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Figuring the "jew"
in Contemporary British Writing

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Under Postcolonial Eyes: Figuring the "jew" in Contemporary British Writing

Efraim Sicher and Linda Weinhouse

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Contents

Acknowledgments *vii*

Preface *ix*

Introduction 1

1. Under Colonial Eyes: Doris Lessing and the Jews 47

2. Under Postcolonial Eyes: *Baumgartner's Bombay* 70

3. Hybridity's Children: Andrea Levy, Zadie Smith, and Salman Rushdie 87

4. The Color of Shylock: Caryl Phillips 122

5. Down Cultural Memory Lane: Ali, Lichtenstein, and Gavron 144

6. The Postmodern Jew 176

7. Radically Jewish 199

Bibliography 247

Index 272

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Title page of *Coryat's Crudities* (1611) (detail) 11

John Leech, "The Cheap Tailor and his Workmen," *Punch* (1845) 13

Woodcut in the Almanach of Peter Wagner (Nuremburg, 1492) 22

Cartoon from the Iranian newspaper *al-Vefagh* 23

Store owned by A. E. Abrahamson's father, Morris, ca. l920 51

The Star and the Crescent: Fieldgate Synagogue with minaret (before development) 146

The Multicultural Legacy of Immigration: Murals by Meena Thakor and Kinsi Abdulleh opposite the Jewish Soup Kitchen, Brune Street, East London 147

Brick Lane, 1950s 148

New Road Synagogue, 1980s 148

Rachel Garfield, still from *So You Think You Can Tell* (video, 2000) 233

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Preface

DISCOURSES OF THE "JEW"

Shylock, Fagin, and Svengali have long passed into common usage in the English language and can hardly be regarded as evidence of antisemitism, even if some Jews take offense at the term "shylocking," associated with underworld loan sharks and sharp business practice (more recently also with trafficking in body parts). The cosmopolitan subversive moneyed parvenu is easily recognized in *An Education* (2009), a British film which reworks the Pygmalion theme, familiar from Shaw's play and the popular *Educating Rita* (1967), to tell the story of an English schoolgirl seduced by a much older man about town, David Goldman, who introduces her to the adult world of shady deals and promiscuity. David Goldman's "jewishness" is not concealed or coded, since the assimilated Jew has become largely "invisible," but it is evident in archetypal character traits. As in Graham Greene's novel *Brighton Rock* (of which the 2010 movie remake was set, like *An Education*, in the hippie swinging sixties), an innocent woman is corrupted and her life destroyed, except that this is no religious morality tale of evil but a tragic story of an adolescent rebellion against parental control which opts for Paris and happiness instead of forced study for Oxford entrance. Shylock, Fagin, and Svengali are frequently invoked whenever a public figure is suspected of wrong-doing or it is suggested that he is not to be trusted. Fagin was "an indelible part of British culture," a TV adjudication body decided, when clearing the Channel 4 satire show *Bremner, Bird and Fortune* of racial defamation in depicting Lord Levy as the hook-nosed Fagin of the musical *Oliver!*, singing, "you've got to pick a pocket or two."[1] The revival of Lionel Bart's musical in 2009, with comic actor Rowan Aitkinson playing Fagin as a comic but sinister villain, with insinuations of sexual deviancy (bringing together the traditions of pantomime and the Stage Jew), aroused the wrath of Jewish playwright Julia Pascal,[2] but most critics could only see an uproarious Cockney knees-up that did little justice to Dickens.[3]

Shylock has often been read through Fagin, and it seems few could believe that the "jew" was not synonymous with dishonest and merciless money-

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making. The fact that Disraeli in his time was caricatured stereotypically as a Jew says something about the ubiquity of racial typing in politics.[4] When complaint is made, this is seen as proof of Jewish ownership of the press. As Princess Michael of Kent famously observed in an interview with a German newspaper when Prince Harry was criticized in early 2005 for wearing Nazi uniform at a party, "The press has a different sensibility because of its ownership structure."[5] Each incidence is surely not sufficient to warrant hysteria over a "tsunami" of antisemitism (to use British Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks' controversial phrase), but it certainly points to the recurrence of stereotyped language that may no longer be regarded as offensive in a postmodern spirit of free speech. However, there may be underlying anxieties and prejudices here, as well as political manipulation of ethnic sensibilities. In 2010, the TV soap opera *Eastenders*, which had a strong multicultural agenda, featured in its summer–fall 2010 series a Jewish character, Darren Miller, who was rejected by his girlfriend Jodie Gold for not being "Jewish" enough because he was not circumcised, and thus racially excluded from the clan. Familiar tropes of the intolerant, vengeful "jew" and Jewish wealth are reinforced when it turns out Jodie isn't really her father's daughter (and thus not even half-Jewish), which sets Harry, her dodgy, underworld father, on a vengeful mission against both daughter and gentile mother that makes Shylock appear meek in comparison. When Martin Amis in his novel *London Fields* (1989) describes a mother's pimping of her underage teenage daughter as "kosher," the reader understands what is meant, just as the front cover in January 2002 of the respected liberal magazine, the *New Statesman*, could ask whether there was a "kosher conspiracy" against the background of a gold Star of David piercing the British flag, insinuating suspicions of Jewish money undermining the British economy and politics.

At the same time, the "jew" has become an emblem of the quintessential postcolonial migrant, at home everywhere and nowhere, a product of the postmodern condition, an exemplary figure of the repressed and humiliated of the Third World for South Asian and Caribbean writers seeking an identity in early twenty-first-century Britain. Jewish historical experience has become the measure of Black suffering and a trope for genocidal slaughter, though this is hardly the first time that persecution of the Jews has been appropriated as the emblem of another nation's' suffering (for example, in the poetry of Polish patriot Adam Mickiewicz). In "A Far Cry from Africa" (1956), for example, Caribbean poet Derek Walcott (recipient of the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature) bemoans the callous cruelty of colonial policy in its brutal exploitation of the "savages, expendable as Jews."

