Holocaust and the Indian Ocean: Jewish Detention in Mauritius (1940-1945)

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Abstract

In September of 1940, a group of nearly 2000 Jews from across Eastern Europe were rounded up by German authorities, put aboard ship transports, one from Bratislava, the other Vienna, and began a journey down the Danube that would end up taking them across the Indian Ocean. After much diplomatic scrambling the British Government arranged to have the group detained on the island of Mauritius, then still a British colony. This group of now-stateless refugees would be detained for the entire duration of WWII, leaving an impact on the island and its people, as well as the South African Jewish community; however, it is an impact that has remained largely unexplored. In this article, I want to look at a few of the sparse sources relating this history: some artworks produced by two of the detainees, as well as a contemporary novel written by Indo-Mauritian author Nathacha Appanah, entitled Le dernier frère *or* The Last Brother*. I want to suggest that in Appanah's 2007 novel, the author imagines the space of the island as intricately entangled with the narrative of Jewish displacement there. In* The Last Brother*, the island itself and its geographies are places of entanglement, and articulate a version of Michael Rothberg's "multi-directional memory." In doing do, Mauritius gives space for thinking about the role of imperial and colonial geo-politics in the making of a what would become perhaps the defining political subjectivity of the twentieth century, the stateless refugee. Reading Mauritius as host to a Southern Hemisphere experience of the Holocaust, offers possible ways to see how both the rise of Nazi Europe, but also the geo-political tectonics of the dissolution of European empires and the creation of postcolonial nations across the globe were entangled in a related set of motions surrounding Europe's expulsion of its Jewish population.*

"Illegal Immigration" and Carceral Empire

Detainees, or Prisoners?

Looking at and Looking from the Indian Ocean

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no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark.
(Warsan Shire, *Home*)

"Illegal Immigration" and Carceral Empire

On September 4, 1940 four steamers left Bratislava and sailed down the Danube towards the Black Sea, bound for Palestine. On board were some 2000 Jews from across Eastern Europe who had been rounded up by German and Austrian authorities. Nearly 1600 of these now stateless people would spend the next four months at sea on a journey that took them across the Indian Ocean and to the island of Mauritius, where they would spend the duration of WWII detained in a prison camp. Many of these passengers had paid exorbitant fees to be part of this exodus, as they were under the impression that the transport was to terminate in Palestine, some believing they would be reunited with their families who had already immigrated there. There was of course the added incentive of being given an opportunity to leave an increasingly Nazi-occupied Europe.

On the banks of the Danube between Bulgaria and Romania, two groups in particular, one aboard the steamer *Helios*, the other the *Schoenbrunn*, were transferred to a Greek freighter named the *Atlantic*. Sailing under the (neutral) Panamanian flag, the *Atlantic* began to make its way towards the Straight of Istanbul, and from there on to Cyprus where it was met by British ships who were to escort it to Haifa. After quarantine, disembarking, and a brief internment in a camp at Atlit, British colonial authorities enforced the recently passed *White Paper*

of 1939, which limited Jewish immigration to British Mandate Palestine, and consequently denied this group entry. On December 9, these 1580 passengers were subsequently taken aboard two Dutch ocean liners and proceeded through the Suez Canal and along the East Coast of Africa for another 17 days until the two ships arrived in the harbor of Port Louis, Mauritius on December 26, 1940. The detainees were then transferred to Beau Bassin Prison which had been converted to an internment camp for the purposes of housing this group. This would be their home until the cessation of the War in 1945.[1]

The original policy laid out in the 1939 *White Paper* is at pains to orchestrate a balance between immigration—Jewish immigration, specifically—and maintaining the sovereignty and national integrity, both demographically, but also economically, of the Arab and other already existing populations of Palestine. However, much of the machinations around the creation of the paper also have to do with maintaining sufficient Arab loyalty during the interwar years and in the lead up to WWII. Moreover, as is seen specifically with this story, where British authorities escorted the group to Haifa only to remove them almost immediately, the enforcement of the *Paper* was often equivocal at best. Some of the language of the *Paper* itself is perhaps the source of that equivocation in policy:

> it is necessary that the Jewish community in Palestine should be able to increase its numbers by immigration. This immigration cannot be so great in volume as to exceed whatever may be the economic capacity of the country at the time to absorb new arrivals. It is essential to ensure that the immigrants should not be a burden upon the people of Palestine as a whole, and that they should not deprive any section of the present population of their employment.[2]

[1] For more detailed descriptions of this voyage see Aaron Zwergbaum, " 'Exile in Mauritius,' " *Yad Vashem Studies* 4 (1960): 191-257, as well as Dalia Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[2] British White Paper of 1939, Section II, The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, accessed June 30, 2020, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/brwh1939.asp.

Not based solely on economic and employment indexes, the *Paper* also highlights the symbolic importance of immigration to the "Arab peoples" of Palestine, a goal laid out in the earlier and infamous Balfour Declaration in which immigration was capped at 450,000 as it was believed that this would suffice to achieve a "national home for the Jewish people." The *Paper* continues to say that:

> His Majesty's Government believe that the framers of the Mandate in which the Balfour Declaration was embodied could not have intended that Palestine should be converted into a Jewish State against the will of the Arab population of the country. [...] His Majesty's Government therefore now declare unequivocally that it is not part of their policy that Palestine should become a Jewish State. They would indeed regard it as contrary to their obligations to the Arabs under the Mandate, as well as to the assurances which have been given to the Arab people in the past, that the Arab population of Palestine should be made the subjects of a Jewish State against their will.[3]

Given the proximity to the passing of this legislation, the group, numbering just under 1600 peoples, were promptly and perhaps predictably refused entry into Haifa, declared "illegal immigrants," and just as suddenly became stateless refugees and wards of the British Empire.

It is revealing to look at the British government's reactions to its own uneven success in actually enforcing the stipulations of the *White Paper* as it related to curtailing Jewish immigration into Palestine. This is seen in a series of amendments, in 1939 and 1940. Note the increasingly hostile language of the legislation, from the *Immigration (Amendment) Ordinance* of August 22, 1939 to its evolution into the *Defence* [sic] *(Immigration) Regulations* in March of 1940. Despite much equivocation around enforcement by the British, as Dalia Ofer writes, in fact the British "persistently maintained [a] strict distinction between refugee policy and immigration policy" when it came to Jewish groups leaving

[3] Ibid.

