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Afterword: 'little family quarrels'

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Afterword

> "Granted, the Jews are harassed-- what am I thinking of? They are hunted down, exterminated, cremated. But these are little family quarrels. The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case everything takes on a *new* guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance".[1]

There was a time when Frantz Fanon's dismissal of the Nazi onslaught against European Jewry as a "little family quarrel" would have caused outrage. Fanon himself realised this—"what am I thinking of?"—before he rightly characterised the Nazi genocide as that of a people "hunted down, exterminated, cremated". But, even after a second thought, Fanon still characterized the genocide as a "little family quarrel". What does he mean by this? One clue is his rejection of Freudian (or "white") psychoanalysis built on the foundations of the archetypal "little family quarrel" known as the Oedipus Complex.[2] But the wider context for Fanon's statement is his understanding of anti-Semitism and fascism as a matter primarily for the European continent. Racism and colonialism are more global. The contrast between the local (Europe) and the global is reinforced by a series of oppositions— Jews and blacks, inside and out, mind and body— to show the fundamental differences between anti-Semitism and racism ("I am given no chance. I am over-determined from without").[3]

Despite these reductive binaries, I believe that Fanon's "little family quarrels" can be read less dismissively than first assumed. After all, what Fanon is doing with such provocative statements is decentring the history of Nazism—and by extension the Shoah (*pace* Raphaël Confiant)—so that it can intersect with other forms of oppression such as colonial racism, genocide and slavery. From the perspective of the twenty-first century, the decentring of the Shoah (as part of a wider colonial project) is something that has been at the heart of, for instance, Paul Gilroy's, *Between Camps: Race, Identity and Nationalism at the end of the*

Colour Line (2000), Mark Mazower's *Hitler's Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (2008), and Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009). My own *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History* (2013) recovers the intertwined histories underscoring this twenty-first century project and shows that such histories were, ironically, part of imaginative literature long before they were recognized by postcolonial and Holocaust scholars. These knotted histories go back to the 1940s and 50s and include such Caribbean figures as Fanon and his teacher, Aimé Césaire, along with Jean Améry, Hannah Arendt, Albert Memmi, Primo Levi and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Canonical novelists of Caribbean background, such as Andrea Levy, V. S. Naipaul, Caryl Phillips, and Zadie Smith, all show that Jewish and Caribbean history remains part of the literary imagination into the twenty-first century. As this volume demonstrates, there is a long cultural and social history within the Caribbean which refuses to separate out (or "discipline") Jewish and Caribbean histories. Sarah Phillips Casteel's *Calypso Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination* (2016) has rightly shown the ingrained character of Caribbean creole culture which mixes Jewish/Caribbean identities and decentres, above all else, the dominance of Ashkenazic/European literature and history. *Calypso Jews*, along with this collection, engage with the lengthy historical memory of Caribbean culture which includes 1492 as well as 1939; slavery and colonialism as well as Jewish refugees and the Shoah. Is this because the hybridity of the Caribbean particularly speaks to Jewish hybridity as Caryl Phillips has argued?[4] Is there a specific Caribbean form of "metaphorical thinking"— seeing "similarities in dissimilars" as Aristotle characterised— which in the literary imagination counters boundary-driven disciplinary thinking?[5] It is tempting to privilege the Caribbean as a uniquely creolized space which has incorporated an ambivalent Jewish history (refugees and victims as well as slave owners and colonialists) into its culture.

But Fanon, once again, problematizes a too easy set of "crossings" from Caribbean to Jewish and back again.