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In multicultural societies, ethnic identity is no longer to be considered as marginal or defined in terms of center and periphery, but, instead, we should think in terms of "frontier" selves negotiating for ethnic space with other minorities and define difference as a subject position within and in a sense opposed to multiculturalism. As Sander Gilman has suggested in *Multiculturalism and the Jews,* the figure of the "jew" is a key to understanding the very nature of the multicultural society represented in cultural texts. Gilman's study looks at the question obliquely, as an issue in Jewish self-identification and cultural politics, beginning with enlightened German Jewish intellectuals in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and continuing through the debate over cultural pluralism versus a competitive difference in the diaspora in the early twenty-first century.[6] The Holocaust is seen in this scheme as a radical marker of difference, marking out the Jew as both victim and witness. We will see later in this study how that radical marker of extermination has given rise to the figure of the Vanishing Jew and how Jews have radically redefined themselves in a multicultural society, but let us note that the multicultural debate has often marginalized Jews and also brought with it a competition for victimhood.

In all these cases we are addressing *discourses* about the "jew," not the religion or historicity of characters. It is, as Bryan Cheyette has explained, a shifting and ambivalent signifier in the dominant social discourse about nation or empire that defines the Other, not to be understood outside the historical and ideological context, but also not a means to overdetermine authors as "antisemitic."[7] By "jew" we mean the cultural construction of a figure (as distinct from real Jews, with capitals, whether or not they have any capital). Such a construct tells us about the perception of the alien, who always plays a vital role in the formation of nationhood, and it reflects shifts in identity in the host society. In public discourse, the "jew" and, more recently, the "zionist" have been imaginary yet powerful constructs that serve as handles with which to divide the world politically and to conscript the support of an ideological constituency in a global solidarity. These constructs have entered the mainstream of public discourse in Europe, unlike the United States, where aggressive anti-Israel rhetoric is associated with militants on the political fringe such as David Duke or radicals like Noam Chomsky,[8] though antagonism to Jews and harassment of Zionists are on the rise on American as well as European campuses. There is little or no relation to the many and diverse beliefs and practices of real Jews or Zionists, though it can be said that the rhetorical positioning of much public discourse tends to misrepresent substantive issues or occlude any true understanding of the

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identities and views of opponents, whether as conscious manipulation or in a lazy, almost unconscious conformism to familiar clichés and received opinions, that may hide unthinking prejudices and bias. The reason for this is that media coverage and the circulation of cultural texts construct what we "know" about social types and determine the identity of the "Other" in any debate over the boundaries of social behavior, thus concealing or implicitly permitting exclusionary practices (hostile attitudes, boycotting, and other forms of outgrouping). As levers of political debate, such labels tend to be reductive and not usually available to rational analysis or empirical verification.

As a metonym for the entrenched particularism opposed to Enlightenment values and the universal principles of the French Revolution, the "jew" has circulated widely in European political thought, and was racialized in the twentieth century as a trope for the enemy within, devoid of roots in the nation, but has been revalorized in postmodern philosophy.[9] The use of the figural "jew" in the rhetoric of radical opposition to authoritarian forms of national identity, in fact, has become widespread since May 1968, when the barring of German Jewish student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit gave rise to the slogan "nous sommes tous les juifs allemands." Like the French republican support for Dreyfus earlier in the century, the figure had little to do with real Jews, but was inspired by the spirit of *fraternité* and civil rights, yet here the French students were adopting the victim's identity as a "jew" in their own universal figural identity.[10] Later, the previously hostile figure of the "jew" as the rootless cosmopolitan became almost synonymous with the exiled intellectual and paradigmatic refugee fleeing persecution, opening up to appropriation that disidentified the "jew" from the Jewish people; echoing Derrida in "Circumfession" (1993), Edward Said once claimed for himself the title of the last Jewish intellectual, one of the dying breed of followers of Adorno, and a "Jewish Palestinian."[11] The ambivalence of this metaphorical identification, internalized in a post-Holocaust Jewish identity, was taken up by Alain Finkelkraut's celebrated *Le juif imaginaire* (1980; *The Imaginary Jew*, 1994), but Finkelkraut soon realized that on the Left the figure excluded Jews as Others and in the first decade of the twenty-first century it slid into a general equivalence of victims in the discourse of the "New Antisemitism."[12]

The figure of the "jew" has been further allegorized in French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard's *Heidegger and the "jews"* (1988), where he refers to the forgotten in European memory, as distinct from real Jews or Jews as a political or religious referent.[13] Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin have critiqued this use of an allegorical trope to refer to all Arabs, Blacks, and Others who

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have suffered persecution and genocide because it deprives real Jews of their ethnic and cultural difference, as well as their historical memory outside of a universalizing discourse.[14] However, the dichotomy between figurative and real Jews, which Steven Beller has held responsible for obscuring the study of the history of antisemitism,[15] can be useful in understanding normative and influential Western discourses about "jews" which relate to widely held beliefs and perceptions that make up a textual web of conventions projecting a Jewish collective in the Western imagination.[16] Indeed, the dissemination of facts about real Jews, the presence of real Jews, or even their murder and absence from society do not seem to shake the myth of the "jew." As Jonathan Judaken has noted in the case of the anti-antisemitism of the Frankfurt School, the construction of "the jew" both describes and inscribes a marker of difference based on religious, ideological, biological, or genetic concepts, whether hostilely, philosemitically, or as internalized self-image.[17] If we refer to real Jews living in a historical situation and affected by the impact of antisemitism in real life, we will drop the quotation marks; Jews, Zionists, Whites, and Others will all be treated as case sensitive.