Europe and attempting to enter Palestine.[4] Ofer notes how this distinction is encoded in the *White Paper* itself, arguing that "Embodied in the White Paper restrictions were several assumptions, first and foremost that immigration to Palestine (and the creation of a Jewish national home) was to be considered a separate issue, unrelated to the plight of Jewish refugees seeking to leave Europe."[5] The problem the British Colonial Office faced was that subsequent to monetary penalty and internment the most expedient recourse seemed to be to eventually release these immigrants into Palestine, an option the colonial authorities were at pains to avoid. As Lauren Elise Apter has shown, the White Paper is the source of what she calls a "disorderly decolonization," which she claims is the result of attempts by the British to "assure stability throughout the Middle East" by legislative endeavors in the *Paper* itself to "keep the world Jewish problem separate from Britain's Palestine problem."[6] It was the intention of the *Paper* that the plight of European Jews was not to be a colonial issue for the British Empire, at least not one that would affect this Middle Eastern holding of the Crown. The "problem" as we will see, in this instance at least, was to be outsourced to other theaters of the British Empire.

The evolving and equivocal policy towards Jewish immigration to Palestine, and by extension towards refugeeism more broadly at this time, highlights the ways in which the Empire practiced both direct and exacting forms of carceral violence, witnessed in the increasing scrutiny towards migration and the meting out of incarceration, while also showing how incoherent and even contradictory colonial violence could be. This specific story of detainment also points towards the synaptic ability of imperial networks to mobilize, calling on various parts of the empire to address situations unfolding in another, and specifically around issues of carceral control of its populations. While largely outside the scope of this article, the detainment of this group of Jewish immigrants in Mauritius does demonstrate some of the deeply ingrained penal infrastructures which allowed for the colonial space to act as a prison of/for empire. This story finds itself at the crucible of

[4] Ofer, *Escaping the Holocaust*, 129.

[5] Ibid., 128.

[6] Lauren Elise Apter, "Disorderly Decolonization: The White Paper of 1939 and the End of British Rule in Palestine" (PhD diss., The University of Texas, 2008), vii.

colonial detainment practices and an unfolding crisis of statelessness, while also gesturing towards how the issue of Jewish immigration to Palestine just before the mid-twentieth century sent reverberations nearly around the whole of the British Empire.

Hannah Arendt describes this process in *Origins of Totalitarianism,* which locates the creation of minority and refugee populations during the first half of the twentieth century within a trajectory of a persistent reliance on the nation-state "solution." Arendt, writing in prescient historical proximity to the end of World War II, describes the European geo-political dynamics of the interwar years:

> [...] out of the liquidation of the two multinational states of pre-war Europe, Russia and Austria-Hungary, two victim groups emerged whose sufferings were different from those of all others in the era between the wars [...] they had lost those rights which had been thought of and even defined as inalienable, namely the Rights of Man. The stateless and the minorities [...] had no governments to represent and to protect them and therefore were forced to live either under the law of exceptions of the Minority Treaties [...] or under conditions of absolute lawlessness.[7]

The passage resonates with the story of these refugees mentioned above by drawing attention to the immense upheaval of people during the pre-war years and throughout WWII. Arendt also describes how "With the emergence of the minorities in Eastern and Southern Europe and with the stateless people driven into Central and Western Europe, a completely new element of disintegration was introduced into postwar Europe. Denationalization became a powerful weapon of totalitarian politics."[8] At a time when the Western European state was failing, unable to encompass the proliferating needs of its "citizens," the "nation" was staking a violent claim in the geo-political realities of both the European and international communities, from at least the inter-war period and for the rest of the twentieth century. No longer a structure of political redress for its citizens, the

[7] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1985), 268-269.
[8] Ibid., 269.

state had ossified into a receptacle of identitarian and cultural essentialisms. As Arendt claims, "the transformation of the state from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation had been completed; the nation had conquered the state."[9] Both symbolically and literally, Nazi Europe saw this movement of peoples as a cleansing, or purification, but also an asymmetrical or unbalanced substitution which revealed to the world the crisis over national identities which would dominate the geo-political theater of the second half of the twentieth century, and right up until today.

Moreover, this story of refugeeism, of exile, and of an Indian Ocean island being written into and out of the geo-political tectonics of WWII and the Holocaust, offers possibilities for seeing various other forms of citizenship and belonging being negotiated at this historical moment, and from regional perspectives further afield than the dominant Euro-Imperial ones. Often, the events of Europe from 1939-1947 are divorced from their larger geo-political resonances across the colonial and decolonizing world.[10] As Michael Rothberg notes, "the Holocaust has come to be understood in the popular imagination, especially in Europe, Israel, and North America, as a unique, sui generis event."[11] Nor does Arendt, for all her comparative insight, manage to fully map the global reverberations of the Holocaust. Rothberg explains how,

> As Arendt moves in *The Origins* from anti-Semitism, through the colonial encounter in Africa and the European refugee crisis after World War I, to the totalitarian camp system, she follows a trajectory that shuttles between European and non-European worlds. Yet she never quite achieves the

[9] Ibid., 275.

[10] Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009). Rothberg's is a very notable recent exception here and will be discussed below. But even Rothberg's commendable work to think the Holocaust and decolonization together does not take account of the Indian Ocean, much less this otherwise overlooked story of Jewish exile and its relationship to colonial history on the island of Mauritius.

[11] Ibid., 8.

> "planetary" or transnational account of the "tensions of empire" in modernity called for by recent critics of postcolonial and global culture.[12]

As will become clear with my reading of Natacha Appanah's *The Last Brother* below, I am following Rothberg's own "comparative" approach to thinking about the Holocaust and the moment of global decolonization. Appanah's text allows for what Rothberg's notes are the "possibilities for solidarity as well as distinction" between "Jews [and] postcolonial subjects" who are often otherwise distinguished by "minority and postcolonial critique."[13] Indeed, by looking at Appanah's Mauritius, as well as the nexuses of circulation mapped through Indian Ocean histories more broadly, I argue that we can see an example of the "Shared histories of racism, spatial segregation, genocide, diasporic displacement, cultural destruction—and [...] savvy and creative resistance to hegemonic demands provid[ing] the grounds for new forms of collectivity."[14] These solidarities, Rothberg suggests, are opened by thinking about the multi-directional vectors of memory diverging from the Holocaust and postcolonial identity.[15] In thinking about Mauritius as host to a Southern Hemisphere experience of the Holocaust, perhaps it is possible to see the ways in which not only the rise of Nazi Europe, but also the decolonizing and dissolution of European Empires and the creation of postcolonial nations across the globe were entangled in a related set of motions surrounding Europe's expulsion of its Jewish population.

