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AHR Roundtable
Postcolonialism and the Study of Anti-Semitism

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Shortly after the end of the Second World War, Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) refuted the belief in an “eternal anti-Semitism” as a means of explaining the rise of Nazism. According to Arendt, this timeless conceptualization of “Jew-hatred” turned anti-Semitism into a “normal and natural reaction to which history gives only more or less opportunity. Outbursts need no special explanation because they are natural consequences of an eternal problem.”¹ By restoring the history of anti-Semitism to time, place and context, Arendt was able to compare the “imperialist and totalitarian versions of anti-Semitism” at the heart of Nazi ideology.² A contextualized history of anti-Semitism takes up the first third of *Origins*, with the question of racism in African colonial culture in part two acting as a historical precursor to Nazi totalitarianism and genocide. In other words, Arendt’s comparative perspective is not possible without her rethinking an “eternal anti-Semitism” and returning it to history. That is why in recent years *Origins* has become a common point of reference for those within postcolonial studies who wish to explore the historical inter-connections between racism, fascism, colonialism and anti-Semitism.³

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951; repr., New York, 2004), 16.

² *Ibid.*, 9.

³ For a summary of the Arentian turn within postcolonial studies see Dan Stone and Richard King eds., *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History: Imperialism, Nation, Race, and Genocide* (New York, 2007).

After her death in 1975, Arendt was read as a political theorist and *Origins* was primarily interpreted as an account of “totalitarianism” rather than a book where the histories of “Anti-Semitism,” “Imperialism,” and “Totalitarianism” (the titles of its three sections) intersect.⁴ The mixed fortunes of Arendt’s *Origins*— marginalized in the second half of the twentieth-century only to be foregrounded in the twenty-first—indicates just how troubling the conjunction of anti-Semitism and colonial culture has been until quite recently.⁵ It is a paradox of Arendt’s reception that her work is both central to the formation of postcolonial studies and Holocaust Studies— the former following *Origins* the latter following the fierce debate sparked by Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1961)— but it is only in recent years that she has been a catalyst for bringing these two disciplines together.⁶ One reason for this delay is that the contextualized history of anti-Semitism exposes the tensions and contradictions within and between early anti-colonialist activism and later postcolonial literature and theory.

As a stateless person for more than a decade, and a Jewish refugee from Nazi-occupied Germany and France (escaping from Gurs internment camp in 1940), Arendt, after the failure of European humanism, struggled to find a language to articulate what she called in her 1950 preface to *Origins*, “homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth.”⁷ Likewise Arendt’s contemporary Frantz Fanon searched for a new global humanism, insisting on the first page of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) on “the kind

⁴ Richard H. King, *Race, Culture and the Intellectuals 1940-1970* (Baltimore, 2004), 96 notes that the working title of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was *The Elements of Shame: Anti-Semitism, Imperialism, Racism*. The term “totalitarianism” was introduced late in the day in the third section of the book because of the intervention of Arendt’s publisher. See also Stone and King, *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History*, 5.

⁵ That *The Origins of Totalitarianism* constructed colonial racism and genocide in Africa as a precursor to Nazi genocidal anti-Semitism was a key reason why this work was not more widely acknowledged within postcolonial studies. For a discussion of the difficulty of historicizing genocidal racism in Africa as the “origins” of Nazi anti-Semitism see e.g., Stone and King, *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History*, 9-11 and Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, 2009), 33-65.

⁶ David Cesarani, *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (New York, 2004), 325 and Stone and King, *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History*, 2. It is significant that Arendt’s work is the starting point for many of the contributions to the roundtable indicating the extent to which she remains an influential figure when rethinking anti-Semitism in differing historical contexts.

⁷ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, xxv.

of tabula rasa which from the outset defines any decolonization.”⁸ Both Arendt and Fanon engaged with the “common enslavement” of the oppressed both on the continent of Europe and within its colonies and spoke of a “new beginning” for humanity after decolonization and the defeat of fascism.⁹ Other anti-colonial theorists and camp survivors at the end of the Second World War—most prominently, Jean Améry, Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi, Primo Levi and Jean-Paul Sartre—made connections between the history of genocide in Europe and European colonialism. Améry, for instance, drew on the work of Fanon to help him to overcome his sense of Jewish victimhood after his time in Auschwitz-Birkenau; Césaire, on the other hand, thought of fascism as colonialism brought home to Europe; and Fanon, Memmi, Levi and Sartre made lasting linkages and analogies between French colonialism and anti-Semitism throughout their work.¹⁰

These thinkers did not speak with a uniform voice. In fact, one of the lasting strengths of this work was its varied attempts to find a language to recuperate the humanist values of Europe that had so recently descended into barbarity. Whereas Fanon, Césaire, and Sartre thought that humanist values were mired in the colonialist history of Europe and were beyond salvation, Levi, Memmi, Améry and Arendt all attempted to reclaim these values.¹¹ But, with the breakdown of the grand narratives of the first half of the twentieth century, these debates concerning European humanism seemed increasingly irrelevant until quite recently. The rise of ethnic identity politics since the 1970s has meant that these early intertwined histories,

⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, 1963), 1.

⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York, 1964), 43 and Arendt *Origins*, 616.

¹⁰ For detailed discussions of these anti-colonial figures in relation to the intertwined histories of anti-Semitism and colonialism see, e.g., Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 66-107 and Bryan Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History* (New Haven, 2014), 43-113.

¹¹ See e.g., Robert S. C. Gordon, *Primo Levi's Ordinary Virtues: From Testimony to Ethics* (Oxford, 2001); Jonathan Druker, *Primo Levi and Humanism after Auschwitz: Posthumanist Reflections* (London, 2009); Jean Améry, *Radical Humanism: Selected Essays*, trans. Sidney and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington, 1984); Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (London, 2004); Jonathan Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question: Anti-antisemitism and the Politics of the French Intellectual* (Lincoln, 2006); Christopher J. Lee, *Frantz Fanon: Toward a Revolutionary Humanism* (Athens, Ohio, 2015); and Peter Hudis, *Frantz Fanon: Philosopher of the Barricades* (London, 2015).

written mainly in the 1940s and 1950s, have been largely confined to separate spheres. What is more, it was difficult to locate these comparative histories across Europe and its colonies, given the growth of distinct scholarly disciplines, such as Holocaust Studies and postcolonial studies, which focused on particular racialized victims of the camps and of colonialism. But, because these seminal writers addressed the victims of the concentration camps and decolonization together, more recent scholars who have re-engaged with them have approached these intertwined histories from a variety of trans-disciplinary and intellectual perspectives.¹²

Paul Gilroy's work in the late 1990s was the catalyst for a return to these comparative histories and specifically to the postcolonial turn in reading Arendt's history of totalitarianism. Gilroy extended the reach of Arendt's work by including the black Atlantic within his purview. It was also significant that he began his work with Fanon's oft-cited belief that "an anti-Semite is inevitably anti-Negro."¹³ Such cross-cutting histories resulted in Gilroy refusing any form of identity politics or race-thinking. His work also militated against conventional disciplinary thinking that made it "so difficult for so many people to accept the knotted intersection of histories" which, in an early example, brought together black American soldiers as witnesses to the horrors of the Nazi death camps.¹⁴ Such examples were multiplied in his later work, which brought together a wide range of popular and cultural histories across national and racial divides and which enabled him to "connect the presence of

¹² Max Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory: The Holocaust and Colonialism in French and Francophone Fiction and Film* (New York, 2013), 11-38 has a useful discussion of this re-engagement.

¹³ Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Race, Identity and Nationalism at the end of the Color Line* (London, 2000), 1 quotes Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York, 1967), 122. *Between Camps* has been particularly influential and developed interestingly the last chapter in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993) which brought together Jewish and black nationalism.

¹⁴ Gilroy, *Between Camps*, 78 and "Not Being Inhuman" in Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, eds., *Modernity, Culture and "the Jew"* (Stanford, 1998), 282-297. See *Strangers and Neighbors: Relations between Blacks and Jews in the United States*, eds. Maurianne Adams and John Bracey (Amherst, 1999) for the intersection of Jewish and black histories more generally in the United States.

colonial peoples in Europe” with the “history of Europe’s Jews and other vulnerable minorities.”¹⁵ Following Gilroy, there was a range of comparative histories written to understand the inter-relations between fascism, anti-Semitism, colonialism and racism that either drew directly from Arendt or from a critical relationship to Holocaust Studies. The main approaches of this new work can be found in two important books: one by Aamer Mufti, who globalizes the “Jewish Question” in South Asia, and a second by Michael Rothberg, who reconceives the politics of memory following the Nazi occupation and French decolonization as forms of “multidirectional memory.”¹⁶

Mufti, following Arendt’s historicist approach, begins with the “paradigmatic narratives” of Jewish existence within the liberal nation-state: “assimilation, emancipation, separatism, conversion, the language of state protection and minority rights, uprooting, exile and homelessness,” which constituted the so-called Jewish Question in modern Europe.¹⁷ His claim is that these paradigms were disseminated globally, under colonial and semi-colonial conditions, and have resulted in a crisis-ridden Muslim minority in India who were positioned similarly to modern European Jewry. Rothberg, on the other hand, distances himself from Arendt’s historicism by drawing on memory and trauma studies, which were developed mainly within Holocaust studies, so as to define multidirectional memory as a “counter tradition in which remembrance of the Holocaust intersects with the legacies of colonialism and slavery and ongoing processes of decolonization.”¹⁸ His work is focused on post-war France that is described as a “laboratory” where the differing histories of colonialism and Nazism overlap. For Rothberg, the emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has

¹⁵ Gilroy, *Between Camps*, 77. See also Rebecka Rutledge Fisher and Jay Garcia, eds., *Retrieving the Human: Reading Paul Gilroy* (New York, 2014).

