

## Introduction: Jewish Studies and Postcolonialism

Willi Goetschel and Ato Quayson

*University of Toronto*

*The introduction to this special issue makes the case for seeing Jewish studies and postcolonialism as part of a historical constellation that has mutual filiations and genealogies in the two fields. It calls for the imperative to see the world's problems historically but also through the mutually illuminating perspectives of the two fields.*

**Keywords:** critical constellation, Jewish studies, postcolonial studies, refugees, slavery, pedagogy, colonialism

If what is past is prologue, as Antonio would have it in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, then history is a manual with which to anticipate and perhaps avoid its more tragic pitfalls. The metaphor of a tempest seems entirely appropriate for describing our contemporary moment. As we write, hundreds of thousands of despairing refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, the Mediterranean, and Africa have arrived at the gates of Europe, straining to get in. The media debates on nomenclature, on whether these are refugees, asylum seekers, or migrants, only obscure the essential question of precarity under which these people have embarked on their quest for safe haven away from the cauldron of war and economic collapse. They also obscure the fact that the arriving refugees to Europe's shores represent just a fraction of the world's displaced persons, whose number stands at some 42,876,582 according to the UNHCR's *Protecting Refugees Report*. Most commentators peg the number in 2015 at closer to 60 million. In the specific case of Syria, 12 million people have been internally and externally displaced since their civil war started in 2011. Of this, a staggering 4 million are refugees in neighboring Turkey and Lebanon, and only 250,000 of these have

Willi Goetschel is a professor of German and philosophy at the University of Toronto. He is the author of *The Discipline of Philosophy and the Invention of Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), and *Constituting Critique: Kant's Writing as Critical Praxis*, translated by Eric Schwab (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994). He is the editor of the collected works by Hermann Levin Goldschmidt in nine volumes (Vienna: Passagen, 1993–2014), the executive editor of *The Germanic Review*, and the general editor of *Bamidbar: Journal for Jewish Thought and Philosophy*.

Ato Quayson is a professor of English and the director of the Centre for Diaspora and transnational studies at the University of Toronto. His most recent publications include: editor of *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, two volumes (2012); editor with Girish Daswani of *Companion to Diaspora and Transnationalism* (2013); and *Oxford Street: City Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism* (2014). He is the editor of the *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*.

applied for asylum in Europe as of August 2015.<sup>1</sup> This represents just 2 percent of the displaced population from Syria. Europeans have responded with a range of conflicting reactions to the overall refugee crisis. As Slavoj Žižek notes, their reactions are strikingly similar to the sequence that people display when they learn of a terminal illness: first denial, then anger, then bargaining, and only lastly acceptance.<sup>2</sup> But in the case of Europe, the acceptance phase has yet to be fully embraced and is currently the subject of intense negotiations. Dublin I, II, and III, as well as the entire Schengen apparatus that allows free movement within Europe for members of the European Union is now under intense pressure. For observers of these tragic events from the conjuncture of Jewish studies and postcolonialism, however, the scenes of today's refugee crisis and the debates around them recall another traumatic moment of recent world history. Scenes like the ones we see in the media today were routinely reported for Jewish refugees fleeing the ravages of Europe between the two world wars and after. The debates about how to deal with them were as confused and intense as what we hear today. As Michael Marrus notes in *The Unwanted*, his wide-ranging book on European refugee crises of the twentieth century:

Best known are the refugee crises wrought by fascism, especially that caused by the Nazi persecution and expulsion of Jews from Central Europe. Here we meet the peculiar characteristic of the refugees in the twentieth century—the fact that they have nowhere to go. Awkward, confused, powerless, and often utterly demoralized—these refugees presented the international community with the by-now stock figure of the unwanted suppliant. Although Europeans spawned a variety of agencies and proposed a series of expedients to deal with the refugees, many continued to wander, homeless and rejected. Many more never even became refugees, for by refusing to receive some who had escaped, Western European countries effectively denied to others the possibility to leave.<sup>3</sup>

While the expulsion and displacement of European Jews in the twentieth century might be taken as providing historical analogues for many experiences of today's refugees, to focus on the twentieth century is necessarily to single out the Shoah as the connecting point for Jewish and postcolonial studies. It also means enshrining a traumatic historical event and its numerous consequences, that is to say, to privilege a particular hindsight vision that is not just problematic because of its often-exclusionary approach but also because it assimilates the past as if it were the prologue to a tragedy on which the curtain has already fallen for good. Just as in so many prologues that preceded the various colonial regimes to which millions of men, women, and children were cast as supernumeraries in countless tragedies, we are reminded today that history is not what is past but what we make of it. If the current situation of “a world on fire,” as Mufti puts it in his interview for this issue, brings

1 An excellent breakdown of the nature of the Syrian refugee crisis is provided by Professor Hans Rosling in a short but well-structured video. See [www.facebook.com/gapminder.org/videos/1014061668628791/?pnref=story](http://www.facebook.com/gapminder.org/videos/1014061668628791/?pnref=story); last accessed on September 10, 2015.

