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# From the Editors

## Dear Colleagues,

“The Jewish people” is a rousing term evoking a timeless collective with common purpose. It appears often in declarations about history and politics, commanding authority with the definite article and coherent subject. But who are these people? Who identifies with them and under what criteria? Who speaks for the Jewish people? The historical answer, and perhaps the contemporary one, is that self-appointed elites speak on behalf of particular Jewish communities and sometimes in the name of transhistorical and geographically diffuse Jewish people. Beyond the official register what have the people themselves had to say? What acts have they engaged in that constituted the Jewish people? What might the Jewish people be up to now?

Maybe the idea of a Jewish people—or any people, for that matter—is illusory, with each instance of conjuring the unified collective motivated by the need to clarify who is in and who outside the group. The biblical people of Israel may have emerged from the various local groups who joined a military alliance or agreed with a program of state centralization. The Jewish people of the rabbinic era may have gained recognition through the normative practices defined by the rabbis. In medieval and early modern times, the Jewish people may have traveled on shared circuits or marked the cycle of the year in similar ways. The Jewish people of modernity may have gained definition through the exclusions and inclusions afforded them by different states. The notion of a unified people may have seemed most palpable with the founding of a Jewish state and may now be beleaguered by disputes about the policies of the state.

Yet there is no denying that individuals have seen themselves and their practices as part of a longstanding Jewish people. An affective, emotional component fosters a sense of belonging and self-understanding. Each individual utterance concerning the people contributes a layer of meaning to the term and brings the speaker into a wider dialogue. For all that scholars might say about the construction of ethnicity and religion, something particularly powerful and compelling occurs during identification with a people. This issue considers the events that created the Jewish people and the experience of belonging. It captures moments of ordinary and extraordinary actions that have constituted the people. The articles focus on a nonelite, grassroots perspective on Jewish texts and history. Rather than telling a top-down story of events and Jewish cultural production, “The People’s Issue” portrays a bottom-up version, ranging across popular culture, folklore, the local, the public sphere, and the masses. In some cases, this may involve a counterreading of hegemonic texts; in others, a shift of focus from the usual narrators and subjects. In an eclectic manner, “The People’s Issue” presents a kind of people’s history of Jews and Judaism.

**Matti Bunzl**

*University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

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*University of Illinois at Chicago*



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# From the President

## Dear Colleagues,

The 350th anniversary of the British capture of New Amsterdam (promptly renamed New York), passed without official commemoration, *The New York Times* reported on August 25, 2014. It cited “ambivalence toward the British and a dispassion for the past” as the chief reasons behind the “nearly unanimous indifference” toward the anniversary. Professor Mike Wallace of City University, who wrote a history of early New York, explained that lowering a Dutch flag and raising a British one “doesn’t set the pulse-a-pounding.”

Having myself been involved in commemorating quite a number of historical anniversaries—the one hundredth anniversary of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, the 350th anniversary of American Jewish life, and most recently the 150th anniversary of Ulysses S. Grant’s Civil War order expelling Jews from his war zone—I question whether the metric of “set the pulse-a-pounding” is the right one to employ. Perhaps the popularity of military anniversaries (the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812, the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, the 100th anniversary of World War I, etc.) may be attributed to racing pulses, but the 850th anniversary of the birth of Moses Maimonides (commemorated around the world in 1985), the 900th anniversary of Rashi’s death (in 2005), or this year’s twentieth *yahrzeit* of the Lubavitcher Rebbe?

All of the commemorations in which I have been involved have entailed instead well-planned efforts to *arouse* interest in events that otherwise might not have gained any notice at all. Anniversary celebrations—historical or personal—do not happen by themselves. That’s why we have already begun thinking about how to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Association for Jewish Studies, to be commemorated in 2018–19—stay tuned! My guess is that what really distinguished the celebration of the 350th anniversary of American Jewish life from the 350th anniversary of the British capture of New Amsterdam is that far-sighted communal leaders made a conscious effort to promote educational, scholarly, and cultural events relating to the anniversary of the Jews’ arrival, while nobody, it seems, sought similarly to exploit the anniversary of the arrival of the British.

Why might this be significant to those reading this issue devoted to grass-roots perspectives on Jewish texts and history? It seems to me that anniversaries—maybe even the anniversary of AJS—can serve as an effective tool for exciting grassroots interest in our work and for forging ties between the larger public and the community of scholars. Each of the anniversary commemorations in which I have been involved engaged both scholars and lay representatives, and in all cases the lay nonprofessionals expressed pleasure at the opportunity to engage with scholarly materials (“it’s as if we were back at university,”

one happily exclaimed.) Scholars also have much to learn from lay enthusiasts. In my forthcoming book, *Abraham Lincoln and the Jews: A History*, which I wrote with a celebrated collector of Lincoln materials to mark the 150th anniversary of Lincoln’s assassination, I certainly learned as much from my collaborator as he did from me.

Admittedly, anniversaries are somewhat arbitrary and, as Maoz Azaryahu has shown in his illuminating study of successive celebrations of Tel Aviv’s birthday, they almost inevitably evince “specific political priorities, ideological agendas, economic interests, and cultural conventions.” But, remembering that no history is truly dispassionate, we might also note that anniversaries promote historical consciousness, stimulate interest and inquiry, and, in the best of cases, inspire creativity, renewal, and reassessment. That was certainly true of the recent commemoration of Tel Aviv’s centennial, and one can think of many similar examples as well.

Scholars of music have long appreciated the power of the anniversary. “The Beethoven anniversaries, involving among others, Liszt and Schumann, were important moments in nineteenth-century music history,” Leon Botstein reports. “The 1909 Haydn centennial was a turning point in the evolution of Haydn scholarship. . . . The list of such important anniversaries is a map of the evolution of our historical consciousness.” As early as 1928, the *Musical Times* praised anniversary celebrations for their contribution to “the initiation and development of the historical sense, the stimulation of music-making, and the enlargement of repertoires.” More recently, in 1997, scholars of music simultaneously commemorated the bicentennial of Schubert’s birth, the 150th anniversary of Felix Mendelssohn’s death, and a hundred years since the passing of Brahms.

Botstein, to be sure, argued back in 1997, that “our scholarly and concert agendas need to find some other impetus than anniversaries.” In Jewish Studies too (and especially at AJS), an exclusive focus on anniversaries would unquestionably impoverish scholarship. But if our goal is to embrace “the people” in the work that we do, then paying close attention to anniversaries as opportunities for forging wider communal ties and engaging the larger public in our work surely makes sense. Experience suggests that when scholars fail to mark the anniversaries of milestones from our past—like the 1664 capture of New Amsterdam—the significance of those milestones can easily be forgotten.

**Jonathan D. Sarna**  
*Brandeis University*

# From the Executive Director

*Dear Colleagues,*

As any historian planning a final exam will tell you, “turning points” in history are often overstated. Many of the trends that emerge after “watershed” moments had their seeds earlier on. This is true for several developments in the field of Jewish Studies since the financial crisis of 2008. The global recession unleashed six years ago sped up and heightened trends in academic Jewish Studies that had been brewing since the early 2000s. Certainly, 2008 left its particular imprint on the Jewish world, which the field of Jewish Studies is closely connected to as a source of major funding. But many of the challenges our field has faced over the past six years would have likely emerged had the financial markets not melted down.

It’s not to say that all is grim. If AJS is one mirror of the field, there are signs of vibrancy, commitment, and productivity. AJS had a record number of members (more than 2000) and a record number of conference participants (1200) this past year; our website brims with information about the more than 230 colleges and universities in North America with majors and minors in the field, and the more than 200 endowed Jewish Studies chairs. Presses continue to publish a breadth of work in the field, despite their own budgetary challenges, and Jewish Studies scholars are redefining the nature of the scholarly monograph with new digital platforms for their work. Jewish Studies has been truly institutionalized (in the best sense of the word) and there is a feeling of at-homeness and confidence among its scholars within the North American university.

And yet, there is an undertone of concern since 2008 about the future of the field. You hear this from tenured professors, those in tenure-track lines, and most frequently, from those in adjunct positions, those just finishing their PhDs, and those still in graduate school. They are aware of change afoot in higher education and academe, especially regarding how students, parents, administrators, boards of overseers, and state legislatures view the college and the classroom experience, and new metrics (largely driven by economic calculations) used to evaluate programs of study. From speaking with AJS members—professors, adjuncts, independent scholars, and students—and from reading widely the publications, blogs, websites, and reports of the higher education press, I see four themes that have come to the forefront of the Jewish Studies collective psyche since 2008.

## **(1): Concern about Course Enrollments**

This is a concern not particular to Jewish Studies, but rather across the humanities and some of the social sciences. Several professors describe feeling the need to reinvent their areas of expertise and course offerings in order to attract more students. Some state that courses that in the past had been “gateways” to Jewish Studies (i.e., on the Holocaust), no longer interest students in great numbers. Others say that Jewish students, who once took Jewish Studies courses as a way to explore their identity, were either no longer as interested in using the classroom as a way to explore their Jewish identity, or were simply just not interested in exploring their identity.

While there are certainly factors specific to Jewish Studies, most would agree that these enrollment trends are part of a broader attack on the humanities and essentially any subject matter non-STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) in higher education today. You see the exact same phenomenon in English,

History, Anthropology, Sociology, and language programs across North America, with some institutions closing down programs they regard as nonessential (i.e. not enough majors or the economic value of a major is unclear). This phenomenon is not true for all our members—because of cross-listing policies and how credits can be applied, some professors have seen their enrollments grow—but that tends to be the exception rather than the rule.

## **(2): Shifting Landscape of Funding Sources**

In North America, funding for Jewish Studies has come from both college/university budgets and private funding, largely from the Jewish community; likewise, support for individual scholars and their research has come from national funding entities (i.e. the National Endowment for the Humanities, the ACLS), as well as from private funding sources. But donors of the new generation in the United States, many associated with Jewish family foundations that helped to expand the field of Jewish Studies so significantly in the 1980s, 90s and early 2000s, are shifting their support to other areas. Some are now drawn to the growing field of Israel Studies. Other foundations are shifting control to a younger generation, whose interests expand beyond things Jewish and are not compelled to support Jewish Studies in the way their parents did.

Consequently, Jewish Studies faculty express concern that if someone in their department or program retires, the line might not be replaced, or if it is replaced, it might go to someone doing Israel Studies, for which there appears to be more donor interest, rather than rabbinics, medieval Judaism, or Yiddish literature. There are a few major Jewish foundations in the United States still very much on the Jewish Studies scene, but a debate persists among some Jewish Studies scholars about the ideological orientation of these foundations and their impact on the field. This debate, it’s important to note, is not unique to Jewish Studies, but affects virtually every field that accepts funding from outside sources (think for example of the controversies over Confucius Institutes, funded by the Chinese government and overseen by the government agency Hanban). In short, whereas a decade or two ago, the funding opportunities for Jewish Studies seemed ample, the question looms now of who will sustain current programs and support the next generation of scholars.

## **(3): The State of the Academic Job Market**

According to a report in *Inside Higher Education* on the annual survey of new doctorates conducted by the National Science Foundation, 58.3% of the 5503 students graduating with PhDs in the humanities in 2012 had jobs or postdocs upon graduation, with 83% of the jobs in academe; that’s in contrast to 69.9% of those graduating with PhDs in the social sciences who had jobs upon graduation.[1] In terms of Jewish Studies, according to a study of Jewish Studies jobs data since 2010 conducted by Ethan Zadoff, there has been relative stability in the number of postings over the past few years. Still, graduate students I speak to are understandably concerned, and there is a palpable increase in the number openly exploring careers outside of academe, especially if they want to remain in a particular city. Some are reluctant to piece together adjunct positions for too many years, given the difficult economics of adjunct life. As one recent PhD just told me, it is not so much the hours

in the classroom, but the boundless hours of preparation and grading that take place outside of classroom time. Combine that with the commuting involved in teaching on two different campuses, and one can easily earn less than \$20,000 year doing full-time work, after seven or eight years of intensive professional training, and also have no time to work on the publications that could help secure a tenured line. AJS, among other learned societies, now sees it as our duty to help graduate students explore a range of careers, including work in the non-profit, foundation, publishing, and K-12 teaching worlds.

#### **(4): Relevance/Broader Impact of the Field**

Jewish Studies scholars are being asked more and more to demonstrate the impact of their work beyond the university's walls; those applying for grants are often expected to include in their proposals an explanation of how their findings will be made accessible to the general public, through blogs, interviews, public lectures and the like. This is not necessarily a bad thing; most scholars want people to read their work and for their work to have a positive impact on people's lives both inside and outside the classroom. Indeed, in December 2014, AJS revised its mission statement to include reference to our role in connecting scholars with the general public: "AJS's mission is to advance research and teaching in Jewish Studies at colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher learning, and to foster greater understanding of Jewish Studies scholarship among the wider public."

The tensions surrounding the question of "impact" and "relevance" post-2008, though, is that scholars in the humanities are often asked to quantify the impact of their research or of majoring in their field through metrics that are not necessarily suitable for their field (i.e. salary of job after graduation or number of students enrolled in a particular course).

Most scholars want their work to have broader reach and their students to go out into the world well prepared; they just want that reach and preparation to be measured and judged through appropriate means.

#### **What next?**

What's clear is the need for more data to better understand the state of Jewish Studies in greater depth. AJS has just completed its first major survey of the field since 2008 to shed light on what

members' professional lives are like. AJS President Jonathan Sarna will be sharing highlights of the survey in his plenary address at the AJS Conference, and a more detailed report will be shared on the AJS website. In 2015, we hope to follow up this member survey with a census of institutions in order to better understand enrollment, hiring, and graduation trends, as well as the structure and financing of Jewish Studies programs.

What is also required is a sense of perspective. In 1979, writing in the *AJS Newsletter*, AJS President Michael A. Meyer noted with concern:

When the AJS was founded a decade ago, its priorities clearly lay in establishing the integrity of Jewish Studies as a legitimate area of academic endeavor. . . . The Association sought to provide order and professionalization. To a large extent, it achieved these objectives. Today a new situation, one in which job opportunities have been drastically reduced, has called for a new set of priorities: we must seek to deal in innovative ways with the seemingly intractable problem of job scarcity.

He then went on to describe a special panel to take place at the AJS Conference that would help Jewish Studies PhDs explore jobs outside of academia.

This reminded me how very cyclical many of these trends are, and how we might be discussing four years from now the new wealth of opportunities in the field. It doesn't mean we should sit back and passively ride out this wave, but rather work tirelessly to protect the Jewish Studies programs and positions that took so many decades to build and, we hope, will continue to be in great demand for decades to come.

#### **Rona Sheramy**

*Association for Jewish Studies*

[1] <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2013/12/09/data-show-modest-gain-number-new-phds-jobs-upon-graduationre#sthash.cQFH9bi5.dpbs>

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# The People's Issue

## Foregrounding Ordinary Israelite Women

Carol Meyers

**N**egative stereotypes about ordinary ancient Israelite women abound in the popular imagination, as I learned repeatedly when asking my undergraduates about their images of women in the biblical period. They uttered words like “subservient,” “devalued,” “inferior,” and even “oppressed.” Scholars, especially those with literary approaches, express similar views, labeling ancient Israel “patriarchal” and assuming general male dominance. Even Tikva Frymer-Kensky *z”l*, well known for heralding biblical women and defending the Bible against charges of misogyny, asserted that women were dominated by their husbands. Scholars and students are alike in their perceptions that Israelite men always had power over women. They are also alike in basing their assumptions on specific biblical texts as well as overall biblical androcentrism.

But can one really make assumptions on the basis of a single kind of evidence from the biblical world? Arguably not, for biblical texts have intrinsic biases that preclude their value as a source of reliable information about the lives of ordinary women. For one thing, most biblical texts have a national purview and are not generally concerned with the daily lives of average folk; ordinary women are often background figures if they appear at all. Moreover, the biblical authors and their intended audience were virtually all male, making the Bible an unlikely source of female perspectives. In addition, the authors and their ancient audiences were largely elite men; thus biblical regulations and narratives, with their frequent attention to servants and slaves, hardly reflect the experiences of the peasant farmers of both genders who comprised the majority of the population. Finally, most authors were located in Jerusalem, a capital city that was the setting for lifeways differing in important respects from daily life in the agricultural settlements—sizeable walled towns as well as villages and farmsteads—in which most people lived. Biblical sources thus have intrinsic biases of subject matter, authorship, social class, and location.

Because of these biases, biblical texts have limited value for reconstructing the lives of ordinary women; at the very least, they must be used with considerable circumspection. Problems in relying on a single authoritative text have emerged in other fields in which information from such texts is compared to evidence from other sources. In disciplines as divergent as Assyriology, Classics, the study of Coptic Christianity, the social history of sixteenth-century Iberia, and ethnography, scholars have noted a discrepancy between information in authoritative written sources and information gleaned from other materials—including but not limited to iconography, archaeological data, epigraphic remains, direct observation (in the case of ethnography), archives, commercial records, and other nonprescriptive documents. The daily lives of ordinary women, it turns out, were rather different from the impression given by official written sources. In all these disciplines, it has become clear that attempting to draw conclusions about gendered behavior and family relationships on the basis of a limited set of texts produces flawed results.

Consideration of ancient Israelite women reveals a similar disjunction between biblical images and the social reality reconstructed using nonbiblical materials. Those materials are largely archaeological—not simply the products of field work, but also the interpretation of the published results. That is, archaeological excavations yield information about the structures, artifacts, and installations constituting the physical space in which Israelite agrarians, both male and female, lived and worked. But a household’s physical features are meaningless without interpretation. The archaeological data are mute: they don’t tell us who used various artifacts, for example, nor do they reveal the social and economic dynamics encoded in their use. Only by consulting ethnographic data from similar traditional societies can inferences be made about a woman’s activities and their social context and

meaning. This combination of archaeological evidence and ethnographic analogy is a comparativist approach that goes by various names, including gender archaeology, ethnoarchaeology, household archaeology, and feminist archaeology. Whatever the label, archaeology in the service of gender analysis is a multidisciplinary project that provides a window into gendered patterns of everyday life in premodern societies.

Identifying and interpreting the artifacts of grain production is a case in point. Grains were the mainstay of the Israelite diet, providing over 70 percent of a person’s daily caloric needs. Indeed, they were so central to survival in the rather unforgiving highlands of the Land of Israel in the Iron Age that they were economic and social as well as physical substances. Women not only participated in harvesting wheat and barley but also carried out the numerous subsequent steps, which took as much as two to three hours a day, necessary for converting grains into edible form. The role of women in performing this vital subsistence task (and many others—such as producing other foodstuffs, household textiles, and various utilitarian objects and installations) would have been highly valued. It was also the source of considerable household power in a society that lacked a market economy, except perhaps in several urban centers in the late monarchic period. Moreover, the power that accrued to women by virtue of their role in converting raw materials into edible (or wearable or usable form) complemented the power accrued to men as the producers of those raw materials. Moreover, female power was probably augmented by the social knowledge of women, whose tasks were often done in the company of women from neighboring households. These interactions not only relieved the tedium of their daily tasks but also gave them information that contributed to the welfare of household units. That is, they would know if someone were injured or ill and unable to carry out essential tasks; they could then arrange for assistance. In a world without

government-sponsored social services, the informal networks formed by women working together formed a vital mutual aid society.

Other women's roles can be reconstructed by identifying and interpreting other kinds of objects and installations, including the artifacts of the household religious activities that were the primary and most common aspects of the religious lives of most people. Women surely had significant roles in preparing household celebrations of monthly and seasonal agricultural festivals. They were also largely responsible for other activities that we might not consider religious—such as caring for the sick and injured, protecting pregnant women and newborns from evil spirits, lamenting the dead, and even guarding bread dough from contamination by malevolent forces—but which had ritual components imbued with sacral meaning. These ritual procedures, many concerned with life-and-death matters, were believed to be essential for the

well-being of the members of a woman's household. Women were thus ritual experts in household life no less than priests were at communal shrines. Their lives were surely enriched by this dimension of household life in ways that perhaps compensated for the drudgery and tedium that characterized daily existence.

The complementary nature of female and male contributions to maintaining Israelite households meant a balance of power, at least between the roles of the senior female and male in the multigenerational family groups living and working in most Israelite households. The senior woman was responsible not only for an array of tasks and activities but also for organizing the tasks and activities of others, allocating resources, and determining the use of household space. In this way she would have exercised authority over both young and adult children, the wives of male offspring,

and even in certain circumstances the senior male. To be sure, the situation was hardly one of gender equality in every aspect of household or community life; but the notion, derived from texts, of pervasive female subservience flies in the face of what can be gleaned from gender archaeology about a balance of gendered power in many areas of daily life. This information may even call into question the appropriateness of the "patriarchy" label. At the very least, it allows us to bring ordinary Israelite women into the foreground and acknowledge the disconnect between text and social reality.

*Carol Meyers is the Mary Grace Wilson Professor in the Religious Studies Department at Duke University and the immediate past president of the Society of Biblical Literature. Her most recent book is Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context (Oxford University Press, 2013).*



Iron Age wall at Tel Beersheba. Photo courtesy of Carol Meyers.

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# Marxism and the Bible

Roland Boer

**M**arxist approaches to the Bible are flourishing in a way they have not done for a long time. Indeed, we are now witnessing one of the most significant developments of such approaches, with increasing sophistication and insight. I would like to offer here a methodological overview of Marxist literary criticism of the Bible by means of four “touchstones,” with a focus on a specific text to see how they work.

## *Dialectics*

The first is a focus on contradictions and therefore on dialectics. In recent years, Fredric Jameson has emphasized once again the role of dialectics and contradiction in literary analysis. He argues that literary texts are produced in economic and political situations that always face tensions and contradictions. Therefore, texts cannot avoid showing traces of those contradictions. Such traces may appear in the content of the story, perhaps in narrative conflicts, or between characters, or in the plot. But the traces may also be found in the form of the story, whether inconsistencies in the language, or in the conflict of genres, or in anomalies or breaks in the story. The main point is that a Marxist approach to the Bible seeks out the contradictions, wherever they may be found.

As an example, let us consider the text of Genesis 1–3, which is full of contradictions. These include the tensions between the orderly account of creation in Genesis 1 and the earthy account in Genesis 2; a perfect garden that has a flaw in it (the tree of good and evil), which means that the garden is not so perfect; the fact that the serpent actually speaks the truth and God does not (the human beings do not die as a result of eating the tree). But the key tension is between two states of the human beings. On the one hand, they behave like king and queen. They are the highest point and focus of creation. They walk about the garden and can eat from it without any labor. In the evenings they meet and talk with God. On the other hand, when they are expelled from the garden, they are no longer king and queen. They become peasants, with lives full of hard labor, pain, and death.



WHEN ADAM DELVED AND EVE SPAN,  
WHO WAS THEN THE GENTLEMAN?

Artwork by E. Burne-Jones, April 1888, for the first book edition of William Morris' *A Dream of John Ball*. Via Wikimedia Commons.

## *Mediation*

The second point is that the relation between texts and their contexts is always mediated or indirect. Let me put it in terms of reflection and response. A text does not reflect its context; it responds to it. We may think of the text as the answer to a question posed by its social and economic context. The problem is that the answer given is usually unexpected and indirect. The text may try to solve a problem by offering an imagined solution, producing a world that is far from a direct relation to reality.

A more theoretical formulation of this relation between text and context draws upon the work of Louis Althusser, which he develops in relation to ideology: a text is the representation of an imaginary relationship to real conditions of existence. That is, as an item of ideology, a text is not directly related to real conditions. That would require a simple relationship between two items—the text and its context. Instead, Althusser suggests three items: 1) the context or the real conditions, which are the social and economic forces; 2) the imaginary relationship to that context, which is how people conceive of their relationship to the realities of everyday life; 3) the representation of that conception

or belief, which is where the text appears. That is, the text is an effort to represent the way people imagine how they fit in the world (this imagined way may be incorrect or correct, although it is usually a mixture of the two). Now Althusser's position becomes even more complex: the way the representation works may be in terms of content—in the words of a story, myth, or poem. It may also appear in indirect ways, in the language, in the structure of a story, or in unexpected traces that we often ignore.

Let us see how this works with the text of Genesis 2–3. I suggest that the story represents the way different groups or classes understood their relationship to agriculture. The Garden of Eden is clearly an agricultural garden, with domesticated plants that are good for food. It also includes animals that the man names, which is an indication of domestication. Above all, it is a garden, a space that God himself has cultivated for human use. However, this is an agricultural space far from reality, for it is an ideal garden or agricultural estate. The first human beings do not need to work, for all the fruits and grains are freely available.

Why tell a story like this? It seems to be an ideal, a dream world without hard labor, without the need to plough the ground, sow seed, deal with pests and disease, harvest a crop, and then turn it into food. But we need to ask a crucial question: for whom is this imaginary garden an ideal? The hint that it may be the ideal of a specific group or class is the end of the story, when the first human beings are expelled from the garden and must work hard for their daily food. But to explore that issue, we need to consider the next point of Marxist analysis of biblical texts.