At the age of eighteen Fanon volunteered to join de Gaulle's Free French and sailed from Martinique singing "Hitler, we are going to knock you off your hilltop".[6] By the end of his life, many of his comrades in the Free French were on the other side of the trenches as Fanon joined the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) to liberate Algeria from colonial rule. Such is Fanon's "impossible life" in the well-known phrase of his North African comrade, the Tunisian-Jewish Albert Memmi.[7] Memmi's characterization of Fanon's various incarnations has been taken up by Henry Louis Gates and many recent accounts that wish to see a more Caribbean "provisional, reactive and local" approach to Fanon rather than his appropriation by "global culture".[8] It was from this "local" perspective that Memmi was to engage with Fanon as a cosmopolitan exile. In his long essay, and several shorter pieces, Memmi traces Fanon's various guises as an assimilated "white" French Antillean, a black West Indian, a revolutionary Algerian nationalist, a pan-Africanist, and a universalising "new humanist", and concludes that it is the very "impossibility" of Fanon's serial transformations that has become "the source of his far-reaching influence".[9]

For Memmi, it was the disavowal of his origins and the people of Martinique in particular that characterises a diasporic Fanon who "broke with France, the French people and Europe".[10] In this reading, Fanon's life becomes something of a family romance with the surrogate fatherland of Algeria taking the "place of Martinique".[11] Memmi characterizes Fanon as a déraciné "Jewish intellectual" which accounts for a succession of invented guises (or conversion narratives) culminating in Fanon's rejection of Algerian nationalism and his turn to pan-Africanism:

> I suspect that Fanon's sudden and intransigent Africanism roused new hostility against him. He might have shared the fate of those Jewish intellectuals who declare themselves universalists and are suspected of cosmopolitanism and even treason; they are not considered sufficiently legitimate members of the community to be permitted such aloofness. For an Algerian so late in the making it was imprudent, to say the least, to put so recent a bond to the test.[12]

There is a strong sense in which the Tunisian-Jewish Memmi transforms Fanon into a "family likeness" or an imagined double.[13] But while Memmi's version of Fanon may be considered to be an act of cultural narcissism, it is worth remembering that Memmi was well aware that his reading of Fanon through the prism of a diasporic Jewishness was based on lived experience. Fanon was denounced by Memmi's acquaintance, Dr Ben Soltan, as a "Zionist" (as well as a "Black Doctor") after a conflict of interest at the Clinique Manouba in Tunis where Fanon worked for three years following his exile from Algeria in 1956. Soon after working at Manouba, Ben Soltan, the director of the clinic, argued that Fanon was maltreating Algerian and Tunisian patients "on Israeli orders" or as a "spy and ally of the Jews".[14] Two of Fanon's closest colleagues at the clinic were Tunisian-Jewish. While these accusations were not taken seriously, Fanon's position was made so uncomfortable that he moved his family out of the hospital grounds. After this episode, Memmi rightly stressed Fanon's discomfort as a Black non-Muslim in Algeria and the fact that he needed an interpreter, although he was learning Arabic, to function as a psychiatrist at the Manouba clinic. The accusation of being an Israeli spy— three years after France's involvement with Israel and Britain in the Suez adventure to neutralize Egyptian influence in North Africa, and maintain French colonial control— both reinforced and arose from Fanon's status as an outsider or "European interloper".[15]

Such concerns, which Memmi relates to prevailing and long-standing anxieties about supposedly untrustworthy cosmopolitan Jews (*pace* Dreyfus) in French colonial culture, were particularly troubling for Fanon. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), for example, Fanon was haunted by the image of the deracinated cosmopolitan (as opposed to the revolutionary "organic intellectual") who was always at risk of becoming a *luftmensch*: "This tearing away [from 'the white man's culture'], painful and difficult though it may be, is, however, necessary. If it is not accomplished there will be serious psycho-affective injuries and the result will be individuals without anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless— a race of angels".[16] The deracinated intellectual— "colourless, stateless, rootless"— is contrasted with the organic intellectual who was "a living part of Africa and her thought".[17] In this reading the figure of the cosmopolitan Jewish intellectual (somewhere between the colonial and decolonial) needed, as Fanon believed, to become an organic part of a decolonized global culture.

