“Diaspora” indicates the dispersal or scattering of a body of people from their traditional home across foreign lands; yet, like the agricultural sowing of seeds from which the word comes to us (from the Greek *speirein*), it also suggests an anticipation of root-taking and eventual growth.

—Nico Israel, *Outlandish: Writing between Exile and Diaspora*

A number of new critical works published in the last decade suggest that we are in the midst of a thorough reexamination of Jewish diasporic identity.¹ Epitomized by the series *Jewish Identities in a Changing World*, the broad-reaching project proposes “to update what is meant by Jewish identity or, more precisely, what differentiates Jewish identities around the world.”² One line of this discussion focuses on the meaning of Israel in global Judaism and the relationship of the Jewish Diaspora with the original homeland. And yet, as the passage from

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Nico Israel I quote at the beginning of this chapter suggests, diasporic identity is equally characterized by its evolution and permutations in the other nations where Jews have lived. Accordingly, another line of study considers Jewish identities that are oriented toward these other homelands. Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein’s influential collection of essays *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans* falls into this second category. Lesser and Rein call for Jewish Latin American studies to become part of a new ethnic studies that would be comparative within regional and national contexts. Pointing out that “the relationship between national- and immigrant-originated ethnic identity is not unique to Jews,” they emphasize the potential rigor and illumination a cross-ethnic studies framework brings to any consideration of the relationship among Jewish Latin Americans, their national identities, and their diasporic imaginary homelands.3 Lesser and Rein’s work reminds us that Jewish identity is molded by language, by generation, by gender, by ethnicity and ancestral homeland, and of course by nationality.

Nationality and ethnicity are two aspects of diasporic identity that frame this chapter’s analysis of a recent novel by Jewish Mexican writer Ivonne Saed. Jewish Mexican literature requires its own specific analytical framework as, within Latin America, Jewish communities and their relationships to the larger national body vary. The largest Jewish communities of the region are found in Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, countries where, as Judit Bokser Liwerant points out, “mass immigration changed the socio-ethnic profile of the populations [and] multi-ethnic societies were built with a *de facto* tolerance toward minorities.”4 The story of the small Jewish communities in Mexico is somewhat different. There, the rhetoric of an immigrant nation falls away, replaced by one that celebrates the autochthonous Mexican, who literally arises from the soil (from the Greek root *chthon*, meaning ‘earth’). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, national ideology enthroned a concept of homogenous *mestizaje* that “helped define who was in charge and in control of the new body politic.

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