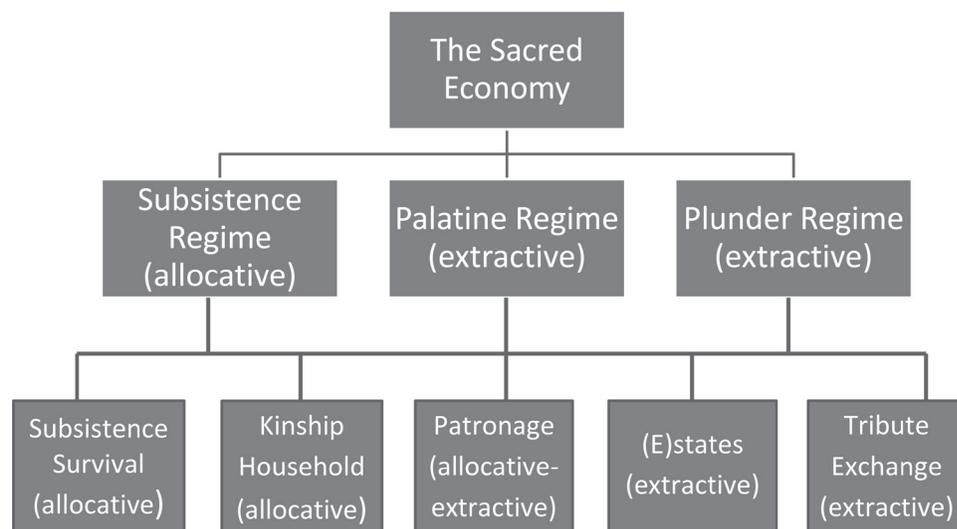
## *Expansion*

The third feature is what I call expansion, that is, the expansion of analysis beyond the text. A text is always part of a larger reality that includes economics, politics, culture, and ideology. In this way, Marxist analysis challenges the overwhelming tendency of modern interpretation to break human existence into little pieces that seem to have little relationship to one another. A Marxist approach challenges us to think and work in light of a larger whole and to see how the

parts belong to that whole. In other words, it dares to think in terms of the big picture and to examine the frameworks we use.

In the case of Genesis 2–3 we need to factor in economic and social factors into our interpretation. This enables us to answer the question I asked earlier: for whom is this agricultural garden an imagined ideal? Does it perhaps represent the hopes of the majority of peasants in the ancient world? They comprised 90 percent of the small populations. Living mostly in village communities of between 75 to 150 people, their lives tended to be short (life expectancy was about thirty) and the work of herding animals and growing crops was tough. Yet they had a system of living that had stood the test of time. They needed little and developed an economic and social system of life that was strong enough to withstand the difficulties they faced. Would they dream of a life in a grand agricultural estate in which they did not have to work and in which food was provided without labor?

Or is the text a representation of the ideal life of the small ruling class? This class was made up of the despot, priests, scribes, and landlords (who were also tax collectors and lenders). They supplied their own needs through palatine estates. These estates were separate from the peasant villages and were managed by landlords or agents appointed by the despot. They grew crops, herded animals, made beer and wine, produced bricks and building materials. And the workers on them were usually dragged from the villages and forced to work. These workers might have to pay off a debt, or they might be slaves from a war, or might be called on to work for some time of the year (when they had to leave their villages). In other words, the ruling class did not actually do any work; they relied on the laborers in the estates to do the work for them. So they came to believe that the agricultural estates simply produced goods for them, without their own labor. Grain would arrive, or meat from animals, or textiles for clothes—all without work on their part. I suggest that Genesis 2–3 actually represents the imaginary relationship of this ruling class to their conditions of existence. The image the text presents is one of a vast and lush estate. It even manages to remove labor by making God the one who creates and maintains the estate. It seems to produce food entirely by itself. Indeed, the man and woman behave as king and queen in their estate. They have been created at the peak of creation, talk with God, and have everything provided for them.



Reprinted from Roland Boer, *The Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel*. Library of Ancient Israel; Westminster John Knox, 2014. Courtesy of Gale Yee.

### Resistance

But now a contradiction arises in the story of Genesis 2–3, which brings me to a fourth feature of Marxist approaches. The man and woman do not remain king and queen forever. As is well known, the reason is disobedience in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The result is punishment: the woman will have pain in childbirth and be subservient to the man; the man will need to work hard for their daily food. He will struggle with a hard ground, full of thorns and thistles. And they will die: from dust they came and to dust they will return. Then they are banished from the garden, never to return.

At an economic and political level, this crucial episode in the story still represents a ruling-class perspective. The life of a peasant, they feel, is hard and unrewarding, best to be avoided at all costs. Yet, the rulers know that they too can easily be reduced to the status of peasants. All it would take is an invasion by a powerful army, or a severe famine, or another disaster. Their hold on power is precarious at the best of times.

But how does the episode of disobedience and punishment relate to resistance? A Marxist literary approach locates resistance by looking “between the lines” of a story, attempting to read against the dominant ideological position of a story. In Genesis 2–3, the dominant position is that the man and woman disobeyed God and were punished for their “sin.” But when we reconsider this account, it becomes a moment of resistance.

They say “no” to the figure that represents power, even in the face of punishment. But my point is that the story preserves a moment of rebellion. And it does so in the attempt to show that such rebellion is futile. Indeed, it is worth pointing out that myths like this often tell a story of resistance that is crushed, thereby preserving the moment of resistance.

This point concerning resistance is indebted to the work of Ernst Bloch and Antonio Negri. It requires a dialectical approach that challenges the dominant ideological position of a story in order to find moments of resistance. These moments then provide hope for those who later read these stories. Even more, we should not think that this resistance is on the fringes, challenging a stable and central power. We need to change our perspective on this relationship as well. Instead, resistance itself is central, and power constantly seeks to adapt to that resistance. Ruling-class power develops ever new ways to undermine that resistance. It should be no surprise, then, that myths constantly focus on the need to crush resistance. These myths are yet another way in which despotic powers attempt to undermine the creativity of resistance.

*Roland Boer is research professor at the University of Newcastle, Australia, and professor of Literary Theory at Renmin University of China. His most recent publication is *Idols of Nations: Biblical Myth at the Origins of Capitalism* (with Christina Petterson; Fortress Press, 2014).*

# The Failed Marriage with the Ten Lost Tribes

Dina Stein

The Israeli Folk Archives (IFA) at the University of Haifa hold about twenty narratives that tell of a member of the Ten Lost Tribes who miraculously saved a Jewish community. Among these, there are a few that mention an eventual marriage between a local woman and the foreign savior, whom we presume lived happily ever after. Curiously enough, there are two stories told by Yemenite informants that end differently. They record a failed marriage of a woman (!) savior from the tribe of Dan and the man who called upon her.

Before taking a closer look at the tales we should bear in mind that stories told of the Ten Lost Tribes—beginning with Eldad the Danite’s account in the ninth century—may have had as much to do with intercommunity issues in a geographically spread-out Jewish world as with a messianic fantasy that involves the return of the Tribes. We should also consider the underlying, even opposing, goals of the IFA, founded by Dov Noy in the 1950s: to give voice to marginalized groups and corpora and to provide further support for the image of Israel as a melting pot of Israel’s “Twelve Tribes.”

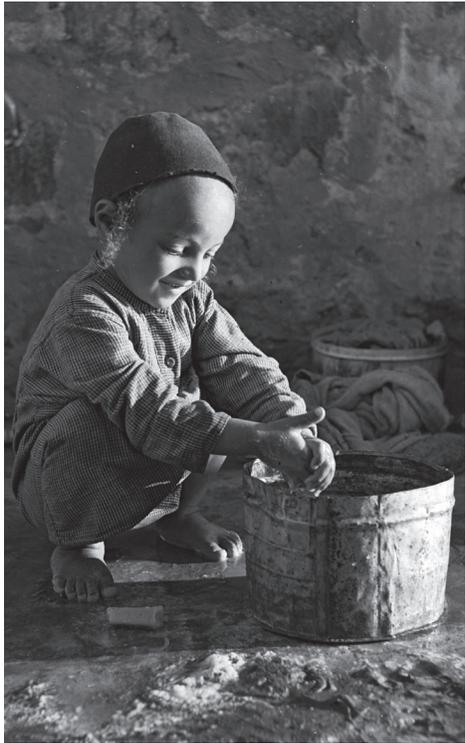
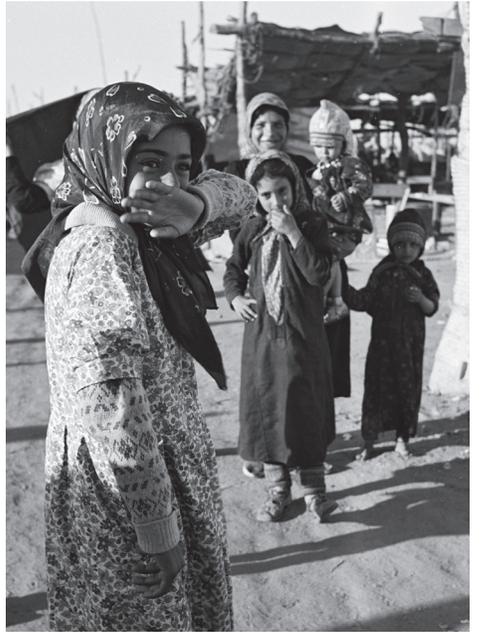
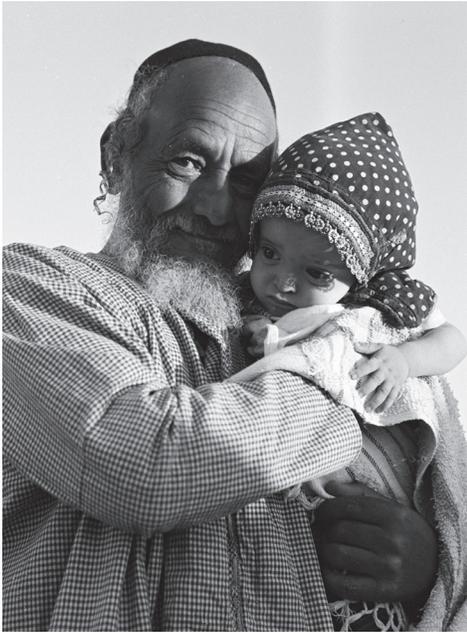
The two tales (IFA 11289, 11292) begin in a familiar fashion. A community is faced with an ultimatum posed by its local king:

either they prove that they have a single warrior who can overcome a thousand gentiles (to “prove” the verse from Deut. 32:30) or else they are doomed to be exiled or killed. A messenger is sent out to the land of the Ten Lost Tribes (or Sons of Moses), and after a standard number of trials and tribulations, including of course the challenge of crossing the unbridgeable river, Sambation, the messenger returns to his community with the Danite savior—a woman in this case—who can perform the necessary acts of salvation. The community is thus saved and granted at least temporary relief from Gentile persecution. The trouble, however, begins when the Danite woman and the messenger are married, and domestic, mundane life replaces the adrenaline-charged moment of existential strife. In one story, the newlywed couple moves back to the Land of the Ten Lost Tribes (11292); in the other (11289), they remain in the land of the saved community. The crux of their domestic hardship and their incompatibility in both versions is the same. IFA 11289 reads as follows:

The couple lived together for a short time. They fought constantly and could not live in peace. They did not have a common language. When the husband



Photos by David Eldan and Zoltan Kluger, 1949–1950. Courtesy of the Government Press Office, State of Israel National Photo Collection.





used to say to his wife: girl, bring me two beans, she gave him two beans exactly, no more no less. And likewise, when he used to say, as a figure of speech: bring me a cup of coffee, and such things, she used to follow his words and make only one cup of coffee, because the Sons of Moses are people of truth . . . And because they didn't understand each other, and because they didn't succeed in overcoming their hardships, the woman went to Rabbi Abraham and said to him: I wish to divorce my husband, because this man does not speak the truth,

and I cannot, and am not used to living in a society that does not speak the truth . . . He (the husband) granted her a divorce and said: leave in peace. She said to him: let me bid you farewell forever, my champion, with a kiss. She kissed him on his mouth and he died instantly. She vanished from the eye.

This unique comic coda seems to undermine what is usually perceived as a solemn national myth. It is also clearly modeled on a Talmudic story (Nedarim 66b), which tells of domestic misunderstandings between a Babylonian who marries a native Palestinian woman. In the Talmudic story, as in the IFA tales, the lack of understanding between the couple supposedly stems from their different dialects / use of language. But, unlike the Talmudic story, which ultimately imagines Babylonia and Palestine to be part of one "imagined community," which also holds the promise of reproduction, in our story no such harmony (however tension ridden it may be) is intimated, the couple divorces childless (in the 11292 version their two babies die at childbirth). In other words, whereas the Babylonian/Palestinian couple of the Talmud is imagined as belonging to the same arch-group, the incompatibility between the Danite woman and the messenger designates them as belonging to different groups, almost two different peoples. Furthermore, the "truth" by which the Danite woman abides is absurd: it does not take into account the metaphorical and especially the pragmatic aspects of language. If elsewhere the Ten Lost Tribes are fantasized as the keepers of "authentic," "true," traditions, then this humorous anecdote frames their alleged "truth" as unfit for practical, everyday life.

The carnivalesque quality of the anecdote is indeed surprising. Why, and when, would such an addition be made to the standard, albeit varied, tale of the savior of the Lost Tribes? The possible answer to that is speculative, since by and large we do not know the different contexts in which the tales of the IFA were told and to which they referred. We indeed may not know the "original" contexts, but one context is clear enough, and that is the context in which the tales were written down. In our case, we know that the stories were recorded at the early stages of the founding of Israel, probably in the mid-late 1950s. Obviously our tales, including their codas, may have been told in their country of origin, Yemen, or even by early Yemenite settlers in Palestine. Or maybe not. What is undeniable is that they were seen fit by the storytellers to be told, or retold, in the context of IFA's projects. Read in the context of the IFA project—with its implied dual alliance with "folklore" in the service of building an imagined (unified) nation and as an expression of the marginal and defiant—one explanation of the tales emerges. If Zionism and the founding of the State of Israel was envisioned in messianic terms—as it was indeed by many of the immigrants from Yemen (dating back to earlier Yemenite immigrations)—then our story with its humorous coda surely sticks a pin in an inflated ideological balloon. The story invites one to imagine what the postmessianic, mundane world looks like. But indeed it says more.



Much has been written on the role Yemenites played in the Zionist melting pot before and after the founding of the state, including the deportation of Yemenites from the Kinneret farmhouse in 1936 or the alleged disappearance of Yemenite children in the 1950s, an affair that resurfaces periodically in Israeli journalism. The ambivalence towards Yemenites as “noble savages” and “natural workers” perceived as inferior to the Ashkenazi leaders of the Zionist revolution, and hence meant to serve the latter, is evident already in the Kinneret incident. The immigrants of the early 1950s were presented with a harsh reality, both physical and spiritual-religious, and with a patronizing establishment.

This is not how the immigrants had envisioned the return to Zion, the moment of salvation. A year after he had arrived in Israel, Rabbi David Gavra, the leader of the community in Ajur (near Bet Shemesh), wrote to Israeli officials:

You gentleman know that we, the Jews of Yemen, left our homes and lands, and left our belongings, because of our love for the Land of Israel and because of our love of our brothers, the dwellers of this land, the Ashkenazim and the Sepharadim. Why is it my brothers and friends that you look down upon as and disgrace us . . . and what sin have we committed. If you shall say that we have no part in the land and that we are not Jews, you better return us to Yemen without belittling us.

His words are loud and clear: the hope of being part of one Jewish community is shattered.

Structurally, Rabbi Gavra’s letter (which is signed by other Yemenite leaders) is based on a match that fails—between the Yemenites and the rest of Israel. As in the folktale, the match and its failure take place after the moment of salvation. In the IFA tales it is after the miraculous salvation of the Sana’a community, in the rabbi’s text—about a year after the miraculous salvation of his own community (and at the peak of immigration from Yemen). The structural analogy between the two narratives renders the folk-narrative a symbolic staging of the historic-experiential narrative, as articulated by Rabbi Gavra. A symbolic reading of the IFA

tales will accordingly see the failed marital bond between the Yemenite and the member of the Lost Tribes as reflecting the failed bonding between the Yemenite immigrants and the larger Jewish community, the pseudo-“Lost Tribes.” Rabbi Gavra’s words are explicit and painful; the folktale is implicit and playful. Both express the trauma of Yemenite immigration in the nascent days of the state.

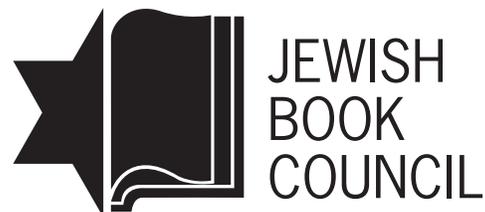
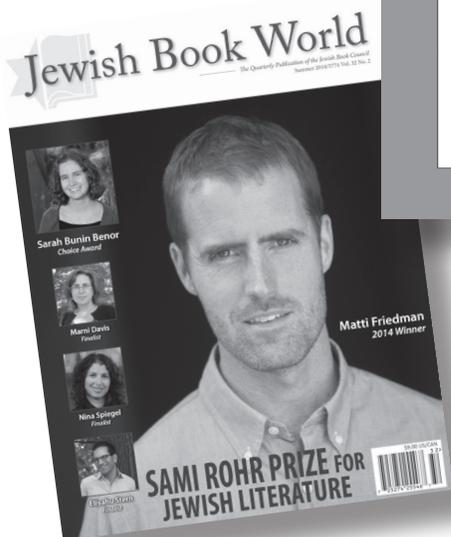
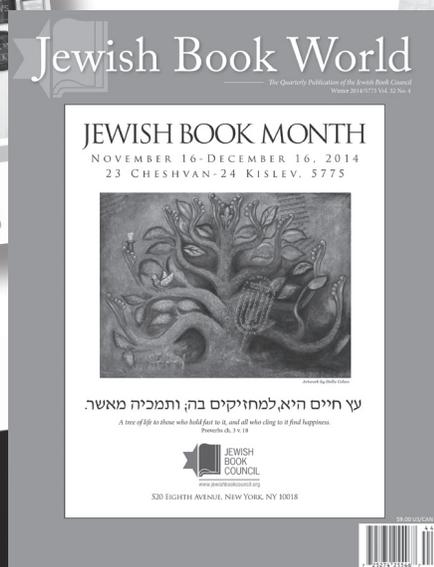
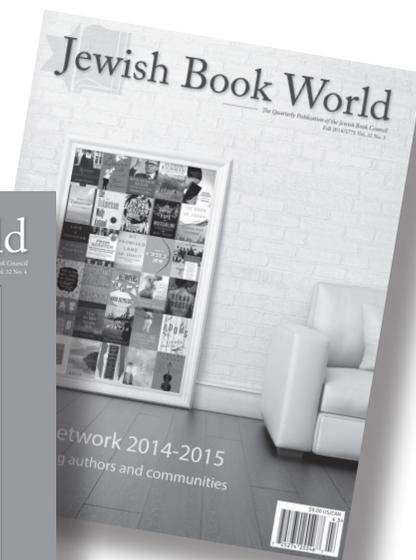
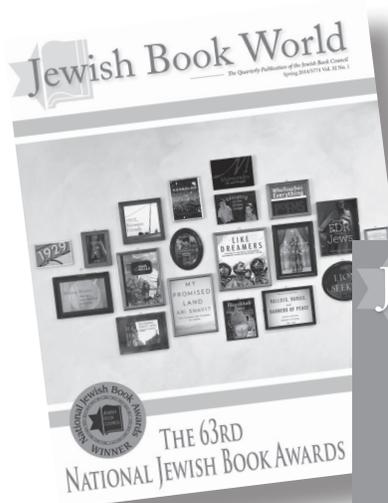
*Dina Stein is associate professor in the Department of Hebrew Literature at the University of Haifa. Her most recent publication is Textual Mirrors: Reflexivity, Midrash, and the Rabbinic Self (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).*



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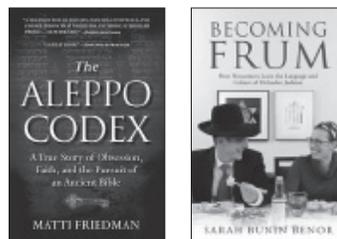


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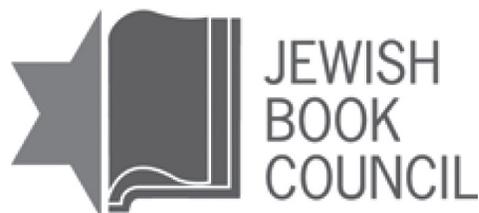
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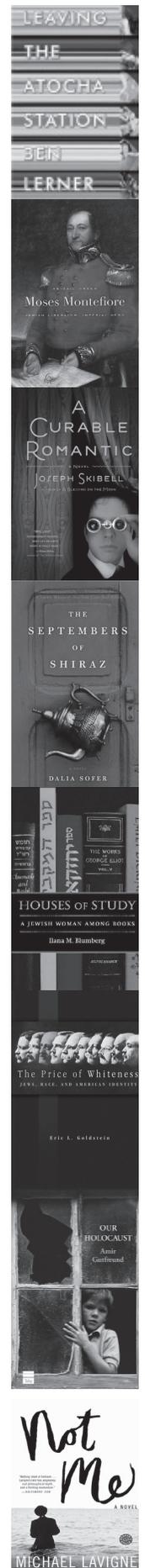
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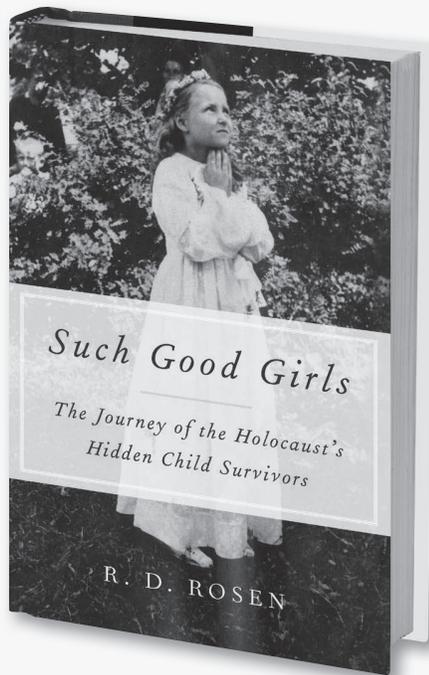
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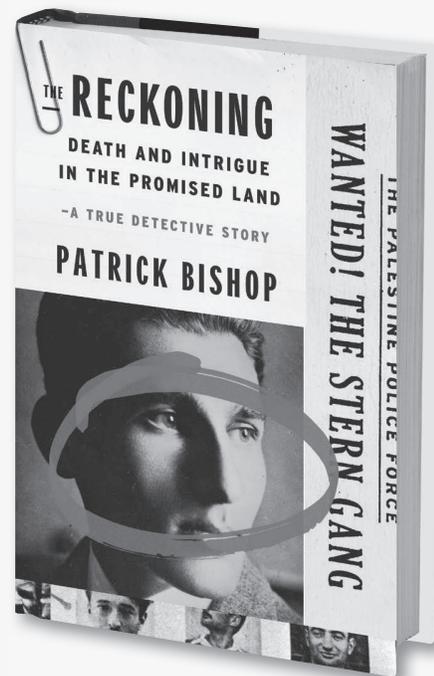
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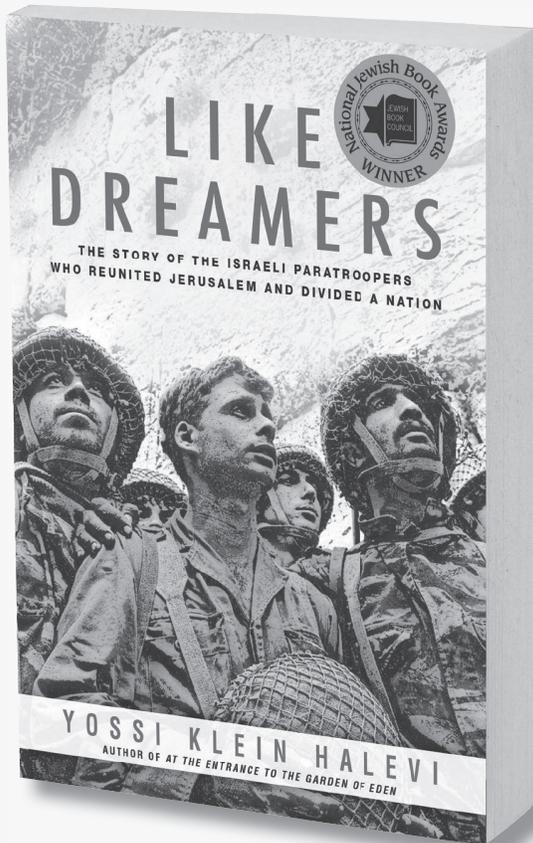
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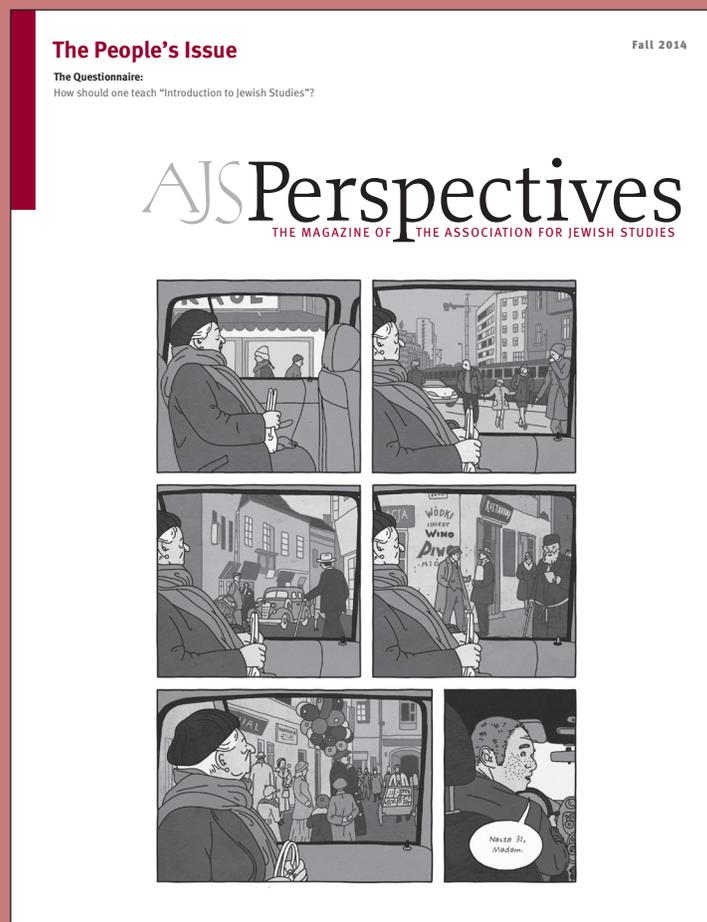
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# The Vicissitudes of ‘Am Ha-’arez

Azzan Yadin-Israeli

**Y**aakov Hazan, one of the most prominent figures in Socialist Zionism and a founder of Ha-shomer Ha-za’ir, was once asked to assess the educational policies he helped institute. His response was somber: “We wanted to raise a generation of *’epikorsim*, but instead raised a generation of *’am-’arazim*.” Though both stand beyond the pale of traditional rabbinic Judaism, there are differences between them. The *’epikoros*, the Mishnaic Hebrew form of Epicurus, is firmly anchored in an antireligious tradition and rejects rabbinic teachings due to philosophical and existential disagreement. “Know what to respond to an *’epikoros*,” says Rabbi Elazar (Mishnah Avot 2:14), indicating the force of *’epikoros*’s argument is such that even the most prominent rabbis must be forewarned and forearmed. The *’am ha-’arez*, in contrast, is a hollow negation: not a scholar, not learned, an ignoramus. For Hazan, the young generation of Socialist Zionists had rightly turned its back on traditional rabbinic Judaism, but failed to erect a worthy spiritual and ideological alternative. Ironically, Hazan himself used the term *’am ha-’arez* in a sense that emerged only in rabbinic sources, apparently unaware of its rich nonrabbinic life.

