</sup> The Hebrew reads: ארתו אני מכנה "היהודי שלי" דוקא. (*Arabeskot*, 72, my emphasis), which translates as: I call him *just* "my Jew."

<sup>18</sup> In a survey carried out in 2008, 45 per cent of Israeli Palestinians identified themselves as Arab, 24 per cent as Palestinian, 19 per cent by their religious affiliation, and only 12 per cent said they were Israelis (Peleg and Waxman 129). The results of this survey mirror Bar-On's attempt to categorise Shamma even though he leaves out the religious component of identity.

results in shifting the main focus of his novel from the Israeli Palestinian to the Palestinian:

His compatriot here speaks much more to my heart than he does. He forces me to respond and take a stand toward him. You have to bear in mind that he is still a pure Palestinian, whose strength resides in his lack of cynicism. (*Arabesques*, 168)

According to Bar-On, the 'pure' Palestinian Paco provokes a response in him, which as another writer on the programme rightly points out, shows that Bar-On prefers his 'enemies simple and well defined' (*Arabesques*, 168). The Palestinian, contained within his un-hyphenated identity, and within his territory, is easily opposed to the Israeli Jew, whereas the Israeli Palestinian constitutes an ambiguous and hence dangerous enemy. Yehoshua described this fear of the enemy within through Veducha's behaviour towards Na'im, and as his novel confirms, this ambivalence makes it not only difficult to define them as Israeli Palestinians, but above all, to define the Israeli Jew *in opposition to* the Israeli Palestinian. For Bar-On, Anton does not constitute an enemy 'in the accepted sense of the word' (*Arabesques*, 168), suggesting that Anton is indeed an enemy who is difficult to recognise, as he is sharing important aspects of Israeli identity with Bar-On himself. Moreover, Bar-On considers Paco's demand for a Palestinian state as easier to reconcile with Jewish nationalism than Anton's aspiration to become an equal Israeli citizen: 'I feel much closer to the problem of *this* Palestinian' (*Arabesques*, 168). Shammass clearly links Bar-On's view to Yehoshua's position in their earlier debate, where the Israeli Jewish writer imposed ethno-nationalism on the Palestinian inside Israel.<sup>19</sup>

Rick keeps calling Anton 'Paco,' an act that he sees as his 'modest contribution to the camouflage measures you've been taking' (*Arabesques*, 172). He criticises Anton for not giving equal balance to both sides of his identity but putting too much emphasis on the Israeli aspect of it. The relationship between Bar-On and Paco, his new subject, or object, of writing

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<sup>19</sup> In a recent article in *Haaretz*, Yehoshua acknowledged that the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories is destroying Palestinian identity and he advocates a two-state solution. However, he did not admit that Israel's colonisation of the Palestinian land is at the root of the problem and needs addressing and compensation ('Dividing the Land of Israel').

is also described in terms of camouflage, as Liam, an Irish writer, comments that 'The apparent idyll is just for show, a camouflage, and the showdown is only a matter of time' (*Arabesques*, 173). Hannan Hever expands on the idea of camouflage when he argues that:

On the one hand, the self, seeking to secure its unity, masks the gap between itself and the Other. This has the effect of creating an 'improved' Other, an Other which is similar to the self and thus less ominous. On the other hand, this masking mechanism preserves the permanent difference between the improved Other and the powerful self, thereby ensuring the Other's subordinated, dominated position. (2002: 108)

This description of the relationship between self and other maps onto the relationship between Bar-On, the Israeli Jew, and Paco, the Palestinian. Bar-On creates an image of Paco that is close to his own identity, an 'improved' other that does not threaten his hegemony, which, as Hever has pointed out, maintains the other in a subordinated position. This description of camouflage also resonates with Yehoshua's representation of Na'im's Israelisation, which similarly maintained him in an inferior position, ultimately confirmed by his relocation to the periphery. To reciprocate this power dynamic, Shamma's portrays Bar-On as the assertive writer, the active agent, whereas Paco seems passive, an ideal object. Bar-On and Paco can be read as representatives of their respective nations, Israel and Palestine, and hence constitute a critical comment from the author on their positions of power, or lack thereof, within world politics.

The seemingly reciprocal understanding between Bar-On and Paco is increasingly threatened until Paco throws a beer can into a lake and 'the chasm between him and Bar-On gaped open again' (*Arabesques*, 202). Paco's rebellion can be interpreted as an act of desperate resistance, without any apparent reason and with its only purpose to disturb the peace, at least from Bar-On's point of view. Edward Said has identified two types of Palestinians defined in the Israeli mind since 1967, one of them being the 'good Arab, the reasonable man,' who is opposed to 'the intransigent, rebellious type of

fellow, the so-called terrorist, the wicked enemy of Israel' (1974: 6).<sup>20</sup> Paco's act of rebellion allows Shammas to specifically address Israeli Jewish representations of Palestinians as 'terrorists' and 'irrational,' who are not considered as equal partners in the peace process because their demands are 'unreasonable' but rather as an obstacle to solving the Middle East crisis.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, Paco's 'irrational' act can be read as his refusal to be the 'subject' of Israeli Jewish history. Disturbing Bar-On's 'idyll' illustrates the fact that Paco, and by extension the Palestinians, ask to be compensated for the losses that the creation of the state of Israel has entailed for them. They want Israel, and the world, to recognise that they are not only an 'annoying' presence but that they have suffered injustices which need to be addressed and redressed before any serious peace talks can be resumed. Comparing Paco to Anton allows Shammas to differentiate between Palestinian and Israeli Palestinian national aspirations. Bar-On's shift from Israeli Palestinian to Palestinians constitutes a criticism of the Palestinian prominence within international discourses, which often results in a neglect of the Israeli Palestinians<sup>22</sup> and their cultural and political exclusion within Israel that Shammas's novel seeks to remedy.

Throughout *Arabesques*, Shammas acknowledges the metafictionality of his work, self-consciously referring to the artificiality of his novel in relation to 'reality,' expressed most succinctly in his epigraph: 'Most first novels are disguised autobiographies. This autobiography is a disguised novel.' Moreover, the emphasis on the metafictional level allows Shammas to interrogate the possibility of literature as writing back to and challenging cultural and political exclusion. The idea of writing as power is apparent not only in the Israeli Palestinian Anton who is writing the Israeli Jew Bar-On's story but also in Bar-On's own position as a writer who supposedly writes

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<sup>20</sup> A similar binary logic is identified by Collins, who argues that 'Internationally, Palestinians have too often been rhetorically reduced to two figures: the bomb-wielding, airplane-hijacking "terrorist" and the pitiful refugee' (67).

<sup>21</sup> As Cordesman has noted, in March 2002, during the second intifada, 'Israel publicly declared that Arafat was an enemy rather than a potential peace partner' (288), illustrating that the image of the terrorist is still used in the twenty-first century to denigrate Palestinian demands for equal rights in terms of national sovereignty.

<sup>22</sup> This disregard is also discussed in Pappé's aptly named 2011 monograph *The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinians in Israel*, which engages with the history of the Palestinians inside Israel from 1948 to 2010.

about Anton. Bar-On is represented as a God-like creator figure, observing Anton with Amira, his Egyptian Jewish lover, outside on the balcony:

Bar-On stood on the other side of the glass window of the illuminated, buzzing room, one hand still on the switch and the other wagging at us, and with a sly smile on his face. Then he turned the light off, whipped out his notebook and jotted something down. (*Arabesques*, 148)

This scene aligns observing 'real' life and its transformation into fiction and places Bar-On in a position of power. However, bearing in mind that Bar-On is a character in Shammas's novel, this scene proves above all Shammas's authorial power. Bjørg, a Norwegian writer, worries about the increasing influence of Bar-On's writing on Anton's life, describing him as 'someone who before my very eyes is turning into a character in a book' (*Arabesques*, 166). The connection between 'reality' and fiction also consolidates the link between Yehoshua as a real life character and his fictional embodiment Bar-On and directly references Shammas's criticism of Yehoshua. To further blur the distinction between fiction and reality, and between author and character, Anton tells the reader that he, together with his lover Amira, wrote the scenes in which Bar-On appears as first person narrator. Throughout the novel, Shammas positions the struggle for power and domination as a key characteristic of the relationships between writer and subject, questioning Aleid Fokkema's description of 'postmodern' characters as 'get[ing] out of hand, lead[ing] a wilful life of [their] own' and their appearance as 'autonomous being[s]' (20). Shammas shows a very pronounced awareness of his characters *as* characters, as the epigraph to his novel indicates, insinuating that his position as 'postmodern' (minority) writer is conscious, self-chosen, and to a certain extent a pose. Part of this pose, or rather critical stance, is to represent Bar-On at times like a caricature, magnifying his bad qualities and ridiculing his opinions in relation to Israel as a Jewish state. However, I would suggest that Shammas's constant references to the metafictional level of his narrative demonstrate that he is aware of the instrumental use of Bar-On as a critical tool to address Yehoshua's exclusionary viewpoints.

The scene with the light switch is repeated when Paco tries to usurp Bar-On's position as a creator:

All of a sudden we were flooded by the balcony light. We looked into the room, and there is Paco trying to hide his face behind a mask (...), wagging a finger at us. Then he turns off the light and returns us to darkness. (174)

According to Hever, Bar-On 'sees in this love [between Anton and Amira] an intolerable threat to the established boundaries delimiting his national culture' (2002: 203). Paco's exposure of the two lovers echoes Bar-On's fear of miscegenation and the infiltration of his 'pure' Israeli Jewish culture and identity, which can be read as an exaggerated version of Yehoshua's attempt to maintain Israeliness as the culmination of Jewishness and to prevent it from being 'mixed' with Palestinian identity, apparent in his refusal to let the relationship between Dafi and Na'im succeed. By mirroring Bar-On and Paco's behaviour concerning interracial relationships, Shammas criticises both Israeli Jewish and Palestinian nationalism for their exclusivity and their excessive patrolling of identity boundaries. Gil Hochberg observes that in addition to attacking Zionist ethno-nationalism, Shammas's criticism specifically targets 'the separatist aspirations of Palestinian nationalists by showing how such aspirations overlook the existence of Israeli-Palestinians and the complexities this population introduces to the concept of the "two-state solution"' (77). The fact that Paco sides with Bar-On rather than with Anton is one indication of this 'separatist' nationalism, which focuses on the 'pure' Palestinians inside the occupied territories and neglects the aspirations of the Palestinians in Israel.

Shammas complicates the relationship between Israeli Jew, Israeli Palestinian, and Palestinian further when Anton meets the Palestinian Michael Abyad. Michael Abyad turns out to be Anton's supposedly dead cousin after whom he was named. His meeting with Michael leads him to consider events from yet another perspective: 'I have chewed Michael Abyad's gum (...) and seen the world through his eyes' (*Arabesques*, 202). Michael Abyad's fate indirectly influences Anton's life, as Michael's, or rather the dead Anton's, story, represents the Palestinian side of Anton's identity. Michael confesses that he had 'decided to write [his] autobiography in

[Anton's] name and to be present in it as the little boy who died' (*Arabesques*, 258). This admission raises the number of authors who have contributed to the narrative to four: Michael Abyad, Anton, Yehoshua Bar-On, and Shamma. Through the multitude of differing authorial voices, all of whom are related to Israel and Jewishness, whether as citizens or non-citizens, Shamma challenges the idea of a monolithic Israeli Jewish identity based on Zionist and religious ideals and stresses the artificial linguistic and ethnic boundaries imposed by the Israeli state. At the same time he contests the 'Jewish' nature of concepts such as minority and otherness by collocating the ways in which Palestinians in Israel face similar experiences to pre-state Jews in that they are a discriminated minority excluded from comprehensive rights as citizens.

