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Afterword: Jewish Agency and Iridescence in Heritage-Making Processes

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Afterword: Jewish Agency and Iridescence in Heritage-Making Processes

Sacha Kagan

Abstract:
The afterword reflects on the various contributions in this special issue of *Ethnoscripts*, which explores the dynamics of contemporary Jewish agency in the context of Jewish cultural heritage. It emphasises the complexities and tensions that arise as Jewish subjects engage with their heritage, highlighting negotiations within communities, intergenerational dialogues, and the interplay between State and minority interests. The afterword revisits several matters discussed in the contributions, such as post-vernacularity, counter-heritagisation, and State and national narratives and policies. It highlights dimensions of critical reflection and attention to complexity. It argues that Jewish heritage should not only be revived and enlivened but also critically engaged with, fostering a dialogue that recognises its complexities and contradictions across different contexts and historical narratives. This text introduces the concept of iridescent heritage, which articulates heritage as dynamic, multifaceted, and shaped by the interactions between subjects, heritage objects, and interpretive frameworks. This idea moves away from fixed and flat conceptions of heritage towards a more processual and complex understanding of its meanings. The afterword suggests the explanatory resonance of a conceptualisation of iridescence with the insights from several contributions in the special issue.

Key words: Jewish agency, post-vernacularity, queering, complexity, iridescence

Introduction

The contributions gathered in this special issue of *Ethnoscripts* articulate several processes through which the agency of contemporary Jewish subjects is activated and contributes to heritage-making. This goes not without tensions and unfolds through negotiations amidst communities, across generations, and between State-related and minoritarian interests.

The agency of Jewish individuals and communities manifests in their interactions with heritage sites and practices, as evidenced by the contributed texts, which critique the representation of Jewish history in institutional frameworks and call for more participatory approaches. The contributors illustrate various tensions, such as those between grassroots activists and heritage professionals, intergenerational differences, and the contrasting priorities of Jewish communities in Europe and the United Kingdom (UK) regarding what constitutes significant heritage. The resulting complexity of Jewish cultural heritage reveals itself as iridescent and questions the limitations of institutional practices of heritagisation.

Jewish agency enlivening heritage

The contributions in this volume highlight the agency of various contemporary Jewish subjects in their relation to Jewish cultural heritage and its institutionalisation across Europe.

One level of agency is found in Egorova's study where Jewish subjects in the UK express themselves as users of Jewish cultural heritage sites and tools. They articulate their wishes and criticisms towards museum and heritage organisations and initiatives. Egorova's interviewees address a glaring silence on Jewish history in museal and heritage-site representations of English medieval history and the relative invisibility of Jewish heritage even at recognised Jewish cultural heritage sites (except for those already seeking it out). They are only mildly swayed by media tools supposed to discretely aide the discoverability of Jewish cultural heritage and find that a more visibly 'observable materiality of the built environment' in terms of its Jewish cultural heritage would be preferable.

Everett's text discusses several recent exhibitions in France, illustrating the known limitations of museal practices with an 'exhibition's limited space for contemporary voices' when framed within 'traditional museum frameworks structured around chronological, artifact-based narratives'. In contrast, he takes the case of a grassroots-initiated festival where 'embodied, participatory experiences' flourish and whereby Jewish individuals and communities obtain a greater degree of agency. This observation highlights the cruel lack of such practices in museums. Despite a century of advocacy by critical museum studies and half a century of attempts at 'new museology', such efforts are still meeting top-down backlash at many museums (Davis 2011: 61-64; Coffee 2019). However, whereas Everett finds no museal cases of the curatorial changes he advocates for and whilst he argues that 'exhibitions necessarily contain narratives within the constraints of western time', some promising efforts at queering museology have been developed around the world (Sullivan and Middleton 2020). They demonstrate there is no such 'necessity' – but rather a tenacious curatorial conservatism dominating the field.[1] Queering approaches to museum work, as practiced at other museums, could and should inspire future reforms at Jewish museums. With this in mind, Everett offers a compelling plea for a reformation of museal curatorial practices to open up more spaces of possibility for Jewish agency, as when he posits that an 'effective engagement with Maghrebi Jewish memory requires

1 Everett discusses 'a shift in inclusive practices from institutional to participatory frameworks', highlighting the Dalâla festival – which as a festival is of a different nature than the museum exhibitions discussed in the text. Everett compares them as 'curatorial practices'. Through a transversal comparison that stresses embodiment and dynamic forms in musical practice in contrast to intellectualism and fixed forms in traditional museography, Everett raises a valid desideratum to be directed at museum curators.

multilayered approaches that balance institutional resources with community agency'.