This much is clear: the biblical *’am ha-’arez* bears no resemblance to the rabbinic. The phrase first appears following Sarah’s death. After mourning his wife, Abraham asks the Hittites who (according to Genesis) inhabited the city of Hebron, for a burial place, and when they assent, “Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land (*’am ha-’arez*)” (Gen. 23:7). Since Abraham is characterized as a stranger in this chapter (“I am a stranger and an alien among you . . .” v. 4), *’am ha-’arez* appears to refer to the Hittites’ status as, quite literally, the people of the land. In this passage the group in question is ethnically other, but it need not be.

In 2 Kings, the defeat of the Baal-worshipping queen Athaliah and the reestablishment of the Davidic line reaches its dramatic peak when Athaliah enters the Temple to find that her young usurper, Jehoash, has assumed the royal position by the Temple pillar with “all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets” (2 Kgs 11:13). Athaliah is summarily executed and immediately thereafter “all the people of the land went to the house of Baal and tore it down” (2 Kgs 11:18). In these

passages, *’am ha-’arez* is contrasted to the religious other—Athaliah and other Baal worshippers—and is akin to *ha-’am* (which appears alongside it), the popular, non-elite masses.

So too when God commissions Jeremiah, the prophet is promised divine aid to assure that he stands firmly “against the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land (*’am ha-’arez*)” (Jer. 1:18). The



Hayyim Nachman Bialik, 1923. Photo by Zoltan Kluger. Courtesy of the Government Press Office, State of Israel National Photo Collection.

*’am ha-’arez* are clearly part of the Judean landscape, and Jeremiah distinguishes them from the royal and religious elites. Though further nuancing is possible (some scholars identify the group as rural), the general contours of *’am ha-’arez* are clear: the nonelite collective inhabiting a defined region, whether Israelite/Judean or not.

But things become more complicated during the Second Temple period. Propheying in the early days of the restoration, Haggai sees the return to Zion as a unifying moment: “Yet now take courage, O Zerubavel, says the LORD; take courage . . . high priest; take courage, all you people of the land . . . for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt” (Hag. 2:4-5). The imperial governor (and descendent of the Judean royal line), the priesthood, and *’am ha-’arez* are united in their present task, and in their shared origin of the Egyptian exodus—*’am*

*ha-’arez* is evidently the people of Israel in the Persian province of Yehud. But not everyone viewed unity with favor, for the local populace is barred from assisting in the restoration of the Temple despite their protestation to the returning exiles that “we worship your God as you do” (Ezra 4:3). This rejection is justified as a response to the locals’ custom of intermarrying with other religious and ethnic communities: “The people of Israel . . . have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands” (Ezra 9:1-2). In so doing, parts of Israel have become, themselves, *’am ha-’arez* and so Ezra urges the returning exiles to “separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives” (Ezra 10:11). With this shift, *’am ha-’arez* for the first time comes to mark a group that is both internal and other.

The tannaitic *’am ha-’arez* is also an internal otherness, though one defined in a more specific halakhic sense as a person who is not scrupulous in the observance of tithes and purities—the countertype of the *haver*: “One who accepts four principles is considered a *haver*: that he not give a gift offering (*terumah*) or tithes to *’am ha-’arez*; that he not perform purities for *’am ha-’arez*; and that he eat non-consecrated food in a state of ritual purity” (T. Demai 2:2). The difference between the *’am ha-’arez* and the sage is significant but does not entail strict social ostracism, as sages are allowed to take the daughters of *’am ha-’arez* in marriage, though they should not to give their young daughters to *’am ha-’arez* lest they—still impressionable—adopt unscrupulous observance (T. Avodah Zarah 3:3).

The Babylonian Talmud, in contrast, offers a radically negative, and radically troubling, assessment of *’am ha-’arez*: “One must not marry the daughter of *’amei ha-’arez* since they are an abomination, and their wives are creeping creatures, and it is of their daughters that Scripture states, ‘Cursed be anyone who lies with a beast’ (Deut. 27:21)”; “Rabbi Elazar said: ‘It is permissible to perforate an *’am ha-’arez* on Yom Kippur that falls on the Sabbath.’ His students said to him: ‘Rabbi, say—to slaughter him.’ He said: ‘That requires a benediction, the other does not’”; “The hatred of an *’am ha-’arez* toward a sage is greater than the hatred of a non-Jews to Israel—and their wives’ is greater yet”

(all these sayings are from B. Pesahim 49b). Given the Babylonian Talmud's centrality in the traditional rabbinic curriculum, it is no surprise that its view of 'am ha-'arez held sway for centuries (even if some of the more extreme sayings were qualified as exaggerations by later authorities).

But the vicissitudes of 'am ha-'arez did not end at their Talmudic nadir. With the collapse of traditional Jewish social hierarchies and the rise of various *völkisch* national ideologies, many modern Jews came to see freedom from Talmudic learning (and learning more broadly) as an advantage, not a stigma. And so began the rehabilitation of 'am ha-'arez. Thus Bialik, in his attempt to "rehabilitate" Halakhah as a poetic mode suited for vital national composition ("*Halakhah Ve-'aggadah*") writes:

When a man of Israel reads [the Mishnah tractate] Zera'im, for example, does it not happen that air of life [*'avir shel hayyim*] and the smell of earth and grass waft at him from within the words, so that he might suddenly forget that he is in the *bet midrash* and that he is studying, and see before him the people—the people of the land—as they labor in the field and the garden and the vineyard and the threshing floor . . .

In this subtly brilliant juxtaposition, Bialik reverses the hierarchy of rabbinic scholar and 'am ha-'arez, as the farmer's engagement of the physical world—the smell of the tilled field, his body's exertion as he brings sustenance from the earth—transports the scholar to a reality far removed from the house of study. In this passage, the Mishnah becomes the unintended (that is: dialectical) instrument of subversion: neither its pithy prose nor its halakhic canonicity can suppress the sensuous vitality seething beneath its surface. It is 'am ha-'arez who breathes the "air of life," an implicit contrast to the atmosphere of death surrounding the *yeshivah bokher*. (The phrase *'avir shel hayyim* may be a subtle reference to Bialik's own identification with the Mishnaic farmer, who is breathing the "air of life" and also the "air of *Hayyim*").

Bialik is not alone. Some of the revisionist moments are institutional. A Talmudic dictum states: "'am ha-'arez die on account of two things: that they call the Torah ark 'the ark' and they call the synagogue *bet ha-'am*" (B. Shabbat 32a). The ubiquity of Reform synagogues named "Temple *Beth Am*" is, in a manner, an attempt to reclaim a dimension of the congregation actively suppressed in this saying—the communal, the 'am aspect of 'am ha-'arez. Others are literary: Shneur Zalman's poem "A Song of Praise to 'Amei Ha-'arez," or Yair Agmon's novel

'*Am ha-'arez* (2012) in which a recently released soldier hitchhikes through Israel because he wishes to meet the full human spectrum of its residents. Agmon writes: "I am dying to meet them already, the *kibbutzniks* from Ein Harod, the settlers from Kedumim, the fishermen from Tiberias, the Christians from Nazareth, the rich kids from Ramat Aviv and the *moshavniks* from Vitkin, the Ethiopians from Hadera and the career officers from Reut, the Palestinians from Ramallah and the *Haredim* from Bene Berak . . ." He is eager to meet the titular 'am ha-'arez—the rich human mosaic that makes up present-day Israel, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

The Talmud's, then, is but one of several understandings of 'am ha-'arez; the tradition is rich enough to provide more positive meanings, and fluid enough to justify forging unattested meanings. We are not bound by the Bavli's pejorative sense of 'am ha-'arez, a sense that Yaakov Hazan both laments and, in his unreflective assumption that the Talmud's meaning is dispositive, ironically exemplifies.

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# Jewish Folklore as Counterculture

Dan Ben-Amos

**A** literacy divide runs deep in Jewish society. The scribes, the priests, and the prophets who wrote the Bible referred to the folk on the other side of the divide as *ha-'am* (the people), and the sages, who taught the books that followed, called them *'olam* (the world population). Both terms resonate in subsequent Jewish languages. The Yiddish word *'amkha* (common people), and its analogue in Judeo-Spanish, *povlacho*, have their roots in the Bible where the concept of the “people” is ubiquitous. It occurs in a variety of forms as *kol ha-'am* (all the people), *'am ha-'arez* (the people of the land)—a term which already in the Bible, and certainly later, had furthered its semantic scope—and in supplications to God as *'amkha Yisra'el* (Your people Israel). In some dialects of Judeo-Arabic the terms that draw upon postbiblical usages are *'amah*, *'olam*, or *'al-'olam 'al-kul*. In the Bible the term refers to mindless multitudes, immense crowds, or a general population mass. While the writers of these texts shaped Judaism as we know it, the *'am*, the folk, experienced Jewish life in a way that we had—and still need—to discover.

What was that experience and how was it verbally represented? Is it possible to reach out and observe the lives of the Israelite multitudes beyond the literacy barrier, beyond the priestly prescriptive religious and ethical rules, and the prophecies that admonished their transgression? And for later periods, is it possible to perceive the lives of the common Jewish folk in Vilna, Baghdad, Fez, Salonika, Sana'a, and other cities and villages of the Diaspora? Is it possible to do so without condescension? Is it possible to overcome the paradox of literacy, which, at times, preserves orality only in its own terms?

It is not so easy. Literacy transforms knowledge in a selective and teleological way. Oral traditions filter through the sieves of literacy in bits and pieces and then function to advocate or reaffirm the writers' ideology. Surely, over time, as literacy spread, the control over its venues has loosened. Ideas, beliefs, narrative themes and forms, humor, and folk-wisdom have seeped through the cracks and become available, free from strict sectorial control. This enabled the oral and the literate to intertwine, converge and diverge, contradict and complement one another. Counterculture



Rivka Askenazi recording her father. Courtesy of the Israel Folktale Archives named in honor of Dov Noy (IFA) at the University of Haifa.



Kol Israel recording. Courtesy of the Israel Folktale Archives named in honor of Dov Noy (IFA) at the University of Haifa.

and culture have become the spiritual twins that thrive through their differences.

The folklore of the biblical period becomes apparent in the text through narrative repetitions, recurrent themes, and slips of pen. Intra- and intercomparisons evince the presence of orality in biblical literacy. The stories of divine announcement of the births of Isaac, Samson, and Samuel, the barrenness of Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah, and the miracle tales of the early prophets, are the staples of folklore of many peoples as well as the ancient Israelites. In the Bible, they support fundamental religious and ethical tenets, or historical narrative constructions. The story of the young David, who killed the monster Goliath and

married King Saul's daughter, integrates the widespread theme of the dragon slayer into Israelite dynastic and national history. Another story, which at the time was available regionally, the Egyptian tale of the two brothers, Anubis and Bata, a story of sexual abuse and false accusation, was incorporated into Joseph's biography as a prelude to the central myth of nation formation: the Exodus from Egypt. The folklore that ancient literates could not appropriate, they condemned. Magic and witchcraft, demons and ghosts, and the witches and wizards that controlled them, were banned. But the stronger the condemnation, the more solid is the evidence of their entrenchment in ancient Israelite religion and society.

In Hebrew and Aramaic postbiblical literature, literacy and orality intertwine. The orality of these narratives is text dependent. The Midrash is the exegesis of the Bible and the Talmud of the Mishnah. Yet neither is limited by the texts it interprets. They include legends, fables, proverbs, tales about postbiblical events and personalities, and jokes that circulated orally at that period.

Many traditions that were either excluded from or generated by the Bible became newly valuable in an exilic situation. The ordinary people that the Bible, with a few exceptions, hid under the general category of *ha-'am*, came alive in postbiblical literature, in their mundane struggles and in their confrontation with history. At times, they became allegories for moral principles. True, some people stood out: Stories about sages, students, miracle workers, and martyrs recurred with greater frequency than tales about other people. Yet even these exemplary personalities act in an ordinary world in which demons and magic freely take part, moving in the liminal crevices between categories of place and time. The biblical world from which they were banned receded into the mythical past. The many postbiblical traditions that the rabbis did not report became the foundational narratives of Jewish folklore. Subsequent generations expanded them into a compendium of themes, personalities, historical events, and figures that populated Jewish imagination, conversation, storytelling, and song.

The next thousand years or so—from the early Middle Ages to early modern times,



Beth Shean, Dov Noy, and women tellers. Courtesy of the Israel Folktale Archives named in honor of Dov Noy (IFA) at the University of Haifa.

which, as far as folklore is concerned, edged into the nineteenth century—witnessed the liberation of Jewish folkloric creativity from the rabbinical authorities. Individual authors and scribes wrote down tales and described haunted worlds. Their manuscripts became the treasure troves of Jewish medieval folklore, which after the print revolution enjoyed wider circulation as chapbooks, broadsides, and market literature.

The narrative repertoires of Diaspora communities expanded the thematic range of Jewish tradition at the same time that they made apparent latent divisions among Jewish societies. Jews commemorated common biblical and postbiblical events and personalities in synagogues, but at home, in the market place, and at secular venues narrators and singers spun tale types into Jewish oral traditions.

Stories about regional and ethnic personalities and locations became the talk of the town in diverse Jewish languages and communities. Life cycle rituals were occasions for combined celebrations. Communally, Jews were oppressed by ruling authorities that subjugated them politically, economically, and socially. Individually they suffered from poor health and poverty. In this period the Jewish cult hero—a rabbi magician known not so much for learning as for miracles—took form. These heroes saved threatened communities and helped desperate individuals. They were charismatic leaders, from Rabbi Meir Ba'al Ha-nes to Rabbi Israel Ba'al Ha-shem who assumed central positions in Jewish societies and in Jewish narratives. In their death, their tombs became pilgrimage destinations. To lift their spirits Jews imagined supernatural beings—male and female demons—that conferred wealth or seduced them into promiscuous sex. At times, the new tales functioned like the old ones to reaffirm Jewish social, ethical, and even religious, values. Yet Jewish folklore contained the seeds of

secularism in Jewish societies long before they sprouted in the Enlightenment period.

Modernity and its tendency to turn lore into a subject worthy of study were late in coming to the Jewish folk. As S. Y. Agnon, the Israeli Nobel laureate, had the hero of his tale “Edo and Enam,” say:

Besides, all these scholars are modern men, even if you were to reveal the properties of the charms, they would only laugh at you; and if they bought them, it would be as specimens of folklore. Ah, folklore, folklore! Everything which is not material for scientific research they treat as folklore. Have they not made our holy



Frecha Dadya recorded by her daughter. Courtesy of the Israel Folktale Archives named in honor of Dov Noy (IFA) at the University of Haifa.

Torah into either one or the other? People live out their lives according to the Torah, they lay down their lives for the heritage of their fathers; then along come the scientists, and make the Torah into “research material,” and the ways of our fathers into—folklore.

Not quite as cynical and nihilistic as Agnon imagined them, scholars and amateurs, motivated in their quest for identity by nostalgia, curiosity and, paradoxically, alienation began to search for folklore in Jewish societies, after the term was coined in 1846. Cultural relativity and diversity in Jewish ethnic groups were first to be discovered. The Ashkenazim in Europe, the Sephardim in and around the Mediterranean basin, the Mizrahim in Arab lands, and the many other groups, from India to Ireland and further west, combined in their respective cultures Jewish and foreign aspects. Their folklore had its own integrity manifested in speech, narrative, and poetic genres and in celebrations and rituals.

The proverbs are the wisdom literature of the people, the philosophy of the folk.

This is an applied philosophy. A general truth in metaphoric language, that is cast in an irrefutable formulation and applied to a conflict situation. Together, they map the value system of Jewish society. While proverbs are available in narratives and in lists, folk songs have an elusive presence in ancient and medieval literature. They are mentioned, but rarely seen. In addition to the literacy divide, they had to overcome the gender barrier, since folk singing was primarily a feminine art. Their songs barely left any traces in Jewish manuscripts and early prints, until folklore research discovered the feminine voice in Jewish folk poetry and found that Song of Songs came alive in the singing of Jewish women.

The folk-poetic pulse continued in the twentieth century and under new circumstances moved in different directions. In Europe male tenors, baritones, and basses joined the choruses in ghetto and partisan songs during the war. In many cases songs of known authors became the songs of the people. In others, ghetto street singers composed and sung poetic satires and laments. In postwar America a revival movement of klezmer music generated also a renewal of Yiddish vocal singing. A different kind of poetic revival occurred in Mandate Palestine and later in Israel. Its context was the Zionist renewal of Jewish rustic life in *'Erez Yisra'el*. A new society requires a new folklore, and poets and composers imagined a folk poetry composed of a



Laluzer Farizada recorded by his daughter. Courtesy of the Israel Folktale Archives named in honor of Dov Noy (IFA) at the University of Haifa.

synthesis of ancient imagery, contemporary reality, and messianic orientalism that became known as *shirei 'Erez Yisra'el*.

In contrast to folk songs, folktales had a continuous visibility in Jewish literacy, and the discoveries of modern research, particularly the massive recording that was initiated by YIVO and continued by the Dov Noy Israel Folktale Archives (IFA), exposed a

process that began already in the Middle Ages and was characterized by thematic internationalization, regionalization, and democratization. A Jewish Cinderella may avoid riding her magic carriage on the Sabbath, but in all other respects, her story follows the plot line and the motif cluster of other stories of this tale type, with an acceptable range of variations. The heroes of these tales may not be Jewish at all. However, when such narratives become confrontational stories, the Jewish hero or heroine is likely to be victorious. The legends—those stories the narrators would like to impress upon their listeners as true—resort to local landmarks, place names, and personalities as verifying agents that intensify the narrative's regional dimensions.

Finally, the rise in prominence of the common people, noticeable in the Jewish oral tradition of late antiquity, becomes dominant in Jewish ethnic narrative traditions. The common people populate Jewish folktales. Sure, rabbis, pious people, and miracle workers function in these tales. But when communities are in distress, deliverance is

achieved through the mediation of a charismatic or a lowly figure. The biblical and the Talmudic-Midrashic personalities recede into a religious-mythic domain, with the distinct exception of Elijah the Prophet, who is the most ubiquitous personality in the folktales and legends of all Jewish ethnic groups. Modern authors drew upon modern oral traditions, thereby making some of them part of the international, rather than exclusively Jewish, literary canon, such as the stories of the dybbuk and the Golem of Prague.

Ironically the folk genre with the least presence in Jewish literacy, once discovered, made the greatest impact upon the modern literate world and attained recognition as a category unto itself. This is Jewish humor. As late as the end of the nineteenth century Jews were thought to have no sense of humor. With such a miserable history, it was believed, what was there to laugh about? But as it turned out Jewish history was fertile ground for humor. East European Jewish humor turned out to be so funny that it survived the relative prosperity of the United States and the

Jewish political independence of Israel. In America Jewish folk humor attained a decisive presence in the mass media, and in Israel, in spite of some morbid predictions, Jewish humor is alive and well.

Humor is a subversive form of communication, built upon incongruity, inversion, and dissonance. These features occur in high concentration in other forms of folklore as well, vesting in them countercultural qualities. Romanticism sought to restrain these tendencies by appropriating them for nationalism and the expression of group solidarity, but this was only an ideological muffle of orality. In Jewish society in particular, without the voice of the people, the voice of the sages is hollow.

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# Literature as Jewish “Popular Culture” in Nineteenth-Century Central Europe: The Historical Novel

Jonathan Skolnik

Historical fiction became a wildly popular genre in nineteenth-century Europe. Although the themes of the works of Walter Scott were largely bound up with questions of national identity, they had an international influence and the literary model proliferated. Jewish writers were also inspired by the idea of a popular, modern prose genre that could recount the saga of a people, or of the emergence of a modern nation. When Heinrich Heine began working on his historical novel, *The Rabbi of Bacherach*, in the 1820s, he saw it as a project for a “new Jewish literature”—so he wrote to his fellow members of the “Cultur-Verein,” the nucleus of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement. In the wake of Heine, beginning in the late 1830s, numerous German-Jewish writers wrote historical novels (in German) about Jewish history, which were serialized in Jewish newspapers like the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* and *Der Israelit* and then distributed to Jewish readers across central Europe through publication societies such as the Institute for the Promotion of Israelite Literature, founded by Ludwig Philippson, Adolph Jellinek, and Isaac Jost in 1855. These books circulated even more through Jewish lending libraries and educators, who were the primary subscribers to the publication societies.

Historical fiction was one of several genres cultivated by nineteenth-century German Jewish writers who wrote in German, primarily if not exclusively for other Jews. Two of the main authors were Ludwig Philippson and Marcus Lehmann—rabbis who also wrote novels in German for other Jews. Other notable genres of nineteenth-century Jewish literature were romance literature and the so-called “ghetto tales” or “ghetto literature” of the kind popularized by writers like Leopold Kompert and Karl Emil Franzos. For scholars such as Hans Otto Horch, Jewish historical fiction was something of a failed attempt by elites (rabbis like Philippson and Lehmann) to manufacture an “ennobling” didactic literature for Jewish youth, whereas the “ghetto tales” of Kompert, Franzos and others became a successful, and indeed more “genuine” form of Jewish popular culture



Cover of the newspaper *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* featuring the serialized Philippon novella *Die Marannen*. Reproduced from the Visual Library of the Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main.



Else Lasker-Schüler, 1912. Courtesy of the Else Lasker-Schüler estate, Jerusalem, Israel.

because it found resonance with greater numbers of Jewish and especially non-Jewish readers. In Horch’s understanding, ghetto literature was “popular” to the extent that it was popular with readers or in the ways that it paralleled the kind of *Volksliteratur* embodied by nineteenth-century Romantics such as the Grimms, but also by Jewish writers like Berthold Auerbach, whose “village tales” (few of which had explicitly “Jewish” themes) were extremely successful with German readers. Indeed, it was Berthold Auerbach who authored both *Spinoza* (1837), one of the very first Jewish historical novels, as well as *Schrift und Volk* (1846), a programmatic work on realism as a people’s literature.

But if, on one level, the village tales and ghetto stories romanticized the “old ways” and sense of community found in an idealized countryside and the historical novels celebrated and lionized princes, adventurers, and luminaries of the past, nineteenth-century Jewish literature also served as a potent means to confirm the values of its real audience: the new Jewish bourgeoisie. A “middlebrow” aesthetic appealed to Jewish writers and readers who sought to construct a modern Jewish identity that conformed to their integrationist social aspirations. In the nineteenth-century German Jewish context, a “popular” culture was first and foremost a German middle-class culture.

There was a paradox at the heart of a minority writing (and reinventing) its own history in a majority language in the era of modern nationalism. Nineteenth-century German Jewish writers wrote novels in German about Jewish history read mostly by other Jews, but their works sought out Jewish narratives that could harmonize with themes in German national culture. Thus, the abundance of Sephardic themes in the works of Heine, Auerbach, Philippson, and Lehmann can be in part explained and can acquire new meaning when we understand German Jewish philo-Sephardism in the context of works like Schiller’s *Don Carlos*, something known to all German readers. The theme of heroic Jewish conversos resisting a villainous Inquisition was adopted by integrationist German Jewish authors in part

as a bridge that could unite them with German enlighteners like Schiller. Thus, “minority culture” could also be a “popular culture,” one that positions an integrating minority in relation to a majority “high culture.”

