

# JEWISH AFFAIRS



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# JEWISH AFFAIRS

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In publishing JEWISH AFFAIRS, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies aims to produce a cultural forum which caters for a wide variety of interests in the community. The journal will be a vehicle for the publication of articles of significant thought and opinion on contemporary Jewish issues, and will aim to encourage constructive debate, in the form of reasoned and researched essays, on all matters of Jewish and general interest.

JEWISH AFFAIRS aims also to publish essays of scholarly research on all subjects of Jewish interest, with special emphasis on aspects of South African Jewish life and thought. Scholarly research papers that make an original contribution to their chosen field of enquiry will be submitted to the normal processes of academic refereeing before being accepted for publication.

JEWISH AFFAIRS will promote Jewish cultural and creative achievement in South Africa, and consider Jewish traditions and heritage within the modern context. It aims to provide future researchers with a window on the community's reaction to societal challenges. In this way the journal hopes critically to explore, and honestly to confront, problems facing the Jewish community both in South Africa and abroad, by examining national and international affairs and their impact on South Africa.

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*Cover: "The Four Sons", from a 1950s Haggadah.*

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## OBITUARY

# JOSEPH SHERMAN

\*

Marcia Leveson

In November 2008 Joseph Sherman, Yiddishist par excellence, visited Vilnius, a centre of lost Jewish culture. He was overwhelmed with emotion. Perhaps it is fitting that this so rewarding returning to roots should have been one of his last journeys, since it was this world of Yiddishkeit that he had spent so much loving care in bringing back to life. Yiddish and its literature was his passion, and through his rescue of many lost texts, his commentary and his brilliant, finely nuanced translations, he single-handedly made it available to a world readership.

While attending a conference in Germany in December last year, he was suddenly taken ill. After a long struggle and slow recuperation back in Oxford, an infection ended a life so vivid and a career of such creative energy and achievement.

Joseph Sherman leaves an impressive legacy and also fond memories of a uniquely talented man and a caring friend.

Born in Johannesburg on 5 March 1944, he was educated at King David School and the University of the Witwatersrand, training as a teacher and actor/director. His first posts were at King Edward VII High School and afterwards he was Vice Headmaster at King David Victory Park. He joined the English Department at Wits in 1980, becoming Associate Professor in 1996.

Joseph's familiar tall figure with the signature bow tie lit up the corridors of Wits. He had many friends from all disciplines, and it was a joy to partake with him in academic discussion on a wide variety of topics, from Elizabethan drama and poetry to the nineteenth century novelists and playwrights, from South African literature to Yiddish writing.

His intellectual breadth and acuity was matched with a blazing, sometimes wicked, sense of fun and humour. We will remember with much fondness his twinkling eyes and huge gusts of laughter, his keen sense of the dramatic, the beautiful and the important.

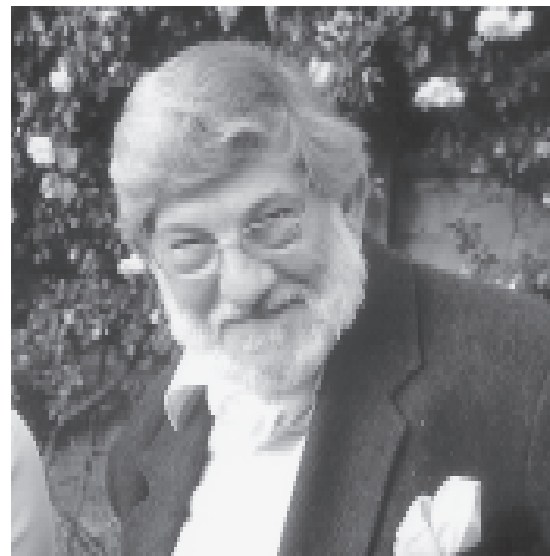
Joseph's contribution to university life was multifaceted. He delighted in mounting dramatic presentations, and he took part in these with great gusto, involving his colleagues and students in the fun. He could transform himself with ease into Dickens, and memorably he was Dr Johnson – a film

fortunately captures that triumph.

His teaching was inspirational – he was loved and a little feared by his students. He did not suffer fools lightly and late-comers were greeted with – “Better never than late! Mr Smith or Miss Levy”. But all those who were committed to scholarship or in need of help would earn his support and encouragement given with that generosity of spirit that is the hallmark of the best of academics.

I was fortunate to share many of his interests, notably that in South African Jewish studies. We travelled to several conferences, where he always drew clusters of admiring acolytes. He was the wittiest of men, with a special bent for satire, and he could be the sternest of critics, reserving his scorn for those whom he considered lazy or whose work he considered sloppy. How very few could match his energy in taking part so wholeheartedly in teaching and administration, mounting of productions, presentations at conferences, concern for rescuing Yiddish books in the library and elsewhere. And his scholarship was of the finest – his list of publications is astonishing. It seemed effortless, but if you knew him well, you were aware of the long and hard hours he worked.

From 1990 to 1998 Joseph was executive editor of *Jewish Affairs*. Here again his dedication to excellence and the promotion of Jewish studies found expression. He broadened the editorial board to include overseas scholars, and aimed to produce an internationally accepted journal, attracting many first



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*Marcia Leveson, a long-serving member of the Editorial Board of Jewish Affairs, is a former Professor and currently an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of English, University of the Witwatersrand.*

class, refereed articles. The original and colourful covers - the work of Jewish artists - are striking. He voluntarily and tirelessly edited everything himself, and was committed to the propagation of the journal. I felt privileged to be a member of the editorial board and to learn from his efficient and decisive handling of meetings and his dedication to his subject.

Joseph's research had led him to the international fields. In 1983 he had interviewed I B Singer in Miami, and in 1998 his translation of Singer's *Shadows on the Hudson*, hitherto published only in serial form in a Yiddish paper during the 1950s, appeared to great acclaim. In 1999 came his translation of Bergelson's *Descent*.

In 2002 he was appointed the Woolf Corob Fellow in Yiddish Studies at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, University of Oxford, and in 2005, University Research Lecturer at the University of Oxford. He loved Oxford and here he truly found his *métier*. He told me, "It felt as if I had died and gone to Heaven."

He was in demand as a reviewer in the most prestigious journals, and he lectured around the world, keeping in touch with important scholars in his field. In 2003 his book *The Jewish Pope: Myth, Diaspora and Yiddish Literature* was celebrated as an original and significant contribution to Jewish

thought. Then, again he co-edited the collection of essays, *David Bergelson: From Modernism to Socialist Realism* (2007) - another coup. He continued to produce a large body of first rate publications. In 2008 in New York he worked on a volume of the unpublished and never translated stories of I B Singer, which he had discovered some years before at the University of Texas. He had completed the translation of Bergelson's finest novel, *When All is Said and Done*, and was completing a long-planned anthology of Soviet Yiddish stories, none of them previously published in English, as well as a study of the life and work of Peretz Markisch.

It is a blessing that he had those years where his special talents were so widely appreciated and honoured. In December 2002 the Modern Language Association of America awarded him the Fenia and Yaakov Leviant Memorial Prize for Yiddish Translation.

His much loved wife, Karen, was by his side during the dreadful period of his last illness. We all mourn with her. Joseph was a proud Jew with a unique personality, immense capabilities and wide-ranging knowledge, who became famed as an expert in his field, forging an unmatched and enduring role in South African and international Yiddish and Jewish studies.



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# ANTISEMITISM IN SOUTH AFRICA: HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

\*

Milton Shain

Late in 2008, I was struck by two virtually concurrent news headlines: the *South African Jewish Report* of 19 September led with the headline 'Low anti-Semitism in SA – but don't be complacent', and a week later I received a piece - written by Sydney Shapiro, Director of the SAZF in Israel - entitled 'South Africa almost tops anti-Semitism charts'. What is one to do with such discrepant information – or at least such discrepant headlines, only eight days apart?

The *SA Jewish Report* article was based on a talk by David Saks at the recent Gauteng Board of Deputies conference in Johannesburg. Saks monitors antisemitism in South Africa with great professionalism and care. He told the gathering that South Africa has a relatively low rate of antisemitism, which is ten times higher in the UK, France and Argentina, 15 times higher in Australia and 20 times higher in Canada and Germany. His figures are calibrated in terms of antisemitic incidents, carefully monitored, and with agreed criteria across the Jewish world. Our low figures – and indeed a decline in incidents this year – are attributed by Saks to dormant far-right white organizations, coupled with an anti-racist ethos in post-apartheid South Africa, buttressed by our chapter nine institutions, such as the Human Rights Commission and the values embedded in our Constitution. However, Saks did warn that the absence of antisemitic incidents does not necessarily mean the absence of anti-Jewish sentiment.

Shapiro, on the other hand, bases his 'South Africa almost tops anti-Semitism charts' on a 'Pew Global Attitudes Survey of 2008' which found that South Africans, along with Spaniards, Mexicans and Brazilians, hold some of the most negative views of Jews outside of the Muslim world. According to the Pew Survey, 46 percent of South Africans harbour unfavourable views of Jews and of those 46 percent,

two-thirds dislike Jews in the extreme. A much lower figure of 11 percent is recorded in Australia which, given the high number of anti-Jewish incidents in that country, seems to challenge directly the connection between anti-Jewish incidents and attitudes.

This problematic connection between anti-Jewish incidents on the one hand and attitudes on the other is important. Put simply, to what extent are hostile attitudes towards Jews important in the antisemitic equation? Do they inevitably result in actions and should we be concerned about the figures indicated in the 2008 Pew Survey? In reflecting on these questions, it seems to me necessary to examine antisemitism in South Africa over a long period. By tracing the ebbs and flows of hostility towards Jews from the late nineteenth century to the present, we can attempt to delineate the driving forces of hatred and the contexts within which hostility is most apparent. In this way it is possible to assess the present situation and to make sense of the Saks and Pew Survey assessments.

It seems to me useful initially to separate what the historian Todd Endelman has termed 'private' from 'public' or 'programmatically antisemitism'. By 'private' antisemitism, Endelman means expressions of contempt and discrimination outside the radius of public life, as opposed to 'public' antisemitism which is the injection of antisemitism into matters of policy and the manipulation of antisemitism for partisan political ends. The only period in which South Africa has experienced 'public' or 'programmatically' antisemitism was in the 1930s and early 1940s – a period characterised by a heightened and exclusivist Afrikaner ethno-nationalism, coupled with socio-economic and political turmoil. Calls to curtail Jewish immigration and even to limit Jewish opportunities did not come from nowhere. These calls built upon a long maturing anti-Jewish stereotype that was already evident in the late nineteenth century.

To be sure, with the influx of Eastern European Jews in the late nineteenth century, an anti-Jewish stereotype was quick to emerge. In the rural areas the *smous* was often a figure of fun, while in the towns and cities the Jewish business competitor was often accused of dishonest practices. Moreover, in Johannesburg and Cape Town, the 'Peruvian' Jew was associated with the seamier side of urban life, including illicit liquor selling in Johannesburg and vice and prostitution in both Cape Town and Johannesburg.

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More sinister was the image of the Jew as cosmopolitan financier, associated with the Jews among the Randlords and blatantly linked to the notion of Jewish international finance which was reinforced by the liberal-left in England during the Anglo-Boer War. J. A. Hobson, the one-time *Manchester Guardian's* correspondent in Johannesburg, was the best known exemplar of this view. His sentiments were succinctly captured in his book, *The War in South Africa*, which postulated the notion of the Boer War being fought in the interests of a "small group of international financiers, chiefly German in origin and Jewish in race".

The notion of a Jewish-capitalist conspiracy was revived after the war, this time in connection with the controversial importation of Chinese labour to replace the dwindling reserves of African labour in the mines. Increasingly the alien plutocrats or 'Hebrew Goldbugs' were portrayed as responsible for the scheme, while poems and satirical compositions alluded to a Jewish-Chinese takeover of Johannesburg. It was in this climate that Hoggenheimer, the quintessential Jewish parvenu, appeared upon the South African stage as a character in *The Girl from Kays*, a musical which toured South Africa shortly after the Anglo-Boer War and struck a responsive chord in the popular consciousness. By 1910 Hoggenheimer - allegedly the *eminence grise* of South Africa - had become a household name and a visible component of the anti-Jewish stereotype.

The anti-Jewish stereotype was thus firmly in place by 1910, intimately bound up with the local stresses and upheavals engendered by South Africa's 'mineral revolution'. For many categories of the social spectrum - the impoverished farmer, the unemployed worker, the competing merchant, and the frustrated businessman - this stereotype served as a psychological cushion. It was a universal scapegoat in an age of turmoil. But very significantly, it did not engender a major anti-Jewish movement. There were on-going calls to curtail the influx of Eastern European Jews; but there was no widespread call to limit options for Jews already living in South Africa. That would occur only after the stereotype was further embellished.

During the First World War Jews were accused - quite unjustly - of 'shirking' from military service; after the war they were accused of Bolshevik subversion. The Bolshevik charge emerged in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and in the context of the post-war economic depression and burgeoning black radicalism in South Africa. Thus a 'Russian-Jewish' conspiracy was the way leading newspapers depicted the heady days of March 1922, the so-called 'Rand Revolt'. Something had to be done to curtail the influx of Bolshevik-orientated immigrants from Eastern Europe.

In addition to associating Jews with Bolshevism, newspapers began to question the potential for Jews to integrate into South African society. 'Unassimilability' became the new catchword, an idea influenced directly by nativist literature from the United States as well as by a new domestic

segregationist discourse in which race and culture were conflated. By introducing notions of 'racial stock' and 'racial quality', newspapers were able to mobilise well established negative images of the Jew. At the forefront was the *Cape Times*, imbued with an exaggerated fear that British subjects were being replaced by aliens. The aliens, it noted, were "from racial stocks which experience has shown to be unsuitable to the peculiar conditions of this country". They were, in other words, unassimilable. Eugenicist based fears of 'race mixing' and 'mongrelization' - primarily associated with South African blacks - now informed perceptions of the Eastern European Jew.

Given these developments it is hardly surprising that the full spectrum of the English and Afrikaans press welcomed the Quota Act of 1930 which set out to curtail eastern European Jewish immigration. In Endelman's terms, the Act heralded the transformation of 'private' into 'public' or programmatic antisemitism, originally evident in the formation of the South African Christian National Socialist Movement (better known as the Greyshirts), under the leadership of Louis T. Weichardt. At its peak the movement had 2000 members and its success inspired a number of similar organisations to mushroom across the country.

Although inspired by Nazi forms and racist or *volkisch* discourse, the substantive message of South Africa's many fascist-like movements related to the South African experience: Jews had fomented the Anglo-Boer War, inspired blacks against white civilization, controlled the press, exploited Afrikaners, dominated society, and so forth. Their voices grew louder as German-Jewish refugees began to enter South Africa in the wake of Hitler's ascent to power. The groundswell of anti-Jewish feeling, especially demands for actions and threats against the existing Jewish community, prompted the ruling United Party to introduce stiffer educational and financial requirements for purposes of immigration. These were to take effect on 1 November 1936 and resulted in an interim increase in German-Jewish immigration. By the end of October well attended meetings, led by a group of Stellenbosch University professors, protested against the arrival of the *Stuttgart* carrying some 570 German-Jewish immigrants. One month later Purified Nationalists were calling for the unequal treatment of Jews. They wished to curtail the new immigrants' access to the professions, limit their involvement in certain occupations, and proscribe name changing.

In an obvious response to flourishing antisemitism, coupled with a private Bill introduced by Malan to restrict Jewish immigration and stiffen naturalization laws, the United Party introduced an Aliens Bill in 1937, designed to restrict Jewish immigration - particularly from Germany - without mentioning Jews by name. Immigrants were to be permitted entry by a Selection Board on the grounds of good character and the likelihood of assimilation into the European population. The Bill failed to satisfy the Purified Nationalists; for them any Jewish

immigration was unacceptable. The 'Jewish Question' was now a central plank in the political platform of the Radical Right. Malan, under pressure from the ultra-right Greyshirts, focussed increasingly on the Jew as an explanation for the Afrikaners political misfortunes. It was Hendrik Verwoerd, however, who stood at the vanguard of anti-Jewish agitation. In a major editorial in *Die Transvaler*, the newspaper he edited, he summarised the whole corpus of antisemitic discourse: Jewish domination in business and the professions, the unassimilability of Jews, Jewish alienation from the Afrikaners, questionable Jewish commercial morality, and the use of money by Jews to influence government through the English-language press. Obviously the 'Jewish Question' was no longer the concern solely of fringe fascist groups; it was now firmly entrenched within mainstream white politics.

Malan's Purified Nationalists predictably stressed the 'Jewish Problem' in the 1938 general election campaign. Party propaganda was underpinned by an insistence on the prospect of Jewish domination. The election year also saw the emergence of a new paramilitary authoritarian movement, the *Ossewabrandwag*. Born out of the centenary celebrations of the Great Trek, the *Ossewabrandwag* attacked so-called "British-Jewish-Masonic" imperialism and capitalism, "British Jewish" democracy, "Jewish money-power" and "Jewish" disloyalty. The rhetoric of protest and opposition was riddled with racist assumptions and antisemitic generalizations. Jews were aliens, disloyal and bent on exploitation. Hostility was driven largely by Afrikaner intellectuals, some of whom had studied in Germany where they imbibed views of the corporate state, an idealist worldview, and a sense of exclusivist nationalism. These ideas propelled a powerful republicanism rooted in notions of divine election, a leitmotif within the Afrikaners' civil religion. Like their European counterparts on the Right, Afrikaner nationalists were opposed to liberalism, Marxism and laissez-faire capitalism. Nationalist sentiment, in other words, sharpened perceptions of the Jew as a quintessential alien. For the Afrikaner he symbolized all that was foreign and oppressive. Moreover, as English speakers for the most part, Jews were political enemies.

The Jew also helped to consolidate an all embracing Afrikaner identity, understood in terms of cultural unity, national roots, and opposition to the foreigner. In this way antisemitism helped to cover or paper over class divisions and antagonisms within Afrikaner society. The Afrikaner's inferior status in society and his poverty could be explained in racial or national terms. By employing this discourse of race to exclude and denigrate Jews, the Afrikaner was in turn elevated. Consequently, it is no coincidence that antisemitism continued to suffuse specifically right-wing Afrikaner political discourse and programmes, this despite the upturn in the economy from the mid-1930s.

Antisemitism was given further impetus following the South African parliament's decision to support

the Commonwealth war effort to resist Germany in 1939. A powerful antiwar movement was orchestrated by the *Ossewabrandwag* in which the appeal of fascism and with it the rhetoric of antisemitism was strong. A range of major National Party publications issued in the early 1940s demonstrated the formative influence of Mussolini and Hitler or the exclusive nature of an insurgent Afrikaner nationalism in which the Jew had no place. However, the struggle against Hitler gradually eroded the warm reception accorded to Nazi and fascist ideas.

The 1930s had clearly witnessed a sea change in the nature and character of antisemitism. Hostility had moved from the 'private' or ideational sphere into the 'public' or party political realm. The transformation was unquestionably related to specific traumas in the 1930s: the intensification of 'poor whiteism' following the impact upon South Africa of the world depression, the emergence of Nazism in Europe and the rise of an illiberal, anti-modernist and exclusivist Afrikaner nationalism. That is why 'public' antisemitism in South African was an essentially Afrikaner phenomenon and why it appealed across the whole spectrum of Afrikaner nationalist opinion. But it was built on the maturation of an anti-Jewish stereotype that had evolved over decades.

After the war South Africa experienced a rapid decline in antisemitism. A new Afrikaner bourgeoisie – well educated, confident and more optimistic than their forebears – enjoyed the economic fruits of racist exploitation and political power. They developed very rapidly a respect for enterprise and material success. The very scaffolding that had underpinned their sense of inferiority was thus removed as they began to experience power and social mobility. A sense of competition with and fear of the Jew declined. A postwar consumerist culture meant the erosion of rural values and a newfound respect for the city. No longer was it an alien and inhospitable place. Most significantly, however, the impetus of exclusivist Afrikaner nationalism waned. English speakers, including Jews, were necessary for the apartheid project. Colour was the cardinal divide and any lingering views – heard earlier in the century – of the Jew not being 'white' soon disappeared.

Classic Jew baiting in postwar SA was restricted to a fringe ultra-right element. So, for example, Hitler's birthday was regularly celebrated in Hillbrow, occasional Holocaust denial literature was distributed, and the *Afrikanerweerstandsbeweging* displayed swastika-like flags from time to time. But Jews had little cause for discomfort, despite the government questioning their loyalty in the early 1960s when Israel supported the African bloc in the United Nations against the apartheid government, and despite the government from time to time reminding Jews of their disproportionate involvement in anti-apartheid activities. Jewish security – at least insofar as the National Party was concerned – was further enhanced by Pretoria's very close ties with Jerusalem from the mid-1970s.

## THE PRESENT

What about the contemporary situation? The radical white Right, with its conspiratorial views of Jewish wealth, power and influence has disappeared. Individuals preaching an anti-Jewish message are at best leaders of small disaffected groups; they are not an advance guard of an ethno-nationalist movement, attempting to mould a 'people' or 'volk' by using the Jew as a classic other as we saw in the 1930s. But what about the majority black population? After all, in the 'new' South Africa, Jewish well-being is essentially dependent upon the black majority.

Historically blacks (including Coloureds and Indians) have never focussed specifically on the Jews when articulating grievances and aspirations. Going back to the late nineteenth century one finds that Jews hardly figure in the African press. The cardinal divide in South Africa has always been one of colour. This is not to say that anti-Jewish sentiment is totally foreign to the black population. Specifically "Jewish capitalists" have been identified in some industrial protests and antisemitic placards have been displayed at a number of strikes around the country. More recently, in the wake of the Gaza War, anti-Zionist protests have raised the possibility of targeting specifically Jewish businesses while questioning Jewish loyalty.

Clearly some blacks have imbibed well-worn anti-Jewish stereotypes. This should not come as a surprise. In a study of matriculation students in Soweto in the early 1970s, Melville Edelstein showed that blacks experienced a greater "social distance" in relation to Jews than toward English speakers in general, although less than towards Afrikaners. They told him that an African who was loth to part with his money was described as being as "stingy as a Jew" – a trope affirmed by the black consciousness leader, Saths Cooper, in an interview conducted in the late 1980s.

Edelstein thought that such prejudice arose from New Testament teaching in school and church. It may well be that there is an added cause: the resentment of blacks - in the widest sense of the term - against Jewish traders in town and country. Certainly one can find evidence of hostile stereotypes in fiction written by blacks. We should also note that a (methodologically questionable) survey conducted in 1990 among urban South African 'elites' showed that black 'elites' harbored substantial antipathy towards Jews. Almost one in five said that the Jewish community 'irritated' them because, in descending order of frequency, they were parasites, snobs, racists, anti-Christ, and unpatriotic; almost the same proportion approved of right-wing antisemitic actions, and nearly one in three considered the Jewish community to be 'mostly a liability' to South Africa.

It needs to be noted that surveys should not be equated with actions. In the 1930s in the United States, for example, the average American held the most appalling stereotypes of the Jew. There is a quantum leap from attitudes to action. Nonetheless, ideas are the bedrock of action. And here one needs

to look at a sustained hostility emanating from the Muslim population among whom many share conspiratorial ideas of the old far white Right. These ideas are manifested in the letter columns of our daily press and articulated in radio talk shows.

In looking at this issue it is necessary to note that anti-Zionism or criticism of the Jewish State cannot axiomatically be equated with antisemitism. The Arab-Israeli conflict, as Bernard Lewis argues, "is in its origins and its essence a political one – a clash between peoples and states over real issues, not a matter of prejudice and persecution." My concern is an anti-Zionist rhetoric which reveals and displays classic anti-Jewish motifs. In other words, a special hatred seems to go beyond the bounds of normal political conflict. Jews or Zionists have become, at least for some critics, diabolically evil. One sees this invariably in the rhetoric associated with Al-Quds Day, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, and in booklets such as Achmed Deedat's, *Arabs and Israel. Conflict or Conciliation?*, published by the Islamic Propagation Centre International in Durban. Here anti-Zionist rhetoric and propaganda degenerates into blatant antisemitism with emphasis placed on Jewish power, cunning and duplicity. This was best captured in the comments made by the deputy foreign minister, Fatima Hajaig, at an anti-Zionist rally in Lenasia in January, 2009. Hajaig spoke of Jewish money controlling the USA and Western Europe, a classic anti-Jewish canard with a long pedigree.

Holocaust denial has also crept into Muslim anger. In 1996, Radio 786, a Muslim radio station, had to apologize for airing an interview with Dr Ahmed Huber, who spoke of the 'Holocaust swindle' and in May 1998, the same radio station interviewed Dr Yaqub Zaki who, besides claiming that the "million plus" Jews who died in the Second World War had died of infectious diseases, spent much of his time engaged with elaborate Jewish conspiracies. Legal wrangles surrounding the broadcast did not prevent *Muslim Views* – the main Muslim newspaper - from suggesting "shortly after a Holocaust Center was opened in Cape Town in 1999 - that its readers avail themselves of a number of books denying the Holocaust. The use of the "Six Million," explained Jameel McWilliams, a journalist on the newspaper, was a "red herring" to divert attention from Israeli 'aggression' against the Palestinians. McWilliams went on to explain that the furnaces had been necessary to burn dead bodies in order to prevent the spread of disease. "We are constantly reminded of the suffering of the Jews by the media, by Hollywood, particularly Steven Spielberg. But where is the evidence that the Germans gassed six million Jews? Was there even a deliberate policy of extermination by the Nazis of European Jewry?"