THE "JEW" AND THE DISCOURSE OF NATION

The figure of the "jew" is instrumental in discourses about the nation which determine who are the outsiders and where the boundaries of membership in any national or ethnic group may lie at any one moment. We must therefore first coinsider the peculiarities of the historical context in Britain. The British Isles—to use a convenient geographical term, for "Britain" is a name that relates to a changing or unstable geographical and political entity—were invaded and settled by Romans, Jutes, Saxons, Vikings, Normans, and Celts, and at various times saw mass immigrations of Huguenots, Irish, Jews, Caribbean and African Blacks, Indians (from East Africa as well as South Asia), Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Arabs, Iranians, and, more recently, Poles. Whether the English were descended from Celts or Saxons was always a matter of more than national pride—it bolstered the Protestant ethos and shaped the ethnicity of the English, which would exclude by definition immigrant aliens or Irish laborers corrupting the nation's culture and the body politic.[18] The ethno-class racialization of the Other was partly displaced in the postcolonial period by color and cultural biases, but in the age of hybridity and multiculturalism it is worth recalling that at the beginning of the eighteenth century Daniel Defoe was complaining in *The True-Born*

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Englishman (1701) that dislike of foreigners was hardly appropriate for a nation of mongrels:

> Go back to elder times, and ages past,
> And nations into long oblivion cast;
> To elder Britain's youthful days retire,
> And there for true-born Englishmen inquire,
> Britannia freely will disown the name,
> And hardly knows herself from whence they came,
> Wonders that they of all men should pretend
> To birth, and blood, and for a name contend. . . .[19]

A multitude of nations had settled and become "true Englishmen," yet the descendants of the Normans had the audacity to pride themselves on their pure English ancestry.

> But grant the best. How came the change to pass,
> A true-born Englishman of Norman race?
> A Turkish horse can show more history,
> To prove his well-descended family.[20]

While England colonized Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, and built an empire stretching across the world, the unity of the nation was never certain. Before the fall of empire, Ireland was gaining independence, and at the end of the twentieth century Scotland and Wales asserted their political, cultural, and linguistic separateness. Two hundred years after the Union Act, the United Kingdom seemed caught up in a process of devolution and perceptible, if slow and ponderous, break-up, a floundering rather than a *Titanic* sinking, as Tom Nairn put it, which could only be understood by examining the character of Britain's historical development as a nation-state.[21]

The Industrial Revolution and rapid urbanization had, from 1750, transformed England from an agrarian economy into an industrialized nation that rapidly became a trading empire and superpower, a process that apparently leveled out regional differences, although these have not disappeared entirely and there are many English people who can trace their ancestry back hundreds of years to a place not far from where they presently live. Post-industrial Britain, on the other hand, is dependent on transatlantic alliances and economic integration into Europe. No longer self-sufficient, but a vulnerable island in a sea of global change and fiscal storms, the United Kingdom no longer seems a suitable case for the nation-state model, since it does not represent one national identity. Instead, it is a disunited kingdom

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comprising various regional and national identities, none of whom, however, seem ready to establish a separate entity. Britain of the late twentieth century was not only *not* the sum of its citizens but was beginning to look like an "archipelago" of ethnic and sexual minorities. Long overdue constitutional reform, therefore, floundered on the question of whom was being represented by the polity. It was no longer useful to talk in terms of "nation" or "state" when discussing the make-up of British society.[22] "The break-up of Britain in the present," the cultural historian Raphael Samuel wrote, "and the uncertainties of the future, necessarily makes us more aware of its contingent character in the past."[23] For this reason, memory of the past is contested, and this is particularly so when identity is in question.

National identity is never stable or static, and it is often multiple. It cannot be totally separated from the idea of statehood, and to a great extent it is based upon traditions handed down from generation to generation and perceived national or ethnic values, or affiliation of kinship.[24] Notably, the relations between different ethnic and geographical identities within Britain (e.g. Celtic/Scottish) have been unstable and shifting, yet they can be summoned to single identity by patriotic song or poetry.[25] Indeed, in modern times, cultural production, particularly literature, can be a unifying as well as excluding force in forging national identity. But it should not be forgotten that, alongside the narrowing ideological landscape of "Englishness" in the nineteenth century, there was always a strong regional voice that was absorbed in a romanticized nationalism that included Scots, Welsh, and Irish within an English literary canon. Notwithstanding the utilitarian trend toward centralization and the importance of London as a cultural marketplace, the refining, rather than redefining, of Englishness did not rule out an exploration of foreign tastes and peripheral voices (including travel literature, the Gothic, the picaresque, or the historical novel), and Edinburgh, as well as Dublin, flourished as *English* literary centers in *British* culture.[26] So we should not regard multiculturalism as "new" if we recall the somewhat contradictory make-up of British culture. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Britain could no longer be easily defined in terms of Englishness, or the English language, which had become an international language bringing together writers from the Commonwealth and several developing nations.

Proponents of multiculturalism would claim national and ethnic differences are subordinate to human solidarity. As Lisa Jardine, Professor of Renaissance Studies at Queen Mary College London, sees it, national identities are decided by the historical moment:

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> who lives where on the face of the globe, is not much more than a historical snapshot. The location of communities in specific places and nations has almost always been the outcome of individual or mass migration, often enforced under pressure of politics or war."[27]

The 1707 Union Act could not wipe out the historical memory of the separate traditions of Wales and Scotland, but, as in Belgium, currently going through a crisis between Walloons and Flemish-speakers, migrations and wars have changed where people live and, in Jardine's opinion, there is no more sense in Scots going back to Scotland from London than for her to return to the Polish *shtetl* where her father (the scientist and broadcaster Jacob Bronowski) was born. That she is British does not change the fact that the "green and pleasant land" which Blake immortalized was England, just as old John of Gaunt in Act II of *Richard the Second* praises his native England, not (as the lines were rewritten in a TV commercial for tea), Britain,[28] though that lament of the imminent passing of this "sceptered isle" was itself a Shakespearean construction that would have sounded strange to the real John of Gaunt, who had multiple European identities and affiliations.[29] Britain has somehow eclipsed "England" and accommodates all comers and outsiders, including Jews. It is the meaning of being "British" that has changed and the relation of citizenship to nationality has become destabilized. Multicultural diversity has in some senses reinforced difference and strife rather than created a rainbow coalition of faiths. While an increasing number of Muslims would accept a hyphenated British identity (54% in a June 2002 poll), very few (3%) would substitute British for Muslim as their identity.[30] Indeed, "multiculturalism" does not necessarily mean racial diversity in the sense used by the media so much as a fraught striving by immigrants from non-European and non-White backgrounds for some certainty and status in an alien country, wavering between community and the host culture.[31]

