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Estelle Tarica

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WHERE YOU DON'T BELONG: ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL 'OTHERNESS' IN LEO SPITZER'S *HOTEL BOLIVIA*

British scholar Jacqueline Rose, framing the Jewish experience of the twentieth century in a global context, affirms the following connection: 'There is . . . a line which runs straight from the heart of Europe and its stateless people to the dispossessed of Africa, Asia, and the rest of the world' (Rose, 1996: 44). This connection is not often asserted, but not because it is a difficult line to draw, from a scholarly point of view. The difficulty lies, rather, in the fear that there is a betrayal implicit in the gesture of drawing it, the betrayal of singularity. Do singular events lose their singularity when they are connected to other events? Without their singularity, isn't their identity – the strongest, most forceful evidence of their existence – also liable to be called into question? Is it possible to be singular without identity? [1]

The following reflections on Leo Spitzer's 1998 book *Hotel Bolivia: the culture of memory in a refuge from Nazism*, are undertaken here with these issues in mind. *Hotel Bolivia* examines the experience of Austrian and German Jewish refugees who fled Nazi persecution by going to Bolivia. Spitzer himself was born in Bolivia in 1939 to Jewish Austrian parents, joining an estimated 20,000 Jewish refugees who entered the country in 1938 during the brief period between the German *Anschluss* of Austria and the *Kristallnacht* pogroms (Spitzer, 1998: ix). At the time, Bolivia was the only nation-state in the world allowing Austrian Jews, who had been stripped of their citizenship, to negotiate legally their escape from Nazi Europe. *Hotel Bolivia* examines the decade from the refugees' arrival in Bolivia to the late 1940s, when Spitzer's family moved to the United States and the bulk of the German and Austrian Jewish refugees had likewise left Bolivia.

Spitzer is a professor of history at Dartmouth College, specialized in African and Latin American history. He is the author of two previous books, one a history of Creole responses to colonialism in Sierra Leone (Spitzer, 1974), the other a comparative analysis of processes of cultural assimilation in Austria, Brazil and West Africa (Spitzer, 1989), and he has also co-edited a volume on the cultural significance of acts of memory (Bal *et al.*, 1999). *Hotel Bolivia* extends Spitzer's prior interests in processes of cultural assimilation to the experience of himself, his family and the wider middle-European Jewish refugee community in Bolivia as they dealt with their life in a new country, a place they found to be 'unbelievably strange' (1998: 84). The book attempts to understand how the refugees' response to the catastrophic losses of the Holocaust shaped their experience of Bolivia, especially their experience of Bolivia as a 'hotel', a place of transit

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rather than belonging. Spitzer argues that the Jewish refugees were able to survive their losses through acts of remembrance that led to the construction of a special 'culture of memory' focused on the lives in Europe they had been forced to abandon. The strength of this culture of memory, he suggests, was largely responsible for their non-assimilation to Bolivian culture. He shows that the culture of memory the refugees developed both responded and contributed to their discomfort with, distance from, and at times strong disdain for Bolivians, and he implies that it explains the transient nature of their experience in Bolivia. The story Spitzer tells, then, is as much one of not belonging – not belonging to Bolivia – as it is one of belonging to a special 'culture of memory'. In what follows, I examine the logic linking Jewish cultural survival to Jewish Eurocentrism and the refugees' experience of not belonging to Bolivia.

Spitzer writes that, when still in the beginning stages of his research, his reflections on the singularity of his object were crucial to shaping his investigations. In interviews, his informants repeatedly referred to their 'Bolivia experience' when talking about those years of their lives. He asks himself, 'What is meant by the "Bolivia experience?"' (1998: 190). Is it a collective experience, or does it vary so much from individual to individual that it cannot be defined as 'shared'? Is it knowable, like an object? Does it have definable characteristics? The issue is further complicated by the fact of his own participation, by his own 'Bolivia experience'. This profound personal connection makes his object of study even less objectifiable. Perhaps in answer to these questions, he offers the metaphor 'Hotel Bolivia' as a unifying principle.

The term 'Hotel Bolivia' was coined by one of Spitzer's refugee informants, in the course of recording his oral history. The term communicates the refugees' ironic appreciation of their new circumstances as well as their sense of their own transience: their gratitude on finding a 'safe place to stay for a while' before they 'packed up again and left' (1998: 159). It also underscores the uniqueness of the Bolivian case. Unlike many other North and South American nations, Bolivia had not encouraged European immigration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; with the exception of the Jewish refugees of the late 1930s, it would not be until the 1950s that Bolivian governments seriously promoted immigrant settlements in Bolivia (both Japanese and European). Thus, when the Jewish refugees arrived in Bolivia in the late 1930s, there was no established Jewish immigrant community already in place. Meanwhile, those countries that did have large, well-established Jewish communities, such as Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and the United States, had refused entry to Jews in these crucial years. All those other 'hotels' were closed to Jews by the late 1930s. After the war, however, most of the Austrian and German Jewish refugees in Bolivia eventually immigrated to those countries. Spitzer writes: 'The title of this book expresses the truth that for many German-speaking refugees Bolivia was indeed a transitory home – a larger version of a temporary resident 'hotel' – which they eventually left after the war had ended.... Most German-speaking refugees ... 'checked out' of Bolivia, choosing not to settle permanently in this Andean nation' (1998: xv). The Jewish refugees who did stay in Bolivia in large numbers after the war were of Eastern European origin ('polacos'), culturally quite different from the refugees Spitzer examines in his book. Only a small minority of the original Austrian and German refugees remained in Bolivia after 1950.

The term 'Hotel Bolivia' also takes on another, equally important connotation over the course of the book, above and beyond the connotation of transience and

hospitality conveyed by the refugee informants. As I will discuss further below, Spitzer is very sensitive to the refugees' prejudices and preconceptions about Bolivia, their exoticist understanding and colonialist attitudes about the place where they so arbitrarily ended up. He brings out the peculiar slippages between refugee and tourist, between refugee and colonial settler, that his sources so often reveal. He thus posits the hotel as an epistemological frame, a way of seeing the world in which one lives: a world of fascination and alienation, regarding which the European visitor is both curious and repulsed, and in which the European is accorded significant social privilege by virtue of race. Spitzer has occasion to imagine that he was, by virtue of his fair hair and skin, a source of awe and wonder to the Bolivian Indians he met and lived with when he was a child, while they, by virtue of their dress and customs, were a source of wonder and disgust to the Jewish refugees. He describes how that wonderment, sparked by ignorance and the sense of strangeness, often and easily shaded into feelings of alienation, disgust, disdain or fear. Spitzer thus tells a story about a cross-cultural experience that was also, if inadvertently, a colonial encounter.