Significantly, Jewish popular culture in the form of historical novels written by and for Jews in mid-nineteenth-century Germany took on a new dimension when these works were translated into Yiddish and Hebrew in the later nineteenth century. As the work of Nitsa Ben-Ari has shown, what functioned as a literature with a pronounced integrationist tendency in the German context was paradoxically transformed into a “national” literature in an eastern European context. Of course, Hebrew and Yiddish readers from the 1880s onwards consumed translations of non-Jewish European authors as well, so the question of what constituted “Jewish popular culture” in the nineteenth century stands as a matter of debate.

But perhaps the most moving testimony to the way in which nineteenth-century German Jewish historical fiction was a form of “popular” culture is the way that twentieth-century German Jewish writers returned to the genre in response to anti-Semitism in the 1920s and 1930s. Else Lasker-Schüler’s strange modernist tale “The Miracle-Working Rabbi of Barcelona” (1921) seems like a fantastic and idiosyncratic story about a pogrom in a surreal, ahistorical version of Barcelona. Yet when we read Lasker-Schüler’s against the background of the nineteenth-century Jewish tales by Heine and Ludwig Philippson, and we take note of Lasker-Schüler’s prominent focus on childhood, we can see how Lasker-Schüler is returning to and rewriting the nineteenth-century Sephardic tales of Heine and Philippson, works she likely read as a child. Similarly, Hermann Sinsheimer, a prominent theater critic whose expulsion

from German cultural life after 1933 was a tremendous blow to his self-understanding as a German Jew, responded with a novel that he published in 1934: *Maria Nunnez*, a Sephardic-themed historical novel that is a rewriting of an 1867 novel by Ludwig Philippson. Sinsheimer’s novel was published with Philo Verlag, one of a few small Jewish publishers that the Nazis permitted to remain open until 1938: these were the only permissible publication venue for Jewish writers in Nazi Germany. Whereas in the 1800s independent Jewish publishers provided a vehicle for a new Jewish popular culture, after 1933 they were a ghettoized space where the popular literature that once was could be recollected.

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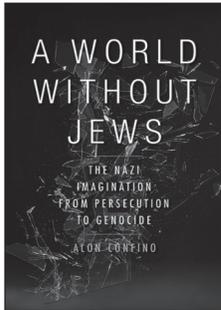
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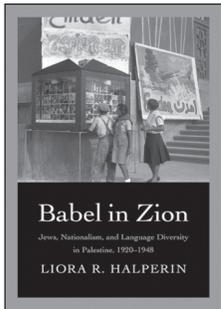


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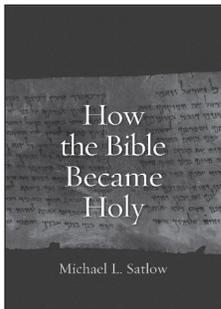
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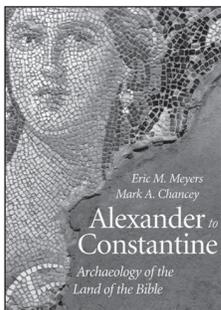
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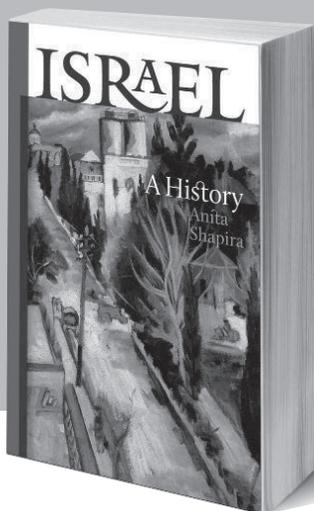
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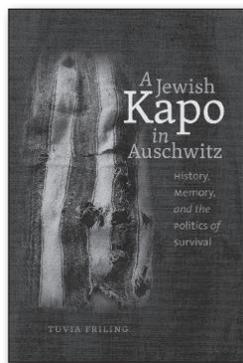
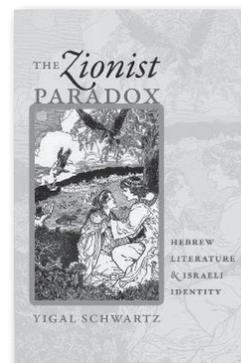
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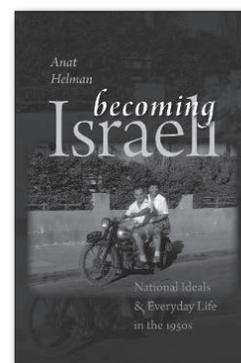
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# Algerian Jews, French Colonialism, and the Question of Nonelite History

Joshua Schreier

The confrontation between the “indigenous” Jews of Algeria and the French colonial administration has been the central drama in the historiography of Jews in modern Algeria. This encounter was, until recently, narrated in the modernizing language left over from the civilizing mission, whereby the “isolated” and “oppressed” indigenous Jews haltingly came to appreciate and assimilate French culture over the course of the nineteenth century. With the aid of liberal reformers who successfully advocated for the extension of the French system of *Consistoires Israélites* (official community organizations) to Algeria, so the story goes, the “regeneration” of indigenous Jews was eventually realized through the 1870 Crémieux Decree that made French citizens of thirty thousand indigenous Jews of Algeria’s northern cities. It is a tidy and triumphalist story, whose success was seemingly confirmed in 1962 when the vast majority of Algeria’s Jews departed for France—despite initial Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) calls for Jews to stay in Algeria, and Zionists’ efforts to encourage them to emigrate to Israel.

Such narratives leave very little room for “people’s history,” if by that we mean histories of people of poorer classes traditionally understudied in historical narratives. Scholars engaged with such histories-from-below began integrating these groups into the historical record several decades ago, focusing not on North Africa but on *other* regions in the Middle East such as Egypt, Iraq, or Palestine, such that the category of “people’s history” is, for Middle Eastern Studies, by now a somewhat dated term. For various reasons, this has been less the case for histories focused on Jews in the Maghreb.

One reason perhaps, was that the central problematic in the historiography of Jews in French Algeria was the supposedly progressive campaign to “emancipate” them. The merits of the civilizing project directed at the supposedly “poor,” “isolated,” and “oppressed” Jews of Algeria appeared beyond reproach to a previous generation of scholars: the struggle, in their eyes, lay between “liberal” and “tolerant” French statesmen and, first, the conservative, anti-Jewish elements in the



Street in Oran, 2000s. Courtesy of the author.

French military, and, second, the intolerant yoke of Islam that had ostensibly relegated Jews to misery. As I have discussed elsewhere, this contest was one expression of the larger fight unfolding in France between liberal or emancipatory republicanism and clericalist, military, and/or royalist forces (it is no coincidence that the 1870 Crémieux Decree was one of the first acts of the new Third Republic; a self-conscious legislative reference to the Revolutionary Decree of 1791 that emancipated the Jews of France). Accordingly, Algerian Jews’ own voices in response to French colonialism were consistently belittled or paled to fit either a liberal French teleology of modernization, or conservative (frequently anti-Semitic) critiques of this vision that objected to full Jewish rights.

This historiographic tendency cloaks some of the wider dynamics that bear on a people’s history. Notably, the traditional narratives emphasizing the triumph of emancipatory, colonial republicanism manifest in the Crémieux Decree elide the poor, rural (and largely non-Jewish) people to whom full rights were *never offered*. Even as French conquest subjected millions of rural pastoralists or peasants to dispossession, rape, and massacre, many in France justified

it as an “emancipatory” project evidenced by the fact that Jews would be liberated from oppressive Islamic rule (similarly, the spread of civil rule in Algeria was also painted as a “liberation” for white colonists bowed under an arbitrary military rule). In other words, the same rhetorical structure deployed during the French Revolution against the Old Regime’s “intolerant” and “fanatic” persecution of French Jews was later used to justify the emancipation of Jews from Islam. Colonialists used emancipation for some in Algeria as a cloak for the exclusion of the many.

This brings us to the colonial category of “indigenous,” a term the “people’s” historian needs to unpack. Jews in Algeria were a varied lot, with Judeo-Spanish-speaking Moroccan Jews in the west hardly identifying with the Berberophone or Arabophone Jews of the M’zab or the Jews of eastern Algeria. The well-to-do merchants of Algerian ports towns, meanwhile, were often part of a trans-Mediterranean commercial network, speaking Italian, Spanish, English, or French, with partners or family members in Gibraltar, Livorno, Algeciras or elsewhere. A people’s history, then, must involve uncovering varied, historic lines of identification between different groups of Jews that were collapsed by French colonial terms.

“Elite” and “popular” did not overlap perfectly with the opposition between “European” and “indigenous.” The famous Cohen-Bacri family, and those of the Busnach clan, were among the most important merchants in Algiers at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Angelo Amar, a scion of the Busnach family, served as the head of the Jewish community of Oran, had roots in Livorno, and had family members settled in the Algerian regency since 1723 or 1724. My current research traces the history of Jacob Lasry, a Moroccan-born Jewish merchant long settled in Oran who had British papers, family in Gibraltar, and significant real estate holdings. He even donated land to the French-installed *Consistoire Israélite* when it was established in Oran. Further complicating the opposition between the “liberal” reformers and the “reactionary” military discussed above, some French

generals such as Bertrand Clauzel actually partnered with elite Jews like Lasry. Some Jews served as translators, intermediaries, or experienced businessmen who could exploit their knowledge of local practices to help finance military operations and benefit themselves in the process. These Jews, though at some level “indigenous” to North Africa, can hardly be described as “subaltern.”

While these merchants were an integral part of Algerian Jewish history, the majority of Jews in Algerian cities such as Oran were of far more modest means. Crucial to any people’s history is the question of how these Jews themselves identified with, responded to, adapted, or resisted French efforts to bend them to forms of civic behavior and religious practice that bourgeois reformers deemed “enlightened” (*éclairé*). They had come to the city in the years following the Ottoman recapture of the city from the Spanish in 1792. At the time, the Dey of Algiers had moved the capital of the western *beylick* of the Regency of Algeria from Mascara to Oran, and offered craftsmen and merchants from surrounding towns such as Mascara and Tlemcen, including Jews banned by the Spanish, the opportunity to settle and develop the newly Muslim city. They worked in the lower echelons of import-export, ran shops in the market, sold fish or produce, or were itinerant merchants. They might have prayed at one of Oran’s seventeen private synagogues, or taught in the *midrashim*, religious schools for young boys. By the time the French arrived in Oran, many were destitute—the war of occupation had uprooted many Algerian Jews as well as Muslims, and political troubles in Morocco would bring more Jews, many quite

poor, from Tétouan into western Algeria over the course of the mid-nineteenth century.

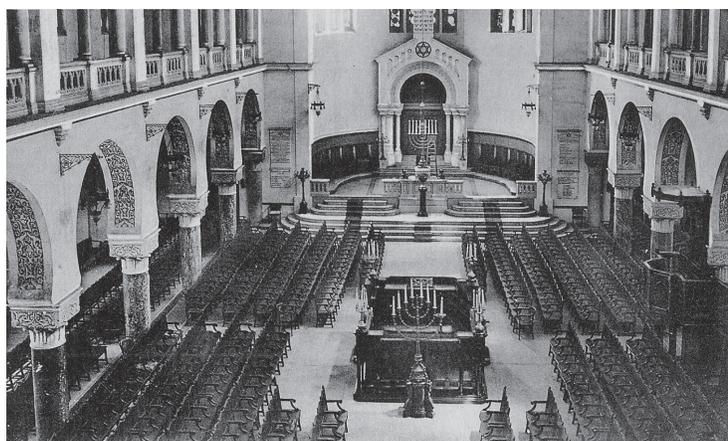
Only occasionally do the stories of these nonelite Algerian Jews percolate to the surface in the colonial archives. Generally, when they do, it is in the event of problems. These problems emerged as certain ways of making a living came into conflict with new French efforts to either control the economy, or forms of religious learning or practice. For example, many responded with dismay when the French installed new rabbis—often Tétouanais Jews favored by reformers—throughout the provinces in 1847. Nonelite Jews also clashed with consistorial efforts to control Jewish education in Algeria. During the 1850s and 1860s, as the consistory attempted to regulate how Jewish schools functioned, many rabbis or teachers were forced to close their schools or give up providing private lessons to children. Jews also sometimes faced censure for simply practicing their trade; one itinerant Jewish trader, working with Kabyle accomplices in the mountains, was arrested when caught bringing goods deemed “unauthorized” into the province of Oran. Consistorial efforts to control synagogues, charity, and education met widespread popular revolt in 1848, as demands for republican governance spread throughout France and its territories. In these ways, merely continuing to make a living or practice local forms of Judaism came to be seen as “resistance” to civilization.

Newer work is in the process of giving us a fuller vision of modern Algerian Jewish history, including that of the nonelite. This includes Jewish experiences of virulent settler anti-Semitism during the late nineteenth

century, or its reemergence in the years leading up to and including the Vichy period. Religious responses to changing sources of authority is another developing avenue for people’s history. Finally, Jewish experiences of the Algerian War of Independence is also a rich topic for nonelite history, for popular Jewish responses to decolonization, Arab nationalism, and the emergence of Israel were far more varied than one might expect given today’s polarization between “Arab” and “Jewish” perspectives.

What, then, are the implications for Jewish Studies of reexamining Algerian Jewish history from nonelite perspectives? Given that historians of the Middle East (among other fields) began integrating workers, peasants, and popular culture into their explanations of historical change more than a generation ago, it demands that we look beyond our field. Specifically, we shift focus from Jews alone and analyze how “civilizing” efforts with which Jews in Algeria contended were part of a wider, and far more brutal, colonial campaign. Combined with recent scholarship’s emphasis on the fact that many Jews resisted elements of French rule, this approach forces a critical reappraisal of “emancipation,” a consistent leitmotif in modern Jewish historiography. Finally, it exposes the limits of crucial categories of Jewish historiography, not only “indigenous,” “French,” “colonized,” or “Moroccan,” but even “Algerian” and “Jewish.”

*Joshua Schreier is associate professor of History at Vassar College. He is the author of Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria (Rutgers University Press, 2010).*



The sanctuary of the Great Synagogue of Oran. It now serves as a mosque. Courtesy of the author.



An early postcard depicting Rue Austerlitz, a major street in the Jewish quarter of Oran. Courtesy of the author.

# Living Side by Side, Really?!

Joëlle Bahloul

Social scientists conducting field research on relationships between Jews and Muslims in the second half of the twentieth century have been exposed to and often wedged in ideological debates originating in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The media pressure and public opinion stereotypes make it difficult to provide any insight into these relationships that would not characterize them in terms of hostility or violent conflict. Ethnographic accounts of nonviolent communication bitterly compete with manipulative journalistic reports. In this race for informational authority, academics lose: their authority weighs very little against that of the expeditious, repetitive media, which often convinces academics themselves. But the media information simplifies the extremely complex world of Middle Eastern and Judeo-Muslim relationships, full of paradoxes and oppositions, even contradictions. Hostility towards Jews in the Muslim world can coexist with friendly neighborhood relations between the two religious communities. Indeed, the concept of neighborhood, that is, being neighbors to each other, is indigenous to the history of Judeo-Muslim relations, including in the postcolonial period of the last few decades. The various types of Jewish-Muslim neighborly relations have also been observed and analyzed by ethnographers.

Those of us who have conducted long-term ethnographic research with peoples entangled in those ideological debates have indeed regularly been exposed to the daily and ritual exchanges of communication, services, and (edible) goods between Jewish and Muslim neighbors in various countries of North Africa and the Middle East. The recent revival of interest in Jewish culture in Morocco is an interesting example of such forms of neighborly paradoxes.

In 2007, a few Moroccan Jewish and Muslim students and young scholars from Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane mobilized their neighborly efforts to create the Mimuna Club (MC), an association with cultural goals whose members meet and organize conferences throughout Morocco about the Judeo-Arab heritage of their country of residence and nationality. They also opened a Facebook site to allow former neighbors

presently residing all over the world to communicate about this agenda with a clear peacemaking and ingathering purpose. As of spring 2014, the MC on Facebook totaled some 377 members. In 2008, the MC published the first issue of *Moroccan Jewish Days*, the MC's annual review. Other MCs have been created in various Moroccan cities, such as Marrakesh, Fez, and Rabat. Several characteristics of this association should be noted. First, its name, the "Mimuna" Club. The term *Mimuna* designates the ritual that marks the end of the Passover week's dietary restrictions and originates among Moroccan Jews. In the past several decades though, Mimuna parties have been celebrated among most Jews of the Muslim world, from North Africa to the Middle East, even though not all these communities call this ritual Mimuna. In practice, the ritual marks the return to the leavened diet, and is essentially organized around the festive communal consumption of various sweet and savory flat breads, baked during the gathering of friends and relatives. The ethnography of the ritual in North Africa or Israel has documented

the nature of these post-Passover dishes, from *mufleta*, a type of leavened pancake served with honey and cheeses, to sweet couscous and meat stews with dried fruits. The ingredients used for the baking of these Mimuna dishes include grains that have been "expelled" from the Jewish houses during the pre-Passover spring cleaning. But instead of trashing those ingredients because they are suspected of containing nonkosher leavened substances, Jewish families would give them away to their Muslim neighbors for the week. At the end of Passover, those Muslim neighbors would return the food, most often in the form of fresh grain or baked goods. The exchange of food between Jews and Muslims at the end of the Passover week is the material formulation of the return to daily neighborly relationships between the two communities. Indeed the Passover week, with its battery of special dietary restrictions, is also a cyclical withdrawal into the inner frontier of Jewishness, that is, a centripetal social process. By contrast, the ritualized conclusion of these restrictions is characterized by the reinstatement of



Muslim-Algerian kitchen, Algeria, 1982. Courtesy of the author.

normal daily relations with the Muslim neighbors, a centrifugal social process.

The founding members of the current Mimuna Club celebrate this cyclical and daily neighborly relationship, and in doing so, claim to recognize and promote Jewish participation in a diverse, multiethnic and multireligious Moroccan heritage.

What does the MC do? What's its agenda? Its Facebook site describes it as follows:

A club about Moroccan-Judaism (i.e., history, culture, and heritage). [...] Our Aims are —To encourage youth to discover the Moroccan-Jewish culture that has always been present in the Moroccan history, in its everyday life.

—To show youth (in particular) and other members of the Moroccan community (in general) how Moroccan-Jewish life is like and what traditions they have, with the highlight of its uniqueness as well as similarities with Muslim traditions in the context of Morocco.

Indeed, virtual communication, the internet, and Facebook are favorable formats and venues for these types of “neighborly” relationships to deploy, after the postcolonial massive emigration of a large number of Jews

from North Africa and the Middle East. For exiled North African Jews, Facebook and the internet are used to remember major assets of their native countries, communities, and cultural traditions. The remembrance of recipes, flavors, and images of ritual and daily food gatherings is important for celebrating the culture in exile. For the Muslims who have stayed behind, Facebook and the chatrooms of various internet sites are favorable loci of remembrance of their Jewish neighbors, of their cuisine, and shared daily domestic encounters. The process is clearly at work in Francophone websites such as Harissa.com, Zlabiya.com, and Dafna.com, or the witty Facebook site La Dafouineuse. Those sites, named after celebrated recipes of the North African Judeo-Arab culinary heritage, vibrantly call for communication between Jews and Muslims who use them profusely in exchanging, critiquing, and promoting their respective recipes, in their search for the “authentic” (grandmothers’) cuisine. Chat rooms are used to send religious holiday wishes to the membership, and other sections are filled with memories of native towns, photos of culinary presentations, elementary schools, and other childhood souvenirs.

But what is key to the operation of the Mimuna Club and other virtual Judeo-Muslim associations, is their engagement in the preservation and promotion of Judeo-Muslim collective memory. They suggest that this collective memory has been constructed in the many decades of shared domestic life, shared meals and ingredients: the incorporated memory of coexistence.

Obviously, the entire Arab-Muslim world does not have the preoccupations that are so dear to the members of the Mimuna Club. The latter are well aware of this situation when they write in their review that “Morocco may well be a model of Jewish-Muslim coexistence.” But what is important to note here is that Judeo-Muslim coexistence transpires in both recent and less recent Middle Eastern and North African history. And some young educated people plan to maintain the memory of this history and pass it on to the young generation. A large nest is always built with tiny twigs.

*Joëlle Bahloul is professor of Anthropology at Indiana University. She is the author of The Architecture of Memory (Cambridge University Press, 1996).*

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*Jewish Culture. Cover to Cover.*

# Shtetl: Toward the Study of Jewish Vernacularity

Jeffrey Shandler

A few years ago, when I was asked to contribute a volume to a series on “Key Words in Jewish Studies,” I proposed a book on *shtetl*—and was met with some skepticism. Was this really a key word, on the order of, say, *Haskalah* or *Zionism*? What I thought to be readily self-evident was, apparently, not so. Still, the series editors were open to the suggestion and encouraged me to submit a proposal. So I hunkered down to make my case and, long story short, convinced them to sign on a volume on *shtetl* (which appeared in January 2014).

As I set to work on the book, it occurred to me that the uncertainty about this subject’s salience in Jewish Studies should be addressed as an issue in its own right. In fact, scholarly attention came rather late to Jewish life in the provincial towns of pre-Holocaust eastern Europe—that is, what *shtetl* has come to signify, especially in languages other than Yiddish, in which the word simply means “town”: any town, anywhere, at any time, inhabited by anyone. To some extent, this belated scholarly engagement reflects a general reluctance in the academy, until relatively recently, to study “ordinary” people and places, as opposed to great individuals, elite groups, major events, large sites, canonical works, and big ideas. Though these provincial east European towns had become home to a Jewish population of unprecedented scope by the eighteenth century, scholars attended to Jewish life there only after Jews had begun leaving these places in large numbers, by dint of urbanization and immigration, in the second half of the nineteenth century. Towns that had once constituted a cultural as well as geographic frontier for Jews came, over time, to be considered a backwater.

Subsequently, these places were reconceived as heritage sites—the last locus of an “authentic” Jewish folk culture newly valued by urban, cosmopolitan Jews (and some non-Jews as well)—and attracted the attention of linguists, folklorists, art historians, and musicologists, among other researchers. After Jewish life in eastern Europe was roiled by World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the Russian Civil War, more scholars—including historians, sociologists, and economists—scrutinized these

provincial towns within the rapid, if patchy, professionalization of Jewish Studies during the interwar years, both within and without the academy. Much of this research was initiated by philanthropies—or, in the Soviet Union, government agencies—seeking to either rehabilitate or transform a beleaguered Jewish population struggling to recover from the war and economic depression.

This intellectual ferment came to an abrupt halt during World War II, when Europe’s Jews were assaulted with unprecedented swiftness, thoroughness, and savagery. Yet in the wake of this devastation came new scholarly attention to the Jewish life that had once thrived in these provincial towns, as the fields of Jewish Studies, East European Studies, and Holocaust Studies took shape within new centers in North America and Israel as well as in Europe. During the postwar decades the word *shtetl* emerged as shorthand for pre-Holocaust east European Jewry as a whole and, moreover, connoted an understanding of its way of life as a common, comprehensive, intimately communitarian cultural system, defined by religious traditions that distinguished and

insulated Jews from their neighbors. This use of *shtetl*, especially in languages other than Yiddish, exemplified as well the word’s evoking of a “vanished world,” of which only vestiges remained, including the reduction of Yiddish from a full vernacular to a handful of isolated words and expressions. The fall of communist governments in Eastern Europe at the end of the twentieth century disrupted this declinist perspective and opened up new possibilities for scholars there and around the world to study the region’s Jewish past as well as its present, including attention to Jews still living in these towns. By the turn of the millennium, *shtetl* studies had come into its own (exemplified by the surge in use of the word *shtetl* in several hundred English-language dissertations after 2000, compared to only a handful of instances beforehand).

Meanwhile, the *shtetl* had been established as a fixture of modern Jewish culture in eastern Europe and throughout the international diaspora of Yiddish-speaking Jews and their descendants, manifest in works of print culture, visual and performing arts, as well as communal and family lore. These engagements are inherently social



Photo from the Ansky Expedition. Courtesy of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

and on the whole driven less by intellection or ideology than by affect and the senses. At the same time that the shtetl has appeared in this broad spectrum of cultural activities, it has provoked diverging sentiments: disparagement (by Zionists, communists, cosmopolitanites), valorization (by Hasidim, Yiddishists, genealogists), and an often sentimentalized or exoticized curiosity (by immigrants and their children, fans of *Fiddler on the Roof* or Isaac Bashevis Singer's fiction, non-Jews now living in towns that once had substantial Jewish populations).

Recent scholarship has often addressed the complex phenomenolization of the shtetl through a binary rubric of "history vs. memory" or "myth vs. reality," but this topic entails a much more involved imbrication of the work of scholars, novelists, journalists, and artists with Jewish life in eastern Europe's provincial towns. Reading fiction about the shtetl, participating in the fieldwork of researchers, or encountering tourist visitors became part of Jewish life in these communities, especially in the interwar years. After the Holocaust, this interrelation was reconfigured. As the shtetl received unprecedented scholarly attention and creative conjurings flourished in the absence of actual towns as exemplars of Jewish vernacularity, an array of new vernacular practices centered on the shtetl arose. These efforts, emerging in response to the destruction wrought by genocide, address a particularly daunting challenge, as they confront the limits of encountering a lost vernacular way of life. Many of these practices—museum exhibitions, documentary and feature films, websites, works of visual art, live performances, tourist activities, courses of study—approach the shtetl through the rubrics of scholarship or with the help of academics. The distance between the erstwhile quotidian and the present one, a distance once defined in part by scholarship, is now often obscured or collapsed. Engagé scholarship on these towns, formerly the work of activists seeking to rescue or reform the Jews living there, now seeks ways to bring people, whether or not they are Jews, closer to this lost vernacular sensibility.

