

Roads Less Traveled: German-Jewish Exile Experiences in Kenya, 1933–1947. By Natalie Eppelsheimer. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019. Pp. x + 212. Paper \$60.95. ISBN 978-1789975390.

During the Nazi period, the British colony of Kenya became an unlikely haven for approximately 800 Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria. Some came independently, arranging immigration with the help of family or friends; most relied on the help of several newly formed organizations to facilitate their settlement. They were assisted in particular by the Plough Settlement Association (PSA), established in 1938 for the purpose of settling refugees on farms, as well as the Kenya Jewish Refugee Committee, alongside the Central British Fund for German Jewry, the Kenya Jewish Board of Deputies, the Council for German Jewry, and other local, British- and German-Jewish support bodies.

The refugees entered a society characterized by racial and political conflict. According to the 1933 census, Kenya's population included approximately 3 million Africans, 34,000 Indians, and 17,000 Europeans. Glossy brochures proclaimed it to be "Britain's Fairest Colony" and "The Land In Which To Make A Home" (5). From early on, however, there was strong local opposition to prospective Jewish immigration, both from colonial settlers who worried about "alter[ing] the essentially British character or the population" in the Highlands (72), as well as from the Indian community, who considered it "outrageous to allow a large number of foreigners driven out from their own lands to enjoy privileges which are denied to British Indians who have actively helped the development of this Colony" (67). Many refugees were placed on remote farms, despite having inadequate or no training in agriculture, and they arrived with few assets, knowing little of what to expect of their new homeland. The prospect of large-scale Jewish settlement was never likely, and most refugees regarded Kenya as a temporary haven, though some applied for naturalization after the war.

Natalie Eppelsheimer's book centers on the first-person accounts of eight Jewish individuals or families who came to Kenya from Germany or Austria in the 1930s. Although the study draws on additional archival, literary, and journalistic materials, much of the thematic discussion and analysis is focused on this limited group of sources. Following an initial chapter touching on aspects of the historical background, the book describes the refugees' arrival and the circumstances of their settlement, before going on to explore elements of refugee life that emerge from the refugees' accounts: their relationships with Africans, the British, and the established Jewish community; and the experiences of children on farms, at school, and at home.

Eppelsheimer begins the first chapter with a vignette of Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, in 1903, offering the leader of the Zionist movement, Theodor Herzl, a fertile stretch of land in the Kenya highland region as "a temporary homeland" (31). In so doing, she opens up a rich terrain of interconnections between colonial, Jewish, and Zionist history, fragments of which surface intermittently over the course of the book. Jews came to Kenya to seek safety from antisemitic persecution. Upon their arrival, however, they found themselves paradoxically positioned as "white, European colonizers" (10), even while the colonial order persisted in viewing them as foreigners and outsiders. Eppelsheimer emphasizes from the outset the "odd position" (10) that Jews inhabited in Kenya's racial hierarchy, and in the book's more analytical sections, she comments on the refugees' paternalistic attitudes and largely unquestioning acceptance of white superiority.

But the many quotes from primary sources she offers call out for deeper probing and more thoroughgoing analysis. In January 1939, for example, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that the first group of PSA settlers departing for Kenya were “young people of good education, some of them only Jewish to an eighth degree ... [and] young people of excellent type” (70). In a parallel example, refugee Heinrich Weyl offered his impressions of Kenya to family and friends in Germany: “In the morning at 7 a boy (of course a Negro), the customary service in Africa, takes away the mosquito net, under which one has to sleep here, and delivers tea to bed. By the way, the boys look very clean and orderly. They wear a long white shirt with sleeves, a livery jacket and a white little cap on their heads. Then real English breakfast with all kinds of items. At noon lunch. At 5 tea with biscuits and at 8 the grand dinner. The ladies mostly in long evening gowns.” (89)

How did these Jewish refugees perceive their position in colonial society? To what extent did they consciously invest in establishing their whiteness, as Jewish immigrants from Europe had done in some other racialized contexts? How do we understand their appropriation of the racist language and cultural mores of their host society? The complex interrelationships among racism, colonialism, and antisemitism are clearly evident here and in dozens of further examples throughout the book, but are subject to little sustained analysis.

Other intriguing questions, too, remain largely unanswered. What led some Jewish refugees to develop attachments to Kenya or British culture? How were more Orthodox refugees able to sustain their religious practice, and what did their “close involvement” with established Jewish communities look like (98)? The presentation of the individual accounts through sequential discussion rather than integrated comparative analysis often results in the somewhat generic conclusion that “the refugees experienced and remembered life in the Colony differently” (190), rather than a more granular and nuanced understanding of the diverging responses that characterized refugee life.

The book originated in a doctoral dissertation focused less on the historical experience of German-Jewish exile in Kenya than on its representation in the novels and autobiographical writings of Stefanie Zweig, whose book *Nowhere in Africa* was adapted into the well-known film. In seeking to present a more historically focused account, the book reframes the narrative and omits substantial chunks of the dissertation, though the shift is not always smoothly implemented; in particular, there is some unevenness in the discussion of memoirs and interviews alongside Zweig’s novelistic representations. Better editorial intervention from the publisher would have been expected here—indeed, as a whole, the book would have benefited from more assured editing and attention to detail.

Despite its shortcomings, the book makes a welcome claim for focusing on what Wolfgang Benz has called the “exile of the little people” and helpfully draws attention to an understudied corner of refugee history. Against the backdrop of a growing scholarly engagement between colonial history and Jewish history, it is to be hoped that future research will probe further the complex and intriguing interrelationships among Jews, whiteness, antisemitism, and empire at this crucial historical moment.

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doi:10.1017/S0008938921000583