¹⁶ Aamer Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture* (Princeton, N.J., 2007) and Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*.

¹⁷ Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*, 2-3.

¹⁸ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, xiii.

enabled other, more marginalized, histories to be articulated such as the Algerian War of Independence (1954-62).¹⁹

The great strength of the comparative work by and about anti-colonial leaders and intellectuals is that it understands the history of Nazism also as a form of imperialism and has shown that the history of genocide is part of the history of colonialism.²⁰ From this perspective, different victims of racism are not confined to separate “communities of suffering,” in Edward Said’s resonant phrase, but are able to discover common experiences with other victims.²¹ This recuperative work stands in stark contrast to the ambivalences in postcolonial studies, when it comes to the history of anti-Semitism, which can be located in many of its founding texts. Robert Young, in an early summary of the field, for instance, speaks of the history of anti-Semitism as a form of internal Orientalism in the West, thereby acknowledging it, but only in a degraded form different from the main focus of the field of inquiry.²² This equivocal gesture fails to link the history of anti-Semitism to a main variant of Western Orientalism—German Orientalism—that focused attention on the Jewish body and was missing from Said’s *Orientalism* (1978).²³

¹⁹ Ibid, 6-7. The main difference between Mufti and Rothberg, and also my *Diasporas of the Mind*, is the dismissal of a “historicist perspective” in Rothberg’s account in the name of validating a self-consciously anachronistic “multidirectionality”. See e.g., *Multidirectional Memory*, 25, 80, 135-172, 306. For an extended critique of Rothberg’s ahistoricity see Bryan Cheyette, “Against Supersessionist Thinking: Old and New, Jews and Postcolonialism, Ghetto and Diaspora,” *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 4 (3) (September 2017), 424-439.

²⁰ The pre-eminent history along these lines is Mark Mazower’s *Hitler’s Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London, 2008) but Mazower surprisingly downplays the influence of Arendt’s *Origins*, on the grounds that his work is not about totalitarianism, while acknowledging briefly other anti-colonial theorists of the 1940s and 1950s. See also A. Dirk Moses and Dan Stone eds., *Colonialism and Genocide* (London, 2007) and, most comprehensively, Mark Levene, *The Crisis of Genocide. Devastation: Volume 1: The European Rimlands 1912-1938* (Oxford, 2013) and *The Crisis of Genocide. Annihilation: The European Rimlands 1939-53* (Oxford, 2013).

²¹ Edward W. Said, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (London, 2000), 208.

²² Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London, 1990), 125 and 139.

²³ For Orientalism and the German tradition see Jeffrey S. Librett, *Orientalism and the Figure of the Jew* (New York, 2015). See also Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, eds., *Orientalism and the Jews* (Lebanon, NH, 2005), 51-67 and Dennis Porter, “Orientalism and Its Problems” in Francis Barker, Peter Hume, Margaret Iversen and Diane Iversen eds., *The Politics of Theory* (Colchester, 1983), pp. 179-211.

To be sure Said, in his formative work, does rightly describe Orientalism as a “strange secret sharer of Western anti-Semitism.” But he also speaks of the “Jew of pre-Nazi Europe” as being eventually “bifurcated”: “one Semite went the way of Orientalism, the other, the Arab, was forced to go the way of the Oriental.”²⁴ That *Orientalism* draws from two Jewish writers, Benjamin Disraeli and Karl Marx, in its epigraphs foreshadows this bifurcation. Disraeli’s legacy goes the way of Empire, “race” and myth-making; Marx goes the way of internationalism, anti-imperialism and intellectual critique. A prevalent strand of postcolonial theory, in other words, was unable to perceive Jews as part of a Western minoritarian tradition. Henry Louis Gates’s influential anthology on racial difference, for instance, which introduced many of the main postcolonial theorists based in the United States in the 1980s, includes little or no discussion of anti-Semitism among its essays. Commenting on the volume in its epilogue, Tzvetan Todorov is “shocked” by the “lack of reference to one of the most odious forms of racism: anti-Semitism” which, he argues, has been “actively ignored” by its authors.²⁵ This omission was due in large part to the routine use of “Western Judeo-Christian” to signify a dominant and dominating white colonial culture. The history of anti-Semitism, and Jews as a minority community, fits uneasily within this formulation. That the only discussion of Jewishness in Gates’s volume concerned a majoritarian and discriminatory Jewishness in the State of Israel highlights this anxiety.²⁶

Once one speaks of a supposedly common white “Western Judeo-Christian” tradition, then “the Jews” only belong to this culture as an aspect of European hegemony. Such a reduction, by definition, flattens out the ambivalent position of Jews who were historically at

²⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978), 27, 286 and 307.

²⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, “‘Race,’ Writing, and Culture” in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. ed., *“Race”, Writing, and Difference* (Chicago, 1986), 377 and 370-380.

²⁶ For a detailed discussion of this issue see Marshall Grossman, “The Violence of the Hyphen in Judeo-Christian,” *Social Text* 22 (Spring, 1989), 115-22. Edward W. Said’s essay, “An Ideology of Difference” in *“Race”, Writing, and Difference*, 38-58, introduces the concept of a majoritarian Jewishness, the only place in the collection where Jewishness is discussed. For a recent account of the tensions between majoritarian and minoritarian Jewishness in relation to colonialism, postcolonialism and Israel/Palestine see Isabelle Hesse, *The Politics of Jewishness: The Holocaust, Zionism, and Colonialism in Contemporary World Literature* (London, 2016).

the heart of European metropolitan culture and, at the same time, banished from its privileged sphere so that ascendant racial and sexual identities could be formed and maintained. In this context, ironically, both postcolonial theory and new critical approaches to the study of anti-Semitism in the 1990s had at their heart the question of ambivalence as a means of complicating racial discourse.²⁷ But such unacknowledged doublings (on both sides of the debate) were not unusual at the time. The similarity in subject area and approach between the history of colonialism and anti-Semitism, as Mufti demonstrates comprehensively, meant that disciplinary boundaries were to be particularly differentiated.²⁸ The reasons for the troubled stance of many postcolonial theorists towards a minority Jewish history took three main political forms: the history of Jews as part of the colonial project; the particular history of Zionism; and the contemporary cultural conflicts between “whitened” American Jews and African Americans.²⁹

The historical transformation from minority to majority may have caused genuine difficulties in incorporating Jewish history into a postcolonial perspective, not least because of the colonized condition of the Palestinians within the post-1967 occupied territories of Israel. Ethnic studies in the United States, from which much postcolonial scholarship grew, emerged, for instance, at a moment of Third World solidarity with the Palestinians. This, in turn, led to sharp academic, political and cultural divisions between ethnic and Jewish studies and postcolonial and Holocaust studies. After 1967, the State of Israel, from a Third World

²⁷ See, e.g., Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 1989); *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Cambridge, 1991); and “Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern” in Cheyette and Marcus, *Modernity, Culture and “the Jew,”* 143-156; and Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994) and “The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse,” *Screen* (November-December 1983), 24, no. 6, 18-36.

²⁸ See, e.g., in relation to Diaspora Studies, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis, 2002).

²⁹ This argument is developed in Cheyette, “Venetian Spaces: Old-New Literatures and the Ambivalent Uses of Jewish History,” in Susheila Nasta, ed., *Reading the “New” Literatures in a Postcolonial Era* (London, 2000), 53-72. See also Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (London, 2013), 72-88 for an excellent summary of the difficulties in bringing together Jewish and postcolonial traumatic histories.

perspective, was no longer a bastion of anti-colonial resistance to British rule.³⁰ But such anti-colonial politics does not explain the refusal to engage with the history of anti-Semitism within postcolonial studies, especially given the extent to which canonical anti-colonial thinkers understood the implications of western anti-Semitism for their own colonial history of assimilation, exclusion and partition. The national formation of colonized peoples after decolonization also reflects the national turn within Jewish history with the increased centrality of political Zionism after the Holocaust. Given these similarities, it is hard not to conclude that an anti-colonial comparative history was unconsciously repressed so that the new discipline of postcolonial studies could retain a misguided political clarity. This repressed comparative history is personified, as Bruce Robbins has argued, by the routine dismissal of the rootless cosmopolitan within a significant strand of postcolonial studies that especially values nationalist anti-colonialism. This figure, castigated by Hitler and Stalin in its Judaized form, was disavowed by this strand of postcolonial studies as such a detached figure was said to disempower and disregard the wretched of the earth.³¹ Aijaz Ahmad, for instance, uses the Orwellian distinction (in all senses) between the principled “exile”—at one with the subjugated masses—and the depthless “vagrant”—a rootless cosmopolitan above the fray—to portray Salman Rushdie and Edward Said as “vagrants.” Only Said’s public