Spitzer keeps his family at the centre of the work while also writing a broader history of the Jewish refugee experience in Bolivia but beyond this task of historical reconstruction Spitzer's main concern is with 'the relationship between memory and cultural survival', with how memory is shaped and used, and with the interdependence of memory and history (1998: xi). Methodologically complex and experimental, the book combines archival and oral history, autobiographical memoir and auto-ethnography, while offering a sustained meta-reflection on how the past is shaped through narratives and how those narratives constitute the singular experience of a particular culture. *Hotel Bolivia* can be said to tell three kinds of stories: the history of German- and Austrian-Jewish refugee immigration to Bolivia during the Second World War; the ethnographic narrative of the formation of a 'culture of memory' among the refugees, describing how their experience was profoundly shaped by acts of remembering that became crucial to their cultural survival in the face of the Holocaust; and finally, the story of how that experience of remembering is remembered in turn by the participant-turned-historian and his informants. Perhaps most significantly, it grapples self-consciously with the dilemmas of writing about a past profoundly determined by the losses of the Holocaust, a past towards which the author adopts the stance of both participant and observer. *Hotel Bolivia* is part of a growing body of work by second-generation Holocaust survivors and refugees concerned with the ethical and epistemological challenges of understanding their families' past and how it has affected their sense of history.

Taken as a whole, then, Spitzer's book engages two fields of scholarly inquiry which are rarely brought into mutual reflection: the study of how Holocaust memories have shaped Jewish experience in the postwar era, and the study of the colonial nature of the cross-cultural encounter between Europeans and indigenous people in the Americas. It is to the promise of that project and to its pitfalls that this article is addressed. Spitzer is partially concerned with showing that the construction of the Jewish refugees' memory of Europe, so crucial to enabling them to survive their exile as a community, drew from and contributed to an established colonial discourse about Bolivian Indians. In other words, *Hotel Bolivia* offers a lucid and perhaps unique account of Jewish Eurocentrism and attempts to explain the reasons for its development in one particular context. Spitzer shows that the Jews' sense of their cultural alienation from

Bolivia and Bolivians was thus not only an integral part of their experience as refugees in a strange land but also a dearly held belief, one that their time in Bolivia appeared to strengthen rather than mitigate. But Spitzer takes his account a step further, not only describing but also justifying the refugees' Eurocentric beliefs. He argues that these were part of a creative – perhaps even laudable – response to the difficulties of their situation against the backdrop of the Holocaust, a sign of Jewish resistance to extermination.

This problematic justification occurs through two strands of thought that I will investigate here. First, the idea that the transience of the Jewish refugee experience in Bolivia was the inevitable result of the unbridgeable cultural differences between Jews and Bolivians, thus implicitly ratifying the notion, central to the refugees' Eurocentrism, that they were fundamentally alien to Bolivia. Second, the idea that the Jewish refugees' embrace of Eurocentrism and racism was necessary to their collective survival. These ideas coincide with Spitzer's decision to have the metaphor of 'Bolivia as hotel' structure the narrative arc of the book and thus to underscore the transient nature of the refugees' relationship to Bolivia and their sense of alienation from its culture. Although Spitzer is most concerned with the culture the refugees developed while there, his account is deeply shaped by this unspoken narrative, such that the central defining fact of the refugees' 'Bolivia experience', as Spitzer tells it, is that they spent barely a decade there and then left. Thus the refugees' 'Bolivia experience' becomes the experience of 'Hotel Bolivia', of not belonging, for Spitzer effectively treats these experiences as one and the same. The idea of the Jews' fundamental alienation from Bolivia, a key tenet of their Eurocentrism, is therefore as important to Spitzer as it is to many of the refugees themselves. Despite the fact that he himself is highly critical of the racist strands of Jewish culture in Bolivia, he participates in the construction of Bolivia as an alien, unknown and ultimately impenetrable place to which it would be difficult, if not impossible, for a middle-European Jewish refugee to belong.

My aim in what follows is to interrogate Spitzer's account of the refugees' racism as *necessary* to their cultural survival, and to propose that it is not the only account possible. The point is not a dismissal of Spitzer's work, but rather a more profound engagement with the dilemmas that animate it. I propose that the defence of Jewish racism to be found in the pages of *Hotel Bolivia* is an unintended and avoidable consequence of Spitzer's experimental methodology, that it responds to the challenges posed by writing Jewish history-ethnography as both participant and observer, and in the shadow of the Holocaust. What follows is thus an attempt to understand more fully the reasons behind that method as well its significance for the construction of particular Jewish and Bolivian objects of study.

Memory, postmemory, history

Spitzer's archive is highly varied, although it gives pride of place to family photographs. Spitzer reproduces and describes these photographs while also dwelling on the ambiguous nature of the past information that they provide to a viewer in the present; they are the source for most of his meta-critical reflections on history and memory. Spitzer also draws from the many oral and video testimonies by refugees that he himself collected in order to write this book. He delves into reports in the Bolivian press of the

late 1930s and the 1940s, and into the papers of Jewish organizations that assisted the refugees in Bolivia in one way or another. Culling from these varied and disparate archives, Spitzer reflects on how the Jewish refugee experience in Bolivia was profoundly shaped by an ongoing process of remembering, and how he himself, both participant and historian, constructs a story about the past.

Despite the hybrid nature of his approach and of the book he has produced, Spitzer presupposes a distinction between memory and history even as he addresses the slippage between them. Citing Natalie Z. Davis and Robert Starn on the role of memory in historical work (Davis and Starn, 1989: 4), Spitzer notes that memory is 'an instrument of reconfiguration and not of reclamation or retrieval' (1998: 191), and he aims to demonstrate the limits of the 'reclamation and retrieval' method of history by questioning the ability of the historian to detach him/herself from a past that constitutes him/her in the present. *Hotel Bolivia* negotiates, contrapuntally, the dispassion of the historian and the emotional involvement of the family member whose personal memories form a part of the narrative of the past that is being written. Spitzer writes that the author plays a 'dual role, as historian and participant' (1998: xvi). Indeed, the author's self-identification of himself as 'dual' is a recurring theme in the pages of the book.

Because Spitzer plays with the difference between memory and history, rather than abolishing the distinction between them altogether, his methodology provides an interesting counterpoint to recent investigations of oral history and collective memory in Latin America. In part because of the semantic overlap in Spanish between *memoria* and *historia* – each can refer to codified genres for the narrative exposition of things past – and in part because of the cultural politics that have accrued around the distinction between official and insurgent/popular narratives of the past, recent scholarly approaches do not always make a distinction between memory and history. Joanne Rappaport's pioneering investigations of indigenous 'historical memory' and of 'the politics of memory' do not treat memory and history as separate categories distinguishable from one another in terms of narrative genre, rhetorical construction, enunciative context, content or a particular epistemological stance vis-à-vis the past. She speaks in general terms, rather, of 'experiences-turned-stories' (Rappaport, 1994: 2), and of forms of relating past experience or of knowing the past (Rappaport, 1998: 15–18). The indigenous historians she studies, meanwhile, are known as 'memoristas' (Rappaport, 1994: 60–70). Rappaport's intervention is undertaken in order to authorize forms of relating past experience that have been ignored and silenced as part of a colonial and then national attempt – still very much in effect today – to consign indigenous cultures to oblivion, both by systematically inhibiting the reproduction of local knowledges, and by labelling Indian history 'myth' or 'folklore', beliefs rather than truth, in order to question Indians' ability to use the past to make legitimate claims on the present. Rappaport draws on Walter Benjamin's writings against 'historicism', the practice of writing about the past in such a way as to normalize the present (Benjamin, 1969: 253–264), in order to insist that the epistemological value of a narrative of the past cannot be divorced from its ethical or political stance vis-à-vis the present. When placed in the broad category of uses of the past that intervene into the present, of a 'question of power in the present, and not of detached reflection upon the past' (Rappaport, 1998: 16), then the differences between memory and history cease to be significant.