If, as we see, Jewish immigration to Palestine is met at this time with the mobilization of vast imperial networks of incarceration, then reading this moment of empire from the perspective of Mauritius goes some way towards imagining what Aamir Mufti suggests would be "a specifically internationalist and postcolonial understanding of the scenarios of Jewish minoritization and exile, and an acknowledgment of affiliation with the modes of critique produced out of them."[16] This would also work to reposition *to* the Global South, and the Indian

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[12] Ibid., 39.
[13] Ibid., 23.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 4.

Ocean specifically, "the conceptual and historical basis for a critique of the Zionist 'solution' and its consequences for the Palestinians, for Arabs more generally, and for *the global culture of decolonization as a whole*."[17] In this way, a history of the Holocaust in the Indian Ocean offers a different view of the development of political and nation-state citizenship from the mid-twentieth century until the present. As Mufti demonstrates, a part of the intellectual and ideological project of the Enlightenment and its dissemination to the colonial world was a crisis of modernity inimical to the project itself. Much of the crisis manifested itself as the anxiety of the formation of the modern liberal (nation) state and entangled with this was the so-called "Jewish question." For Mufti and others before him, Edward Said perhaps most notably, the

> aim [...] is to understand the manner in which the Jews of Europe became a *question*, both for themselves and for others, and the implications this being put into question has for elaborating responses—literary, philosophical, popular-cultural, and political—to the crisis and conflicts of the projects of modernity in European and non-European, specifically colonial and postcolonial, settings.[18]

Mufti analyzes the centrifugal reverberations of this crisis outwards towards the contexts of Palestine/Israel and India/Pakistan, and I would like to take a similar approach here with respect to Mauritius specifically and the Indian Ocean more broadly. What might the kinds of belongings and displacements we see enacted across Indian Ocean worlds offer us by way of conceptual apparatuses for thinking about minor forms of decolonization? In other words, could this story of Jewish refugees interned in Mauritius offer yet another trajectory—that of the European Holocaust—to the transnational and archipelagic frameworks already in place for thinking about the Indian Ocean? The Mauritian experience of Jewish internment might also, as Michael Rothberg suggests, offer contexts in which both the Holocaust and decolonization are seen through "multi-directional" forms of memory. How, we might ask, does the Holocaust play out across the Global South

[17] Ibid., emphasis mine.
[18] Ibid., 10.

and in the Indian Ocean specifically, and how does the island of Mauritius figure in the story of the expulsion of Jews from Eastern Europe and the colonial handover of the British Mandate of Palestine in the middle of the twentieth century?

Detainees, or Prisoners?

It is important to look more closely at the moments preceding the arrival of the group in Mauritius, especially for the ways in which the relationship between imperial legal networks and carceral control is highlighted. In the days before these immigrants arrived in Port Louis, the Governor of Mauritius was forced to construct a legal framework making it "legal" to keep these people detained on the island. In what is perhaps the only full-length scholarly study of this story, *The Mauritian Shekel*, native Mauritian Geneviève Pitot details how, in order to effect the detention of this group in Mauritius, "Special legislation was needed to authorize the Governor to detain a group of people in prison who had not been convicted of any offence. Thus the *European Detainees (Control) Ordinance* was promulgated in Port Louis on 23 December 1940", just 3 days ahead of the arrival of the ships to Mauritius.[19] The *Ordinance* stated that, "It shall be lawful for the Governor to order the detention during His Majesty's pleasure, at any place within the limits of the Colony, of any person who has been deported from Palestine on the ground that such person has entered, or attempted to enter Palestine, without being authorized to do so."[20]

The creation and implementation of the *Detainees Ordinance* in this instance suggests, at least, two things. The first is to gesture towards the imperial networks of carceral control that could be exercised across a broad swath of colonial geographies on relatively short notice. If this does not immediately shock us today given what we know of the insidious reach of colonial empires, then perhaps it is somewhat more alarming to think that a colonial power could chose to first create

[19] Geneviève Pitot, *The Mauritian Shekel: The Story of The Jewish Detainees in Mauritius 1940-1945* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 127.
[20] Quoted in Pitot, *The Mauritian Shekel*, 127.

and then exercise a law on a group of people in one place for a "crime" that was perceived to have been perpetrated in an entirely other place. The uniqueness of the case precluded extradition to either Palestine or the respective home countries of Central/Eastern Europe and thus, according to this logic of colonial justice, the punishment for an indictment in Palestine was detention in Mauritius. The point here is to suggest that some of what the Mauritius case demonstrates is the unfortunately violent and politically consequential synaptic responsiveness of the British Empire; retribution for laws broken in and pertaining to one part of the Empire could be exacted in an entirely different one. While the actual geographical reach of British colonization around the globe was immense, the legal infrastructure of empire, especially pertaining to the rights of citizenship and subjectivity, reduced the distance under the umbrella of corporeal control.

The second thing to point out about this passage from the *Ordinance* is the way in which it mobilizes Palestine specifically as a touchstone for issues of colonial control. The lives of the detainees now held in a prison camp in Beau Bassin on the island of Mauritius became legally circumscribed at this point. While colonial officials argued over the nuances of how to classify this group, whether as "prisoners" or "detainees," and whether their placement in Beau Bassin was to be an "internment" or a "detention," the *Ordinance* itself makes clear that the group were to be "denied the right to challenge the legality of their detention by judicial or other means," the consequence for what was perceived as their "illegal immigration" attempt into Palestine.[21] This characterization as "illegal immigrants" would perennially resurface at various moments in the story of the Beau Bassin group. Despite the occasional relaxing of distancing measures that were meant to keep the detainees away from Mauritians, when Colonial or local authorities desired them to be restricted again it would suffice for officials to remind the Mauritian public that "These Jews are, after all, under detention for an offense against the law of Palestine."[22] Not only was this meant to serve as warning from the British Colonial Office "to other Jews in Eastern Europe who may be considering following their example," but the message is a direct response

[21] Ibid., 127.