³⁰ See, e.g., Michael E Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York, 2004) and Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York, 1999). For the shift in Third World perceptions of Israel, moving from anti-colonial to colonial, see Derek J. Penslar, “Zionism, Colonialism and Postcolonialism” in Anita Shapira and Derek J. Penslar eds., *Israeli Historical Revisionism: From Left to Right* (London, 2003), 84-98. For an extended response and counter-response to Penslar’s argument see Ethan B. Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Maud S. Mandel, eds., *Colonialism and the Jews* (Bloomington, 2017), 275-340.

³¹ Bruce Robbins, “Secularism, elitism, progress and other transgressions” in Keith Ansell Pearson, Benita Parry and Judith Squires, eds., *Cultural Readings of Imperialism: Edward Said and the Gravity of History* (London, 1997), 72 and 67-87. See also his *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress* (New York, 1999). For an alternative postcolonial validation of the rootless cosmopolitan, in the guise of Walter Benjamin, see Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*.

pronouncements on behalf of the Palestinian people, and the death threat looming over Rushdie, are said to redeem them from their self-indulgent “political vagrancy.”³²

This line of argument was given prominence by Kwame Anthony Appiah, in a much quoted passage, who argued that “Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligentsia: of a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained, group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of western capitalism at the periphery.”³³ In a notorious simplification of this passage, Arif Dirlik wrote that “postcoloniality is the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism.”³⁴ In this line of argumentation, the rootless cosmopolitan—and by extension the focus on diaspora, minority histories, and mixed or hybrid expressions of dissidence—are reduced to an expression of global capitalism, itself a reflection of cultural dominance.

It is difficult to say to what extent the rootless cosmopolitan is Judaized in these accounts. But it is hard to disregard entirely the castigation of this figure given the extent to which postcolonial studies at its foundation repressed any inter-connections with Jewish history and the Holocaust. Nonetheless, the longevity and supposed hegemony of Jewish history within western culture (hence “Judeo-Christian”) made it difficult to engage with this history. The post-Holocaust institutionalization of Jewish history resulted in what Spivak calls “disciplinary fear.”³⁵ The history of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism threatened to overwhelm the “new” discipline of postcolonial studies, especially in the Anglo-American academy. That is why self-designated “new” disciplines—such as diaspora studies, postcolonial studies and ethnic and racial studies—have defined themselves as superseding a

³² Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London, 1992), 157-58 and 198. For the Judaization of Salman Rushdie by those opposed to the publication of *The Satanic Verses* (1988) see Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind*, 203-06 and 238-43.

³³ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York, 1992), 149.

³⁴ Arik Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global,” *Critical Inquiry* 20 (Winter 1994), 329, 356 and 328-56.

³⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York, 2003), 19. See also Jonathan Boyarin, *Thinking in Jewish* (Chicago, 1996), 172 who uses the resonant phrase, “discipline and exclude”.

Jewish history, often constructed as age-old or “classic,” despite the recent vintage of this history in the twentieth century.³⁶

But Said refused to endorse this supersessionist narrative within postcolonial studies. In his later work, especially, he consciously included the history of anti-Semitism within his purview and, at the same time, distanced himself increasingly from institutionalized postcolonial studies. To this extent there is a relationship between Said’s rejection of the term “postcolonial” and his return to those whom he regarded as “last Jews,” such as Theodor Adorno, Eric Auerbach and Sigmund Freud.³⁷ In foregrounding these Jewish intellectuals, all in the name of exilic singularity and dissidence, Said highlighted those aspects of postcolonial studies, especially the histories of fascism and anti-Semitism (and by implication their impact on the Palestinian people), which had been hitherto missing. But, at the same time as including this comparative anti-colonial history, Said also distanced himself from the conventional language of Jewish history. Thus, he preferred “exile” over “diaspora” in his work and refused the designation “new Jews” when it came to Palestinian suffering, so as to articulate a narrative that was not merely an appropriation of a better known history.³⁸ What is more, his late work remade all of these Jewish figures in his own image as exiled and

³⁶ “Classical Notions of Diaspora: Transcending the Jewish Tradition,” Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London, 1997), 1-29. Boyarin and Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora* is a powerful critique of the nationalist belief that the Jewish diaspora was superseded by the formation of the State of Israel. The assumption that the “classical” Jewish diaspora is “transcended” by newer diasporas in Cohen, *Global Diasporas* unwittingly reinforces a Jewish nationalist standpoint with regard to the contemporary Jewish diaspora.