More than a referent for pre-Holocaust east European Jewish culture, the word shtetl and what it has come to connote have become fixtures of post-Holocaust Jewish culture. The word's shifting semantic value marks this development, as shtetl acquires a kind of agency, understood not merely



Photo from the Ansky Expedition. Courtesy of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

as defined *by* Jewishness but as defining *of* Jewishness—that is, this phenomenon of social geography and the values associated with it now inform the nature of Jewish life. This shift is manifest in the expansive use of the term shtetl as a metaphor for Jewish communality (in places ranging from Melbourne, Australia, to Bessemer, Alabama) and in the invoking, reenacting, displaying, or imagining of the shtetl within new Jewish definitional practices, including those that non-Jews participate in and sometimes initiate. These practices constitute new Jewish folkways, for investing added values in the term shtetl is primarily a self-styled, grassroots phenomenon. As it indexes a range of associations, the term exemplifies east European Jews' vernacular energy—resistant to conformity or standardization and unashamed of its difference, humbleness, vulgarity, inconsistencies, or hybridities. By dint of its vernacular base, the shtetl is esteemed as a locus for encountering Jewish rootedness in the colloquial, however that encounter might be configured.

The history of shtetl as a discursive subject, both in the academy and beyond, evinces signal shifts in conceptualizing Jewish vernacularity as a phenomenon of modernity. This notion distinguishes colloquial Jewishness from its imbrication with elite Jewish mores by dint of a new cultural self-consciousness. Therefore, beyond its importance for scholarship on Jewish life in eastern Europe from the early modern period to the present, shtetl exemplifies a dynamic

relationship with vernacularity in Jewish Studies more generally. This relationship entails changes not only in how scholars study the lives of "ordinary" Jews but also in how scholars understand their work in relation to vernacular practices, past and present.

Thinking with the shtetl has been a widely shared vernacular activity, primarily undertaken as a means of Jewish self-realization. Participants in this activity have included people living in these provincial east European towns, former residents, visitors, as well as people with no direct experience of these places. For the most part, this undertaking has not been an academic exercise. Scholarship not only came relatively late to the shtetl but has had, ultimately, a limited impact on its conceptualization. Rather, engaging the shtetl has mostly been a subjective, often imaginative, impassioned, and at times explicitly polemical activity. It is the scholar's challenge to acknowledge—and to respect, even while critiquing—the difference between the agendas of most of these engagements and an academic method. The protean, populist nature of shtetl as a key word is therefore both its greatest challenge to Jewish Studies and, at the same time, its greatest virtue—the key to desires that drive a fascination with the vernacular Jewish past.

*Jeffrey Shandler is professor of Jewish Studies at Rutgers University. His most recent book is Shtetl: A Vernacular Intellectual History (Rutgers University Press, 2014).*

# Gender and Everyday Jewish Life in Imperial Russia

ChaeRan Y. Freeze

In her memoirs, *A rebishe heym in amolikh Poyln*, Ita Kalish (1903–94) recalls the strict gender norms that governed her family's Vurke Hasidic court in Poland, especially in the sphere of dress. To ensure strict observance of the boundaries of modesty, her grandfather R. Simḥah Bunem hired a special tailor to sew the women's clothing—which she described as “grotesque” feminine garments of black or red satin adorned with gaudy headpieces of large jewels. The grandfather's intervention invited subversion: Aunt Revele, for instance, wore the “Vurke garments” only when appearing before her husband's family, but exchanged “her veil for a modern bonnet and the housecoat for a beautiful, modern dress” when visiting her father's house in Lodz. The women also took advantage of festive occasions such as weddings to order dresses from Madame Keller of Warsaw, who was “more of an artist than a tailor.” However, when Aunt Tsiyvele entered the wedding hall in her “lemon-yellow satin dress, embroidered with blue velvet flowers with a long train . . . a malicious murmuring arose: such a dress was better suited for an actress than a Vurke rebbe's daughter.”

Kalish's narrative offers more than a trivial description of everyday dress; it reveals *how* gender functioned as a principle for regulating social behavior and enforcing hierarchies in her family. It also suggests that even the strictest households like the Vurke court had space for subversion, but also that the community was quick to discipline transgressors like Aunt Tsiyvele with “malicious murmuring.” Under tremendous pressure, she reluctantly banished her “actress dress” to her closet, never to wear it again.

Gender functioned as an organizing principle in every sphere of Jewish society. Gender regimes (to borrow R. W. Connell's concept)—from family to work, religious, and educational institutions—dictated the expectations of social relations, norms, and behaviors based on perceived differences between men and women. Jewish marital conflicts invariably featured accusations that a spouse had failed to abide by the rules of these gendered arrangements. Take, for example, the Broun case that came under review by His Imperial Majesty's Chancellery for the Receipt of Petitions, an office that issued separate passports: Iosif Broun, a veterinary doctor from the town of Shuia



Portrait of Ita Kalish. Courtesy of the family of Ita Kalish.

(Vladimir Province) castigated his wife for her failures in their marriage, blaming the deaths of three children on her lack of desire to breastfeed and on her “abnormal way of life with endless card games.” His wife Shura (Sonia) Broun countered that her husband was the failed parent for he had refused to contribute “expenses for the upbringing of the children.” In each instance, the couple invoked normative gender ideals as their primary point of reference.

Gender, though allegedly “natural,” had to be maintained through continuous and, in the words of Judith Butler, “compulsory performance.” The Moscow diaries of Zinaida Poliakova (1862–1952), daughter of the wealthy banker and railroad mogul Lazar Poliakov, chronicle the daily activities that reinforced her gender roles as a Russian noblewoman, a status conferred through her father's attainment of hereditary nobility. Like Russian elite women of her day, Poliakova performed her cultivated self to perfection: she spoke several foreign languages including French and English, dressed in the latest Parisian fashion, danced the newest waltzes at balls, reported the hottest society gossip (to be sure, with the proper feminine sensibilities of empathy, pity, and shock), and displayed the exemplary social etiquette and grace expected of noble women. Rarely did she stray from the gendered scripts—in striking contrast to those exceptional

Russian noblewomen who rebelled by pursuing higher education in universities or by joining a revolutionary movement.

As Poliakova's diaries demonstrate, gender never existed by itself: masculinity and femininity always intersected with other vectors such as class, age, and religion (what Kimberlé Crenshaw has aptly termed “intersectionality”). Despite being thoroughly integrated into Russian elite society, Poliakova remained a Jewish woman, subject to the confessional laws of the empire and religious laws that governed her household. Her mother kept a strict kosher home, refusing to violate any dietary laws for the sake of their social life. For all the harsh criticisms of her mother's fanaticism, Poliakova kept a bitter record of how carefully she observed the laws: “Today, we drank black coffee with sugar instead of cream. It was not very delicious, but then everything has to be done according to what is written in the laws of Moses.” Not surprisingly, Poliakova kept a kosher home after she married and moved to France and Italy; the gendered habitus that she internalized proved to be tenacious.

The construction of gender in Jewish society implied sexuality, and any departures from gender norms were considered deviations and disciplined. As in most societies, Jewish women bore the brunt of social stigma for the violation of their chastity. For instance, in 1885 Rakhil Krupen, a cook in the home of a Girsh Kolodnyi of Moscow, accused her employer of violently raping her and firing her when she became pregnant to “hide his vile behavior.” Kolodnyi raised the customary defense that he was a “family man” with several children while Krupen “carried on freely” with young men in the courtyard. Other witnesses also testified that the cook “behaved like a streetwalker.” The truth is impossible to ascertain from the court case. However, the witnesses clearly assumed that, given Krupen's immodest reputation, she could not have been raped and was solely responsible for her pregnancy. The double standard was most evident in a denunciation to the Medical Administration of Vilna by a certain A. Polevich of Voronov (Lida district) in which he accused Sheina Zlata, of infecting him with a sexually transmitted disease (presumably syphilis). The indignant Polevich demanded that the state “summon her to

the hospital immediately to have the disease treated; otherwise, still more innocent men will suffer from this disease because of her.”

Gender was also a critical component of the symbolic order of representation, language, and imagery in Russian-Jewish culture. A close reading of Lev Levanda's novel *Turbulent Times* (serialized in *Evreiskaia biblioteka* in 1871–73), illustrates how writers employed gender to articulate social and political concerns. The novel explores the conflicted loyalties and choices of acculturated young Jews in two northern Pale of Settlement cities (probably Grodno and Vil'na) during the Polish Uprisings of 1863–64. These former Polish lands, a hotbed of discontent and nationalism, erupted in rebellion against tsarist rule, ending in the loss of Polish cultural and administrative autonomy. Previous scholars have argued that the novel posited a binary choice between loyalty to Russia and Polish nationalism. Focusing exclusively on the male protagonist Arkadii Sarin, scholars have treated him as the embodiment of Levanda's own identification with the Russian state or his failures as the subversion of the author's positive message of Russification. But a gendered reading suggests that the novel was not simply about choosing between two old rivals. Rather, it explored the fantasy of political liberation and longing for a nation that would embrace Jews in comradeship through an affective merger, not only as a matter of law.

Like his Russian contemporaries Feodor Dostoevsky and Nikolai Leskov, Levanda relied on liminal female protagonists, tropes of love, gossip, and folktales (similarly gendered as female) to undermine the dominant political discourses. The author plainly sympathized with Sofia Aronson and Polina Krants, both of whom devoted themselves (whether in practice or in spirit) to a romantic, national cause. This was not necessarily because he favored the Polish uprising (which he treated as a noble but futile endeavor) but because they could throw caution to the wind for one glorious moment like their heroic historical ancestors. As Krants's friend, Meri Tidman described her: “Such a rich poetic nature is never compatible with the difficult prose of Jewish life . . . I love her as a sister, more than a sister. I love her as a beautiful dream, as a beautiful ideal toward which we strive but cannot attain.”

Tidman's voice of reason served to temper the romantic fantasy. As long as Jews remained subjects (not citizens), shunted from one power to another, the whole idea of an affective merger with another nation was absurd:

If it is possible for a subject, a slave, to have a fatherland, then we don't have to rack our brains about what our fatherland is. Today, our fatherland is Russia because it has power, but tomorrow when the power has

reverted back to Poland, Poland will be our fatherland. . . . So it does us no good to sign up as Polish or Russian patriots.

Traditional Jewish elders whose public performance feigned acceptance of both state hegemony and Polish superiority expressed similar sentiments. Reb Yoḥanan's folk story told how an orphan was forced to choose between two stepparents who hated him: “The complete orphans are we, the Jews, the stepfather—Russia, the stepmother—Poland. . . . It is always easier to reach an agreement with a man than with a broad who by nature is cunning, capricious, and muddleheaded.” Infused with misogyny, the tale paid lip service to Russia but asserted that the stepchild neither belonged to the stepparents nor desired to live with them under the present circumstances.

In the end, it was Meri who talked practical politics and held “masculinist” rational views of the state. Paradoxically, it was Sarin who, like Polina, could not be satisfied with mere emancipation but longed for a secular, romantic nationalism (which is neither state based nor confessional) to embrace him. Despite his programmatic performance on behalf of Russification, Sarin who fell in love with Iuliia Krutitskaia (a Polish noblewoman and ardent nationalist) subversively embodied the romantic antithesis of the Russian reason of state. Levanda's bitter doubts and political longings found their expression first in the conflicted Aesopian idioms of his fiction: it would take another decade after the publication of *Turbulent Times* before he could articulate them openly in journalistic prose.

As all these narratives illustrate, gendered practices that seemed “natural” were deliberately constructed to maintain social organization, hierarchies, and power. The construction of gender was a process that operated within broader gender regimes that were slow to change, pushing individuals to take the path of least resistance. Yet the everyday history of Jews in Imperial Russia also reminds one that gender was never only about routinized conformity but also involved elements of resistance, accommodation, and transformation.

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Zinaida Poliakova on her wedding day. Courtesy of the author.

# Fighting Anti-Semitism and Jim Crow: “Negro-Jewish Unity” in the International Workers Order

Jennifer Young

On an evening in late February, 1941, almost six thousand people gathered in midtown Manhattan to attend a performance entitled “The Negro in American Life.” Sponsored by the International Workers Order (IWO) to celebrate the order’s eleventh anniversary, the show was written by black playwright Carlton Moss, and featured a pageant of black heroes from American history, including Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Langston Hughes. The event concluded with a choral performance of the IWO’s unofficial anthem, the cantata “Ballad for Americans,” with soloist Paul Robeson. Musically narrating the story of American democracy from 1776 onwards, the ballad’s narrator invokes Lincoln and proclaims, “[a] man in white skin can never be free / while his black brother is in slavery . . .” Interrogating the narrator, the chorus repeatedly asks him, “Say, we still don’t know who you are, mister . . . are you an American?” until the narrator finally declares, “Am I an American . . . ? I’m just an Irish, Negro, Jewish, Italian . . . Spanish, Russian . . . Czech and double-check American!” The cantata’s lyrics outlined and emphasized the IWO’s political philosophy: fighting against Jim Crow benefited whites as much as blacks, and white ethnic groups had the responsibility to resist assimilation as part of the central battle against capitalism’s power to “alienate, discriminate, and segregate.” The real struggle against capitalism could only begin once true unity among races could be achieved.

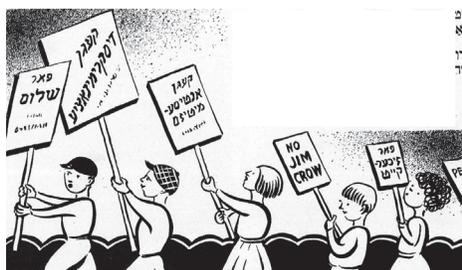
Established in 1930 after a schism within the Jewish socialist Workmen’s Circle, the IWO’s founding members came from the ranks of prominent leaders of the American communist movement. Selling health and burial insurance to workers of all races at the same rate, as opposed to for-profit corporate insurance companies, which charged different rates for workers of different races, the IWO quickly became the fastest growing fraternal order in the United States. Supporting the left wing of the New Deal, IWO leaders hoped that once workers came to see state-supported healthcare, unemployment insurance, and minimum wage as a right, they would work to put the Communist Party at the helm of a worker-led American



Photos reprinted from the October 1949 issue of *Yungvarg*, the IWO Yiddish children’s magazine. Courtesy of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

revolution. By 1941, the IWO claimed a membership of over 150,000 members nationwide. IWO lodges organized foreign-language newspapers, mandolin orchestras, sports teams, May Day parade floats, theater troupes, mass picnics, and marching bands.

While about a quarter of IWO members were Jews, the IWO also included numerous other ethnic/linguistic sections. Large immigrant populations of Russians, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Poles, Slovaks, and Italians made up the majority of the non-Jewish membership, but the IWO also effectively established a foothold amongst almost every national minority group in the United States, from Arabs in Michigan, to Japanese in San Francisco, to Cape Verdians in Cape Cod. The IWO also began to organize black Americans. This proved a more difficult problem than organizing any other group,



and caused considerable consternation and debate among IWO leaders. “Shouldn’t blacks be organized within English-speaking lodges, on the principle of interracial unity?” some members asked. Others responded that, according to the Communist Party’s “black belt” hypothesis, blacks constituted a unique minority group and should, therefore, be accorded the status of a national section.

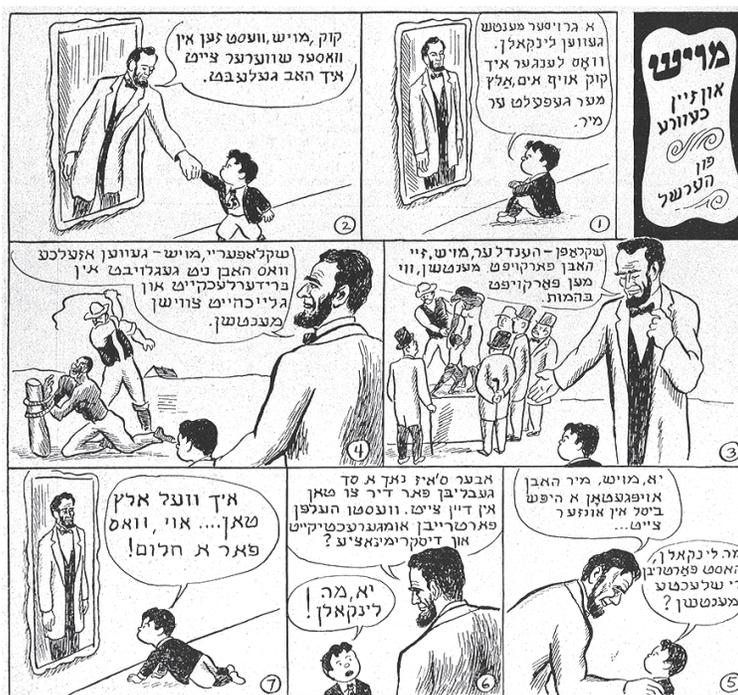
In order to address the issue of black membership in the IWO, the IWO appointed the prominent black Harlem community leader, Reverend Moran Weston, as their Director of Negro Work. Weston worried that pageants, spectacles, and a cult of Negro celebrity would not generate urgently needed political changes for black Americans. In a 1941 newspaper article, Weston connected prejudice against blacks to the war in Europe, arguing that Jim Crow was a form of fascism. Alluding to the recently passed Smith Act, which expanded grounds for deportation of immigrants, Weston announced a new IWO campaign against the poll tax, declaring that the poll tax “engenders fascism in the South and undermines democracy in the North . . .” Foreign-born Americans, now vulnerable to intimidation, raids, and arrests without cause, could particularly understand Jim Crow, Weston argued; it was no coincidence that a key proponent of poll taxes was Representative Smith of Virginia, sponsor of the Smith Act.

In the summer of 1944, the IWO convened a conference to discuss how best to organize blacks within the IWO. Responding to Reverend Weston’s criticism that Negroes within the IWO felt kept apart from the rest of the IWO, the new strategy aimed to organize “general” lodges, not predominated by any ethnic or linguistic group, where Jews, Italians, Poles, white Protestants and others could “express solidarity with the Negro people,” thus creating a “more advanced expression of inter-racial unity.” While a number of “general” lodges were predominantly black, and others were predominantly white, by rule every lodge in the IWO had to be interracial. IWO leaders hoped to recruit seven thousand more black members by the end of 1945, the majority in New York, Chicago, and Detroit.

These “concentrated” black lodges, IWO leaders stressed, should not be seen as a form of segregation, but as a result of focusing on the particular concerns of the Negro people, just as Jewish lodges mobilized around issues of unique concern to American Jews, like anti-Semitism and support for the State of Israel.

While pushing for more black lodges in predominantly black communities and for more interracial lodges in majority white communities, the IWO also continued to sponsor public celebrations of black culture as a method of connecting members in the larger struggle for political solidarity. In a memo announcing Negro History Week in 1945, the IWO encouraged lodge directors to “invite a prominent Negro trade unionist, clergyman, artist, or civic leader as honored guest and speaker.” In response, Lodge 817, a Jewish lodge in Brooklyn, launched their first “Salute to Negro History Week,” reaching out to members of the local Mt. Zion Baptist Church. So successful was this outreach, they reported, that their black neighbors “have joined the IWO in sufficient numbers” to form their own lodge (about fifty people). Still, white IWO leaders, while praising local efforts in observing Negro History Week, worried that these actions were superficial: “Inter-racial unity is not something to be worn like a Sunday suit of clothes—on certain special days of the year. By our daily deeds, we of the IWO labor to . . . attain full equality for all groups of the American people,” one memo declared. Yet despite moderate growth in both black and interracial lodges, leaders worried that white chauvinism kept IWO groups focused on their own affairs, and not on interracial solidarity work.

By the fall of 1949, two nationally publicized incidents galvanized the IWO’s Jewish section to convene a special meeting dedicated to solving the problem of “Negro-Jewish Relationships and Unity.” In September, after an upstate New York outdoor concert featuring Paul Robeson, the audience faced a hostile, rock-throwing crowd, shouting racial slurs against Jews and blacks. Rumors abounded of crosses burning on the hillsides around the amphitheater. That November, a Jewish union leader and IWO member invited black colleagues to his home on Chicago’s south side. White neighbors, worried that the family was planning to sell their house to blacks, instigated a weeklong “reign of terror.” Crowds of up to ten thousand people gathered on the streets, yelling “dirty kikes,” and “communists.”



At the IWO gathering held in response to these sobering events, Abe Chapman, an editor of the Yiddish communist newspaper, the *Morgn Frayhayt*, argued that one real problem with Jim Crow fascism was that it meant that white supremacist ideologies had not yet been wiped out of the IWO itself. “. . . [r]acism is eating the heart of our Order,” another member concurred. Another speaker argued that Jews had not yet done enough in the fight for equal housing: by fighting for Negro rights; he argued Jews could help eliminate anti-Semitism among blacks who were being exploited by Jewish landlords and merchants. Negroes, not Jews, stood as the “barometer of the state of our democracy,” but the battle to end racism and anti-Semitism would have to be fought jointly in order to succeed. Abe Chapman concluded that it was the distinct responsibility of Jews within the IWO to make the “maximum contribution” to this struggle.

In February 1950, the IWO ultimately established the Douglass-Lincoln Society, the official Negro section, “giving leadership to the interracial work of the Order” while “serving the special needs of the Negro community.” Heralding the opportunity for joint action, a *Jewish Fraternalist* columnist envisioned joint commemorations of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and performances of the play *Freedom Road*. This optimism was short-lived.

Several months later, Abe Chapman disappeared. The phone rang repeatedly in his Queens apartment, the beds still made and the

bookshelves still full. As the FBI closed in on Julius Rosenberg and the government prepared for a record-making prosecution of eleven communist leaders under the Smith Act, Chapman smuggled his family out of the country and began a new life in Czechoslovakia. Other leaders went underground as well, preserving a secret network of party leadership in the face of political decimation. At the same time, the IWO received an auditor’s report concluding that it constituted a “hazard to the public,” because of its communist affiliation. The report recommended liquidation. By 1953, the IWO’s assets of over seven million dollars became the property of New York State, its 150,000 memberships were voided, and its officers were discharged from all official duties. Although many groups within the IWO reconstituted themselves as independent entities, none were interracial; the great experiment embodied in the “Douglass-Lincoln” title had come to an uncertain end. While many friendships remained, the project of political unity did not endure.

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# On Common Ground: The New York Photo League, Jews, and Urban Photography, 1936–1951

Deborah Dash Moore

The story of Jews and urban photography in the United States effectively begins in New York City in the middle of the Depression when Sol Libsohn and Sid Grossman, two young men in their twenties, second-generation Jews and native New Yorkers, succeeded in wrenching the left-wing New York Photo League from its older and more experienced leaders. Libsohn and Grossman shared a radical vision for the Photo League as a school and incubator of photography that would change how Americans, especially urban Americans, understood the city. Working together in small groups, the mostly Jewish photographers at the league used cameras to picture life as lived on city streets. In the process, their eyes caught the web of looks—looks given, taken, and withheld—that frame street-level interactions. Their photographs engage looking as part of the fabric of urban life. Even today these images pull viewers into their orbit of a distant world. That gritty, American Jewish working-class milieu took shape in the interwar years.

The experience of hundreds of young aspiring Jewish photographers at the New York Photo League not only created an archive of rough images of city streets but also a distinctive tradition of street photography that was indebted to lively, intense conversations about photography that occurred at the league. This heritage of street photography extended beyond the league's demise in 1951, through the teaching of former league members, and through interlocking circles



Boy on Roof, Pitt Street, New York City, 1938, Photograph by Walter Rosenblum ©.



Hester Street, c. 1938. Photograph by Sol Libsohn. Courtesy of The Estate of Sol Libsohn.

of photographers located in New York City. But even before the league succumbed to anti-communist agitation that landed it on the Attorney General's list in 1947, World War II disrupted the collective spirit of league photographers. Several of its leaders, including Grossman and Walter Rosenbaum, were drafted into the armed forces and served overseas. After the war a more individual, personal, form of street photography, often focused on interactive portraits, emerged.

This type of photo ethnography inscribed acts of looking with an existential significance that questioned the reality of the lives portrayed. Photographs through plate glass windows, always fascinating to photographers for their reflective virtues, invited contemplation of the unreality of urban existence, the interpenetration of inside and outside, the topsy-turvy world of signifiers pointing wildly to each other. Looks stolen provoked an uneasy sense of urban chaos, a disorder and craziness pictured by photographers. Pictures of public performances that transformed profane space into sacred turf transported viewers beyond the streets to contemplate human relations. Here could be seen a frozen moment that raised questions about attitudes toward neighbors.

These changes in Jewish photographers' understanding of their enterprise stemmed

in part from a movement away from collective responsibility for urban images to individual encounters on city streets. Although photographers continued to share their images and learn from each other in classes with master teachers, they increasingly adopted an ethnographic posture of participant observer. They sought simultaneously to picture mundane urban life and to reflect upon it. Their pictures transformed everyday sights concretely exemplified in photos of ordinary people into both ethnographic evidence and works of art. Viewing the circumstances of existence, of life as lived, stimulates reflection upon the fabric of social life. This postwar move by photographers from sociologically engaged street photography to existentially intriguing city people paralleled an emphasis among social scientists on theories of interaction as the glue connecting urban residents. Ties of kinship and metaphors of family connections describe this shift in perceptions. Yet the alienation of urban strangers, first remarked upon and theorized by the German sociologist, Georg Simmel, also endured.