Readers of *Muslim Views* did not challenge McWilliams. It was thus no surprise that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* – that notorious forgery - went on sale at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001, where South African Muslims joined their co-religionists from abroad and others hostile

to Israel in what turned out to be an anti-Zionist hate-fest. Only a few days after the Durban conference – perhaps even inspired by it – Sheikh Mogamat Faaik Gamielien of Cape Town wrote a letter to the *Cape Argus* entitled “The Golden Calf of Judaism” in which he quoted the *Protocols* approvingly. He recalled that the *Protocols* had been banned under the apartheid regime, and that they clearly provided an explanation for Zionist and Israeli actions.

Given this cast of mind it is hardly surprising that many South African Muslims, following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and on the Pentagon, took conspiratorial ideas further. Invariably Zionist connections with the US were identified and an all powerful Jewish lobby was identified. This sort of thinking was evident in an interview conducted in September 2004 with a young Capetonian, Sheikh Mogamat Colby, a student at al-Azar University in Cairo. Referring to the *Protocols*, the Sheikh noted that Jews controlled (and I quote) “economic systems in the world... all our land, all the means of the radio stations, the newspapers, the televisions – they are controlling all these things - and this is how they have full control over the whole world.” These sorts of sentiments are now regularly aired on Channel Islam International, a Multichoice DSTV option that connects South African listeners with some of the world’s most notorious antisemites via satellite.

There can be little doubt that Muslim-Jewish relations have deteriorated in the past two to three decades. But one should not treat the Muslim community as a monolith. Various intellectual discourses operate and compete. Some are innovative and progressive, with an emphasis on Islamic humanism and universalism; others are conservative or Islamist, at odds with religious pluralism and ecumenism. Qibla, a radical Cape Town-based Muslim organization founded in 1979, and the Islamic Unity Convention, for example, are heavily influenced by Khomeinism and some of the more radical schools of Islamic thought. Common to both strands, however, is a hostile critique of Zionism. In some cases this hostility is separated from antisemitism; in others Zionism and Judaism are conflated into a combination which incorporates notions of international Jewish finance and imperialism. In the 1980s, according to former Western Cape Premier, Ebrahim Rasool, these ideas were often merged into an analysis of the South African struggle.

Certainly there has been a radicalization of Islam from the early 1970s among a new generation of Muslims, more in touch with international developments and inspired by the anti-apartheid struggle and the Iranian revolution. Successive defeats of Arab states by the Israelis demanded an explanation: sinister Jewish power and the Jewish lobby in the US provided the answer. Qibla identified Zionism as the ‘citadel’ of imperialism, a term that resonated powerfully in the apartheid context. Indeed, for some observers, Jewish and Zionist manipulation was responsible for South Africa’s race based policies.

In the 1980s, the Muslim press regularly wrote of international financial machinations centred on Zionism. Even local newspapers, noted Sheikh Nazeem Mohammed, president of the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), the official voice of Muslims in South Africa, were “controlled by the Jews.” These conspiratorial ideas were taken further by journalist and academic, Ibraheem Mousa, who spoke of Jews being “in control of a large stash of economic power in South Africa” and as such having substantial influence and political power. A pamphlet, distributed by “Islamic Messages” on the campus of the University of Cape Town, referred to the *Protocols* as the “secret ‘manifesto’ of Zionism for a plot to dominate the world.”

It is clear that much of this anti-Zionist discourse has overflowed into vulgar antisemitism, something noted already in the 1980s by Faried Esack, a prominent Muslim cleric and intellectual. “Nothing that the Jews do will be enough for Muslims”, explained an exasperated Esack in response to a question asking if Jews would be accepted by the Muslim community if they renounced all recognition and support for Israel.

How are we to assess these recent developments? Can the past help us to speculate about the present and the future? Quite clearly, accounting for the ebb and flow of antisemitism is complicated: anti-Jewish hostility cannot be reduced to a single cause. The structural position of Jews and the timing of their entry into society are important. Certainly one sees a significant increase of antisemitism during times of economic and social stress. It was in evidence on the Witwatersrand in the mid-1890s and in Cape Town during the economic depression which followed the Anglo-Boer War. The alien nature of Yiddish-speaking newcomers also had a major impact on perceptions of the Jew. They were ineradicably different and set apart by specific cultural predilections, underpinned – according to their detractors - by a racial essence.

But to account for antisemitism in terms of the conspicuousness of the victims is too simplistic. Prevailing discourses, as cultural critic, Bryan Chetty, has argued in the British context, are inclined to construct the Jew within a particular frame and no account of antisemitism can ignore the historic evolution of an anti-Jewish discourse. While not wishing to discount the Christian *Adversus Judaeos* legacy, in the South African case Jews have by and large not been perceived through a theological prism. At most we can say that religious differences reinforced the alien or outsider status of the Jew. General perceptions, as we have seen, were rooted in the context of South Africa’s own historical reality and intellectual traditions.

In this regard we saw how nativism in the 1920s and ethno-nationalism in the 1930s heightened and sharpened differences. Hostility towards Jews was driven at this time by an anti-modernist and exclusivist Afrikaner ethno-nationalism. Calvinist Afrikaners saw their lifestyle threatened by English-speakers who dominated the urban centres, and among whom

the Jew emerged as a convenient symbol. The right wing Afrikaner of the 1930s employed the 'other' to enhance self definition and to deflect divisions within the group. Insular and backward-looking, it focused on the Jew, an exemplar of the modern.

Given the enormous danger of exclusivist nationalism, it is particularly encouraging that the character of nationalism in the 'new' South Africa – at least up to now - is inclusive in orientation and non-racial in content. Pluralism, multiculturalism, religious tolerance and 'rainbowism' – the very antithesis of ethno-nationalism - takes the sharpness out of ethnic conflict and militates against antisemitism. South Africa's 'rainbow' nation now celebrates cultural diversity and difference. Cultural rights and religious freedom are enshrined in the new South African constitution. Such sentiments are far removed from the exclusivist and triumphalist character of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s. As important is the condemnation of antisemitism by political leaders in recent years. The apology from the deputy foreign minister, Fatima Hajaig, following her tirade in Lenasia, is not unimportant. Unlike the Nationalists of the 1930s, the ANC has not manipulated whatever anti-Jewish sentiment exists for political gain.

Some observers may see the ANC's less than even-handed policy in the Middle East as a form of anti-Jewish sentiment. This is not necessarily the case. The ANC is fully entitled to maintain close ties with the Palestine Liberation Organization. These ties go back to its years in exile when the ANC had every reason to look askance at Pretoria's cozy relationship with Jerusalem. Jews will have to live with the paradox that some of the people whose struggle for freedom they supported are hostile to the Zionist cause and genuinely sympathetic to the Palestinians. Certainly Nelson Mandela saw Yasser Arafat and Muammar Gaddafi as comrades-in-arms, loyal friends who helped the ANC with funds, training and international support. It should be noted, however, that applauding notions such as 'Zionism is Racism' – as happened in Parliament during Arafat's visit in 1998 – raised serious questions for most Jews. Not only does this slogan contradict United Nations General Assembly resolution 46/86 of 1991 which revoked the equation of 'Zionism and Racism', but, it runs counter to the ANC's stated position on the Arab-Israeli conflict – that is, accepting a Jewish State alongside a Palestinian state.

It should also be noted that the ANC alone will not define popular attitudes to Zionism for all time. Many Black leaders have visited Israel, spoken highly of its achievements and have availed themselves of Israeli expertise. Furthermore the majority of Blacks are Christians, with a deep attachment to the so-called 'Holy Land'. Should Israelis and Palestinians resolve their differences, it is possible that all tensions surrounding South African Zionism could disappear. We also need to put Muslim hostility towards Jews in perspective. In the first instance, the Muslim population only numbers about 1.3 percent of the total South African population. As such, the chances

of South Africa taking on an Islamist character are virtually nil. In any event, the vast majority of Muslims at least for now wish to share a multi-faith and multi-cultural South Africa. Only a small minority are intent on dragging the Middle East conflict with all its hostility into local politics. We should certainly not fall into the trap of believing that all Muslims are antisemites or radical Islamists.

In conclusion, with hindsight it is apparent that antisemitism has taken on different forms and emanated from different constituencies over the past century – the English community, the radical right Afrikaners and – more recently elements within the Muslim community. And we have seen how the Muslim community expresses its anger within an anti-Zionist discourse. Judging by the outpourings across the political spectrum during the Gaza War, they are not alone. But it is not unimportant that a Pew Global Project Attitudes Survey conducted in urban areas in South Africa in 2007 indicated that 28 percent of South Africans sided with Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as opposed to 19 percent with the Palestinians. Nineteen percent sympathized with both the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Given these figures and recognizing the absence of a specifically 'Jewish Problem' in South Africa today, it is arguable that Jews are far better off under the new democratically elected government than under the old apartheid regime. Of course Jews share the same concerns as all other South Africans, arising from crime, economics, education and health care. But antisemitism, as such, is of marginal significance in South African public life. And, given the ANC's opposition to racism, the climate for opposing antisemitism in South Africa publicly is more favorable than it has been in the past. There is no exclusivist ethno-nationalism of the right wing variety which, as we have seen, can be a real threat to Jews. The possibility of hostile attitudes, or in Endelman's terms, 'private' antisemitism, being transformed into public policy is remote. And that is the litmus test. Nonetheless, the mood in the wake of the Gaza War and the ugly rhetoric surrounding it is a cause for concern. Fatima Hajaig's comments underlie the easy slippage from anti-Zionism to antisemitism.

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# THE GAZA WAR AND ITS IMPACT ON SOUTH AFRICAN JEWRY

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David Saks

No-one was particularly surprised when Operation Cast Lead - Israel's sustained offensive against Hamas in Gaza, commencing late December 2008 and ending in mid-January this year - led to a corresponding escalation of antisemitic activity worldwide. It has come to be expected that intensified period of unrest between Israel and the Palestinian territories will act as a catalyst for intensifying anti-Jewish hostility in the Diaspora. This was very much the case during the 2006 Lebanon War, which resulted in many Diaspora countries, including South Africa, recording record levels of antisemitism for that year. Indeed, Operation Cast Lead had only been underway a few days when the predicted reports on an upsurge in such acts as assault, vandalism, hate mail, verbal abuse, graffiti and dissemination of offensive literature began flowing in.

Antisemitism levels in South Africa rose sharply during January-February 2009, corresponding to the Gaza war and its immediate aftermath. Over fifty incidents were recorded by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and Community Security Organisation, which by this country's standards was an unusually high figure for such a short period. By comparison, the average *annual* total of incidents in the years 2000-2005 was a little over thirty; in 2006-8, it had risen to 68.

Antisemitic incidents elsewhere in the Diaspora were both significantly more numerous and often of a much more extreme nature. Already, some 300 incidents had been reported in the first six weeks of 2009 by UK Jewry's Community Security Trust. France's main Jewish association, CRIF, recorded more than 100 attacks in January including car-bombs launched at synagogues, compared with an average of 20-25 a month for the previous two years. Incidents recorded included violent assaults, hate emails and graffiti threatening 'jihad'. Similarly dramatic rises have been evident in, amongst other countries, Canada, Australia, Venezuela and Sweden.

Previously, no matter how vitriolic were the attacks on Israel, it was grudgingly acknowledged that Diaspora Jewry could not reasonably be called to account for Israeli actions. Recent developments have suggested that this is perceptibly changing, including in South Africa. Increasingly, Jews are told that it is their moral duty to join in the condemnation of Israel, and that those who dare to defend it should be regarded as complicit in the

latter's "crimes against humanity".

Incidents in South Africa have ranged from relatively innocuous abusive email messages targeting individuals to very serious public acts of hostility impacting on the entire community. Callers-in, and on occasion even presenters, on certain Muslim radio stations have stated that what Israel was doing to the Palestinians has made Jews anywhere in the world legitimate targets.

## The Hajaig Affair

On 14 January Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Fatima Hajaig informed a raucously cheering crowd at a Palestinian solidarity rally in Lenasia that America and most Western countries were in the grip of Jewish money power. Her exact words were:

They [Jews] control [America], no matter which government comes into power, whether Republican or Democratic, whether Barack Obama or George Bush...Their control of America, just like the control of most Western countries, is in the hands of Jewish money and if Jewish money controls their country then you cannot expect anything else.

The SAJBD laid a formal complaint against Hajaig with the SA Human Rights Commission, the concluding section of which *inter alia* stated the following:

Taking into consideration the prevailing environment in South Africa amongst certain elements of the Muslim community in relation to Gaza, the communication of the foregoing statement by the Deputy Minister and the advocacy of these beliefs against the Jewish people, demonstrates a clear intention to be hurtful, be harmful or incite harm and especially to promote or propagate hatred against the Jewish people. It is undiluted and vicious hate speech which constitutes a fundamental breach of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, No 4 of 2000 (as amended) and against the spirit of the Constitution of South Africa and other ancillary legislation.

In advocating the views that she did, the Deputy Minister attempts to depict Jews worldwide as disloyal, plotting and underhand who manipulate their host societies for their own pernicious ends. It is an inescapable conclusion given the

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large attendance at the meeting and the radio broadcasts, that the Deputy Minister is promoting or propagating hatred against the Jewish people. The SAJBD is constrained to record that not since the pre-World War II days when there was great support for the Nazis in South Africa, has a senior politician, more especially one holding high office, behaved in this racist manner. It is shocking to hear these comments in the South Africa of today.

The SAJBD publicised the matter widely (including posting a television interview with its National Chairman Zev Kregel, in which footage of Hajaig actually making the offending comments featured). In its media statement, Board Director Wendy Kahn described the comments as “classic anti-Jewish stereotyping and conspiracy-theory mongering” of the type typically used by those wishing to portray Jews as scheming, manipulative and disloyal to the countries in which they lived”.

The Hajaig affair became something of a media *cause celebre*, with most commentators roundly condemning the Deputy Minister. On her return from Japan, Hajaig issued what purported to be an apology but that was in fact so evasive as to compound the original offense. The SAJBD rejected it outright in a further media release:

[Hajaig’s] statement failed to address, let alone repudiate, the blatantly antisemitic sentiments originally expressed by her, but merely apologised for any hurt it might have caused to the Jewish community.

The bulk of the statement in fact focused on the Middle East situation and Ms. Hajaig’s viewpoints in this regard.

It can only be concluded that Ms. Hajaig stands by her previous statement that the United States and most other Western countries are controlled by Jewish money power. As such, her latest statement does not constitute an acceptable apology but in fact serves to compound the original insult to the Jewish world, the people of South Africa and the United States government.

The following day (4 February), Cabinet discussed the issue at its fortnightly meeting in Cape Town, that same day issuing the following statement:

Cabinet expressed concern about the statement as it was contrary to the stated policies of this government regarding antisemitic sentiments. Subsequent to the Cabinet meeting, the President held discussions with the Deputy Minister to discuss her statement. The Deputy Minister expressed her deep regret to the President for making the statement. She accepted that the comments were contrary to stated government policy. She subsequently apologised unreservedly and unequivocally for the comments and agreed to withdraw them unconditionally.

Further, she assured the President that she does not harbour any antisemitic feelings or views and that in her statement issued yesterday, she had stated that ‘she condemns, without equivocation, all forms of racism including antisemitism in all its manifestations’. The President has accepted her withdrawal of the comments and her unqualified apology and trusts that the matter has been concluded satisfactorily.

While the SAJBD believed that Hajaig should direct her apology directly to the Jewish community as well, and took this question up with the SAHRC, it decided to accept the apology – which this was unequivocally and unambiguously worded – and commend the President and Cabinet for ensuring that it had been made.

Prior to this, Hajaig had already been noted for her vitriolically anti-Israel views. On 29 December, she called the newly appointed Israel Ambassador to South Africa, Dov Segev-Steinberg, to a meeting, in the course of which she lambasted Israel for its actions in Gaza. At the conclusion of the meeting she effectively described Embassy Spokesperson Elias Imbram as being a token black whose appointment was due only to his race. Referring to Imbram, who immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia in the early 1990s, she asked the Ambassador, “When your colleagues in Europe attend a meeting like this do they also take someone along like the person sitting next to you?” When Segev Steinberg queried what she meant by that remark, she remarked disparagingly to her colleague, “I think we are dealing with an Ambassador here who doesn’t understand questions.” Hajaig’s behavior on this occasion provoked an official complaint by Israel to the SA Embassy in Tel Aviv.

### Threats and Boycott Campaigns

Even more troubling than Hajaig’s conspiracy theorizing were statements made at the same rally that explicitly threatened the local Jewish community, inter alia that those with Zionist sympathies be expelled from the country, that ‘Israeli’ (in fact, Jewish-owned) businesses be boycotted and that vigilante action be taken against South African families whose members were serving in the Israeli military.

One presenter said: “The common enemy is making inroads in South Africa... The Zionists in South Africa, must be kicked out of the shores of South Africa”. Another speaker praised “our Jewish brothers and sisters” who had come out against the Israel Defence Force, assuring them “there is a place in the world we are building in South Africa for you”. Those who had not done so, he warned, had “better watch out because the winds of change are blowing”.

Regarding local Jews allegedly serving in the IDF, another presenter shouted: “We are going to become impimpis, the business that we are going to carry out with the Jews, with these Zionist entities. We are going to talk to them, were going to find out

if their sons have gone to fight our brothers and sisters in Palestine and then we'll say to them come and fight us at home".

Other speakers included ANC Provincial Secretary Nazeem Adams and Eddie Makue,

General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches. Makue denied that the fight against Israel and Zionism was antisemitic, saying that he and his fellow activists only wanted to bring their "Jewish brothers and sisters onto the right path".

"This is a global struggle. We are inviting you to join us in it, otherwise you will be mowed down in the annals of history as people who refuse to support justice and peace" he said, again to loud applause.

It was around this time that a boycott campaign targeting Jewish-owned businesses was launched. The specific perpetrators were unknown but it was aimed primarily at the Muslim community. An unsigned e-mail stated that "most SA Jews" supported Israel's attacks on Gaza and continued that "as consumers we can avoid supporting businesses affiliated to those who believe incendiary-bombing helpless children is justified". It named well-known chains with what it terms Jewish connections, including Pick n Pay, Woolworths, Foschini, Nando's and Discovery Health. A number of Muslim leaders urged Muslims to dissociate themselves from the 'racist' campaign against Jews and instead focus solely on boycotting Israeli products.

The Middle East conflict was brought into the heart of Jewish Johannesburg on 6 February when, at the instigation of the Congress of SA Trade Unions (COSATU) and the Palestinian Solidarity Committee, an abusive mob gathered outside the Sydenham-Highland North shul to protest against the Jewish communal leadership' stance on the Middle East question. The rally took place in defiance of the municipal authorities, who denied the requisite permission because the application to demonstrate was made at too short notice. The majority of protestors seeking to join the rally were prevented from doing so by police.

In the course of the demonstration, a banner bearing the image of the Magen David juxtaposed with a swastika was burned and stamped on. Cosatu spokesman Bongani Masuku said: "We want to convey a message to the Jews in South Africa that our 1.9-million workers who are affiliated to Cosatu are fully behind the people of Palestine. Any business owned by Israel supporters will be a target of workers in South Africa."

An Israeli witness further reported that "Death to the Jews" was being shouted in Arabic.

Masuku went on to post a threatening and abusive comment on the It's Almost Supernatural blogsite, part of which read: "Every Zionist must be made to drink the bitter medicine they are feeding our brothers and sisters in Palestine. We must target them, expose them and do all that is needed to subject them to perpetual suffering until they withdraw from the land of others". Challenged on this by a Jewish community member, he responded (amongst other offensive comments) that anyone who sought "to justify the murderous state of Israel" should not merely be encouraged but forced to leave South

Africa.

Masuku made further public threats when speaking on Wits University campus on 5 March. On four occasions, he used the expression "... make their lives hell..." when referring to what COSATU's intentions were regarding those who supported Israel. This included a specific reference to students (clearly Jewish students) on the Wits campus by stating, "... COSATU has got members here even on this campus; we can make sure that for that side it will be hell ..."

Particularly menacing language was used by Masuku in reference to Jewish families whose children were supposedly serving in the Israeli Defence Force: "... The following things are going to apply: any South African family, I want to repeat so that it is clear, any South African family who sends its son or daughter to be part of the Israeli Defence Force must not blame us when something happens to them with immediate effect ..."

On 25 March, the SAJBD lodged a formal complaint against Masuku with the SAHRC.

Also taking place on 6 February was a mass protest rally at the Buzme Adab Hall in Actonville, Benoni. Amongst those participating were Gauteng MEC for Safety and Security Firoz Cachalia, COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi, SA Council of Churches General Secretary Eddie Makue, and former Minister of Intelligence Ronnie Kasrils. Neither had anything to say when one of the speakers, Moosa Alkumi, blamed the First and Second World Wars and war in Iraq on Jewish machinations, described Judaism as "a religion based on lies on deceit" and declared: "To the Zionists who are listening in, we want you to drown in the blood of the victims".

An environment is clearly being created in which Jews, and anyone else, who wish to defend Israel are being intimidated into remaining silent, with the intimation that before long even silence will not be an acceptable option.

Biased and emotive media reports continually focusing on Palestinian civilian casualties without holding the Hamas leadership accountable also greatly intensified anti-Israel hostility. In all, the Gaza crisis was a major fillip for those campaigning for the country to sever all its ties with Israel, whether diplomatic, economic or cultural. However, in a meeting with the leadership of the SAJBD and SAZF on 16 January, President Kgalema Motlanthe unequivocally affirmed that South Africa had no intention of following the boycott route.

In March, antisemitism levels in South Africa declined dramatically, with only a handful of minor incidents being reported. This, as much as the surge in antisemitic behaviour in the previous two months, showed how interconnected the Middle East situation and Diaspora antisemitism have become.

The current assessment must be that South African Jewry is in no more, and indeed somewhat less, immediate danger than its counterparts in Europe and other Western countries. Balanced against this, however, is the reality that it must endure a far more intensive degree of public hostility to its traditional Zionist loyalties.



# DREYFUS, KOMMETJIE AND THE DUBLIN CONMAN

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Gwynne Schrire

The year 2006 marked the centenary of the declaration by the French Court of Appeal that the evidence against Alfred Dreyfus was completely unsubstantiated; moreover, that no conclusive proof existed that a crime had ever been committed.<sup>1</sup> On 12 July 1906, the United Court of Cassation unanimously declared Dreyfus innocent of all charges and announced that his conviction had been pronounced wrongfully and by error.<sup>2</sup> Thus ended twelve years of ignominy, injustice and imprisonment for Dreyfus, a French army captain of integrity.<sup>3</sup>

Ten days later, the *Cape Times* announced to its readers in Cape Town: "Dreyfus honoured on the scene of his Degradation - A Paris telegram states that the Cross of the Legion of Honor was conferred this afternoon on Major Dreyfus in the Artillery Yard of the Military Academy where he was degraded."<sup>4</sup>

The Dreyfus trial had two major repercussions. It led to the fall of the conservative French government and its replacement by a left-wing administration that passed anti-clerical laws, including one separating the church from the state. It also exposed an assimilated young Viennese journalist to the virulent antisemitism arising from the case. This exposure propelled him to found the World Zionist Organisation in an attempt to solve the problem of antisemitism.

The ripples of the Dreyfus trial reverberated around the globe. "A thrill of horror and shame ran through the whole civilised world", the *London Times* had editorialised when Dreyfus was convicted a second time; 50 000 people marched from Hyde Park to the French Embassy in protest. Queen Victoria expressed herself as "too horrified for words at this monstrous, horrible sentence."<sup>5</sup> There were even ripples in Kommetjie, a remote fishing village near Cape Town.

## *L’Affaire Dreyfus*

A secret court-martial, replete with irregularities contrary to all legal procedure, unanimously found Captain Alfred Dreyfus guilty of treason and exiled him for life to Devil’s Island off the coast of South America. On 5 January 1895, he was publicly demoted to a chorus of antisemitic curses by a howling mob.

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Among the horrified onlookers at the event was Theodore Herzl, who was covering the trial for the *Neue Freie Presse*.

When the French Intelligence Service found that a secret military document had been sent to the German embassy Dreyfus, being the only Jew on the general staff, was the automatic suspect. It was impossible for the French establishment, in particular Major HJ Henry of Intelligence, to believe that the aristocratic Major MCFW Esterhazy could be guilty. Dreyfus, the Jew, was the logical scapegoat. He was duly sentenced and exiled.

The Dreyfus family refused to accept his guilt and pressed to have the trial re-opened.<sup>6</sup> Major Henry refused to accept his innocence.

When the new head of French intelligence, Lt. Col. Georges Picquart, discovered that Major Esterhazy was in fact a German agent, Major Henry proceeded to forge documents to confirm Dreyfus’ guilt. In return for his fine detective work, Picquart was dismissed and sent to Africa. However, before leaving Paris, Picquart told his friends what he had discovered and they passed the information onto a left-wing senator who accused Esterhazy in the Senate and announced that Dreyfus was innocent. However the right-wing prime minister, pressured by the powerful religious and military establishments, was not prepared to admit that the army could be at fault. Esterhazy was tried and acquitted and poor Picquart was sentenced to sixty days in prison.

For the first time the press exercised a major influence on the political life of the nation, dramatizing and fueling the event, supporting or denouncing the authorities, exercising pressure and various forms of blackmail.<sup>7</sup> Novelist Emile Zola took up the case with a front-page letter on January 13 1898, in the newspaper *L’Aurore*. In *J’Accuse, a letter to the President of the Republic*, Zola accused the opponents of Dreyfus of malicious libel. Such was the interest aroused by the case that 200 000 copies were sold in Paris. In February, Zola was himself found guilty of libel and fled to Britain.