³⁷ See, e.g., Bill Ashcroft and Kadhim Hussein, eds., *Edward Said and the Postcolonial* (Huntington, 2001). See also Said, *Freud and the Non-European* (London, 2003); *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (London, 2004); and *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (London, 2006). For a further discussion of Said and “last Jews” see Cheyette, “A glorious achievement: Edward Said and the last Jewish intellectual,” in Tobias Döring and Mark Stein, eds., *Edward Said’s Translocations: Essays in Secular Criticism* (London, 2012), 74-97.

³⁸ See, e.g., Patrick Williams, “Naturally, I reject the term ‘diaspora’: Said and Palestinian Dispossession,” in Michelle Keown, David Murphy and James Proctor, eds., *Comparing Postcolonial Diasporas* (London, 2009), 83-103. Said was consistently opposed to describing Palestinians as the “new Jews”. For a frequent misuse of this designation, in relation to Said, see Joseph Massad, “Affiliating with Said” in Adel Iskandar and Hakem Rustom, eds., *Edward Said: A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation* (California, 2010), 32 and 23-49. Ethan Katz’s contribution to this roundtable is a sophisticated critique of the “new Jews” approach to comparative history.

isolated intellectuals. The incorporation and distancing of this history by Said was summed up by his self-image, in one of his final interviews, as a “last Jew” or “Jewish-Palestinian.”³⁹

What is curious about postcolonial studies in relation to these earlier comparative histories is that while postcolonial theory eschewed linking Jews and other colonized minorities (under the sign of “Judeo-Christianity”), postcolonial literature, from the beginning, revealed these inter-connections through a vast range of imaginative work.⁴⁰ Salman Rushdie and V. S. Naipaul are central to this argument given their foundational status within the postcolonial literary canon. Rushdie started to publish fiction at the same time as postcolonial studies began but the contrast between the imaginative and disciplinary approaches to this colonial history could not have been starker. Whereas the discipline of postcolonial studies separated out Jewish and colonial history, Rushdie actively pursued these connections in his fiction. Over three decades, from *Grimus* (1975) to *Shalimar the Clown* (2005), Rushdie evoked the history of Spain (where Jews and Muslims co-existed before they were both expelled in 1492), the history of Jewish communities in India, and also compared border states in Europe and South Asia, where respectively, Jews and Muslims have lived together for centuries. The incorporation of actual historical events and communities into his fiction was a means to authenticate these intertwined histories. It is ironic, to say the least, that imaginative

³⁹ “My Right of Return,” Interview with Ari Shavit, *Ha’aretz*, 18 August, 2000, reprinted in Gauri Viswanathan, ed., *Power, Politics and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said* (New York, 2001), 458 and 443-458. See also Cheyette, “A glorious achievement.”

⁴⁰ For two recent examples illustrating the range of postcolonial literature which brings together colonial and Jewish history and the history of anti-Semitism and colonial racism see Sarah Casteel, *Calypso Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Imagination* (New York, 2016) and Anna Guttman, *Writing Indians and Jews: Metaphors of Jewishness in South Asian Literature* (New York, 2013). See also Marc Caplan, *How Strange the Change: Language, Temporality, and Narrative form in Peripheral Modernisms* (Stanford, 2011) which, for the first time, brings together African and Yiddish literature, and Efraim Sicher and Linda Weinhouse, *Under Postcolonial Eyes: Figuring the ‘jew’ in Contemporary British Writing* (Lincoln, 2013).

postcolonial works were much closer to the comparative historical record than their historical counterparts.⁴¹

After publishing *Grimus* and *Midnight's Children* (1981), Rushdie delivered his well-known literary manifesto in 1982 at a London conference on Indian writing to mark the Festival of India held that year. He notes, above all, that the conference tended to ignore minority communities in India and to describe Indian culture in exclusive, and excluding, Hindu terms. Rushdie's perspective was as someone who has been part of a "minority group all my life" and it was from this standpoint that he delivered his manifesto that proposed an alternative canon of Indian writing going beyond any conception of a single national culture.⁴² His focus on the ways in which Muslims, and his own family, were transformed into a minority in post-partition India anticipates Mufti's account of the same processes. Rushdie includes "the Huguenots, the Irish, the Jews" as part of this alternative transnational minority tradition which again pre-figures the connection, explored comprehensively by Mufti, between Europe's treatment of its Jewish minorities and the treatment of minority Muslims in India.⁴³ These imagined moments of identification with diasporic Jews preoccupied Rushdie to such an extent that they structured his memoir of the decade in hiding after the death sentence placed on him in 1989.⁴⁴