## **Conclusion**

The debate between Yehoshua and Shamma ended with Yehoshua conceding Israeli 'nationality' to Shamma. But as Grossman notes: 'Yehoshua had made only a small change in his position. He was still unwilling to bring the Arabs under the wing of the concepts of "the people of Israel" and "the nation of Israel"' (2003: 276). Yehoshua was prepared to grant Shamma Israeli 'nationality' but not to accept him as part of the Israeli nation, demonstrating the need to sustain the boundaries between Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinians. His attitude confirms his desire to maintain the Israeli Palestinians' position as outsiders in Israel, excluded from the Israeli Jewish majority as Yehoshua believes that the Palestinians should be content with their situation as a privileged minority group. He recognises Palestinian national aspirations as valid, as he exhibits tentative attempts to represent the injustices inflicted on the Palestinians in 1948 through Dafi's questioning of the Second Aliyah, and by giving Na'im an opportunity to voice his opinions and aspirations. However, he does not want to include the Palestinians as full members of the Israeli state, and above all he does not want to accept the consequences that such an integration would entail for Israeli Jewish identity: the loss of the supremacy

of Jewishness and its manifestation as Israeliness. Joseph Massad situates the need for a Jewish majority at the root of the Palestinian problem:

It is a commitment to Jewish supremacy that makes the return of the Palestinian refugees a 'demographic threat' to the Jewish majority in Israel (...), that continues to legitimize the treatment of Israeli Palestinians as third-class citizens, and that legitimizes the continuation of the occupation as a safeguard against threats to a Jewish-supremacist Israel. (152)

Recognising the Arab as a 'moral other' would question Jewish suffering as paramount, and in turn the necessity for a Jewish majority, since it entails acknowledging the suffering of the Palestinian people and shifts the focus from a Jewish lens to interpret events in Israel to an Arab prism, which refuses to link Israel exclusively to the Holocaust and the security discourse.

It is exactly this exclusionary vision of the state, which maintains that 'there is a limit beyond which the Palestinians' exercise of their Israeliness and of their citizenship rights will not be allowed to proceed' (Shafir and Peled 129), that comes under attack in Shammas's novel. By using different authorial voices – Israeli Jewish, Israeli Palestinian, and Palestinian – Shammas demonstrates the plurality of contemporary Israeli identity and deconstructs the concept of a singular or unified Israeli majority identity based on Jewishness. He epitomises 'an Arab morality,' or rather a Palestinian morality, which can be used to judge Israeliness and the exclusivity of the Jewish state. In this way, Shammas challenges not only Israeli Jewish hegemonic identity but also the exclusion of the Israeli Palestinians from democratic citizenship as well as the occupation of the Palestinian territories in the name of maintaining the security of the Jewish majority in Israel.

Whereas in many ways Shammas is able to write from a position of 'privilege' as a citizen of the Israeli state, Palestinian writers from the West Bank are faced with a very different reality. The Israeliness they encounter on a daily basis is above all embodied in settlers and soldiers, representatives of a military government that oppresses them. As a result, they mostly resort to depicting Jewishness as an indistinguishable mass, describing individuals as flat characters, which makes them interchangeable

and unsympathetic. However, the next chapter not only engages with these types of representations but also examines more complex depictions of Jewishness, especially Jews as civilians, and prolonged attempts of Palestinian characters to understand Jewish individuals and their ideologies.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Imagining the Other? Jewish Soldiers, Settlers, and Civilians in Palestinian Literature**

#### **Empathy, Humanity, and the IDF**

In Israeli and metropolitan representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict there is a pronounced emphasis on portraying soldiers as 'human' and in advocating the notion of dialogue as a solution to the conflict, a strategy that can be discerned for example in videos circulated on YouTube. One case in point is a short clip that depicts an Israeli soldier behind barbed wire, dancing, while children on the other side of the fence imitate his gestures and movements.<sup>1</sup> The video is introduced with the line 'a proposed solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict' and exemplifies a tendency to take the conflict out of its context and instead exhibit the friendly and approachable nature of Israeli soldiers. The encounter with local children is used to establish the army's humanity, conforming with representations of wars as humanitarian enterprises when in fact they are fuelled by economic and political gains. Dancing as a way of communication between two enemy sides propagates the notion of dialogue without addressing the power imbalance between Israel and Palestine. There is, of course, an underlying tension in this video, since an armed soldier is standing within shooting range of unarmed children. Another video shows soldiers from the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in Hebron patrolling the streets but suddenly they stop and start dancing.<sup>2</sup> The playfulness of the dance and the depiction of the soldiers as 'human' and 'fun' obscure the political significance of Hebron, a city claimed both by fundamental Jewish settlers and Palestinians. The video does not explain that these soldiers patrol the streets to protect the Jewish

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<sup>1</sup> 'Israeli Soldier Dancing with Palestinian Kids.'  
[www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_detailpage&v=GEXvc1\\_vVEg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_detailpage&v=GEXvc1_vVEg)

<sup>2</sup> This video is entitled 'IDF Soldiers Dancing to Kesha - Tik Tok in Hebron (Rock the Casba).'

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVVte550dyU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVVte550dyU)

settlers who are occupying Palestinian homes and land and moreover there are instances of soldiers attacking Palestinians, as a recent news story of an IDF soldier head-butting a Palestinian youth illustrates.<sup>3</sup>

The Israeli Jewish writer Amos Oz suggests that any solution to the conflict needs to move beyond the notion of dialogue, since ‘rivers of coffee drunk together cannot extinguish the tragedies of two peoples claiming (...) the same small country as their one and only national homeland’ (2006: 7). Instead he proposes that an act of empathy is required: ‘We need imagination, a deep ability to imagine the other, sometimes to put ourselves into the skin of the other’ (2006: 13-14). He contends that one of the main obstacles to an agreement between Israeli Jews and Palestinians is the inability to empathise with the other, as both have internalised the self-image of the victim, which results in self-righteousness, neurosis and insecurity (2006: 74). Whereas the idea of dialogue situates Israelis and Palestinians on an equal level, empathy indicates a willingness to understand the other side. However, this empathic gesture needs to take into account the power imbalance that governs the conflict. Simon Baron-Cohen defines two stages of empathy: recognition and response. Consequently, he asserts that empathy ‘requires not only that you can *identify* another person’s feelings and thoughts, but that you *respond* to these with an appropriate emotion’ (11). In the context of the situation in Israel/Palestine recognition certainly entails acknowledging not only the difference in power and support of both sides but also addressing Israel’s military occupation of the Palestinian territories and the injustices Israeli soldiers commit against Palestinian civilians on a daily basis.

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<sup>3</sup> This attack was filmed by Zidan Sharabati, a volunteer from B’tselem, an Israeli human rights organisation: [www.btselem.org/beatings\\_and\\_abuse/20120726\\_officer\\_head\\_butts\\_palestinians\\_youth\\_in\\_hebron](http://www.btselem.org/beatings_and_abuse/20120726_officer_head_butts_palestinians_youth_in_hebron). However, there are exceptions among the IDF, as some soldiers working in Hebron point out that they were protecting the Palestinians from settler attacks. See for example the testimony on the Breaking the Silence website entitled ‘Kids Do Whatever They Please in Hebron’ ([www.breakingthesilence.org.il/testimonies/database/75697](http://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/testimonies/database/75697)). Apart from Breaking the Silence, other examples of critical engagements with soldiers’ roles in the occupied territories and the moral consequences of killing civilians are the Combatants for Peace ([cfpeace.org/](http://cfpeace.org/)), who actively seek to create structures for reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians.

In discussing the depiction of Israeli soldiers in films, Slavoj Žižek determines 'humanisation' as 'a key constituent of the ideological (self-) presentation of the Israeli Defense Forces,' which is achieved by the representation of soldiers in the Israeli media as flawed and traumatised, 'neither as perfect military machines nor as super-human heroes, but as ordinary people' ('A Soft Focus on War'). The representation of the Israeli soldiers as 'human' is intended to confirm the 'humane' behaviour they exhibit towards the Palestinians. As such, there is a conflation between being human, belonging to the human race, and being humane, 'of treating others with kindness and civility' (Lacqueur 44). However, the IDF's attempt at 'human(e)ising' Israeli soldiers is contested in Palestinian culture and literature, which typically portrays them as unfeeling representatives and accomplices of the occupying power. Gila Ramras-Rauch has argued that depictions of Arabs in Israeli Jewish literature tend 'to be pressed into the service of ideology and dogma, and therefore literary representation lapses into two-dimensionality' (xiv), a tendency equally applicable to the portrayal of Jews in Palestinian literature, and indicating that literature can be considered as a contribution to addressing the power imbalance between both sides, at least on a cultural level. Abdul JanMohamed observes in relation to postcolonial writing that 'the relationship between self and other and between literature and society (...) are mediated by ideology, which (...) is not false consciousness but rather a distillation of *lived* relationships' (266). JanMohamed posits social and political realities as informing any act of writing, foregrounding the impossibility of separating literature and the ideological context from which it emerges. Helga Tawil-Souri argues that in the Palestinian case 'there is an inherent and on-going relationship (sometimes a tension) between politics and culture,' which she rightly attributes to the continued efforts since 1948 to silence the Palestinians and erase their story (140; 142). However, there is a tendency to read Palestinian texts exclusively as examples of political resistance rather than consider them in aesthetic terms but as Edward Said has noted 'there is no necessary contradiction between aesthetic merit and political themes. In the

Arab and specifically the Palestinian case, aesthetics and politics are intertwined' (2003: 164).