The loss of empire and Britain's altered strategic and economic position after the Second World War, a partner in the NATO alliance and an offshore island in Europe, necessarily required a readjustment of national self-definition. The post-*Windrush* influx of colonial subjects led to a new generation of non-Whites born and bred in England, speaking English and enjoying British citizenship. Xenophobia in the form of "England for the English," which characterized the 1950s and 1960s, was an alienating and sometimes violent forcing tube into proud ethnic identity, which, with the advent of Malcolm X, many regained.[32] Discrimination continued, subtly and

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almost invisibly, but racism could no longer be acceptable social or political behavior when large ethnic minorities were themselves British and changing the meaning of being British. Yet South Asian communities and other British Muslims continued to complain of discrimination and ostracism, especially in the backlash following 9/11 and 7/7, and the 2001 Oldham riots gave cause for concern about the success of integration. While anxiety about an encroaching Muslim presence, as elsewhere in Europe, as well as adverse reaction to European unification and to massive immigration of non-White populations, suggested a spread of Islamophobia, antisemitism among both right-wing nationalists and radical Islamist militants questioned the viability of multiculturalism to sustain ethnic coexistence and social cohesion. The global wave of Islamist antisemitism draws on tropes from European discourses about the "jews," particularly the conspiracy theory, as well as the myth of superior Jewish intelligence and world domination, suggesting not a "new antisemitism," but a transformation of existing cultural functions of the "jew."[33] With an estimated 1.6–2 million Muslims resident in the UK, resentment and anger over events in the Middle East could easily spill over into hostility towards British Jews and even physical attacks, as was seen during and after the war in Gaza in January 2009. The British government attempted to contain the security threat after 7/7 and stem extremism among British Muslims, but could not disengage from a link between British foreign policy and race relations at home. For this reason, it was difficult to tackle an anti-racist discourse which claimed that accusations of antisemitism were a smokescreen for Islamophobia.[34]

Legislation on immigration and citizenship defined the "New Commonwealth" immigrants for purposes of exclusion, although anti-discrimination laws delineated some measure of tolerance for racial minorities, re-categorized in the 1980s as "Blacks" and "Asians." By the beginning of the twenty-first century Britain was facing contradictions and conflicts, as did France, in attempting to integrate large ethnic and racial minorities. The Jews largely fell outside these parameters as having successfully achieved a measure of assimilation, while the Black-White polarities of the debate did not take account of the instability of ethnic and racial boundaries (Muslims could be European, African, or Asian; not all south Asian immigrants were Muslim). Legally, it was not clear if Jews were an ethnic or racial group, and therefore it was unclear whether prosecution could be brought against neo-Nazis for incitement of racial hatred against Jews. Moreover, sociologists were very slow in recognizing Jews as a distinct ethnic group that had a

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history of its own within British society, despite the long lineage of antisemitic discourse in English culture.

Significantly, in both Britain and France a postmodern frame of cultural difference, not marked solely by skin color, replaced the former premise of racism on colonial discourse, and reflected the breakdown of integration through institutions, while universalism played off against embattled particularism.[35] "Ethnicity" has become a description of social practice around Europe, rather than a sociological term for cultural difference, and has been applied in an instrumental way that further isolates immigrant communities in the process of integrating them into a secular society, while alienating their religious sensibilities and need for common bonds, often expressed in identification with a remote homeland they may not have known and with radicalism which further isolates them (the absurdities to which these paradoxes lead are satirized in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*).[36]

In this context, the Muslim takes center stage as the "Other," standing in for the religious, ethnic, language, and cultural difference of the new "jew." While qualifying the analogy, some sociologists and commentators have drawn parallels between how immigrant Jews were perceived at the turn of the twentieth century and how Muslims are perceived in contemporary Britain, their loyalties questioned and branded as a terrorist threat, as if antisemitism could help understand "Islamophobia," and the conflation of a Muslim collective with radical fundamentalism.[37] Anthropologist Paul Silverstein has proposed a model of racialization of Europe's new Muslim immigrants in the backlash of the War on Terror for the same reasons that Jewish refugees were once a suspect ethnic group and Gypsies (Roma) still are because of their mobility and extraterritorial loyalties which destabilize national entities and borders.[38] The headline "Muslims are the New Jews" catches attention when Muslims want to make a case against discriminatory practices and prejudiced thinking in contemporary Britain.[39] This is a significant attempt to substantiate the paradigm of an ethnic minority suffering cultural racism in a "conflict of civilizations," but it is misleading—for a start, Jewish "extremists" did not try to harm national security nor were they involved in a real plot to cause disruption and mayhem in Western countries, as Joe Bulman seemed to suggest in his 2009 Channel Four TV documentary, *The Enemy Within*, though some Russian revolutionaries did have ideas about destabilizing tsarist tyranny. Certainly, the anarchists involved in the siege of Sidney Street were by no means identified with the Jewish community or Jewish beliefs; they wore neither *streimels* nor *yarmulkes* and were, in fact, defiantly anti-religious.[40] The collective fear of

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"Jewish Bolsheviks" cannot be compared with the treatment of the Muslim population because immigrant Jews were subject to legal discrimination as aliens, not as terrorists; moreover, they were encouraged to shed their religious and ethnic differences in order to become "English."