Nevertheless, even within the constraints of current museal curatorship, Everett points out that exhibitions also function for their (Jewish) visitors as 'sites where these tensions between fixed categories and nuanced dialogue play out in material form'. The possibility to open up the polysemic potential of curated exhibits speaks to their iridescence, which even the most rigid interpretative and didactic frames cannot fully extinguish in the experience of creatively minded visitors. (I come back to iridescence later.) However, the question remains whether and to what extent such a potentiality was actualised at the discussed exhibitions.[2]

Specific cultural-creative techniques can help stimulate the agency of exhibition visitors and, more generally, of Jewish subjects in their encounters with heritage, as illustrated in Alexander-Rose's contribution, which presents techniques of reappropriation such as collage and montage (as well as the erasure of certain prior elements when reclaiming a problematic figure). With workshops where participants can apply such reappropriation techniques around the figure of the Wandering Jew, Alexander-Rose explores how, '[b]eyond simply informing audiences about the anti-Semitic roots of the Wandering Jew, it is possible to facilitate agential responses drawing from a variety of traditions of creative practice'.

Jewish agency in shaping Jewish heritage is found to venture beyond a close focus on heritage objects, unfolding 'a process-oriented practice of confronting, narrating, and conversing with the past over time', as Becker explains in her text about the work of Jewish lawyers engaged in the process of post-Shoah (non-)restitution of looted art. Becker describes how, through critical dialogue, museums that own looted art can be enticed to forms of restitution besides the return of artworks, for example restituting an art-loving Jewish family's 'story to history' by having the museum tell the story of that Jewish family's ownership – and loss – of the artwork. For Becker, such efforts contribute to 're-inscribing those who were purposefully erased from history into our lives and keeping them alive through collective memory'.

The contribution by Antunes stresses how the agency of Jewish subjects restores life to Jewish linguistic heritage through practice: the text accounts for the efforts of the eSefarad online platform to revive the contemporary practice of Sefardic (Judaeo-Spanish) languages, specifically of Haketia. Antunes observes here the 'destabilisation' of 'ex situ' heritagisation. Conventionally, heritage professionals would transfer elements of an endangered language from 'household[s] of native speakers' to an 'off-site repository' such as a language archive. Instead, platforms like eSefarad are disrupting

2 Such a question could be tentatively answered by qualitative 'visitor studies' by social scientists, which to my knowledge have not been conducted in this context.

the simple dichotomy of 'in situ' original practice vs 'ex situ' heritage preservation. Jewish practices of post-vernacular language revival (Shandler 2005) initiate what we call in this special issue a 'trans situ' heritagisation process (echoing my coinage of 'trans situ' artistic intervention [Kagan 2012]), where elements get transferred and exchanged between speakers, whether vernacular or post-vernacular locutors, in their various living contexts across the world and online, through online media mobilised as vehicles of interaction more than as repositories or archives – as Antunes's study reveals.

A post-vernacular language holds deep cultural value to its locutors. Although it is no longer one's native language of everyday communications and no longer holds a whole community together in everyday life, it is redeployed in various cultural and artistic practices.[3] It is consciously brought back to life by its locutors. This is not just a matter of terminology but helps to stress the importance of focusing on the hiatus, the break in the vernacularity, the losses and reconstructions, the inventiveness, and the relation of such a reactivated language to the other everyday languages in the Jewish subjects' immediate context. Attention to post-vernacularity further leads to reconsidering questions of interpretation and belief of authenticity in the transtemporal resonances of a minority language as heritage in present practice (also allowing Antunes to take some 'analytical distance from questions of authenticity and inheritance'). When we consider these questions through the lens of queer theory, we can identify them as questions of the performed 'realness' (Halberstam 2005) of practiced post-vernacular Jewish languages. This allows a deeper focus on contemporary Jewish agency within a diasporic and communal interest in minority languages. At the same time, attention to post-vernacularity may also allow a critical look at the imaginings of a 'precolonial world' by some heritage activists (as reported by Antunes). Such an imagination is not without its own issues: one cannot 'strip out' colonial histories to recover an imagined position of innocence. Imaginings of the precolonial, coming from the postcolonial condition, are fraught with their own complex entanglements with the white colonial context. Last but not least, attention to post-vernacularity helps avoid the pitfall of being party to a mythologisation of long-durational Jewish sustainability by clinging on to claims of vernacularity, inheritance, and originalist authenticity.