2 Slavoj Žižek, “The Non-Existence of Norway,” *London Review of Books Online*, September 9, 2015; [www.lrb.co.uk/2015/09/09/slavoj-zizek/the-non-existence-of-norway](http://www.lrb.co.uk/2015/09/09/slavoj-zizek/the-non-existence-of-norway); last accessed October 5, 2015.

3 Michael R. Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees from the First World War through the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 10.

home the profound affinity between Jewish and postcolonial conditions in a striking manner, this affinity is an invitation to look beyond the stage-setting and to examine the deeper structural moments that connect Jewish and postcolonial conditions beyond their victimhood. This special issue explores a steadily emerging interest in rethinking the relationship between Jewish and postcolonial studies beyond the timeworn optics that would reduce Jewish and other postcolonial subjects to the mere status of victims. Although the imperative to contemplate history should not be forgotten, this contemplation can remain viable only if reconsidered in the larger context of a more comprehensive imperative to remember “in difference,” in other words, with the commitment to attend to the different singularities each case presents.

Frantz Fanon noted in *A Dying Colonialism* that three-quarters of Algerian Jewry acted as the “eyes and ears of the Revolution,” thus firmly bringing together “diasporic Jewry and the history of anti-Semitism with the colonial struggle and anti-Black Racism” and suggesting that all oppression must generate common cause rather than the atomization of oppressed communities along race and ethnic lines.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in his first plea for the emancipation of the Jews in 1782, Moses Mendelssohn noted the claim for Jewish emancipation and the struggle for human rights as mutually constitutive: “It will be our good fortune if this cause also becomes our own, assuming that we cannot urge the rights of mankind without simultaneously reclaiming our own.”<sup>5</sup>

Jewish studies has received new impulses from postcolonial critique just as postcolonial discourse has found inspiration in the work and thought of Jewish critics and intellectuals. But rather than the assimilation of paradigms from each other’s discourse, we need to gain a better understanding of their interface. The contributions to this issue make a concerted effort at exploring the interplay between the two fields by way of making literary, cultural, and historical interaction legible as illuminating instantiations of an emerging constellation. If the case studies this issue brings together are just the beginning of addressing a desideratum that we deem no less necessary for Jewish studies as it is for the continuing dynamic evolution of the field of postcolonial studies, the agenda that unites both fields is a fuller and more critical grasp of their mutual relevance for each other. Rather than aligning Jewish studies and postcolonial studies via some streamlined and homogeneous form of alterity, we see the critical engagement of the two fields with each other as a timely opportunity for reimagining their critical reciprocity. We can no longer afford to theorize modernity, the politics of religion and secularization and their conflation under the flag of the “return of religion,” and the magic spell of postmodernist self-fashioning in a world saturated by social media without paying critical attention to the ways in which Jewish and postcolonial experience has been assimilated to various discourses.

Edward Said, one of the founding spirits of postcolonial analysis, famously made Palestine a central touchstone of postcolonial critique. But, as Michael Rothberg reminds us in *Multidirectional Memory*, memory need not be competitive in asking

4 Bryan Cheyette, “Frantz Fanon and the Black-Jewish Imaginary,” *Frantz Fanon’s Black Skin White Masks: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Max Silverman (Manchester University Press 2005), 74.