By now the French public had split into pro- and anti-Dreyfus factions and tempers ran high. Officers of the General Staff threatened to resign if Dreyfus was acquitted. There were antisemitic riots throughout the country. These even spilled over into Cape Town when, on 18 April 1898, "two poor men" appeared before the committee of the Cape Town Jewish Philanthropic Society asking for assistance because "they had been driven out of France on account of the late antisemitic movement."<sup>8</sup>

"In a climate of escalating hysteria, the media

acted as a necessary safety valve; its unremitting publicity upheld public opinion over the traditional French authority, which for more than a century had been vested in the army, the judiciary, the nobility and the old money of Catholic France.”<sup>9</sup> Henry’s forgeries were detected. He was arrested and committed suicide in his cell.

The government was forced to retry Dreyfus but as before, it was not prepared to admit that the army could be at fault. The court-martial in Rennes in 1899 once more declared him guilty of treason. This time his sentence was reduced because of “extenuating circumstances” to ten years, five years of which he had already served.

Dreyfus was persuaded not to appeal, and was eventually pardoned by the President of the Republic. In 1904, when a leftist government gained power, Dreyfus demanded a fresh investigation and in 1906 the court of appeal pronounced his complete innocence.<sup>10</sup>

### Kommetjie

Kommetjie is a small seaside village near Cape Town where, some years before the First World War, the small community of regular summer visitors was joined by newcomers, the DuBédats. Mrs DuBédat told them she was an actress who was half English, half Spanish.

“She was a large, fiery, and very commanding woman, married to an elderly, silver haired, very aristocratic looking Frenchman, who was quiet and retiring and never seen to leave the house. The story went that he had been involved in the Dreyfus case in Paris, that he had made a stand, like some others, for Dreyfus when the latter was falsely accused of, and sentenced for, a murder [sic] he had not committed. The case against him was framed in order to protect some high military official – it caused an international scandal at the time, and the Dreyfus defenders fled the country and sought refuge elsewhere.”<sup>11</sup>

The mysterious Frenchman, his exotic wife and his young son evoked considerable sympathy from the locals. (The inaccuracy of the reported facts could be attributed to faulty memory – the information was written when she was in her nineties by Anne Seeliger, a childhood friend of the young son – or it could be due to the ignorance of the locals because a vast distance separated the handful of holiday cottages that made up the remote community of Kommetjie and the sophisticated city of Paris.)

Kommetjie was certainly not Paris. The French family would have found the life there primitive but inexpensive because shellfish could be gathered from the rocks and Anne’s father would come in “towards evening with his friends with their boats laden to the hilt with Hottentot, Silverfish, Galjoen, Snoek in season and Cape Salmon. The seafood replaced meat which was unobtainable locally and we lived virtually on what we had harvested from the sea.”

Seeliger remembered that between 1910 and

1920, other families began to filter in and spend holidays there on a regular basis. The most interesting and entertaining character who joined their group at that time was a lad called Willie DuBédat, who “moved into Kommetjie with his parents before the 1914 War and became the heart throb of all the girls in a very short time. He spoke English such as we had never heard spoken in our lives, was sophisticated by our standards, danced well, and was good at making up funny verses relating to small happenings in our lives.”<sup>12</sup>

This sophisticated retiring man, who was never seen outside his cottage, his flamboyant actress wife and his charming son who set the hearts of all the young girls aflutter – they would have represented a contact with an outside world and its dramas quite foreign to the locals who would have known little about French fashions or dances. One can imagine the excitement created at the arrival of these poor refugees from the Dreyfus Affair. Fugitives who had been forced to flee from Paris to this isolated beach because they had boldly taken a stand for the falsely-accused Dreyfus, a man who had been sentenced for “a murder he had not committed”.

Overseas newspapers took three weeks to come to Cape Town on the Union-Castle ships, and the news would arrive stale and a shop that did not stock daily bread was unlikely to stock daily newspapers. Even so, news about the gross miscarriage of justice that marked the Dreyfus trial had filtered through and was avidly followed in the local papers, just as it was in England, America and Europe. The international interest in the ongoing saga of Dreyfus was so intense that 200 journalists from near and far had descended on the town of Rennes for his re-trial in 1899. It was “the first great international media event of the age, thanks to the influence of the press and modern means of mass communication.”<sup>13</sup>

The Dreyfus Trial was regularly featured by the *Cape Times* as its main item in its overseas “Cable News” section. The *Cape Times*’ partisanship was plainly seen in the subtitles attached to these articles. Examples of these include: *Accused Reaffirms his Innocence* (8.8.1899). *Dramatic scenes: I swear I am Innocent* (9.8.1899). *The Captain Ill* (10.8.1899 – the accompanying paragraph stated that Dreyfus was surviving solely on milk), *Sensational Statement; The Real Culprit* (12.8.1899). *No Motive and No Crime; Absolutely False Charges* (18.8.1899).

One can imagine the shock to the *Cape Times* readers, filled with the expectations built up by those reports, on opening the paper on 11.9.1889 to read: *Dreyfus sentenced - 10 years imprisonment - Further details - Leave to appeal - A chance of pardon*, “I declare before my country that I am innocent. I have suffered tortures for five years for my name and my children. Have confidence in my loyalty and give me justice”. The speech created great excitement in the court.”

It was a gross miscarriage of justice. Small wonder that to the holiday makers spending their summers in such isolated surroundings, the romance the DuBédats represented was sufficient to set every tongue

wagging and make the locals feel very protective towards these refugees who had been persecuted for standing up against such injustice - although they may not have necessarily approved of them. Some of the harvested candles, canned herring, hairbrushes and pea soup would certainly have gone their way along with surplus fish or shellfish, not to mention shipwrecked golf and cricket balls. Anne's mother would frequently feed young Willie and take him in when his mother Rosita threw him out in a fit of temper.

Willie "led a miserable life because his temperamental mother had no rapport with him whatever, no patience, no sympathy, and no interest in his welfare. Sometimes he spent days on the mountain or could not come out to play cricket or hassie (sic) because he had been locked inside for a minor misdemeanor. I can remember seeing Willie being thrown out by the scruff of his neck more than once, followed by kitchen utensils that happened to be handy, a chopper, a bucket, or even a bicycle."<sup>14</sup>

Anne might have been too harsh on her. Another child of the period, Norah Henshilwood, recalled that she did not meet other children at Kommetjie as their cottage was some distance from the others until an invitation to a birthday party arrived from a mother with a young son. It was "a splendid tea with a gift for every child. What her real name was I never discovered: our version of it sounded like Mrs Do Better."<sup>15</sup> Under the circumstances such a party must have involved "Mrs Do Better" in considerable advance planning and organising.

To Anne "she was so absolutely different from anyone else we had ever met. We used to find excuses to go visiting her and to coax her into performing for us. When she was in a good mood, she would dress up for a part... and act (it) out for us. I remember best the performance of *Charlie's Aunt*. She would give us cups of something to drink, which we discovered quite soon was white wine which would send us home tipsy."

They discovered later that she had other weaknesses and when the war broke out Rosita moved closer to the military camp and opened what she called a "comfort station for the boys."

Frank DuBédât died suddenly in 1919 of heart failure and was buried in Glencairn cemetery near Simonstown, leaving no estate whatever. Rosita said she had supported him for years. She remarried a farmer from Beira and, on his death, settled in England with Willie, who later ran a film advertising company in London.

### The Irish conman

The truth about the refugees was not quite what the Kommetjie people had been told. Frank DuBédât was Irish, not French, although his family was of French extraction having arrived in Dublin as Huguenot refugees two centuries previously. He had been the president of the Dublin Stock Exchange and a Justice of the Peace. He was wealthy, influential, charming and respected. On Christmas Eve 1890, he

sent a letter from London to his wife and disappeared. It was believed that he had fallen under a train and been killed.

It was soon discovered that all the money in the Dublin Stock Exchange had also disappeared. His debts were estimated to be between £105 000 and £117 000. His mansion was sold along with his shooting lodge, property, mines, stores and building materials and his grieving widow and three children moved in with her father.

Six months later DuBédât was traced to Cape Town where he was living in a boarding house using the alias Denver. He was arrested and sent back to Dublin where he was charged with bankruptcy and fraud. He was sentenced to twelve months hard labor and seven years penal servitude.

He was released in 1896 after a petition from his wife's family, influential friends and associates. His generous friends gave him a ticket to leave the country. His charm and style accompanied him to Johannesburg where he called himself a company promoter and finance agent. He claimed to have introductions to Cecil John Rhodes and Alfred Beit.

Frank DuBédât began promoting a scheme known as the Delagoa Bay Concession which planned to lease from the Portuguese Government 7 500 sq. metres of coastal land on which they intended to build a jetty to enable ships to come alongside and unload coal. Soon a friend had invested £800 in the scheme and other investors followed. With the cash in hand DuBédât returned to England to interest more investors in the scheme, leaving the concession in the care of his partners.

In London, he moved in with the lovely Rosita Martinez, who was 25 years his junior. She was born in South America and had acted in minor roles with Sir Henry Irving. Eleven days after his wife died in Ireland in 1902, Frank married Rosita, who was recorded as being the daughter of an "African merchant", Elias Nunez Martinez. The witnesses were her father, Hermann Cohn and David Somerville.<sup>16</sup>

As before, Frank lived extravagantly and traveled extensively. As before he obtained a great deal of money and spent it all. An angry investor discovered that the Portuguese government had rescinded the concession some years previously declaring it null and void. He asked Frank for his money back. Frank denied knowledge of the Portuguese decree and would not give clear answers to questions about what he had done with the money.

In 1903, Frank DuBédât was arrested while visiting the offices of that investor's lawyer and tried for obtaining money on false pretences. The judge summed up: "Would the jury expect that the men back in South Africa would not tell their ... partner DuBédât who was exploiting the affair in England that ... the concession had been cancelled?"<sup>17</sup> In sentencing DuBédât to four years' penal servitude, he remarked:

One would have thought that [the previous sentence] would have been a warning and a

lesson, and that you would have employed your great ability honestly. The one thing that has been vouchsafed to you is great ability, common honesty you have not... Men like you will always find dupes.<sup>18</sup>

Within a year, Rosita had managed to obtain a telegram from Beira stating that Frank had not been advised that the notice of cancellation had been published. This, together with representations from his influential friends, gained him an unconditional discharge from prison.

### Dreyfus, Kommetjie and the Dublin conman

After a few years, having run through his – or other people's – money, Frank and Rosita settled in a small cottage in an isolated fishing village inhabited mainly during the holidays. Kommetjie seemed an unlikely choice for this sophisticated man-of-the-world. Its isolation poses the question of whether he was still on the run. It was a village to which there was no road and access was only by hired mule wagon. A village in which there were about ten houses, a few fisherman's huts and an unpretentious boarding-house with a little shop attached to it that did not even stock fresh bread. A village which had no electricity, water or sewerage, but where the living was cheap, fish and seafood freely available and where no one had heard of Frank DuBédats.<sup>19</sup>

It was not what he had been used to in Killiney, Ireland, where his home had had electricity, hot and cold running water and fresh bread. That house also had seven lofty well-proportioned bedrooms, six lavatories, a drawing room, a dining room, a morning room, a day room, a billiard room, a play room, a kitchen, a wine cellar, a dairy, a laundry, a stable for eight horses, a cow house for four cows, a bedroom for three coachmen, and a castellated gate entrance.<sup>20</sup> But the cottage in Kommetjie, Cape Province, was certainly better than a prison cell.

The other attractions of Kommetjie to the impoverished DuBédats are still very much in evidence. DuBédats' cottage, in Afrikander Avenue, still stands, renovated and altered as land-hungry investors are starting to move into the fairly undeveloped seaside village.<sup>21</sup> Afrikander Avenue leads straight to a sheltered bay in which sea birds paddle, not 100 metres from the cottage. Children still paddle in the 'Kom', the natural pool in the rocks that provides safe swimming without the waves and currents of the open sea. Fishing boats are still launched from the beach, which now carries a prominent sign "Pumping of Prawns Prohibited". The soft white sands lead onto rock pools hidden between flat smooth rocks, fringed with decaying fronds of shipwrecked seaweed. Apart from the noise of the motor boats and the cry of the birds, the lifestyle is still quiet and peaceful.

Before his bankruptcy, Frank DuBédats had traveled extensively, "especially to Paris where he acquired a base (and) began to mix with the Theatre set both in Paris and London."<sup>22</sup> After he regained

funds through promoting the Delagoa Bay Concession, he and Rosita "travelled a great deal ... living an extravagant lifestyle."<sup>23</sup> It was highly probable that he would have introduced his young actress wife to his Theatre set in Paris.

In Paris, the Dreyfus Affair was being hotly debated, particularly among the Theatre set, the artists, writers and intellectuals. The spiritual and political crisis engendered by *l'Affaire* was strongly reflected in French literature.<sup>24</sup> It was in the Dreyfus Affair that for the first time the intellectuals intervened as a group in a massive show of commitment.<sup>25</sup> The DuBédats could not have avoided being constantly exposed to it.

They might have seen a play alluding to it, Romain Rolland's *Le Loups* (The Wolves, 1898), which was a theatrical cause célèbre,<sup>26</sup> or antisemitic plays by Lavedan or Donnay in the opposition.<sup>27</sup> They might have attended a showing of the new motion pictures, premiered by the Lumières in Paris in 1895, and viewed filmed docudramas, containing acted scenes from the trial, until these were banned.<sup>28</sup> They could not have avoided the press headlines, the cartoons, the newspaper drawings, the illustrations, the art works and the songs that were being produced by both the pro- and anti-Dreyfusards. It was the main topic of conversation. There was a two-part cartoon of a dinner party which began with the host banning all conversation on the topic and ended with the guests at each others' throats, the table in ruins. Many duels were fought over Dreyfus. It was quite possible that Frank DuBédats himself got into heated arguments in which he took Dreyfus' side.

When DuBédats was released from prison after the intercession of his wife and his friends in 1896, he would no doubt have followed with interest the attempts by the wife and friends of Captain Dreyfus to do the same and he could not have been unaware of the intense press coverage of the Rennes trial three years later. When DuBédats was released from prison for the second time in 1904, after new evidence had been obtained, he would have read of demands for Dreyfus' case to be re-examined.

Small wonder, then, that DuBédats should have identified himself with Dreyfus, a man imprisoned on a trumped up charge who was fighting for justice. Small wonder, too, that he should have turned his feelings of empathy for and solidarity with Dreyfus into a cover story that he was forced to flee France because he had been persecuted for defending him.

Words and excuses came easily to DuBédats. His letters used as evidence in his trials show a pattern of glibness<sup>29</sup>. Assuming a guise was easy for him – his family called him "the actor"<sup>30</sup> – he had used false identities before, as a dead man, as a Mr. Denver, now as a Frenchman; the latter was made easier by the fact that he carried a French surname.

The identification with Dreyfus also indicated that Frank DuBédats was a shrewd judge of public opinion and had sufficient social sensitivity to appreciate that if he portrayed himself as a defender of Dreyfus he would be ensured of sympathy and acceptance from the locals. And if the reporting in

the *Cape Times* was anything to go by, as a Frenchman who was a supporter of Dreyfus, the Killiney conman and his family could rely on the support of the good men and women of Kommetjie. Those good folk never discovered his true identity and his tombstone, a granite obelisk, gave away no secrets.

NOTES

1 I would like to thank Dr Ute Ben Yosef and Lorraine Knight of the Jacob Gitlin Library for assisting me with this project. Lewis, David, *Prisoners of Honour: The Dreyfus Affair*, (1973), 317.  
 2 Bredin, Jean-Denis, *The Affair: The Case of Alfred Dreyfus*, (1983), 480  
 3 Dreyfus was reinstated as a major, re-enlisted in World War I, and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel.  
 4 *Cape Times* 23.7 1906  
 5 Lewis, J, op cit, 298-299  
 6 One of their supporters was Bernard Lazare, a socialist and Zionist. In 2005 a square in Paris was named after him. This marked a change in French attitude. Twenty years previously the French army had refused to erect a statue of Dreyfus in the Paris Ecole Militaire – the statue found a home in the Tuileries gardens.  
 7 Bredin, J, op cit, 517  
 8 *Minute Book of Cape Town Jewish Philanthropic Society 1897 - 1903*, Alexander Papers, Archives of the University of Cape Town.  
 9 Musiker Naomi, “Emile Zola and the Liberation of the Press”, in *Jewish Affairs*, Summer 1994 vol 49 no 4, 41

10 MC Encyclopaedia Judaica, 1972 Vol 6 230  
 11 Wootton, Maria, *The Du Bedat Story*, Killiney to Kommetjie, (1999), 68. Thanks to Dr Samuel Schrire for ordering this book for me from Ireland.  
 12 Seeliger, A, op cit, 172-173 Wootton (p71) gives an example of one his “funny verses”, part of which reads “Beneath the mountains, by the sea/ lies healthy, breezy Kommetjie/ Where Chapman’s and Hout Bay combine/ To make the view around sublime./ Here lived one Willie du Bedat/ Whose mother dear was fairly fat/ His father too was fairly stout/And very slow to move about...”  
 13 Wistrich, Robert, “The Dreyfus Centenary”, in *Jewish Affairs*, Summer 1994 vol 49 no 4,31  
 14 Wootton, M, 69  
 15 Henshilwood, N, op cit, 27  
 16 Wootton, M,47  
 17 *ibid*, 61  
 18 *ibid*, 62  
 19 *ibid*, 73, Henshilwood, op cit, pp 25-27  
 20 *ibid*, 22  
 21 probably about 16 Afrikander Ave, Wootton, p69  
 22 *ibid*, 21  
 23 *ibid*, 47  
 24 Harvey, Paul & Heseltine, JE, *The Oxford Companion to French Literature*, (1959), 225  
 25 Bredin, J, op cit, 521  
 26 Lewis, D, op cit, 221  
 27 HarveyP & Heseltine, JE, op cit., pp 225, 627  
 28 Musiker, N, op cit ,43  
 29 Wootton, M, pp 49-60  
 30 *ibid* , 47



**I am**

I am kind and caring.  
 I wonder if there is ever going to be world peace  
 I hear birds chirping.  
 I see trees swaying back and forth.  
 I want there to be no antisemitism in the world.  
 I am kind and caring.  
 I pretend not to care what others think.  
 I feel the wind blowing through my hair.  
 I touch the earth with my hand.  
 I worry about the people in Darfur.  
 I cry about the death of those who I love.  
 I am kind and caring.  
 I understand my love for my family and friends is infinite.  
 I say I will always be there for those who need help.  
 I dream about the world living as one.  
 I try to be the best person I can be.  
 I hope that someday everybody will live as equals.  
 I am kind and caring.

*Jena Moch*

**Mama Afrika**

Where are you mama?  
 Where are you Afrika?  
 Where are you?  
 I call for you in the night  
 The dark night  
 Black as night  
 I call  
 Where are your breasts that fed?  
 your milk’s run dry  
 we drank like babes  
 our thirst never quenched  
 where are the hands that held?  
 strong hands  
 uniting, inviting  
 hands now tied  
 struggling  
 writhing in pain  
 your screams piercing  
 you have become the savage beast  
 tearing us apart like flesh from the bone  
 over the earth, through the seas, beneath your lair  
 devouring everything in your wake  
 leaving scraps to the AIDS of vultures, hyenas  
 Mama Afrika  
 you are dead  
 buried with the bones and ash  
 Man married you with dowry of gold and diamonds  
 now they have raped, murdered and pillaged  
 leaving behind a wounded beast  
 No longer mama  
 No longer Afrika  
 No longer

*Tarryn Cohen*

# Jews of Breakwater Convict Station in Historical Perspective

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Rebecca Feigelson

“...It naturally exists a fueling of discontent in the minds of prisoners of other religious denominations when they find that man who calls himself Jew (whether he truly is or not) receives superior privileges both in exemption from labour and increased food of better and more varied description, and lends to an increase of ‘so called’ Jews at our station...”

*HM Penfold, Office of the Superintendent Breakwater Convict Station, 17 March 1888  
PBW 14 no 209/1886*

“Man seems to be an incurably religious animal; and the greater his weakness the greater his need for the sustaining support of a religion. Prisoners are often encountered with a unique sense of helplessness and religion can act as anchor in their storm-tossed lives.”

*Kate Richards O’Hare (In Prison London and Seattle: University of Washington Press; 1923, p117*

The growing Jewish exodus from Eastern Europe combined with the discovery of diamonds and minerals in South Africa, resulted in a significant influx of Jews to the Cape Colony towards the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Involvement in illicit diamond buying and later the running of houses of ‘ill-fame’ resulted in the Jewish immigrants becoming synonymous with the growing criminal element. The impact of the criminal element was that a significant number of Jews ended up confined and sentenced to hard labour in the Breakwater prison. This was the first time the Colonial government was confronted with the hindrance of a Jewish minority group within the penal system. Through archival evidence the attitude of the Colonial Government towards Jews within the penal system can be assessed. The events that took place must be understood against the backdrop of a reformed labour system and the growing race and labour issues at large.

The prison system can be understood as an important social institution with a three fold purpose: being places of vengeance where the law breakers

are punished, safe places to segregate unpleasant and dangerous persons, and a place where reformation may be achieved. It can be claimed that penal problems have been systematically solved, not according to criminology and penology but rather according to economics. Whether a given country at a given time resorts to imprisonment with labour, fines, transportation, mutilation or capital punishment can be linked to factors of the labour market rather than humanitarian principles. If there is a scarcity of labour, it is uneconomical to execute the convicts rather than extracting valuable labour from them through prison work. Yet, if there is a large surplus of unemployed labour, demoralized by economic misery, prison will lose its effectiveness as a deterrent against crime unless the conditions can surpass the wretchedness of the slums outside the prison walls.<sup>1</sup> This dilemma was dealt with in the Cape colonial setting through the introduction of unproductive forms of labour (such as the crank and the treadmill) as punishment.<sup>2</sup>

The evolution of the prison system has been linked to the demands of the capitalist labour market, with the function of the prison being to supply and train labour.<sup>3</sup> This theory exemplified with strict implementation of pass laws at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Kimberley, in order to supply the mines with convict labour.<sup>4</sup> Where there is an excess of labour the penitentiary becomes an institute for destroying the work force but when the labour supply is restricted, convicts become useful employees. In the context of the Cape Colony this theory becomes useful as there was often shortage of free laborers. The employment of convict labour was at times the colonial Government’s only choice for the execution of much needed public works, such as the building of roads and harbors.

Punishment by deprivation of a fixed quantum of liberty, exactly proportional to the gravity of the crime committed, is peculiar to a capitalist society.<sup>5</sup> This underlying theory becomes the applicable issue when addressing the conflict regarding the Jewish work exemption; it was deemed unfair that the punishment in laboring hours was to be reduced on grounds of religion. H.M. Penfold, the superintendent of Breakwater, complained in 1888:

It is manifestly unjust that one section of the community should receive these privileges ... I can not think that it is the intention of the law that sentences two men to seven years penal service with hard labour, that one, because he calls

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himself a Jew - should be exempt from at least twenty days a year which the other man has to work...I would suggest that where these exemptions are allowed the time taken from the sentence and compiled at the expiry of their original sentence.<sup>6</sup>

The efficiency of punishment depends on its legitimacy.<sup>7</sup> This is a prominent feature when considering the use of convict labour in public places, where the public may view their toil - such as the building of the Breakwater in Cape Town:

“In the carrying out of punishment, short of death or perpetual imprisonment among communities that have to absorb and receive their liberated criminals, the reformation of the convict before his restoration to society is of paramount importance, both in the political and social point of view...The secondary punishment, being imprisonment with hard labour for the period proportional to the nature of the offence and the character of the offender, not only satisfies the ends of justice for the public good but if properly, humanly and consistently carried out, subserves also to the other end, the reformation of the offender.”<sup>8</sup>

From the start of the colonization in the Cape until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, prison labor was unknown in the colony. This may be linked to wide availability of slave labour at the time. When a felon was convicted, the focus of the punishment was physical pain or death through direct inflictions to the body. Prison was viewed as a place of waiting before the actual punishment occurred. Punishment was presented as a public spectacle and was usually cruel, yet not unusual for the times. Cruel and public punishment was commonly used to display the authority of the state throughout Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. It was common occurrence for brutal executions to be held in the center of town. This form of punishment was inherited by the British from their Dutch predecessors.

The rulers in both the first and second British occupation were most likely influenced by the European Enlightenment Movements of the time which rejected torture practices as they considered them inhumane and barbaric. In 1796 the English governor, Lord Macartney stated,

“Whereas it has been represented to us, that the practice of proceeding to torture against persons suspected of crimes, by breaking upon the wheel and other barbarous modes of execution, prevails in the said settlement, it is our will and pleasure that you should wholly abolish these forms of punishment, and provide other more lenient and equitable proceedings...”<sup>9</sup>

The need for new forms of punishment was also exacerbated by the notion that deportation to other British colonies was now unacceptable, as other

colonies, such as Australia, did not want to accept convicts from the Cape. The abolition of slavery in 1834 led to mass emancipations of slaves in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, resulting in both an increase in convicted felons and an acute labour shortage. The prison population grew from 861 in 1828 to 4,242 in 1842.<sup>10</sup> There were some forms of convict labour, but the system was highly unorganized and lacked structure. For example, in Cape Town prisoners were employed as street cleaners, gardeners in the Government Gardens, and even assistant police officers and overseers of other convicts. The first work house modeled along the lines of those of England was established in Cape Town in 1827 but was used mainly for female offenders. These women were initially assigned the task of weaving coconut matting but in 1845 a switch to laundering occurred as it was determined to be more lucrative.<sup>11</sup> The demise of the old system of punishment by torture or death resulted in a gap in the penal system. The newly appointed Colonial Secretary, John Montagu, devised an organized system of convict labour as means of filling the gap. His system placed equal benefits on both the ends and the means of the punishment of convicts through labor.<sup>12</sup>

Montagu was a passionate advocate of reformation through labour. The expanding economy of the Cape Colony, with its need for efficient labour resulted in the Government accepting Montagu's ideas of reformation through useful labour. His plans were soon in action through legislation; the 1844 ordinance *For the Discipline and Safe Custody of the Convicts Employed on the Public Roads* being one of several. The Ordinance dictated that convicts sentenced to hard labour for longer than three months in the scattered gaols were to be consolidated and placed in one of three convict stations where they would begin the task of building hard roads around the Cape. Initially these stations were located in Tygerberg, to build the roads from the Cape Flats to Stellenbosch; in Cradockskloof, near George, to build the mountain passes into the interior; and in Howisonspoor situated in proximity to Grahamstown. Simultaneously, the existing convict stations, such as Robben Island, were reorganized to be in line with new policies.<sup>13</sup>

Montagu is responsible for systematically organizing the convict labour system in the Cape. He divided the convicts into separate classes, not based on race or even criminal conviction, but reputation. Those criminals with bad reputations for being violent or unruly or those, whose particular sentences required it (about 10%), were put into the chain gangs. A series of graded rewards were laid down for good conduct with the aim of encouraging the convicts. These rewards included permission to correspond through letters (subject to inspection), visitation privileges, small allowances of tobacco, and others. Montagu proclaimed that out of every 100 men, the man who tried the hardest at his daily labor should receive six shillings per month to be paid out on completion of sentence.

