Introduction to 2014 volume of *Jewish Journal of Sociology*

This volume of the Jewish Journal of Sociology covers a lot of ground, touching on issues of fundamental importance for the study of contemporary Jewish life.

The issue starts with a special section on ‘The Relevance of the Jewish Question in the Twenty First Century’, co-edited with Ilan Baron.

Baron’s own contribution to this section, which also serves as an introduction, argues that The Jewish Question seemed to be ‘solved’ in the latter half of the twentieth century. The foundation of the Jewish state of Israel, together with legislation in many Diaspora countries and internationally to protect the rights of minorities, seemed to guarantee the Jewish place in the world. Yet, as Baron argues, the Question has not gone away, and as he shows with reference to the work of the authors Howard Jacobson and Michael Chabon, for both Jews and non-Jews, the place of Jews in the modern world still raises complex questions and animates anguished debate.

Robert Fine’s article roots The Jewish Question in enlightenment and post-enlightenment thinking. He not only shows, like Baron, that the Question has not disappeared, but the same issues that enlightenment thinkers raised about the place of Jews in the modern world still resonate today. In particular, questions of how Jews fit or do not fit into universalist ideologies are still both theoretically and politically contested. It is in debates about contemporary anti-Semitism that these questions become most difficult and most intractable.

The Jewish Question as a question of difference is the focus of Fiona Wright’s article. Wright reflects in particular on her own position as a non-Jewish ethnographer researching Israelis who are critical of or oppose the Zionist project. Such subject positions complicated questions of what a Jew is and what Jewish difference might mean. As Wright alludes, it also opens up spaces for artistic and intellectual play that destabilize any closure in The Jewish Question today.

Roni Berger’s article, while not part of the special section, demonstrates that the question how to be Jewish within a particular kind of Jewish community can lead to tortuous questions that raise very difficult choices and dilemmas. For Haredi Jews leaving Haredi Jewish communities, The Jewish Question is less a question about the place of Jews in the world, so much as a very practical question of how to remain Jewish or not once the all-encompassing Jewish community that they were raised in has been left behind. The policy recommendations that Berger
offers reminds us that to be a Jew today is not simply to reflect on existential questions, but to be faced with the necessity of action.

Miron Kantorowicz, the Jewish social scientist that Mark Tolts discusses in his article, may or may not have thought much about The Jewish Question during his turbulent twentieth century, but he certainly experienced the fallout from the various grand projects that attempted to answer it. As life pushed him from Russia, Germany, the UK and finally to the US, Kantorowicz managed to make significant contributions to the emerging science of Jewish demography. In particular, this little-known figure forms part of the story of pre-war British Jewish demography.

It is serendipitous that Tolts’ article appears in the same issue as an obituary of Professor Sigbert Prais, written by his daughter. Prais, the author of several articles in the Jewish Journal of Sociology, made an important contribution to post-war British Jewish demography. We owe it to pioneers such as Prais and Kantorowicz that those of us who are still fascinated and animated by The Jewish Question today are able to drawn on ‘hard’ data in our deliberations.

We are delighted that, for the second year running, the Jewish Journal of Sociology’s ‘Chronicle’ section has been produced by the Berman Jewish Policy Archive in the US. The digest of social research will be invaluable in surveying the constantly-developing field of Jewish social research.