5 Moses Mendelssohn, preface to *Manasseh Ben Israel’s Vindication of the Jews*, in *Writings on Judaism, Christianity, and the Bible*, ed. Michah Gottlieb, trans. Curtis Bowman, Elias Sacks, and Allan Arkush (Waltham, MA.: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 39–52, esp. 40.

who has suffered most.<sup>6</sup> Rather, memory is multidirectional. Opening up memory in this way allows us to think of the Shoah and the Nakba side by side in order to allow them to illuminate each other. And although Edward Said drew great inspiration from Erich Auerbach, Hannah Arendt, and Theodor W. Adorno, David and Jonathan Boyarin invoke Paul Gilroy in their theorizing of the modern Jewish diaspora.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, it is not unusual for Jewish philosophers and authors such as Adorno, Jacques Derrida, and Hélène Cixous to be discussed in postcolonial studies, typically not as Jews but as thinkers and philosophers that seem to lack any particular affiliation. This is despite the fact that for thinkers like Derrida and Cixous their work is profoundly informed by joint Jewish and postcolonial experiences, whereas critical theory's links to Jewish thought is difficult to ignore.<sup>8</sup>

And yet the history of modern colonialism and the Jewish experience in Europe are deeply intertwined. The year 1492, in which Christopher Columbus claimed to have discovered America, has come to be widely taken in postcolonial studies as the moment of origin of much contestation and colonial discourse analysis. But this historical event was accompanied in the same year by the expulsion of Jews from Spain and in the wake of this decision from Portugal as well. The wealth and properties seized from those that resisted conversion were used to finance the subsequent exploration and colonization of the New World. But colonization is not something that happens only away from home. Colonies are not always to be found outside the borders of a state. Often internal colonization of lands and populations represents the corollary to the operation of empire. Ideologically, administratively, and politically linked, it is only when we attend to both sides of the manifestation of empire abroad as well as at home that we reach a fuller grasp of the intertwined modes of colonialism. As Ato Quayson notes in his comparative paper for this issue, the distinction between extraverted and intraverted colonialism highlights the deep structural similarities between colonial rule in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and other parts of the world and the internal marginalization of Jews in eastern Europe during the long nineteenth century. A comparative perspective on extraverted and intraverted colonialisms also enables a view that reaches beyond the theater of nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of rule and makes newly legible constellations that—outside of a comparative approach—have remained obscured. Thus, it is important to note that the first programmatic call for Jewish emancipation made by Moses Mendelssohn emphasized the link between the particular interests of Jews and the universal interests of humanity. The realization of Jewish emancipation had to be part of the universal liberation from oppression and disenfranchisement, and as the quote cited previously illustrates, was addressed to the plight of Jews in Europe as “indigenous colonists”

6 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).

7 Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

8 For a good recent discussion of the joint Jewish and postcolonial sources of Derrida and Cixous work, see Birgit Kaiser “Algerian Disorders: On Deconstructive Postcolonialism in Cixous and Derrida,” *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 2.2 (2014): 191–211. For recent work concerning the Frankfurt School’s Critical Theory relation to Jewish thought see the two theme issues of *Bamidbar: Journal for Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (2013) and 2 (2014).

(i.e., indigenously colonized).<sup>9</sup> Worse than just being second-class citizens, being considered as an internal colony Jews were subject to a legal regime that Mendelssohn suggested would upon closer examination fundamentally jar with the legal discourses of the colonizing “mother nation” itself. For Mendelssohn, the notion of indigenous colonists critically exposes the problematic foundation of the rule of law based on the model of colonialism, an issue that required correction. This was not just in terms of the emancipation of Jews and other oppressed minorities but because the existence of any sort of colony that would be run on principles incompatible with those applied to the elites of the mother nation could only undermine the very foundation of that mother nation in the first place.<sup>10</sup> Although the notion of indigenous colonists sheds critical light on the variegated projects of colonialism, the term at the same time undermines any sort of claims to priority of rule or ownership in the indigenous colony as well as within the mother nation.

Casting Jews as an internal colony was a way the discourse of the emergent nation-state approached what would in the nineteenth century be called the Jewish Question, the question of what to do with the Jews in the face of the homogenizing pressures of modern nation-state formation. While in Europe Jews occupied a relatively stable outsider position up to the end of the Middle Ages, their status changed with the emergence of the modern nation-state. Understood in diasporic, religious, national, racial, or ethnic terms, the Jewish Question changed with the context in which it was posed. For Edmund Burke the Jews were a metonymic placeholder for the Jacobins, and for Thomas Carlyle Jews and Africans were equally disqualified from holding any sort of public office, while Macaulay argues that Jews should be allowed to be citizens because Catholics have shown they can be Englishmen and Protestants (Huguenots) can be Frenchmen. For him Jews can be “converted” into civilized people by tolerance. Neither Carlyle nor Macaulay admitted a distinction between differences based on religion and those based on race. On the other hand, political critics such as William Godwin correlated Irish with Jewish dispossession while Walter Scott compared the Jewish diaspora with the Scots’ lack of regional autonomy. For his part Lord Byron saw both Jews and Arab Muslims as romantic, nomadic, Oriental people. And in *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot “copied the ending of her friend Harriet Beecher Stowe’s sentimental blockbuster, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which she much admired.”<sup>11</sup>