Good discipline was an essential factor for running

the convict road camps as the men were mostly allowed to work without physical restraints and any violent outbreak could be severely dangerous. It was determined that the six shilling reward system was conducive for promoting good discipline - if a convict committed a major breach of the rules, than his entire savings were forfeited.

Montagu developed records on every prisoner, much in the manner of modern social welfare officers. Each year, a comprehensive report was prepared by superintendents, with the inputs of visiting magistrates, medical officers and religious leader. In this way it was possible for Montagu to keep a close eye on the convict labour system and its progress.

The hours of work ranged from nine to ten hours, depending on the season. At the end of the working day, convicts were required to attend classes teaching reading, writing and spelling. The results of this system of education were astonishing: "Out of 464 who were sent to the station, only 18 could spell or read on arrival... so that the readers and spellers have increased from 18 to 380 out of a total 464 convicts in 12 months."

The system of monetary reward extended to progress in education and four pupils in every 100 were awarded 6 shillings per month for showing the greatest improvement. To encourage reading during non-working hours, Montagu went to the extent of establishing small libraries at the larger convict stations.

Montagu's systems continued in the Cape after his departure in 1852, but his ideals, especially those regarding merit based on behavior rather than race, were not held up in a country growing in racial hierarchies. Prisoners sentenced to hard labour continued to be employed in public works but the emphasis shifted from the building of the hard roads and mountain passes to harbor works - with the construction of the Breakwater in Cape Town the most prominent activity.<sup>14</sup> The establishment of Breakwater Convict station in 1859 was an essential element for the execution of the Harbour Board's Breakwater program and was the largest convict station for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Initially, the station held prisoners of all races, although there was a policy of physical racial segregation.

The later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century has been characterized as a low point in prison administration, and there was a general *laissez faire* attitude with regards to the running of convict stations, contrasting with the times of Montagu. Prison regulations were badly drafted and poorly distributed during this time and the stations ran according to "station custom", often amounting to compromises between prisoners and officials rather than strict discipline. It was known by prisoners that through protest, policies could be changed. There are records of prisoners going on strikes as a form of resistance against bad conditions, such as stale bread. The influx of IDB prisoners being "men of intelligence and education" may have contributed to the spirit of defiance and class consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

Major changes were also taking place in South

Africa affecting the entire country. The successful mining which began in 1871 attracted many immigrants. A result was a significant increase in white criminals, many convicted for crimes surrounding illicit diamond dealing. As the mining industry progressed, the need for labour was further recognized. The pivot of change was in Kimberley, as it was the centre for mining. It seemed a natural step to utilize the supply of convict labour in the mines. Since its introduction, the mining industry had worked on a colour bar system. The lack of racial segregation involved in convict labour system was unfitting for the mine work. The Kimberley Prison became the first prison in the Cape to be legally segregated along racial lines. De Beers Mining Company was also the first non-state company to employ convicts on a regular basis, greatly capitalizing with the supply of cheap labour.<sup>16</sup> De Beers Mining Company established a convict station in 1884 in order to utilize labour more effectively. It is has been pointed out that there as little difference between the mining compound and the convict station in Kimberley - all were part of the system of labour control and oppression. In 1905, the majority of the black convicts in Breakwater were transferred to De Beers Convict Station in Kimberley in order to work on the mines.<sup>17</sup>

One of the many results of the changing system was that whites sentenced to hard labour in Kimberley were not sent to the Kimberley prison, but were transported by train to Breakwater convict station in Cape Town. Florence Bernault claims that the convicts sent from Kimberley for the crime of Illicit Diamond Buying (IDB) seemed to be "refined, intelligent and rich".<sup>18</sup> These criminals were mostly Jewish and this may have created contentions amongst the white convicts at Breakwater. A record of incoming criminals from Kimberley for the crime of IDB on 4 June 1886 reflects the preponderance of Jewish names: Nicholas Shiplich, Frank Schweder, Otto Schaeffer, Charles Siebler, Charles Marcus, Abraham Barnett, Allen Goldenstein. This is also in evidence in the following table of Breakwater convicts undergoing terms of imprisonment for IDB in 1886:<sup>19</sup>

By 1890, the Breakwater Prison held the highest majority of white prisoners when compared to all the other convict stations of the colony. Although it was the industrial centre for penal labor, it also held the reputation amongst prisoners as being 'comfortable'.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Jewish Community of the Cape Colony**

By 1849, the affairs of the Cape Town Jewish community had made sufficient progress to warrant the appointment of a minister. The third Minister to be appointed to lead the Cape Town Hebrew congregation was Rev. Abraham Fredrick Ornstein, who arrived from London in 1882.<sup>21</sup> It was under his leadership that significant changes occurred with regards to the Jews in Breakwater prison.

The mineral discoveries in South Africa combined with the deteriorating situation of the Eastern



NUMBER	NAME	Date of Conviction	Offence	Sentence
295	Wolf Rosendhal	13 <sup>th</sup> Oct 1881	IDB	7 years hard labour
296	Solomon Rosendhal	13 <sup>th</sup> Oct 1881	IDB	7 years hard labour
314	Saul Goodman	26 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1882	IDB	5yrs + E100 or 3/12 added
318	Amos Otto	9 <sup>th</sup> April 1882	IDB	9 yrs
322	William Steinman	16 <sup>th</sup> April 1882	IDB	8 yrs
388	Israel Cohen	15 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1885	IDB	7yrs + 3/12 add
2606	Elias Blumenthal	14 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1885	IDB	7yrs + E100 or 6/12 added
2609	David Cohen	25 March 1885	IDB	7+ E75 or 3/12 added
2608	William Herschal	21 Feb 1885	IDB	4 yr + E75 or 3/12 add
2671	Thomas Roshein	12 Dec 1885	IDB	3yr+ 3/12

European Jewry led to a significant number of Jewish emigrants to the Cape Colony. The arrival of the East-European Jews, usually in state of destitution, unable to speak English or Dutch, perpetuated attitudes of xenophobia and antisemitism.

The struggle to make a living was clearly overwhelming for many immigrants, and prompted some to engage in criminal activity. Most of the crimes committed by Jews involved illegal money-making ventures - the sale of stolen goods, trading without licenses, and fraud in the form of dishonoring cheques. The inspector of the Standard Bank on Plein Street commented that Jews were "an indigent lot, their cheques frequently dishonored..." Prostitution and the keeping of brothels and gambling houses were also fairly common among the indigent Jews of Cape Town. The imbalance of the sex ratio allowed for a growth in prostitution as an economic venture.<sup>22</sup> The growing Jewish stereotype may have also been due to Jewish involvement in the business of diamonds, which was often somewhat crooked. Comments Shain, "If Africans were labeled diamond thieves by mine owners...the Jews were commonly associated with illicit diamond buying."<sup>23</sup> Those who entered a life of crime were clearly desirous of rising rapidly from rags to riches.

*The SA Jewish Chronicle* in 1903 argued that it was the duty of Jews to visit the brethren in Breakwater because of the Jewish duty to visit the sick: "Those suffering of body at hospital are regularly visited and their lives thereby brightened. Is it too much to ask that those of our brethren who are diseased of mind and consequently suffering from the criminal outcome of such illness should receive little consideration...?"

This extract reveals that the Jewish community of the Cape did not see the criminals of Breakwater as outsiders to their community and had an ongoing relationship with them.<sup>24</sup> The Jewish Philanthropic Society papers<sup>25</sup> contain a letter from a convict 'Marcus', who seems to be one of the first Jewish prisoners in Breakwater and who, through insolent behavior as well as connections to the broader Jewish community, may have been responsible for instigating policy change regarding the Jews and labor:

**Breakwater Convict Station  
Cape Town 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1903  
Name of Convict: B. Marcus  
Number (with initial letter) B6219**

Dear Sir

I write to ask you a kindness in regards to the Jewish novel books which you promised to send to the convict station what few are up here as all been read by the Jewish prisoners. I thank you very much to send some up as there is most of them can not read English we are all longing to see you. I beg to remain your humble servant  
Barnet Marcus

Gwynne Schrire, through her close examination of the minute books, discovered that the Philanthropic Society agreed to purchase suitable books for the prisoners. Marcus seems to have been well known in prison circles. There is a report, dated 23 February 1865, about the insolent behavior of prisoner 'Marcus', whose convict number shows him to be the same man who would ask for the Yiddish books forty years later.

"..Yesterday evening convict G6219 "Marcus" came to me and stated that he was unwilling to work on Saturday as it was his Sabbath, but that he was willing to work on Sunday as he did not believe in the Christian Sabbath - this he said in the most impudent manner. I told him that I had no power to alter the regulations and that he should think over it until this morning. ...this morning when while the gang was moving off to work... 'Marcus' was brought over as he refused to work. Marcus said that the report was true and that he would not go to work this morning as it was his Sabbath day and he could not consequently work on it. I then told him that if he refused to go to his work, I would have to place him in confinement, and report him to the government, he was quite agreeable to this and still refused to go to work. Convict 'Marcus' has been confined at this station for the last 15 months during which period he has been regularly visited by his rabbi once a week, but during the period he has never spoken to me on the subject, which leads me to believe it has been other convicts which have advised him that it is fine conduct."<sup>26</sup>

The response to this letter is very telling as it reflects the official policies towards convicted Jews in 1865:<sup>27</sup>

**“Marcus”:  
Breakwater Convict Station  
Feb 11<sup>th</sup> 1865**

I am in the opinion that Jews should not be permitted to remain away from work on Saturdays for although a willing liberty of conscious, the Government can not provide for the peculiarities of every kind of faith. Yet the Roman Catholics are nightly visited by the services of a priest and the Jews by a rabbi.

The Government rules in all its establishment are framed with regard to the requirements of Christianity thus all Sundays, good Friday, Christmas day are holiday. Therefore all Jews and other non-Christians if under the rules of government must perform their religious exercise on those days.

Jews in the army and navy are required to due their duties on Saturday therefore Jews in convict station is to be required to due their duties. If the exception were to be made for Jews than the Malays with equal rights could also require the treatment on their holy days. With regard to the conscious of any individual in such matters I remark that Roman Catholic overseers and constables are on duty at the Church of England service, the RC authority maintaining that in so doing the conscious of the individual on duty is not offended, a Jew on duty on Saturday is in a similar position. So long as a Jew keeps one day holy, it calls on a matter of fact the Sabbath is not exactly the same with regard to beginning and end in any two longitudes. This would equally apply to a Christian in a Mohammedan country.

If it is to be argued that Roman Catholic officers of convict stations and men in army and civil service need not take employment under government unless they please so also ‘Marcus’ (who refused to work on Saturday) was not forced to come to the convict station for he did things which he knew, if discovered, would send him there. He should have thought of the difficulty of keeping the seventh day holy before he made himself amenable to the laws...

The letter refuses the request of the Jewish prisoner ‘Marcus’, thus setting a policy towards Jewish prisoners that would remain unchanged for the next twenty-three years.

Marcus, however, continued his campaign as is shown through a series of letters from 1878 from the London Committee of the Jewish Board of Deputies signed by its President, Joseph M. Montefiore; probably through the Philanthropic Society or Rev Ornstein. The Cape Town solicitor, Louis Emanuel, sent to the Breakwater superintendent copies of previous correspondence dealing with Jews in Convict Labor in order to create a persuasive case for the rights of Jewish convicts to be exempt from work

on their Sabbath, as was the case in England.

**London Committee of the Deputies of the  
British Jews  
23<sup>rd</sup> May 1878  
To the Secretary of State for the Home  
Department,**

Sir,

I am directed by the board to address upon the subject of No 25 of the general rules for the governance of prisoners, recently issued under the authority of the Prison Act, 1877.

This rule provides that ‘No prisoner who is a Jew shall be compelled to labour on his Sabbath’ ...

This board having in 1856 addressed Sir George Grey, one of your predecessors in office, upon the subject, received a reply in the following terms:

...Sir,

With reference to your letter of the 25<sup>th</sup> of September, I am ... pleased to authorize the governors of the various government prisons to grant permission to convicts of the Jewish persuasion to abstain from work on their Sabbath and Religious festivals on their making application to them for that indulgence.... ....

... I am directed by the board to ask that you will be so good as to take into your consideration ... of amending the rule in question, so as to make it in terms apply to ‘Jewish festivals’ as well as the Jewish Sabbath; or if this is impracticable of inconvenient, than that you will consider the expediency of issuing instructions so the governors of several prisons that the word ‘Sabbath’ in the rule in question is intended to include several Jewish festivals (to which I will pleased to furnish you with a list if so required) and that such interpretations be uniformly acted upon...

Joseph M. Montefiore,  
President

The following reply was received by Montefiore from the Home Secretary:

**23<sup>rd</sup> August 1878**

Sir,

Referring to your letter of the 18<sup>th</sup> and previous correspondence, I am directed by Secretary Cross to acquaint you that instructions have been issued to the Prison Commissioners that Jewish

Prisoners are:

- 1) To be exempted from work on their holy days
- 2) To be discharged on the day previous to the Sabbath - or holiday on the event of their sentence expiring on the Sabbath or holiday
- 3) Notice of death of a Jewish prisoner is to be sent to a Jewish Clergyman who attends such prison as well as to his friends.

**Office of the Chief Rabbi**

...The following are faculties which have been granted by home office to the Jewish prisoners confined in Portsmouth Convict establishment and similar prisons. They are exempt from labour on Saturday and all Jewish festivals.

Arrangements are to be made by which a Jewish minister or other competent for the purpose attends at the prison for one hour or more on Saturdays, Sundays and Jewish Festivals with the view of holding divine service and giving prisoners religious instruction. On Passover they are to be supplied with Passover cakes

...I believe that these concessions will contribute to the moral improvement and spiritual welfare of the convicts.

Yours faithfully  
H. Adler  
Chief Rabbi of London<sup>28</sup>

In 1887, the question of observance of the Jewish Sabbath for convicts of Breakwater was raised in the House of Assembly by a Mr. Innes, who asked attorney-general Sir Thomas Upington whether Jewish prisoners might be allowed to observe their Sabbath in accordance to their faith. He had been assured by Rev. Ornstein that it would be quite impossible for anyone to obtain, under false pretences, two days of rest rather than one. (This proved to be a false assurance as later letters from the superintendent, H M Penfold, reflect concern for the growing corruption.) The Attorney-General admitted in reply that in England the prison regulations allow for the observance of Jewish festivals. He too had received a letter from the Cape Town Rabbi, covering communication from the Chief Rabbi in London.

**London Committee of Deputies of the British Jews  
London, March 25<sup>th</sup> 1887**

I may add that in taking action indicated in this correspondence, this board felt that although the number of Jewish prisoners in this country is always small it is not right that the ignominy of their position should be aggravated by the denial of religious observances which are not only in comfort to one who is really of a contrite spirit

but also serves as a most useful in the difficult task reclaiming from crime and bringing light into a darkened heart.

Sir Upington promised to examine the matter further. The presence of Jewish MP's in the House of Assembly like George G. Woolf and Barnett Isaac Barnato might have been of some assistance.<sup>29</sup> But it was no use. The reply from the Attorney Generals office the following year was negative.

**Attorney General Office  
Cape Town  
22<sup>nd</sup> August 1888**

Jewish Privileges

Sir,

With reference to your letter... requesting that Jewish Prisoners may be allowed to abstain from work on the Sabbath day and receive special food on holy days, I am directed by attorney general to acquaint that he is unable to vary the decisions previously arrived at on this subject, that is to say exempt Jewish prisoners from work and allow them to receive special food on certain holy days...

Little good can be done by keeping the men in barracks doing nothing and as he is informed by the police authorities the 'Jewish places of business are kept open on Saturdays almost without exception' he thinks that there can be no ground for feeling that any violence done to the moral feelings of Jewish Convicts performing coerced labor on that day at the same time ...on Saturday afternoons...

Your obedient servant  
Secretary to the law department

A record from 1886 shows the makeup of the prisoners of Breakwater according to religious belief: Jewish 28, Episcopalian 256, Church Reformed 148, Scotch Protestant 6, Roman Catholic 72, German Lutheran 26, Hindu/Mohammedans 9, Non believers 4, Total 549.<sup>30</sup>

Although *official* policy reflects that Jews were not to be granted any special treatment on religious grounds the "station policy" of Breakwater seems to differ. Jews were granted special treatment during the holy days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The record books of 1886 show the complaints from the new superintendent, H M Penfold, regarding this issue. Penfold, being a reasonable man, complains of inconvenience, corruption, unfairness and tension between prisoners that resulted from the allowance of special treatment for Jews. He also suggests a remedy, in that for every day of labour missed, that same time will be added on at the end of the sentence.

Sir

...During the time I have had charge of this convict station, i.e. from the first April 1886 the Jewish prisoners have always had 8 clear days holiday, from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of April inclusive; during said holidays they were allowed coffee, sugar, meat, soup fish, Passover cakes and fruit. During that time it was necessary to have special sentries and much dissatisfaction was expressed and felt by other by other prisoners of other religions.

I find on enquiry that indulgences have only been permitted within the last three years. The practice of allowing prisoners to receive food from outside the prison is liable to many abuses, and it has been abused here, for in many instances forbidden articles have been found secreted in what was proposed to be food required for the observance of the religious rites, such as tobacco, cigars, sweets, money, and newspapers.

With all due respect for the Rev Mr Ornstein, I would like some proof of his statement that the privileges asked for are allowed in the other parts of the civilized world that he names. It is becoming more widely known that the Jewish prisoners do receive more indulgences than professing other faiths; that had in itself lead to abuse for I have no means of ascertaining whether a man be Jew or not, and should these privileges be contained, I have no doubt the Jews will receive a large accession of co-religionists in the gaols and prisons of this colony...

It is manifestly unjust that one section of the community should receive these privileges to the detriment of the rest. We have here prisoners of many dominations, they also have various feasts which should be entitled to the same respect in observance as those as the Jews and I can not think that it is the intention of the law that sentences two men to 7 years penal service with hard labour, that one, because he calls himself a

Jew - should be exempt from at least 20 days a year which the other man has to work.

I would suggest that where these exemptions are allowed the time taken from the sentence and compiled at the expiry of their original sentence. We may have less trouble with these so called religious scruples, for it simply means that for a certain number of days a number of men have kept in idleness, their only pastime to over feed themselves.

Should the Government see fit to grant these privileges I would most respectfully urge that it should be done on the following conditions:

Firstly, the minimum of time for idleness

Secondly, that food only in proportion to requirements of men in idleness be allowed (as I maintain that a convict prison is not the place for feasting)

Thirdly, that convicts should have the option of observing these festivals or not, he being given to understand that every day spent in idleness be made up to the government at the expiry of the original sentence.

In conclusion, in common justice of the prisoners of other denominations, that the same number of holidays on the same conditions, be accorded, where in the eyes of the law, all prisoners are equal...

M. Penfold<sup>31</sup>

A later record reflects that the remedy was taken up as several of the Jewish names have additional time included to their sentence. This is presumably the result of time taken for religious observances.

It is reflected through the record books that Rev. Ornstein was responsible for arranging religious services on the Holy days at Breakwater, although the request had to be first issued to the Attorney Generals office.

Number	Name	Date of Conviction	Offence	Sentence
295	Wolf Rosendhal	13 <sup>th</sup> Oct 1882	IDB	7yrs Hard Labour
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314	Saul Goodman	26 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1882	IDB	5yrs + E100 or 3/12 added
318	Amos Otto	9 <sup>th</sup> April 1882	IDB	9 yrs
322	William Stemman	16 <sup>th</sup> April 1882	IBD	8yrs
388	Israel Cohen	15 <sup>th</sup> Jan 1885	IBD	7yrs+ 3/12 add
2606	Elias Blumenthal	14 <sup>th</sup> Feb 1885	IBD	7yrs+ E100 or 6/12 added
2609	David Cohen	25 March 1885	IBD	7+ E75 or 3/12 added
2608	William Herschal	21 Feb 1885	IBD	4 yr + E75 or 3/12 add
2671	Thomas Roshein	12 Dec 1885	IBD	3yr+ 3/12
3073	Nicholas Steipileh	18 June 1885	I DB+ assault	8 + 9/12

*Office of Superintendent Breakwater Convict Station 9<sup>th</sup> May 1887<sup>32</sup>*

To Captain Penfold:

Sir,

Will you kindly give instructions for the Jewish Prisoners to assemble on Sunday at 3 o'clock pm for the purpose of holyday services? Will you let me know as I wish to make arrangements if you will grant permission to the Jewish Prisoners to be supplied with special food during the Passover Holiday, as has been done in the former years? Passover commences on Monday the 26<sup>th</sup>

Faithfully yours  
Rev. A Ornstein<sup>33</sup>

**Memorandum from the Cape Town Hebrew congregation to the Attorney General- 1888**

...Request for permission to hold religious services in the Breakwater convict station on the Jewish high holidays for the Jewish convicts...<sup>34</sup>

It can be reasonably assumed that these requests were granted as the letters from Ornstein imply that the practice has been done in former years.

Breakwater prison continued to be the hub of the convict labour program of the Cape, utilizing the work of convicts from all religious dominations, until its transformation into a juvenile prison in 1907. In 1923, Breakwater was once again transformed, this time into a hostel for black contract workers. Today, where Breakwater convict station once was, a lodge exists, grounds for the business school of the University of Cape Town and a national monument.<sup>35</sup>

**Conclusion**

The changing nature of the rights of Jewish convicts was the result of continual persuasion and the influence of the growing Jewish community of the Cape. In an attempt to create a balance between equality amongst prisoners and religious freedom, Superintendent Penfold designed a system that would achieve this through adding on additional labour time to compensate for time lost due to religious observances.

It is still unclear whether the Jews in Breakwater were truly pious or just simply seeking upward mobility in their positions as convicts. The attitude of Penfold, as displayed through his writings in the record books, denotes that it was his impression that the convicts were simply playing 'the Jewish card' to gain the special treatment. The counter argument remains that "*Convicts are, as a rule, deeply and passionately religious because they need religion more than other people.*"<sup>36</sup> It is the author's opinion that the motives of the Jews in question were irrelevant as religious freedom is a fundamental human right and should be extended to all individuals, whether they are convicts or not.

**NOTES**

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- 7 M Ignatieff *A Just Measure of Punishment* 1978 found in *Penal System of Colonial Natal*, p14
- 8 John Montagu, Accounts and Papers, 1850, p35 found in TM Corry's *Prison Labour in South Africa* p15.
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- 21 Israel Abrahams, *The Birth of a Community*, Cape Town, 1955
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- 24 Gwynne Schire, 'How Cape Town Jewry Cared for its Sick Poor a Century Ago', *Jewish Affairs*, Winter 2001, p6
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- 30 PBW 14
- 31 Ibid.
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- 33 Ibid.
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- 35 Willem Steenkamp, *Poor Mans Bioscope*, Howard Timmins Publishers, 1979, p50
- 36 Kate Richards O'Hare *In Prison* pg 128

# ISAAC OCHBERG AND SHOLEM SCHWARTZBARD: THE CAPE TOWN CONNECTION TO THE POGROMS IN THE UKRAINE.

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Veronica Belling

A tragic by-product of the Civil War that broke out in Russia after the October Revolution of 1917 were the numerous pogroms that occurred. It has been estimated that as many as 160 000 Jews died in the Ukraine in the years 1919-1921. During this period the Ukraine was occupied at different times by various shades of Ukrainian nationalists, anarchist peasant bands, and by the Red and White armies. All the armies concerned were responsible for pogroms.<sup>1</sup>

Two archival collections in the Jewish Studies Archives at the University of Cape Town are connected to these pogroms. One, which is housed at Oranjia, the Cape Town Jewish Orphanage, relates to the Ochberg Orphan emigration scheme.<sup>2</sup> The second is the collection of Sholem Schwartzbard, who assassinated the Ukrainian Nationalist leader, Simon Petlyura, in Paris in 1926 and who died in Cape Town in 1938 [See Schmidt, M, 'A Makhnovist in Africa: Sholem Schwartzbard', *Jewish Affairs*, Vol. 59, No.4, 2004 – Ed.]. This collection was assembled by Hilda Purwitsky.<sup>3</sup> Both Isaac Ochberg and Sholem Schwartzbard were born in the Ukraine. Both displayed great courage and possessed a keen sense of justice and self sacrifice. Coincidentally, both died in their fifties within three months of one another.