As will become clear below, Spitzer's project in *Hotel Bolivia* is undertaken in part to normalize rather than to question an existing social configuration. He celebrates the present as the sign of the refugees' capacity to survive in the face of traumatic loss and to resist the oblivion which threatened them. But his is also an attempt to take distance from his own community and gain a new perspective on his past, that is, it also does undertake to call into question the configuration of the subject – himself, his family, Jewish refugee culture – in the present. Maintaining a distinction between history and memory has an important function in achieving that aim: it allows the author-scholar to interact with the author-son, the author-observer with the author-participant. It is by choosing to adopt the pose of the historian that Spitzer is able purposefully to violate his own family's understanding of *what* should be remembered and *how* it should be remembered, and to dwell on the limits of *what it is possible* to remember. And it is by bringing that awareness into dialogue with his awareness as a participant-family member that Spitzer is able to interrogate some of the stories his family has told about itself and to grapple with the silences and illusions that are a part of his inheritance.

In this sense *Hotel Bolivia* can be loosely considered a work of 'postmemory', the term coined by Marianne Hirsch in her 1997 book *Family frames: photography, narrative, and postmemory* (Hirsch and Spitzer are married to one another and have collaborated together on scholarly projects). Hirsch defines 'postmemory' as characteristic of 'the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated' (Hirsch, 1997: 22). It is distinct from history because it speaks of a profound personal connection, and distinct from memory because of generational distance (Hirsch, 1997: 22). Although Spitzer himself does not use the term 'postmemory', and in fact does not cite Hirsch's work in his own study, *Hotel Bolivia* reflects the kinds of doubts and conflicting desires that characterize the experience of postmemory as Hirsch describes it.

Like Spitzer, Hirsch is interested in how individual and collective identities survived the destruction of European Jewry through specific acts of remembering. Her particular concern is with the narratives people tell about their family photographs, and with the ethical and epistemological questions sparked by those acts of survival, questions that are especially acute for the children of survivors. The epistemological challenge lies in part with the nature of photographs themselves, which 'bring the past back in the form of a ghostly revenant, emphasizing, at the same time, its immutable and irreversible pastness and irretrievability' (Hirsch, 1997: 20). The experience of viewing a family photograph, she suggests, makes it difficult to distinguish past from present. But this challenge is compounded for those with 'postmemory', for whom the experience of looking at family photographs from the Holocaust past reaffirms their own fragmented grasp on the events they did not experience first hand and yet which have so forcefully shaped their lives. For the children of survivors, such family photographs evoke the force of the past as well as its distance; they are 'the leftovers, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes, of the work of postmemory. They affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance' (Hirsch, 1997: 23). The ethical problematic confronting these second-generation viewers, meanwhile, emerges from their

awareness that the photographs involve narratives that may work to 'sustain an imaginary cohesion' in the face of absence and loss (Hirsch, 1997: 7). Such memories then serve as a kind of compensatory fiction, one that has been necessary for survival but to which the child may be resistant, for it has 'evacuated' the child's own stories about the past.

Like Hirsch's *Family Frames*, *Hotel Bolivia* accords the family photograph a privileged role in the investigation of the past. Like Hirsch, Spitzer dwells extensively on the epistemological and ethical problems such photographs pose for the viewer. He focuses, like Hirsch, on the fragmentary nature of his knowledge of the past, and on the spectral quality of the past for the viewer, for the past has been made simultaneously absent and present in the photographs. And he also addresses directly the necessity of the illusion of continuity created around such photographs – created by the acts of memory they inspire and by the acts of memory they re-present – for families that have lost so much. *Hotel Bolivia* is written with the acute awareness of the difficulty of distinguishing past from present, and of the need to grapple with an illusion of continuity that one both sees through and understands to be necessary, and which may be experienced as compulsory and overwhelming. Spitzer has himself been caught up in the very 'acts of transfer' that he wishes to analyze, and indeed he writes that he understands his book to be participating in such acts (1998: xx).[2] But he also at times adopts the 'reclamation and retrieval' method of traditional historiography in order to take distance from his own community and reveal the at times illusory nature of its self-image, and to compensate for the abyss of memory. He uses history as both a violation of, and compensation for, memory and postmemory.

The contrapuntal method that results is the most fascinating and significant feature of the book, as Spitzer uses it to textualize his experience of belonging to the very object he studies. But it is also a highly unstable and self-conflicted approach. Jewish historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi explains the dilemma for the author who seeks to honour collective memory while also adopting the historian's perspective: 'The historian does not simply come in to replenish the gaps of memory. He constantly challenges even those memories that have survived intact' (Yerushalmi, 1982: 94). Historical inquiry, he writes, 'cut[s] against the grain of collective memory' (Yerushalmi, 1982: 95). *Hotel Bolivia*, committed to expressing the views of both the historian of, and the participant in, the development of a Jewish collective memory, cannot help but reproduce the conflict between them. When does Spitzer 'cut against the grain' of his family's narrative in search of a truth that individual and collective memories have buried or forgotten, and when does he instead respect the weave of the past that has been handed down to him? What are the effects of these decisions on the narrative of the 'Bolivia experience' that Spitzer constructs?

Alien Bolivia

Hotel Bolivia is about the 'Bolivia experience' of Austrian and German Jewish refugees in the late 1930s and 1940s, but it cannot really be said to be about Bolivia. Or rather, the Bolivia of the refugees' 'Bolivia experience' emerges, in this book, as a spectral country. Keeping the experience of displaced people at the core of his analysis, Spitzer underscores at all levels of his text the great extent to which the lives led by Jewish

refugees in Bolivia were overshadowed by their connection to another place. For them, Bolivia was a negative more than anything else: not Europe, not home. Spitzer writes:

> . . . it was Austro-German Jewish bourgeois society, the cultural end product of nineteenth-century Jewish emancipation in Central Europe, that gave the new arrivals a model for emulation and a common locus for identification in their place of refuge. Indeed, at the very time when that dynamic social and cultural amalgam was being ruthlessly and systematically destroyed by the Nazis, the Jewish refugees in Bolivia tried to recall and revive a version of it in a land thousands of miles from their home; in a country that offered them a haven, but in which many of them felt themselves as mere sojourners. (1998: x–xi)

This is one of the explanations behind the ironic name they assigned their place of refuge – 'Hotel Bolivia' – as if they were tourists rather than refugees, as if Bolivia were a vacation spot rather than an escape route out of a war zone.

But the connection to tourism is more than just a dark joke, as Spitzer makes clear. He carefully explains the place of Bolivia in the German and Austrian imagination in order to account for the refugees' perceptions. He calls these imaginings the refugees' 'invisible baggage', filled with 'limited or stereotypical' knowledge of Bolivia 'derived from widely disseminated, highly romanticized adventure literature – a literature that routinely represented the landscape and people of South America as mysterious, primitive, exotic if not forbidding, and that simplified or blurred the particularity and diversity of both' (1998: 83). Nineteenth-century novels by German writer Karl May occupied a prominent place among this baggage, ironically enough – as Spitzer reports – since May was also 'the favorite reading of the young Adolf Hitler' (1998: 84). Spitzer also examines photos of Andean landscapes taken by his family and other members of their social circle, and shows how they are linked 'ideologically to earlier European imaginings of the South American continent – to discourses about a "wild and gigantic nature" and an "aesthetics of the sublime" that were disseminated into German literature and the German popular consciousness through nineteenth-century Romanticism and the epic writings of Alexander von Humboldt' 1998: 93).

