Editor's Introduction

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It is with great pleasure that I introduce the current issue. The main articles are guest-edited by Joëlle Allouche-Benayoun, inspired by their presentations in a session on Jews and “Judaicities” at the 2015 meeting of the International Society for the Sociology of Religion (ISSR) in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium. These articles represent significant research and researchers who focus their insights on Western Europe, primarily France and Belgium. The guest editor, in her introduction, offers some historical, demographic, religious, and cultural context for this population. More generally, each of the contributions illustrates the importance of understanding the historical, political and cultural contexts in which Jews find themselves and with which Jewish identity intersects. In the first paper, Allouche-Benayoun gives us a historical context for understanding Jews from Algeria, as they recount their life stories. She relays their experiences during World War II, as their status plunged from French citizens to “natives” overnight in 1940, and how this collective history colors Jewish identity for them, even today. Geneviève Dermenjian takes us even further back through the history of Algerian Jews, situating them together with other cultural groups during the period of French colonization, and she then discusses how Jewish identity was perceived by the European settlers. We are made to understand how this long history colors the experiences of Algerian Jews in ways very different than the experience of immigrants to the United States, for example. Valérie Assan takes a different approach. Understanding the importance of transmitting the Jewish past in France, she focuses on the organizations that serve as “players in ‘memory policies,’” which preserve and present the historical perspective so critical to our understanding of French Jews’ experiences and collective memories.

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From Eliezer Ben-Raphael, Günther Jikeli, and Paul Zawadzki, we gain insight into how antisemitism is manifesting itself in France and Belgium today. Jikeli, drawing on the existing surveys in France, discusses how contemporary antisemitism has moved away from contesting the Frenchness of French Jews (and the Algerian Jews among them) to focusing on anti-Zionism as a form of antisemitism. Ben-Raphael also discusses this “neo-antisemitism,” which is perpetuated by relatively small radicalized groups. He focuses on the experience of antisemitism in Belgium, using data from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and grounding his understanding of the data in contemporary interpretations of antisemitism throughout the world. Ben-Raphael concludes that the “allosemitism” of Zygmunt Bauman and Artur Sandauer best characterizes how Belgian Jews experience antisemitism, although he notes that current circumstances exert their own restraints on how antisemitism is experienced. Zawadzki reflects on antisemitism through the sociologists who study it, and focuses on the ways in which their sociological approach colors their interpretation of the data as it occurs. This reflection deepens a theme that has characterized our field of study of late, that researchers’ personal and professional narratives influence their theoretical and empirical interpretations, and brings it to a new epistemological and moral level.

Aurélien Gampiot’s research compares black Jews in France to those in the United States. The comparison shows the extent to which the experience of black Jews is a result of the origins and connection of black Jews in each respective context. Thus, while the roots of many black Jews in the United States stretch back to the days of slavery and forced migration from Africa, through decades of institutionalized discrimination and prejudice that continues through contemporary experiences, the black Jews in France have a post-colonial background that colors their perception and experience; they often join with others as they shape their identities through community organizations, some of which are transnational, providing a wider base for forging identity out of the intersection of race, ethnicity, and religion.

Mira Niclescu’s focus is on Jewish Buddhists. In her essay she turns to a more theoretical understanding of the intersection of these two identities, showing variations in how that intersection is manifest as it situates itself in an “interstitial” area between the two. Her approach to intersecting identities fits well with the theme of intersecting ethnic, historical, religious, nationalistic, racial, collective, and individual identities, which the other contributors also discuss.

Besides enlightening us about new perspectives on contemporary Jewry, I expect that these essays will provide a thought-provoking re-analysis of our own Jewish identities and the intersections that have shaped how they are experienced by us as individuals and collectively, wherever we may be hanging our hats in contemporary constellations.

Our research editor, Helen Kim, adds to our international focus in this issue by interviewing Adam Mendelsohn, director of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. As the primary source of Jewish studies and research in the area (and probably in all of Africa), the Kaplan Centre finds itself partnering with many other Jewish

organizations to disseminate findings and reinforce Jewish identity. Clearly, the center itself is influenced by its situational uniqueness.

And finally, we round out the issue with our book reviews and list of books received. In his brief reflection on the book review section to date, Daniel Parmer, book review editor, introduces the current reviews and presents others' reflections on the books they favor in their teaching of contemporary Jewry. Aaron J. Hahn Tapper's *Judaisms: A Twenty-First Century Introduction to Jews and Jewish Identities*, reviewed by Jennifer Thompson, surveys the complexity and plurality of the different types of global Judaisms. (This reflects the emphasis on plural Judaisms and "Judaicities" discussed at the 2015 ISSR session providing the majority of articles in this special issue). Naomi Prawer Kadar's *Raising Secular Jews: Yiddish Schools and Their Periodicals for American Children, 1917–1950*, reviewed by Jonathan Krasner, traces the development of Jewish identity in the United States through Kadar's analysis of the children's magazines published by four major Yiddish school networks; as the book explores the development of ideological and educational concerns over time, it too reminds us that no Jewish phenomenon can be well understood without a situational and intersectional contextualization.

As Parmer wishes us in his introduction to the book reviews, happy reading!