Isaac Ochberg, the older of the two, was born in 1878 in the town of Uman. Although he personally never experienced a pogrom, the Jews in Uman lived in constant fear of attack. In 1895 Isaac, then only 17, joined his father Aaron in Cape Town, where he had immigrated in 1893. Here, despite initial hardships, he soon demonstrated the entrepreneurial skill and daring which eventually made him one of the richest men in South Africa. His entrepreneurial enterprises included property speculation, building projects, salvaging shipwrecks, and scrap metal dealings. He

also played a very active role in communal affairs, becoming South African Jewry's leading philanthropist and serving as an Executive member of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies. Yet Ochberg never forget his roots in the Ukraine, and his early struggles made him empathise with the disadvantaged and particularly with children.<sup>4</sup>

In 1921, the majority of the Jewish community in South Africa was made up of immigrants from Eastern Europe, predominantly from Lithuania and White Russia. Between 1880 and 1911 the community grew from approximately 4 000 Jews of mainly English and German origin to 46 926 Jews of predominantly Eastern European origin.<sup>5</sup> Whilst fundraising for pogrom victims was customary, the idea of actually bringing Ukrainian Jewish children to South Africa was quite revolutionary. Ochberg, the President of Oranjia from 1916, was the moving force behind the scheme. It was his report to the committee in 1920 about an estimated 300 000 Jewish children left destitute as a result of war and pogroms, that led the Cape Jewish Orphanage to



Sholem Schwartzbard in the French military during World War I.

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agree to bring some of them to South Africa. Ochberg obtained the support of the Federation of Ukrainian Jews in London, who agreed to bring the orphans from the Ukraine to London, if the Cape Jewish Orphanage would provide transport from England to South Africa. A team of canvassers led by Ochberg himself traveled the length and breadth of South Africa appealing for financial support and for offers of adoption. Permission to bring the children to South Africa, was obtained from the Minister of the Interior, Patrick Duncan, and the Prime Minister, Jan Christiaan Smuts was persuaded "to act on a pound for pound principal in connection with the Pogrom Orphan Fund." It was also agreed that Ochberg himself would make the journey to the Ukraine to collect the children.<sup>6</sup>

Support for the scheme, however, was not unequivocal. The economic recession which followed in the wake of World War I had led to an increase in anti-alien agitation, which made many fear that the arrival of large numbers of Jewish orphans would only result in an increase of antisemitism.<sup>7</sup> Others opposed the scheme on the grounds that the children would lose their Judaism in South Africa.<sup>8</sup> It was also felt that with the Balfour Declaration, Palestine was the appropriate place to transfer refugee Jewish children.<sup>9</sup>

On 18 March 1921 Ochberg, at his own expense, set sail for London. Here he was given permission to enter Russia under the aegis of the great humanitarian, Dr Frijdtof Nansen. On 18 May, he set sail for Warsaw. He then spent the months of June and July travelling by truck or by wagon, from one village to the other, picking up destitute children. These were deposited at special depots in the cities of Minsk, Pinsk, Vladivostok, Stanislavov, Brest-Litovsk and Warsaw, where he had people waiting to care for them. He then had to face the agonising prospect of choosing amongst them. According to the stipulations of the South African government, the children had to be in good health and had to display some degree of intelligence. Ochberg also would not break up a family. If one of the children did not fit the criteria, he would leave all of them.<sup>10</sup>

Ochberg originally brought 233 orphans to Warsaw. 37 of them, however, ran away and others took ill, so that eventually only 167 were taken to London.<sup>11</sup> The archives contain the original emigration papers of the children issued in Warsaw, and their travel papers together with their passport photos. The emigration papers contain the childrens' names, their towns of origin, where and in what condition they were found, and information as to the fate of their families. The most common cause of the death of the parents, if they survived the pogroms, was typhus and starvation. Some fathers were recorded as having been killed in the 1914-1918 war. Occasionally the father had already emigrated and had died in America or Argentina. (I found one case where the parents were found eating grass and potato peels, having no means to earn a living, whilst the children were starving). The majority of the children ranged between 5 and 12 years of age, although there

were also a few as old as nineteen. The horrors of the children's experiences can only be hinted at in the emigration papers. Hirsch Stillerman, whose whole family was murdered by bandits, reported that they demanded that he thrust out the eyes of his nine-year-old sister. When he refused, the bandits severed his left hand and murdered his sister in front of him.<sup>12</sup>

From Warsaw, Ochberg took the children to Danzig, where he had chartered a boat to take them to London. There the children were placed in temporary shelter and clothed and taken care of by Jewish institutions. On 2 September, they set sail on the *Edinburgh Castle* for South Africa. The reminiscences of the orphans tell of their trepidation on being taken to Africa. Rumours abounded that they would be thrown into the sea, sold into slavery, or that they would be eaten by lions on arrival. It was only their faith in "Daddy Ochberg," as they called him, and to whom they became extremely attached, that gave them courage. Whilst Ochberg and his wife, who had met him in London, travelled First Class, double bunks were fitted for the children in Steerage. The orphans further recall that Ochberg spent all his time with them. He delighted in surprising them with small treats such as biscuits or chocolate hidden under their pillows.<sup>13</sup> In the words of Becky Greenberg: "Isaac was a honey, he was like a father to us. There was no difference from one child to another, every child was a darling, everyone was lovely and everyone he patted. He was just wonderful."<sup>14</sup>

In Cape Town harbour they were greeted by a tumultuous cheering crowd. Just over half of the children were accommodated at Oranjia in Cape Town, while 78 were dispatched by rail to the orphanage in Johannesburg. Twenty of the children brought to Cape Town were adopted. In 1922 Ochberg returned to the Ukraine as a representative of two Jewish relief organisations, on whose behalf he distributed food, clothing and medical supplies.

The story of the Ochberg orphans has turned out to be one of the great success stories of South African Jewry. There can be no doubt that bringing the children to South Africa, not only saved their lives but gave them opportunities that they would never have had, had they been left in the Ukraine, or even taken to Palestine. In the words of Fanny Lockitch, "He really snatched us from the jaws of death you can say, because if we hadn't died then of famine and disease, we would have perished twenty years later in the gas chambers."

Whilst the Ochberg archive is a living archive, which is still frequently consulted today by the offspring of the orphans, the Schwartzbard collection represents an event which has been buried in history. This collection is truly unique as the only other collection about Schwartzbard is to be found today at the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research in New York. Although considerably smaller than the Yivo collection, it documents a little known episode in Schwartzbard's life, and provides a very personal glimpse into the soul of a man who was prepared to risk his own life to avenge the wrongs perpetrated

against the Jewish people.

Sholem Schwartzbard was born in 1886 in Balta in the Ukraine, an area which was also the site of terrible pogroms. Schwartzbard lived through the pogroms of 1905 and was active in organising Jewish self-defence units. In 1906, he was forced to flee Russia because of his revolutionary activity. He ultimately settled in Paris, where he worked as a watchmaker. When the First World War broke out in 1914, Schwartzbard joined the French army as a volunteer and was awarded a Croix de Guerre. With the outbreak of the civil unrest in 1919, he went to join the Red Army in their fight against the counter-revolutionary White Russians. Thus Schwartzbard actually witnessed the horrors of these barbaric pogroms, and particularly the pogrom at Proskurov, where in the space of three hours 2000 unresisting Jewish people were massacred in cold blood.<sup>15</sup> Fifteen of Schwartzbard's own relatives were killed in these pogroms. When he returned to Paris, he could not erase these scenes from his mind. Six years later, when he became aware that Simon Petlyura, the Ukrainian leader, was living in exile in Paris, he planned his assassination. He first identified him from a Ukrainian postage stamp that appeared in the Larousse encyclopaedia. Later, he saw his picture in a Ukrainian journal that was being published in Paris. On 26 May 1926, Schwartzbard waited outside the restaurant on the Rue Racine where Petlyura regularly took his lunch. There he waylaid him and shot and killed him in broad daylight, thereafter waiting for the police to arrest him. When questioned as to why he had acted the way he did, his answer was simple: "I am a Jew!"

The incident caused a worldwide sensation. At the ensuing trial in November 1927, Schwartzbard was acquitted thanks to the brilliant defence of his lawyer, Henri Torres, and also to the support of world opinion and of eminent personalities such as Henri Barbusse, Maxim Gorky, Romain Rolland, Albert Einstein and Leon Blum. In fact, the tables were turned and Petlyura and his armies were condemned. Schwartzbard was acclaimed a hero. After his acquittal, Schwartzbard devoted himself to Jewish cultural work. In 1929, he was employed by the Yivo, the Yiddish Scientific Institute in Vilna, to initiate a branch in Paris. In 1933-1934 he went on a lecture tour of the United States and was given a hero's reception.

Schwartzbard first arrived in Johannesburg in September 1937 on a mission on behalf of the Yivo, to publicise the recently published Universal Encyclopaedia in Yiddish, the *Algemeyne Entsiklopedye*, three volumes of which had already appeared. In 1937, when the very existence of the Jewish people was being threatened by the rise of Hitler's regime in Germany, the publication of an encyclopaedia in Yiddish was an act of cultural defiance. The publicity leaflets characterise it as "The symbol of a nation's will to live." At a time when ten million Yiddish speakers existed, another seventeen volumes were envisaged.

At the beginning of February 1938, Schwartzbard

came to Cape Town. There he met Hilda Purwitsky, a teacher and journalist, who were on the Cape Town committee of the Yiddish Encyclopaedia, and who was assigned to act as his secretary. A very unusual woman, Hilda and Schwartzbard were in many ways kindred spirits, fearless adventurers who were prepared to risk all for their high ideals. They formed a close friendship. Barely three weeks later, on 3 March, Schwartzbard died suddenly of a heart attack at Hilda's cottage in Camps Bay. It was Hilda who assembled this documentary collection after his death, and it is in fact as much a testimony to her own life as to Schwartzbard's.

Born in Lithuania, Hilda Purwitsky was just a year old when she arrived in South Africa with her parents in 1902. Her father was a blacksmith, according to Hilda, the only Jewish blacksmith in Cape Town. Despite her poor immigrant background, Hilda managed to train as a teacher, subsequently obtaining a matric and a degree from the University of Cape Town. Hilda's teaching career is intrinsically bound up with the education of the Eastern European immigrant children, who arrived in South Africa unable to speak English and unversed in Western manners. Together with her great friend and well known Cape Town educationalist, Rosa Van Gelderen, they ran the Central Girls' School, the successor to the Hebrew Government School, where Rosa was the principal. It was at the Central Girls' School that Ochberg's orphans were educated. Hilda also organised evening classes to teach English to the parents of immigrant children.<sup>16</sup> Schwartzbard visited the school and spoke to a gathering of 200 children.

Schwartzbard's mission to enlist subscriptions to the Yiddish Encyclopaedia in South Africa was not an easy task. Although the first and second generation Eastern European immigrants in South Africa spoke Yiddish, they were not necessarily literate in it. Hilda herself, although she spoke fluently, could not read or write in Yiddish letters, and all her Yiddish writings in the archive are in English transliteration. In Johannesburg, where the Jewish population was larger, Schwartzbard had fared better. Ironically it was Schwartzbard's sudden death which subsequently enlisted the support of Cape Town Jewry for the encyclopaedia.

One of the most important contributions of this collection is the very personal glimpse it provides into the nature of Sholem Schwartzbard. In Hilda's words, "He was a child who bore greatness as a mantle round his strong shoulders – he was a great man with the heart and soul of a child." Words she uses again and again are: charming, simple, childlike, spontaneous, impulsive, fiery, charismatic. She calls him the happiest person that she has ever known. He loved nature, he was fascinated by the heavens, and his heart was full of sympathy for all suffering humanity. He had an intimate knowledge of Greek and Roman mythology and of Biblical and Talmudic legends. Yet his speech was seldom coherent and he could not well express the poetic thought of his mind.<sup>17</sup> He was also aware of his own shortcomings



and was quite prepared to make fun of himself. A description of his visit to the Kruger National Park highlights his childlike impetuous nature. On encountering a group of lions at the side of the road, "Our hero, Sholem did not think long, jumped out of the car and wanted to greet them. With difficulty we managed to drag him back into the car."<sup>18</sup>

Hilda was clearly infatuated by Schwartzbard. She describes him as, "a blue eyed, stocky man of small stature with a brilliant smile... a big lion-like head, with thick golden hair..." Schwartzbard was already the author of a book of poetry in Yiddish, *Troymen un virklekhkeyt* (Dreams and Reality, 1920). In Cape Town he wrote a number of new poems dedicated to Hilda, which he romantically inscribed on postcards and posted to her:

*"Liebste mayne!  
Du ost mich geretet fin umglik –  
Fon zweifel ostu mikh bafreiet.  
Mit liebe mit fred und hoffnung  
Ostu mikh bakleyt und baneiet...  
Du ost mir gihelt meine vunden  
Di tifste leiden und schmertz..."*

(My Darling!  
You have saved me from sadness  
You have freed me from doubt.  
With love with joy and hope  
You have clothed and renewed me  
You have healed my wounds  
The deepest suffering and smart...)

Other new writings by Schwartzbard in the collection include a poem dedicated to the Cape of Good Hope, *Tsum Kap fun guter hofenung*, a charming Indian legend, *Di Legende fun hartsn* (The Legend of the Heart), and an essay about the joys of wine, entitled, *Vayntroybn un vayn...*, (Grapes and wine...). Hilda's description of their last evening together is haunting:

We met him at 6.30 in town, and took him in our car to our bungalow by the sea. Sholem was very jolly and in the best of humors. We all laughed and joked over dinner, and as we know no French he taught us to say, *A la votre sante!* It was one of the happiest evenings imaginable. After dinner we went outside. It was a calm and warm evening. The sea was peaceful, the sky was bright with stars. Sholem admired the scenery, the big rocks (*felsen*), and looked at the stars. He pointed out Orion and the Pleiads and the Milky Way, and said he would never forget the strange beauty on this night. When he got back to Paris and saw the constellations reversed he would remember their loveliness in this Southern sky, and the glory of the summer night. He said that he was very, very happy.<sup>19</sup>

Schwartzbard was buried at Woltemade Jewish cemetery in Maitland in Cape Town on 4 March 1938. Thousands of people attended his funeral,

which was the largest funeral that Cape Town Jewry had ever known. A death mask was made by the well known South African artist, Lippy Lipshitz, and a special album in his memory was published, in Yiddish and English, by the Sholem Schwartzbard Memorial Committee in Johannesburg.

Hilda's main purpose in assembling this collection was to provide herself with documentation to write a book about Schwartzbard, a project with which she persisted even into her eighties. In 1939, she traveled to Paris to meet his widow, Anna. Together with Dr. Joseph Bernfeld, the secretary of the Yivo office in Paris, she helped Anna to sort the hundreds of photographs and newspaper clippings that Sholem had accumulated. Thus the greater part of the collection consists of press clippings of tributes and articles about Schwartzbard and Hilda's outline for a biography. In 1933 and 1934 Schwartzbard himself had published two books of memoirs in Yiddish, *In krig mit zikh aleyt* (At war with myself), and *Inem loyf fun yorn* (As the years go by) from which Hilda translated lengthy excerpts.

Immediately after his death Hilda conceived of the idea of having his remains transferred to Jerusalem. After his acquittal in 1927 he had actually expressed the desire to settle permanently in Palestine, but in 1928 he had been refused admission by the British authorities.<sup>20</sup> However, Hilda could not elicit support for this idea in South Africa at that time. Thirty years later, on 7 December 1967, Schwartzbard's remains were finally re-interred at Kfar Avichayil, a cemetery for Israel's heroes of World War I and II, near Natanya in Israel. He was eulogised by Rachel Yanait, the widow of Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Israel's second President, and by Menachem Begin. Schwartzbard's death mask was donated to the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel.

These two collections relating to the Ochberg orphans and to Sholem Schwartzbard, highlight the interconnectivity of Eastern Europe's Jewish Diaspora. Events in the Ukraine echo not only in the large Jewish centres of Paris, London and the United States, but also in South Africa. In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a large Jewish immigrant community in South Africa which rallied to the aid of their coreligionists and which was a potential market for the newly published *Algemeyne Entsiklopedye*. Thus, primary sources for the experiences of the victims of the Ukrainian pogroms, 1919-1921, have found their way to a land remote from the centres of Eastern European Jewish life.

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# ELIE WIESEL – RETROSPECTIVES ON HIS 80<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY

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Mona Berman

On 26-8 October 2008, the Elie Wiesel Center for Judaic Studies at Boston University hosted an international conference to celebrate Elie Wiesel's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. Over three days the participants reviewed all the major areas of Wiesel's life work. As one scholar succinctly put it, "His legacy has been his life and his life has been his legacy".

It was a great moment in this writer's own life. I have studied, admired and written extensively on the work of Wiesel for over thirty years, have read almost everything he's written, and also having followed the many scholars and commentators on his work.<sup>1</sup> Most of the latter were also in attendance.

Critical consideration was given at the conference to Wiesel's writings on subjects ranging from the Bible and Hasidism to the Holocaust and the State of Israel, as well as to his human rights efforts on behalf of oppressed people throughout the world. On the cover of the programme were the words which have become synonymous with his teaching: "There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest."

In 1986, Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and dedicated it to his fellow survivors who "have tried to do something with their memory, with their silence, with their life ... they have given an example to humankind not to succumb to despair." With the prize money he established "The Elie and Marion Wiesel Foundation" to advance the cause of human rights and peace throughout the world by organizing conferences and symposiums to bring out awareness of injustices and hate. Few Nobel Prize winners have achieved as much acclaim, worked as tirelessly and inspired so many people throughout the world with their moral vision.

9 a.m. on Sunday, 27 October, found me sitting in the auditorium of the Law School at Boston University for the first of the ten three-hour sessions that would be held for the duration of the conference. Looking around, I recognized many familiar faces. Many of the speakers had written important texts on

the Shoah, which are prominently displayed on my book shelves. Over the years I was fortunate enough to have met other academics who were scheduled to speak on their particular fields of expertise. The reputation of these Jewish and non-Jewish scholars was formidable, but when the unmistakable and charismatic figure of Elie Wiesel finally appeared in the hall to a well-deserved standing ovation I knew that this event would be unforgettable. He looked slightly older, a little greyer and had a few more lines on his distinguished face. He smiled, nodded modestly to the gathering, and sat down quietly in his seat.

In his welcoming message, Boston University President Robert Brown expressed his gratitude to Wiesel for enhancing the reputation of the University during the three decades he has been the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities and Professor of Judaic and Holocaust Studies, a department that was established specifically for him. He observed that Boston University was usually a quiet studious place until Wiesel gave a public lecture, at which time 1000-1500 students would suddenly descend on the University and crowd into the auditorium to listen.

"Once they are inside and he is introduced, it is silent. He does not need to move about, he sits at a desk – calm – he is a writer and teacher and there is an incredible impact. He teaches and writes what he has witnessed. The students who take his classes learn ethics, religion, fiction, compassion and how to stay in touch for a lifetime" Brown told the audience.

In the first session, *Biblical and Talmudic Themes*, Everett Fox (Clark University) spoke on the topic 'Elie Wiesel as Interpreter of Biblical Narratives', explaining how Wiesel, a born story teller, was able to flesh out Biblical texts and transform them into contemporary narratives. A more personal account was given by Reuven Kimelman in his paper 'Wiesel and the Tales of the Rabbis', in which he recalled the time when he and Wiesel sat together in Professor Saul Lieberman's Talmud classes. The intricacies of Talmud and the study of Torah had taught them that study was a remedy for evil while prayer was a remedy for misfortune. For Wiesel, obsessed with truth and detail, Talmud was the song of his teacher, who made the past present. According to Rabbi Joseph Polak, it was Wiesel who awakened Torah study in the United States. This idea was corroborated by David Weiss Halivini, who illustrated various aspects of Wiesel's vast knowledge of Biblical and Talmudic texts and explained his invaluable contribution to Aggada.

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*Mona Berman is a veteran South African journalist and author, who has contributed numerous articles and book reviews to Jewish Affairs over many years, as well as writing a regular column for the former SA Jewish Times. She holds four degrees and has authored four books, including Silence in the Fiction of Elie Wiesel (2001) and Irma Stern: a memoir with letters (2003).*

The afternoon session on *Hasidism* was introduced by Steven T. Katz, director of the Center for Judaic Studies at Boston and the organizer of the three day conference. He spoke with passion about 'Elie Wiesel as a Contemporary Interpreter of Hasidism' and described his relentless search for truth and authenticity, his portrayal of mysticism, his love of the Baal Shem Tov, his study of Kabala, and his conviction that "the just man can influence God".

Arthur Green, a dynamic orator and authority on Hasidism, placed Wiesel firmly in the Neo-Hasidic context and reminded the audience that it was Wiesel who had been the first teller of Hasidic tales after the war. He explained that his existential struggle in post-war France was very different to Martin Buber's personal struggle. Wiesel impacted on Karlebach and Schechter and was highly influential in the USA. Wiesel never sought that role but in his re-creation of Hasidism he took the lead in healing the wound and "letting us be". He brought back the joy in Yiddishkeit and was directly responsible for exposing the plight of Soviet Jewry who lived in a society pervaded by insidious fear. He was responsible for making sure that their freedom became the responsibility of every Jew.

In the same session Nehemia Polen, a former student of Elie Wiesel and the Professor of Jewish Thought at the Massachusetts Hebrew College, spoke about 'The Hasidic Tale and the Recovery of Sacred Space in the Life and Work of Elie Wiesel'. She discussed one of my favorite, and one of the most enigmatic works, of Wiesel's early fiction, 'The Gates of the Forest', and retold one of the best known and loved Hasidic stories:

When the great Israel Baal Shem Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.

Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Maggid of Mezeritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: "Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer". And again the miracle would be accomplished.

Still later, Moshe-Leib of Sassov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: "I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient". And it was sufficient.

Then it fell to Israel of Rizhin to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: "I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient". And it was sufficient.

Gershon Greenberg, Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the American University in

Washington DC, explained the phenomenon of "Elie Wiesel and Hasidut through the Holocaust: of Kotzk and Lubavitch". Whenever Wiesel refers to Mendel of Kotzk he concludes that among the thousands of Hasidic leaders, great and small, from the Baal Shem's time to the Holocaust, he is undeniably the most disconcerting, mysterious and tragic figure of all. The last speaker of the session, Pinchas Geller from the American Jewish University in Los Angeles, spoke about 'Elie Wiesel in Context', explaining that after Auschwitz everything changed: Talmudic studies, Torah, Mishna, Hasidic Tales and Gemorah. When the Hasidic rabbis and others lived through the reality of their time they lived with complete faith – "they were not broken". Wiesel had brought them back to our consciousness.

Each speaker was chosen with great care as an authority in his or her particular field pertaining to an aspect of Elie Wiesel's writing, his fiction, his Talmudic and Biblical texts, his methods of teaching, his philosophy and his activist work for victims of oppression wherever they may be. Each lecture emphasized that Wiesel does not regard himself as a theologian, philosopher or influential political activist, but is a story teller who tells the story to a listener who in turn becomes the teller of his tales.

On the second evening of the conference, Wiesel delivered his plenary lecture on *Kristalnacht*, which was free and open to the public. The auditorium was packed to capacity and the atmosphere of excitement was similar to Wiesel's annual public lectures at Boston University and the 92<sup>nd</sup> Y in New York, where for the past thirty years they have become major milestones in the calendar of his followers. Some years ago, an article in the *New York Times* proclaimed him as a superstar, a hero, because of the strong passions he aroused in his audience. He alternated his subjects between Biblical characters, Hassidic Masters and their tales and current events. As the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz (27 January) and the anniversary of *Kristallnacht* (9-10 November) were dates close to the conference, his lecture on "The Night of Broken Glass", spoken in his quiet, measured and melodious voice, gave a chilling account of the destruction of books, Torah scrolls, precious religious objects and the callous vandalism of the Nazis which would be a forerunner of the extermination of the culture and people of European Jewry. Few who heard his lecture will ever forget it.

The Monday morning session was devoted to *Holocaust Literature*, with renowned scholars such as Alvin Rosenfeld who spoke about 'The Futility of Holocaust Testimony' and gave a background to writers such as Amery and Primo Levi who wrote about their own trauma and were seeking lucidity of their experiences. Wiesel, on the other hand, believed that the call of the writer and his primary obligation was to tell tales as all the rest was commentary. It is only the story teller that can make the unbearable bearable. And it is always the last survivor who is condemned to tell the tale.

Alan Berger, a powerful speaker and perceptive

commentator on Wiesel's work, spoke about how a writer such as Elie Wiesel can say 'No' to God. The way he questions God is an indictment of God yet he ironically becomes His defender. God is never far from Wiesel because he believes that the way to God leads to man. In spite of Wiesel's denial, Berger believes that Wiesel is a great theologian, as his poem *Ani Maamin* attests. He is rooted in Jewish Midrash which is his way of connecting to God, mindful that "Thou should be joyful". Wiesel has an eternal dialogue and confrontation with God, and writes in spite of Auschwitz, not because of it. His work is always concerned with questions not answers as he believes it is part of our Jewish tradition to question God but it is not up to us to blame Him.

Ellen Fine, a distinguished scholar, was one of the first people to write a book about Wiesel, a man she has known and admired for over thirty years. She gave an impassioned portrayal of him as a young man in her talk 'Dialogues and Dreams: Holocaust Memories of Elie Wiesel'.<sup>2</sup> Fine commented that Wiesel's *Dialogues*, a genre he invented in his "literature of testimony" and explored in *One Generation After*, have not been studied sufficiently because even though the "essentials of individuals are there" there are times that the reader is unclear about the identity of the speaker. Perhaps it is Wiesel's intention to blur the characters as while their words sear and scorch they preserve the intensely personal and intimate memories. She found a similarity between the 'Dreams' and the 'Dialogues', which are like a silent scream as the narrator searches for his father in the cemetery. The world was a better place because of Elie Wiesel's dreams, she concluded.