A similar phenomenon to what Galchinsky notes as the “inalienability of discourses on Africans, Indians, and Arab Muslim from the Anglo-Jewish Question”<sup>12</sup> can be observed with regard to the German-Jewish Question that undergoes a landmark shift in the 1780s when the discourse changes from the theologically infused distinction between Christian and Jewish to the notorious distinction between

9 Moses Mendelssohn, *ibid.*

10 See Willi Goetschel, “State, Sovereignty, and the Outside Within: Mendelssohn’s View from the ‘Jewish Colony,’” *The Discipline of Philosophy and the Invention of Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 178–88.

11 Michael Galchinsky, “Africans, Indians, Arabs, and Scots: Jewish and Other Question in the Age of Empire,” *Jewish Culture and History* 6.1 (2009): 57. Our insights here draw predominantly on Michael Galchinsky’s illuminating discussion of the intersectional character of the Jewish Question in the nineteenth century.

12 *Ibid.* 47.

Germans and Jews that lastingly rebrands Jews who had for more than a millennium settled in German lands as foreigners. From seminal figures of eighteenth-century German Orientalism as diverse as Johann David Michaelis, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Bruno Bauer, Karl Marx, Richard Wagner, and Otto Weininger, the Jewish Question shifted from a theological to a social and political problem, and then eventually to a mix of sociopolitical and cultural concerns. The Jewish Question, in other words, served the changing needs of the time as a form of a shadow discourse to substitute for confronting the challenges that the various national agendas of the emerging nations of Europe were confronted with.<sup>13</sup> While upon closer examination the Jewish Question thus turns out to be the question that drives Europe's quest for the formation of its various national identities, this search for national selfhood was defined by an exclusionary logic that relegated the challenge that Jewish difference posed for the project of European nation building to the margins. In terms of the geopolitical imaginary, it exported the question to a Middle East invented as a central function of European Orientalism.

The ironies of the construction of race as the bearer of difference are also to be seen from the internal differentiations among Jews themselves. The invention of the notion of the Mizrahi (or Arab Jews) is a case in point. Subsumed under a single category, the entire spread of Jewish identities from Africa's far northwest with its Moroccan Jews to the Middle Eastern Jews of Iraq and Iran along with the Jews of the Levant including Palestine illustrates the problematic implications of the invention of Arab Jews versus European Jews. The colonial nomenclature is evidenced in the fact that a geographic notion (Mizrahi, the Hebrew word for Eastern lands) is converted into what ultimately boils down to a distinction between the global north and the global south. Such quasi-racial distinctions highlight the problem of Israel's own internally colonized Jews that can only complicate the predicament of the Palestinians even more.

Historically then the Jewish experience in modernity can be said to have provided fertile templates for understanding questions as varied as minoritarianism, diaspora, nostalgia, racialization, ethnicity, cultural difference, linguistic creolization, hybridity, and colonialism, all of which are central concerns in postcolonial studies. As Aamir Mufti notes in his interview with Ato Quayson for this issue, even the terms by which we might understand the discourse of Muslim minority status in India after Partition are best illuminated when set alongside the discourse on the minority status of Europe's Jews during the Enlightenment. He restates in his interview some of the key insights of his book *Enlightenment in the Colony*, but expands them here for application to different postcolonial predicaments.<sup>14</sup>

To move from interpreting Jews as providing analogues to concepts in postcolonial studies to viewing them as actors in real history is also to shift into an identification of the ironies and contradictions of which they were both symptom and articulation. Natalie Zemon Davis's paper for this issue, which weaves a rich and variegated background to the Jewish lifeworld in the era of colonization and slavery, poignantly captures this as well. We find in her nuanced description of Jewish slave

13 For the term *shadow discourse* see David Suchoff, *Kafka's Jewish Languages: The Hidden Openness of Tradition* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 17.