Anti-racism could attack both antisemitism and the "racist" Jews, while the successful assimilation of Jews in British society which supposedly made them "invisible" raised questions about just how they were perceived in terms of an equal citizenry. The use of stereotypes in representing Jews in the media still prevailed, a good example being Maureen Lipman's portrayal in the British Telecom TV campaign in the 1980s of a Jewish grandmother "Beattie" (to match the telephone company's acronym BT). If "Beattie" encouraged the middle classes to use the phone, as a model citizen representing Thatcherite self-help, less innocuous stereotypes of Jewish vulgarity (unwelcome social climbing and disrespect for social boundaries) and stinginess (trying to get something for free) were not far behind a comic figure of the Jewish mother who treats the telephone line as an umbilical cord to her family.[41] British children's historical fiction could present an ambivalent adoption of Jewish suffering in the middle ages and in the Holocaust to teach racial tolerance, but, for all the mandatory cultural sensitivity, without necessarily acknowledging the Jews' full religious equality in the present or challenging some older stereotypes.[42] There is much talk of integration which cites the Jews as a "good" example for Muslims, ignoring the fact that the "bad" inassimilable Jews who refuse intermarriage and maintain separate lifestyles from the rest of society are still being criticized, as they were prior to the Aliens Act of 1905, only this time in the name of multiculturalism. Hasidic Jews in Stamford Hill were perceived as beyond the pale of multiculturalism because they did not adopt the rules of "civility," wore strange clothes, and separated themselves socially and sexually from the rest of society out of obedience to a "fundamentalist" religious practice which one columnist in a liberal progressive newspaper likened to female genital mutilation, illegal in Britain but carried out on thousands of British girls each year; the "racist" Jews, she believed, were not integrating like the Caribbeans in such classic tales of immigration as Sam Selvon's *Lonely Londoners* (1956) or Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000).[43] On the one hand, the public space of multiculturalism beckons with its promise of respect for difference; on the other hand Jewish difference is abhorred as "racist" or "inassimilable." Integration demands giving up religious "intolerance" of sexual freedom in its "fundamentalist" modesty,

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dress, and behavioral codes, as well as its "exclusionist" sexual practices or gender segregation.

FIGURING THE "JEW" IN MULTICULTURAL TEXTS

The promise of multiculturalism may be weighed against traditional Jewish separateness and clannishness, while in-marriage rules (despite rampant exogamy) have reinforced old stereotypes of the Jews as exclusionist racists, unwilling to overcome their ancient particularism. The class snobbery so characteristic of the English has remained an almost unthinking reaction that disparages Jews, or envies them (or both), while traditional working-class resentment of Jews as wealthy capitalists and/or alien immigrants also reinforces negative stereotypes. Moreover, in Britain acceptance of immigrants has, historically, been a process of accommodation that recognizes difference on condition difference is assimilated into national identity and values, something that is problematic when national identity and values are in dispute and different constructions of ethnicity and race are in play within liberal universalism.[44] The "jew" is caught doubly, as archetypal alien undermining society, and as agent of European colonialism. Moreover, whereas the Jews were suspect as cosmopolitans undermining Englishness and holding dual loyalty in right-wing antisemitism, the Jewish community is subject to political scrutiny in liberal progressive circles whenever Israel is portrayed as a perpetrator of war crimes and as morally guilty of its own inception. Israel has become identified as the world's number one enemy for both the far right and the far left, but in the eyes of many liberal intellectuals it has somehow become tainted with colonialism. We therefore open our discussion by showing how the narrative of the "jew" is embedded in English culture, but must be examined in both its local and global contexts in order to understand the complex transformation of the figure of the "jew" that changes in accordance with the needs of the moment, yet often reverts to familiar tropes.

The recurrence of blood libels and the revival of conspiracy theories in the early twentieth century, for example, can be explained by a complicated intertwining of biological race theory, economic causes, political crises, and anxieties arising from modernity. The demonization of Israel similarly revives familiar tropes, yet emerges from an ideologized *anti*-racist platform. The demonisation of Israel is reinforced by the recirculation of hostile images from Arab and anti-Zionist propaganda that originated in Western medieval and Nazi images of the world Jewish conspiracy and now imperceptibly

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reactivate latent narratives embedded in English culture with its shelf memory of blood libels and ubiquitous icons of Shylock and Fagin. The apparent contradiction of an anti-racist antisemitism can be partly explained, as we will see, by a tendency to exclude Jews in postcolonial discourse and to transfer the figure of the "jew" to Muslims, who come to be seen as neocolonialism's new "jews."[45]

Beyond sympathy for the anti-Zionist cause, which might conceivably project guilt for British imperialism, it is curious that colonialist attitudes sometimes persist even among writers known for progressive and liberal views. The perception of the "jew" has a complex relation to the color bar and to racial/ethnic prejudices, for example in the life and writing of Doris Lessing, to be considered in chapter one. For Lessing, the "jew" figures as a source of intellectual power, a cosmopolitan who is a middleman in the colonial equation, but also serves as a screen for other minorities. There may be a projection here of colonial anxieties caught between the historical situation in southern Africa and the autobiographical writing time of British postwar politics. The "jew" is the object of desire, yet also of dubious sexual and racial identity who is successfully assimilated, but not fully accepted into colonial society.

We move on in the next chapter to Anita Desai and an Indian view of the "jew" in *Baumgartner's Bombay*. Baumgartner is a Holocaust survivor who enters the Hindu-Muslim divide in India during the violence of partition and independence. *Baumgartner's Bombay* presents the dual mirror of the Jew in Europe and the Muslim in India. Each suffers exclusion and expulsion, and each is a stranger at home in a multicultural ocean of humanity. Baumgartner is the other's Other who, through his passage to India in Venice and later in the internment camp, grasps an identity that remains elusive, denied, and unclaimed, in a postcolonial paradigm of rootless hybridity. Desai, of course, passes over the real genealogy of Indian Jews, who include a number of eminent Indian writers such as Ruth Prawer Jhabvala (a German-Jewish refugee), Esther David, or Nissim Ezekiel,[46] and seems to be more interested in the figure of the "jew," for so long a site of anxiety about modernity and miscegenation in the Western imaginary. The "jew" is now the quintessential outsider and embodiment of migration across continents and cultures, and, as Anna Guttman contends, a literary figure that gives easy access to the Anglo-American market, with its middlebrow taste for Jewish and Holocaust themes.[47] The "jew," as Vijay Mishra has put it, is, in the "unfinished narrative of modernity," either a Romantic version of the Jew's beautiful daughter (such as Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*), or an exemplary figure of urban

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estrangement (Leopold Bloom, for example), and therefore fits into the transnational mobility of postcolonial writing. Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*, for example, is a novel which proposes an anthropological contiguity between medieval Jewish merchants trading between the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent and resistance to colonial erasure of such cross-cultural migrations.[48] There is in the "jew" both an affinity and an attraction for Indian writers such as Desai and Salman Rushdie who are preoccupied with themes of wandering, homelessness, and alienation, and who see in Jews fellow cosmopolitans. The Wandering Jew, after all, is the ultimate figure of the outsider at home everywhere and nowhere, typifying for modernity