[22] Legislation quoted in Pitot, *The Mauritian Shekel*, 129.

by the Office to the expressed desires of the South African Jewish community to send material aid to the detainees.[23] The message is clear: that not only would the Colonial Office not tolerate the direct infringement of its colonial legal infrastructure around Palestine, but it would also try to obfuscate any kinds of horizontal demonstrations of Jewish solidarity that were attempted in this Southern Hemispheric theater of the War.[24]

The detainees' relationship to Palestine would continue to define them legally[25] and materially throughout the five years of this ordeal. As Aaron Zwergbaum, one of the former detainees and writer of one of the earliest studies of this story writes, shortly after the departure of the group from Haifa in November of 1940, "The [British] Government of Palestine published a statement on the deportation of illegal immigrants."[26] In the statement, the government makes clear that its sympathies (at least outwardly expressed) notwithstanding "they are responsible for the administration of Palestine and are bound to see to it that the laws of the country are not openly flouted."[27] Furthermore, the British government "can only regard a revival of illegal Jewish immigration at the present juncture as likely to affect the local situation most adversely and to pose a serious menace to British interests in the Middle East."[28] Both Zwergbaum and Pitot note how the inherent contradictions within documents such as the *Balfour Declaration* allowed the British to hold a host of equivocal positions, straddling between a growing refugee crisis in Europe and maintaining their own delicate colonial balance in the Middle East.

The British government's response to immigrations infractions in Palestine was that such "illegal immigrants" "shall be deported to *a British colony* and shall be

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[23] Ibid.

[24] I'll say more below about this relationship between the detainees and the South African Jewish community. But eventually a steady supply of support and supplies were allowed to pass between the two countries and forged a horizontal solidarity that persists to this day.

[25] For a much fuller exploration of the nuances of language surrounding the detainees' legal categorization, especially for the Colonial Office's employment of naming/classification as a putative measure, see Pitot, *The Mauritian Shekel*, 126-132.

[26] Aaron Zwergbaum, " 'Exile in Mauritius,' " 218.

[27] Quoted in Zwergbaum, " 'Exile in Mauritius,' " 218.

[28] Quoted in Zwergbaum, " 'Exile in Mauritius,' " 218.

detained there for the duration of the war."[29] The implication was that Palestine, as a British colony, would not become the de facto safe haven for refugees fleeing Nazi Europe on the eve of WWII. This is also important because it relates to a clause in the statement which not only stipulated the colonial incarceration of the Jewish emigres, but effectively forbade in perpetuity their ability to enter Palestine at any future date. This prohibition was only later changed in 1944, allowing for a case by case application process for the right to enter Palestine upon the end of the War. However, the bureaucratic language around categorizing members of the group presented great difficulty in effecting this process. As Zwergbuam notes, this was because "the refugees were officially called 'detainees' and it was sometimes stressed that were not 'internees.' "[30] Not only were the members of the Mauritius detention continually marked by the Palestine infraction, but it is also an instance of a dissemination of carceralization across the networks of empire. Of course, there are other instances of the networks of empire being mobilized for the incarceration of bodies, and often its own subjects; Australia being perhaps the most obvious. But this is a somewhat more nuanced example for the ways in which the British Empire is seen to flounder around these questions of citizenship and refugeeism. There is something of a litmus test at the end of empire which indeed may have much to do with its dissolution.

Looking at and looking from the Indian Ocean

In what follows, I want to look at a few of the sparse sources relating this history, and especially creative responses to it, including artworks produced by two of the detainees, Peretz Beda Mayer and Fritz Haendel, as well as a more recent novel written in 2007 by Indo-Mauritian author Nathacha Appanah, entitled *Le dernier frère*.[31] I want to suggest that Appanah's novel, translated in 2010 as *The Last Brother*,[32] imagines the space of the island as allowing for an intricately entangled

[29] *Palestine Post* November 21, 1940, quoted in Zwergbaum, " 'Exile in Mauritius,' " 218; emphasis added.

[30] Zwergbaum, " 'Exile in Mauritius,' " 219.

[31] Nathacha Appanah, *Le dernier frère* (Paris: Editions de l'Olivier, 2007).

[32] Nathacha Appanah, *The Last Brother* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2010).

and multi-directional narrative of both Jewish and colonial displacements on the island. Mauritius, in Appanah's novel, creates space for multiple voices, multiple memories, and multiple histories, existing in what Françoise Lionnet calls a "creolized totality."[33] In other words, the Mauritius of Appanah's imagining is a narrative totality which does not subsume its different elements into a unified whole. In *The Last Brother*, the island itself and its geographies are the representational holders of multiple senses of difference, giving weight to the myriad problems of representation in colonial contexts, and especially to moments of exchange such as this which gesture to a multiplicity of relations. Nor can these stories of mutual displacement as well as solidarities be easily placed within global (and global north) narratives of the Holocaust. Rather, as Lionnet claims, "The novel provides a unique opportunity to engage in a creative dialogue with the long history of Mauritian literature *as well as* with the Jewish memoirists [...]"[34] A place of entanglement in the novel, Mauritius gives space for thinking about the role of imperial and colonial geo-politics in the making of what would become two of the defining political subjectivities of the twentieth century, the stateless refugee and the postcolonial subject.

One of the ways in which we might better understand some of the horizontal and "minor transnational"[35] connections captured in this story is by thinking through some of the currents of Indian Ocean Studies. Thinking *from* the Indian Ocean shifts some of our focus away from the more spectacularized and received narratives of the Cold War, Non-Alignment, and the Holocaust, and might instead ask us to think about sedimented layers of migrations and displacements across the region, as well as connections that extend horizontally towards a proliferation of stories that cannot be easily collated under grand, sweeping headers such as "decolonization," or "diaspora," etc. To try and capture this sense of multi-directionality, Isabel Hofmeyr proposes what she calls the "Indian Ocean

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[33] Françoise Lionnet, "Continents and Archipelagos: From *E Pluribus Unum* to Creolized Solidarities," *PMLA* 123, no. 5 (October 2008): 1503-1515; 1509.