14 Aamir Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

ownership in the seventeenth century a number of vectors that become relevant for discussing the contradictions of Jewish historicity in a postcolonial vein. Davis's paper depicts seventeenth-century Amsterdam as a world of dense interpersonal connections but not necessarily of interracial accommodations. Thus, on the one hand, David Nassy interacts, collaborates, or otherwise communicates with a variety of personages both Jewish and non-Jewish such as Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, Manasseh ben Israel, Oliver Cromwell, Joan Bleau. At times he launches strong arguments for the necessity of guaranteeing Jewish freedoms, while simultaneously being actively involved in the buying and selling of slaves and the establishment of the colony of Suriname, which came to be known in the period as Jerusalem in the savannah.

Davis also sets the cosmopolitan character of seventeenth-century Amsterdam against a world in which populations are in transition and flux. Painted in the picture for us are much small-scale and large-scale movement. Population movement is as much due to the forced movement of African slaves as it is due to the clashes of European powers in what we must now understand as the collocation of trade and geopolitical considerations. Place names of great significance as the loci of such clashes include Pernambuco, Cayenne, and of course Suriname itself, where European powers clashed on the ownership and control of colonies and trade routes. The Dutch wrestle Pernambuco from the Portuguese and the Portuguese retake it from them; the Dutch oust the English from Suriname; and the French arrive in Cayenne to discomfit the English and force their departure. Each clash between European powers triggered further displacements for the Jewish communities as well as for other European colonialists in the same places. To be sure, the European population movements, both Jewish and otherwise that took place in the period are only a small fraction of the large-scale movement to the New World that steadily took place from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries.<sup>15</sup>

Slavery is the main source of intractable contradictions for the Jewish lifeworld in the period. In their celebration of Passover, slave-owning Jews continued to contemplate the captivity of their ancient progenitors, the struggle for freedom, and the necessity to always affirm and defend their own freedoms. It is partly a quest for the freedom to exercise their religion that motivated the Jews to colonize Suriname. And yet, as Davis shows us in the conclusion to her paper, the emblem of Jewish displacement that is at the core of the Passover prayer did not prevent Jews from robustly defending their right to own slaves. And from the other side, slaves were inducted into aspects of Jewish life such as circumcision, which many of them already practiced back in Angola and the Guinea Coast, and also the adoption of the Sabbath as their day of rest day as opposed the Christian Sunday of other slave plantations. If the Sabbath ensured that slaves on Jewish plantations enjoyed an extra rest day more than their counterparts on Christian plantations, this rest was only relative. For on such days their labor was required to facilitate the Sabbath observances of their slave masters.. And the desire for freedom was by no means the exclusive monopoly of Jews;

15 For more on world migrations and the impact these have had on postcolonial studies, see Ato Quayson, "Introduction: Postcolonial Studies in a Changing Historical Frame," in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*, ed. Ato Quayson, Vol. 1. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3–29, and "Africa and its Diverse Diasporas," *The Oxford Handbook to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Graham Huggan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 628–47.

their slaves often hungered for it, and in significant instances broke free to form their own rebel communities. What this tells us is that in the seventeenth century freedom (for the European or the Jew) could not be countenanced without slavery.

As Willi Goetschel demonstrates in his discussion of Spinoza's dream of a black Brazilian, the rich historical tapestry of the seventeenth century must also be understood as central to the inception of the modern philosophical subject. Although the dream has been discussed with regard to its significance for understanding the role of the imagination in Spinoza as well as the issues of freedom, slavery, and race, Goetschel addresses the specifically postcolonial juncture that is marked in Spinoza's dream and the letter in which he writes about it. As he shows, Spinoza's dream figures the philosopher's awakening to the precarious status of the modern subject as the recognition of the constitutive significance of what we can now see as the peculiarly postcolonial social constellation behind the formation of modern consciousness.

In the meantime, there was a thoroughly hybridized Caribbean-Jewish culture to emerge, reflected in modern literary representations of Jewish figures in writers as varied as Caryl Philips, Jamaica Kincaid, Maryse Conde, and David Dabydeen, the last in his intertextual engagement with his eye-opening re-examination of Hogarth's plates being the particular subject of Sarah Casteel's essay for this issue. Casteel makes eighteenth-century British representations of blacks and Jews newly legible from a productive postcolonial point of view. As she shows more broadly in her book *Calypso Jews*, the long presence of Jewish communities in the Caribbean also implies a different kind of historical entanglement, one that has to be taken alongside the Holocaust as defining the complexity of Jewish historicity for the region.<sup>16</sup>