Moving a few steps further from what is canonically considered as Jewish cultural heritage, Crowdus exemplifies how contemporary Jewish creative arts function as futures-oriented and agency-fostering cultural produc-

3 A language may be simultaneously vernacular and post-vernacular. For example, Yiddish in the twenty-first century is both post-vernacular for a number of Jewish subjects, especially in North America, and vernacular for others, as for certain Haredi communities (also in North America). This points to yet another interesting area for investigation in terms of Jewish inter-agency: the boundaries and exchange zones between vernacular and post-vernacular contemporary practices of such a language.

tions that reclaim a Jewish heritage at the local level for contemporary urban Jewish subjects. With its discussion of a gangsta rapper in Germany, the case study demonstrates how a musician counters the imagery of Jews as victims, otherwise omnipresent in the German context. Crowdus describes a 'counter-heritagisation' of Jewish heritage at play in Dimitri Chpakov's rap album *Yellow Bar Mitzvah*, which allows more 'Jewish pride' and thus may encourage its Jewish audiences to feel more empowered. As Crowdus notes, this gangsta rap will work for some Jewish people, whilst it will be a turn-off for other Jewish subjects, especially those who are queer and feminist and who, in present-day Germany, are 'searching for alternate forms of heritage-making through which to exercise agency and create heritage. They are doing so in a way that mobilises their own futures-oriented, existential concerns. This stands in contrast with the dominant memory culture'. In my own research with queer Jews in Germany, interviewees pointed to more appealing alternatives than the macho imaginary of gangsta rap in its usual guises – which, with few exceptions, is heavily and simplistically heteronormative. Dimitri Chpakov is not one of these exceptions but a genre-typical apologist of real and enacted physical violence, cultivating the self-image of an egotistical macho and perpetuating toxic masculinity. Far from this kind of direction, my interviewees find inspiration mostly across the Atlantic, for example in the Jewish punk bands Schmekel or the Shondes in the United States of America, or in the transgender pop icon Dana International in Israel. Back in Germany they are inspired by the eclectic post-Soviet genre-crossing music of Yuriy Gurzhy and his various bands and projects (from Rotfront to the Jukrainians – queer-friendly if not queer). Looking more widely at contemporary Jewish cultural production in Germany, some interviewees also found inspiring queer Jewish examples in the works of Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Debora Antmann.

Tensions and negotiations

Several contributions in this volume describe tensions between professional agents of heritage and Jewish agents. These are mostly tensions between museum and heritage professionals and more grassroots actors and organisations. The cases discussed in the contributions (for example, in Everett's text) sometimes articulate tensions between the agency of single Jewish expert academics or artists and that of various Jewish communities and sub-communities, which may themselves be partly at odds with each other. By looking at how the heritage of Judaeo-Spanish and Hebrew languages have been revived and how linguistic heritage is managed, Antunes illustrates tensions between nationalist projects and minoritarian diasporic approaches in heritage revival. (I come back to the special issue's discussion of the Nation State later.)

Ravvin's text points to tensions between heritage professionals and local non-Jewish communities. He shares a personal account of how the take-over of a Jewish cultural heritage site by heritage professionals drove out pre-existing (if tenuous) community-based embeddedness and contributed to alienate the 'protected' heritage from its immediate surroundings whilst striving to save and preserve it. Ravvin narrates how, in the Polish village of Radzanów, well-intended heritage professionals have been '[r]removing the [synagogue's] purpose as a library [and] downgraded it to a shell, a tomb'. This is a typical account of professionalisation driving out grassroots attachments.[4] The institutionally based efforts and incentives from heritage organisations fail to connect with the local Polish community's own sense of meaningfulness. The result feels like a superficial partial preservation in the face of a wider destruction of the site's pre-war atmosphere. Ravvin witnesses how the preservation of a synagogue contrasts with the disappearance of other architectural traces of a formerly Jewish site through the removal of the small single-storey wooden houses around the central square: 'the fuller sense of a pre-war Jewish village that I had encountered a few years earlier was fading from view'. In this story, Ravvin considers his possible agency as the only Jewish agent on site, whilst other Jewish subjects are discussed as active elsewhere in the country, especially in Warsaw and at a few sites that attract most Jewish tourists. Ravvin points especially to the dwindling of one form of Jewish agency as negatively affecting Jewish cultural heritage in Poland (notwithstanding the laudable success of the POLIN museum in Warsaw): namely the recent decline in 'philanthropic efforts' by descendants of Jewish survivors (from abroad) and the decrease in their touristic flow of pilgrimage to formerly Jewish ancestral places in Poland.