In this chapter, I interrogate the possibility of fellow feeling in encounters between Palestinian and Israeli Jewish characters and read empathy, and the lack thereof, as a critical comment on the notion of dialogue as a solution to the conflict. I engage with ideas of Jewishness as a majority identity in Israel through the representation of Israeli soldiers, settlers, and civilians in the fiction, travel narrative, and diaries of two internationally circulated Palestinian writers, Sahar Khalifeh and Raja Shehadeh, published between 1975 and 2008. Their roles as spokespeople for the Palestinians leads them to strategically resort to two-dimensional depictions of representatives of the military rule in order to denounce the injustices inflicted on the Palestinians in the West Bank. Nevertheless, neither Shehadeh nor Khalifeh allow their texts to become exclusively dogmatic and their desire to legitimise their own group's claims is far from unconscious. In Khalifeh's novels, the plot builds towards encounters with Jewishness, which are situated as catalysts for the political development of the main characters. Shehadeh, on the other hand, offers many small instances of encounters with Jewishness to create a bigger picture of the oppressive nature of Palestinian life under occupation and the Israeli Jews' roles within it. Both authors' characters display a willingness to engage with the 'enemy,' and exhibit the ability to show fellow feeling towards individual Jews. Israeli soldiers and settlers, however, are mostly represented as instruments of state power rather than humane beings, but, as Khalifeh explains in an interview in 1980, the daily encounters with the Israeli military rule do not encourage any engagement with the Israeli soldiers as individuals:

Israelis are always minor characters in my books. Why? Because in reality we only come into contact with soldiers and other representatives of the occupation. We have minimal contact with the Israeli civilians. How can I write about somebody or something I don't really know? Despite my best intentions and feelings for them as fellow human beings, I can't capture them as fully rounded figures. (qtd. in Isaksen 186)

Although it might be argued that her Jewish characters are indeed not fully rounded figures but instead serve as catalysts for Palestinian characters, her novels, *Wild Thorns* (*Al-Subbar*, 1975; English translation 1984) and *The End of Spring* (*Rabi' Harr*, 2004; English translation 2008), demonstrate an engagement with Jews as civilians. Her representations critically develop from tentative and brief attempts to imagine Jews in *Wild Thorns* to an extended description of a Palestinian boy's engagement with an Israeli Jewish girl in *The End of Spring*. In Shehadeh's works, encounters with Israelis, whether as soldiers, settlers, or civilians, are omnipresent. As a human rights lawyer, he mainly focuses on human rights violations, which are conveyed by the diary form of his memoirs, detailing the daily injustices committed against the Palestinians under occupation. His early work *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank* (1982) describes his friendship with an Israeli Jew, Enoch, whereas in his later memoir *The Sealed Room: Selections from the Diary of a Palestinian Living Under Israeli Occupation* (1992) he no longer engages with civilians but focuses on settler violence and Israeli soldiers as tools of the Israeli government.<sup>4</sup> It could be argued that in Shehadeh's diaries, politics take precedence over aesthetic concerns, as they serve primarily as documents to denounce the Israeli occupation and its consequences for the Palestinians but as Anna Bernard argues, Palestinian literature is typically measured against a notion of 'sophisticated' writing that 'is often implicitly defined as that which displays the formal, linguistic, and/or intertextual experimentation employed by the "avant-garde" writing produced in the West' (2007: 667). Shehadeh's travel narrative *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (2007) follows these conventions more closely as he describes various walks he took from 1978 to 2007 in the West Bank, and the Israeli Jews he met, concentrating on imagining Israeli Jewish settlers and their motives for occupying the Palestinian land. Shehadeh's works develop from depicting soldiers and

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<sup>4</sup> Several critics have pointed out that in times of conflict, there is a tendency to delegitimise the enemy as a means to legitimise one's own claims, a strategy that Gertz and Khleifi have identified in the context of Palestinian cinema as a 'battle against those who have obliterated Palestinians from history and geography' (7). For an extended discussion of the use of stereotypes in conflict, see Bar Tal and Teichman's *Stereotypes and Prejudice in Conflict: Representations of Arabs in Israeli Jewish Society* (2005).

their treatment of the Palestinians into a broader engagement with the ecological consequences of the occupation for Palestine, which positions the settler as a 'new' enemy of the land, the people, and the peace process.

Both authors offer a rebuttal to metropolitan and Zionist accounts of Israeli Jews and the Jewish history of victimhood as unique by describing the humiliation and suffering of the Palestinian people under Israeli military rule. They contest what Yoram Peri has established as the dominant self-image Israel projects in the media: the depiction of the 'hapless victim at the receiving end of the conflict, while the Palestinians are the instigators and the aggressors' (146).<sup>5</sup> Above all, they refute the image of the Israeli soldier as a human benefactor who suffers under occupation by exposing their inhumane treatment of Palestinian civilians.<sup>6</sup> One of their key strategies is to demonstrate the Israeli Jews' inability to feel empathy, or even sympathy,<sup>7</sup> for the Palestinians, which is suggested as arising from their role as 'colonisers' of another people. In this way, both Khalifeh and Shehadeh challenge the Israeli discourse of minority and contest the idea of Israeli Jews as victims. The refusal to portray agents of the military occupation as humane proves that the subjugated group does not see dialogue, or imagining the other side, as a solution, but rather that Palestinians demand the rectification of injustices committed against them and Israel's acceptance of its responsibility for the dispossession, displacement, and occupation of Palestine and its people.

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<sup>5</sup> This image is confirmed in Philo and Berry's analysis of the representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the UK and US media. They identify a tendency to depict the occupation only in terms of securing Israel's position as a Jewish state. However, this foregrounding of Israeli interests excludes the Palestinians and their suffering from reaching international audiences and facilitates the representation and justification of Israeli military actions as "security" requirements (...) rather than as an extension of military control or the occupation' (Philo and Berry 208).

<sup>6</sup> One twenty-first-century example of a sentimental and humanising description of Israeli soldiers is Goldberg's contentious account of the battle of Jenin, entitled *A Psalm in Jenin* (2003). More critical engagements with the moral consequences of having to serve in the occupied territories can be found in Grossman's *The Smile of the Lamb* (1983; English translation 1991) and in two recent films – Folman's *Waltz with Bashir* (2008) and Maoz's *Lebanon* (2009) – which examine the psychological stress of Israeli soldiers during the 1982 war in Lebanon.

<sup>7</sup> Keen distinguishes between empathy as feeling the other person's feelings and sympathy as a feeling of support or pity for the other person's situation (5), a distinction that I will adopt for the purpose of this chapter.

### **'We Will Never See Each Other': Perceptions of Jewishness in Shehadeh's *The Third Way***

Raja Shehadeh's *The Third Way*, like his other memoirs, is written in English to expose an international audience to Palestinian suffering at the hands of the Israeli military. His documentary of life under occupation can be situated just before a turning point in the Palestinian liberation struggle, which until the 1980s was motivated by 'the belief that if they remained steadfast, salvation would come from outside' (Andoni 209). Shehadeh advocates *sumud*, or steadfastness, 'to stay put, to cling to our homes and land by all means available' (*TW*, vii) as a third way, to resist his 'Israeli occupiers [who] want [him] to believe that vengeance and submission are [his] only alternatives' (*TW*, 39). His resistance certainly expresses itself in his depictions of Jewish characters as 'flat characters' or types, who, as E. M. Forster notes, 'are constructed round a single idea or quality' (27). They are generally underdeveloped, as they are mostly Israeli soldiers and Jewish settlers, who are referred to as 'they,' 'the coloniser,' 'the military rule' and are reduced to their role as representatives of the Israeli military government and as oppressors of the Palestinian people. Although Shehadeh is careful throughout his memoir not to demonise his Israeli Jewish characters, he certainly calls attention to the soldiers' loss of humanity, resulting from the humiliating and inhumane treatment of the Palestinians at official places and roadblocks. His cousin from Amman relates his experience at the border control on Allenby Bridge, a description which is marked by a pronounced use of passive verbs: 'they were undressed' and 'the corpse (...) was being transported' (*TW*, 7). The use of the passive voice makes it seem as if these actions are inflicted on the Palestinians by an invisible force, until this force is embodied in the description of 'the Israeli officer' (*TW*, 8). Another encounter with a soldier hones in on his facial expression and Shehadeh observes that 'the soldier's pale, neurotic eyes, sweating face and dangling gun gleamed in the strange purple light' (*TW*, 32). The description of the soldier's appearance foreshadows his treatment

of Shehadeh, suggesting that his inhumane behaviour towards Palestinians has marked his face with inhuman traits.

One exception to his depiction of soldiers as cruel and unfeeling is a gentle soldier at a roadblock, who addresses Shehadeh in Arabic. The author rejects this gesture of rapprochement, explaining that '[i]t seemed very wrong that this kind of peace-seeker should try to dispel his discomfort over the occupation by assuming a gentle attitude' (*TW*, 65). He condemns this simple, but futile, attempt as a self-serving move intended to relieve the soldier's conscience. In retrospect, Shehadeh realises that the soldier 'is no less a puppet of fate than I - with no mastery over his own destiny' (*TW*, 66). Shehadeh's imaginative act results in a very depressing outlook on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, representing both himself and the soldier as 'puppets,' deprived of any significant agency and at the mercy of the Israeli military power. In this sense, his feeling for the soldier can be identified as sympathy. However, Shehadeh withholds his empathy, apparent in his refusal to explain the soldiers' alternatives, which are nevertheless implicit in his harsh reaction to the soldier's attempts at rapprochement. The soldier could have objected to completing his military service, a practice that emerged on an organised level during the 1982 Lebanon war and became more common during the first intifada in 1987.<sup>8</sup>

The threatening representation of Israeliness, apart from the 'gentle' soldier, is counterbalanced by Shehadeh's portrayal of his friendship with Enoch, the first Israeli Jew who is actually named. The author describes their encounter as follows: 'We began as personal friends and slowly, as our trust in each other grew, we faced up to, and confronted, each other with the feelings that we each have as members of our warring peoples' (*TW*, 35). Their friendship is premised on the ability to encounter each other first and foremost as individuals and only slowly develops into acknowledging the other as part of the 'enemy.' This encounter is reminiscent of Jewish-

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<sup>8</sup> Cohen notes that *Yesh Gevul* ('there is a limit'), the first conscientious objection movement, was founded in August 1982 but that only in 2000, with the experience of the first and second intifada, a manifesto was signed by 600 veterans protesting against serving in the occupied territories, which led to the creation of a new resistance movement called *Ometz-le-Sarev* ('Courage to refuse to serve') (62).

Palestinian dialogue groups in the United States, whose purpose is described by the Israeli activist Miko Peled as 'eliminat[ing] the barriers between two sides through listening and empathy' (122). He stresses the fact that in these dialogue groups:

Jews and Palestinians exist as equals. (...) There are no occupiers and no occupied, we are all citizens with equal rights and protection under the law. (...) Had we been living back home, we would never have met like this. (119)

In a similar vein, Shehadeh and Enoch's friendship is based on equality and recognising the suffering of the other side:

It was because Enoch forgets neither his nor my people's suffering – without entering into an obscene competition of who suffered more – that I have learned from him to be open to, and feel deeply, the past history of the Jews and what Israel means to them. (*TW*, 36)

Shehadeh illustrates the ways in which Palestinians and Israeli Jews can accept each other's histories of suffering on a micro-level, but only if neither of them tries to put their suffering on a 'pedestal,' an attitude Esther Benbassa has criticised as being predominant in Israeli society: 'Suffering creates rights, and recognition of suffering is a right. It puts those who suffer and the community of sufferers on a pedestal. This leads to a race to suffer in order to exist' (2010: 165). In contrast with the official, and abstract, approach of the Israeli national discourse, which positions the Holocaust and the persecution of the Jews as a justification for the creation of the state of Israel and the occupation of the Palestinian territories, Enoch elicits Shehadeh's sympathy. His humanity and individuality lead the author to acknowledge that there are Israeli Jews beyond the soldier or the settler who are human beings like himself. Furthermore, his friendship with an Israeli Jew leads him to consider the Palestinian discourse of victimhood in a new light:

What I have learned from Enoch has made me expect more from the Jews (...). But even more importantly, it has taught me to expect much more of myself: never to excuse the psychology of a victim – someone whose actions and reactions you can understand, in the circumstances, but not respect. (*TW*, 38)

He exhibits an understanding of the use of victimhood for political and ideological reasons but nevertheless condemns the Jews' reliance on suffering to justify their claims to Palestinian land and the injustices committed against Palestinians.