And yet this surplus of images boiled down, in the end, to an elaborate apparatus of ignorance. 'The moon was more real to us [than Bolivia]', says one refugee to Spitzer in the testimony he collected (1998: 82). It was not the kind of place any of them could ever have imagined living, not only because of its sublime alien-ness, but also because they perceived it as a cultural wasteland. The negative images the refugees adopted from their exposure to mid- to late nineteenth-century European colonial discourse and race theory far outweighed the impact of Humboldtian sublimity in shaping the refugees' attitudes. This is a point for which Spitzer provides evidence without directly arguing, as when he cites one refugee reflecting on her first and lasting impression of Bolivian women: 'The Indian women wore multiple skirts and colorful mantas. They were sometimes beautifully dressed, richly dressed, with gold and silver pins and gold earrings. But they had no culture. They had no civilization' (1998: 84). Spitzer does a good job of distancing himself from these racist perceptions. He calls attention to the strong element of historical irony that surrounds them, and leaves us room to ponder some profoundly troubling facts. For instance, the fact that, when faced with Bolivians,

the Jews proudly affirmed Hitler's culture as their own. Or the fact that, although their agricultural settlement ultimately failed, the Jewish refugees received far more government support and attention than Bolivia's majority agricultural workers, largely indigenous, because, as Spitzer says, the Jews were 'the racial beneficiaries' of Bolivia's unequal 'status arrangement' (1998: 130). That Jews might be the 'racial beneficiaries' of a nation-state divided by its own colonial origins is no longer surprising, given that it is now a deeply-entrenched feature of the post-Second World War era, yet it makes this aspect of the 'Bolivia experience' no less terribly ironic. What does one make of the fact that the refugees asserted an idea of European civilization to establish themselves as superior to Bolivians, that they turned Bolivians into signs for 'not Europe' when they themselves had only just barely survived the role?

Of the refugees' first impressions on arriving, recorded in the testimony collected by Spitzer, only the testimony offered by Werner Guttentag, one of the few who remained in Bolivia (going on to found a successful publishing house), offers a narrative that moves from incomprehension and prejudice to new awareness and knowledge. Guttentag says, 'I noticed that I was in a black land . . . so many men and women were dressed in black or dark clothing. Only some time afterward did I learn that they were still in mourning clothes – mourning their dead, casualties in the disastrous Chaco War that Bolivia had fought with Paraguay' (1998: 84). Guttentag's insight is significant for two reasons. First, because it displays a fairly nuanced perception about the political situation of late 1930s Bolivia, for the Chaco War was the defining experience of the 1930s in terms of orienting subsequent national events. It is not a stretch to say that the political ramifications of Bolivia's defeat in the Chaco extended all the way to the refugees themselves. One of the factors that led Bolivian leader General Germán Busch to welcome Jewish refugee immigration in 1938 was that Paraguay had just offered 15,000 Austrian Jews refuge in the Chaco, an action perceived as a territorial threat by Bolivia and which Busch desired to counteract with colonization projects of his own featuring Jewish refugees (Klein, 1968: 357–8). That was the context for the Minister of Agriculture and Immigration's declaration of Bolivia's extraordinary official policy:

> Bolivia's doors are open to those men of sound body and spirit from all over the world who wish to come here and work the lush lands we freely grant them . . . in Bolivia we should participate only in the sympathy, rather than in the hatred or the persecution, which Semitic elements of European countries might merit. (cited in Klein, 1968: 357–8, translation mine)

Guttentag's observations are also significant, above and beyond the unspoken historical link between the Chaco War and the Jewish refugee presence in Bolivia, because he was able to perceive the catastrophic losses of others in the midst of experiencing his own. If Jews' 'Bolivia experience' of the late 1930s was spectral, so too was the Bolivians' 'Bolivia experience' of those years.[3] Of the other testimonies cited by Spitzer, meanwhile, none of the refugees goes beyond an account of their first bewildered impressions of Bolivia and Bolivians. If these first impressions truly represented their most important and lasting impressions, as Spitzer seems to suggest, then indeed their ignorance was tenaciously cultivated over the course of years.

Nothing brings home the ghostliness of Bolivia more than the story of Spitzer's aunt Ella, his mother's sister, for whom Bolivia became, literally, the land of death. Four years after moving there from Austria, Ella committed suicide, at the age of 23. Seeking a fuller understanding of the circumstances of her death, Spitzer encounters conflicting and fragmentary accounts from other family members, if not total silence. He ends up with a story about what Spivak would call a subaltern and singular woman, one whose death sent a message that her family could not recognize, or did not want to recognize (Spivak, 1999: 306–11). It was thanks to Ella's decision to go to Bolivia that the entire family was able to escape Europe in time – her *decision*, Spitzer underscores, for she was in a special position: she was able to choose among several possible options for survival. She chose Bolivia, writes Spitzer, because it was the only option that guaranteed her parents' survival as well as her own; but this choice involved leaving behind her lover and accepting the marriage offer of another man, a marriage that failed within a year. Spitzer reconstructs Ella's story as one of an individual sacrificing herself for her family; he writes, 'familial survival was at times purchased at great cost: in her case, with the currency of personal happiness and the coin of self-denial' (1998: 43). Here, Spitzer tries to write two stories at once, Ella's story and her family's, and to point out the gaps between them that make such a reduction difficult.

Ella's situation was special but not unique, for many of the refugees developed a similarly spectral relationship to Bolivia. Seen from their perspective, as Spitzer here tries to do, Europe is the land of the living. In Bolivia, it is kept alive by the refugees in myriad ways: in the clubs and institutions they found, such as the Escuela Boliviana-Israelita or the Club Austriáco, which held 'Dirndl Balls' enthusiastically attended by Spitzer's parents; in the wholehearted transplantation of the divisions among European Jewry to Bolivian soil, nasty prejudice and all;[4] and in the distancing mechanisms the refugees developed to keep themselves separate and distinct from Bolivians, the most important of which involved assertions of 'European modernity' against Bolivia's 'backwardness'. Looking at photographs of Bolivians taken by refugees, Spitzer notices that the refugees are never pictured alongside them:

> The refugees, out of the frame, behind the camera, gazing at the 'other', enhance their own identity in the perceived contrast, shore up their sense of 'civilized' self, and perhaps confirm a vision for themselves that many of them may have begun to question during their trauma of displacement – a vision of European cultural modernity and progress. (1998: 98)

Regarding the agricultural settlers who colonized several abandoned haciendas in the Yungas region of La Paz – an effort that failed after several years – Spitzer writes that the Jewish settlers almost never came into contact with local inhabitants other than when work required it, noting:

> . . . the settlers maintained their own sense of 'civilization' – of 'culture', 'modernity', 'advancement' – with few, if any, sojourns into a realm they generally contrasted with their own, and often dismissed as 'primitive', 'backward', and 'less civilized'. Far from their origins in Europe, excluded and persecuted in their homelands, compelled to emigrate and live in a place that at an earlier time would have been difficult to conjure up even in some of their wildest

> bouts of imagination, the Jewish settlers in Buena Tierra were determined to preserve their 'Europeanness', a semblance of European cultural life and existence they nurtured and deeply cherished. (1998: 130)

It is through stories such as these that *Hotel Bolivia* communicates the refugees' experience of loss and disorientation. Spitzer shows that the idealization of the place where, had the refugees stayed, they would have been killed becomes crucial to their survival; and that idealized notions about the place where, having safely arrived, they can live, repeatedly confirm their losses. Haunted by their attachments to Europe, it is the refugees' life in Bolivia that is, paradoxically, spectral:

> Before their departure from Europe, each and every one of [the refugees] had been identified as undesirable and stripped of citizenship and possessions. Their 'present' in Bolivia, the 'here and now' from which they looked back upon the past and confronted the future, had come about as a consequence of oppression and expulsion, and it was indelibly marked by painful loss, separation, and ongoing war. (1998: 153)

This aspect of their 'culture of memory' is a recurring feature of Spitzer's book.

In another story of death in Bolivia, he describes himself looking at a photo of himself as a young child, in which he is holding the hands of an older, Indian child, both smiling; they are friends, according to the caption on the back of the photo, though Spitzer cannot remember the child. What he most notices in looking at the photo is the 'abyss' separating him from it, the 'discontinuity' – he cites John Berger – 'between the moment recorded and the moment of looking' (1998: 105). He cannot remember the child's name; nor can he remember, or determine, whether it was a boy or a girl. What he does know is that this nameless child was killed not long after the photo was taken, 'hurled to the street from a second-story balcony by the crazed son of our landlord' (1998: 106–7). But Spitzer goes no further with the tale, omitting even the barest commentary about the meaning of this event, other than to underscore the distance between past and present signified in a photo from his childhood.

Reading of these chasms – the photographic and temporal abyss, the abyss into which the child was dropped – I came to think of this child as Ella's lost sibling, her Bolivian twin, and to inflect him or her with Spanish: 'Ella' became the nameless, unknown *ella* or *él*. I wondered if *ella*'s life was forgotten so that Ella's might be remembered. Ella had been rescued from the photographic abyss, her story reconstructed, as much as possible, by Spitzer in the role of participant-turned-historian, determined to violate his family's silence in the name of validating Ella's life – whereas the child remained there in the chasm, its death more memorable than its life. What inhibited Spitzer from rescuing the memory of the child's life? This is one anecdote among several in which the participant-Spitzer does not turn to the historian-Spitzer in order to compensate, if only partially, for the abyss of time. Is there a memory here whose integrity Spitzer did not wish to violate?

Spitzer offers a compelling view of how the refugees' ignorance about the place where they ended up – an ignorance produced by European colonialism, he argues – and the effects of the trauma of forced displacement in the context of catastrophic loss, combine to turn the Bolivia of the refugees' 'Bolivia experience' into a very

particular sign: for survival, for transience, for 'inferior' ways of life, for 'not Europe'. But it would be too easy to say that the refugees who are the subjects of Spitzer's book lived in an imagined Bolivia; that it is because 'Hotel Bolivia' is a fictitious construct, one preventing them from coming into contact with the real Bolivia, that feelings of belonging remained alien to their 'Bolivia experience'. Their Bolivia is not imagined in the manner of a mirage or a fairytale, just a sign competing with other signs, such as the one Guttentag perceived in the black-clad people around him: Bolivia as a nation of survivors, mournful Bolivia. Not Bolivia-the-different, but Bolivia-the-same.

What is striking about Spitzer's account of the hotel sign, however, is how thoroughly coherent and monological it is; how little these other possibilities, these other signs of Bolivia, intrude to affect the central narrative arc of the story. Those aspects of the refugees' 'Bolivia experience' that do not fit well into the story of transience implied by the metaphor of the hotel remain unexplored. There are several notable moments when Spitzer alludes to these other aspects of the Bolivia experience without addressing their significance. In his discussion of why the Jewish agricultural settlement at Buena Tierra ultimately had to be abandoned, he reveals that some of the settlers were unhappy with the fact that their connection to the land could not be legalized in their own names. Most of the settlers had to be coerced into going to Buena Tierra in the first place, and most of them, 'ambivalent about their long-term plans', were unwilling to commit to the settlement. But some of them, Spitzer points out, 'did want to formalize a new arrangement with SOCOBO [the resettlement agency] that would allow them to own their houses and their assigned lots' (1998: 134–5). These settlers clearly were not relating to Bolivia as hotel, but as a possible home: they wanted to make the Bolivian land their own. This itself raises a number of issues about their sense of entitlement in a context in which landownership, increasingly removed from Indian communities over the course of the nineteenth century in highland Bolivia, has always gone hand in hand with social and political power. More narrowly, with regard specifically to the refugees' sense of belonging to Bolivia, this information is sufficient to question the strength and stability of the 'hotel' metaphor.[5]

Spitzer also offers three 'vignettes', culled from the oral testimonies, which suggest that the refugees developed particular emotional attachments to Bolivia. A man talks about missing salteñas, a Bolivian culinary specialty; a woman affirms her feelings of longings for Bolivia, but not for Austria; Spitzer himself speaks of his mother, who every year ritually feeds the *ekeko* – a small god of prosperity – whom she brought with her to the United States (1998: 159–60). These people communicate their attachments, once they have left Bolivia, in the form of nostalgic remembrances and rituals. But the vignettes are made to speak for themselves, while both Spitzer-participant and Spitzer-historian momentarily disappear. The omission is particularly surprising because of Spitzer's quite extensive discussion, in another section of the book, of the importance of nostalgic memory. He convincingly argues that nostalgic memory should be seen in a positive light because it helps 'reconstruct the continuity of individual and collective identity' and because '[i]t sets up the *positive* from within the "world of yesterday" as a model for creative inspiration and possible emulation within the "world of the here and now"' (1998: 146). By this token, the refugees' nostalgic memory of Bolivia, once they have left it, continues to animate their present day, despite the transient nature of their experience there. In this sense, they can be said to

have used the memory of Bolivia in order to affirm Bolivia as their world – their 'world of yesterday' – and to situate themselves as strangers in their new home, the United States, much as they used the memory of Austria to situate themselves as strangers in Bolivia. Spitzer thus indirectly provides evidence for the existence of other kinds of 'Bolivia experience', and of other narratives to which he might have turned to frame its overall significance.

The archive of places you don't belong

In order to make the 'Bolivia Experience' the story of Hotel Bolivia, to privilege that aspect of it above all others, Spitzer must affirm Bolivia's difference, its alien-ness, over other aspects of the Jewish experience of Bolivia. What is the nature of this alien-ness? There are, I believe, four distinct ways offered to understand it.