Tensions may arise between different generations – though the texts speak there less of tensions than of negotiations and differences. Generational differences are considered in some of the contributions. In her discussion of contemporary Jewish subjects' 'turn towards agency in the post-Holocaust world', Becker stresses how second- and third-generation descendants of victims do not define themselves in terms of victimhood and thereby unlock their agency when working on familial and societal Jewish heritage from the twentieth century. As noted earlier, Crowdus shows how younger generations find new forms of cultural practice that allow a meaningful connection to their Jewish heritage. Everett discusses later generations, in the case of Jews of North-African descent in terms of 'postmemory' (after Marianne Hirsch). He points out how 'the post-memory generation engages differently with heritage', with 'active reimagining'. He especially shows, with the case of the Dalâla festival, 'spaces where interrupted transmission becomes a site of cre-

4 Concerning the motivation of the local community, this may also be a case of what economist Bruno Frey (1997) called the 'crowding out' of 'intrinsic motivation' through the intensification of 'extrinsic motivation'.

ative possibility rather than merely a wound to be healed'. This is a process that does not happen without tensions, frictions, and negotiations with earlier generations, with other minorities, and with State-related institutions: '[d]ialogue – both intergenerational (intra-familial) and intercommunal (Maghrebi Jewish–Muslim) – does not always begin in mutual recognition; it may be preceded by resistance or rejection'. At the same time, though, we should not forget that every generation actively re-imagines memories. Remembering is an act of 'continually recreating the past' (Hinton 2015: 354) and memories 'can never be recovered in an unmodified form within the constraints of the present' (Hinton 2015: 363). First-generation witnesses, too, re-imagine their own memories as days and years go by and as the lived experience continues to evolve, unavoidably affecting the act of remembering. The difference between the generations lies rather in the degree of acknowledgement and explicitness of their reimagining: first-generation witnesses can still claim that they memory is 'directly' sourced from the event; and they may be burdened by societal expectations that mystify their memory. Both prevent them from overtly engaging in actively re-imagining their memories – unless they are artists or writers, in which case society grants them more creative license.

The special issue highlights a number of 'processes of negotiation' – between grassroots initiatives and those projects that come from State-controlled or primarily State-funded organisations such as museums and heritage organisations; and more broadly hermeneutic negotiations between various agents that eventually allow us to delve beyond binary conceptions of Jewish cultural heritage. For example, the contributions illustrate intercommunal and transcultural exchanges, frictions, and dialogues that delve beyond a simplifying binary of antagonism vs consensus. Elements of cultural heritage that are situated at the 'borderlands of religious or cultural tension', such as the originally anti-Semitic and Christian figure of the Wandering Jew, can be creatively negotiated, as Alexander-Rose exemplifies with the long history of the various Jewish re-appropriations of the Wandering Jew.

The juxtaposition of Egorova's UK-based study with other, more continental-European cases also suggests a specific contrast between the UK and continental Europe in terms of both State-based/institutional Jewish cultural heritage and Jewish responses. For example, Egorova's interviewees stress the importance of certain former synagogues as heritage sites when they perceive past 'Jewish communities' endeavour to state through an architectural landmark their rights and achievements, their success at integrating into the mainstream society coupled with a desire not to lose their specificity'. Egorova's interviewees wish for a higher visibility of formerly Jewish architectural heritage sites in the country, which they perceive as comparatively less developed in the UK than on the continent. This contrasts with the situation in continental Europe where heritage professionals of several countries have developed a quasi-obsessive passion for the preservation of former syn-

agogues as Jewish cultural heritage whilst contemporary Jewish subjects are more interested in other areas and dimensions of a living Jewish heritage, feeling at odds with what they perceive as a fetishism of dead Jews.