Israel's use of the Holocaust and its consequences for the Palestinians is most poignantly expressed in one of Shehadeh's dreams. He describes Israeli soldiers entering his room and before his eyes, they turn into camp inmates in 'striped rags' (*TW*, 63). The state of Israel and its defence become conflated with the Holocaust, illustrating the omnipresence of this association in Israel and in the West, and the difficulties Palestinians face in achieving support for their cause in the shadow of the Holocaust. Idith Zertal notes that 'by means of Auschwitz (...) Israel has rendered itself immune to criticism, and impervious to a rational dialogue with the world around her' (4). The soldiers/camp inmates explain that their motif is vengeance and that 'you, the Arabs, are the new Nazis. But we shall get you first' (*TW*, 63). Shehadeh reiterates the idea of the Palestinians as 'repeating' the Nazis' crimes, propagated by the Israeli state in times of crisis. Significantly, however, the power balance is reversed, which is confirmed when one of the soldiers stamps Shehadeh's arm with a concentration camp number. Apart from denouncing the Holocaust as a justification for occupying Palestine, Shehadeh draws attention to the Palestinians as the victims of a catastrophe that was perpetrated in Europe. Shehadeh's transformation into a camp inmate at the end of his dream indicates that the Jews are now the dominant group, and the perpetrators of Palestinian marginalisation and oppression.

Although the friendship between an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian and a mutual recognition of their histories of suffering seems to work on an individual scale, Shehadeh elucidates the impossibility of an empathic encounter with Israeli soldiers and settlers:

I feel empty: in the hollow centre of a wheel with rusty spokes. At the end of every spoke is a head – a haunted, hunted, greedy, cruel death-mask. (...) I look out into the other side, the backs of the masks, and instead of hollows I see twin masks – the fragmented faces of our occupiers: riveted to the backs of ours in a way that ensures that *we will never see each other*, as the wheel spins faster and faster. (*TW*, 137-38)

His representation of the faces of Israeli Jews and Palestinians as masks, attached to each other's backs, frozen in their recalcitrant ideologies and beliefs – and especially his insistence that 'we will never see each other' – demonstrates his pessimistic view of the possibility of a solution based on mutual recognition of one another's pasts. This image contrasts with the description of his friendship with Enoch, which develops slowly and cautiously, whereas the relationship between Israel and Palestine is beyond Shehadeh's control, exemplified by the speed of the spinning wheel. Even though he exhibited a desire to engage with Enoch as an individual, he is aware that this rapprochement cannot be maintained on a collective level, implied in Peled's assessment of successful dialogue groups as only being possible *outside* of Israel. In the end, his resistance to the Israeli occupation – manifested in the concept of *sumud* – is irreconcilable with allowing dialogue as a solution to the conflict. Dialogue's inability to acknowledge that the conflict is between differently empowered groups ultimately results in Shehadeh's decision to no longer describe his relationship with Enoch as it suggests an illusory microcosm of the ways in which Palestinians and Israelis could communicate with and understand each other. In addition, dialogue does not force the Israeli Jews to assume responsibility for the injustices committed against the Palestinians. Consequently, although Shehadeh engages with Jewish suffering on an individual level through Enoch, he insists on representing the Israeli Jews collectively as the dominant group. He eschews any distinction between different political, cultural, and ethnic Israeli identities by representing the Israeli Jews primarily as oppressors of the Palestinian people, whether explicitly as soldiers and settlers, or implicitly – and complicitly – as Israeli Jewish civilians, replicating Israel's dissemination of Palestinians as a unified antagonistic group threatening the Jewish state.

### **David versus Goliath: Discourses of Power and Security in *The Sealed Room***

*The Sealed Room*, set in 1990-1991, is situated against the backdrop of the first intifada and the impending first Gulf War. Shehadeh moves from

focusing on personal and individual stories of Palestinian oppression to encompassing the larger political situation, namely Palestine and Israel's positions in relation to other world powers, most importantly the Arab states and the United States.<sup>9</sup> Bashir Abu-Manneh explains the consequences of the United States' alliance with Israel for the occupation of Palestine: 'there is no occupation, no expansion, and no rejection of Palestinian national rights without US support' (46).<sup>10</sup> He analyses the creation of the Israeli state and the occupation of the Palestinian territories within the context of colonialism and global power relations, asserting that 'post-1967 is a mere continuation of post-1948, but now in a new environment where decolonisation is a powerful global ideological force' (47). The juxtaposition of the 1948 war with the seizure of the Palestinian territories in 1967 positions Israel's occupation of Palestine as a settler-colonial movement that needs to be held accountable for violating human rights and international laws, like any other colonial power.<sup>11</sup> Considered in the light of international powers, unsurprisingly, the main theme that runs through Shehadeh's later portrayal of life under occupation is the idea of Palestinian powerlessness in the context of Israeli military occupation and world politics. He compares the Palestinians to Israeli 'props,' stressing the fact that the 'Palestinians are useful in helping to confirm that Israel lives under danger from the evil that lurks all around it' (*Sealed Room [SR]*, 138). His narrative is characterised by a more desperate tone than his earlier memoir, reinforced by the impending Gulf War and the insufficient number of gas masks available for Palestinians, which acutely and ironically exposes the Palestinian dependence for protection and survival on a government that is responsible directly and indirectly for Palestinian deaths every day.

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<sup>9</sup> According to Jayyusi, this focus on the political is a typical move: 'Palestinian writers of personal account literature are more mindful of the "external" forces at play around them (...) – even when very personal emotions are brought to the fore, the writing usually defines a social context' (67).

<sup>10</sup> An earlier account of the relationship between Israel, Palestine and the United States can be found in Chomsky's *The Fateful Triangle* (1983).

<sup>11</sup> Playfair observes that 'officially, Israel has steadfastly refused to concede that its presence in the territories is an occupation, on the grounds that to do so would be to recognize the sovereignty of the previous Jordanian and Egyptian governments respectively. Instead, Israel prefers to call its control over the land an "administration"' (5). This insistence on nomenclature has wider legal implications, since it also indicates a clear Israeli refusal to view themselves as occupiers.

As a result, Shehadeh's representation of Jews and Israelis is informed by a more disillusioned view of the soldiers and the settlers. This memoir narrates the increased number of settler attacks on Palestinians but above all, Shehadeh highlights the distance between Israeli soldiers and Palestinians: 'Our civilian world never seems to have an impact on their military one. They seem well cocooned in their own world of sounds and images' (SR, 58).

Despite this distance, Shehadeh occasionally tries to imagine the soldiers' motivations. Upon seeing two soldiers at a petrol station in the West Bank, he 'wondered how they felt. Like thieves? Unwanted, unseen, unwelcome?' (SR, 44). He inverts Israeli Jewish perceptions of the Palestinian people as usurping the land of the Jews by projecting this image onto the soldiers. Instead of presenting this 'imaginative' act as an attempt at rapprochement, Shehadeh uses it to accuse the Israeli Jews of depriving the Palestinians of their land and home. A further imaginative act occurs when Shehadeh discovers a soldier on the roof across from his office: 'Today instead of going to my office I decided for a change, to go across the street to the roof of the post office and be an Israeli soldier' (SR, 45). He assumes the role of a reservist, whose key motivations, according to Ruth Linn, rest on their loyalty and their 'belief in [their] right and necessity to fight a defensive and just war' (197).<sup>12</sup> This description of reservists' rationales for serving in the army implies that there are alternatives to the military service and thus contradicts Shehadeh's earlier representations of soldiers as having no options. Acknowledging the soldiers' alternatives leads Shehadeh to physically imagine himself in the position of an Israeli sniper. The paranoia and feeling of powerlessness he experiences as a result allow him to condemn the arbitrary and unjustified nature of the soldier's actions, which can be linked to the larger Israeli security discourse, where every act

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<sup>12</sup> Ben-Ari suggests that, in the case of reservists called for duty, the tension between civilian and military persona is attenuated by viewing the uniform as a mask, which allows 'the reservists [to] cease to be the normally identified, circumscribed, constrained members of Israeli society who must be concerned with how they are regarded by themselves and by others' (176). This mask in turn allows them to execute actions that would normally be morally questionable but are placed outside of right and wrong through their definition as 'national' duty and protection of the homeland.

is motivated by allegedly maintaining security and fighting terrorism, as noted by Lisa Hajjar:

Israel conflate[s] Palestinian nationalism and terrorism. Not only [a]re acts or threats of violence against the Israeli state or its citizens criminalized, but nonviolent nationalist activities (...) [a]re criminalized as well. This conflation, combined with Israel's maximalist interpretation of its right to security, has been invoked to justify brutal interrogations, extrajudicial executions, and collective punishments. (2006: 26)

Israel's security is positioned as the reason for oppressing the Palestinians but moreover, any manifestation of Palestinian nationalism, whether violent or non-violent, is immediately used as an excuse to further restrict Palestinian mobility, for example through the increasing number of sieges imposed on Ramallah during the first intifada. The author illustrates the paranoia that this security discourse produces: an Israeli soldier shoots at an innocent man in an office, who does not behave suspiciously in any obvious way. Shehadeh then changes perspectives again and explains that 'It didn't kill me. The bullet from across the street broke the glass of my office window and made a hole in the wall' (SR, 47). The reader finds out that the man hit by the soldier's bullet is the author himself. Shehadeh's act of imagination can be read as an attempt to examine the reasons underlying the shooting of an innocent man but he concludes that he 'never want[s] to change places again' (SR, 48). Although in many ways impeded by life under occupation, Shehadeh does not want to experience the threat that the soldier feels while serving in the territories. This stance shows sympathy for his condition, but significantly it refuses empathy. Considered in light of Fanon's discussion of the human need for recognition, where Fanon, following Hegel, posits that 'man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognised by him' (2008: 168), Shehadeh's refusal to empathise with the soldier can also be seen as a refusal to grant him full humanity, since he does not recognise his actions as the only valid option, implying that the soldier could choose not to serve in the military and thus opt out of killing civilians.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, this choice is very difficult and has severe consequences, as refusing to serve in the army without health reasons is punished with a prison sentence.