First, there is what I have been calling the 'spectral' aspect of the refugees' experience of Bolivia, of which the story of Ella is the emblematic example. Spitzer does not use the word 'melancholia', but this does appear to be the condition he is describing: an inability to participate fully in the life of the present because of one's attachment to what has been lost or left behind. The spectral experience of alienation and non-belonging was by all accounts widespread among Jewish refugee populations, regardless of where they ended up. A 1944 publication by the American Jewish Congress, titled simply *The Jewish refugee*, describes this as an almost universal feature of the refugee experience:

> The refugee, surrounded in his daily life by people whose educational and cultural background is inferior to his own, feels no desire to associate with them beyond the limit of strict necessity; nor does he desire to participate in the unions, clubs, or other societies where he can meet his new colleagues. It is easier for him to remain in the circle of his countrymen where his former station and titles are recognized, where he speaks his own language and *forgets his present degradation*. Hence the voluntary separation of many refugees from the majority of the population and the establishment of their own organizations. (Tartakower, 1944: 395–6, emphasis added)

That acts and institutions of remembering the past are simultaneously acts and institutions of shutting out or forgetting the present thus seems to be a common element of refugee life. In effect, like other groups threatened with destruction, the Jewish refugees responded to their circumstances by living in two times or two 'presents' simultaneously: a present of alienation and degradation, and a present of community and dignity kept alive by memory.[6] The passage from the book *The Jewish refugee* diagnoses a situation that occurred in the United States as much as anywhere, namely, difficulty integrating, a desire to remain separate, to remember the old home by forgetting the particular conditions of life in the new. Thus this feature of the refugees' 'Bolivia experience' was not particular to the Bolivian nature of it. It was, rather, central to the refugee experience in general.[7]

Second, Spitzer explains the Jews' feeling of alien-ness as the product of what he calls their 'invisible baggage', of the prejudices they inherited from their cultural

moment. The existence of this 'invisible baggage' among their other possessions demonstrates that the refugees were the products of their time, of a certain pedagogy that most if not all Germans and Austrians shared. Third is what I will call the 'compensatory fiction:' to make up for the violence, for the loss of dignity, to which they were subjected in Europe, the refugees turned to a readily available cultural narrative which reconfirmed that they belonged to the culture from which they had been expelled. Calling on the idea of European superiority to Bolivians, they were able to claim their national culture again as their own. I will address below the troubling implications that arise when this compensatory racism is posed as integral to the refugees' cultural survival, and lauded as a sign of their resilience.

All three of these accounts of the refugees' perceptions of the alien-ness of Bolivia – the spectral quality of the melancholy life, the 'invisible baggage' inherited from Eurocentric pedagogies, and the compensatory fictions of those who are valiantly resisting abjection – describe aspects of the refugees' experience from which Spitzer himself has been able to gain some distance. His reflections on the circumstances of Ella's death, his retrieval of the nineteenth-century pedagogies of which the members of his parents' generation were the product and his ironic stance vis-à-vis the more troubling aspects of this racist education and, finally, his scholarly analysis of the role played by nostalgia, all suggest that Spitzer has framed his family's 'hotel' experience in such a way as to remain himself marginal to certain aspects of it.

But Spitzer also suggests, implicitly, a fourth approach to the alien-ness of Bolivia, by offering us a glimpse of a country that neither historian nor participant enters. The strangely unexplored lacunae of his account, such as the story of *ella or él*, the gaps to which he points but does not attempt to fill, are aspects of this unknown country. The withdrawal of the historian and the participant, and of the fascinating dialogue between them, suggest that Spitzer has placed himself before a truly mysterious landscape of the past, and that he believes there are some things about Bolivia which it is difficult if not impossible to know. This sense of limitation has a strong effect on the construction of his archive, diminishing it in ways that are surprising in a text devoted to the blurred coexistence of memory and history and to the literal creation of new archives.[8]

Perhaps this sense of epistemological limitation might not be so noteworthy, were it not for the fact that it tends to coalesce into a true blockage to knowledge exclusively when in the presence of that most basic image of the European other, the impassive, anonymous and stoic Indian. I have already mentioned the anecdote of the unknown, unremembered and unpursued Indian child who died so violently from the rooftop. Other moments of similar blackout occur in stories concerning Indians, as when Spitzer talks about the two Aymara women who served his family. He remembers both of them, not ironically, as being named 'Ana', though he is sure that cannot be right (1998: 161), and recounts the conflicting feelings of fear and attraction he would experience when peering into the darkness of their small maid's quarter (1998: 162). He notes, further, that other than the few memories he has of his servants, it is difficult for him to find out how the Jews were perceived by Bolivia's non-Spanish-speaking indigenous majority:

> Since most of these indigenous Bolivians were illiterate, their early impressions or reactions remained within the realm of oral discourse and were not transmitted outside the confines of family or small group conversation. Unrecorded in writing

> or in more widely disseminated forms of popular and artistic representation, little firsthand contemporary information about indigenous reactions has thus been retrievable for analysis. (1998: 164)

In this moment, it is the distanced historian who is speaking, the one who seeks 'information retrieval' rather than to understand how memory functions in the construction of history. Yet at the same time, the possibility of recording such information has been suspiciously foreclosed. Such information does not exist in writing, he explains, yet neither did the bulk of the refugees' memories. Yet in this case there is no thought given to the creation of a new archive, filled with previously unrecorded oral narratives of the past, as happens with his refugee informants. Finally, his own careful self-reflection on how he remembers the past, so important in constructing the history of the refugees, is not brought to bear on the challenges to the historian posed by a past experience that resists easy excavation.

In trying to understand how Bolivian Indians viewed the refugees, both participant and historian disappear, and the author turns to conjecture. He writes:

> Quite possibly, the immigrant newcomers made no special impression on the indigenes. . . . [C]ould many Indians really have made additional physical or cultural distinctions between the *judíos alemanes* (as the German-Jewish refugees came to be called), and other European immigrants to Bolivia? On what basis could they have drawn their comparisons? Did this refugee episode, in which so many thousands of Jewish Europeans entered Bolivia and found a haven from persecution, really have any significance at all, or much relevance, for people whose own marginalization and subjugation so restricted and limited their knowledge of an outside world? (1998: 164)

Noticing the absence of a retrievable archive of memory, he infers the absence of memory altogether. Invoking the presumed ignorance of his would-be informants, he provides an alibi for his own decision to remain ignorant of them. The difficult and partial illuminations he has found in personal memory and historical archives do not extend to them. Something blocks that fragile light: his decision not to violate the frame of the hotel, and to address himself to these Bolivians as if he were inside it.

To write knowledgeably about Bolivian cultures of memory clearly would have required a wholly different book. My aim in pointing to the limits of Spitzer's method is not to advocate for that other book. Nor is it to wish that he had more aggressively pursued the 'native informant' out of the sense that such a person might reveal the true significance of the Jews' 'Bolivia experience' for those around them. My aim is rather to signal that Spitzer could have more fully exploited the possibilities for different kinds of knowing which he himself opened up in bringing participant recollection together with archival research. The gaps left open in those moments where neither participant nor historian steps in, as in the above conjectures, are of a different nature from the gaps of memory and history that any narrative of the past and the self necessarily confronts. Such gaps do exist in *Hotel Bolivia*, to be sure. But they are opened up in those moments when Spitzer, after searching, realizes he cannot know with certainty the nature of the refugees' 'Bolivia experience'. The

paradigmatic example of this not knowing that opens onto a hermeneutical abyss is, again, the story of Ella, for Spitzer decided not to know the ultimate meaning of Ella's death. In his restraint around that episode lies a great deal of truth, one that emerges in the clash and gap between the participants' knowledge and the historian's knowledge. But in his commitment to knowing the Bolivia experience as 'Hotel Bolivia' he is prevented from this kind of 'not knowing' Bolivia. He knows it, rather, as strictly unknowable.