The rhetorical and intellectual art of cultivating tensions around one's heritage and mobilising these tensions towards critical reflective insights is also in itself a cherished aspect of one's Jewish heritage – at least for the subjects in my own empirical research (Kagan and Crowdus forthcoming). The latter cultivate a sense of Jewish criticality which is rooted in Talmudic heritage, branches out into Critical Theory, and (for some of my interviewees) influences contemporary queer theory and artistic research. This critical Jewish tradition may be a much more academic and elitist cultural form than the activation of Jewish agency through the Jewish pride of a gangsta rapper, but this makes it no less relevant for a significant number Jewish subjects.

Jewish heritage and the Nation State

Yet, one dimension that is only partly and indirectly considered in the contributions to this special issue on tensions and negotiations of difference is the State. One finds across several contributions the presence and agency of some State-related institutions and discussions of nationalist discourses and ideologies and of colonial legacies of European States; but one finds no close discussion of the State apparatus, as in the workings of governmental cultural institutions steering museal and heritage organisations from the top or in the roles of political parties and organisations. It is all well and good to 'conceptualise the state as a fluid structure with distributed agency rather than as a stable and monolithic entity', as the special issue's guest editors express in their introduction; but if this claim is put forward to avoid further describing the workings of such a fluid State, especially in relation to its upper echelons, then 'fluid' and 'distributed' do not have sufficient explanatory power.

Given this caveat, the contributions do shed light on the 'political-cultural interactions between dominant and subaltern groups', as the guest editors intended. Crowdus draws attention to recent research (Ross 2024) that examined how State-supported efforts at preserving Jewish cultural heritage in Germany is 'part of the national *Erinnerungskultur* (memory culture) [...] in the service of non-Jewish subjectivities'. Everett, focusing on Maghrebi-Jewish heritage as represented in French museums, calls for curatorial approaches that would 'challeng[e] both Eurocentric and nationalist historiographies' to 'create new possibilities for understanding the complex legacies of the colonial encounter beyond the constraining frameworks of national belonging'.

Antunes considers the logic of instrumentalisation of minority heritage by Nation States, for example in how Israel 'draws on a rhetoric of national cultural diversity to prolong colonial dominance over previously minoritised

sub-ethnic groups'. He discusses the political context of the heritagisation of Jewish languages, caught in between nationalist projects, whether in Israel or in other countries, and diasporic Jewish minority communities. The heritagisation is caught between a '"revivalist" ideological framework aligned with the political ideal of national restoration of a mythical homeland', the various involvements of imperial powers, and attempts at decolonial reparation through alternative ways to heritagise minority languages that are motivated by an 'endangerment sensibility' and that instead revive 'conviviality within ethnic and religious difference'.

The special issue of course does not discuss all problematic aspects of the relation between the Nation State and history. For example, the Polish Nation State, especially in the years under the nationalist government led by the Law and Justice party, engaged in a negationist policy silencing voices that would point to a history of Polish anti-Semitism.[5] Polish nationalists push all the blame of anti-Semitism on to the Germans and the Shoah, for earlier periods on to the imperialist Tsarist regime in Russia or for the period since the Second World War on to the Russian Soviets. Polish nationalist narratives suppress accounts of complicity of Poles under such regimes, especially before the First World War, of anti-Semitism in interwar Poland, and of anti-Semitic crimes committed in Poland since the Second World War (including the Kielce pogrom of July 1946 and the 'anti-Zionist' campaign of 1968, which resulted in the expulsion of most remaining Jews from Poland, as mentioned in POLIN's permanent exhibition).

The iridescence of Jewish cultural heritage

In the research project on 'Queering Jewish Cultural Heritage in Europe' that Miranda Crowdus and I conducted from 2022 to 2025, we developed the concept of 'iridescent heritage' to think about Jewish cultural heritage (Kagan and Crowdus forthcoming). Perceiving and analysing heritage as iridescent steers it away from fixed determinations and towards complex processes that include contradictory and multilayered intersectional developments. Iridescence stresses the dynamic and complex multiplicity of interpretations and meanings of heritage, which keep shifting, as do the contextual relations of living subjects to cultural heritage. The notion was previously deployed in queer museum studies to point out how, under a queering perspective, heritage reveals itself as 'multifaceted, complex, contradictory and shifting' (Sullivan and Middleton 2020: 33). As a concept that highlights the relational ontology and epistemology of cultural complexity, iridescence 'thwarts