Shehadeh reflects on Israel's military presence in the territories and analyses the soldiers' behaviour in light of the possibility of a future Palestinian state:

For the first time, I felt differently about them. I had no contempt. They are soldiers because they accept the need for the defence of their country. When we have our own country, we too will need to defend it. I only hope we will not place any of our own in the same position as these soldiers of having to fight to keep what is not ours. (SR, 50)

Although Shehadeh acknowledges defence of a homeland as necessary for a state, he explicitly draws attention to the fact that the level of security that Israel needs, or believes it needs, to protect the state is the result of colonising Palestine and maintaining an illegitimate occupation of the Palestinian territories. Shehadeh no longer refers to his friendship with Enoch, whose absence could be read as symptomatic of the absence of Israeli Jewish support for the Palestinians. Although the first intifada, as Tanya Reinhart notes, led many Israelis to realise the moral, economic, and human costs of the occupation of the Palestinian territories, only one third of them were firmly opposed to the occupation (7-8). Shehadeh again draws comparisons between the Holocaust and the situation in Palestine, specifically between the Warsaw Ghetto and life under occupation: 'An entire community is left to collapse because its lifelines are cut. (...) And those responsible for this observe these specimens of humanity: Look how they behave, see how they are unable to care for themselves' (SR, 145). The Palestinians' fate under occupation is aligned with Nazi practices in Jewish ghettos. This comparison stresses the fact that inhumanity is imposed by the occupier, who then paradoxically despises the dominated for not being human. But implicit in this depiction of constructed inhumanity is the ability of the dehumanised to look back at the dehumaniser and reflect his inhumanity in creating and perpetuating binary oppositions based on degrees of 'humanity.'<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Barghouti describes the distinction between different types of humanity as 'relative humanity,' which is defined as 'the belief that certain human beings (...) lack one or more of the necessary attributes of being human and are therefore human only in a relative sense. (...) Accordingly, such relative humans are entitled only to a subset of the otherwise inalienable rights that are due to "full" humans' (1537).

Shehadeh realises that the conflict has also influenced his own ability to feel empathy, and as a result he has 'sealed' himself off from the Israeli Jews, both literally, by spending a lot of time in his sealed room to be safe from chemical attacks, and figuratively, through his refusal to engage with Israeli Jews as human beings:

I want to leave my sealed room never to return. I don't want to live with grudges and have to compromise my humanity. (...) The time has come to force open the doors of my mind and rejoin the world. I want to leave my sealed room. Will you leave yours? Then we'll meet halfway. (SR, 181)

This statement could be read as advocating a dialogue between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, and it seems to be a plea for a conclusion of the conflict by encouraging an understanding between both sides. In his later memoir, *When the Birds Stopped Singing: Life in Ramallah Under Siege* (2003), Shehadeh admits that

This is exactly what the right-wing government in Israel encourages, that we come to see Israel as one demonic faceless mass of soldiers who (...) perpetrate atrocities and inhuman actions to revenge their dead and atone for the horror their society experienced at the hands of the Palestinian bombers. (108)

He is aware of the dangers of perceiving the Jews exclusively as the 'enemy,' as shown in *The Sealed Room*, and like Grossman he cautions against the consequences of dehumanising the other side. Such an attitude reifies prejudices and fundamentalist ideologies, which in turn results in one's own dehumanisation because it engenders a loss of recognition of and response to the other side's predicament and suffering.

### ***Palestinian Walks: Settler Ideology and Rights to the Land***

Shehadeh opens his travel narrative *Palestinian Walks*, in which he describes a series of walks he took in the West Bank between 1978 and 2007, with a self-reflexive account of his strategy for representing settlers:

Throughout the book, the settlers, the main villains of my stories here, are a constant presence. I despise the aggressiveness of their intentions and behaviour towards my land and its inhabitants but I rarely confront them directly.

They are simplified and lumped together. (*Palestinian Walks* [PW], xix)

He shows a pronounced awareness of the risks of pressing literature into the service of dogma, of choosing to represent the settlers as 'villains' in order to make a political and ideological point about their presence on the Palestinian land. In contrast to his memoirs, his travelogue exhibits a more narrative quality, which could be categorised as a more 'aesthetically' pleasing mode of literature, and he uses the familiar pastoral mode to bring the land to the fore. His aim is explicitly testimonial: he wants to 'record how the land felt and looked before this calamity (...) to preserve, at least in words, what has been lost forever' (PW, xviii). The desire to document the state of the land can be situated within the pastoral genre's aim to 'present nature as a stable, enduring counterpoint to the disruptive energy and change of human societies' (Garrard 56). However, in *Palestinian Walks*, this pastoral mood is disrupted by encounters with settlers and soldiers. The descriptions of soldiers do not differ significantly from earlier accounts as they are marked by Shehadeh's feelings of humiliation and anger at his own impotence. But rather than representing soldiers as marked by 'evil', in *Palestinian Walks* Shehadeh instead illustrates that appearances can be deceptive, for example when he describes one of the soldiers, who turns out to be stubborn and relentless, as having a 'smiling face' (PW, 132). There is one exception to the representation of soldiers as cruel and unfeeling, when Shehadeh is helped by an Israeli soldier to get up a rock: 'I couldn't help but be grateful. Without him we would not have been able to proceed with our walk' (PW, 127). However, Shehadeh is convinced that if the soldier had known that he was a Palestinian, he would not have helped him. The author also engages briefly with the new Jewish immigrants, describing his envy of their superior position compared to his: 'They looked and acted as though the world belonged to them, for theirs was the new life of victory in war; ours the sour grapes of defeat' (PW, 129). First and foremost, however, Shehadeh situates the occupation of the West Bank in the broader framework of environmental critique and the damaging consequences for the land, subverting the Zionist idea of 'making the desert bloom' and the

Zionist perception of the Palestinians as unable to look after the land. His work as a human rights lawyer links him publicly to the land, as he represents many Palestinians in legal cases in order to save their land from expropriation, but the land also constitutes part of his private identity, functioning as a shelter from the occupation and the daily oppression: 'The hills began to be my refuge against the practices of the occupation, both manifest and surreptitious (...) I walked in them for escape and rejuvenation' (*PW*, 5). Walking through the land of his ancestors allows him to transcend time and space as the land is intimately connected with memories of people and places in Shehadeh's mind.<sup>15</sup> His personal link with the land resonates with the Zionist idea that 'the redemption of the uprooted Jewish exile is (...) intrinsically tied to and dependent on the possibility of physically reconnecting to the ancestral land' (Braverman 76). Shehadeh exhibits the same need to establish a physical connection with the land through his walks, as a result of the successful Zionist repossession of their 'biblical' land at the expense of the Palestinians.

The settlements are perceived not only as destroying the Palestinian land but also as suffocating the Palestinian people: 'When I looked at night towards the north I saw a continuous stretch of settlements and roads that were creating a noose around Ramallah' (*PW*, 33). Comparing the settlements to a 'noose' reminds the reader that the settlers are not only the hangmen of the Palestinians but also the hangmen of the peace process. Virginia Tilley deplores the role of the Jewish settlements in foreclosing a two-state solution, noting that they 'have accomplished their purpose: the territorial basis for a viable Palestinian state no longer exists' (1). Nevertheless, Shehadeh is grateful that the Palestinians in Ramallah do not have to engage with Israeli Jewish settlers on a daily basis: 'At least we have been spared the terror of fanatic fundamentalists squatting inside our town claiming that it belongs to their ancestors on biblical grounds as has happened in the old city of Hebron' (*PW*, 48). The absence of settlers in Ramallah allows Shehadeh to move more freely and to distance himself from

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<sup>15</sup> This idea of walking and retracing someone else's footsteps to connect with their past is expanded on in Shehadeh's 2010 text *A Rift in Time: Travels with My Ottoman Uncle*.

their fundamental beliefs, which often manifest themselves in the form of harassment of and violence against the Palestinian people.

While defending Albina, a Palestinian whose land is claimed by the settlers, Shehadeh has his first face-to-face encounter with Jewish fundamentalists: 'They (...) were hard-headed men who were fully committed to what they were doing and they had no conception of how Albina, the victim of their actions, would see them. Nor did they seem to care' (*PW*, 76). This depiction of the Jewish settlers demonstrates the common Zionist belief in the Jewish inalienable right to the land of Israel, which Virginia Tilley has described as follows:

The long-exiled Jewish nation so clearly needs the land and has such a clear right to it that the 'Arabs' are clearly irrational, obdurate, and bloody-minded in clinging to the biblical highlands – especially when they have 'so many other places to go.' (69)

Both Shehadeh's and Tilley's descriptions draw attention to the settlers' perception of their divine justification as overriding Palestinian claims to the same land, and in many ways they confirm that the settlers are barely aware of Palestinian territorial rights. Consequently, Shehadeh foresees a bleak future for the relationship between Israeli Jews and Palestinians and for the possibility of any rapprochement, at least between Israeli Jewish settlers and Palestinians:

What will today's settlers leave for posterity but ugly structures which destroyed the land they claim to love and a legacy of hateful colonial practices condemned the world over that have contributed to delaying the onset of peaceful relations between the Palestinians and the Israeli people? (*PW*, 116-17)

The author's statement constitutes a warning against their environmental and settler-colonial practices. He disapproves of the ways in which their structures interfere with the landscape and he stresses that their rigid ideology creates a fictional world where Jews believe their right to the land to be sanctioned by God.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lustick has observed that Jewish fundamentalists do not see the Palestinian claims to the land as comparable to the biblical rights of the 'Chosen People' and in its extreme manifestation, this fundamental world-view denies Palestinians the right to the land

Whereas previously Shehadeh only described the settlers from a distance or as a group, towards the end of the novel he relates a meeting with an individual Jewish settler:

Just as I reached the water I realized that someone else was already there. I noticed him from the corner of my eye. I did not look directly at him. I did not want to allow him to disturb my peace. (*PW*, 189-90)

Shehadeh admitted in the beginning of his travelogue that he is reluctant to confront the settlers as he is unable to understand their exclusionary ideology and their imperturbable insistence on their right to occupy the Palestinian land at the expense of the Palestinians. But one of his main reasons for refusing to engage with the settlers is physical fear, resulting from an awareness of the acts that a self-righteous person is capable of. This fear is confirmed by Lustick who observes that the settlers' 'chosenness' leads to a nullification of 'the moral laws that bind the behaviour of normal nations' (76). Shehadeh comments sardonically, 'But of course *he* had the authority; *he* was the law. He also had a gun. And a settler can shoot at a Palestinian with impunity' (*PW*, 191). The settlers are above the law in their own world-view, while the Palestinians as an occupied population are subjected to the occupiers' laws and military courts.<sup>17</sup> However, the fact that he is curious about the settler's ideology leads Shehadeh to enter into a conversation with him, which soon turns into a heated discussion about their mutual rights. The settler reiterates a number of myths about the Palestinians and their presence on the land: 'You would have done the same as we are doing. Only you lacked the material and technical resources' (*PW*, 195). He portrays the Palestinians as backward people unable to provide the necessary resources to make 'the desert bloom,' a slogan used to present the settlements as 'an ecological mission designed to keep the country green' (Pappé 2006b: 221). The settler, who remains unnamed throughout the

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because of an absence of 'real' suffering, and believes that their destruction is inevitable (77-78).

<sup>17</sup> For an overview of the legal system in the occupied territories, see Hajjar's *Courting Conflict: The Israeli Military Court System in the West Bank and Gaza* (2005). Hajjar uses the term 'carcalism' to 'describe the Israeli rule over the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza because it captures the fact that they are treated collectively as suspect and punishable' (2005: 186).

encounter, positioning him as a stand-in for the Jewish settlers as a whole, exemplifies the indoctrination that settlers are subjected to, which results in a stubborn and intolerant world-view that does not acknowledge Palestinian rights to the land.