Jewish street photographers seem to collude with viewers, suggesting a shared responsibility for looking. Far from objectifying the people they portrayed, the pictures seem both abrasive and evanescent. How can one hold onto the moment of insight? How does existence depend upon what is permitted to be seen? What images endure and enter a metaphoric communal family album? These photographs will become collective memories of an urban past. They offer future generations insights into an unselfconscious Jewish world that was transformed by Holocaust and Cold War into highly self-conscious perspectives.

The league attracted largely working-class Jews, native New Yorkers, who discovered photography, were passionate about its possibilities, and wanted to learn basic techniques. They came to the league for classes in how to take pictures that encouraged them to acquire a language for talking about photography. Like many second-generation New York Jewish organizations, the league was not explicitly Jewish. Most members possessed

Jewish urban backgrounds that seldom needed or wanted articulation. Photography united them, but so did progressive and leftist politics. Photo League members shared no love for capitalism and championed socially responsible government welfare. Yet they also eschewed a politicized photography focused on strikes, pickets, rallies, and evictions. Their method often involved groups of photographers working together to document a neighborhood or street, considered the constitutive urban units of community.

The commitment of Photo League members to street photography and the documentary mode of presentation grew out of their desire to stimulate communal self-awareness and to effect social change. “The Photo League members were encouraging art with social purpose, photography that could improve living conditions and better civil liberties,” writes Lili Corbus Bezner in her book, *Photography and Politics in America: From the New Deal into the Cold War*, “and they were doing this, at times, in a language popularized by radical Depression-era politics and born from the Marxism of the Russian revolution.” (24)

League members joined styles of talking and habits of looking with categories of perception. Their common fund of experiences drew upon a city of eight million, almost two million of them Jews, which made New York feel half-Jewish. Through their ongoing discussions about photography as a group activity, members came to work within linked discourses of aesthetic and social action. An unselfconscious Jewishness facilitated creative conflict among photographers and occasionally between them and their subjects.

They took different paths to the league’s modest quarters near Manhattan’s Union Square. Some were teenagers still in high school and curious about photography. Others came to learn darkroom skills. Despite clumsy equipment that was far from state of the art, it was better than trying to develop film at night in an apartment bathroom or kitchen. By working together with others, one received training in the technical and expressive potential of variable exposures, shutter speeds, depth of field, not to mention darkroom craft. Still others arrived through a teacher’s recommendation. But irrespective of motivation, most league members stayed because they got caught up in the excitement of photography.

They took a class with Sid Grossman, a young man who considered photography a means to change the world. From Sid they learned not only about how to take pictures but also about the history of photography. If they knew nothing about art, Sid sent them to visit the Metropolitan Museum to learn. If they didn’t have a political point of view, Sid pushed them to develop one. If they had never looked before at photographs, Sid encouraged them to visit the few galleries that showed photographs. And then he urged them to take photos of what they knew: New York City streets. But he also insisted that they see those streets anew, without the aid of conventions.

“An honest viewpoint. A clean lens.” The Photo League announced this ideal as an aesthetic, political, and moral statement in its April 1939 issue of its newsletter, *Photo Notes*. League photographers demanded both objectivity and engagement. A “clean lens” portrayed metaphorically the meaning of an “honest viewpoint.” The “objective” lens, as it’s called technically, introduces light into an optical system. The Photo League promoted a resonant trope of clean, honest, objective, and interactive interestedness. For these street photographers technique was methodology; they endlessly debated obligations of technique and theory. Committed enthusiasts of so-called Straight Photography urged one another to take unstaged photographs of “real” people in “real” circumstances in natural light, pictures developed and printed without special darkroom manipulations. For its proponents at the league, the “straight” photo held the potential to harness a photographer’s instantaneous choices—in perspective, framing, and timing—on behalf of truth, or at least of honesty. But league photographers understood that objectivity, or at least honesty, also required that they cultivate reciprocity with neighborhood residents for whom they served as a communal mirror. Their work shows how eyes that take can give as well.

The influence of the league lingered in exchanges of ideas and images, in friendships and contacts that it had nurtured and in a heritage of Jewish photographic practices that pictured the city as common ground.

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Henry Street, Manhattan, c.1946-47. Photograph by Rebecca Lepkoff. © The Estate of Rebecca Lepkoff. Courtesy of Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York.



Mulberry Street, New York City, 1947. Photograph by Sid Grossman. © Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York.



East Side Sweet Evelyn, New York City, 1938. Photograph by Morris Engel. Courtesy of the Estate of Morris Engel.

**YAD HANADIV**

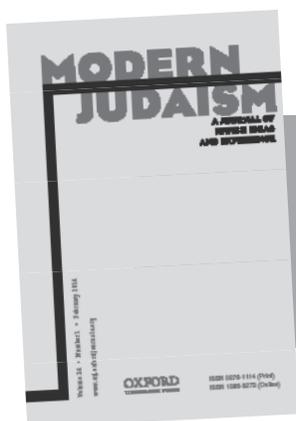
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The American Academy for Jewish Research is pleased to announce the winner of its annual Salo Baron Prize for the best first book in Jewish studies published in 2013. The prize, which comes with a \$5,000 award to be presented at the annual luncheon at the AJS Conference, will honor:

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Cambridge University Press**

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Required for Application:

1. A copy of the thesis prospectus including a chapter outline, and a one page statement, including a budget, about the necessity for travel (i.e. collections to be consulted, sites to be visited).
2. A letter of recommendation from the dissertation advisor. The advisor must affirm the need for travel and the letter must state that the institution does not provide summer or travel funds.

All materials should be submitted online to Cheri Thompson at [cherithompson@gmail.com](mailto:cherithompson@gmail.com) by February 2, 2015. For questions and further information, please contact Professor David Stern, Chair of the committee at [dstern@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:dstern@sas.upenn.edu). Awards will be announced in mid-April 2015.



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Please submit applications on-line via email to Cheri Thompson, administrator of the American Academy for Jewish Research, at [cherithompson@gmail.com](mailto:cherithompson@gmail.com).

The deadline for applications is February 2, 2015. Recipients of grants will be notified by May 2015.

For questions or further information regarding this program, please contact Professor Seth Schwartz: [srs166@columbia.edu](mailto:srs166@columbia.edu).

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Judaic Studies Program  
P.O. Box 208282  
New Haven, CT 06520-8282  
EMAIL: [renee.reed@yale.edu](mailto:renee.reed@yale.edu)  
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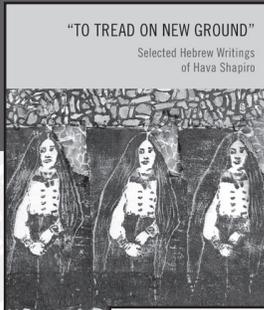


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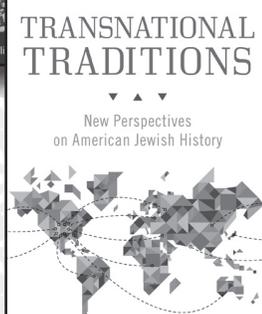
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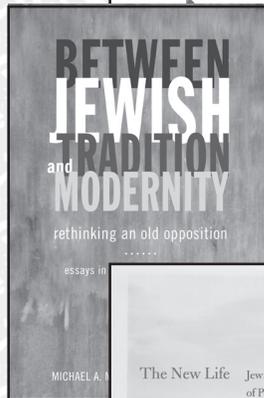
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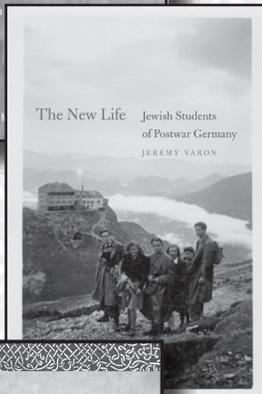
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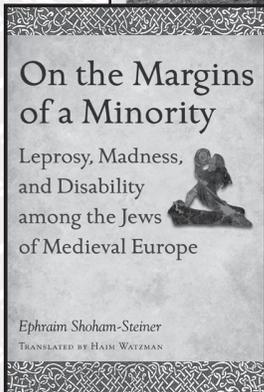
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# Encounters in an Israeli Line: Sha'ar Ha-'aliyah, March 1950

Rhona Seidelman

**W**as it the immigrant standing in line who started the fight? Or was it the clerk, on the receiving end of the line, who first attacked the immigrant? That depends on whom you believe. The accounts we have contradict one another and leave holes in what we know (most significantly, no one got the immigrant's story. They didn't even get his name.). And so we can't rely on the written documents as a way to pin down a culprit. Instead, we can turn to them to try and imagine the environment that led to this eruption of violence. What was it like for people to experience these punishing lines, in this first place of arrival to the newly established Jewish state?

\*\*\*

In March 1950, one year after the Jewish Agency had opened Sha'ar Ha-'aliyah ("The Gate of Aliyah"), an Ellis Island-like camp near Haifa, the newspaper *Ha-dor* reported on a violent encounter that took place in one of the camp's many lines:

I was an eyewitness to the shameful display whereby an employee, by the name of Reis, grabbed a French-speaking immigrant by the throat and went to throw him outside . . . Bloodshed was prevented through the intervention of other employees (S. Harzion, *Ha-dor*, March 25, 1950).

Very quickly, Harzion's piece got the attention of Sha'ar Ha-'aliyah's director, Yehudah Weisberger, who promptly contacted Shim'on Reis (the employee mentioned in the article) and asked for an immediate explanation. By the next day Reis had submitted to Weisberger his own account of the incident:

On the day indicated in *Ha-dor* I was sitting, as usual, in my seat, receiving the public. Suddenly, from behind the door, I heard screams—as well as a dramatic cry of "Reis!" [. . .] Inside, the official was struggling with a tall and strong young man (apparently from Morocco) who did not want to stand in line and had broken in by force.

I wanted to rescue the official as well as restore order, and I tried to explain to the young man (*without the use of physical force*) that he, first of all, had to stand in line, like everyone else and, second of all, he had to obey the official. But the young man did not want to listen to me, jumped upon me and took a swing at me—which I managed to avoid (CZA AK 456/3).

Weisberger was satisfied with this explanation. When he reported back to the Sha'ar Ha-'aliyah police on what had happened, he relied on Reis's own statement before adding his own analysis:

Knowing the situation in the camp, it's unthinkable that someone working in the reception would treat a new immigrant in the way Mr. Harzion described, and we are inclined to the opinion that these details found their way into the [published] letter from Mr. Harzion's imagination: It is hard to believe that Mr. Reis was the attacker in the mentioned incident, and it is most likely that the

description given by Reis himself is closer to the truth (CZA AK 456/3).

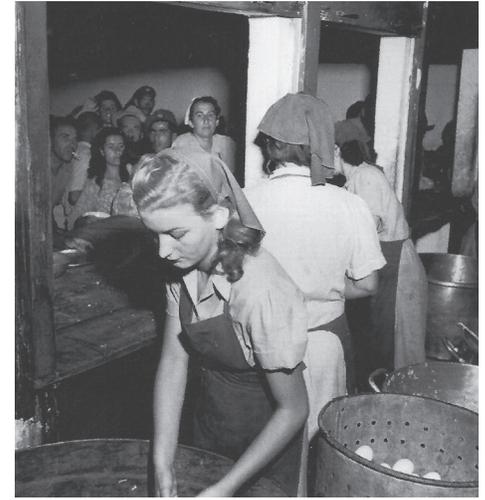
What made Weisberger come to Reis's defense so unequivocally? Was it purely out of loyalty to his employees? Was it because of his own prejudices against the immigrant Reis described as "apparently from Morocco"? Certainly "knowing the situation in the camp," as Weisberger did, it is not hard to imagine that any immigrant confronting Sha'ar Ha-'aliyah's lines could have snapped. The camp itself was built to hold five thousand immigrants, who were meant to stay there for only around four to five days to undergo a medical exam and then be assigned their permanent places of residence in Israel before being bussed to their new homes throughout the country. But what actually happened was that it became impossible to evacuate the immigrants already residing there before new ships and planes arrived. Although some people did manage to complete their processing and leave in a number of days, many others ended up staying in Sha'ar Ha-'aliyah for weeks or months. The camp was filled beyond capacity with thousands more people than it was intended



Photo reprinted from *Haolam Hazeh*, 31.3.51.



Sha'ar Ha'aliya Absorption Camp, Haifa, 1950. Photograph by Robert Capa. © International Center of Photography. Courtesy of Magnum Photos.



"Receiving the lines wasn't necessarily much easier than standing in them." Shaar Ha'aliya, 1951. Photo reprinted from *Photographs from Israel* by Boris Carmi (Prestel, 2004), p. 25.

to hold, the premises were filthy, conditions were tense and often spiraled out of control.

The grueling line became a symbol of Sha'ar Ha'aliyah and the challenges and disappointments of immigration. One photograph of the camp shows at least fifty-eight people in line and another has over one hundred—and these are only the people visible to the camera. Immigrants who had just arrived to Israel after drawn-out, often extremely difficult journeys (in the broadest sense), had to wait in these impossibly long, unruly lines before their every meal, before their medical examination, and then before their encounter with the final processing committee. The lines were the result of overcrowding, misunderstandings, and eagerness to leave Sha'ar Ha'aliyah as soon as possible. Because of language barriers, people did not always understand where they were supposed to be and when. Sometimes people would arrive at their appointments early—they were eager to finish the processing as quickly as possible—and they would end up waiting for hours. It was then, after waiting so long, that the new immigrant—often exhausted and frustrated—interacted with the Sha'ar Ha'aliyah staff: men and women like Shim'on Reis.

Yet, it's just as easy to imagine that a person working in the camp could have snapped, since receiving the lines wasn't necessarily much easier than standing in them. Many of the people who worked in Sha'ar Ha'aliyah were themselves immigrants, with varying degrees of

newness. Their jobs gave them the security of a paying job with vacation time and opportunities for promotion in a difficult economy, but it was hard to deal with the crowds, the dirt, and the unattainable expectations (of the immigrants as well as the often idealistic clerks) day after day. In many cases there wasn't a common language between the immigrants and the camp personnel, and often there seemed to be no way to bridge the huge cultural gaps that separated people. Shim'on Reis claims to have "tried to explain to the young man" that he had to stand in line. Perhaps he did. But he gives us no reason to believe that they actually understood one another.

As it turns out, over a year later Shim'on Reis was sentenced to a month in prison after he attacked a different immigrant—a man from Iraq who had himself been arrested by the Sha'ar Ha'aliyah police. The following post appeared in *Haaretz* in August, 1951:

According to Reis, he lost his temper when he saw the police's tepid response to the arrested men, who had been accused of attacking police officers and Jewish Agency officials . . . after witnessing the leniency of the police he decided to punish one of the "criminals" himself.

This later guilt does not necessarily mean that Reis also attacked the immigrant in 1950 (although it certainly casts a shadow on his character). Based on the existing

evidence we still aren't left with a definite culprit. Instead, what we are left with is a glimpse into why these grueling lines became a symbol of people's experiences in Sha'ar Ha'aliyah; a sense of how either man may have been pushed to a breaking point; as well as, perhaps, a sense of amazement that—in such an environment—these stories were the exceptions and not the rule.

Sha'ar Ha'aliyah was the first stop on Israeli soil for nearly 400,000 Jewish "diasporic" immigrants; a place where they began to be transformed into the Israeli people and the Israeli people began to be (profoundly) transformed by them. The Jewish Agency conceived of it as an isolated space where the masses could be met, contained, and controlled with order. But, in so many ways, the immigrants who went through Sha'ar Ha'aliyah defied this balance of power. The people who emerged from this flawed process were emboldened, often disappointed, vocally and physically defiant, and carried with them a strong sense of entitlement to the goings-on in their state. In the controlled chaos of the Sha'ar Ha'aliyah lines we can see the people, and the newly complicated encounters between people, that were bringing Israel to life.

*Rhona Seidman is visiting assistant professor in the Program in Jewish Culture and Society at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her book manuscript is tentatively titled, "Under Quarantine at Israel's Ellis Island, Shaar Ha'aliya."*

# “The People Demand Social Justice”

Jonathan Simons

“The people demand social justice” was the loudest and most frequently raised slogan of the Israeli social justice protests of the summer of 2011. The protests were certainly popular. Beginning with a protest encampment of about fifty tents on July 14th on Tel Aviv’s Rothschild Boulevard, tens of thousands joined a demonstration in the city nine days later, increasing and spreading to 85,000–100,000 in rallies in other cities by the end of the month, then building to 200,000–350,000 a week later, and culminating (after a pause in the mass demonstrations) with about 460,000 on September 3rd, the majority of them in Tel Aviv.

The protests were also popular in the opinion polls, reaching up to 90 percent approval ratings. The protests were popular with the press too. Channel 2—which broadcasts Israel’s most popular news programs—interrupted its usual Saturday night schedule with extended coverage of the big demonstrations. Crucial to these “media events” was a story of success or failure according to the numbers participating—would the anticipated target be reached? How quickly would the crowds gather? Popularity in the public sphere, like TV ratings, can be measured.

So who were these people? And what were their demands? From the start, the tent encampment gave voice to the frustrations of young, urban, generally secular Israelis with the cost of housing—both for rent and purchase—in the heavily populated center of the country (especially Tel Aviv). Between 2005 and 2011, rents had increased by nearly 50 percent in the Gush Dan region. A Facebook campaign launched by Daphne Leef, under the heading of “*Bet, zeh ’ohel*” (“H is for tent”) sparked the broader protest and gave it some its names, “The Housing Protest” or the “Tent Protests.” Very soon, however, the agenda of the protest movement broadened to include the high cost of living in general, building on the “cottage cheese” protests and boycott earlier in the summer that led to a drop in the price of that basic product.

In addition, the tent protests and demonstrations demanded better public services, notably health and education. Following decades of neoliberal economics,



Photos courtesy of the author.

privatization, welfare cuts, and the concentration of much of the wealth in the hands of a few “tycoons,” the crowds also called for a “welfare state.”

The rapid accumulation of issues fed into the overall demand for “social justice,” a demand addressed to the government, whose economic and social policies were neoliberal.

On occasion, the protest was held in the name of the middle class, as in this virtual poster circulated on the web for the demonstrations held on July 30th, which proclaims: “The middle class is collapsing: PROTEST RALLY . . . The struggle is e-v-e-r-y-o-n-e’s struggle.” If this were indeed the struggle of the middle class, could it be everyone’s struggle—the “people’s” protest? Sociologists Uri Ram and Danny Filc understood the movement to be creating a new class coalition and broad social solidarity between the Tel Aviv middle class and lower social strata, which could thus claim the title of “the people.” Similarly, Ze’ev Rozenhak and Michael Shalev saw in the protests a response of the young middle class to their limited housing and career opportunities, which they framed in universal terms as “the people” rather than as a particular social group. Cultural philosopher Ariella Azoulay heard in the heterogeneity of the protestors’

claims a new civil language in which the people articulated a universal demand for social justice. Whether middle class or not, the throng-filled streets, the sound of rhythmic chants, the collective energy of bodies in public space, created the heady atmosphere in which everyone, the “people,” seemed to be demanding “social justice.”

There were suspicions, especially from the naysayers, that this was no authentic, spontaneous grassroots movement expressing genuine economic hardship and dissatisfaction with the prevailing social order. Someone must be pulling the strings from above in a coordinated attack on the Likud-led government, said some, including leaders of the settler movement. The Communist Party, international anarchists, the “National Left” movement—leftists of all sorts. Or, it was said, the protests were not really serious—voicing the complaints of the rich, of hashish-smoking, sushi-eating hedonists, who all felt entitled to an apartment on Rothschild Boulevard. After all, they said, these were not actually homeless people, or welfare victims, as in previous tent protests. Even sympathizers imagined that some group or other must be organizing everything and running the tent encampments that spread from city to city—how else could this be happening?



It was the Dror movement (graduates of the Ha-no'ar Ha-lomed Ve-ha'oved youth group), or the scouts, or the National Union of Students. As it was, many groups did join in and lend support, including those above, as well as the nonprofit New Israel Fund, the Histadrut (Trade Union Federation), the mayors of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the left-wing Meretz Party. Even Prime Minister Netanyahu said he understood the problem with housing prices and was working to fix it. Taking in the signs and banners at the tent camps, it seemed that every social grievance was represented there: divorced fathers, animal rights campaigners, and by no means insignificantly, the campaign to “share the burden equally,” meaning to oblige the ultra-Orthodox to conscript. The people.

Or only some of the people. The ultra-Orthodox were not there, other than some Bratslav Hasidim. The national religious were also thin on the ground, and the

religious Zionist youth movement Bnei Akiva withdrew from the protests in the wake of accusations about the leftist character of the social protest movement. Yet, movements of “the people” are never all of “the people.” Populist movements always entail some split between the totality of social classes and groups—some people are not “the people”—whether the aristocracy, the establishment, or the tycoons. Certainly, for some of the protestors, the tycoons, the government, and the neoliberal socioeconomic system they engineered, were the targets of the protest. The language of revolution was in the air.

Populist movements are usually energized by central fissure between “the people” and its enemy. In the case of the Israeli social protest, however, the split between the people and its enemy was less significant than the divisions within the protest. For the most part the protest held itself to be apolitical, raising problems that it demanded

the government take care of rather than demanding to get rid of the government. The protestors, to be sure, were not bought off by the prime minister’s announcement of a new housing plan on July 26<sup>th</sup>, and when the government appointed Professor Manuel Trajtenberg to head a commission for socioeconomic reform, the protestors appointed their own committee of experts. Ultimately, though, the social protest could not weave together a populist movement that could sustain its claim to speak for the people. As Chen Misgav has pointed out, the media focus on Rothschild and its social media origins drew attention away from other tent protests even within Tel Aviv and Jaffa that spoke for different social groups and demands. In the Ha-tikvah quarter, in Levinsky Park, in Jaffa, longer-standing grievances of Mizrahi Jews mixed with the national claims of Israeli Palestinians and African migrants’ demands for rights. It’s not that there was no sense among the protestors that if the people’s demand for social justice were to be fulfilled, the perennial social injustices among the people would have to be overcome: between Jews and Arabs, Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, men and women, center and periphery. But the demand for social justice was never articulated in a way that could address all of those injustices. The social protest was indeed a carnival, but as Yehuda Shenhav says, despite its best intentions, a conformist carnival. ‘Am, “people” in Hebrew, also means “nation,” and in the Israeli context, the nation—a Jewish nation, Ashkenazi-dominated, masculinist, ruling over Palestinians—trumps the people. As one of the protest leaders, Stav Shaffir, put it following a terrorist attack on August 18th, the demand for social justice was framed in the terms of national security. The social protest was populist but not populist enough. The “nation” called for social justice. The people have yet to appear.