In the session on *Testimony* Lawrence Langer, whom I had met years ago at Simmons College in Boston when he was Professor of English Literature, reminded the audience how greatly Holocaust history has suffered in this half century and how the fallacies of gentile perspectives are so readily accepted by contemporary Jews.<sup>3</sup> He mentioned the difficulties experienced by Primo Levi in trying to have *If this is a Man* published. When it was eventually published ten years later it was widely read and greatly acclaimed. He discussed Victor Frankel's book *Man's Search for Meaning* and how in 1999, nine million copies of the book were sold. Langer believes that the value of the novel depends on the authenticity of the author, and as Victor Frankel spent no more than three days in the death camps, he wondered how he could have gained such insight into Auschwitz. He acknowledged the difficulty in identifying fact and fiction in the Holocaust. In 1954 Vilkomorsky's *Fragments*, supposedly a memoir, became a best seller but was subsequently discovered to be a fake. Even when it came under suspicion, no one challenged the author's legitimacy when he gave a public lecture. Apparently, he was born in Switzerland and was not even a Jew. Today, people were exploiting the Holocaust because it was an event so improbable, unfamiliar and impossible, and the experience was so horrible, that no one was prepared to believe it. In *Night*, on the other hand, Wiesel, the writer, transcends

history and autobiography by using the imagery of atrocity and his own experience to involve the non-participant in the essence of Auschwitz.

One of the sessions of the conference of particular interest was the one devoted to *Teaching*. I presumed that it would specifically be about teachers' methodology in the classroom but to my surprise the speakers offered a key to the magic Wiesel creates when he is teaching. Alan Rosen, the first speaker, was one of Wiesel's students, later became a tutor of his classes, and is now a Research Fellow and Lecturer at the International School of Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem in Israel.<sup>4</sup> He described Wiesel's classes as spaces filled with shadows and with song – the essential dimensions of learning. He spoke about the importance of listening, which transforms both students and teachers. Wiesel always used the Baal Shem Tov as an example of a person who knew how to listen because every one who heard him believed that he was listening only to them. As a teacher of humanity, Wiesel was able to transform his students, who in turn became the teachers telling the tale. Rosen's title of his paper came from his personal experience as Wiesel's student, teacher and listener: 'Classroom filled with Shadows and with Song: Dimensions of Learning, Listening and Teaching'.

Reinhold Boschki, a remarkable teacher, is Director of the Department for Religious Education at Bonn University. He spoke about 'Elie Wiesel: Teacher Through Words – Teacher Through Silence' and had an extraordinary story to tell of his own transformation after reading *Night*. His subsequent meeting with Wiesel led to his decision to do some courses with Wiesel at Boston, which changed his life, outlook and teaching methodology. He is now responsible for teaching 1400 young German students about the ethics of remembrance, the value of memory and the story of the Holocaust, not through facts and statistics, with which young people become bored, but with the essence of Wiesel's philosophy that to teach and to learn are equally important as everyone has the same access to Torah and Talmud. There must be mutual respect between teacher and student and while words are important, silence is equally meaningful. Wiesel taught him that learning must be at the same eye level as teaching. A teacher need never stoop down to a student. Boschki's goal is to establish a University of Human Rights for teachers who can ask questions, learn to listen and thus encourage students to find their own answers.

Ariel Burger, a teacher involved in Jewish learning, education and combined Jewish philanthropies in Boston, presented a paper 'Toward a Methodology of Wonder: Lessons for Educators from Professor Wiesel's Classroom'. He spoke about the joy in learning and the curiosity, good fun and wonder of Wiesel as a teacher. He further discussed the 'Literature of Memories' and how essential it is to write everything down because Jewish people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are starting to forget.

In the last session of the conference, *Round Table: The Lasting Contribution of Elie Wiesel*, five formidable scholars delivered their papers and Wiesel

gave a short and modest reply as a fitting conclusion to the three days of deliberation. Pnina Lahav, Professor of Law at Boston University, was the first speaker to raise the question that countless people ask: Why does Wiesel not live in Israel? She explained that she grew up in Tel Aviv and could not understand his reluctance to come to Jerusalem, a city he loves passionately, until she realized that the work and contribution he has made to the US and world Jewry required that it had to be from the Diaspora.

Reference was made by Roger Pol-Droit to Wiesel's important place in French Literature, as all his books, fiction and non-fiction, are written in French, the language he chose not only for its poetic lyricism but because he was able to freely express ideas in his adopted language that were not weighed down by the past. He spoke too of the recurring themes in Wiesel's writing which intensify the border between wisdom and madness, present and past, presence and absence, words and silence.

John K Roth, one of the foremost Christian academics of Philosophy, has co-authored and edited more than twenty books and is the Founding Director at the Center for the Study of Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights at Claremont McKenna College. He spoke about Wiesel's contribution to a Christian understanding of Judaism, and the profound impact he had had on himself and his own Christian identity. Misunderstanding Judaism had caused immense suffering, but he believed that Wiesel had brought Christians to a new understanding of the autonomous humanity of Judaism.

The person, initially responsible for persuading Wiesel to come to Boston University is John Silber, President Emeritus and Professor of International Relations, Law and Philosophy. In his powerful affirmation of Wiesel in his paper, *Wiesel's Legacy: Insight, Action and Perseverance*, he reminded us that Wiesel never looked into a mirror until after Auschwitz and was unable to write for ten years until Francois Mauriac persuaded him to write his memoir. He wrote *And the World was Silent* in Yiddish and later rewrote it in French, shortened and edited it from over 300 to 120 pages. That book, *Night*, has become a classic and is read generation after generation. Silber says that Wiesel is truly a wise man and his comprehension is expressed through ambiguity and paradox. He believed that not only was Wiesel the most important Jew in the world but was important to humanity in general: "He uses his unique moral authority to encourage peace because his legacy has been his life and his life has been his legacy".

The final speaker was the renowned orator Irwin Cotler, Professor of Law at McGill University, Member of Parliament and former Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. His concluding address 'Professor Elie Wiesel: The Conscience of Humanity' refers to Wiesel as a Messenger, a universal metaphor for justice. Wiesel is not only a teacher but an advocate for justice and humanity. Wherever Wiesel had gone, he had inspired people with the abiding imperative that "unto each person

there is a name". Cotler spoke of the danger of hate and the demonising of the other, using the leader of Iran as a prime example. He warned of the danger of antisemitism, which is a paradigm for hatred and how we are witnessing the escalation of antisemitism aimed at wiping Israel off the map. He also spoke about the danger of silence and indifference to genocide because "no one can say we did not know about Cambodia, Darfur and Rwanda".

When Elie Wiesel finally stood up to another heartfelt ovation, he said little. He was incredibly moved by the speakers, the three day conference, the accolades, the love shown to him and the things his friends and colleagues had to say about him. He recalled the 1400 children from Sighet and the many great scholars who perished. He admitted, "It's possible. It's possible now. God refused to look – not that he was hidden or there was an eclipse. Human beings did it, not God."

I left the hall saying goodbye to the many new friends I had made. I knew that this extraordinary event would never be repeated but would forever stay in my memory. Whenever I would recall it, speak of it or write about it, I would remember the words and sentiments uttered at the conference and the silence that accompanied the words.<sup>5</sup>

#### NOTES

- 1 My association with Elie Wiesel commenced in 1964 when I first read *The Gates of the Forest*, and shortly after that *The Town Beyond the Wall* and then his seminal work *Night*, now the most widely read book in Holocaust literature. In the 1970s, I started research on his life and work and in November 1985 completed my Masters thesis: "Elie Wiesel's Fictional Universe: The Paradox of the Mute Narrator".
- 2 I was particularly interested in what she had to say as I had interviewed her in New York many years before when I was setting out to write my thesis, with her book, and Lawrence Langer's *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, as my only sources of reference.
- 3 After reading Langer's *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* and later *The Age of Atrocity and Versions of Survival*, I had the opportunity of an interview with him, which convinced me that my argument for a "literature of testimony" was viable.
- 4 Rosen was also editor of *Celebrating Elie Wiesel: Stories, Essays, Reflections, to commemorate Elie Wiesel's 70th birthday* (1998).
- 5 Regrettably, space does not allow me to mention all the speakers and scholars who so generously shared their expertise and knowledge at the conference.

# RELIGIOUS EDUCATION THROUGH LITERATURE

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Azila Talit Reisenberger

## Abstract

*Religious education in South Africa is at a turning point. No longer may religious instruction in a particular tradition be accepted as a matric (final year) subject. Instead, religious education takes the form of general religious studies.*

*This paper proposes that instead of seeing the new policy as a crisis, one should see it as an opportunity to reconstruct the format of Religious Education in South Africa and update it for modern needs. Furthermore, as teaching a particular religious tradition is prohibited, the paper proposes that instead of abandoning it, one can teach religious education through literature. Since the background study for the paper has been done in the Jewish Community, examples from Jewish education and the Jewish community in South Africa are used, but the theory and the proposals made in the paper could be seen as a model for all religious traditions, and in particular traditions and denominations that are not in the mainstream.*

## Worldview

From the minute babies are born their senses take note of the world around them. As we grow and develop our emotional and intellectual capacity, we keep assimilating the information we receive of the world and accommodating our perceptions of ourselves and our place in the world around us in line with the new information. This perpetual process depends on the impact the world has on us, and the impact we make upon our surroundings. At the same time, it affects the overall model we have of the world and ourselves. In turn this model is the 'spectacles' through which we continue to view all of the above. David Chidester describes this process as a negotiation of our "worldview", describing worldview as "...an open set of discursive, practical, and social strategies for negotiating person and place in a world" (1992:4).

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In keeping with Joachim Wach's definition of religion, Chidester goes further and suggests that our worldview corresponds to our religious view. The essence of this argument is that our multi-dimensional understanding of the world is, in fact, one and the same as what we usually call 'religious beliefs' comprising the theoretical, practical and social dimensions (Wach as in Chidester 1992:176).<sup>1</sup> I maintain that philosophical understanding of religion may deal with the essence of religion but it does not deal with the pragmatics of organised religions, each of which has its own history, perception of the Deity as well as a particular code of worship and of expected behaviour.

Each organised religion likes to teach its followers its own uniqueness in order to shape them to what it deems to be better members of the particular tradition. Such religious instruction can be carried out at adult level, but many religious traditions prefer to start it at the young, school-going age. In South Africa we know of many churches<sup>2</sup> that provide after-hours, or weekend religious tuition, such as Catechism, Sunday School, Madrasa, Cheder etc.

There are many reasons for starting religious instruction at a tender age. Better informed children can relate to, and feel part of, the church from a young age. They can also be better indoctrinated at a young age, which ensures that a) they are dissociated from other religions or denominations, thus cutting out any 'wrong choices' that they may make in attempting to join them – a strong reason for the dogmatic character of many organised religions and b) it ensures that they do not question authority.

From an educational point of view, teaching people from a young age is an effective way of implanting in them a particular worldview as a blueprint for whatever they subsequently learn – the information is embedded in their consciousness before they reach the rebellious age when they question everything and tend to rebel against whatever the older generations present to them.

In the Twentieth Century, when parents and communities delegated the education of their children to the schools, most schools in South Africa<sup>3</sup> offered religious instruction in line with Christian thought, Christianity being then seen as the dominant religion. Children of other religious traditions could be excused from class, and these traditions were allowed to send their own instructors to teach such children. In



addition, further religious instruction of minority groups was outside of school hours or at special schools that were established and run by particular communities, for example the Islamia College, or the Herzlia schools in Cape Town – for Muslim and Jewish children respectively.

### Religious instructors

The validity of religious instruction – as well as the method of optimising it – is a subject of fierce debate. On one side are the religious leaders who put forward faith-based indoctrination when they construct their curricula and employ teaching methods, and on the other are the philosophers of education who put emphasis on teaching methodologies, wide-ranging information, critical thinking, and interpretation.<sup>4</sup> For many years the latter, i.e. educationalists, have stressed that indoctrination is not a sound way to impart knowledge, including knowledge that deals with religious matters. “Like the nascent fields of psychology and sociology, religion as a phenomenon, like the human mind or human society, has to be seen not as a given, but as an object of ... [investigation]” (Thistlethwaite 2003: 390), and this means that religious instruction must also fit into the greater world context and no longer be taught in restrictive isolation.

If one follows the proposition of many scholars that ‘[r]eligion, like science and history, is an expression of the human attempt to understand and respond to what is really the case’ (Newbiggin 1982: 105), then to instruct religion along narrow and dogmatic lines would be counterproductive.

Furthermore, recognising that religious beliefs or worldviews are not crystallized entities but involve a process of modification and transformation, lends emphasis to the aspect of evolution and growth. This applies not only of curricula but also to the role of the educators involved in religious education – who need to adjust their methodology and their attitude in accordance with their time and place. Attitudes and methodology that worked in the Middle Ages are not necessarily effective in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; what is suitable for 10 year-olds is different from what is suitable for 18 year-olds; and what is applicable in Jerusalem is not necessarily effective in South Africa.

Having said this, it must be clear that while methods of teaching are changing, the core of the material changes very little since the core scriptures of most religions have not changed significantly throughout the ages, and the mode of worship has been evolving very slowly. What is malleable and changing is the way the adherents interpret these scriptures, and how they negotiate between their life-experience and the demands of the scripture, i.e. what they choose to emphasise and practice, and what they try to play down and even disregard.

Religious leaders’ conservative approach and general dismissive attitude towards change can impact on the way they teach, and this paper suggests that it hinders their efficacy and success, especially when teaching young adults who are themselves going

through a major process of personal change and development. This becomes clear when we note that within the process of negotiation of worldview, two fundamental factors exert particular power and authority on issues that come under scrutiny, namely relevance of the issue to our own existence and our own ability to relate to it and to the mediator (i.e. the instructor).

Relevance and ability to relate to instructors influence both the learners’ wish to learn as well as their willingness to accommodate and assimilate the material which is presented to them. And as far as religious instruction is concerned, these factors impact on the learner’s decision whether to keep and uphold particular religious practices, customs, beliefs, or to discard them – in line with their worldview.

### Jewish religious education in South Africa

As this paper deals with religious education in South Africa, one needs to illustrate how the above applies to the practices there; and as the initial study concentrated on Jewish Education, Judaism will be used as the model for other religious traditions.

Having said that all worldviews are constantly negotiated, it is important to note that in 2007 religious education in South Africa is not part of a constant ongoing evolution but rather at an abrupt turning point. In 2005 the South African Minister of Education announced that religious instruction in a particular tradition cannot be accepted as a matric (final year) subject. From 2008, religious education at this level has instead taken a form of general “religious studies”. Within this topic the students must learn the history of religions and religious concepts, the way religions organise themselves, ethical principles and the social issues that most religions struggle with, etc. This should be seen as a move in the right direction towards reconciliation and unity, but the leaders of the various religious traditions – especially leaders who represent minority groups, amongst them Jewish community leaders – have expressed their grievous concern.

As has been mentioned above, the community fears that if children are not introduced to their religious traditions while they are young, not only may they miss years of instruction, but more importantly, religious educationists may miss the opportunity to reach children before they arrive at the critical, rebellious and antagonistic phases of their lives, thereby escalating their resistance to what seems to them conservative and old fashioned.<sup>5</sup> Rabbis and community leaders may know instinctively that worldview and religious beliefs are negotiated throughout our lives, and they want to reach the young Jewish children while they still take for granted, as “God’s word from Sinai”, everything that the parents and teachers tell them. This unquestioned foundation of our worldview, what we imbibe with our “mother’s milk”, is identified by the sages as *Girsa de’Yankutah*<sup>6</sup>, and in most cases it is so entrenched in our worldview that it forms an unquestionable axiom and becomes a non-negotiable

foundation of our worldview.

The education ministry does not, in fact, prohibit schools from teaching about a particular religious tradition in the primary schools,<sup>7</sup> but rather has stopped a detailed study thereof at a matriculation level. Alas, this prohibition signals to parents and learners that this subject is not to be taken seriously. The paper suggests that the Education Minister's decree be seen as an opportunity to bring Jewish and other minority religion's education in South Africa up to date through some radical changes, rather than becoming alarmed and hostile on the one hand or giving up on religious instruction altogether on the other. It advocates a paradigm shift, i.e. teaching the religion by means of teaching literature. This will require a change of teaching texts, for example, from the traditional Scriptures to Modern Hebrew literature written in South Africa, and replacing religious leaders as instructors with modern teachers of literature. If one proposes that the *raison d'être* of teaching this particular material is to highlight its Jewish aspects, then one has to ensure that instructors have a solid knowledge of Jewish tradition in addition to their training in literature.

### Learners' responses

Currently Jewish religious instruction in South Africa is carried out mainly in two ways. About three-quarters of Jewish children of school-going age in South Africa go into the Jewish day school system where the Hebrew language and Jewish religious instruction are included as part of the curricula; the remainder have religious instruction to varying degrees – from none at all to extensive teaching within the local communities.

At the communal institutions, i.e. local synagogues, the instructors are the Rabbis, their assistants, or their wives, and as the time for instruction is restricted the syllabi are limited and aim mainly at preparation for Bar- or Batmitzvah.

At the Jewish Day School, on the other hand, the 'Jewish' syllabi include Jewish history, introduction to custom and tradition, learning to use the prayer book, familiarity with the Jewish calendar, exercise of practices, etc. The historical aspects can be, and mostly are, taught by history teachers, but all other aspects that deal more with traditional practices, laws and customs, are taught by Rabbis. On occasions when this is not possible they are taught by men or women who are observant of the *Halachah* in the strictest form.

Many young adults in the Jewish day school system complain bitterly that they do not find the material relevant to their own lives and that they cannot relate to the Rabbis, who are the mediators of the learnt material. It seems, then, that Jewish religious instruction for them has not been very effective.<sup>8</sup>

The problems cited by learners interviewed in 2004 were the inability to relate to the Rabbis or the very observant men and women – who are, in the main, visibly different from the students in their clothes, their religious apparel, men's beards, head

covers and *Tzitzit*, women's wigs etc. Furthermore, the teaching methods employed were mostly not up-to-date teaching methods. The Rabbis tended to exercise the learners on what they themselves had learnt in their religious academies, called *Yeshivas*, which concentrate on the study of religion with no secular topics whatsoever. The material that they chose to pass on to the learners did not, in the main, feel relevant to their young, mostly secular charges. In other words, Jewish instruction in South Africa to date is seen by many learners as irrelevant, and they cannot relate to it or to the instructors.

### A suggestion<sup>9</sup>

I suggest that the term 'Jewish' or 'Jewish identity' be seen as an inclusive term incorporating: religious practice side by side with issues of ethnicity and community, Hebrew language, history with attention to the 'in-group', attachment to Israel and, last but not least, a study of South African Jewry as a particular minority group in South Africa. This paper proposes that all the above can be reached through teaching Jewish Literature, or even better: Hebrew Literature that has been written in South Africa.

It is safe to say that Hebrew literature written in South Africa was directed at the 'in-group' only. The topics and themes it covers reflect the lives of the learners and their families. Teaching this particular literature will incorporate the teaching of Hebrew (which is also needed for prayer) with themes that the learners will be able to relate to while at the same time identifying with the South African context of the story. Moreover, since the material reflects a reality similar to their own, it will hopefully draw them closer to their families, many of whom may be reflected in the stories. All these aspects make it more relevant to the learners; and, above all, they will be able to relate to the educators, who are modern people trained as teachers with modern methodologies.

Furthermore, even when the teachers deal with Jewish customs and rituals they will not be seen as judgmental – as the Rabbis seemed to be – since they seem to be 'like us'. This will allow for more open discussion, for freedom to ask questions without fear of being called *am ha'aretz*, which is the derogatory term that the Rabbis employ to describe 'ignorant' religious people.

### Problems of relating to the texts

To date the material taught in Jewish Instruction classes is chapters from the Bible, the Talmud, or limited paragraphs from traditional books that state the *Halachah*. Unfortunately these texts, on the whole, seem to lack relevance to the learners' lives. Scriptural debates regarding whether you are or are not allowed to do certain work on the Sabbath are not relevant to learners whose parents go to work or do shopping on that day. Furthermore, paragraphs stating which foodstuffs are Kosher or not, are not seen as relevant to learners who live in a home which does

not adhere to the laws of *Kashrut*. So many of the texts studied in class to date were perceived as foreign and not relevant to the learners.

### Problems of relating to the teachers

Most scholars agree that one of the most important aspects affecting the efficacy of teaching is the differing levels of student involvement. "Teacher behaviours do cause students to be either active or passive, and thus largely determine both overt and covert involvement" by students (Hough 1967: 376, 377).

Cogan methodically proves that there is a direct link between students' perception of their teachers and student behaviour and change (1967: 70). This perception is shaped by the behaviours and actions of the teachers and the general interaction between student and teacher. If the teaching methods and behaviours of the teacher are inclusive and integrative (including traits such as motivating students, relating to students, being self-effacing, being responsive), there is a positive increase in required and also self-initiated work (1967: 87). However, if a teacher creates a learning environment where students do not feel comfortable about expressing their personal opinions ("preclusive behaviour")<sup>10</sup> and there is strong "dominative contact"<sup>11</sup> by the teacher over the student, there will be a direct negative effect on the production of required and self-initiated work (1967: 82), and students "will be more easily distracted from their schoolwork as well as rejecting of teacher domination". (Flanders 1967: 105). Cogan reiterates the Deweyan Philosophy of Education, and suggests that "there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education" (Cogan 1967: 72).

Successful teachers, therefore, have to create the environment for students to feel comfortable in assimilating the knowledge into their own understanding; encourage inclusive and integrative behaviour in both themselves and students; and use teaching methods that promote personal experience which can transform random knowledge into understood meaning for each student.

All these educational qualities are rarely displayed by Rabbis, who are not trained as educators, but rather as the upholders of the religion which requires them to be more dogmatic. Thus a situation is created where the visible differences between students and religious instructor, compounded by the lack of methodological skills, together with the visible difference in degree of religious observance, catapults the Religious Instruction classes into an artificial space, into a vacuum.

Studying religious education in a vacuum and without personal affiliation creates fundamentalism and "inhibits future development of religious thinking", while at the same time engendering the situation of "hypocritical conformity" where both students *and* teachers "are invited to pretend to believe what they do not in fact believe to be true" (May 1968: 52).

I agree with Edwin Cox who suggests that all the aims for religious teaching should be justifiable on educational grounds too "so as to contribute to the growth of the pupils' understanding and ability to think about and deal with the secular pluralistic settings of their greater lives." (Cox 1982: 56). Understanding of one's religion within a greater and more open context allows for an understanding of one's religion's contributions to culture, music and other disciplines. It also allows for further acceptance of other people's beliefs (desirous to South Africa and imperative in our expanding global community) and provides an opportunity for students to create their own individual belief that is sincere and hence stronger under scrutiny (Cox 1982: 56).

I suggest that through studying literature together learners can properly engage in understanding the characters, and, if they have religious inclinations, learners can incorporate their insights into their own worldviews – through the process of thinking rather than through dogmatic instruction. P. May, who has made a similar proposition, terms the use of literary tools for religious education the "poetic approach" (1968: 65).

Teaching through discussing literary characters allows personal understanding through individual identification and cognitive evaluation. Through discussion and debate, concepts cease to be alien or threatening and can be fitted into our familiar schemes and assimilated into our lives (Robinson, 1982: 88).

I maintain that religious education via literature is the best way of creating a teaching medium that promotes wider thought, individual identification and assimilation, and personal understanding of a subject that is usually difficult to grasp as abstract and theoretical. Once we have properly understood a concept for our own individual selves, it can be mentally linked to other concepts we already understand and "this kind of learning permeates the being" (Sotto 1994: 59) and has lasting effect on our worldview. Newbiggin suggests that instruction should be made via a medium that allows students to see a concept as a truth (via understanding) and yet be open to further evidence which might enable them to amend this belief – students will accept because they understand on a personal level (1982: 104). This can be done when discussing narratives that depict South African reality, rather than learning texts two millennia old.<sup>12</sup>

### A case study

Through my research on Hebrew literature written in South Africa, I have become familiar with the writing of Zalman Aaron Lison. His stories were prominent in the *Barkai*, the Hebrew journal published in South Africa from 1933 to 1970. Lison's Hebrew was good and his stories flowed and were engaging – his aesthetic skills and the stories' literary merit were beyond doubt.

After his death his family published a selection of his stories in book form. I chose two of these stories and, with their permission, introduced them into the

syllabi of senior grade students in South Africa.<sup>13</sup> This in turn required some preliminary work by way of printing the stories and preparing accompanying material, such as literary analysis of the stories for teachers and more experienced students who are able to read it in Hebrew, as well as background articles on the historical context and the Jewish customs that are depicted in the texts. These latter articles are written in English for the students to read by themselves. All this was done, and was published together in the form of a book entitled *Pride in Tradition through Acceptance: Jewish Identity in South Africa as reflected in the stories of Zalman A. Lison* (Reisenberger 2005).

One of the stories, *Darga Basulam*, describes the relationship between a Jewish smous and the people of the land, i.e. the African folk and a Boer farmer. The unravelling narrative portrays the torturous lives of the immigrants as well as the relationship between the Jewish immigrants and the locals. From a Jewish point of view, the story highlights (amongst others) the following themes:

1. the importance of Jewish names,
2. specific beliefs and traditions related to death,
3. mixed marriages, and
4. the importance of the community.

As the story describes many Jewish customs and rituals, it is an excellent way to teach these customs to students who, to date, have been alienated by the overpowering religious teachers teaching these topics in their Jewish daily schools. These customs can be taught while discussing the protagonists in the narrative rather than by Rabbis 'prescribing' them and pressurizing the student to 'adhere or else'. Learning customs through discussing a third person rather than the 'self' allows for freedom to question, protest, prove ignorance, negate, etc. Furthermore, as the teacher is a trained teacher and well versed in educational methodologies, she or he is more likely to be more open-minded, encourage debate, and be less judgemental on topics of tradition.