The settler invites Shehadeh to smoke with him, a very symbolic gesture of sharing the (peace) pipe. Even though Shehadeh feels like a traitor to the Palestinian cause, he believes that they are 'joined temporarily by [their] mutual love of the land' (PW, 203). Although this moment seems to be overly idyllic and coming close to advocating Israeli-Palestinian dialogue as a solution to the conflict, Shehadeh stresses the ephemerality of their 'peace' as this encounter does not solve any of the problems underlying the conflict: 'I was fully aware of the looming tragedy and war that lay ahead for both of us, Palestinian Arab and Israeli Jew' (PW, 203). Shehadeh's meeting with the settler can be read as indicative of his contradictory approaches to Israeli Jewishness as complicit with the Israeli occupation throughout his work. On one hand he shows a pronounced desire to engage with Israeli Jews and to understand their position and rights to the land, exemplified by his friendship with Enoch and the sentimental representation of him and the settler smoking together. On the other hand, however, the encounter with the settler exhibits the limits of Palestinian empathy towards Israeli Jews as it requires this empathy to be reciprocal. Shehadeh's attempts at imagining the other side, whether as soldiers, settlers, or civilians, ultimately serves as a political tool to denounce their complicity within Israel's occupation of Palestine.

### **Between Intolerance and Humanity: Representations of Israeli Jews in the 1970s**

Sahar Khalifeh's *Wild Thorns* is set in 1972, five years into the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Her novel is marked by a conspicuous absence of individualised Israeli Jewish characters: they are mostly soldiers referred to in passing or simply identified as 'the Jew,' which fits in with Forster's definition of flat characters. The distance maintained between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, occupier and occupied, on a narrative

level can be linked to the political situation in the mid-1970s, described by F. Robert Hunter as marked by an increased political awareness of the implications of the occupation among the Palestinian community (42). Nevertheless, Khalifeh's novel includes two prolonged interactions between Israeli Jewish civilians and Palestinians. When the protagonist Usama el-Karmi kills an Israeli officer, one of the Palestinian women, despite her initial contempt for the Israeli Jews, approaches the widow:

Um Sabir's eyes met those of the Israeli woman; she seemed to be both begging for help and screaming in pain. Involuntarily, something was shaking the locked doors of Um Sabir's heart. She softened and responded to the woman's unspoken plea. 'God have mercy on you!' she muttered. (*Wild Thorns [WT]*, 159)

Um Sabir exemplifies the two stages of empathy that Baron-Cohen has identified: recognition and response. It is significant that the connection between the two women is made by looking at each other, and strengthened when Um Sabir reaches out and touches the woman's shoulder. Focusing on the Israeli Jew's body allows the Palestinian to perceive her simply as a woman who has lost her husband and suffers like any other human being. Khalifeh has explained her character's act of reaching out as motivated by the realisation that 'when they are faced with problems of death and sickness (...) these human beings are like us' (qtd. in Nazareth 82), indicating the uniting and equalising quality of sharing an understanding of suffering. Adil, Usama's cousin, also shows an awareness of the woman's grief and speaks to her in Hebrew. The woman rests her head on Adil's shoulder, which again draws attention to a physical connection as a means to overcome the distance between the two enemy sides. As a result of this encounter, Adil feels his 'own sense of humanity swell and deepen as [he] became aware of the Israeli officer as a human being' (*WT*, 204). By accepting the grieving woman as human, Adil's perception of her husband, the soldier, also becomes more humane. In the foreword to Edward Said's *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Akeel Bilgrami, commenting on the relationship between self and other, observes that: "The "Other" (...) is a source and resource for a better, more critical understanding of the "Self" (2004b: xii). Fellow feeling allows Adil not only to perceive Israeli Jews as

human beings but also to recover his own sense of humanity. He realises that the occupation and the need to work for the occupier in order to support his family has hardened him against his surroundings. In the Arabic original, the reciprocal relationship between Adil's recognition of the Israeli Jew as a human being and reclaiming his own humanity is made more explicit, as it reads: 'Through his humanity flowed your humanity' (*Al-Subbar*, 174).<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, Khalifeh insists that these instances of encountering the human side of Israeli Jews are isolated and cannot be sustained on a daily basis under the Israeli military occupation, which is confirmed by Zuhdi, who, like Adil, works in Israel. When Shlomo, a fellow Jewish worker, asks him if he admires the terrorists that have perpetrated an attack on a Jewish town,<sup>19</sup> Zuhdi feels offended and projects his anger and despair onto Shlomo. In his mind, his Jewish colleague becomes responsible for all the injustices the Israeli military rule has inflicted on the Palestinians, emphasising his complicity in Israel's occupation of Palestine:

I know it wasn't you that blew up the house in Saada, that you're not responsible for putting Hamada and Basil and the rest into prison. But yet in some way you're to blame too, you're responsible but not responsible. (*WT*, 112)

They argue and Shlomo leaves, muttering 'Terrorists! *Aravim muloukhlahki*'<sup>20</sup> (*WT*, 112), reinforcing the stereotypical perceptions of Palestinians predominant in the Western imaginary. Above all, their argument can be read as a microcosm of the political situation at the beginning of the 1970s. The failure of the Palestinian resistance in the occupied territories, caused by poor organisation and internal rivalries, resulted in an increase in Palestinian terrorism as a last resort, both in Israel and abroad, as the events of the Munich Olympic Games in 1972 amongst others show (Sayigh 210).<sup>21</sup> Zuhdi starts a fight, which replicates the idea of

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<sup>18</sup> من خلال انسانيته تدفقت انسانيتك <sup>18</sup> All translations from Arabic are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>19</sup> The attack Khalifeh is referring to took place on 19 November 1974, when the DFLP launched a suicide raid in Beit She'an (Bisan) (Sayigh 348).

<sup>20</sup> *Aravim muloukhlahkim* means 'dirty Arabs' in Hebrew (*WT*, 112).

<sup>21</sup> The PFLP is most notorious for this attack, but there were a number of plane hijackings, along with other guerrilla actions. See Sayigh's *Armed Struggle and the Search for a State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1996* (1997), especially pp. 306-12.

misdirected agency on an individual level, as it does not solve his problems but results in him being put into prison, where he reflects that:

Shlomo wasn't all bad. He was just a human being, like you and me. But he was also an ass, just like the thousands of Shlomos before him. I'm an ass too. Two asses fighting over a bundle of clover and a pack-saddle made in a factory. (*WT*, 139)

Zuhdi's comment situates the opposition between Israelis and Palestinians within a historical context and suggests that Palestinians are able to understand individual Israeli Jews but only if they are not cruel and inhumane representatives of the military occupation.

The only humane representation of Israeli soldiers occurs when they are witnessing a reunion between a Syrian prison inmate and his son whom he has not seen for five years. Zuhdi cynically comments: 'The barbarity and torture you witness in the prison walls doesn't make you cry, but a boy of no more than five does?' (*WT*, 148). Khalifeh demonstrates that the soldiers have hardened against Palestinians being humiliated and tortured but that they are still able to feel empathy for an encounter between a father and a child. Although this moment could be seen as illustrating that the occupation has not completely dehumanised the Israeli soldiers, read in light of Thomas Lacqueur's observation that 'sentimental feelings for distant strangers can blind us to suffering at home for all sorts of self-serving reasons' (37), it affirms their desire to avoid engaging with problems close at hand, by displacing their empathy onto a situation they can identify with more easily. Eventually, Khalifeh's description of the soldiers' ability to feel empathy is very pessimistic,<sup>22</sup> supported by her refusal to engage with them on a narrative level. By exposing the inhumanity of the Israeli soldiers in examples of mostly antagonistic rapprochement, she opposes the representation of the IDF as personable and charitable towards Palestinians and exemplifies the dehumanising consequences of the occupation for the occupiers, as discussed earlier in relation to Shehadeh's works.

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<sup>22</sup> Breaking the Silence published a report in 2012, where Israeli soldiers describe the violence they inflicted on Palestinian youths and children between 2005 and 2011 ([www.breakingthesilence.org.il/testimonies/publications](http://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/testimonies/publications)). Although many of them show remorse for what they have done, in general their testimonies offer a very bleak outlook on the soldiers' ability to feel empathy with Palestinians and to treat them humanely.

The novel closes with Adil's parents' house being demolished because his brother has become a resistance fighter and thus an enemy of Israel, a practice which would become a common form of punishment during the first and second intifadas (Amnesty International 83). Adil reflects on himself as a 'failed' resistance fighter: 'If only you were more cruel, or harder of heart, you'd blow up everything you could lay hands on' (WT, 206). He clarifies that it is not cowardice or complacency that is preventing him from joining the resistance movement but his humanity, his inability to inflict pain on other human beings, which is more easily overcome by Usama, who attacks the Egged buses that bring Palestinian workers to Israel. Adil explains that he's 'not a rose and (...) not a thorn' (WT, 192): he neither passively accepts the occupation nor does he violently resist it, like Usama and Zuhdi, the 'Wild Thorns' of the English title. Similar to Shehadeh, Adil practices *sumud*, steadfastness: 'They lived their everyday lives stoically, silently' (WT, 207), recalling the original Arabic title of the novel, الصبار , which translates as 'the cactus.'<sup>23</sup> Through his encounter with individual Israeli Jews, Adil epitomises Said's idea of the work of humanists as making 'transitions from one realm, one area of human experience to another' (2004: 80). As a result, his engagement with the Israeli Jewish woman as a human being has helped him to put the conflict, and his own role in it, into perspective. Adil's inability to participate in violence suggests that empathising with the other preserves one's own humanity. Nevertheless, Khalifeh remains very suspicious of a rapprochement between Israeli Jews and Palestinians: 'The truth is that there is a complete divide between us and them, geographically, politically, and culturally (...). We have no common ground' (qtd. in Isaksen 187). She presents the gap between the occupier and the occupied as unbridgeable and exhibits the limits of dialogue and rapprochement if the other is representative of a inhumane military rule, which is unable to empathise with the suffering of

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<sup>23</sup> According to Farsoun, the cactus bush is known as a symbol of patience and perseverance, and thus of *sumud*. Like the cactus, the Palestinian people should remain on their land, defending it against ever increasing outside pressures (213-14). Kimmerling and Migdal conclude that this form of resistance is 'a bitter lesson learned from 1948' (212).

the Palestinian people and to recognise their existence and rights as human beings.