Rushdie's imagined genealogy—"one of the more pleasant freedoms of the literary migrant [is] to be able to choose [one's] parents"—is not unlike Said's own imagined genealogy with his fellow Jewish exiles.⁴⁵ But, these imagined genealogies can be rather

⁴¹ The novels that incorporate these histories are *Grimus* (London, 1975), *The Satanic Verses* (London, 1988), *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London, 1995), and *Shalimar the Clown* (2005). See also, Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind*, 203-243; Guttman, *Writing Indians and Jews*; and Shaul Bassi, "Mooristan and Palimpsest: Jews, Moors and Christians in Amitav Ghosh and Salman Rushdie" in David Brauner and Axel Stähler, eds., *The Edinburgh Companion to Modern Jewish Fiction* (Edinburgh, 2014), 367-77.

⁴² Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London, 1991), 20. See also Susheila Nasta, *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (London, 2002).

⁴³ Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 20.

⁴⁴ Rushdie, *Joseph Anton: A Memoir* (London, 2012) is discussed further in these terms in Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind*, 238-243.

⁴⁵ Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 21.

troubling. As Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967) indicates, the complex and often contradictory incorporation of Jews and Jewish history into fiction includes anti-Semitic images. On the first page of this foundational postcolonial novel, for example, there is a description of "Mr. Shylock" who rents out a room to Naipaul's persona, Ralph Singh (born Ranjit Kripalsingh), newly arrived from the Caribbean: "I thought Mr. Shylock looked distinguished, like a lawyer or business man or politician. He had the habit of stroking the lobe of his ear and inclining his head to listen. I thought the gesture was attractive; I copied it. I knew of recent events in Europe; they tormented me."⁴⁶ The evocation here of both the Holocaust and the racialized figure of Shylock in a single breath indicates the way in which the postcolonial novel raises both the difficulties and possibilities in "mimicking" Jews and Jewish history.⁴⁷ Naipaul's Caribbean exile admires his Jewish landlord and sees him as embodying ambiguously both northern European civilization ("a lawyer or business man or politician") as well as the consequences of European barbarity ("recent events in Europe; they tormented me"). In copying Mr. Shylock's mannerisms and dress, and enduring the high rents of his boarding house, Singh significantly gains a sense of identity in exile, however provisional, in relation to his erstwhile prototype. The canonical figure of Mr. Shylock, taken from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (1598), was an imaginative resource for postcolonial novelists but, in the case of new academic disciplines, such presumed ascendancy was seen as threatening.

Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* inspired a younger generation of British-Caribbean writers, such as Caryl Phillips, who not only had a "fascination" with "the Jews" but who also regarded Shakespeare's Shylock as their "hero." Phillips initially drew on Jewish history rather than Caribbean history to understand his own minority status. Not unlike Naipaul's

⁴⁶V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (London, 1967), 5.

⁴⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, following Naipaul, placed the concept of mimicry at the heart of his theories of colonial resistance. However, Bhabha's version of mimicry is only discussed in relation to the colonizer unlike Naipaul's more wide-ranging contextualization.

persona, Phillips’s younger self stabilized his fragmented Black British identity in the racist north of England in the 1970s by identifying closely with Jewish victimization.⁴⁸ Phillips has written extensively about his experience of being the offspring of the Windrush generation of migrants to Britain’s shores, arriving from St Kitts in 1958 at the age of 12 weeks, and his resultant loss of self during his formative years. He was to eventually claim a “Jewish grandfather” as part of an imagined genealogy and identified closely with Jewish suffering during the Second World War and, after the war, in the Soviet Union.⁴⁹ Such identification with “the Jews,” as Gilroy also notes, confirmed a sense in which public representations of the Holocaust enabled other minorities and histories of oppression to be articulated.⁵⁰ That is why the youthful Phillips—as a fellow “black man living in Europe”—takes Frantz Fanon’s Antillean philosophy professor at his word: “Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you”.⁵¹ This sentiment, recounted by the most prominent anti-colonial thinker and activist in the latter half of the twentieth-century, was to inspire a wide range of Phillips’s early fiction based on the histories of slavery and anti-Semitism.⁵²

Hannah Arendt’s oeuvre— somewhere between literature, history, philosophy and politics— responded to the horrors of the modern world “without banisters” (in her felicitous phrase). That was why she was to read novels and other narratives as a way of understanding and articulating what she thought of as totally unprecedented times.⁵³ It is not a coincidence, in this regard, that imaginative literature was a key component of the anti-colonial work of the

⁴⁸ Caryl Phillips, *The European Tribe* (London 1987), 55 and 66. See also Stephen Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary* (Oxford, 2009), and Clingman, “Other Voices: An interview with Caryl Phillips,” *Salmagundi* 143 (Summer 2004), 112-40.