The story also illustrates the importance of a Hebrew/Jewish name. This may encourage the students to familiarise themselves with their own given names or, in their absence, to choose a name, and be proud of it.

During interviews with two Heads of Department from Herzlia, the Hebrew day school in Cape Town, one of the teachers expressed the following reservations concerning the teaching of this particular story (which may apply to other locally written Hebrew literature):

- a. Some learners don't have, don't know or don't care about, Hebrew names.
- b. Some learners suffer as a result of a mixed marriage, and dealing with it as a literary theme may upset them.
- c. Ten years after the dismantling of the Apartheid political system, fond depiction of the Boer farmers may not be politically correct.

These points support my proposal, as when these issues are raised and discussed in a non-threatening environment by instructors whom the students can relate to, then the students are more likely to absorb the knowledge and incorporate it into their lives.

### Conclusion

The paper has suggested that, instead of seeing the new policy as a crisis for Jewish, or any other particular Religious Education, we should see it as an opportunity to reconstruct and update our methods in line with modern needs. The old style of teaching specific religious texts by religious leaders could be replaced with teaching literature written in South Africa by teachers of literature. The students can relate easily to modern teachers of literature, and the texts will raise issues pertaining to various aspects of their traditions in the country they know. The projection of the issues onto protagonists in a narrative rather than onto the students themselves will enable more open debate and rigorous inquiry since the discussion is transferred from first person to a third person

I believe that this will increase learners' desire, as well as their ability, to practice their religious tradition.

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**NOTES**

- 1 In line with the malleability and negotiated character of what constitutes our worldview, Chidester terms these discursive, practical and social aspects 'strategies' rather than beliefs, yet he deals with these strategies (worldview) when he discusses religious beliefs. I follow his argument when I deal with religious studies.
- 2 The term 'church' is used here to denote a religious community body, thus it can also represent synagogue, mosque, temple etc

- 3 I do not discuss here the Bantu Education system, as it raises many problematic issues, none of which are relevant to the core issue of the paper.
- 4 For a study of Religious Education with particular emphasis on an interpretive approach, see Robert Jackson, 1997.
- 5 Leslie Francis states that there is a constant and persistent deterioration in a child's attitude towards religion as their age increases. The rejection of religion is also founded in early education and gets compounded as school years progress (Francis 1982: 26, 27).
- 6 Which literally means: the way you learn initially (as a baby). Used often by the 11th century Biblical and Talmudic commentator Rashi.
- 7 And indeed the subject is a part of Life Orientation.
- 8 By interview of a random sample of 20 past learners from Herzlia, the Hebrew day school in Cape Town, who had matriculated in 2003.
- 9 I propose that minority groups, such as Muslims or Hindus in SA, use the module to investigate the religious education in their own community.
- 10 Cogan 1967: 80
- 11 see Flanders' concept of when teachers have strong dominating control over their students (Flanders 1967: 104)
- 12 Indeed, at younger ages, when learners have fewer skills to debate and struggle with abstract concepts, one may still have to maintain religious teaching alongside particular scriptures in order not to deviate too much from the core religious principles and lose the essence of all the discussion in the first place. See May 1968: 69.
- 13 "Senior grade" here denotes students at matric level and undergraduate students at university.



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# VITZEN, MEISES, KLOGGEN UND HUMOR: A BRIEF HISTORY OF YIDDISH HUMOUR

\*

Maurice Skikne

Jews enjoy an almost world-wide reputation for being able to laugh at themselves. We have been doing this from time immemorial, it is said even from Biblical times. Not only that, but we have that very special ability to laugh even about the history of our oppression and persecution.

From the academic perspective, it is possible to categorize the subject of Yiddish humor into but a few divisions. It does, however, happen that with the very long history of this language (about a thousand years), there exist thousands of jokes (*Vitzen*), funny stories (*Meises*), and curses (*Kloggen*) for almost every situation in our lives. And it does not end there. What is excluded from this study are which one would term “*Proste Meises*”, that is, those with sexual or chauvinistic connotations. That is the province of some of the cruder publications.

It must be gainsaid that it would appear that prior to the advent of Yiddish, a derivative of German in the state of Bavaria, Prussia, what can be classed as “Jewish humor” had had its beginnings in the Torah, and certainly in the Talmud/Gemorah. A couple of examples will suffice to illustrate this:

- The Torah highlights the slaying of Abel by his sibling Cain [Beraishish, 4:9] – When Hashem questioned Cain about the presence of his brother, Cain’s retort was: “I know not; am I my brother’s keeper?”
- In the Gemorah (*Berachos*, 60b), regarding “*Mode Ani*”, Rashi comments regarding the status of the wicked that “sleep is beneficial for them and the rest of the world, as they do not disturb the wakened”.

Yiddish humor as such has probably been around ever since the birth of the Yiddish language itself. However, humorous expressions and curses (especially the latter) can probably be traced back to Biblical, and certainly to Talmudic times. One has only to study Gemorah to sense the humor of the great Sages’ explanations and debates. These commentaries were obviously Hebraic. However, once our predecessors began to migrate into Europe and Yiddish developed, many such expressions found

their way into the latter by simple transposition. It is also noteworthy that there are no swear words in either Hebrew or Yiddish. Those became imports from the Germanic tongues (including English). Thus curses and expressions tend to express - mildly - ones disappointment in the speech, expression, behavior or eating habits of an unsavory person, without using absolute crudity. This is indeed quite remarkable!

Here, as I see it, are the main categories of Yiddish Humor:

- Curses (as distinct from the biblical ‘*Klolim*’ in Deuteronomy 27:15-25): Many curses fall into the category of wishing someone ill health, great discomfort or, in extreme cases, death.
- Expressions/sayings: These are generally a commentary on life, behavior, food, politics and, inevitably, money.
- Jokes: Yiddish jokes can be sourced from Eastern Europe older type (mostly coined prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century) or the West (from about the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century), many from the USA, but there are numerous ones coined, in the U.K., and in South Africa. The main differences are that European ones describe the harsh oppression, restriction and poverty (were written in Hebrew script usually); whilst those of the West basically bemoan the affluence and often spoilt atmosphere we live in. They are usually written in Phonetic English

Most Yiddish curses, although serious expressions of anger, have an amusing touch to them. Here are some examples:

- *Zain tzainer zollen arois faln* (“He should lose all his teeth”)
- *Merren zollen vaksen fun zain boich* (May beets grow from his belly)
- *Er zoll vaksen vie a tsibale – mit zain kop in dred* (He should grow like an onion, with his head in the soil)
- *Hitler –Yemach She’mo - zol zein vie a lomp: hengen bai tog, brennen bai nagt und zein oisgelessen in frie* (Hitler –may he be stricken from memory – should be like a lamp: hanging by day, burning at night and be extinguished in the morning)
- *A Mishemeshine zol em treffen* (A bad thing should happen to him)

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- *Besser Zich vinshen, ader yenem shilten* (Better to wish yourself good, than to curse someone)
- *Es Felt em a Shrayfel in kop* (He has a screw loose/Not a full box of chocolates)

Yiddish expressions typically convey a conventional thought but usually have a deeper meaning:

- *A patch fargeyt, a vort bahteyt* (A slap is forgotten, but an insult [word] is remembered)
- *Vainik kloggen fun Saichel, ober mer kloggen fun Zair oiskook* (Many complain about their looks, but few question their intelligence)
- *Tsu Hayeren is vi a fidel. Ven die musik shtait, die fidel kleit* (Marriage is like a violin. When the music stops, there are strings attached)
- *Amol fleggen di elteren lernen di kinder reidden; heint lernen di kinder di eltern shveigen* (Some time ago, parents taught their children to talk; now children instruct their parents to be silent)
- *Aintz is a ligen, tsvai zain ligens, drei mol is politik!* (Once is a lie, twice are lies too; but thrice is political)
- *Vos ba a nicheren iz oifen loong, is ba a shikkeren oifen tzung* (What a sober man thinks is expressed by a drunkard)

This brings us to *Meises/Vitzen*, Jewish jokes or humorous stories. There are numerous categories of these, as the following (by no means exhaustive) list shows: Jewish American Princesses/*kugels*, acting, Old *Yiddelech*, waiters and restaurants, Israel, antisemitism and oppression, money, poverty, small children, *shnorrer meises*, education, *shlemiels*, *shlemazels*, cultural types, atheists and agnostics, quick responses, *ganovim*, judges, lawyers and defendants, liars and exaggerators, Chelmer jokes, gambling, food, eating, barmizvahs, brisses, army and navy, Jewish holidays, Gentile holidays, smoking and drinking.<sup>1</sup>

#### **An Oppression Meise**

Three Jews are caught attempting to cross the Russian border, during the oppressive reign of the Tsars. Brought before a magistrate, the weary and homeless Jews were each asked just where they thought they were going. "I was hoping to go to Palestine" said the first "My destination is Rome" said number two "I planned go to Australia", said number three "Why so far?" asked the magistrate "Far?" said the Jew "Far from where?"

#### **Poverty**

A poor woodcutter was walking in the forest with a heavy bundle of timber on his back, when he had a dizzy spell. He let the bundle down

crying, "Oh Death, release me from this terrible burden!"

No sooner spoken, when the *Malechemovis* (Angel of Death) appeared saying, "you called for me?" Astonished, the woodcutter stammered, "Yes, your Excellency... would you kindly... ah, help me to get this bundle back on my shoulders?"

In the eternal battle of the sexes, anti-wife, as well as anti-women *maises* abound in Yiddish popular culture:

"I had to marry you to find out how stupid you are!" the yiddisher wife yelled at her husband "You should have known how stupid I was, the minute I asked you!" he replied.

Rabbi Bernstein is giving his Friday night, Shabbos drosho, when there is a sudden flash of lightning, and a clap of thunder. The smoke clears next to the pulpit, to reveal the Devil standing there complete with tail and trident fork! The Rabbi gets a terrible fright and runs out of the shul, followed by the congregation except Shmulik. He remains calmly seated right in front of Satan.

Satan: "Do you know who I am?"

Shmulik: "Sure I know who you are"

Satan: "Aren't you afraid of me?"

Shmulik: "Sure I am afraid of you!"

Satan: "So why did you not run out too?"

Shmulik: "Because I *bin merriid* to your sister *far* 40 years!"

There is a strong wind blowing outside this delicatessen, it is freezing, and raining as well. The door of the shop opens-closes, and a guy walks up to the counter and says: "Give me two Bagels please, one wit' seeds and one plain" Storekeeper: Bernstein, are you telling me you walked t'ree blocks in such a terrible vedder [weather], to buy two Bagels-one wit' seeds and one mit' out seeds" "Who sent you?" Bernstein: "Who d'you t'ink vud send me, my Mudder?"

Talmid [Student]: "Rabbi, why did G-d make man before woman?"

Rabbi: "Because, He did not want any advice on how to make man"

Wives get their own back, though. For example, why are there so many unhappy Jewish marriages? Because Jewish women get all excited about nothing - then they marry him!

Chava is standing at the open grave of her husband Berel after the Levaia [funeral]. Her friend of many years, Sonia, walks up and says: "Condolences Chava; but I heard that you spent R50 000 on the Levaia. Why so much?"

Chava: Well the Levaia cost R8000, I gave the Rabbi R1000, I donated another R1000 to the

Chevre Kadisha”.

Sonia: “So that’s only R10000, what about the other R40 000?”

Chava: “Mit dat I bought a stone”

Sonia: “A stone for R40 000! It must be very big. How big!?”

Chava: “Five Carats!”

There is a vein of gentle irreverence in Jewish humor, in which the rabbi is often the butt.

The Rabbi and the *Shammes* [beadle] were always at loggerheads. However, they usually made a show of cooperating for the good of the shul. One Sabbath evening, however, the rabbi was delivering one of his extended sermons when he noticed old man Levine snoring away loudly. It was very disturbing! He summoned the *Shammes* and said: “Wake up Levine promptly, he is disturbing me!” The *Shammes* retorted: “Rabbi, you put him to sleep, you wake him up!”

A carpenter had wry sense of humor, and did not believe in imposing on Hashem: “Dear *Abershte* [One above]”, he prayed, “I ask you for sustenance and clothes to wear. Nothing more....The *lechayims* [drinks] I’ll buy myself!”

And finally...

A Yiddel is standing on a street corner in Manhattan one day when a Japanese tourist

comes up to him and says: “*Mithta*, excuse, can you please *dilect* me to the 5<sup>th</sup> avenue in Manhattan?”

The yiddel looks him up and down and says: “Huh! Pearl Harbor you found!”

There are these three couples on the beach, all trying to outdo one another.

The first woman, very wealthy, says to her husband: “Sam I *t’ink* ve can go for the drive *dis hafternoon*.” He responds: “*Wuch* car ve’ll take, de Cadillac or de Chrysler?” - “De Chrysler!” - “De cabriolet or de Sedan?” - “De Cabriolet” - “De pink or de gold?” - “*Nu*, de gold!”

The second wife says to her husband: “Its getting a *leetl vindy*, Jack pleez fetch mine *Fer* coat”. Jack: “Mink or de Ermine?” - “Ermine” - “De *treekwoder* or de full *vun*?” - “de full”. So off Jack goes to fetch de coat.

Now the third couple are not so rich. The wife says to de huzbend: “Herry, *hask* me de time.” Harry: “*Vhy*?” - “*Hask* de time!?” - “*Nu*, *vots* de time?” - “Six diamonds past four rubies!”

#### NOTES

- 1 If readers wish to contribute to the list, feel free to contact the writer through the editor.

#### Translating the Biblical Song of Flight

**Dive into the center** swim into the guts of great mother sea

**Separate her borders splash across her boundaries** heave on through

Double *entendres* vulgurous puns

*Signals* the repeating *believing* barely **beginning** barely

*Image* the shifting **signs the repeating**

Bowels off closing **vowels off twisting**

**Smoking the quill or possibly kill eternal hope**

eternal *faith* of a

**kwack kwack kwack**

**greening or gagging**

boobs billion ten *glob* glistening *waste* upon **waste void upon void**

globes **burning** **ten**

truck ton thirty a of **brights the in trapped**

*colluding* colliding **grease the splattering**

**grace the shattering**

awetomic collision



ants on the worms

**worms on the ants** so on with *suffering salt*  
**sick silly snot**

#### *Help*

*Belief* awestruck an page printed the heal  
cannot I

I’ve **lost the way** I’ve **lost it all** all that we  
are

**let it be ended** let there be **death**

**what is the use** *hell* *what is the use*

**when up she rises** and up she rises

she rises up *and by God*

she flies!

Ben Wilensky



# KLEZMER – MUSIC WITH A JEWISH SOUL

\*

Alan Jacobs

Klezmer is Yiddish Music par excellence. It is the music of the Jews of Europe and America, a music of laughter and fears, of weddings and festivals, of dancing and prayer. Born in the Middle Ages, it came of age in the shtetl, where “a wedding without Klezmer [was] worse than a funeral without tears.” Most of the European *klezmerim* were murdered in the Holocaust; in the last 25 years, however, Klezmer has been reborn, with dozens of groups, often mixing it with jazz or rock and gaining large followings throughout the world.

‘Klezmer’ is derived from two Hebrew words: *Kley* (vessels or tools) and *Zmer* (melody), hence “vessels of the music.” The term does not denote a particular kind of music, nor is it a reflection of a musical style. Rather, it refers to the natural ability of a human being to express him or herself through song.

In 15<sup>th</sup> Century Europe, there were organized Jewish music bands, which performed music of Jewish and non-Jewish origin. Sometimes, the government authorities imposed restrictions on performances by such bands.

The Chmielnicki massacres of 1648 led to some Jewish musicians fleeing south to Greece and Turkey. These teamed up with Rom (Gypsy) musicians and toured the Balkan Peninsula and Black Sea regions. The new music they composed, with its different influences and playing styles, influenced the Klezmer style and repertoire to such a degree that it is now some of the most popular Klezmer performed.

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the *klezmerim* had nearly disappeared from Germany, Austria, Moravia, Bohemia and Holland. However, they flourished in the Yiddish speaking centre of Eastern Europe – Poland, Slovakia, Lithuania, Romania, Carpathian Hungary, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia. Klezmer had become indispensable to all Jewish celebrations (particularly at weddings in Eastern Europe) and this lasted until the eve of World War II.

Most of the traditional Klezmer music performed today is based on the *klezmerim* of Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia and Ukraine from the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the eve of World War I. The earliest sound recordings (1895), the published and unpublished sheet music, and the oral histories from *klezmerim* who lived at that time all help to give us

a more complete picture of Klezmer.

Much of what we know about the repertoire the *klezmerim* played comes from the few surviving collections, manuscripts and single sheets of music. Most *klezmerim* did not read or write music. The largest of these collections comes from the research of Soviet ethno-musicologist Moshe Beregovski (1892-1961), conducted in the years 1928-1936. During the difficult years under Hitler and Stalin, Beregovski tirelessly collected Jewish folk music.

Mikhl Joseph Guzikow (1809-1837) was the most famous and admired klezmer in Europe of his day. He was born in Shklov, Belarus, to a family of *klezmerim*, learning the flute and also playing some clarinet and oboe. Because of his weak lungs, he learned to play the *hakhbreydl*, a kind of hammer dulcimer. His music was reputedly admired by Franz Liszt and Felix Mendelssohn.

The Klezmer was very important in shtetl life as shown by a few of these Yiddish sayings: *Vos far a klezmer, a za khusene* (the wedding’s only as good as the Klezmer), *Az tsvay Kapi-Sonim gayen raysn zikh bay di Klezmerim di strunes* (when two paupers go dancing the *Klezmerim* play harder) and *A Khasene on Klezmer iz erger fun a kale on a nadn* (a wedding without a Klezmer is worse than a bride without a dowry).

Jewish communities in Russia had to supply an annual quota of young men for the Czarist army. In the army, Jews learned to play wind instruments and to read and arrange music. Their years of playing military music changed the make-up of Klezmer bands in Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Some of these musicians went to America and influenced the repertoire and make-up of Klezmer bands there.

Traditional Klezmer music performed today can be put into two broad musical styles. One is the Polish–Ukrainian (with some Belorussian, Slovakian and Russian influences) sound and the other is the Romanian-Turkish (with some Hungarian, Galician and Carpathian Ukrainian influences). The capital of the Polish–Ukrainian sound was Barditshev–Ukraine, where there were several Klezmer virtuosi who led bands that became legendary throughout the Ukraine, parts of Poland and Russia. The capital of the Romanian–Turkish sound was Yas, Romania, which from the turn of the century through the eve of World War II, was the home of several virtuosi and their bands that were famous throughout Moldavia and Bessarabia.

The violin as we know it today was invented in

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the mid-16<sup>th</sup> Century and it became the leader and symbol of Klezmer music. The Klezmer violinist was an extension of the Chazan's voice. The Chazan made a *krecht* (groan) from the neck up and a Klezmer made a *krecht* from the neck down. His ability to imitate the crying, moaning and laughing cantorial techniques he had heard since he was an infant was shaped into specific Klezmer ornamentations. The Klezmer's conservatory was the synagogue, his lessons the daily prayers.

The famous Klezmer violinist Stempenyu (1822–1879) was immortalized by the great Yiddish writer Shalom Aleichem in his novel *Stempenyu*. He wrote:

The public sits with great respect as the Klezmer plays a cheerless *maralne* [Yid., Moral, a display piece played with a great deal of improvisation], a tearful one. The violin - tiokh - tiokh - tiokh - called out to the wedding guests and continued to echo in their hearts. In every heart, but especially in the Jewish heart. Such a violin. He squeezed the different strings and mostly sad and tearful songs came out... For such a mood one only needed the right musician, a skillful one, a Klezmer; such a skillful one as Stempenyu was.

The *krechtsn* (groans, moans) were the moaning, achy long notes that gave Klezmer music its distinctive sound, used usually by the violinist and clarinetist to evoke a lament.

The *kneytshn* (fold, wrinkle and crease) were short notes with the achiness of the *krechtsn* but which were swallowed sharply as if squeezing the tip of the sound. The *tshoks* (lavishness, splendor, swagger) were 'bent' notes (purposely noting concert pitch but just slightly under or over the actual note) with a laugh-like sound. Flageolets (Italian: small flute) were harmonics generally played on the violin. Their use allowed the Klezmer to create rapid whistling sounds evoking the heavens. The root of Klezmer music - what made it sound Jewish - was not to be found in the folk music of Central or Eastern Europe, but in the meditations and prayers of our Middle Eastern ancestors and neighbors.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, many young Klezmer and other violinists had obtained permission from the Czar to study in the music conservatories of St. Petersburg under Leopold Auer (1845 – 1930) and in Odessa under Pjotr Stolyarsky. Some of these Klezmer violinists went on to become world famous virtuosi. They included Bronislaw Huberman (1882–1947, of Poland, who in 1936 founded the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra), Efren Zimbalist (1889–1985, Russia), Mischa Elman (1891–1967, Ukraine), David Oistrakh (1908–1972, Ukraine), Jascha Heifetz (1901–1987, Lithuania) and Nathan Milstein (1904–1992, Russia).

The last two may not have played Klezmer but they had heard plenty of it. The Klezmer's repertoire during the interval years still consisted of many of the traditional wedding melodies, dances, military marches, and light classical overtures. But it was

significantly changed. The popularity of Yiddish theatre was on the rise both in Eastern Europe and America. Sheet music and recordings were available. Yiddish films from America and Eastern Europe were screened. People had radios and listened to popular European and American tunes. Yiddish songs like *Roumania, Roumania, Mayn Shtetle, Papirosen* and *Vu Zaynen Mayne Zibn Gute Yor* were all written in the United State yet became very popular in Central and Eastern Europe during the 1920s and 1930s – so popular, in fact, that many Jews and Rom living in Eastern Europe, who sang and played these tunes, thought that they were originally from their countries.<sup>1</sup>

By 1902, the Yiddish press in the USA was advertising Catskill resorts catering specifically for the Eastern European Jewish immigrant. The Catskills hotels hired *klezmorim*, mostly for dances and background music during dinner. Some of the popular tunes were *Yosl Yosl, Shabbes Tzu Nakht* and *Hu-Tzu-Tza*.

David Tarraschuk (1897–1989, Ukraine), known as David Tarras, could transpose and sight-read music and was soon recording with bands. Tarras was the most popular Klezmer clarinetist from the mid-1930s to end of 1950s. His style of playing has influenced a generation of Klezmer revival clarinetists, most notably his protégé Andy Statman.

Some *klezmorim* attempted the crossover to American popular music by arranging, composing, and performing Klezmer music in jazz style. One of the simpler novelty tunes was *Lena* from Palestreena, written in 1920 by Conrad and Robinson. Other popular tunes were *Sheyn Vi Di Levune, Matzo Balls* and *Bay Mir Bist Sheyn*.

Probably the most successful of the *klezmorim*, who performed in the Klezmer and jazz worlds, was Sammy Muziker (1916–1964). He played clarinet and saxophone in Gene Krupa's band in the late 1930s and early 1940s. He married Dave Tarras' daughter.

Micky Katz (1909–1985), a Jewish clarinetist who lived in Los Angeles, became very well known to Jews and non-Jews. He sold a lot of records and was listened to by many of the Klezmer revivalists. He was able to play his style of music into the mid-1960s, even though most Klezmer musicians had retired a decade earlier.

During World War II, *klezmorim* performed in various ghetto ensembles, playing popular and Jewish music. Many *klezmorim* were sent to concentration camps and often had to play in the camp orchestra. In addition to slave labor, they had to perform for the Nazis at their dinner parties and other events. Leopold Koslowski was such a Klezmer. The S.S. Commandant said to him that if he could teach him to play Strauss's "Blue Danube" in seven days, so that he could perform it on his accordion at an S.S. Party, he would not have to work as hard as the other prisoners. If he did not succeed, he would be shot. The SS man was very unmusical, but he managed to play the waltz.

*Klezmorim* in the camps often had a prolonged life but most were eventually murdered. It would take fifty years after the holocaust for Yiddish culture in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union to be revived.

By the 1960s, Klezmer music had been all but relegated to the Hasidic enclaves of Brooklyn. Jewish musicians now followed different paths in music – jazz, pit orchestras, film orchestration and the like. The immigrants' children and grandchildren were now active participants in the 1950s beat generation and eventually the 1960s counter culture movement.

The third generation of East European immigrants to America were the first "*Baalei Kulturniks*" (masters of culture), Klezmer revivalists who began playing Klezmer in the 1970s. They learned from recordings and first hand from those first and second generation *klezmorim* that were still alive. This generation includes Michael Alpert, Zev Feldman, Giora Feidman, Henry Sapoznik and Andy Statman.

The fourth generation *Baalei Kulturniks*, who began playing Klezmer in the 1980s, had learned from three previous generations and began to push the boundaries. Klezmer bands began to experiment with elements from jazz, rock 'n roll and ethnic genres like Rom, Balkan and Arabic music.

By the late 1980s Western Europe, particularly Germany, became more receptive to the growing interest in Yiddish culture and brought several Klezmer bands from America to tour. Some of the musicians were David Buchbinder, Frank London, Deborah Strauss and Yale Strom.

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, born into an illustrious rabbinical family in Berlin, is credited with having started the Neo-Hasidic folk song genre in the US. Carlebach's simple, melodic tunes, which he sang while accompanying himself on guitar, were based on one of the building blocks of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Klezmer music, the *Nigun*. These *nigunim*, some wordless, most with Hebrew text, are still sung by many thousands of Jews around the world today. Before any *Baalei Kulturnik* band played in Eastern Europe, Carlebach had toured the Eastern Bloc, the former Soviet Union and Poland, and played to sold out audiences in 1988. He thus sowed some of the early seeds of the Klezmer revival movement that became a regular part of the Jewish cultural renewal.