Each of the papers in this special issue illuminates the intersections between Jewish studies and postcolonialism in new and enlivening ways. We have already noted the contributions of Natalie Zemon Davis, Willi Goetschel, and Sarah Casteel. Ato Quayson lays out the ground for a comparative postcolonialism of world literature by examining the work of Sholem Aleichem, the seminal Yiddish writer of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, alongside that of Chinua Achebe, the equally renowned father of modern African literature. Despite all their obvious differences, the two authors' fundamental commitment to modes of storytelling allows us to draw parallels and counterpoints between them. For in both works storytelling is shaped by the essential polysemy of orality (such as the collocation of proverbs, gnomic statements, and anecdotes as crucial aspects of the stories being told) as well as an orientation toward ritual. Marc Caplan, from whom Quayson draws broad inspiration for his own contribution, also turns to questions of comparison in world literature. Caplan explores parallels and contrasts between Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* and Moyshe Kulbak's *Montog*, particularly on the question of their choice of nothingness as a form of political action. The question is of clear political significance, which is well demonstrated in the discussion Caplan provides of the Yiddish and Irish writers, but it is the implications for a wider understanding of literary comparativism that Quayson and Caplan's papers invite us to turn. What are the implications of comparing minor literatures in a postcolonial vein, especially, as in the case of

16 Sarah Philips Casteel, *Calypso Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).



Beckett and Kulbak, or Sholem Aleichem and Chinua Achebe, the two literary traditions that have evolved with little reference to each other, and even in complete ignorance of the other's existence? The answers to these questions also require a definition of comparative postcolonialisms for understanding world literary history from a decentred and minoritarian perspective.

Nils Roemer for his part delves into diaspora theory in a new and significant way. The connection between flânerie and exile in the writings of Weimer visitors to Paris highlights a dimension of the flâneur rarely raised in discussions of Benjamin's usage of the term. More importantly, these Jewish writers and thinkers adopted Paris as a counterpoint to German modernity. Roemer shows the imaginative uncoupling in the work of these Weimer visitors of cultural identity from the nation-space, something that came to be enacted in a more tragic register on behalf of Jews after 1933. Anna Shternshis's *explication de texte* of Sholem Aleichem's *Adventures of Menakhem Mendl* also picks up on the theme of the delinking of cultural identity from nation-space, but from a specifically pedagogical disposition. The largely negative reactions that Jewish-heritage students in her Jewish studies classes have to Sholem Aleichem's iconic illustration of the *luftmensch* ("man of air") contrasts sharply with those of students in her diaspora and transnational studies classes. The point of this contrast is that Menakhem Mendl's relevance for Jews in the diaspora becomes residualized as they gain a greater sense of "territorial" integrity. Contrastively, for the students in her diaspora classes, the connection between identity and personal integrity (as in wholeness, not ethical uprightness) is still not quite secure. Thus, these students experience their identities as a form of territorial insecurity, something that makes Menakhem Mendl extremely relevant to them. Ironically, then, it appears that the less relevant to Jewish concerns this character has become, the more universal his significance for a reading that is informed by a more universal diasporic interest. On the other hand, it is precisely the specificity of the Jewish experience of modernity as Roemer shows us that solicits this more-universal interest. The universalism of Aleichem's writing is rendered newly legible from a conjoined postcolonial and diasporic Jewish perspective.

In conclusion, we would like to note with Chinua Achebe that if the world is like a mask dancing, you cannot see it by standing in one place. There are fertile implications in this view for a collaborative perspective. Jewish studies needs postcolonial studies in order to develop its critical potential, and vice versa. There is a historical nexus between racism and antisemitism, between colonialism and European nationalism, and between Jewish scriptural slavery and New World slavery (Africans in the New World sang of Exodus and Babylon). These are not mere historical facts that require our full critical attention; they also represent a constellation the grasp of whose genealogical filiations is imperative for fully understanding the critical role that Jewish studies and postcolonial studies continue to play in the world today. Part of the critical agenda of this theme issue is the exposure, critical examination, and renegotiation of the expectations and paradigms that define each field. As will hopefully be attested to in these pages, one's particular project emerges in its critical specificity and clarity only by its juxtaposition to, and reflection in, another's project. But beyond a sharpening of critical focus, we have also taken this collaboration as an invitation to dream together, to be inspired by one another, as well as to share our own inspiration. With the publication of this issue, we extend this invitation more broadly.