> *l'homme moyen sensual*, . . .vainly trying to integrate himself into a culture to which he is essentially alien. And this predicament of the Jew is merely a magnification of the predicament of modern man himself, bewildered and homeless in a mechanical world of his own creation.[49]

To this we should add the historical experience of the Holocaust as an exemplary racial violence and traumatic uprooting, which Anna Guttman sees as a natural path for South Asian authors to explore when negotiating their global identities,[50] though Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, who fled Nazi Germany with her family to England before World War Two and later moved to India with her husband, seems to have erased her Jewishness in her construction of an imaginary "India" as a site of displacement and marginality seen though Jane Austen characters wearing masks of Englishness.[51]

Immigrants to Britain have, on the whole, wished to be seen to be more English than the English and to pass on to their children the perceived values of their adopted culture, in which, like the Jews before them, they were often upwardly mobile but not fully accepted. The postmodern and postcolonial situation encourages a mixing of religions, races, languages, and cultures. The resulting hybridity breeds a generation that enjoys multiple identities, but it does not necessarily comprise a workable "multiculturalism." Hybrid children may turn out to be monstrous animals, like the child in Peter Carey's *My Life as a Fake*, or the failed experiment in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. In his novel *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), J. M. Coetzee comments

> It is as hard to imagine the child of Red Peter as to imagine the child of Kafka himself. Hybrids are, or ought to be, sterile; and Kafka saw both himself and Red Peter as hybrids, as monstrous

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> thinking devices mounted inexplicably on suffering animal bodies. The stare that we meet in all the surviving photographs of Kafka is a stare of pure surprise; surprise, astonishment, alarm. Of all men Kafka is the most insecure in his humanity. *This*, he seems to say: *this* is the image of God?[52]

Hybridity bears a heavy price and may conceal family secrets, as we will see in the following chapter, "Hybridity's Children." Andrea Levy is herself of mixed Jewish and Caribbean descent. In her *Small Island* (2004), one of the four protagonists who tell the story is of Jewish descent, and the significant context is World War Two and racism. Racist England is encountered as an island as small minded as the small island of Jamaica, where ignorance and prejudice are rife. Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* brings the offspring of Pakistani immigrants into contact with a Jewish family in order to parody liberal fostering of "hybrids" as ideal multiracial objects for breeding. But the hybrids are not happy with their multiracial identity, and the children of Pakistani immigrants are split between assimilation to a latent English colonial identity and a confused fundamentalism. In Smith's *The Autograph Man* a hybrid Chinese/Jewish collector of autographs explores multiple identities, many of which are fake, like the autographs he collects, thus indicating that postmodern identity in Britain is often phony but life can never be reduced to essentialist labels, however much Alex tries to keep his identities (and also his women) separate. India is an interesting example of hybridity and multiple cultures in the writing of Salman Rushdie, whose novel *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) turns to the historical experience of Spain and the encounter of Jew and Moor, which serve to unpack the construct of hybridity as a slippery creature that undermines the very concepts of identity and our understanding of history.

In the next chapter, we show how Caryl Phillips rewrites Shakespeare from the perspective of Othello, thus writing back to racial stereotyping. In the end, however, the Jew-Black switch is turned around into a confrontation between European racism and an imagined Othello figure, a confrontation refracted in the humiliation and indignity inflicted on the Holocaust victim and on the Black Jewish Ethiopian in *The Nature of Blood*. Again, we will see how the trope of the "jew" is manipulated into a politicized postcolonial agenda, but here presented as a contiguity between the view of European racism seen by the former colonized subjects of the British Empire, and direct experience of "epidermic" racism as Black citizens of Europe. In pressing for a careful review of such contiguity, Paul Gilroy has cautioned against a

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simplistic parallel between the Black and Jewish experiences, illustrated by the irony of Black soldiers fighting fascism on behalf of a country that discriminates against them. Gilroy reminds us of the shock of General Patton's Black troops on liberating a concentration camp filled with corpses and dying Jewish inmates, which brought home the ultimate logic of colonialism and the complex irrational hatred which crosses color lines.[53] In urging us to take note of the testimony of Primo Levi and Jean Améry, as well as that of colonial prisoners-of-war, Gilroy wishes to alert us to the ever present thinking behind modernity which leads to the complicity of rationality in barbarism. In the postmodern era of loss of innocence, the histories of the Jews and the Blacks in the West serve as counterweights.[54] In Caryl Phillips' *The Nature of Blood*, the Black's view of European racism works through the confused identities of the Other, as well as presenting the subaltern's view of European antisemitism.

In the following chapter, the cultural reconstruction in postmodern texts of the memory of London's East End is explored in order to interrogate the ethnic boundaries of an imagined urban territory. In Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, a Jewish territory is vacated and occupied by Asian immigrants, in a parallel immigrant experience that posits a multicultural existence which is doubtful when matched against the historical record. The absence of the Jews haunts the streets of the East End, giving rise to a search for the "Vanishing Jew," understood quite differently in the work of Iain Sinclair and Rachel Lichtenstein. Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair's *Rodinsky's Room* (2000), and Lichtenstein's subsequent book entitled *On Brick Lane* are preoccupied with reconstituting part of the urban palimpsest, but for Lichtenstein this is also a personal search for her own identity and roots. Jeremy Gavron's novel about Brick Lane, *An Acre of Barren Ground*, on the other hand, posits different immigrant experiences as part of a polyphonic and multiple ethnic identity that says a lot about the ambiguities and contradictions of cultural identity in contemporary Britain. The figure of the "Vanishing Jew" emerges as a post-Holocaust construct of a cultural absence, a post-traumatic phantom that haunts the imagination but also inspires a postmodern remolding of cultural identities that can be multiple and fluid.