### **The Louse and the Demon: Ideas of Jewishness After Oslo**

*The End of Spring* follows the political development of the two brothers Majid and Ahmad in relation to the siege of Ramallah and the Battle of Jenin in 2002. Khalifeh continues the representation of Israeli Jews as flat characters: they are referred to as 'them' and 'the Jews,' placing them inside a very clearly delineated us/them, Arab/Jewish binary. The novel opens in the post-Oslo period, which Said among many has described as a time when Palestinians realised that 'there was no real peace agreement, only an agreement to keep Israeli hegemony over the Palestinian territories safeguarded by hypocritical rhetoric and military power' (2000a: 188). In this climate of disillusionment, stemming from a misconstrued Palestinian belief that the Oslo Accords would mark the beginning of a decolonisation process (Bishara 5), Khalifeh's novel maintains a pronounced distance between her Palestinian and Israeli Jewish characters, reified by stereotypical accounts of Jewishness. Ahmad and Majid's father holds many prejudiced beliefs about Jews: 'Arabs were rougher than Jews and used to getting tired and crossing long distances' (*The End of Spring [ES]*, 81). Majid's cousin Issa, who lives in a refugee camp close to the fictional Jewish settlement of Kiryat Shayba, compares the Jews to lice who need to be destroyed: 'He pressed his index finger to his thumb as if to squash something and said, "Like a louse."' (*ES*, 26). The father's and Issa's representations of Jewishness resonate with nineteenth- and twentieth-century race theories about Jews: Ahmad's father's describes the Jew as feminine and soft, and Issa echoes the Nazi discourse of the Jew as both louse and 'demon' (*ES*, 94), subhuman and superhuman. Western discourse on Palestinians reflects this paradoxical perception, as Ahmad's father explains: 'The West sees us in a very ugly and negative light. One minute Saddam, the next Arafat, and the next some Bedouin with a dirty lice-infested beard holding a knife behind his back' (*ES*, 64). The Palestinian is

situated in turns as a dictator, a terrorist, and a Bedouin, all of whom are threatening to eliminate the Jews. These contradictory descriptions of Palestinians are elucidated in Dan Bar-Tal and Yona Teichman's study about stereotypes associated with Arabs in Israeli society:

From the very beginning the encounters between Jews, mostly from Europe, and Arabs, living in Palestine, fostered negative stereotyping. Arabs were attributed such labels as primitive, uncivilized, savage, and backward. In time, as the conflict deepened and became more violent, Arabs were perceived as murderers, a bloodthirsty mob, treacherous, cowardly, cruel, and wicked. (121)

A rise in stereotyping the enemy is closely linked to conflict, since conflict increases the distance between Israeli Jews and Palestinians and necessitates the depiction of the Israeli Jew as completely opposed to and separate from the Palestinian. However, the image of the louse, the vermin, allows Khalifeh to compare stereotypical portrayals of Jews and Arabs and implicitly links the fate of the Palestinians to the suffering of the Jews in Nazi Germany. This connection not only alludes to the similar procedures and processes of dehumanisation and dispossession, albeit on different scales, but also suggests that the Palestinians are the victims of a catastrophe they did not perpetrate. Khalifeh's implied comparison can be aligned with Shehadeh's more explicit uses of the camp inmates and the Warsaw Ghetto as Jewish experiences of minority and suffering to illustrate the abysmal situation of the Palestinians in the occupied territories.

For Ahmad, however, the Jew might be primarily defined as a stereotypical other contrasted with his Palestinian identity but contrary to other characters in the novel, he seeks knowledge to overcome the strangeness of the Jews. Ahmad first encounters 'real' Jewishness when he sees a Jewish girl in the settlement of Kiryat Shayba. His ideas of Jewishness are shaped by his father's accounts of the Jewish settlers, who are constructed as an embodiment of evil in relation to the Palestinian people, echoing Shehadeh's description of the settlers as 'villains': 'she was a Jewish settler and her father was a Jewish settler and that meant that her father owned a machine gun and had forelocks and was the scum of the earth' (*ES*, 18). Nevertheless, their friendship develops with a surprising ease: 'And just

like that, they became friends. Or at least it was the start of a friendship, a secret friendship' (*ES*, 32). This encounter between the two youths can be interpreted as Khalifeh advocating the necessity of encountering the Jews without preconceived ideas and prejudices and to accept them as individuals and human beings, rather than relying on second-hand demonised or dehumanised descriptions of the enemy. Nevertheless, the author is aware of the limits of a rapprochement between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, which is confirmed by the episode with Amber the cat and its influence on Ahmad's political development. Ahmad wants to show Mira a cat that he received from one of his brother's friends, but it escapes into the settlement. With his brother's cousin, Issa, he decides to rescue the cat from the settlement and from Mira, who has betrayed their friendship by not returning it to him: 'Mira had gone far away from him now. She was no longer his beautiful sweetheart. She had become a little settler' (*ES*, 92). By taking away his cat, Mira's behaviour is linked to that of the Jewish settlers who are taking away Palestinian land. Ahmad's failed friendship with Mira allows Khalifeh to caution against a reconciliation between Israeli Jews and Palestinians that is based on dialogue. Both Mira, and the Israeli state, although clearly on a different scale, refuse to acknowledge their role in the Palestinians' suffering, which allows Khalifeh to insist on the need for Israel to assume responsibility for the occupation and dispossession of the Palestinians as an imperative for any agreement between Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

In spite of the theft, Ahmad does not hate Mira as a Jew but because she has deprived him of his cat: 'He didn't hate her. Or he did hate her, but didn't know how to categorize her' (*ES*, 92). This distinction contests the link between the persecution of the European Jews at the hand of European majority societies, and of course the Nazis, and the Palestinians as 'repeating' this persecution, an analogy used by Israel's political leadership to justify and expand strict security measures to maintain Israel as a Jewish refuge from anti-Semitism. As discussed throughout this study, and as Jacqueline Rose asserts, 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 military 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' (2005: xiii). In her novel, Khalifeh similarly criticises Israel's security discourse, which situates the Arab as a dangerous enemy to the Jews, even though the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not have its roots in 'ethnic hatred' but in a struggle over the land and the resulting colonisation of the indigenous people. Tilley, in discussing Arab depictions of Jews, stresses the historical, political and social context as determining their views of the other side: 'Although Arabs are certainly not immune from anti-Semitism, Arab language against "the Jews" reacts primarily to Zionist explicit promotion and privileging of "the Jews" and to the Palestinians' expulsion and dispossession in favor of "the Jews"' (162). Through Ahmad's encounter with Mira, Khalifeh demonstrates that the Palestinians initially do not hate the Jews as Jews but as occupiers and oppressors. Nevertheless, over time, with the increasing weight of occupation and the daily humiliation, their feelings of hatred extend to the Jews as an ethnic and religious group who is occupying Palestinian land and denying Palestinians territorial sovereignty and basic human rights.

### **Jewishness, Politicisation, and the Second Intifada**

As a result of breaking into the Jewish settlement, Ahmad is imprisoned. Majid faces a predicament similar to Ahmad's, when he argues with a powerful man, al-Washmi, who is found dead the following day. Both brothers are accused of actions they have not perpetrated, and their incrimination seems very incidental. Majid is rescued by a group of resistance fighters:

And just like that, Majid became a fugitive in the hands of a band of revolutionaries, and just like that a new page was opened in the life of the young musician. He put down his guitar and picked up a machine gun. (*ES*, 106)

The repetition of 'and just like that' indicates the incidental nature of Majid's transformation from mildly political musician to politicised resistance

fighter. Moreover, it echoes the development of Ahmad and Mira's friendship: 'just like that.' Representing these events as accidents suggests that they could happen anywhere. This 'incidental' nature, however, is only conferred by the English translation as the Arabic reads *و هكذا* (*Rabi' Harr*, 105), which translates as 'and thus.' In Arabic, these events are represented as consequences of previous events, opposing a sequential reading of Ahmad and Majid's political developments, based on a logical unfolding of a string of connected events, to a predestined transformation from apolitical to political. Indeed, Majid contradicts the incidental nature of his politicisation by illustrating the inevitability of becoming part of the Palestinian resistance: 'They're playing a death dirge, and we're required to dance to it' (*ES*, 112). Majid believes that participating in the conflict is not a choice but an inevitable result of the Israeli Jewish oppression. Both Khalifeh and Shehadeh use the image of the puppet on a string to describe the power imbalance between occupier and occupied, with the latter severely dependent on Israel as the 'puppet master,' denying the Palestinians active agency and the freedom to make their own decisions. The use of this image stands in stark contrast to Shamma's idea of ventriloquism, illustrating the differences in terms of empowerment between Palestinians inside and outside of the Green Line.

Majid, whose condition is still unstable after being hit by shrapnel, witnesses the siege of Ramallah from Arafat's headquarters. His feelings of oppression foreshadow life after Operation Defensive Shield, when the Israeli military re-occupies the West Bank: 'We are in prison. We fell into the trap' (*ES*, 169). The Al-Aqsa Intifada exposes, once again, the difference in power and military equipment between Israeli Jews and Palestinians: 'The Jews stayed inside their tanks and armored vehicles, and they dropped bombs from their warplanes and shot rockets into the alleyways from armored cars' (*ES*, 184). Contrary to the first intifada, the conflict is no longer face-to-face but, as Suad notes: 'The enemy is like a machine, and now we're going to become like machines' (*ES*, 120). The Israeli Jews turn into machines, or more accurately hide inside machines, as a disembodied presence waging war against the Palestinians, thus confirming the image of

the soldier as a 'military machine' that the IDF seeks to refute. Majid is aware of the consequences of the occupation not only for the Israeli military but equally for the Palestinians in the West Bank: 'Oppressive and unyielding suffering does not awaken in a person the language of charity' (*ES*, 118). It is impossible to sustain empathy for the oppressor, especially in conditions of war, or impending war, expressed similarly in Shehadeh's memoir *The Sealed Room*: 'Of course we like to see you hurt. You have refused to make peace; you take our land, kill our people, defame our name' (*SR*, 119).<sup>24</sup>

Ahmad, on the other hand, despite having been to prison, still needs to 'harden and develop thick alligator skin' (*ES*, 133), according to Suad, another resistance fighter. He is used as a human shield by an Israeli soldier, which leads him to join the resistance, along with his cousin Issa: 'And just like that, they found themselves joining in with the other young men behind the barricades in an enclosed courtyard in old Nablus' (*ES*, 141). Like previous instances of 'and just like that,' the Arabic original uses 'thus,' which posits Ahmad's social environment as a key factor in influencing his political formation. Ahmad himself considers the episode with the cat as the turning point in his political 'awakening': 'If it weren't for the cat, I would never have woken up and gotten involved in all this' (*ES*, 175). Ahmad blames Mira, the Jewish settler, for his politicisation and exhibits the ways in which his perceptions of Israeli Jews, in this case as liars and thieves, shape his political outlook. But he insists that for him, political involvement means volunteering for the Red Crescent and saving instead of taking lives. He becomes very desperate and disillusioned when he sees the countless victims, especially the number of disfigured bodies after the Israeli Jewish attack on the Jenin refugee camp.<sup>25</sup> He resorts to photography as a means to

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<sup>24</sup> This intense hatred directed against an occupier, or coloniser, is a common feeling among colonised populations. See for example Fanon's discussion in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), particularly his chapter 'On Violence.'