5 As a descendant of Eastern-European Jews who fled from Polish and Lithuanian regions of the then Russian Empire to France shortly before the First World War, I am especially sensitive to this point. And as argued by interviewees in my own research, the public memory of the Shoah often overshadows earlier anti-Semitic crimes in modern Europe.

fixed determinations by insisting on the constantly processual and relational co-constitution of things and subjects' (Kagan forthcoming). I am focusing on a triangular relational dynamic of iridescence between

(1) a *queering subject* who engages with heritage things, with other subjects, and with various discourses and other modes of access to heritage things;

(2) a *heritage thing* that has a number of dimensions and layers (with both so-called tangible and intangible dimensions),[6] which may be highlighted and start shimmering through once examined in a certain light (that is, seen through certain interpretive lenses or in relation to certain discourses and other modes of access) and when engaged with by the queering subject;

(3) a number of *interpretive lights*,[7] which are more or less hegemonically normative and have the potential to inform the subject and facilitate encounters between the queering subject and the iridescent heritage thing.

Iridescence does not originate in one of the three – the thing, the subject, or the interpretive light – but emerges from the relational dynamic between them.

I find several characterisations of this iridescence in the contributions to the special issue. The concept of iridescence articulates what Egorova's text evokes about the perception of the material world as a 'relationship between a perceiving subject and a world of material objects', resulting in what Egorova describes as a diversity of ways in which we perceive landscapes, turning sensory environments into sites of contestation. Complementing and adding to the previous notions of 'dissonant' (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996) or 'difficult' (MacDonald 2009) heritage that Egorova's contribution mobilises, my conceptualisation of iridescent heritage is taking a more constructively and reparatively relational orientation to qualitative complexity. It means acknowledging dissonant and controversial experiences of heritage as productive. A heritage that is acknowledged and valued for its iridescence will be more likely to unfold its reparatively queering effect and thus 'unsettle the host versus migrant dichotomy', as suggested by Egorova, allowing for a deeper feeling of resonance between people and heritage sites, which Egorova discusses as 'ambience'. Ambiance could be understood as a search for a latent cultural resonance in the triangular relation between subjects, heritage objects, and history, when such resonance is felt as a latency, a potential-

6 I explicitly use the term 'thing' instead of 'object' or 'item' following Tim Ingold who conceptualises 'things' as gathering agency through the meshwork of life, 'to insist that the inhabited world is comprised not of objects but of things' (Ingold 2010: 4). 'No longer a self-contained object, the thing now appears as an ever-ramifying web of lines of growth' (Ingold 2010: 12). A thing is 'a certain gathering together of the threads of life' (Ingold 2010: 4).

7 My discussion of 'lights' (Kagan forthcoming) is grounded in Didi-Huberman's and Zagury-Orly's conceptualisations of the light of fireflies endangered by the dominant light of floodlights.

ity. The geography of ambiance that Egorova envisions as 'a more prominent part [...] of the background environment' for contemporary migrant communities in the UK may then constitute what I defined elsewhere, drawing on Jose Muñoz, as a 'space of potentiality' where orientations towards desired futures can emerge (Kagan 2022).

The history of Jewish people in Algeria before, during, and after the French colonisation, as discussed in Everett's contribution, is one of many richly iridescent examples of Jewishness as a complex identification: ethno-racially multilayered, in which various Jewish groups and individuals are entangled in a range of forms of indigeneity, non-whiteness and whiteness, and processes of assimilation to and othering from white colonial hegemonies. They relate to a variety of possibilities for postcolonial situatedness, marked by ambivalences and contradictions rather than conveniently simple identities.

The iridescence of heritage is especially striking in Alexander-Rose's text, with the ambivalence of the figure of the Wandering Jew from a medieval Christian antisemitic myth. First turned by artists into a 'paradigmatic nomad', the figure was then recuperated by modern diasporic Jews as a symbol for a 'historic legacy of exile'. They rewrote the figure in Jewish terms 'as a chronicler of Jewish history. His itinerancy is not a curse but a fundamental element of collective Jewish diasporic experience', thus loosening this figure from its original Christian framing. Alexander-Rose's own curatorial work highlighted many facets of that figure. She inquires further into the figure's potential for queering, 'such as re-gendering or incorporating new geographical sites of non-Western [...] histories and experiences' to extend its relevance beyond Europe. Seeing such elements of shared heritage as iridescent invites us to ask further questions of them, besides situating them as 'borderlands of religious or cultural tension', as Alexander-Rose does. An iridescent thing has surface properties that can diffract and unfold meanings in a variety of ways in its interplay with various interpretative lights and hermeneutic subjects. Over time, it is as if the iridescent thing would be gathering new qualities at its reflecting surface, variably absorbing and reflecting/re-emitting the new interpretative lights that touch it and the new subjects that encounter it.