*Jonathan Simons is associate professor of Communication and Culture at Indiana University. He recently published “Promoting Peace: Peace Now as a graphic peace movement, 1987–1993,” in Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History 5 (2013).*



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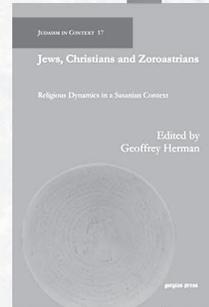


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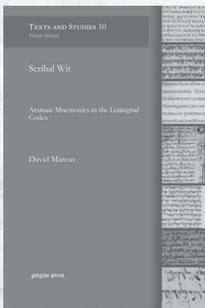
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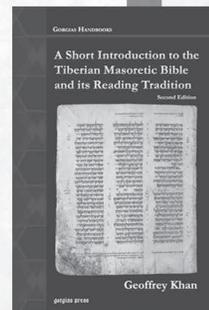
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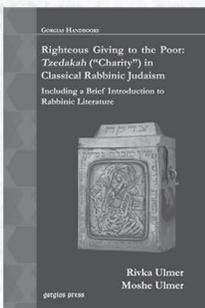
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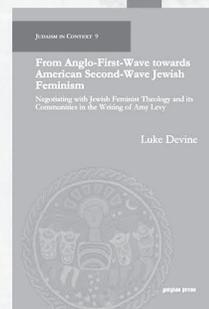
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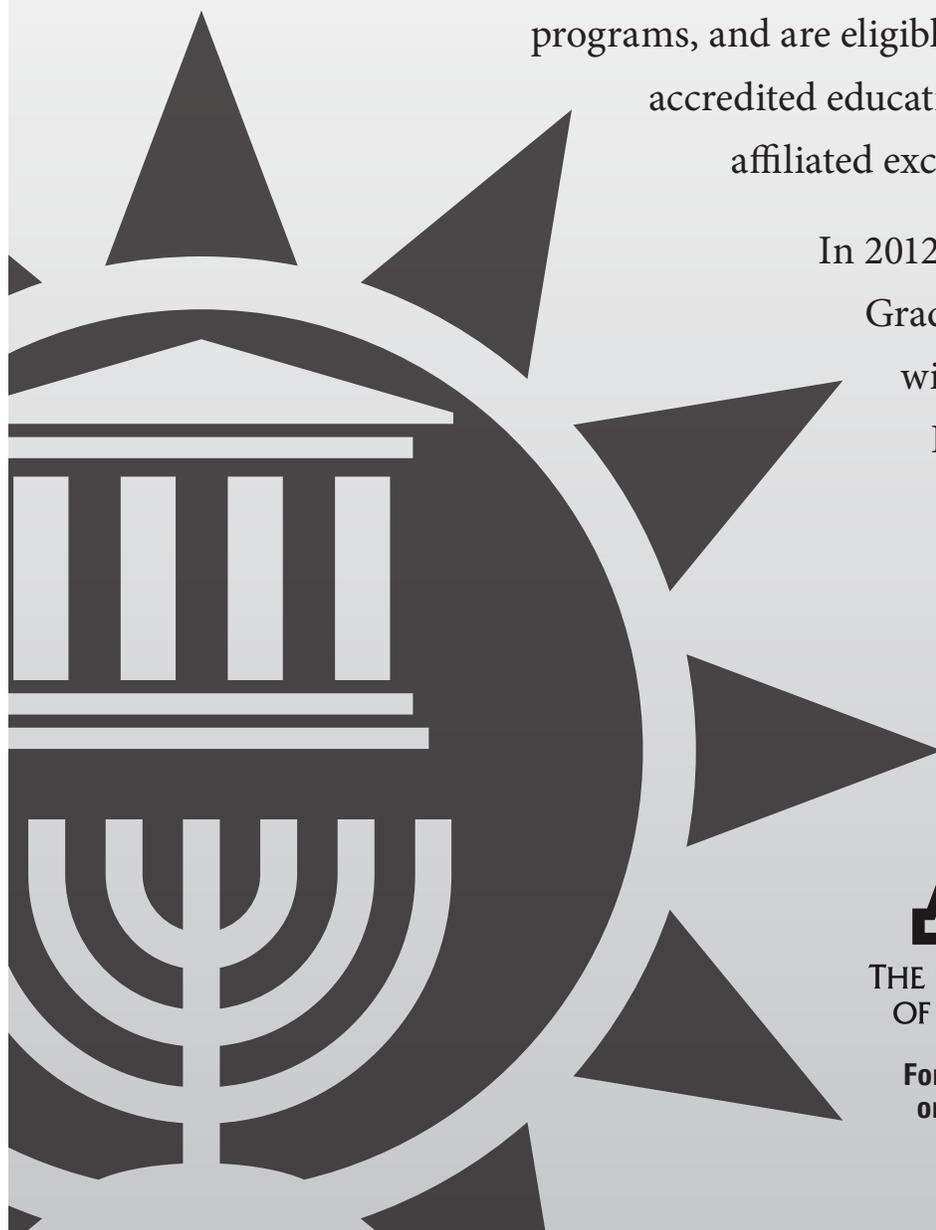
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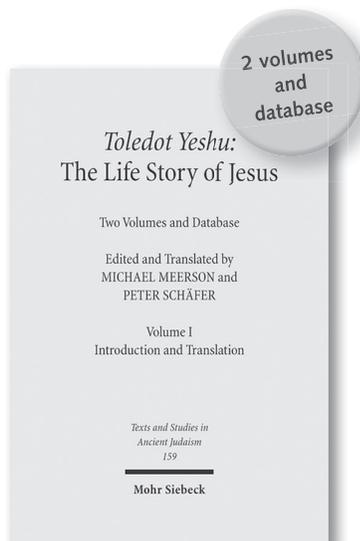


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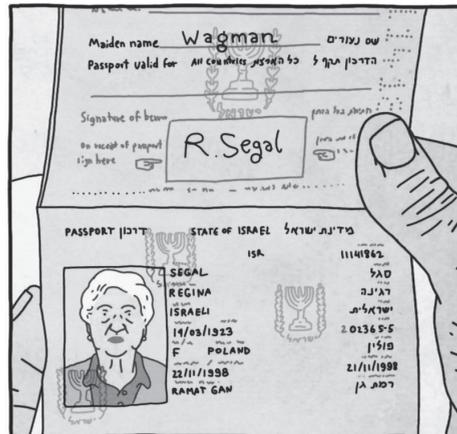
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# The Practice of Everyday Space

Barbara Mann

Rutu Modan's remarkable graphic novel *The Property* (2013) raises provocative and timely questions about how ordinary places become historic, and the ways in which, nevertheless, their ordinariness persists. Mica travels from Tel Aviv to Poland with her grandmother Regina, in order to recover the apartment belonging to Regina's family before the war. It is Regina's first time back in Poland since leaving in 1938, and both women travel under the shadow of the recent death of Regina's son/Mica's father. In the book's opening pages, the author directs the reader's attention to Poland's historical significance through the presence of a group of Israeli high school students who blithely riot throughout the entirety of the El Al flight to Warsaw. These young people need to be drawn in, their guide says, though he seems disappointed to find that Regina is not a survivor: she could not possibly have a story to share. Yet this group—emblematic of Israeli culture's historically short-sighted engagement with the Shoah—disappear after this opening sequence, reemerging in only a single, tearful frame at the end of the book, as if to say—"let's get this bit of bother out of the way, so we can address the heart of the matter." The heart of the matter turns out to be, actually, an affair of the heart: Regina's memory of her prewar romance with the man now living in her family apartment (who—spoiler alert—is Mica's grandfather!). Along the way, Mica herself falls for a local Polish tour guide / comic artist, and an Israeli acquaintance that they encounter on the flight has ulterior, though ultimately harmless, motives. The book ties up its story lines with a fabulous montage set in a cemetery on the



Images reprinted from *The Property* by Rutu Modan (Drawn and Quarterly, 2013). Courtesy of the publisher.

Polish "All Souls Day" (*Zaduski*), during which the Hebrew prayer for the dead, *El Male Raḏamim*, is chanted, summoning all those ghosts and memories, private and civic, Jewish and Gentile, that haunt the Warsaw cityscape.

In between these two broad, dramatic nods to History—especially the memory of Polish-Jewish experience and the Shoah—Modan's narrative takes place in the more expressly mundane sites of everyday life: cafes, streets, restaurants, cinemas, public transportation, hotel rooms and bathrooms, and other domestic interiors. The search for "the property"—itself caught up in the legal and social machinations of history—provokes strong emotions for Regina, and readers witness how she painfully registers the past within the city's streets: when a taxi takes her back to the address where she grew up, Modan frames scenes outside the car window in sepia to depict the diverse and dynamic

street life of her memory—a visual echo of Shimon Attie's moving public installations, where slides of prewar Jewish life were projected on contemporary buildings. Both offer palimpsestic renderings of eastern European Jewish experience. But perhaps it takes a graphic novel, with its playful respect of different discursive realms, to create an intertextual frame for a palimpsest, and to make it meaningful. Once a place has entered history, it's difficult to retrieve it in any other way, even for those who lived it. In Modan's book, Warsaw as a space in the Jewish historical imagination meets the counter-space of Regina's personal past; this latter, more interior experience of place seems poised to supersede, or at least critique, those monumental, curated sites marking Warsaw's Jewish past, especially the ghetto tours and recreations of "Jewish Warsaw" that Mica happens upon. Within the space of the graphic novel, text and image conarrate Warsaw's Jewish places, interrogating the limits of their historicity and their ability to endure—within the interior space of "the property"—beneath the illuminating yet blinding glare of history's grand narratives.

This year I read portions of *The Property* together with family and friends during the seder on Passover's first night. Passover is one of those times of year in which space and place seem paramount. I mean here not only the recitation of texts containing tangible particulars of place (e.g. the experience of slavery, the tactility of the plagues), but also the seder itself as a kind of space, created through a self-contained set of exercises and rituals, performed in innovative and free-wheeling fashion in a home, or home-like setting. While the text itself is relatively static, commentators have intervened and commented through the Haggadah's visual dimension. Who among us has not dawdled over the illustrations during a particularly long stretch of Magid? Pictures are among the Haggadah's most effective teaching tools; witness, for example, the changing attitudes and attire of the "Four Sons" in different historical periods.

The creative proliferation of the Haggadah as nearly a genre unto itself in contemporary Jewish culture seems to me somehow consonant with the transnational emergence of the Jewish graphic novel as



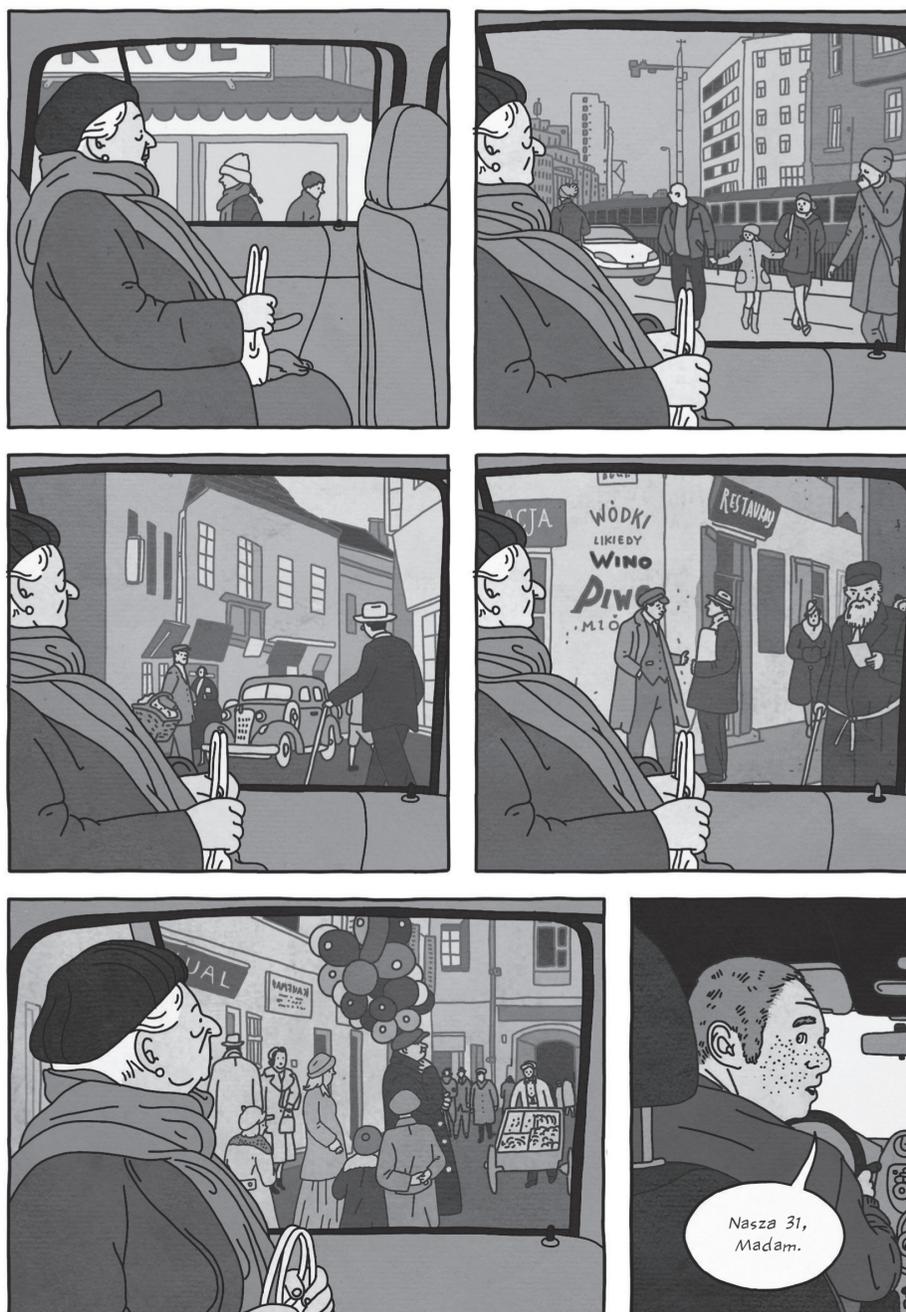
an important site of cultural transmission, especially regarding difficult memories (the *New American Haggadah* [2012] and *Maus* [1991] being well-known examples of each). In both instances, narrative text and visual images are framed by inventive layouts and experimental font cases, creating works that push against—and at times entirely erase—the distinction between secular and religious cultural forms. The relation between *The Property* and the Haggadah as an image-text is especially poignant, given the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which began on the first night of Passover, April 19th, 1943. While the Haggadah and

the seder turn our attention repeatedly towards the monumental events of Exodus and after, through the cyclical refrain “in every generation,” Modan’s vivid narrative and delicate images urge us to remember those more everyday details, without which freedom is inconceivable: a cooked meal, a shared embrace, a family secret.

Passover, of course, is famously not like every day. But it does ask us to examine, even overturn, our routine ways. The prompt “what makes this night different from all other nights” leads to an examination not only of difference, but of sameness—that quotidian habit or object that is so ingrained,

so “natural” a part of “all other nights,” that it takes an entire week (or eight days) to produce a state of hyperawareness regarding those very practices we may usually take for granted: like, to take a random example, eating bread. The Passover seder is an immersive, studied attempt to replace the everyday with difference, with the hope of reminding ourselves, for yet another year, of the precious sameness of everyday places.

*Barbara Mann is associate professor of Hebrew Literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary. She is the author of Space and Place in Jewish Studies (Rutgers University Press, 2012).*





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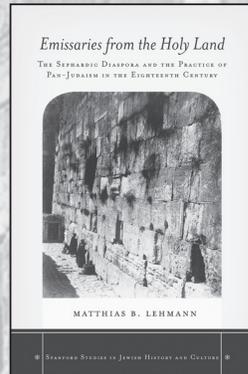
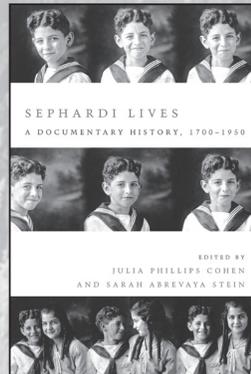
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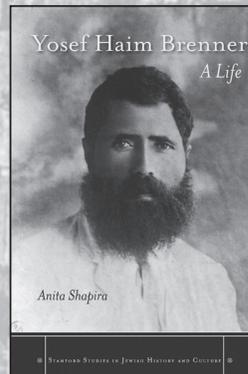
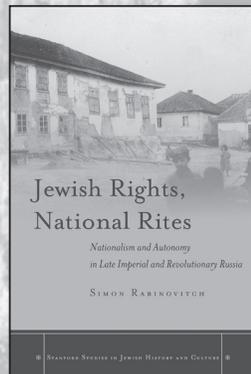
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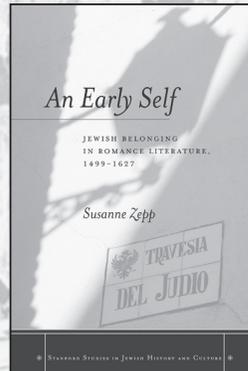
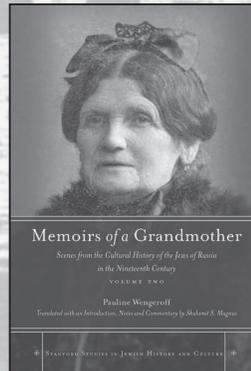
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# People versus Ideas

Riv-Ellen Prell

**O**n my first day of graduate school in Anthropology at the University of Chicago in 1971 one of the senior faculty announced to the assembled anxious and enthralled incoming class, “Anthropologists study ideas and not people.” His forceful declaration underlined that “we” had little in common with misguided anthropologists who believed that their work entailed gathering obsessively detailed knowledge of kinship, cultivation styles, and other matters about particular groups occupying far-flung regions of the world for the purpose of “filling out the ethnographic record.” Rather, our fieldwork would be no less detailed, but it was to serve the more important master/mistress of *theory*. In the 1970s those ideas were likely to include Marxist debates on economy, Weberian questions about religion, power, and economy, or Durkheimian engagements about religion, symbolism, and social organization. Emerging concerns about colonialism and anthropology’s close connections to it were to prove as challenging as the hurricane force of feminist thought, postmodernism and other theoretical challenges that would follow. Those issues were not yet in focus on that fall day when I learned the dichotomy between studying “people” and “theories” or “ideas.”

I was to be challenged many times over my decision to identify American Jews as an ethnographic “site,” or “my” people as an ethnographic object. They conformed imperfectly to anthropological theories because of the pluralism of the United States, and the lack of coherence of what it meant to be an “American Jew,” or of “American Judaism,” not to mention “Jewishness.” However, it was hardly anthropology alone that provided the challenge to transcend people in favor of ideas.

Jewish Studies clearly had its own admonitions. It is not difficult to imagine a parallel orientation gathering where students were handed, as I have been told, a fragment of a Dead Sea scroll or a Talmud tractate and told to make this text the center of graduate study. Decoding and unpacking the text became the initiation into a world of scholarship untroubled by the daily life from which the text emerged. Though these studies captured debates and challenges to

authority, their distance from what ordinary people did was enormous. Not only was it difficult to learn about daily life, frankly it was not valued. The culture and history of the Jewish people was a story best told through its authoritative and written sources.

There are many ways to phrase this core dilemma. What is the relationship between a textual tradition and “lived religion,” as some scholars now term the latter? What is the relationship between the triptych of practice, belief, and text? How is “identity(ies)” linked to practice and authority? If this seemed complicated in the 1970s it is far more so today, as theorizing Jewish life requires an even deeper engagement with syncretism, global anti-Semitism, and nationalisms. Put another way, “people” have become more difficult to theorize through (or ignore) for forty years since “they” have been steadily fracturing the capacity of theory to ignore their complexity and diversity.

I have, nevertheless, never strayed too far from that early admonition offered on the first day of graduate school. To rephrase it in light of “the people’s issue,” what are Jews saying, doing, or meaning when they engage in the many things that have interested me, from creating independent prayer communities and innovating liturgy to circulating gendered stereotypes and slurs and situating Jewish characters and families in the popular novels and media that they create?

What has engaged my interests, above all, is to understand how Jews transmit Jewishness in the United States—how and why do parents, teachers, peers, partners, rabbis, artists, and even children circulate to one another some behaviors, beliefs, ideas, and abstractions that they think of as “Jewish,” no matter how far outside any sensible version of a “great tradition” they may fall? This ongoing stream of stubborn, insistent innovation and reconfiguration of “Jewishness” in America welcomes a rich and profound interpretive pursuit that situates people at the crossroads of gender, social class, culture, nation, identity, imagination, and time. It anchors “culture” to practices and ideas, and seeks to understand how and why those practices are shaped as they are. These are questions of theory, but they have led me to pursue the people and relationships that,

until the 1970s, were overlooked because they did not appear to author the texts or run the institutions that defined Jewish life. Scholars’ inclusion of women, families, and children has consistently proven not only to offer rich perspectives on Jewish culture and history, but often to reshape how we understand them.

No scholars of postwar Jewry have undertaken a systematic study of questions related to socialization—family dynamics, class aspirations, education, or even popular culture—with an eye toward understanding what forces shaped Jewish Baby Boomers from the 1950s to the 1970s. My research has focused on a corner of the problem. I have asked how their teachers and rabbis, youth leaders, and counselors created new spaces and transformed old ones to accommodate their unprecedented numbers, their relative affluence, and new suburban addresses. I have paid attention not only to those whose task it was to shape children, but to the experiences of children themselves. Both groups, frankly, often are overlooked as marginal to the real work and importance of postwar Jewish life that was centered on adult relationships focused on institution building, philanthropy, and Israel.

How were youngsters to be recruited to that world? I found it unexpected, to some degree, to uncover how many of those who guided youth aimed to create an alternative socialization to that offered by the Baby Boomers’ families, synagogues, and communities. Youngsters of the middle class shone with the patina of new wealth and new opportunities that their parents eagerly sought. But their Jewish teachers and leaders were skeptical, uncomfortable, and often openly questioning of what sort of Jews they were encountering. They asserted their own vision of a Jewish culture that was being reshaped in the overlapping and contradictory spaces of American triumphalism and the devastation of the Holocaust, and the growing pulls between the many pressures to join the suburban synagogue world and the opportunities for far greater acculturation to American society.

Children, and particularly teens, are never passive recipients of such messages, particularly such richly contradictory ones. Youth cultures are the product of not only

rebellions, but reconfigurations of visions intended to shape them. Jewish summer camps, because of their artificial isolation and intensity, proved to be an ideal setting in which to understand how Jewish youngsters received, responded to, and reshaped those messages in their many formulations.

Certain patterns emerged in a view across the summer camps of the various Jewish movements that intended to “countersocialize” Jewish youngsters. These “new Jews” integrated their Jewishness with a deep sense of their parents’ failures, and a desire to remake a more rigorous Jewish practice or Zionism that engaged America critically. Their adolescent development, sexual awakenings, and Jewishness were synthesized with cultural styles and questions that overflowed the boundaries

of the carefully demarcated space and time designed for them. Gender and sexual norms went largely unchallenged in the camps in the mid- to late 1960s, though they would soon after. What was challenged, fundamentally, were the politics, culture, and basic assumptions of the foundations of their parents’ worlds. To miss how these campers, and then college students, challenged American Jewish life from the left, the right, and the center is to miss entirely a key component of how Zionism, Jewish religious movements, and Jewish life took shape in the 1970s.

A rereading of what shapes something as tangible yet as open ended as “American Jewish culture” does not easily sort out into polarizing “theory” or “people,” or “text” or “experience.” What drives us to

look outside the normative texts or actors in Jewish life has proven essential to grasp the full complexity of the cultures of Jewish people. To unmoor those people from a serious engagement with theories of Jewish history and culture might leave us with self-referential narratives that lack an interpretive framework beyond themselves. We need to stay at the task of rethinking history and culture systematically. In that way we best serve the vision of a broad understanding of people and ideas.

*Riv-Ellen Prell is professor of American Studies and director, Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Minnesota. She is the author most recently of “Ethnographers and History: A Conversation Located in Jewish Studies,” American Jewish History, vol. 98.*

Hofstra University, Department of Religion, invites applications for the *Florence and Robert Kaufman Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies*, a full-time faculty position anticipated to begin in the Fall of 2015. Rank: Open (must have a Ph.D.) The Jewish Studies program at Hofstra is housed in and a vital component of the Department of Religion. The Kaufman Chair will join a small but vibrant religion faculty furthering the critical study of religion, and she or he will develop and shape the Jewish Studies program (which offers both a major and a minor at the undergraduate level) as part of the departmental mission. Other responsibilities include a normal teaching load of two courses per semester, participation in department-wide work and engagement in university-wide or public dialogue about issues of relevance to Jewish Studies. The field of specialization is open, but an ideal candidate should be able to offer a broad range of courses. Candidates must have a record of excellence in the undergraduate classroom. As holder of an endowed chair, he or she must also be a scholar with an established impact in the field of Jewish Studies, or have demonstrable potential for such an impact. An application should include a letter of interest, C.V., example of scholarship, evidence of teaching excellence, transcripts and three letters of reference. (Applicants above the Assistant level may omit transcripts and simply submit the names of referees at this time.) We will begin reviewing applications as of Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> and will continue until the position is filled. Please send material to Dr. John Teehan, Chair, Department of Religion, 104K Heger Hall, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY 11549. Hofstra University is a private liberal arts university with no religious affiliation on Long Island. Hofstra University is an EO/AA/ADA educator and employer.