The decentring of a foundational European Jewish history—concerning, for instance, migration (as the first "model minority"); the ghetto (from Venice onwards); or the "classic" diasporic people— can be productive as well as provocative. After all, decentring can be thought of as another means of decolonising this largely westernized narrative.[18] But decolonising history is not the same as superseding it. As I have shown elsewhere, supersessionist thinking, in relation to Jewish history, has made it much harder than needed to find connections in the past and in our most urgent present between different forms of dehumanisation—colonialism, slavery, antisemitism and genocide—and between shared forms of suffering.[19] Fanon's "impossibility" (containing both the Jewish cosmopolitan and the Afro-Caribbean organic intellectual) dramatizes how Caribbean culture not only creolizes Jewish history but also holds different differences in place. As this collection demonstrates,

there is a creolization of Jewish history and culture in the Caribbean but also a Jewish and Caribbean history and culture that resists blending too easily.

To some, however, the very intersection of Jewish and Caribbean histories is morally (and also aesthetically) wrong. If particular national and ethnic histories are conceived as unique, unitary, and uniform then they are necessarily confined to separate spheres and stand alone. An example of this argument, based on the unbending uniqueness of ethno-racial difference, can be found in Hilary Mantel's notorious response to Caryl Phillips's *The Nature of Blood* (1997). Here she lambasts Phillips for mixing "black" and "Jewish" history in the guise of Shakespeare's Othello and Shylock:

> …it is demented cosiness that denies the differences between people, denies how easily the interests of human beings become divided. It is indecent to lay claim to other people's suffering: it is a colonial impulse, dressed up as altruism. The heart may be pure, but more than the heart is needed; good motives sometimes paralyse thought. We are not all Jews. That is a simple fact. It is why the Holocaust happened.[20]

Mantel's fear is that by universalizing the Jewish experience other histories will be colonized. Unique racial identities need to be maintained to understand, in her reasoning, why the "Holocaust happened". Her argument highlights the fear of "the Jew" as an all-encompassing metaphor for victimhood as "we are not all Jews".[21] Mantel's misguided sense that the longevity and hegemony of Jewish history can deny the "differences between people" leads to what I call the "anxiety of appropriation".[22] In disciplinary terms, such anxiety, however wrong-headed, may well explain why self-designated "new" disciplines— such as diaspora studies, postcolonial studies and ethnic and racial studies—have needed to supersede a foundational Jewish studies. The richness of this collection, and other work on the

Caribbean/Jewish nexus, is a testimony to a thriving Caribbean culture which has maintained a non-supersessionist dialogue with Jews, Judaism and Jewishness.

Despite Mantel's fears, the anxiety of appropriation is hardly a feature of imaginative Caribbean writers. On the first page of V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), for instance, there is the figure of Mr Shylock who the young Caribbean exile, Ralph Singh (born Ranjit Kripalsingh), mimics in order to give his fluid identity some kind of shape. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) similarly uses an all-encompassing (if caricatured) "Jewish" name to counter the idea that Jews and Hindus are model minorities (contra Naipaul) who are worth imitating. That is why *White Teeth* insists on a dismissive account of "Mr Schmutters and Mr Banajii …merrily…weaving their way through Happy Multicultural Land".[23] In both *The Mimic Men* and *White Teeth*, Jewishness enables an exilic or minority Caribbean identity to cohere provisionally in a form of self-appropriation. This perhaps explains why Caryl Phillips not only had a "fascination" with "the Jews" but regarded Shakespeare's Shylock as his "hero".[24] In response to an alienated sense of identity in predominately white, racist Yorkshire, in the 1970s, Phillips was to eventually claim a Jewish grandfather as part of an imagined genealogy.[25] It was the Shoah in the 1970s which enabled Phillips to engage with a publically recognized form of suffering which spoke to his family's private suffering in the Caribbean.

Andrea Levy, who also perhaps has a Jewish genealogy, takes the opposite view to Naipaul, Phillips and Smith and, instead of appropriating Jewishness, goes back to the ambivalence of Fanon.[26] As with Fanon's perverse sense of littleness, the idea of smallness in *Small Island* (2004) is deliberately confused and confusing. From the Empire Exhibition, which opens the novel, there is a sense of the "whole empire in little" or in "miniature" which puts everything else in perspective.[27] Is the Caribbean made up of "small islands" other than Jamaica? Or is Great Britain a "small island" outside of its colonies? Perspective rather than identitarian

coherence (or not) is central to the novel with smallness and greatness redefined continually by its four main characters. Some character's grow (such as Gilbert), some shrink (such as Bernard), depending on the perspective of Hortense and Queenie respectively. This narrative play enables Levy to turn Fanon's "little family quarrels" into a novel which decentres and decolonises "white" European anti-Semitism so as to foreground racism and segregation.