Alexander-Rose raises the question whether a figure such as the Wandering Jew, iridescently contrasted between its anti-Semitic roots and its Jewish reappropriations, can be radically reappropriated at all if these dark roots are ignored. Or in other words, does the Wandering Jew need critically wondering Jews? Besides the pun, my answer would be a resounding yes, pointing to the triangular relationality of iridescence: an iridescent heritage can only shimmer and critically enlighten in its rich complexity if the subjects that relate to it strive towards a literacy of complexity. This is something that Edgar Morin called a systems sensibility, which he likened to a musical ear and which I further conceptualise as an 'aesthetics of complexity' (Ka-

gan 2011: 235-240). The point here is not to leave heritage to those with the supposed expert knowledge of its roots and ramifications but to encourage all to explore heritage in its living, shimmering complexity (however little, or much, their own initial knowledge may be historically informed) and in relation to their own evolving positionalities.

What if time itself iridesces? What if different timescales iridesce in resonance with different spatial scales? What if we work with temporalities that indeed offer hybrids of linear and cyclical times? What of interferences of different temporal scales, resonances between the distant and not-so-distant past, lived experience and memory, and imagined futures? The discussion of a 'spectral dimension' of heritage in Antunes' text may then be critically informed by the concept of iridescent heritage. The past can feel 'spectral' in the ontological and epistemological context of a linear temporality, but what about Jewish temporalities where the past is anyway not supposed to be bygone? When past times are understood as iridescent from the outset, when they are expected to iridesce in the present, is their presence spectral? Do they not then feel spectral because we filter them through a modernist and genealogically Christocentric lens that has come to nearly dominate everyone's epistemic framing of temporality?

Conclusion

The contributions in this special issue examine the importance of contemporary Jewish agency for a living Jewish heritage. They illustrate a range of tensions, conflicting priorities, and complex processes of negotiations beyond binary conceptions. Together, the contributors demonstrate that Jewish cultural heritage can be vibrantly enlivened and evolving when it allows for Jewish agency, marked by a series of negotiations and re-imaginings that allow for both personal and (inter-)communal processes of identification beyond predetermined identity assignations.

This afterword suggests complementary perspectives to the insights given by the contributors. It discusses the notion of post-vernacularity in Jewish languages, also deployed by Antunes: the revival of vernacular languages, such as Judaeo-Spanish languages, illustrates a shift from simple preservation to a more dynamic engagement that incorporates cultural creativity and reflects the contemporary lived experiences of Jewish individuals. The afterword also addresses counter-heritagisation: examples like Dimitri Chpakov's gangsta rap illustrate a form of cultural production that challenges dominant narratives of victimhood and emphasises empowerment, though responses to specific cultural formats and values vary amongst different Jewish communities and individuals. Regarding the State and national narratives, the afterword critiques that the role of State institutions in shaping heritage narratives has only partially been examined. Whilst several contributions in

the special issue assess the influence of nationalism and colonial legacies, I suggest than an exploration of how the power dynamics at the political level affect Jewish heritage may be also insightful.

The special issue highlights how histories of migrations relate to the transnational quality and richness of Jewish heritage. The texts contribute to an understanding of Jewish migrations and other transnational movements as 'agentive capacities', from the Jewishly re-inhabited myth of the Wandering Jew to the long-term presence and movements of Jewish subjects and cultures across Europe, in the Maghreb, and across the Mediterranean region.

The exchange between different regional and generational Jewish perspectives, and the possible frictions this could lead to between them, should be seen as constructively enhancing the agonistic iridescence of Jewish heritage, as nourishing critical Jewish thinking. Jewish heritage should not only be preserved and enlivened but also critically engaged with, fostering a dialogue that recognises its complexities and contradictions across different contexts and historical narratives. An iridescent heritage tells tales of a complex conviviality rather than flattening convivial sociabilities into a linear scale between irreconcilable antagonisms and consensual concord.

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