⁴⁹ Caryl Phillips, *A New World Order: Selected Essays* (London, 2001), 130. See also Casteel, *Calypso Jews*, 235-270, for a comprehensive discussion on Phillips in these terms.

⁵⁰ For connections between Phillips and Gilroy see Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity*, 73-5.

⁵¹ Phillips, *The European Tribe*, 54 quotes Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, 122.

⁵² Casteel, *Calypso Jews*, 235-270.

⁵³ See, in particular, Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb, ed., *Hannah Arendt: Reflections on Literature and Culture* (Stanford, 2007).

1940s and 1950s and also of those who recuperated this history in the twenty-first-century.⁵⁴ The most important anti-colonial thinkers and Holocaust survivors all incorporated complex and mixed narrative forms to help them comprehend the uncharted territories of mass decolonization and genocidal anti-Semitism in Europe. Thinking “without banisters” is also the way in which postcolonial studies and the study of anti-Semitism can be brought together to enrich the historical record.

What the study of anti-Semitism can learn from the history of colonialism and decolonization is the sheer quotidian and discursive nature of colonial racism. Rather than thinking of it as a unique “evil,” postcolonial theory rightly understands colonial racism as part of the everyday, and of a widely disseminated knowledge economy, even though this racism ranged from the assimilatory to the genocidal.⁵⁵ Too much of the history of anti-Semitism has been overdetermined by the extremities of the Holocaust and industrialized mass murder in the death camps as if all anti-Semitism leads inevitably to Auschwitz. The unique extremity of this teleological version of anti-Semitism has made any comparative perspective particularly fraught and has, in general, marginalized the study of anti-Semitism outside of a genocidal context.⁵⁶ In recent years, the “colonial turn” in Holocaust studies has been a particularly welcome means of decoupling the study of anti-Semitism from teleology so as to return it to place, context and history. Once the history of anti-Semitism is seen to be part of race-thinking in general (and vice versa), then a much richer understanding of the intertwined histories of colonial racism and anti-Semitism is made possible as these histories no longer follow an exceptionalist historical narrative.

⁵⁴ All of the most recent work on the intersection between Jewish and colonial histories includes extensive discussion of imaginative texts in this context. See, e.g., Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind*; Mufti, *Enlightenment in the Colony*; Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*; and Silverman, *Palimpsestic Memory*. This inter-disciplinary approach reflects the anti-colonial work of such figures as Jean Améry, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Primo Levi, and Jean-Paul Sartre who all wrote in complex narrative forms, and often published imaginative literature, in an attempt to make sense of what they regarded as their unprecedented times.

⁵⁵ The most influential articulation of everyday colonial racism can be found in Said, *Orientalism* with its discursive all-encompassing approach to the subject.

⁵⁶ For an elaboration of this argument see Cheyette and Nadia Valman, eds., *The Image of the Jew in European Liberal Culture, 1789-1914* (London, 2004).

The most interesting studies of anti-Semitism views the representation of Jews as a microcosm of broader historical concerns.⁵⁷ This now established approach follows Arendt in refusing a free-floating “eternal” anti-Semitism (outside of time and space), in order to locate discourses about Jews in a particular context. To this extent the history of anti-Semitism is only historical if, paradoxically, it recognizes the inherently ahistorical nature of the term itself.⁵⁸ Such a critical approach to the study of anti-Semitism may help postcolonial studies to be more self-critical not only about its subject matter, which is all too clearly demarcated, but about its willingness to engage with intertwined histories which cannot be contained easily within a single “banistered” disciplinary perspective. The main advantage of thinking of anti-Semitism and postcolonialism together is that these inter-relations stay true to the history of the pioneering anti-colonial work of the 1940s and 1950s. Such mutual affinities, at their most accommodating, enable both the study of anti-Semitism and of colonial racism to move beyond insular histories of victimization and to adopt a more open-minded sense of historical connectedness.

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⁵⁷ See e.g., Cheyette, *Constructions of ‘the Jew’ in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations 1875-1945* (Cambridge, 1993); Jonathan Freedman, *The Temple of Culture: Assimilation and Anti-Semitism in Literary Anglo-America* (New York, 2000); Michael Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion: “The Jewish Question” and English National Identity* (Durham, NC, 1995); James Shapiro, *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York, 1996); Anthony Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms, 1350-1500* (Cambridge, 2006); and Nadia Valman, *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Cambridge, 2007). The contribution of Maurice Samuels to the roundtable explores these studies in relation to the issue of historical contextualization.

⁵⁸ See David Feldman’s contribution to the roundtable for an expansion of this argument.