Levy's decentred narrative is best illustrated by the introduction of Gilbert who enrols in the Royal Air Force at the beginning of the Second World War. Gilbert, born in Jamaica, volunteers to fight for his "Mother Country".[28] While based in Virginia he encounters the American army, organised along Jim Crow lines, and increasingly severe forms of anti-Black racism. He is told by the Americans that "you would never catch no self-respecting white man going into battle with a nigger" and, by the British, that "no white women will consort with you".[29] Gilbert's sense of self is quickly reduced to the words "coloured, black, nigger".[30] Needless to say, Americans do not distinguish between Caribbeans and African-Americans as, following Jim Crow, "the American army is very strict about keeping black folks apart".[31] Worse still, American soldiers in Britain also "segregate" the "Mother Country" along racial lines— "Lincoln is a white town"; "Nottingham is a black town"—and "blacks" can only sit at the back of the cinema.[32]

Gilbert ignores such segregation and sits in the middle of the cinema next to Queenie Bligh, a white woman. As a consequence, a riot ensues against "uppity niggers" and Arthur Bligh, Queenie's brother, is murdered.[33] After Arthur's death, Gilbert begins to contemplate the nature of the war he is fighting:

> Everyone fighting a war hates. All must conjure a list of demons. The enemy. Top of most British Tommies' list would be the army that hated them most— the Nazis. …But from that first uneasy hospitality at the American base in Virginia to this

> cocky hatred that was charging across the room to yell in the face of a coloured man whose audacity was to sit next to a white woman, I was learning to despise the white American GI above all other. They were the army that hated me the most! ...If the defeat of hatred was the purpose of war, then come, let us face it: I and all other coloured servicemen were fighting the war on another front.[34]

Rather than combatting the hatred of Jews, Gilbert refigures the war so that it is centred on the hatred of blacks. The decentring of the Shoah is, however, problematized by Gilbert's Caribbean Jewish father who tells Gilbert, "you could have been Jewish" which was "the worst curse that could befall anyone".[35] After a few rums, his father would "berate [Gilbert's] estranged Jewish mother, father, the Torah, the synagogue and the silly hats".[36] As a result, Gilbert's father became a "fervent convert" who took "Christianity very seriously".[37] Unlike the predominant narrative in *Mimic Men*, *White Teeth* and *The Nature of Blood*, it is not identification with Jewishness that resolves a fractured black identity but conversion to Christianity. By transcending religious Judaism, Jewishness in *Small Island* becomes a racial matter on a par with blackness:

> Anthropoid— [Gilbert] looked to the dictionary to find the meaning of this word used by Hitler and his friends to describe Jews and coloured men. I got a punch in the head when the implication jumped from the page and struck me: "resembling a human but primitive, like an ape". Two whacks I got. For I am a black man whose father was born a Jew.[38]

This double consciousness becomes a feature of *Small Island* as Gilbert wrestles with the nature of the racial war he is engaged in: "We [are] fighting the persecution of the Jew, yet even in my RAF blue my coloured skin can [not] permit anyone to treat me as less than a man".[39] Not unlike Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, the novel has two competing narratives

of identification and differentiation. On the one hand, there is Gilbert's strong identification with Jewish persecution: "The picture in the newspaper was of a German Jew. He wore a cloth star on a dirty coat. He walked along a street, hunched and humbled, while non-Jews eyed him with an expression of disgust… I knew only too well.[40] But, at the same time as this affiliation with his fellow victims, Gilbert cannot decide "which war" or which "front" he is fighting on. Is it the war against anti-Semitism, or the war against racism?[41]

What *Small Island* illustrates, above all, is the audacity which is at the heart of the Caribbean-Jewish nexus. The uneasy familiarity of this intersection, across many centuries, has led to literary risk-taking or is that risk-making? The inbetween nature of Caribbean Jews—other and self, white and black, coloniser and colonised—may well place them at the heart of a hybrid Caribbean culture. The chapters in this important collection illustrate both the dangers as well as the abundant rewards of "metaphorical thinking" in relation to such long-standing "crossings". Seeing "similarities in dissimilars" has given us many transgressive, cross-making provocations from Fanon to Levy and beyond. But the alternative to such dis/similarities (however flawed) is a diminished capacity to enlarge our global understanding of what it is to be human.

