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Editorial Note: Continuity and Change

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Over the past decade, *Social Identities* has carved out a niche as a unique scholarly journal for the study of race, nation, gender, and culture. The founding editors, Abebe Zegeye and David Theo Goldberg, nurtured the journal, making it today a key publication in the field. They published a remarkably wide spectrum of inspiring and thought-provoking articles, always keeping the journal relevant and incisive. A cursory glance at its table of contents during the past ten years illustrates the wide terrain that has been covered. *Social Identities* has been attuned not only to events in the contemporary world, but also to major trends within social theory. For example, it has been home to such disparate topics as people, place and space, media representations of social identities, whiteness, blackness, Jewish identities, genocide, post-apartheid South Africa, national culture, national cinemas, visual cultures, race and racism, critical race theory, architecture, gendered identities, race and politics, indigenous identities, slavery, sport, migrant cultures, Latin American identities, diasporas, Caribbean identity, African-American identities, Islam and modernity, African cinemas, and hybrid and post-colonial identities. It is worth reiterating the original aims and scope of the journal, as articulated by Zegeye and Goldberg:

> Recent years have witnessed considerable worldwide changes concerning social identities such as race, nation and ethnicity, as well as the emergence of new forms of racism and nationalism as discriminatory exclusions. *Social Identities* aims to furnish an interdisciplinary and international focal point for theorizing issues at the interface of social identities. The journal is especially concerned to address these issues in the context of the transforming political economies and cultures of post-modern and postcolonial conditions. *Social Identities* is intended as a forum for contesting ideas and debates concerning the formations of, and transformations in, socially significant identities, their attendant forms of material exclusion and power, as well as the political and cultural possibilities opened up by these identifications.

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As incoming editors, we are extremely grateful for the work the founding editors, authors, and reviewers have done. We wish to affirm the broad intellectual contours of the journal as set out in its original aims and scope, and intend to follow their lead, ensuring that *Social Identities* remains essential reading for an ever-increasing readership. We see *Social Identities* as a forum where challenging and radical ideas that disrupt the certainty of orthodox thinking are exchanged. It is not our intention to revolutionize the focus of *Social Identities*—though we do believe there is scope to widen its horizon and increase our readership. To this end, we are keen to relate 'our' forms of knowledge to issues of immediate concern for non-academics, and respond to the myriad ways in which resistance to the powers of militarism, neo-colonialism, patriarchy, and capital are being constituted in the contemporary world. In order to do that, we are keen to keep abreast of the changing dynamics of contemporary social theory, to be able to respond to the very challenges our world presents to its different subjects, both in the West as well as in the Post-colony.

We are highly cognisant that the distinctions and ambivalences associated with social identities, race, language, nation, nationalism, gender, class etc. can only be comprehended through a variety of disciplines and theoretical approaches. In the ten years since *Social Identities* was inaugurated, the world has undergone tremendous changes. A major feature of the new century and a condition of contemporary capitalism is an unprecedented globalisation, spurred by a financial and communications revolution that has made the world seem ever closer. Globalisation has problematised, at one level, the very idea of the sacrosanctity of nation-state borders. The flow of information and humans respects no borders. The resultant globalisation has also meant that new forms of conflict and asymmetric violence have become a reality. In this new configuration, the perceived enemy itself has become invisible, further problematising the very notion of borders. The twin-tower attacks in New York, the war in Iraq, daily atrocities in Israel and Palestine, the genocide in the Sudan, the recent bombings in Bali and Madrid, new forms of anti-sex public health, and the horror of the Tsunami have become monumental global symbols for many daily tragedies. It is in this context that the project of *Social Identities* needs to be re-examined and carried forward. It requires us to be responsive and attuned to the nuances and the worldliness of theory.

This, our inaugural issue, brings together a series of papers that critically engage with how social identities are continually forged and re-forged within different cultural constructs. Wai-Yip Ho writes about the increasing divide between Muslims and non-Muslims in the post 9/11 world. In such a context, Ho examines the possibility of intercultural understanding by examining the work of Akbar S. Ahmed and Ernest Gellner as a way to break down the binary structures which seem to be epitomised in rhetoric such as the 'clash of civilizations'. Ho argues that Ahmed's and Gellner's work is a bridge to a better understanding of Islam—a vital task at this particular moment.

The theme of religious identity is explored further by Tovi Fenster, who considers the contestation of urban public spaces through an examination of the Mea Shearim

neighbourhood of Jerusalem, where religious and non-religious identities are played out in the public sphere. Fenster points out how secular women have been denied the right to city spaces through an appropriation of religious identities. The tension between women's individual rights of citizenship and the group rights to difference illustrate the complexity of identity formation in global urban spaces that are increasingly inhabited by people of different ethnicities, cultures and nationalities.

The contestation of multiple identities within the same geographical space is most acutely being played out in the ethnic conflict between the Hutu and Tutsi in Burundi. Simon Turner examines notions of sovereignty by drawing on the work of Carl Schmitt and the idea of a state of exception. He draws on experience from fieldwork in a refugee camp in Tanzania in the late 1990s, arguing that particular notions of power underpin the sovereign's authority—in this case, Tutsi 'secrets', conspiracies, and motives, lie behind public authority. It is the maintenance of power through these modes that allows on the one hand the practice of everyday life, and on the other, forms of ethnocide.

David Gilbert points out that the category 'mixed race' has only been recognised in the United Kingdom census since 2001. He notes the paucity of scholarship on the very notion of 'mixed race', and looks to US literature to understand how such individuals negotiate their identities within a highly racialised Britian. The final article in this issue is by Herman Wasserman, who seeks to understand the construction of social identities in post-apartheid South African media debates. Wasserman examines the text of President Thabo Mbeki's speeches on the role of the media in the country and in particular in the lead up to last year's election. The role of the media in the transformation, Turner argues, is leading to a reconceptualisation of social identities within South Africa, as the nation is fixated upon questions of identity, nationalism and reconciliation.

As you make your way through this first issue under our collaborative aegis, we hope you will be as stimulated as we are, both by *Social Identities*' record and by its potential future. At a moment of unparalleled human interaction, in terms of both daily mobility and migration, new forms of North-South engagement, via the uncertain dialectic of management and labour, and new forms of subjectivity, as described by social movements as well as the state and commerce, a journal such as this one needs to be especially nimble, juggling theoretically and empirically rigorous scholarship with responsiveness to the vagaries of the contemporary.