[34] Françoise Lionnet, " 'Dire Exactament': Remembering the Interwoven Lives of Jewish Deportees and Coolie Descendants in 1940s Mauritius," *Yale French Studies* 118/119 (2010): 111-135; 115.

[35] Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, eds., *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

as Method" where, "as transnational and oceanic forms of analysis become more prominent, the Indian Ocean attracts attention, especially as a domain that offers rich possibilities for working beyond the templates of the nation-state and area studies."[36] The point here being that as both material archive and conceptual space the Indian Ocean is "complicating," not only presenting entangled archives of displacements, movements and meetings, but likewise suggesting trans-disciplinary modes of approaching those multiplicities. As Hofmeyr elsewhere writes, "At every turn the Indian Ocean complicates binaries, moving us away from the simplicities of the resistant local and the dominating global and towards a historically deep archive of competing universalisms."[37] Lionnet complicates what she sees as Hofmeyr's representative approach, which traces the trajectories of cosmopolitan mobilities across the Indian Ocean. Lionnet wishes to retain the productive complexities of both the "the notion of creolization and of the producers of Creole cultures," so that they not be subsumed by the totalizing universalisms attendants on histories of cosmopolitan movement across the Indian Ocean.[38] In what follows, I want to retain Lionnet's sense of various Indian Ocean life-worlds as productive of creolized totalities as she calls them; spaces that rather than being subsumed by universalism can retain the tensions of local, horizontal entanglements while at the same time being part of histories of global movement.

Mauritius: European Expulsion and Exotic "Relief"

I first want to look briefly at the lives of two Czech-born artists aboard the transport that landed in Mauritius, Peretz Beda Mayer and Fritz Haendel. The two were prolific in their renderings of conditions aboard the ship during its nearly four-month journey, as well as having produced a sizable amount of work during the 4 ½ years spent in Mauritius, from sketches, to paintings, to woodcut prints

[36] Isabel Hofmeyr, "The Complicating Sea: The Indian Ocean as Method," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 3 (2012): 584-590; 584.

[37] Isabel Hofmeyr, "Universalizing the Indian Ocean," *PMLA* 125, no. 3 (2010): 721-29; 722.

[38] Françoise Lionnet, "Cosmopolitan or Creole Lives? Globalized Ocean and Insular Identities," *Profession* (2011): 23-43; 26.

and carved figurines. In many of these works, as well as in the writings from the time of their detainment, there is a consistent figuring of the island as a space of extreme remoteness and exceeding exoticism in similar ways to Arendt's using Africa and colonial space as representational relief. The same can be said in many of these sources for the figure of the Mauritian in these representations. One of the artists, Beda Mayer, relates his impression of the group's arrival to the island:

> Mauritius, rising in the distance out of the calm Indian Ocean, appeared more and more enchanting the closer we approached. The island, surrounded by lagoons of a blue I had never seen before, was fringed with thick green vegetation and tall exotic coconut palms behind which rose hazy purple hills. Here was something new, something totally different from anything I'd ever known, so exciting I felt my pulse race; my eyes welled up with tears [...] The island has 2500 mm of rain a year. Rain from heaven! You could see three or four rainbows at a time on that island! It's a true paradise: the sky, the greenery, the birds, the monkeys, the covered market at nearby Beau Bassin, with its Chinese, Creoles, Indians, Africans, milling around, buying, selling, bargaining, all seen under the shimmering sunlight filtering through slits in the roof—a feast for all the senses.[39]

Beda Mayer's description rests heavy on stock tropes of tropical paradises: a land of such over-abundance as to spill over the diegetic and ontological bounds of description, with "blues [...] never seen before" and such a "thick green vegetation" being the product of celestial waters. Indeed, one seems to be overwhelmed by the visual field presented by the sight of this earthly paradise: with its "three or four rainbows at a time."[40]

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[39] Quoted in Elena Makarova, *Boarding Pass to Paradise: Peretz Beda Mayer and Fritz Haendel* (Jerusalem: Verba Publishers, 2005), 70.

[40] See Françoise Lionnet's work here on the long history of Mauritius in the Western, and especially French, literary imagination, from Baudelaire to St. Pierre, especially "Shipwrecks, Slavery, and the Challenge of Global Comparison: From Fiction to Archive in the Colonial Indian Ocean," *Comparative Literature* 64, no. 4 (2012): 446-461.

Studies in "Native" Ethnography: The Creole and the Cosmopolitan

Later, when it was discovered that Haendel and Mayer were both quite artistically talented, as well as each having had some printing experience, Mr. Armitage, the Prison Commander, enlisted the two to make public notice posters for the colonial administration. Beda Mayer relates that,

> when Mr. Armitage learned that I had some printing experience, Fritz and I were given a workshop and commissioned to make wooden printing blocks for all the island's public notices. Among the many projects we were given, was a campaign to encourage the locals to work a five-day week. Our posters showed a smiling Creole man who gained the benefits of work, compared with his lazy, slouching brother who didn't [...] I don't know if the campaign helped at all—three days' pay sufficed to buy dried fish, rice and peppers; they'd pick some fruit in the garden, and what more could a man want?[41]

These kinds of portrayals still persist. As Lionnet notes that, "The common perception of Creole peoples and languages is still shrouded in ignorance and mired in exotic clichés, in racial mythologies of degeneracy and the deficiencies associated with insularity and slavery, orality, indenture, forcible transplantation, or imposed immobility."[42] Ultimately, Beda Mayer seems conflicted about what he calls his "workshop for propaganda," lamenting that "here we were, designing posters to encourage Mauritian productivity, while who knew what was happening to our people at the other end of the world?"[43] Though Mayer expresses a reluctance to be involved in the administration's project, it is because of the apparent absurdity of the distance to which he finds himself removed, here "at the other end of the world." Offering a series of woodcuts and posters that tap into a capitalist ethic of productivity and utilitarianism so foundational to the colonialist spirit, Mayer and Haendel produce a series of images which feature slouching, smoking, and seemingly "unproductive" Creole figures and reflect

[41] Quoted in Makarova, *Boarding Pass,* 92.
[42] Lionnet, "Cosmopolitan or Creole Lives," 28.
[43] Quoted in Makarova, *Boarding Pass,* 92.

many of the stereotypes for representing the Creole figure within the colonial imaginary.