Indeed, in postmodern fiction, as we will see in chapter six, the "Postmodern Jew" has become an ambiguous figure of post-historical sensibilities of invented or fake identities. The figure of the "jew" as marginalized outsider re-emerges as a radical source of cynicism and healthy subversion of middle-class complacency. Yet Jewish writers have also increasingly written back to antisemitism, contributing to the general

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postmodern debunking of history a revision of the imperialist past that uncovers deceits and betrayal, but also undoes the apparent invisibility of British Jews achieved by successful assimilation and model integration. They join other subalterns whose marginalized voices have become more central to the literatures of the former Empire and have helped to redefine both Britishness and the parameters of English literature.[55] In externalizing antisemitic stereotypes and showing how Jews seem unable to escape the "Auschwitz syndrome," Howard Jacobson throws off any taboos about the Holocaust in his comic novel *Kalooki Nights* (2007) and externalizes antisemitic stereotypes in offensive and obscene black humor. Jacobson would defend racial jokes such as Bernard Manning's stand-up comedy in Manchester clubs, which does not spare Blacks among the audience from racial insults, because he believes humor to be the lance that releases the pus and heals social tensions.[56] Perhaps there is a confusion of ethnic humor (particularly Jewish self-mocking humor that often relies on hostile stereotypes) with racial stereotyping, which is often demeaning and has a history in colonialist culture.[57] However, the exposure of prejudice among the host society and the out-group can, as in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*, easily fit into a long tradition of British satire which ridicules through burlesque exposure and reduction to the absurd. The participation in postcolonial discourse of real Jews has complicated the racialization of the "jew," as will be seen in the final chapter, when secular radical Jews assert alternative cultural identities, alongside self-hating and antisemitic Jews. On the other hand, Jewish feminist artists have contributed their own gendered perspective to the exposure of racial stereotypes, often in an intervention in sexual politics and social discourse that transgresses boundaries.

This book is timely as the study of postmodern and postcolonial fiction has been reconfigured in the transnational matrix of global migrations, suggesting, as Stephen Clingman has proposed, a new "grammar of identities" that cuts across paradigms of modern/postmodern, colonial/postcolonial, as well as across time and space.[58] Migrancy not only changes the way we think about the human condition, but also the way we read literature across national and ethnic borders. Susheila Nasta, for example, has recast South Asian writers in Britain within a hundred and fifty years of Black presence and the contemporary debate over hybridity and diaspora.[59] At the same time, the usual Eurocentric view has been challenged by Edward Said and others, and Said has famously remarked on the resemblance of the history of antisemitism to the way the political and cultural discourse of the West has "Orientalized" Islam.[60] In fact, the mirroring of antisemitism and

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Orientalism has attracted the attention of Aamar Mufti, who has attempted to shift the discussion of the "Jewish question" into a postcolonial axis that spans the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent.[61]

In the present reflection on the figure of the "jew" in postmodern and postcolonial fiction we hope to contribute to that debate by showing how the image of the Other, in this case the archetypal Other—the "jew"—affects changing national identities and the notion of identity itself, while transformations of familiar tropes and new directions in the sorry history of antisemitism point to both surprising as well as disturbing implications. In particular, the displacement of the "jew" by the Muslim can summon global solidarity with victimhood, but, while recognizing Jewish suffering in the Holocaust, postcolonial discourse has tended to erase real Jews from the mental and cultural landscape or to deny particularity to Jews as Jews. What happens when the Other is reimagined by transnational writers, especially when they engage with the figures of Shylock and Othello, as in the novels of Salman Rushdie and Caryl Phillips, and look at Jewish history from the perspective of, respectively, India and the "Black Atlantic"? What of real, as distinct from imagined, Jews who cross from marginality into multiethnic diversity and write against the antisemitism of Empire, revisioning history? These are some of the questions we will be addressing in our book, which cherishes the modest ambition of reexamining the parameters of British fiction from the standpoint of an Other who was scapegoated and excluded in the process of the shaping of Englishness, and is now, once more, central to the political and literary imagination of global diasporas.

NOTES

1. "Broadcast Bulletin Issue number 62-12|06|06," Office of Communications, http://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv/obb/prog_cb/pcb33. The lyrics of the original musical were changed to fit the sums of money for alleged purchase of peerages. See Simon Rocker, "Spot the difference between these men (Channel 4 can't)," *Jewish Chronicle*, 16 June 2006.

2. Julia Pascal, "Time to bury Fagin," *Guardian Comment is Free*, 17 Jan. 2009; accessed online.

3. Michael Billington, "Oliver!" *Guardian*, 15 Jan. 2009; accessed online.

4. In his book, *The Victorians* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), A. N. Wilson comments on the antisemitic reactions to Disraeli that these were a "flaw" more characteristic of the left than the right and that such remarks were muted after the Holocaust.

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5. Luke Harding, "Princess Michael defends breeding, Botox—and Harry," *Guardian*, 17 Feb. 2005; accessed online. The scandal, it must be said, was more to do with the erratic and shameful behavior of the royals than antisemitic sentiments.

6. Sander L. Gilman, *Multiculturalism and the Jews* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

7.Bryan Cheyette, "Neither Excuse nor Accuse: T. S. Eliot's Semitic Discourse," *Modernism/modernity* 10.3 (2003): 433.

8. Robin Shepherd, *A State Beyond the Pale: Europe's Problem with Israel* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2009), 51–52.

9. For a history of the postmodern trope of the "jew" from Dreyfus to Levinas and Derrida see Sarah Hammerschlag, *The Figural Jew: Politics and Identity in Postwar French Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); and see also Neil Davison, *Jewishness and Masculinity from the Modern to the Postmodern* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

10. Hammerschlag, *Figural Jew*, 3–4

11. Ibid., 23–24; Said, "My Right of Return," quoted in ibid., 1.

12. Ibid. Finkielkraut, cited in ibid., 5.

13. Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and the "jews,"* trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1988), 3–4. For a detailed critique of this use see Geoffrey Bennington, "Lyotard and 'the 'Jews,'" in *Modernism, Culture, and 'the Jews,'* ed. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, 188–96; and Max Silverman, "Re-Figuring 'the Jew' in France," in ibid., 197–207.

14. Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin. "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19, 4 (Summer 1993): 700–01. For a summary of critiques of Lyotard's use of the term see Hammerschlag, *Figural Jew*, 8–10.

15. Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3–5.

16. See Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 27–29.

17. Jonathan Judaken, "Between Philosemitism and Antisemitism: The Frankfurt School's Anti-Antisemitism," in *Antisemitism and Philosemitism in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries: Representing Jews, Jewishness, and Modern Culture*, ed. Phyllis Lassner and Lara Trubowitz (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 41, n. 6.

18. Robert J. C. Young, "Hybridism and the Ethnicity of the English," in *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, Benita Parry, and Judith Squires (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997), 127–50.

19. Daniel Defoe, "The True-Born Englishman," *The Novels and Miscellaneous Works of Daniel De Foe* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1888), 5: 433.

20. Ibid., 438.

21. Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: New Left Library, 1977), 12–13.

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22. See "Who We Are and What We Ought to Be," *Guardian*, 8 May 1990, reproduced in *National Identities: The Constitution of the United Kingdom*, ed. Bernard Crick (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 168–71.

23. Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory 2: Island Stories—Unravelling Britain*, ed. Alison Light with Sally Alexander and Gareth Stedman Jones (London: Verso, 1998), 22.

24. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

25. Margaret Canovan, "'Breathes there the man, with soul so dead…' Reflections on patriotic poetry and liberal principles," in *Literature and the Political Imagination*, ed. John Horton and Andrea T. Baumeister (London: Routledge, 1996), 170–97.

26. Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*: *The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 15–16.

27. Lisa Jardine, "A Point of View: Nation or State?" BBC Radio Four, 7 Dec. 2007; http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7133315.stm accessed 9 Dec. 2007.

28. Ibid.

29. Ania Loomba, *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12.

30. According to a *Guardian* ICM opinion poll, quoted in Tariq Modood, *Multiculturalism: A Civic Idea* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 108.

31. Clive J. Christie, *Race and Nation: A Reader* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998), 233.

32. For a stunning visual record of the passage of Black Britons from travelers to arrivals on the *Windrush* and from the Notting Hill riots to celebrity in entertainment and sport, see Paul Gilroy, *Black Britain: A Photographic History* (London: Saqi, 2007).

33. Gilman, *Multiculturalism and the Jews*, 225–42.

34. Efraim Sicher, *Antisemitism, Multiculturalism, Globalization: The British Case*. Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism #32 (Jerusalem: Vidal Sassoon Center for the Study of Antisemitism, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2009).

35. Max Silverman and Nira Yuval-Davis, "Jews, Arabs, and the Theorization of Racism in Britain and France," in *Thinking Identities: Ethnicity, Racism and Culture*, ed. Avtar Brah, Mary J. Hickman, and Máirtín Mac an Ghaill (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1998), 25–43.

36. See Alice Bloch and John Solomos, eds., *Race and Ethnicity in the 21st Century* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Salvador Cardús, "New Ways of Thinking About Identity in Europe," in *Ethnic Europe: Mobility, Identity, and Conflict in a Globalized World*, ed. Roland Hsu (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 63–79; Commission on Integration and Cohesion, UK, 2006, cited in Cardús, 75, n. 5.

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195–218. See Maleiha Malik, "Muslims are now getting the same treatment Jews had a century ago," *Guardian*,2 Feb. 2007. See chapters three and five below.

38. Paul Silverstein, "Immigrant Racialization and the New Savage Slot: Race, Migration, and Immigration in the New Europe," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 366–67.

39. For example, India Knight, "Muslims are the new Jews," *Sunday Times*, 15 Oct. 2006.

40. David Cesarani, "Why Muslims are not the new Jews," http://www.thejc.com /comment/comment/21173/why-muslims-are-not-new-jews, 19 Oct. 2009. Cesarani is a professor of history at Royal Holloway, London University.

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42. Madelyn Travis, "'Heritage Anti-Semitism' in Modern Times?: Representations of Jews and Judaism in Twenty-first-century British Historical Fiction for Children," *European Judaism* 43.1 (Spring 2010): 78–92.

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44. Tony Kushner, "Remembering to Forget: Racism and anti-Racism in Postwar Britain," in *Modernity, Culture, and 'the Jew,'* ed. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, 226–27.

45. Efraim Sicher, "The Image of Israel: A View from Britain," *Israel Studies* 16.1 (Spring 2011): 1–25.

46. See Shalva Weil, *India's Jewish Heritage: Ritual, Art, and Life-Cycle* (Mumbai: Marg, 2002). On American Asian writers who use the figure of the "jew" in constructing Indian identity see Jonathan Freedman, "'Who's Jewish?' Some Asian-American Writers and the Jewish-American Literary Canon," *Michigan Quarterly Review* 42.1 (2003): 230–54.

47. Anna Guttman, "Marketing the Figure of the Jew: Writing South Asia, Reading America," in *The Global Literary Field*, ed. Anna Guttman, Michel Hockx, and George Paizis (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), 60–79. The global literary economy is, of course, heavily Americanized, but in addressing marketing and its effect on reception, rather than engaging in textual analysis, Guttman ascribes to Desai the *intention* of writing for an American Jewish readership, thus downplaying the author's postcolonial concerns and the significance of her biographical background, which are, as we shall argue, all-important.

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49. Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 38.

50. Anna Guttman, "The Jew in the Archive: Textualizations of (Jewish?) History in Contemporary South Asian Literature," *Contemporary Literature* 51.3 (2010): 503–31.

51. Ronald Shepherd, *Ruth Prawer Jhabvala in India: The Jewish Connection* (Delhi: Chanakyu Publications, 1994), 1–3.

52. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 75.

53. Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 287–326; "Not Being Inhuman," in Cheyette and Marcus, *Modernity, Culture, and 'the Jew'* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 292–97.

54. Gilroy, *Against Race*, 82–96.

55. See Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002).

56. Michael L. Ross, *Race Riots: Comedy and Ethnicity in Modern British Fiction* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 14; Ross cites Jacobson's *Seriously Funny* (1997).

57. Ibid., 7–14.

58. Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

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