Unspoken connections

I started my reflections by speaking of a connection between the statelessness of European Jews as a consequence of Nazism and the dispossession experienced by people in the global South. Here I will address the possibility of making this connection without effacing the singularity of these experiences (their singularity, but not the identity which they might express: it may indeed get lost), and of rhetorically stepping 'outside' the epistemological frame of the hotel as it has been construed in this book, in order to establish a different kind of relationship between the refugees and their Bolivian hosts.

Following from Rose, it is by turning to the modern history of the nation-state that such a connection can begin to made. Rose speaks of the need 'to write anti-Semitism . . . back into the history of imperialism and into a critique of the modern nation-state' (Rose, 1996: 43–4). For that, she turns to Hannah Arendt's *The origins of totalitarianism*, and to Arendt's insistence that the Holocaust be understood in part as the product of a crisis in the nation-state. The only guarantor of human rights, of 'the rights of man', Arendt argues, is 'the people', that is, 'the nation'. She continues by remarking ironically on the fate of European Jews: 'The full implication of this identification of the rights of man with the rights of people in the European nation-state system came to light only when a growing number of people and peoples suddenly appeared whose elementary rights were as little safeguarded by the ordinary functioning of nation-states in the middle of Europe as they would have been in the heart of Africa' (Arendt, 1973: 291). Foregrounding the political history of the nation-state, Arendt abolishes the distinction between Europe and Bolivia that the Jewish refugees repeatedly invoked.[9]

Arendt's critique of the nation form opens up an avenue for linking anti-Semitism to other ideologies of national exclusion. Spitzer deals extensively with the prevalence of a well-developed, intellectual anti-Semitism in Bolivian politics in the years coterminous with the refugees' stay. But he does not notice that the very same people who were publishing attacks on Jews were also publishing attacks on Indians and cholos and asserting the importance of 'Europeanizing' mestizaje.[10] The monthly journal *Kollasuyo*, published in La Paz and dedicated to advancing the cause of Bolivian nationalism, offers a microcosm of unexpected connections. Its inaugural issue, from January, 1939, contains a virulently anti-Semitic article entitled 'The Jews in Bolivia'. The article warns of the danger of admitting these 'sin patria' [nomads/people without a nation] into a country such as Bolivia, which, because it is 'lacking in character', is easy prey to Jewish cunning. Its lack of character, of course, is due to a racial mix deemed pathological by the author. The article thus argues against Jewish immigration

but in favour of other forms of European immigration in order to achieve Bolivia's 'mejoramiento étnico' [ethnic improvement] (Medeiros, 1939: 66). Roberto Prudencio's article 'International Judaism and its Danger for Bolivia', from the same issue of *Kollasuyo*, recycles the Protocols of the Elders of Zion to argue that Jews pose a specific danger to Bolivia in part because of their non-occidental culture, in part because of Bolivia's endemic weakness, its 'bajeza' [vileness] (Prudencio, 1939: 73).

Both of these articles contained thinly veiled negative references to Bolivia's indigenous and cholo population, especially on the question of national feeling and moral standing. The journal as whole exalted ancient indigenous civilizations, as its title suggests, yet, in a characteristic move, also identified contemporary Indians and their urban kin as core to the nation's problems. Most of the articles published therein reflect the Bolivian 'discourse on the autochthonous', which, as Javier Sanjinés writes, 'generated ambivalent racial sentiments of pride, nostalgia, and fascination with the Indian, while at the same time demonstrating a repugnance for any breaking of racial boundaries that could not be rationalized and strictly controlled by mestizo-criollo consciousness' (Sanjinés, 2004: 35). The two articles I cited above justify their claims by drawing on the same reasoning used by Alcides Arguedas in his 1909 *Pueblo enfermo*, his diagnosis of the racially pathological nation. Disease remains the operative metaphor for these thinkers (references to parasitical invasion, to unhealthy elements, etc.). The parallels are there: Jews lack legal claims to a nation, while Bolivia's indigenous majority lack true feeling for the nation; the former must be kept out; the latter utterly transformed in the image of Euro-America. An analysis of Bolivian anti-Semitism thus leads directly into an analysis of the racist strands of Bolivian nationalism.

A decision to address Bolivia as a site where Jews were imbricated, however loosely, in social relations shaped by a vertically integrated, hierarchical national order (which Spitzer only briefly touches on), rather than as an intercultural, horizontal zone of contact, would reveal some unexpected – and highly unstable – convergences between distinct experiences of alienation and dispossession. It would also shed light on the ways in which the national space remains a space of colonial encounter, by which I mean that one does not need to be literally a foreigner in order to experience or engage in processes of colonial-style othering. Spitzer writes, 'Culturally and, in many respects, socially, Bolivians and refugees remained each other's "other"' (1998: 181). But the mutual 'othering' that took place cannot be understood solely as the product of foreign-ness. On the contrary, the colonial nature of daily life in modern Bolivia is nourished by everyday relations of inequality between Bolivians and accrues in both public and intimate spaces.

The transformation of the 'Bolivia experience' into 'Hotel Bolivia' depends on a particular understanding of what it means 'to be other', and what it means 'to other', that reduces it to a matter of distancing, non-contact and ignorance. Such a vision overlooks the myriad daily practices of 'othering' that are part and parcel of the experience of Bolivian nationality. To expand this understanding of cultural estrangement to include such daily practices would provoke the further unsettling realization that the difference the refugees affirmed between themselves and Bolivians was not necessarily a sign of their continued residence in the 'hotel'. The 'othering' Spitzer describes could easily be offered up as proof for a wholly opposite argument, namely, that Bolivia did indeed become home, though of an uncomfortable sort. The refugees' Austrian-bred racism matched Bolivian-bred racism on many points, judging

from the anecdotal evidence Spitzer presents, and in this sense the Jews were perhaps not as strange to the ways of Bolivian society as one might think.

Spitzer's *Hotel Bolivia* concerns the connections Jewish refugees maintained despite the violent uprooting to which they were submitted and the violence they survived, connections to each other, to their sense of home, to a collective identity. But it denies that they might have participated meaningfully in other kinds of connections while in Bolivia. On the contrary, Spitzer actively argues that Jewish cultural survival depended precisely on these denials. Spitzer gives to the refugees' feelings of cultural superiority a positive spin: this is how they assert their collective survival, how they resist Nazism, how they keep alive something that Hitler tried to extinguish. Their 'nostalgic memory' for Austria and European bourgeois cultural life, Spitzer argues, proclaims 'defiance, resistance, victory'. Through it, they 'reassert their rightful belonging within a body politic and cultural tradition from which the Nazis had severed them. You have failed, they seem to assert. We survive. We have a claim on the best of the past, and we welcome the future!' (1998: 143). He couples their Eurocentrism with resistance, cementing the two so tightly together that he is left with no room to examine critically their Eurocentrism without implying criticism of their resourcefulness, their capacity for hope, their ability to survive. Thus, although he uses irony to distance himself from the fact that Bolivia, for the refugees, was largely a sign for 'not Europe', he too quickly shifts to an appreciation of how that sign in turn signifies something else, namely, Jewish resistance. We are left with an uncomfortably narrow economy of choice. In Spitzer's account, Jewish resistance to Nazism cannot be uncoupled from the refugees' unexamined racist and colonialist attitudes without disappearing. Rendered as necessary and essential, the connection between Jewish Eurocentrism and Jewish survival in the face of mass extermination has here been naturalized.