Lionnet makes an interesting comparison between what she sees ultimately as a false distinction between the cosmopolitan and the Creole figure, noting that,

> the cosmopolitan subject tends to represent a dubious ontological excess [...] personified, by means of clichés, some of them racialized: the rootless intellectual, the wandering jew [...] The Creole subject, by contrast, continues to index a racial, cultural, economic, linguistic deficit embodied by the manual or indentured laborer, slave, or economic migrant whose position is ipso facto that of a subject devoid of civilizational quotient and depth. Both the cosmopolitan and the Creole thus appear situated at a similar distance from the national norm but on the plus and minus sides of it, respectively.[44]

Ultimately, according to Lionnet, the "Mascarene Experience" offers the materialities of the Indian Ocean as ways out of this essentializing cul-de-sac; that because of the particularities of commercial histories, movements and exchanges in the "insular regions of the Indian Ocean," there emerges a "Creole cosmopolitan who participates actively in the construction of cultural meanings through technologies of oral, print, visual, and virtual communication."[45] The Creole cosmopolitan is a useful formation in thinking about this narrative between a group of detained Jewish immigrants and how they are remembered in the imaginary of Mauritius.

Writing Mauritius

In *The Last Brother*, Appanah attempts to do just this, to give voice to *both* the Mauritian and Jewish actors in this history. However, as the novel is structured as a series of flashbacks, memories and dreams which border on hallucination,

[44] Lionnet, "Cosmopolitan or Creole Lives," 29.
[45] Ibid.

Appanah also foregrounds the instability of these voices, as well as some of the problems of representation surrounding memory and history. The novel is told from the perspective of Raj, a now elderly Indo-Mauritian man, who nearly sixty years before befriended a young boy named David, one of the Jewish detainees at the Beau Bassin prison. The novel is a series of Raj's memories, recalling how, after a cyclone hit the island and two of his brothers died, Raj's father moved him and his mother from their home in Mapou to another part of the island in Beau Bassin.

The connection between the two boys, Raj and David, begins after Raj's father takes a job as a security officer at the Beau Bassin prison camp. Left alone after the death of his two brothers, Raj starts to follow his father to the prison each day, hiding in the forest just outside the surrounding barbed wire fence. The prison in Appanah's telling becomes a site of entanglement of different forms of belonging and un-belonging, as well as different narrative imaginings of this history. Day after day, through the mediating lines of the barbed wire, Raj's obsession with the prison and with David grows until one day, in a desperate rage at the thought that David might have disappeared, Raj enacts a moment of physical and narrative entanglement with the fence and with the world of the prison on the other side. Raj remembers that:

> I struck the ground with both my fists and grabbed hold of the barbed wire in a rage I had hitherto rarely known. My eyes were flooded with tears and the prison was no longer more than a blurred picture [...] I plunged the palms of my hands into the metal coils, pain mingling with my anger, I shook the barrier with all my strength and with a dull sound something was suddenly uprooted like a rotten plant. A part of the barbed wire fence came out of the ground. It vibrated [...] Today, just as I remember David's golden curls, I can also remember the smell of rust and blood on my hands. In the forest on the way home I would sniff at my palms, as if they were a drug, and at each intake of breath I was infused with a surge of serenity and hope.[46]

[46] Appanah, *The Last Brother,* 74.

As Raj remembers this moment it is the prison fence specifically—the line of mediation between what he sees as two different worlds—that is both the source of physical pain in the story itself, but also the cathartic object around which the memory is viscerally located. The pain Raj registers is both for the imagined loss of his new would-be confidant David, but also for his actual loss of his two brothers in the typhoon, a trauma Raj has translated into his obsession with David.

While the prison fence is an obvious marker of separation—both symbolic and real—between the detainees and the local population, for Raj it becomes a site of mediation and entanglement between the histories and memories of the Jews brought to Mauritius and a Mauritian voice, here in the figure of Raj. Two stories, of diaspora, and of displacement, told at and through the line drawn by the barbed wire fence as Raj becomes part of the story of Jewish detainment and, reciprocally, this story of the Holocaust has become a part of Raj. In this moment, we see how Raj's own story of displacements, though writ small in the novel as an intra-island relocation, is actually part of a much broader, global history of colonial trafficking of people from one part of the Empire to another in the service of colonial labor practices. We see in Raj's telling of his encounter with David the attempt of one diasporic figure to narrate ("tell precisely") not only the story of another displaced figure, but to make sense of his own place within the imperial histories of Mauritius.

To return for a moment to Rothberg's reading of Arendt, he makes clear that the ability to frame the otherness and the persecution of European Jews is made by Arendt at the rhetorical expense of the colonial body. Rothberg locates an irony of occlusion and insight in Arendt's (mis-)apprehension of the colonial world, and Africa specifically, as a relief, or metaphorical backdrop, for what is ultimately for Arendt a narrative about the failure of *European* modernity. An ahistorical Africa, and by extension colonial world, are the representational dividend paid for an investment in a critique of the colonial and totalitarian foundations of European culture. Rothberg writes that,

> Arendt's *inability* to comprehend the subjects at Europe's periphery as bearers of history, memory, and culture is intrinsically related to—and even provides the conditions for—her *ability* to recognize Europe's internal others. The imagined savage without culture—the imagined barbarian—provides the metaphorical grounding for two of the central "characters" of Arendt's analysis: the naked human being deprived of culture, and the stateless concentration camp inmate stripped of the right to have rights.[47]

However, in this moment at the prison fence, Raj, the Mauritian boy displaced on his own island by colonial economics as well as a natural disaster, becomes an agential part of his own narrative, but also a part of this narrative of persecution of Europe's Jewish peoples. Appanah goes a long way to giving voice to the colonial subjectivity missing in Arendt's formulation and thereby offers a reframing of the Holocaust via histories of the lives of colonized peoples and their movements that stretch across the Indian Ocean.

Appanah not only gives dimension to the colonial subjects of this story, but also fills out the colonial space, moving beyond some of the exoticizing tropes used to represent it. In the novel, the forest outside Beau-Bassin functions as a space where the two narratives can bear on one another; both the troubled and pathological weaving together of Raj's memories and the largely erased narrative of David, representative of a whole group of detainees. Both unstable and displaced in their own ways, Appanah's novel is able, in some quite touching moments, to give a polyphonic articulation both to these two minor and thus kindred subjectivities, as well as to a minor landscape which is witness to this bond. As the novel comes to a moment of heart wrenching climax, where Raj recounts his journey with an ailing David, and as David gets progressively weaker from malaria, Raj remembers that

> David's little voice arose beside the camphor tree, his Yiddish words filled that tropical night, his Jewish song enfolded the forest and enfolded me,

[47] Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 40.