<sup>25</sup> During Operation Defensive Shield, the Jenin refugee camp was one of the places where the most intensive fighting occurred. Israeli soldiers used Palestinian civilians as human shields and destroyed hundreds of houses, some with their inhabitants still inside (Hajjar 2006: 29). Goldberg's contentious *A Psalm in Jenin* (2003) offers a starkly different account of this battle, as he is very adamant in representing the Israeli Jewish soldiers as human and

cope with the horrors and to document the life and suffering of the Palestinian people under siege. As a volunteer, he sees Mira again, who has become a peace activist. This encounter is mediated through his camera, just like the first time when he saw her: 'She came near. Through the lens he saw her enlarged face. (...) She was so beautiful! But she had stolen Amber' (*ES*, 265). Both face-to-face encounters are preceded by an encounter through a lens, keeping a certain distance and giving Ahmad time to take in Mira's appearance in detail. The lens places Ahmad in a position of power, allowing him to see Mira, whereas Mira cannot see his face, but only the camera, which acts as a protective shield. Ahmad is torn between his love for Mira and the hatred he feels because she betrayed him. He refuses to talk to her because she is 'a dirty thief' (*ES*, 266), referring both to the actual theft of the cat and positioning her as a representative of the Israeli state who stole Palestinian land.

When Ahmad's father defends their house against Israeli bulldozers, Mira's friend Rachel<sup>26</sup> comes to his help. Ahmad describes the scene as follows:

History marched forward like the hands of Big Ben toward a girl who dreamed of love and the human conscience. The British woman beneath the tires. Click. Click (...) Take a picture. She has become one of us. (*ES*, 274)

He comments, ironically, that history has killed Rachel, as British colonialism is partly responsible for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and now a British woman is killed by this conflict. Rachel can be aligned with Forster's description of round characters as 'fit to perform tragically for any length of time and [able to] move us to any feelings except humour and appropriateness' (50-51). Although Ahmad did not have any prolonged interaction with her, and she certainly fulfils the function of catalyst rather than rounded character, her tragic death leads him to take revenge by

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charitable towards the Palestinian population, recounting numerous occasions of soldiers sharing their food with them and treating them in a dignified manner.

<sup>26</sup> The character of Rachel recalls the American peace activist Rachel Corrie, who was killed in 2003 by a bulldozer while trying to protect a Palestinian house in Gaza. In August 2012, her case was brought before an Israeli court, which unsurprisingly, did not acknowledge any Israeli responsibility in her death since the bulldozer driver supposedly had not seen her. For more information on the trial, see Sherwood's article 'Rachel Corrie Death.'

driving the ambulance, a pale imitation of the bulldozer, at a group of Israeli soldiers: 'He surges forward with all his might, like a rocket' (*ES*, 275). Ahmad's father's ominous prediction about Majid's fate as a martyr is fulfilled through Ahmad. However, Khalifeh does not represent Ahmad's development as predictable but posits his social environment and his perceptions of Israeli Jews as key factors in determining his choices, combining the suddenness of 'and just like that' with the sequentiality of 'and thus.'<sup>27</sup> Ahmad's experiences with Jewishness can be situated within Sara Ahmed's view of the encounter between the self and the stranger as 'suggest[ing] that identity does not simply happen in the privatised realm of the subject's relation to itself. Rather, in daily meetings with others, subjects are perpetually reconstituted' (7). On one hand, it could be argued that Ahmad's involvement with and his ability to feel empathy for Israeli Jews led to his death, which in turn could be read as a warning against a rapprochement between Israeli Jews and Palestinians. But, on the other hand, and more importantly, Khalifeh explains Ahmad's martyrdom as a result of the Israeli Jewish oppression and the bulldozing of his house. His death indicates that Khalifeh does not see dialogue as a solution for the conflict, since she confirms the lack of empathy of the Israeli Jewish occupiers for the Palestinians as an impediment to peace and above all, she advocates the need for a decolonisation of the Palestinian territories as a prerequisite for any rapprochement.

## **Conclusion**

Both Khalifeh and Shehadeh use simplified representations of Jewishness and Israeliness as a majority to delegitimise the oppressor. At the same time they refuse images of Jewish minority, specifically the image of the Jew as a victim, to highlight their own situation as an occupied and oppressed people. Shehadeh's portrayals of Israeli Jews vacillate between a desire to

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<sup>27</sup> A reading of Khalifeh's novel as countering stereotypes about Palestinian 'terrorists' renewed after the events of 9/11 is advanced in Bernard's 'Another Black September? Palestinian Writing after 9/11' (2010).

engage with the other side and an understanding of literature as an ideological tool to validate his position. Khalifeh's representations display a more linear critical development from the tentative and brief attempt of imagining Jewish humanity through the Israeli Jewish widow in *Wild Thorns* to an extended description of Ahmad's encounter with Mira as a human being in *The End of Spring*. Khalifeh has argued in an interview that:

The solution is not only to fight. It is also to know what is your enemy. (...) Your enemy is exploitation and exploitation is symbolized and represented by the military suit and the military star. Once you take this star and throw it to the ground it means that (...) he becomes like YOU, just a human being who suffers like you suffer. (qtd. in Nazareth 83)

She sees soldiers and settlers, representatives of Israeli military rule, as an impediment to perceiving the Israeli Jews as human(e) beings and allowing a rapprochement between Palestinians and Israeli Jews and their respective histories of suffering. In Khalifeh and Shehadeh's works, the encounters with Israeli Jewish civilians are mostly positive, and their Palestinian characters attempt to engage with the Jews as human and humane beings, and not exclusively as enemies, following Tilley's observation that 'the enemy is Zionism and Israel, not Judaism per se. "The Jews" are feared and detested because they incarnate the occupation policy that oppresses the Palestinians – for Israeli forces act in the name of "the Jews"' (163-64). By portraying individual Israeli Jews as able to elicit sympathy from Palestinian characters, Khalifeh and Shehadeh clarify that they do not oppose coexistence with civilians who recognise their rights to self-determination. However, Palestinian encounters with individual civilians are eventually doomed to fail in order to denounce the majority of Israeli Jews' complicity with Israel as an occupying power and their lack of sympathy, let alone empathy, for the Palestinian cause, specifically the absence of any actions that could lead to the end of occupation and the recognition of the injustices the Palestinian people have suffered since the creation of the Israeli state.

## CONCLUSION

In exploring literary representations and adaptations of ideas of Jewishness from the Holocaust to the second intifada, and the ways in which Jewish and non-Jewish writers engage with concepts associated with Jewishness in their works, I hope to have extended the scope of post-World War II perceptions of Jewishness as either conflated with quintessential otherness and victimhood or as oppressors of the Palestinian people. I have offered a more diverse analysis of ideas of Jewishness, not only relying on minority and victimhood as key aspects defining the 'Jew' after the Holocaust, but also tracing the ways in which these concepts have developed in relation to Israel as a Jewish state and the occupation of Palestine. My thesis has situated Jewishness as a construct between Europe and its others but crucially has mapped the development from marginalised Jewish other into hegemonic Israeli self. My study confirms the importance of situating Zionism alongside other colonial and exclusionary ideologies to consider Israel's role as an occupier of the Palestinian people as a moral problem for contemporary Jewish identity, as expressed in its literary productions.

Esther Benbassa draws attention to the Jew as both 'subject' and 'other' within contemporary identity construction: 'the Jew is not simply the West's other (...) The Jew is a subject. And, like all human societies, Jewish society too has relied on the image of the other in constructing and defining itself' (2004: ix). At the heart of this study lies a persistent ambiguity surrounding the figure of the Jew, as both insider and outsider, as part of the majority and the minority, an ambiguity that travels across geopolitical, linguistic, and cultural contexts. The Jewish, Palestinian, and postcolonial texts under consideration posit Jewishness as an instrument of resistance to dominant powers and ideologies, but significantly, they do so not through an exclusive focus on concepts associated with Jewish minority identity but by envisioning Jewishness as both coloniser and colonised but also as having moved from minority to majority. In analysing the ways in which theories travel, Edward Said ascertains two key elements: the strength of 'travelled'

theories and the attention to difference that is necessary when applying theories to another context. He interrogates the effects the movement across time and space has for a concept and concludes that 'it necessarily involves a process of representation and institutionalization different from those at the point of origin' (1991: 226). Indeed, the adoption of ideas of Jewishness in the West relies on the institutionalisation of Jewishness as conflated with victimhood and marginality, which has led Jonathan Boyarin to observe that 'the symbolic character of Jewishness, and the role of the name "Jew" in the history of Western semiotics, makes Jews good to think about human nature with' (2008: 9). However, this symbolic nature of Jewishness is not only prevalent in a Western metropolitan setting but can equally be applied to the Middle East. In the context of my study, however, rather than signifying victimhood and suffering, Jewishness becomes synonymous with Europe and the West through its colonising urge and its occupation of Palestine and its territories.

Yet I would contend that appropriating ideas of Jewishness in literature, and culture more generally, complicates a trend that Gilbert Achcar identifies, whereby in the West the Holocaust

Continues to [be] regard[ed] (...) from the standpoint, and the sense of responsibility, of the *culprits*, whereas the Arab world and most of the Third World regard the state that claims to represent the victims of the Shoah from the standpoint of the victims of the Nakba and Israel's subsequent acts. (34-5)

One recent example that deviates from this tendency is Boualem Sansal's *An Unfinished Business* (2010). In the context of pan-Arab nationalism and received ideas about Arab loyalties to the Palestinians, it could be considered as unusual that an Algerian writer engages with the Holocaust. However, his novel can be read as a case in point of respectful uses of Jewishness to open up a comparative framework with other contexts. Sansal illustrates that the experience of the Jews in World War II can be used productively in a non-Jewish context to move beyond the Holocaust as an example of Jewish weakness. Instead he demonstrates the advantages of focusing on the universal lessons that the Holocaust teaches us rather than shrouding the genocide of the Jews in a uniqueness discourse and conflating

Jewishness exclusively with victimhood. At the centre of his story are two brothers, Rachel and Malrich, who discover that their German father was a member of the SS and fled to Algeria after World War II. Rachel researches his father's trajectory and his motives in depth, which culminates in his death as a tragic re-enactment of the camp situation to atone for his father's crimes. Malrich, on the other hand, after reading about his father's story in Rachel's diary, decides to follow Rachel's advice that: 'Silence perpetuates a crime, gives it new life, closes the door on justice and truth and throws open the door to forgetfulness, to the possibility that it might happen again' (88). As a result, he applies the lessons he learned by reading Rachel's account of his father's role in the camps – above all the dangers of totalitarian regimes for the individual – to the Parisian suburb where he lives and resists the rising Islamist fundamentalism in his community. Nazism increasingly stands in as an implicit metaphor to express fears about exclusionary ideologies, exemplified by Malrich's comparisons between the *banlieue* and the concentration camps.

Sansal's juxtaposition of Nazism, Jewish victimhood, and Islamic fundamentalism is at times unsettling in its directness but by opposing Rachel's identification with Jewish victimhood with Malrich's adoption of (Jewish) resistance, he shows the ways in which theories gain in strength and relevance by travelling across different contexts, while at the same time preserving the specificity of disparate historical and geopolitical situations. The figure of the Jew and its liminality constitutes an important narrative tool to think through events of the twentieth and twenty-first century as it allows a dialectical engagement with culture and politics. However, using tropes associated with Jewishness requires awareness of two pitfalls: equating Jewishness with a cosmopolitanism that makes it easily adaptable to varying contexts without paying attention to the circumstantial differences and an overrepresentation of Jewishness as conflated with quintessential victimhood since 1945, which not only deflects criticism addressed to Israel but also eclipses the Palestinians and their plight from the public discourse.

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