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[1] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 115-6.

[2] Bryan Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 68-71 and chapter two.

[3] Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind*, 54-68 for a reading of these binaries.

[4] After discovering that he was related to a "Jewish trader with Portuguese roots" Caryl Phillips concludes that "the cultural hybridity that is the quintessentially Caribbean condition

had certainly marked my person". Phillips, *A New World Order: Selected Essays* (New York and London: Vintage Books, 2001), 130 and this collection, xxx.

[5] For Arendtian "metaphorical thinking" see Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind*, chapter one.

[6] Cited in David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life* (London: Granta Books, 2000), 92.

[7] Albert Memmi, "The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon", *Massachusetts Review* (Winter 1973), 9-39.

[8] Henry Louis Gates, "Critical Fanonism", *Critical Inquiry* (Spring 1991), here 457-8 and 457-470 and also Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life*.

[9] Memmi, "The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon", 30.

[10] Memmi, "The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon", 19.

[11] Memmi, "The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon", 24.

[12] Memmi, "The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon", 32.

[13] Albert Memmi, *Dominated Man: Notes Towards a Portrait* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 16. See also Gates, "Critical Fanonism", 465-470.

[14] Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life*, 313-317 and Memmi, "The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon", 26.

[15] Gates, "Critical Fanonism", 468. See also Peter Geismar, *Frantz Fanon* (New York: Dial Press, 1971), 133-34.

[16] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), trans. Constance Farrington (New York, 1963), 175.

[17] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 167.

[18] Santiago Slabodsky, *Decolonial Judaism: Triumphal Failures of Barbaric Thinking* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[19] Bryan Cheyette, "Against Supersessionist Thinking: Old and New, Jews and Postcolonialism, the Ghetto and Diaspora," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 4, no. 3 (2017): 424–439.

[20] Hilary Mantel, "Black is not Jewish", *Literary Review* (February, 1997), 40

[21] "We are not all Jews" echoes Hanif Kureishi's short story "We're Not Jews" in *Love in Blue Time* (London and New York: Faber, 1997), 41-51. See also Wendy Zierler, "'My Holocaust Is Not Your Holocaust'": 'Facing' Black and Jewish Experience in *The Pawnbroker*, *Higher Ground*, and *The Nature of Blood*", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 18:1 (Spring 2004), 46-67.

[22] Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind, 32-40.*

[23] Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 398.

[24] Caryl, Phillips, *The European Tribe* (London and New York: Faber, 1987), 55, 66.

[25] Phillips, *A New World Order,* 130 and note 4 above. See also Stephen Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary* (Oxford, 2009); Clingman, "Other Voices: An Interview with Caryl Phillips," *Salmagundi* 143 (Summer 2004), 112–140.

[26] Sarah Phillips Casteel, *Calypso Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 4.

[27] Andrea Levy, *Small Island* (London: Headline Review, 2004), 2.

[28] Levy, *Small Island*, 158.

[29] Levy, *Small Island*, 132-133.

[30] Levy, *Small Island*, 151. There is a parallel here with Frantz Fanon who was also racially abused in Paris after fighting for the Free French.

[31] Levy, *Small Island*, 158.

[32] Levy, *Small Island*, 159-60.

[33] Levy, *Small Island*, 187.

[34] Levy, *Small Island*, 177.

[35] Levy, *Small Island*, 129.

[36] Levy, *Small Island*, 129.

[37] Levy, *Small Island*, 130.

[38] Levy, *Small Island*, 129.

[39] Levy, *Small Island*, 186.

[40] Levy, *Small Island*, 130.

[41] Levy, *Small Island*, 193.