> little Raj. His voice was so serene, the words flowed naturally, and this recital entered into me and reached my heart, *making me at one with the world around me, as if, until then, I had been a stranger to it.* (p. 140; emphasis added)

Through a focus on voice and especially in relation to space, and specifically to the landscape, Appanah offers us a unique moment of textual and historical entanglement, where Raj's world comes to make sense to him in the Yiddish words of a dying David. As Lionnet writes,

> By focusing on the unusual plights of the Central European Jews, she [Appanah] breaks open the common binaries along which Mauritian literature and culture traditionally tend to be defined: white/black, Hindu/Muslim, Indian/Creole, British/French, perpetrator/victim. *The Jewish presence puts into perspective all local histories of conflict; those histories, in turn, create new ground from which to understand both the specificity of Jewish victimization and what it shares with other forms of discrimination.*[48]

This is critical, in other words, because it realizes the ways in which the expulsion of European Jews—in many ways instantiating a political category characteristic of much of twentieth century geo-politics, the stateless refugee—as well as the daily lives of those who lived under multiple and various forms of colonialism—come to bear on one another. Mauritius in Appanah's telling provides a narrative space open to holding both of these minoritized and displaced voices alongside one another. We might think of the island here as Lionnet's "creolized totality," productive of narratives of entanglements rather than of occlusion. Or we might also see how the island has been the sight of a very particular instance of Rothberg's "multidirectional" forms of memory, allowing for a whole series of horizontal trajectories of remembering and un/belonging.

[48] Lionnet, "Dire Exactement," 118; emphasis added.

I argue that the novel is an exploration of how these two narratives of subjectivity might be told in relation to one another, and on and through the island of Mauritius. Appanah's text suggests that when the exoticizing tropes of Edenic otherness are removed, Mauritius becomes less a backdrop or narrative relief and more the place upon which two forms of subjectivity—the stateless refugee and the colonial subject—find some common ground for articulation. As Raj remembers his journey with David through the woods beyond the prison, he wonders whether:

> In the forest did I forget why we were there, David and I? Did I forget the policemen, his gleaming nightstick, his voice when he came looking for David, did I forget my father's sweating face infused with rage when he looked at us, my mother and me? [...] For suddenly the forest stopped, its dense green protection came to an end and we found ourselves on the verge of a neat, smoothly pack dirt road, incongruous after that cyclone [...] and this terrible road was as smooth as one imagines the roads in paradise to be, but it led straight up to a locked gate with padlocks and chains, surmounted by a sign [...] *Welcome to the State Prison of Beau-Bassin*.[49]

Think here of the earlier depictions of Mauritius as Edenic paradise, and how it is the space of the prison specifically that is able to complicate this vision. Think too of the earlier examples of Mauritius exceeding representational boundaries as compared to the prison fence as a boundary which in itself provides the space for mediation. Rather than a space of excess or over-abundance, the forest is mapped through David and Raj's movements together through it, and is shown to have very real borders and boundaries which tend to end in figurations of power: the policeman, Raj's father, and the prison itself. But the forest also protects these two young boys, both from discovery initially as well as from the storm that rages on the island (a protection not earlier afforded to Raj's brothers). In this way the forest is also a space of escape and *marronage*.[50]

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[49] Appanah, *The Last Brother,* 115-116.

[50] I would like to thank Bruno Jean-François for this insight.

In Raj's memory/narration, the tale of his own deprivation, displacement and loss is intermingled with that of the story of Jewish refugees. Like the blood and rust at the prison fence, this memory becomes a transhistorical re-telling of both stories, one a palimpsest inscribed over the other. The detainees become a constitutive element of Raj's own life and life-story. His memory of the detainees is tangled up with and written into the larger narrative of Jewish Diaspora. Raj also tells a narrative of displacement, on a personal level of his alienating migration across the island and the loss of filial bonds. But also, Raj's loss signals a larger colonial subjectivity, one based on forced movement, indenturing labor policies of the British Empire, as well as the historical practices of slavery brought to the island by each of the various colonial powers that have ruled over it. Raj's narrative is an attempt to make sense of his own story within the larger vectors of an imperial nexus of global movements, displacements, and exploitational labor practices stretching across the Indian Ocean.

It is, of course, significant that Appanah chooses the Jewish Cemetery at Saint Martin as a space of narrative analepsis from which Raj begins to tell his childhood story of meeting and escaping with David. The Cemetery is a real place about a mile from the prison camp at Beau Bassin and contains the graves of 127 of the former detainees. The novel opens as Raj awakens to a vision of a now-grown David standing in front of him, prompting him to call his son to take him to Saint Martin to visit David's grave. As Raj walks through the cemetery, where those who died during detainment are buried, he seems to embody its history, feeling the memory of it inhabit him: "I am reading the names on the graves, images jostle one another in my head, memories come back so strongly that I am aware of their weight on my chest, I see their color in my eyes, feel the taste of them in my mouth and I have to slow down, inhale deeply, and swallow to calm them."[51]

It is at this moment in the novel that Raj finds the gravestone of his childhood friend, David. He kneels down to clean the stone, and places "a little red box upon it that contains his [David's] Star of David" that the young boy had given Raj some sixty years earlier. The flooding of memory into Raj's body is the moment at

[51] Appanah, *The Last Brother*, 7.

which the novel begins to tell the history of what happened. Kneeling before the grave, Raj says "I reach out my hand to David, close my eyes, and remember," and thus opens the story of the two young boys brought together through the violences of both Nazi Europe as well as imperial economies.[52] The cemetery functions both in the novel and historically as a site of multi-directional memory, crisscrossed with the stories of those who were detained, the lives of Mauritians who were witness to these histories, as well as the larger political machinations of an empire. The cemetery is a somewhat unique site of Indian Ocean remembering/memory of the Holocaust.

