

Re-emergence of Nazi Racist World in Philip Kerr's *March Violets*

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Abstract

Philip Kerr's Bernie Gunther novels, with the protagonist Bernard Gunther, set before, during and after the Second World War explores the brutal and inhuman racist treatment given to the Jews. The struggle for survival and subsequent killings of the Jews by the Nazis take place in each novel. Hitler considered the Jews, a non-German, foreign race responsible for the defeat of Germany in the First World War. Philip Kerr makes re-emergence of the minute details of the exploitation of the Jew people and their miserable life with inevitable ill-fate in the German society, where the dictator has planned to exterminate or abolish their existence and compels them to face the Holocaust. Hitler, through his ideology of Nazism, declared the 'Aryan' race superior to other races like the Jews, Slavs and the Roma and considered them as inferior and sub humans. So Philip Kerr's Bernie Gunther novels unfold the injustice and oppression of the Jews through Bernie's moral but sarcastic nature.

Key Words: Philip Kerr, racist, exterminate, Jews, Hitler, injustice, superior, holocaust

Philip Kerr, a British novelist, known for the Bernie Gunther series of historical thrillers was born in Edinburgh, Scotland. He was educated at a Grammar School in Northampton. He read Law at an undergraduate and gained his master degree in Law and Philosophy from the University of Birmingham during 1974 to 1980. He wrote novels on various subjects, including fourteen Bernie Gunther novels, three Scott Mansion novels on football, popular Children of the Lamp series for adolescents and adults and some standalone novels dealing with history, science, technology and so on. But he often explores the history of Germany, especially the Nazis.

The present paper focuses on re-emergence of German racist or anti-Semitic world in Philip Kerr's *March Violets* set in Germany and elsewhere

during the 1930's. Throughout the series, he portrays the racial discrimination faced by the Jew people under the dictatorship of Hitler in Germany.

Wikipedia defines Racism as:

Racism is the belief in the superiority of one race over another. It may also mean prejudice, discrimination or antagonism directed against other people because they are of different race or ethnicity.

Britanica.com defines Racism, also called Racialism, as any action, practice or belief that reflects the racial worldview—the ideology that humans may be divided into separate and exclusive biological entities called "races", that there is a causal link between inherited physical traits and traits of personality, intellect, morality and other cultural and behavioural features;

and that some races are innately superior to others.

Philip Kerr, having researched about Nazi Germany, especially Hitler's hatred of the Jews forces Bernie, the protagonist, to experience the suffering of these people under authoritarian government. In each novel of the series Bernie comes to know even darker side of Nazi party. While pointing out the biological features of human that proves one of a distinct race, Ali says, 'skin colour, shape of nose, type of hair, and size of skull' are considered (13). The first novel of the series, *March Violets* was published in 1989. The novel depicts the Berlin of 1936. At the beginning of the novel Bernie finds that the two SA men are taking away a red poster of the journal *Der Stürmer*. This journal disseminates anti-Semitic notions of the staunch followers of Nazism run by Julius Streicher. Bernie comes to know the anti-Semitic realities of the Third Reich when he finds on the showcase "semi-pornographic line-drawings of Aryan maids in the voluptuous embraces of long-nosed monsters." (BN 5) The expression 'long-nosed monsters' denotes the physical specification of Jewish people. Jews were berated for being a virus that is destroying Germany.

Jewish people are captured, tortured and killed enormously in the Nazi era without any intimation. The people of inferior race like Jew obliged to hide themselves for existence. Kerr depicts this secret battle for survival in the novel when Frau Heine requests Bernie to find his Jew son who has been disappeared. His secretary, Frau Protze inquires Bernie of the crimes of Frau Heine's son. Bernie sardonically responses, "You mean apart from being a Jew." (BN 31) It implies that one's race is sufficient to be regarded a

criminal in the dehumanizing Nazi era. The terror of the Nazi actions and the probability of anything can happen are echoed by Weizmann who argues that nothing can be said about "when they will ban Jews from breathing oxygen" and also remarks that he will not be able to sell books as the Nuremberg Laws prohibited Jews from selling books (42-43).

The Nuremberg Laws were enforced to deprive Jews of the right of citizenship in Germany. It also prohibited intermarriage between Jews and Aryans. On 9 November, 1932 all the possessions of Jewish people were destroyed. As a result they had to move to other places. They were alienated and displaced in the Nazi era. Jews were forcefully turn jobless. They were forced to leave professions, civil services and businesses. The plight of Jews is at the centre of the novel. When Bernie goes to jeweller's shops in Berlin, he sees people standing in a queue are from various background, mostly Jews and not to purchase but to sell and assumes two similar points in them 'their Judaism and lack of work' (BN 88). During the Third Reich Jews did not have access to employment or work in the Nazi offices. It signifies that they are the victims of totalitarian Nazi government which compelled them to trade their precious jewellery in order to stay alive.