Spitzer's approach to understanding the present-ness of past experience defines a particular object of study, or rather, as I have tried to suggest above, it 'un-defines' it, for it establishes a shifting and changing relationship between scholar and object. The experience of loss was perhaps the central fact of the refugees' life, but it was also more than just a fact or an event: it generated a particular culture, of which the historian himself is a member. This culture is not, at first, expressive of an identity, but rather of a position and an affinity. If the past is another country, then Spitzer belongs there as much as he does in the country of the present, and he writes his book from both 'locations'. The inhabitants of both these countries, however, appear in this text as if unconnected to the wider sphere of global relations and the history of European and Latin American modernities. They have been lifted out of time and out of a geopolitical reality, and placed metaphorically within a hotel whose boundary serves primarily to keep Europeans in and natives out.

Spitzer's decision to work through both memory and history, creating a text at the interface between them, offers a rich possibility for representing a singular experience of the past that is nevertheless not transparently expressive of an identity. The resulting narrative is indeed tremendously compelling, for it constructs a historical object – an experience – which ceases at times to be an object as it slides into indefinition, into an existence without identity made present in the gaps between image and text, between remembering and forgetting, between individual and collective desires, and between the objective and participant stances of the author. But there are also significant limits to such a project, as I have tried to show here. The very indefinition of this narrated experience,

its lack of objectivity and objectifiability, rests uncomfortably alongside the over-objectifiability of Bolivia itself – not the Bolivia of the 'Bolivia experience' but another Bolivia repeatedly construed by Spitzer as unknown if not unknowable. This may seem a paradox, since it is generally through knowledge that objects of study are constituted. Here, it is rather the unknown that becomes an object, an opaque, immovable mass resting just beyond the page. It constitutes a rather different absence than the one signified by the catastrophic loss – the Holocaust – in whose shadow *Hotel Bolivia* is consciously written. What marks the absence of the *known* or *knowable* Bolivia is rather the certainty with which the author asserts that there is no way for it to have ever become present. Non-existent or never known, it cannot be lost. It is an absence, in other words, that *Hotel Bolivia* never mourns, and so this Bolivia remains excluded from a story constituted through the indeterminacy of intimate investments, in the interstices of objectivity and subjectivity. Why did the Jewish refugees, including himself, remain detached observers of, rather than participants in, Bolivian life? Why, in other words, did the hotel never become a home? Spitzer, unwilling or unable to pose the question directly, is also unwilling or unable to confront directly some of the more troubling implications of his answers. 'What world do you want to, do you think you, belong to?' asks Rose, 'How far does it stretch?' (Rose, 1996: 42). Because Spitzer ignores those aspects of the 'Bolivia experience' that do not fit the name 'Hotel', we are left with a very narrow view of the Jewish experience of belonging in or to Bolivia.

Notes

1 These questions about singularity allude to Gayatri Spivak's understanding of subalternity as 'a position without identity', and to her search for a 'singular woman' (Spivak, 2004: n.p.; Spivak, 1999: 245 n. 74 and 306–11). The 'singular', understood in this vein, characterizes those objects of study – or objects of desire – that exist yet without proclaiming their identity. Spivak's notion of subalternity understands it not so much as an identity but rather as a position in a relationship, specifically the relationship between a scholar and her object of study.

2 Diana Taylor uses the phrase 'acts of transfer' to describe the cultural effects of the performance of memory (Taylor, 2003: 2–3).

3 The figure cited by Klein is of over 65,000 Bolivians killed in the Chaco War, whether in combat, captivity or desertion. He points out that this number is proportionally equivalent to the losses suffered by the European nations in the First World War (Klein, 1982: 193–4).

4 Spitzer analyses the distinction between 'yekkes', Central European Jews, and 'polacos' or 'Ostjuden', Eastern European Jews. In Bolivia, according to Spitzer, the two groups founded different clubs and synagogues; received different treatment from refugee organizations; and appeared not to overlap socially on any occasions. Of the Jews who settled in Bolivia long term the overwhelming majority are 'polacos'.

5 I thank the students in my seminar 'Memoria Andina' for this observation.

6 The idea of two times lived simultaneously comes from Carlos Mamani Condori's analysis of the experience of indigenous peoples in Bolivia. He argues that they live in two temporalities: one is the time of rupture and chaos, which is national time, the time of the present day; and the other is the time of continuity, history and identity, which is the time of the past, figured as night, 'el tiempo chullpa:' 'We oppose the culture of

domination (the culture of catastrophe) with *chullpa* time' (Mamani 1992: 20). Clearly the analogy between the 'Bolivia experience' of Aymaras and the 'Bolivia experience' of the Jewish refugees should not be overstated. Yet the comparison brings out a salient fact, namely, that the experience of national modernity for populations that have been racialized as 'other' to the national race or culture, and consequently disenfranchised, takes this dual shape. Both the experience of the Jewish refugees and the experience of Aymara Indians – granted the vast and incommensurate differences between them – converge on this point to mark the experience of the modern nation as 'heterogeneous' and fractured, as Antonio Cornejo Polar would say (Cornejo Polar, 1978, 2003), rather than unified and consistent.

7 Spitzer's treatment of these points, however, is far more evenhanded and rigorous than Walter Laqueur's, who, in his study of Jewish refugees, asserts that the Bolivian climate was unsuitable for Europeans (Laqueur 2001: 219). So narrow is Laqueur's vision of European history that he forgets it was Europeans who colonized the Americas.

8 Spitzer's communication with over 50 personal sources, the majority in the form of videotaped interviews, constitutes itself a significant addition to the archives of Jewish and Holocaust history.

9 It is also worth further examining the politics that give Arendt's key metaphor its emotional thrust: *Mitteleuropa* as uncivilized as Africa? Shocking! Attempting to render a more thoroughly political account of totalitarianism, Arendt nevertheless relies on crude cultural assumptions. She stabilizes Africa as the sign for lawlessness and scandalous exploitation. The only difference between Africans and Europeans, she implies, is that the latter mistakenly thought themselves to benefit from the rule of law, which turned out to be hollow on the matter of human rights. She presumes that no one in Africa could believe themselves bound – even mistakenly – by such a contract. Europe has now woken up to find itself no better than . . . Africa! As for the absolutely direct connection between the fragility of the rule of law in Africa and the stability of modern European nation-states, not a word is said.

10 I use 'Europeanizing' in Mary Louise Pratt's sense, to distinguish between a properly European vision and Latin American Eurocentrism (Pratt, 1992: 175).

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