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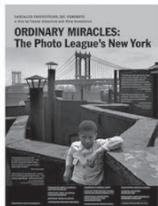
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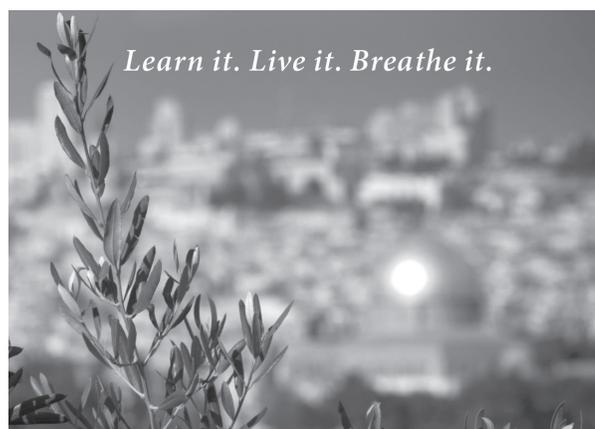
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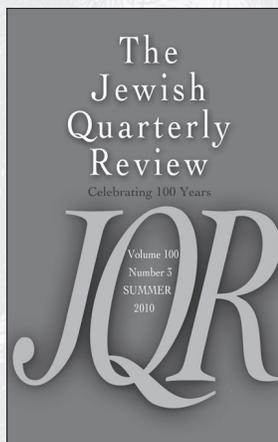
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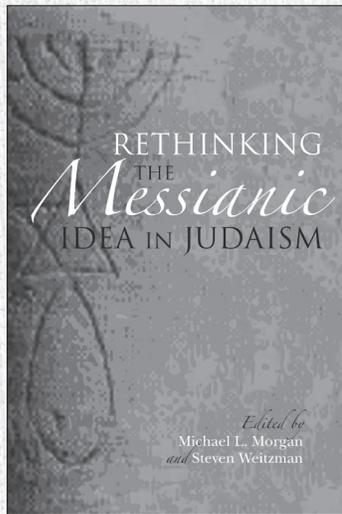
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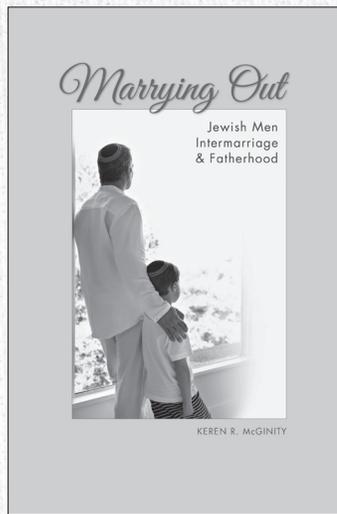
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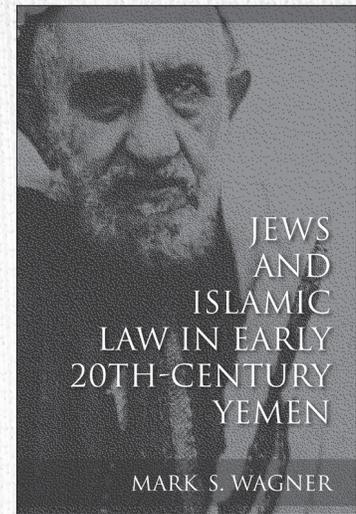
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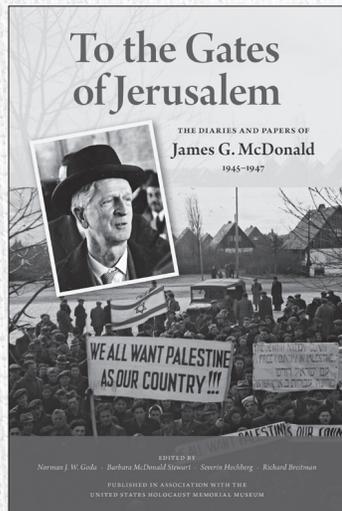
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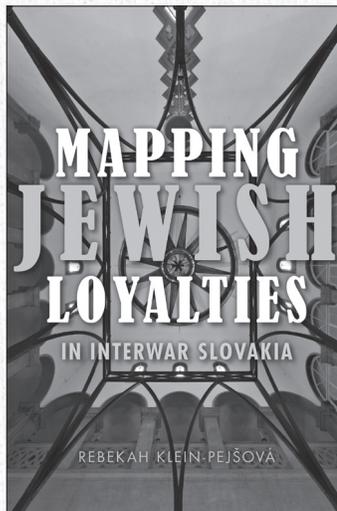
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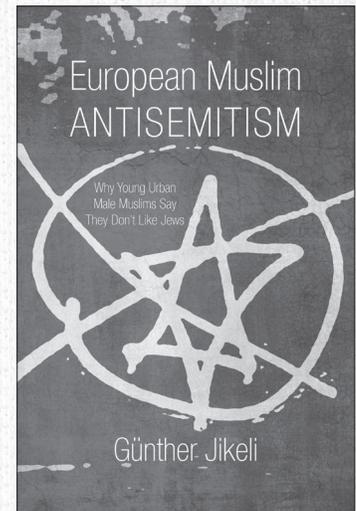
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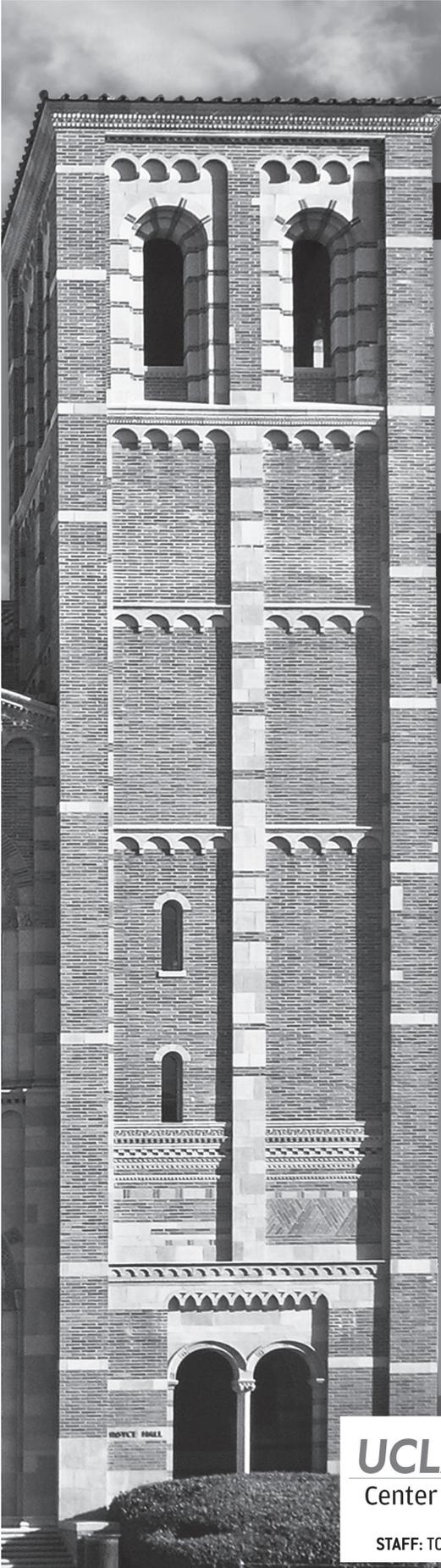


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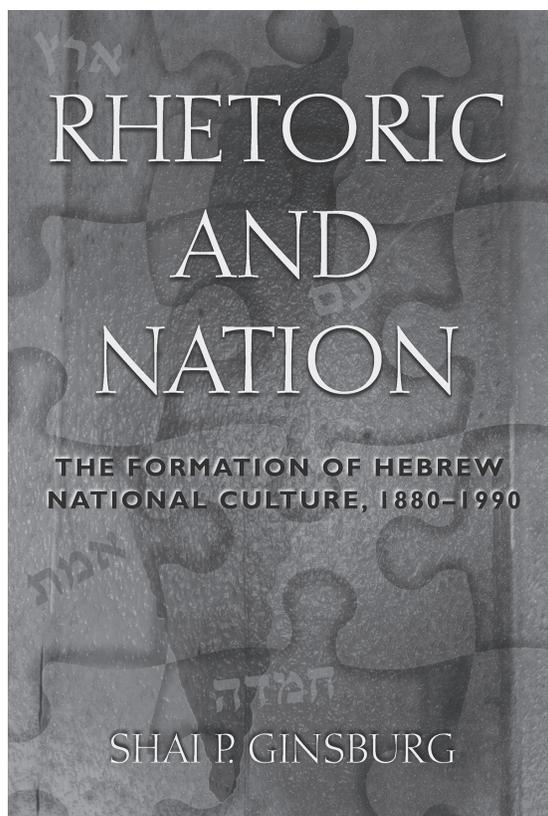
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# The Questionnaire

## How should one teach “Introduction to Jewish Studies”?

### RESPONSES

#### **Phillip I. Ackerman-Lieberman**

*Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies,  
Vanderbilt University*

I taught “Introduction to Jewish Studies” for the first time this past semester (Spring 2014). I let my students know at the very first meeting that the course wasn’t going to be an introduction to Jewish religion, or Jewish history, or even Jewish literature. Although I think that a lot of students come to an “Introduction to Jewish Studies” expecting some or all of these things, I am fortunate to teach in a program that offers other courses that specialize in these matters. Because I am a historian, I did bring a sense of trajectory and structure to the course by relying on a broad-based narrative of Jewish history from a textbook. But my main objective for the course, week in and week out, was to provide an introduction to just what it is that Jewish Studies scholars do. As students read pieces from the textbook, I assigned them a brief scholarly article for each classroom session, engaging questions pertaining to the period about which they had read. We spent much of our time in class discussing the ways the author of the scholarly article intended to intervene in the field and to make a contribution to the literature. By exposing students to a range of scholars and methodological approaches, they got a taste of the breadth of Jewish Studies scholarship.

However, Jewish Studies scholars constantly engage primary sources directly using those methodological tools to tackle the central questions of Jewish history. To give students a taste of the role primary sources play in the field, I asked students to read selections of primary sources that animated both the narrative material in the textbook and the questions in the secondary literature.

I structured students’ writing assignments to mimic the scholarly process: students were asked to participate in a library session exposing them both to hard copy and electronic resources, to write book reviews, to prepare an annotated bibliography and a paper abstract (they actually presented

their abstracts to each other at the end of the course), and finally to draft a brief paper that outlined the major scholarly trends on a question of their own choosing. I hope they left my course with a facility with the basic research tools and a sense of the richness of methods Jewish Studies scholars employ, as well as an exposure to the broad arc of the Jewish historical experience.

#### **Janice W. Fernheimer**

*Associate Professor of Writing, Rhetoric,  
and Digital Studies & Director of the  
Interdisciplinary Program in Jewish Studies,  
University of Kentucky, Lexington*

Although Jewish American culture is most commonly associated with East Coast urban metropolises, in actuality Kentucky has a Jewish history as rich and deep as the Bluegrass itself. Some of the people, products, and places most strongly associated with Kentucky have Jewish chapters in their histories. For example, the Gratz family of Lexington and the Simon family of Louisville were related and both served instrumental roles in the development of Kentucky’s two largest cities. In business, the bourbon founder Jim Beam descended from Jacob Boehm (a German Jewish immigrant). The Jewish bourbon connection lives on today in Heaven Hill, one of the last remaining family-owned distilleries, revived after Prohibition by the five Shapira brothers. And, in humanities, the epic poem “Kentucky,” written by Israel Jacob Schwartz, tells of Jewish acculturation within the state and remains a seminal work within American Jewish history and literature.

Kentucky is unique because Jewish heritage is everywhere but not always immediately visible. Because of this not-yet-fully-recognized ubiquity, students at the University of Kentucky are taught a broad range of methods and approaches to both Jewish topics in the commonwealth and beyond. Part of our shared scholarly adventure is to map the uncharted territory of Kentucky’s Jewish heritage. Using oral history, archival, and rhetorical methods we work together to represent Kentucky Jewish communities’ diversity and to integrate their

perspectives with the more familiar narratives of Jewish identity, history, and culture in the commonwealth, the United States, and the world beyond. Students learn about this rich Kentucky “Jewgrass” heritage first hand in several ways. In collaboration with the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History and local Kentucky Jewish community members, they work to both analyze and conduct oral history interviews. Students learn methods for uncovering, interpreting, and curating primary archival materials as well as creating and constructing new repositories of artifacts both digital and print. As a rhetorician, I find it helpful to use the tools of my trade (an understanding of audience, rhetorical purpose, and exigence) to help students engage the issues they encounter in the primary materials and our Jewish Studies courses and to better understand the texts they encounter. Our goal as a faculty is to not only teach the diversity of Jewish Kentucky history, culture, and heritage, but also to teach the tools for knowledge construction and understanding so that this heritage can be both preserved and generative.

At the University of Kentucky, we offer a minor in Jewish Studies, which means that (as of yet) there is no official course in methods. Instead, *every* course we teach must engage in some discussion of why Jewish Studies matters and how one best studies it. For the Kentucky Commonwealth students we meet in our classes, who are mostly non-Jewish students, Jewish Studies is important because it simultaneously offers a local context and a global passport to world history, literature, languages, and culture. And while some students may have never met a Jewish person or encountered Jewish ideas before arriving on campus, our courses enable them to put Jewish history, thought, and culture in both local and transnational perspective. Our minors graduate with first-hand experience accessing, analyzing, and helping to generate primary materials and strong research and writing skills that enable them to contextualize, interpret, and intervene in complex rhetorical situations both inside and outside of the classroom.

## Matthew Goldish

*Samuel M. and Esther Melton Professor of History & Director of the Melton Center for Jewish Studies, The Ohio State University*

The main subjects usually covered in “Introduction to Jewish Studies” courses are Jewish history, beliefs, and practices. That is a huge amount and each instructor develops her or his own style. I am a historian so I begin with history, which I think is necessary to understand the development of beliefs and practices. History also encompasses topics in which some students have particular interest: the Bible; the relationship of Judaism to Christianity; the Holocaust; the State of Israel; and contemporary Jewry.

There is usually a core textbook to which other readings—primary and secondary—are attached. After trying a number of these I now use Nicholas de Lange’s excellent *Introduction to Judaism*. It is readable, it covers the topics I want to discuss, and it avoids most of the denominational slant that colors many introductory works. Instructors often use Barry Holtz’s standard *Back to the Sources*. I have not found a text reader that really works for me so I cobble sources together from various places. Many of them are now available free on the internet.

One problem I have found teaching the introduction is the varying levels of student knowledge, from the day-school slackers to people who never met a Jew before arriving at Ohio State. A few years ago I was doing my standard “all of Jewish history in forty minutes” schtick (with jokes, of course). I had just hit minute four—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—and I thought I was doing great, when a student in the second row put up her hand. “I have no idea what you are talking about,” she said. “I don’t know anything about these people and I have no idea what you’re saying.” She was applauded. I had to rethink the assumptions I could make about student knowledge. This is tricky and I have no clear solution.

## Leah Hochman

*Assistant Professor of Jewish Thought, Hebrew Union College-Los Angeles*

When I first started teaching Jewish Studies I took a “best athlete” route; I invited colleagues from across the disciplines to engage the students in the ways they “did” Jewish Studies. But the students lacked context and instead of seeing a synthesis of disparate methods, they

saw a chaotic mishmash. So I began teaching it as a history of an idea: starting with the early *Wissenschaftlers* we traced the development of the study of Judaism “in its fullest scope” from Immanuel Wolf’s description of the aspiring field in 1822 to its realization in colleges and universities in the twentieth century. But we found that approach too dry; the students wanted the opportunity to pry apart the political aspirations of each generation. So we turned instead toward an investigation of academic programs throughout the United States and Canada and assessed the requirements for Jewish Studies minors and majors: language offerings (“just” Hebrew or were Arabic, Persian, Yiddish, or Ladino available and acceptable?), programmatic structure (chronological or subject focused or by discipline), which departments offered the majority of courses, and the presence of an introduction to or capstone in Jewish Studies. We were surprised that hardly anyone seemed to teach a class that looked at Jewish Studies broadly, as a field in its own right, as a multidisciplinary lens through which to view a multitude of subjects. And so my students designed their dream class: historical context was followed by star lectures from across campus, and students presented semester-long projects on topics informed by their favorite academic discipline.

Next time, I will include social media and an examination of the multitude of Jewish organizations offering real-time learning on web-based platforms and in mini-conferences. In the six years since I last taught the class, Jewish Studies has exploded beyond the borders of the university. Its fullest scope includes all the portals through which people learn and engage in Jewish learning, even the study about the study itself.

## Sarah Imhoff

*Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies, Indiana University*

I don’t teach “Introduction to Jewish Studies.” In some ways, this is an accident of curriculum: instead we have “Introduction to Judaism” and introductory Jewish history courses, and I’ve taught each. But in other ways, this arrangement is relevant—even central—to larger questions about teaching Jewish Studies. Parallel to the pedagogical question about *how* we teach Jewish Studies is the disciplinary question of how we know *what* to teach.

From where I stand, Jewish Studies isn’t

a discipline or a method, and herein lie both the assets of interdisciplinarity and flexibility, but also the challenges of articulating a body of knowledge or a set of skills our students should have. Where is the intellectual core of Jewish Studies? Is it the study of descent-based groups of people we call Jews? Is it the study of text? How is it related to religion? Donors, foundations, campus Hillels, and institutional structures all stake claims on this. For instance, whether Jewish Studies is a nondepartmental “center,” a subsection of Religious Studies or History, or an “area studies” unit implicitly shapes the method and the student experience of Jewish Studies.

At its worst, an unidentified method or discipline can lead to unreflective valuing of all things Jewish merely because they are Jewish, and our students come away with little more than a more robust version of narratives they might hear at a Jewish day school. But at its best, it equips our students to engage with the real world, which rarely respects the boundaries of academic disciplines. Jewish Studies students can ask, for instance, how we have come to live in a world where personal history, cultural affinity, DNA, family structure, and religious observance all compete for the authority to define Jewishness. And this kind of rich and subtle questioning, in my eyes, is a central goal of Jewish Studies.

## Jeffrey Israel

*Assistant Professor of Religion, Williams College*

My introductory course in Jewish Studies is entitled “Judaism: Before the Law.” It is a humanistic exploration of “the Law” as a concept that arises from, but also transcends, Jewish thought and practice. Students begin with the Law of Moses in the Hebrew Bible, and over the course of the semester are introduced to the rabbinic distinction between “Oral Law” and “Written Law,” medieval philosophical justifications for the Law, modern interpretations of the Law as Moral Law, Hasidic challenges to the centrality of the Law, and twentieth-century Jewish fiction that is haunted by a felt absence of the Law. The course also covers the nature of rabbinic authority, methods of Jewish legal interpretation and innovation, and Halakhah as it pertains specifically to women, Gentiles, idolaters, food consumption, and the Land of Israel. In addition, the course addresses non-Jewish depictions of Judaism as essentially legalistic. Students learn how Judaism came

to be stigmatized as dead letter contrasted to living spirit, corrupt flesh contrasted to pure soul, and antagonistic particularism contrasted to benevolent universalism. They investigate the origin and legacy of Immanuel Kant's claim that "strictly speaking Judaism is not a religion at all" but merely individuals "of a particular stock" who have established themselves under "purely political laws." They trace this line of thought from Paul through Spinoza and Kant to contemporary thinkers like Giorgio Agamben and Alain Badiou. Course materials include classical sources from the Talmud and Midrash, modern philosophical texts by Franz Rosenzweig, Leo Strauss, and Joseph Soloveitchik, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Kafka's *The Trial* with his parable "Before The Law," short stories by Bernard Malamud, Woody Allen's film *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, and ethnographic accounts of contemporary Jewish observance. In general, I hold the view that an introduction to Jewish Studies ought to show students how the study of Jews, Jewishness, and Judaism can be a valuable exercise in humanistic inquiry. By "humanistic inquiry" I mean investigation into human thoughts, practices, and institutions as they emerge and vary in different places and times.

### **Martin Kavka**

*Associate Professor of Religion, Florida State University*

I have never taught an introduction to Jewish Studies per se, which would give students an overview to the various methods and approaches that scholars take when they look at people who identify as Jews. Being housed in a department of Religion, my introductory class is an introduction to Judaism. In one semester, I take students on a whirlwind tour that begins with the sacrificial cult of ancient Israelite religion and ends with Rabba Sara Hurwitz, the dean of Yeshivat Maharat. I have long wondered whether learning outcomes for such a class might be improved if the course were spread out over a year, but there is something about the quick pace that prohibits students from getting too comfortable with any form of Judaism as marking a site of truth, with respect to which all other forms become deviant and false. (Undergraduates, especially in the American South, are more invested in truth than most contemporary philosophers.) On the first day of this class, I introduce my students to the work of Gershom Scholem, particularly some comments on Judaism from fifty years ago

that were published posthumously under the title "Judaism." That essay begins by claiming that "Judaism cannot be defined according to its essence, since it has no essence." Whether my students are Jewish or Christian, religious or secular, they start out skeptical of the worth of Scholem's resistance to any and all abstract accounts of Judaism. But after examining such phenomena as the centralization of worship to the Jerusalem Temple in the Book of Deuteronomy, the collapse of Deuteronomistic frameworks of suffering in the rabbinic period (and later, in post-Holocaust theology), the difference between Midrashic and Maimonidean approaches to biblical texts, the radical accounts of creation in Kabbalah, and the existence of a proudly feminist Orthodox Judaism, my students are sufficiently dizzied that they can acknowledge the truth of Scholem's claim that the study of Judaism is nothing more and nothing less than the study of Jews.

For Scholem, this meant that there was no choice but to affirm the State of Israel as "the living force of the people of Israel," but such a claim falls into the same problems of abstraction that Scholem decried in Jewish theology. In a time when "just Jewish" is a sociological term of art and Birthright trips are yet another manifestation of college hookup culture, Judaism can be taught as itself, as just as ordinary as any other religious tradition. The political potential of such a pedagogy is greater than we scholars might realize.

### **Rachel Kranson**

*Assistant Professor of Religious Studies, University of Pittsburgh*

While the University of Pittsburgh does not offer an "Introduction to Jewish Studies" course, I started teaching a survey of modern Jewish history when I joined the faculty of Religious Studies in the fall of 2011. From the outset, I wanted to avoid rendering the histories of non-Ashkenazic and non-male Jews as secondary or marginal, the stuff of "special topics" on women and Sephardim. My goal was not necessarily to replace the famous men who have traditionally been studied in surveys of modern Jewish history with a new pantheon of Jewish women and non-Europeans (though I did some of this as well). Rather, I wanted to acknowledge the geopolitical and gender dynamics that allowed generations of scholars to present the experiences, concerns, and cultural productions of Ashkenazic Jewish men as the defining material of modern

Jewish history. And of course, I wanted to do this in a way that was engaging and not too convoluted or complicated.

Serendipitously, my first semester teaching the modern Jewish history survey coincided with the release of the third edition of Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz's *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (Oxford University Press, 2010). I was delighted to discover that unlike the previous editions, the new edition included a wealth of illuminating primary sources that addressed the concerns and experiences of Jewish women and non-European Jews, and I assigned many of these documents to my students.

As I soon discovered, however, a large percentage of my students had purchased used, second-edition copies of the book that did not include the new texts. Rather than get annoyed by this, I decided to use it as a teaching opportunity. We began our primary source discussions by talking about which of the assigned texts could only be found in the newer third edition, and why this might have been the case. Analyzing their textbooks offered my students a concrete and entirely accessible way to think about how, for better or for worse, the study of Jewish history always reflects the choices and assumptions of the scholars who create it.

### **Alan Levenson**

*Schusterman Professor of Jewish History, University of Oklahoma*

The Passover ditty Dayyenu reminds us that many approaches "would suffice us" to introduce Jewish history, Judaism, or Jewish Studies. Any good university-level course needs to keep Schwab's four-fold distinction of instructor, student, subject, and milieu in mind. Our program at the University of Oklahoma sits at the buckle of the Bible Belt, although I've seen that dubious distinction claimed by colleges from Florida to Ohio. Since many of our students understand religion as synonymous with Christianity, I present Judaism as a developing religious system (including the preference of praxis over creed, the importance of fictive kinship, the privileging of the Hebrew alphabet, the ethnic dimensions of Jewishness, and the startling discontinuities among different historical eras). I have had students who are legitimately surprised to discover that Jews do not practice the religion of the "Old Testament," and I am reasonably sure they are not twelfth-century friars. A good argument can be made for interdisciplinarity rather

than multidisciplinary as a pedagogic goal—actual integration of approaches rather than multiple approaches encountered sequentially in different departments. But at a public university scratching at the coveted “Top 100” designation, I am satisfied with mere disciplinarity. If I can convey a set of useful Religious Studies concepts (e.g. ritual objects, sacred texts, liturgical units, prayer book reforms) and also teach students how to put on their historians’ glasses and interrogate the presuppositions, possible counter-arguments, and general context of written documents, I am ready to declare victory—for that semester at least.

To paraphrase Hillel—all the rest is tactics, go and study. Every instructor ought to maximize his/her advantages and minimize her/his failings. I am a Jew by birth (this should not be assumed) and *shul* goer by inclination (this should definitely not be assumed); I feel comfortable doing reality checks or poking a little fun at the realia of Jewish life—especially if it illuminates elite versus folk versions of the same. I am untutored in Gender Studies, so while I make a point of devoting time to women’s history and flagging obviously patriarchal features of Judaism, this approach is not at the center of my syllabus. I am past fifty, so while I instruct via Powerpoint and YouTube, I also have students read documents aloud in class,

learn texts in *hevruta*, or write their own *teshuvot* before seeing Rambam’s or Rashi’s (e.g., Should I say God of our Fathers if I am a convert? May I divorce my wife for boils?). I hold students accountable for a considerable amount of reading, providing them with a reading guide for each of our four textbooks. I also assign several one-page papers with very specific prompts. The only “higher critical skills” I cultivate are reading, writing, and speaking. Relative to the academy at large, I am a positivist and an optimist: I believe there is material worth mastering and I believe our students are capable of achieving a great deal within a twelve-week or fifteen-week (at OU) semester. How one teaches Jewish Studies is how one should teach anything: with the conviction that it matters.

### Jacqueline Vayntrub

*Visiting Instructor in Hebrew Bible,  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

The activities of conventional scholarship tend to be solitary ones: reading, reflecting, writing. The scholar faces her laptop, *attending, examining, and arranging many precepts*. But teaching is (supposed to be) predominantly a social activity. The magic of learning is not in the rote transmission of knowledge, *etching facts on the tablet of the student’s heart*, but in the experience of debating meaning. The

assigned reading material in an “Introduction to the Hebrew Bible” course seems self-evident from the title: students are introduced to ancient Israelite religion and culture through the lens of a textual canon. Yet how does one create the experience of dialogue out of texts composed by individuals who no longer walk this earth? The challenge of revivifying ancient texts can be mitigated by an appeal to the three-dimensional world out of which these texts emerged—a recreation of the social world of ancient Israel and early Judaism—and the tradition of dialogue surrounding the text in Judaism. In my courses I try to recreate the multisensory experience of the world the text represents, teaching a practicum in ancient Near Eastern cuisine, bringing in material objects from excavations for students to hold (and hopefully not break!), and having students re-enact the narratives. We also discuss the place of text in Jewish practice, like the performance of ‘Eshet Hayil at the Shabbat table and the reliving of the Exodus narrative during the Passover seder, to give the written a lived context. Examining how texts are performed in Jewish practice can also give a glimpse into their reception history and can connect to the life of the text in contemporary religious communities. These activities draw students out of the written word and into dynamic experiences that they can identify with and learn from.

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