Anti-racist pictures and cartoons were usually seen in the magazines during the Nazi era. In *Der Stürmer* Bernie finds an image of a man with a devil's tail having a big sharp nose in angel's shadow reminiscent of the physical attribute of a Jew (92). In the Nazi regime people were forced to change the name for sounding Jewish. Paul alters her mistress's name from Hannah Roedl to Eva, because he assumed Hannah echoes Jewish and Eva as

Aryan (197). Paul was very much dedicated to the racial standards of the Nazi government. When Paul comes to know the fact that her wife Grete was born to a Gypsy woman, he accused Hermann Six of hiding the reality and begins hating Grete. He was endangered by the idea of his career in the SS and the party only. Six criticised him and his Führer which made them sworn enemies (BN 226). The racism tends to destroy the bonds at personal, social, religious and professional level which has been evidently shown in the novel by Kerr. The antiracist policies of the Nazis treated other races secondary.

Racism deals with unequal and inhuman treatment to the members of the other race. Hitler's hatred of Jews is depicted in the novel. When Bernie is looking for the murderer, he experiences the hatred of the Jews in the Olympic Games where he sees that Hitler selects only Aryan racist players for the games but Jessie Owens, the son of a sharecropper and whose grandparents had been slaves, disproves the assumed superiority of Aryan race and its dominance by winning a number of gold medals which results into Hitler's anxious departure from the stadium with his officials. Hitler in his autobiography *Mein Kampf* mentions that there is only one pure race that is Aryan race superior to all other races. He also adds that the final aim of any German government had to be the uncompromising removal of the Jews altogether. The outlook of Nazis towards the inferior races like Jews is clearly pointed out by Kerr when the Olympics is organised in Berlin. The matron calls Jesse Owens a 'gazelle', won the race beating the so-called master Aryan race on their land. Bernie accentuates that this Negro as 'making mockery of crackpot theories of Aryan

superiority' whom the Hitler's race can never eliminate. The German mass applauded while Hitler along with other Nazi bureaucrats completely neglected to consider the success of this Black American (BN 202).

Fredrickson elucidates some essential features of racist government. The existence of racist theories is in ideology itself which continue to improve the differences everlastingly. 'Social segregation' is passed by the law itself at numerous stages and not just an individual to show the discrimination between the oppressor and the oppressed. Adherents of other racial groups are 'excluded from holding public offices'. They are given limited access to 'resources and opportunities'. As a result such groups are forced to confront with poverty or impoverishment (101). Jews were not permitted to practise law in the Nazi regime. Only Germans had been allowed to such professions. Kerr shows such racial discrimination when Bernie sees the business card of a lawyer having written as Dr. Fritz Schemm, German Lawyer. He dislikes this type of racial treatment to Jews in Nazi governed Germany. Most of his clients are Jews who give him a case of 'missing persons' which is very common in the Nazi era. The vicious outcomes of such cases are that bodies are found thrown in the Landwehr canal by the Gestapo and SA, suicide, as wanted and sent to KZ, a Concentration Camp (12-13). Bernie finds a public notice demanding people to go and watch an anti-Semitic film and a motivating picture of the Führer (29).

Jews were also banned from entering some places like the black sign on the beach 'No Jews Here' (BN 203). Racial indiscrimination in jail is also

represented by Kerr in the novel. Bernie discovers the dissimilarity between the behaviours. There was one hut for 150 Aryan convicts and three times more Jews are kept in the similar kind of hut. Bernie also comes to know the significant difference in death rate in the prison where the death of one Aryan per night and near seven to eight in the hut of Jews. Jews were severely beaten to death in the prison. It was a type of living hell for the Jews. Dachau was developed as a place where all the anti-Nazis were imprisoned, tortured and eventually killed. Everything was indescribable, horrific, shameful and animalistic. Jews were given the work of shifting blocks a whole day but not the Aryans (BN 246-48).

Conclusion:

Each country and people living in it is bound to the history of that nation. Everything that takes place in history remains still for generations. Racial discrimination, segregation based on caste, colour, religion or social class system separate human beings. As a result the elite

or biased class is deprived of every right of living. The Jews in Germany got suppressed for many years, particularly from 1933 to 1945 during which they have to face so many hurdles in order to survive. The hatred of another human being is sinful. Many Jews were imprisoned, assassinated, deported from their homeland, and massacred. Bernie, the protagonist of the Bernie Gunther novels is an eye witness of what happened under Nazi Party rule, Hitler's government during the Second World War. After all literature emerges out of society and human nature so novelists try to portray each and every aspect of human life from the oppressor and oppressed class. Literature based on such themes is the voice of the suppressed that presents the wicked or negative dimension of human nature which is against the code of conduct. Thus the people suffering from social ills need to revolt against the established norms like the ordinary German people against Nazi government to survive.

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