The St. Martin remains an instance of the kinds of multi-directional histories which make up this story of detainment on the island. The small Jewish section of the cemetery, containing the graves of detainees who died during their time in the camp, was granted by the Colonial Government in 1946 to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies who were then charged with its care. Government documents show that on November 20, 1946:

> The Honourable Raymond Bérenger, Esq., Director of Public Works and Surveys acting for and on behalf of the Mauritius Colonial Government [...] doth make a free grant to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [...] all that portion of land containing twenty-two square perches or hundredths of an Arpent, Colonial Measure, forming part of the St. Martin Cemetery Grounds.[53]

The pronouncement is an interesting act of horizontal granting of sovereignty across colonial spaces to a non-colonial, non-governmental body. The Jewish section of the St. Martin Cemetery was initially held by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, a lay organization, and has more recently been placed in the charge of the Island Hebrew Congregation, who continue its upkeep.

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[52] Ibid., 8.

[53] Quoted in Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, *African Jewish Congress: Mauritius Report* (Johannesburg, s.n., 1998).

The initial decision to grant this land to a South African group was no accident, and was based on the continued lines of communication and support demonstrated between the detainees and the South African Jewish community during the majority of the time spent in the camp. Records of communication reveal a history of robust dialogue between both individuals and governments, including letters from detainees in search of relatives living in South Africa, and requests for material support and especially with regards to kosher items for Holy celebrations. Nor did this connection cease once the War had ended and the detainees were released. Initially, Isiah Berger, who had immigrated to Mauritius in the 1930s, and Jacques Desmarais a native to the island, did much on the ground to ensure the upkeep of the Jewish section of the St. Martin Cemetery. While officially administered by the SAJBD and the United Jewish Appeal, Pitot notes that Desmarais "Until his death, maintained the cemetery at his own expense out of a sense of idealism."[54] More recently, after Desmarais's death, and the cemetery having falling into disrepair from repeated damaged due to cyclones, Johannesburg-based Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft has continued to care for the space. As Spiritual Leader and CEO of the African Jewish Congress, Rabbi Silberhaft, also known as "The Traveling Rabbi", is responsible for serving much of southern and some of central Africa, as well as Madagascar and Mauritius. Since the 1980's he has fundraised and personally overseen multiple restorations as well as the general upkeep of the cemetery.

The network of support for these restorations points again to some of the multi-directional trajectories of this story. The Mauritius-based Medine Sugar Estate, a corporation involved in the cultivation and production of sugar, as well as the real estate and hospitality industries, has consistently shown great interest in this history through its continued monetary support in maintaining the cemetery. Rabbi Silberhaft has also staged multiple ceremonies at the cemetery and organized a reunion of former detainees in Mauritius. In 1999, eight different Chevra Kadisa societies, from all of the major cities in South Africa, contributed to the renovation of the cemetery. Even more recently a ceremony was held in November of 2014 to commemorate the opening of a small museum adjacent to

[54] Pitot, *The Mauritian Shekel*, 228.

the cemetery which tells the story of the voyage to Haifa, and the detainment in Mauritius. The communication and support between the detainees and the South African community during WWII points towards histories of transnational solidarity that connect communities across the Global South to the very real and tangible effects of the Holocaust that played out in their own hemisphere. And the more recent act of memorialization, especially around the cemetery, demonstrates how these same communities continue to participate in the multi-directional memory that this history maps. However, these networks also raise the question about participation, as it is also the case that this history has very little footprint on the popular Mauritian imaginary.

I want to conclude by returning to a moment in Appanah's novel, which both gives a voice to the otherwise silent/silenced David, but which also reimagines the figure of the Mauritian, colonial subject in this story. This moment goes some way towards framing how this story might complicate some of the geographical coordinates and directions of the multi-directionality caught up in the histories of the Holocaust, especially as they reverberated around the Indian Ocean. At the end of the novel, Raj tries to imagine from David's perspective what he himself might have looked like to the young detainee. He ends up articulating a Mauritian subjectivity, one entangled with and articulated through David's voice that Raj ventriloquizes. As a now elderly Raj tries to remember his earlier time with David, he slips into the consciousness of the young detainee, looking out from the vantage point of the prison. Raj muses that:

> He might be saying things like: *On the other side of the barbed wire I saw a dark boy with black hair. He was weeping like me and he had leaves stuck to his face and you could have taken him for an animal. He was half buried in the earth, this boy with dusky skin. I could only see his head, his eyes as black as billiard balls, and if he'd not been weeping he would have frightened me with his face like a savage's.*
> Perhaps he might also say: *Raj taught me how to climb trees, how to run so that my feet don't touch the ground (or hardly), he told me to run for the sake of running, to forget your body and your head and just feel the*

> *air against your face, feel the speed you can reach the more you forget your legs and look straight ahead and laugh.*[55]

Ultimately, the prison is a space of difference for both children: that is, of the exile of David to the island, as well as Raj's father's displacement of the family across the island for a new occupation away from the hardships of the cane cutters' camp. However, it is the site of the prison that also allows for a "minor transnational" connection between the two boys. A relationship whose contours are both precipitated by and yet not over-determined by the structural relationship of a colonial metropole to its peripheral colonies; two minoritized figures finding relation to one another, and in this relation, give specific form to sweeping global trajectories of displacement across the Indian Ocean.

The Jewish detainment to Mauritius is both symptomatic of British imperialism—as discussed above—and yet Raj and David's relationship mediates this structure through a connection that finds both boys as part of minor populations of occupied and displaced, and even imprisoned, peoples. Thinking about a history of the Holocaust in the Indian Ocean, we come to read in this story, and through the figuration of the island of Mauritius and its inhabitants, what Aimé Césaire long ago pointed out: that the rise of Nazism, both its politics and its ethno-cultural nationalism, are part of the same entangled genealogy as the colonial imaginary and its practices. As such the political subjectivities that arose from them and out of their aftermaths, the postcolonial subject, the stateless refugee—both in the post-WWII moment of decolonization and today—must be thought about in relation to one another.

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[55] Appanah, *The Last Brother,* 126; italics in original.

Imaginary in African Literatures, explores the relationship between ecological and decolonial thinking in African literary and cultural production across the twentieth century. *African Anthropocene* argues that "the speculative turn" is African literatures is a current mode of thinking about climate change and planetary futures that can be traced back to at least the start of the twentieth century, where decolonial thinking is linked to environmental awareness and ecological forms of writing.

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