Klezmer music in Israel is associated with and played only among Hasidim. One of the best known Klezmers in Palestine at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was drummer Moyshe Poyker. An important Klezmer clarinetist in Israel was Avram Segal (1911 – 1995), born in Tsfat. He played Hasidic *nigunim* and Arab tunes. Another influential Klezmer musician is clarinetist Moshe Berlin, born in 1938 in Tel Aviv. An International Klezmer Festival is held annually in July in Tsfat.

Klezmer, the musical language of the Jews, and Yiddish, the spoken language of the Jews, have traveled together down the same road for nearly the same length of time. Just as Yiddish has incorporated new vocabularies based upon new cultural trends, so have the many Klezmer revival bands infused new musical forms, like free jazz and rock 'n roll, into a

19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century East European Klezmer sound. Klezmer must always stay grounded in Yiddish, as it is the musical abstraction of the Yiddish language.

The earliest descendants of today's *klezmorim* were the medieval Ashkenazic minstrels who played and sang in Yiddish. For the Klezmer revival scene to continue to develop and flourish, whether it be neo traditionalist or Avant-Gardist, the Yiddish component will need to be explored, examined and exploited to help us better to understand the past, present and future world of the Klezmer.

## NOTES

- 1 *Roumania, Roumania* was composed by Aaron Lebedeff (1873-1960), born in Gomel, Belarus. *Mayn Shtetle* was composed by Alexander Olsha Netsky (1892 – 1940) born in Odessa – Russia. *Papirozen* (cigarettes) was composed by Herman Yablokoff in 1932.

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# L'AFRIQUE: A TRIBUTE TO MARIA STEIN-LESSING AND LEOPOLD SPIEGEL

\*

Lana Jacobson

On 25 May 2009, the Spiegel/Stein-Lessing Wing for African Art in MuseumAfrica will be dedicated to honor two distinguished German Jewish pioneers of African art. After their marriage in the mid-1940s, Dr. Maria Stein-Lessing and Leopold Spiegel combined their skills to produce an important legacy in the field of African and South African art and artifacts. As a result of a bequest by Spiegel, an exhibition of art and artefacts which were collected by himself and Stein-Lessing, his first wife, will form the first exhibition in the area entitled *l'Afrique*. A book of the same title will be launched simultaneously in memory of Stein-Lessing.

Between 1933 and 1939, approximately 6000 German Jews came to South Africa to escape Nazi tyranny. Traveling by ship, the majority docked at Cape Town, and while some remained there, the majority moved on to different destinations, in particular to Johannesburg.<sup>1</sup> One of the new arrivals was Leopold Spiegel, who came to South Africa in 1935, at the age of 24. Maria Lessing arrived the following year. She had left Germany in 1933 for London, where she was awarded her Doctorate from the University of Bonn for the thesis she had been working on in Germany (1934). In South Africa, she made a name for herself as a lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The book *l'Afrique* was edited by Natalie Knight, who also contributed the introduction and the essay 'Hidden Treasures'. It has several essays by Jewish writers – Esmé Berman, Dr. Paula Girshick, Prof. Andrew Spiegel, Phyllis Woolf and Nessa Leibhammer. The publication has proved to be a celebratory revival. Deep and enduring memories keep flooding in from many parts of the world from art luminaries whom Stein-Lessing shaped, including Esmé Berman, Cecil Skotnes, Judith Mason, Elizabeth Rankin, and Professor Eric Fernie.

Fernie, who went on to become Director of the famed Courtauld Art Institute, has vivid memories of his Wits lecturer: "It wasn't the idiosyncrasies, the chain smoking, the dog tethered during lectures. What I remember is her intensity. I knew nothing about medieval cathedrals, but when Dr. Stein-Lessing had given us a lecture on them, it just seemed as if they were the most fascinating things in the world."

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Maria Lessing was born in Germany in 1905. Her personal life is a blank until 1933, when she moved to London and gained employment at its Courtauld Art Institute. On coming to South Africa, she was appointed Head of the Art Appreciation Centre at the Pretoria Technical College. She became fascinated by African art and artefacts, becoming a committed collector. She was assisted by the Jewish community and in particular by Richard and Frieda Feldman.

Scrupulously private, she married and divorced in a short space of time. At some point, her surname changed from Lessing to Stein-Lessing. Typically, there is no record of her first husband or of their time spent together. She then met fellow émigré and refugee Leopold Spiegel, who was in the army at the time (he would attain the rank of sergeant and receive two medals before his discharge in 1946).

The two were diverse in character. Leopold was a socially sophisticated European, with style and courtesy brought up by upright proper German parents. Maria was intellectually sophisticated. But there the similarities ended.

While Leopold was polite, she was forthright, sometimes even downright rude. He was lean; she sturdy. Social class was an integral part of his life, as was etiquette (like standing when a woman entered the room and not sitting until she did, or eating fruit or bread with a knife and fork). Propriety was an anathema to her. When she entered the lecture room, her impatient spaniel dog would skid ahead, dragging Maria's inelegant body along by the leash. She would then bend in her sensible Dr. Clark look-alike shoes and tether him to the desk leg.



*Leopold Spiegel, 1912-2006*

Leopold was dapper. He rather fancied himself as a 'ladies man', sporting a pipe and army uniform, and had a taste for imported clothes and shoes, which he matched with a hat or cap from his varied collection. Maria, by contrast, was disheveled - she did not devote herself to being decorative, insisting on wearing outdated calf length suits over tightly buttoned blouses leaving no exposed flesh. The soft curtain of hair above her lip was yellow tinged at the cupid bow from smoking. It was her frizzy salt and pepper hair that drew most attention, springing from her scalp like a wild thorn bush. She wore owl-shaped glasses, except for special occasions, when she donned post-war era cats' eye art deco fashionable spectacles and a hat.

Unsurprisingly Spiegel's first impression of his future wife was unfavorable. Of their first meeting, he recalled: "In the army, I didn't have much social life, therefore I was very pleased when an acquaintance invited me to join his family for a Friday night meal. But, can you imagine my surprise when I was fetched by a woman driver? This was not etiquette in Germany".

They went to dinner, and Maria remained in the driver's seat, literally and metaphorically, throughout their courtship and marriage. He was in total admiration of her. 'M' and 'L', as they fondly referred to one another (and became known as to both friends and enemies) married shortly afterwards and moved to an apartment in Yeoville.

The couple had several important commonalities. Both were Jewish émigrés fleeing extermination in Germany. They were both lonely. Stein-Lessing particularly must have led an achingly solitary existence, as she never mentioned family; the only parental link one can find, after wading through mounds of research, is her father, who once lived at Our Parents Home. Leopold's family managed to escape Germany. His parents and one brother joined him eventually in South Africa. His other brother Klaus lived and died in Palestine.

Maria's high qualifications as an art historian enhanced Leopold's own not insubstantial interest in art. At this time, he struggled to find employment, but he made up for it later in life by investing wisely, and accumulating a fortune. Because L was unemployed M opened a small shop, l'Afrique, in central Johannesburg.

Maria joined the staff of the Fine Art Department of the University of Witwatersrand in 1946. It is from then onwards that she garnered fame, and notoriety, for her Bohemian persona and mannerisms, her teaching and her collections.

Esmé Berman was one of her first students at Wits. They liked each other immediately, and later Maria became Esmé's mentor and friend. She recalls:

Maria Stein-Lessing was something of a sorceress; puffs of smoke from an endless chain of cigarettes clouded the air of the lecture-theatre, and out of the fog Maria somehow conjured up a vital image of the past. She gave luminous life to the periods with which she dealt

and endowed them with permanent meaning for her students.

Ironically, back then most South Africans were completely unaware of indigenous art and its invaluable future role on the world stage. They were dismissive, labeling it mere 'ethnography', or "crude crafts." However, M and L had both been exposed to European and African cultures, to Primitivism and Expressionism. They knew that African masks had inspired the great masters of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century art in Europe, including Picasso, Gauguin, and Matisse.

In addition to masks and items from Central and Western Africa, L and M collected Zulu, Ndebele and Tsonga art items. They focused on something completely overlooked in South Africa. They found beauty in carvings and beadwork. Commented Egon Guenter, a fellow émigré and major African art collector:

In my opinion Stein-Lessing and Spiegel, who was inspired by her, were important to South Africa because they were amongst the first people who tried to create an interest in indigenous art as early as the 1940s. The contribution of the German immigrants was that they recognized the value of African art at a time when others, especially South Africans, were completely unaware of it.

Paintings and sculptures include work from artists who befriended them - Irma Stern, Elza Dziomba, Walter Battiss, Alex Preller, Cecil Skotnes, and many others.

Stein-Lessing continued lecturing and collecting, and became Director of Bantu Arts and Crafts in Johannesburg. Her job required making trips around the countryside. Thus their African odyssey began. L



*Dr. Maria Stein-Lessing, 1905-1961*

became well versed in the value and quality of Southern African art, an interest he sustained throughout his life. The odd couple scrambled, trawled, and crawled, through the veld, in huts and caves in remote surrounds, becoming knowledgeable of indigenous craft and rock engravings and paintings. Guests to their jam-packed flat would be confronted by hundreds of pairs of eyes staring at them from masks on every square metre of the walls, or they would bump into woodcarvings, combs, snuff boxes, headrests, mats and baskets.

In 1949, the couple relocated to London, where Stein-Lessing lectured in art at the University of Cambridge and curated an exhibition *Art in South Africa* at the Wakefield City Art Gallery, Yorkshire. Three years later, they returned to South Africa, where she organized festivals and exhibitions on South African Art and artefacts and resumed her post at Wits University.

M was always ardent about teaching, but by the late fifties, she grew disillusioned. As the months passed, she grew more irritable. What appeared as deep personal strength and an air of invincibility was in reality despair.

The illustrious artist Judith Mason remembers M vividly:

She was already in her mid fifties, but she looked like a different generation to other women her age. She had the life of Jewish refugee written across her face, and one got a good idea of what her life must have been. She was very highly-strung and extremely intense, which was demanding. We were just young and blind to the value of African art, which Europeans had the eye to see. They formed part of the intellectual hub of society. We were intellectually slovenly with our limited South African education; we were grumpy ill-bred little sods. We were so busy being 'cool' we were frozen in a coma.

One day, Stein-Lessing pounced on a blank faced Judith in class. She had been talking about 'the Venerable Bede': "Vel, who da hell VAS BEDE? Go back to your schools, get your money back!"

Continues Mason: "I never saw her buoyant. She was very angry a lot and she looked worn. I always had a sense that she was happy at home, though she looked like L's mother. She was six years his elder, but she looked much, much, older. His behavior was quite juvenile in a way. She was positively the boss".

South African politics compounded M's mounting despair. Wits University has always been a highly politicized environment. The Nationalist regime had come into power, and apartheid was entrenched. South Africa had been excommunicated from the British Commonwealth. She feared neo-Nazism taking hold of the country. Artist Cecile Sash recalls her saying, "The Nazis are going to get me."<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, M was Acting Head of Department of Art in 1961. The responsibility was overwhelming, and her attitude towards her colleagues was decidedly underwhelming, which didn't inspire them to offer

assistance. She turned helplessly to her long-time pupil and friend Esmé Berman, asking for assistance in creating tutoring models.

Esmé, who was heavily pregnant at the time, had watched helplessly as her mentor navigated into helpless depression and she recalls warning M, "If you don't watch it you will get a knife in your back."

The turning point was when very close friends of hers, fellow German émigrés, left South Africa for the United Kingdom. M felt betrayed by life itself.

Aware of her declining mental condition Prof Douglas MacCrone, Professor of Psychology and Deputy Chancellor of Wits at the time, visited her one afternoon in 1961 and tried to comfort her. L was not home at the time, and M confessed that she wanted to die. But he calmed her and firmly believed when he left her a few hours later that she would not do anything rash. That evening she gassed herself.

Maria Stein-Lessing's death came as a huge shock to everybody. To L, whose family had already been so disrupted by the Holocaust and war years, this was the cruelest blow of all.

Berman presented a eulogy and a memorial at Wits honoring Maria Stein-Lessing in March 1965. For his part, L faithfully preserved her memory, and continued collecting artefacts, with works of artists and friends such as Walter Battiss; Cecil Skotnes, Gordon Vorster, Maggie Laubser and Irma Stern adorning his walls. The collectables grew and when he remarried several years later, his bride Minna persuaded him to sell 600 pieces to the Museum of Man and Science, which then passed on the items to MuseumAfrica (then the Africana Museum).

Seven years later, Minna died from a stroke and L was alone yet again. Later, he married Hilda 'Ginger' Woolf, and in doing so was thrust into a fully-fledged family with two daughters, one living at home, the other married with three small children. They were happily married for thirty years.

Ginger's death left L bereft and mourning deeply for a very long time. In the process, he became increasingly isolated and less able to interact socially with other people.

Nonetheless, he retained, the gentleman style and courtesy instilled in him by his upright parents. He died in 2006 aged, 94, at Randjeslaagte Estate, a retirement complex in Johannesburg. Through his generous bequest, the names of Spiegel/Stein-Lessing will be a permanent feature in the African art world.

## NOTES

- 1 Hellig, Dr. Jocelyn, *Seeking Refuge German Jewish Immigrants to Johannesburg in the 1930s*, SA Jewish Board of Deputies, 2005, p30
- 2 Bernard Sachs interviewed Maria a month before her death, later observing: "The nightmare of Nazi Germany is always there in the background. Every once in a while, as I spoke to her, it kept suppurating upwards from the wound of memory. And I noticed that the present condition of South Africa wasn't so soothing to this wound", *SA Jewish Times*, 4/8/1965

## ALECK GOLDBERG- AN APPRECIATION

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Isaac Reznik

“Growing up in a small Jewish country community on the Highveld of the then Eastern Transvaal, now Mpumalanga, Johannesburg in the minds of both adults and children - had the image of the quintessential big city, where everything even the humdrum, was endowed with an element of wonder.”

This was how the late Aleck Goldberg, who passed away last year just before Shabbat Chol Hamoed Sukkot at the age of 85, described a prospective visit to the great metropolis during his boyhood. Aleck was born and grew up in the small Eastern Transvaal town of Ermelo, moving to Johannesburg only after matriculating there.

I first met Aleck Goldberg in the early 1970s when the then General Secretary of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, the late Gus Saron, approached me to prepare (together with the late Dr. Julius and Bianca Sergay) an audio-visual presentation - ‘Speak with one Voice’ - to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SAJBD. I spent many hours with Aleck. Both of us had an ardent interest in and keen understanding of South African Jewish history, and we would spend many hours at his office discussing Jewish affairs.

My first impressions of Aleck could not but be influenced by the aesthetic atmosphere of his office. The latter was adorned with a Berenice Michelow lithograph and a pastel by Lionel Abrahams - two of the many expressions of his multifaceted artistic and creative interests. Creativity, an integral part of Aleck’s interest and involvement, spanned a wide spectrum - classical music, art, and insatiable interest in reading, particularly journals of Jewish interest, and writing about Jewish literature and communal activities. All of this in turn revealed the many facets of his cultural background.

When Aleck retired as executive director of the SAJBD in 1990 I asked him, and he agreed, to join the editorial board of *Jewish Tradition*, of which I was then the editor. We both also served on the Library committee of the SA Zionist Federation for many years, until his passing.

When Aleck decided to write a book about the South African Jewish community I, as director of the Rabbi Aloy Foundation Trust, arranged for the funds to be made available for its publication. I spent many

hours with Aleck editing the book, which eventually appeared under the name *Profile of a community - South African Jewry* (2002). At its launch, he generously thanked me for my “invaluable help” in compiling several of its chapters.

For more than fifteen years, until his untimely illness, both Aleck and I regularly attended a shiur on Wednesday evenings at the home of the late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris. Aleck always participated fully in the shiur, and invariably Rabbi Harris would ask him to comment or elaborate on the subject being discussed.

I could best describe the late Aleck Goldberg as a “scholar and a gentleman”, and in all the years that knew him, I never once heard him speak badly about anyone. His knowledge of Judaism, teaching background and ability to articulate and write fluently in both English and Afrikaans also made him the ideal candidate for Jewish professional leadership.

Aleck is survived by his wife Musa, who was always at his side, and supported him in all his endeavors, his two sons, daughters in-law, daughter and grandchildren.

May his memory be for a blessing.



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# ISLAM AND THE DEMOCRATIC DILEMMA

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Paul Eidelberg, William E. Morrissey

Last year marked the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the debates between the then-great American senator Stephen Douglas and an obscure Illinois lawyer named Abraham Lincoln. A single election campaign for one seat in the United States Senate, generations back: it all seems too parochial, so distant, so entirely irrelevant to today. And yet the basic principles enunciated in that debate illuminate perhaps the most agonizing conflict of our own time, the confrontation between the liberal democracies of the West and the Islamic monarchies, tyrannies, oligarchies in the Middle East - with Israel at risk.

Lincoln and Douglas met two years before the American republic sundered in its bloodiest war, a civil war that cost more American lives than the First and Second World Wars combined. The issue that threatened the Union was simple: slavery. But the question of slavery cuts to the heart of how we define 'democracy.'

After all, 'democracy' simply means 'rule of the people' or popular sovereignty. Popular sovereignty requires majority rule. But where does that leave an enslaved *minority*? In a community of three, if Eidelberg and Morrissey want to enslave Schwarz, what is poor Schwarz to do? The principle of pure democracy gives him no alternative but to submit to the rule of the majority.

In the 1850s, the champions of popular sovereignty in America intended to escape the increasingly sharp division between Americans (usually in the Northern states) who sought to abolish slavery - condemning it as a crime against humanity - and Americans (usually in the Southern states, where slaves picked the cotton and tended the tobacco plantations) who upheld slavery as 'a positive good,' as the phrase went. In reply to both sides, Douglas proposed a seductive solution: Let the people decide. If the settlers of an American territory want to join the American Union, let them vote slavery up or down. End of problem.

Douglas told Illinois voters that popular sovereignty was "the great principle that every people ought to possess the right to form and regulate their own domestic institutions in their own way." Self-government means that "every community [may] judge for itself, whether a thing is right or wrong, whether it would be good or evil for them to adopt it."

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Self-government is "the birthright of freemen."

The framers of the United States Constitution endorsed popular sovereignty, Douglas claimed, in order to honor diversity. "The laws and domestic institutions which would suit the granite hills of New Hampshire would be totally unfit for the plantations of South Carolina." Separate and distinct conditions require separate and distinct laws, even separate and distinct definitions of right and wrong. "Uniformity is the parent of despotism the world over, not only in politics, but in religion." The diversity popular sovereignty ensures therefore amounts to "the greatest safeguard of all our liberties."

Then, as now, this was an attractive argument. After all, only a tyrant would contend that the laws adequate to, for example, a largely nomadic desert people in the Seventh Century CE could sensibly apply to the citizens of Paris or Buenos Aires. But the argument doesn't quite work. The key to its unsoundness rests in the little word 'totally'. No one could deny that regions as diverse in climate and terrain as New England and the deep South could thrive under the same laws. Uniformity in that sense would indeed spawn despotism, or at least misery, in one or both places. But does that mean that *all* or even *most* of the laws of New Hampshire and South Carolina must diverge from one another?

Enter Lincoln. The purpose of popular sovereignty, he said, is not simply to honor diversity and to avoid the tyranny of a deadening conformism. *For what reason, by what criterion*, do we judge diversity good and despotism bad? On this point, the American founders had spoken with one voice, in their Declaration of Independence from the British monarch and parliament: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." *Governments* exist in order to *secure* those rights, and the moral legitimacy of the democratic *form* of government - along with all other forms - stands or falls on its ability to do just that.

When the American founders go on to say that governments derive their just powers from the *consent* of the governed, they mean two things. First, every adult who is to be governed must be asked - a point that the founders (who of course included slaveholders among them) knew must include the slaves, who were more 'governed' than anyone. More subtly, 'consent' must mean not mere assent - a child can give that - but *reasoned* assent, assent given after due



deliberation, debate, and expressed in a free and fair vote by the people or by their (freely and fairly) elected representatives. Consent, in other words, must stay within the framework of the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, within (as the Declaration also says) the laws of nature and of nature's God.

When Lincoln lost his senatorial election to Douglas in 1858, he did not call upon his followers to take up their guns and march on Washington in order to reverse the result. Having consented to participate in the political process - debating, deliberating, deciding - he also consented to accept the result of that process. In doing so, he followed the practice of politics as defined by perhaps the greatest of political philosophers, Aristotle. It is in considering Aristotle's definition of politics that we can begin to see the problem of Islamic rule.

Aristotle begins his study of politics with the family. In every family, he sees three distinct forms of human rule. There is the rule of the parents over the children; this entails a one-way, 'commanding' type of rule, exercised by the rulers for the sake of the ruled. 'I'm doing this for your own good,' is the perennial theme of parenting. The families Aristotle saw also exhibited the rule of masters over slaves; this also entailed one-way or commanding rule, but now exercised by the rulers for the benefit of themselves. Not for Aristotle the sentimental talk of the slaveholder as wise parent/guardian of the 'childlike' slave - the stuff of the Southern planters' rhetoric, and of tyrants everywhere. In both of these forms of rule, the unspoken command underlying all the other commands is: "No talking back!"

But not so for the relationship between husband and wife. In the ancient world, of course, the husband might have the final word in any argument, but arguing, persuading, and even consent always underlay the marriage. Aristotle calls this government-by-reasoning, this talkative way of rule, this ruling-and-being-ruled, this give-and-take, the only genuinely *political* rule. It is the only kind of rule fit for adult human beings, who are, uniquely, creatures capable of reason, creatures whose God-given natures cannot flourish without the opportunity to think things through.

Now consider Islam. It comes in many varieties, of course, but at its core, according to its scriptures themselves, is *command* - the commands of Allah, through Mohammad. What is more, Mohammad represented Allah's commands to establish a regime of *military* conquest - a regime of armed force. Whereas the God of the Bible is no less commanding, note this: the prophets talk back. One of them, famously, even wrestles back! Consider also God in Christianity, calling upon Christians to conquer, to be sure, but to conquer by persuasion and witness, not by fire and sword. It is no slander on Islam to take it at its word. Islam command *jihad* - wars of forced conversion, the alternative to which is either death or *Dhimmitude* - that is to say, strict subordination to the Muslim conqueror.

Dhimmitude might or might not mean literal

slavery, but the point remains: this is not politics; this is not government by the consent of the governed.

We select the example of the founder of the Islamic 'Republic' of Iran, which of course is in fact a religious oligarchy. The founder of the Iranian regime, the late Ayatollah Khomeini, propounded his theory of ruling in his book, *Islam and Revolution*. Khomeini understands Islam as a regime, a way of rule. It is Allah's regime, a comprehensive system of laws, "a complete social system" through which "all the needs of man have been met". No more legislation is needed; Allah has provided mankind with the final and authoritative way of life under Allah's laws. It is left only to rulers to execute those laws and to judge disputants under the laws' guidance. "If Muslims had acted in accordance with this command and, after forming a government, made the necessary extensive preparations to be in a state of full readiness for war, a handful of Jews would never have dared to occupy our lands".

Khomeini conceals nothing concerning the character of this regime. It is, he writes, constitutional - a genuine rule of law - but "not constitutional in the current sense of the word, i.e., based on the approval of laws in accordance with the opinion of the majority. It is constitutional in the sense that the rulers are subject to a certain set of conditions in governing and administering the countries, conditions that are set forth in the Noble Qur'an and the Sunna of the Most Noble Messenger.... Islamic government may therefore be defined as the rule of divine law over men." Consent comes in only at the beginning - when the infidel accepts the rule of Allah and of Allah's laws and the authority of Allah's prophet, Mohammad.

But how can such a set of laws, first laid down in a small community that knew nothing of modern states, modern technology, modern economies, really *rule* today? Khomeini does not flinch. The sinews of the modern state in its day-to-day exercise are the lines of command seen in bureaucracies. But "superfluous bureaucracies and the system of file-keeping and paper-shuffling that is enforced in them" are "totally alien to Islam." "When the juridical methods of Islam were applied, the *shari'a* judge in each town, assisted only by two bailiffs and with only a pen and an inkpot at his disposal, would swiftly resolve disputes among people and send them about their business." There is no 'state' in Islam - only the community of believers, the *ummah*, and the local rulers. Insofar as Muslims might 'need' to adopt statehood in order to defend themselves from similarly-organized infidels, they do so only with a view toward eliminating the state altogether, in future.

But what of modern technology? The judges and executors of Islamic law defer to those most expert on that law, the clerics, the *fuqaha*. The Islamic political community is not a monarchy or a democracy but a 'fuqaharchy.' And above all the *fuqaha* stands the supreme religious ruler on earth, the Imam. This, then, is a system of rule, a regime, based not on politics but on command, and Khomeini again not

only understood this but insisted upon it: “With respect to duty and position, there is indeed no difference between the guardian of a nation and the guardian of a minor.” The clerics are the fathers of the people, the Imam or supreme cleric - “the universal divine vicegerent” - the father of fathers. This is “a vicegerency pertaining to the whole of creation, by virtue of which all the atoms in the universe humble themselves before the holder of authority.” Muhammad and the Imams “existed before the creation of the world in the form of lights situated beneath the divine throne; they were superior to other men even in the sperm from which they grew and in their physical composition” - “limited only by the divine will.” Thus the power of the Imams, rulers superior *in nature* to men and indeed to all of creation, far surpasses the power of mere human invention.

For Khomeini, and indeed for many Muslims, Shi’a or Sunni, all men most emphatically are *not* created equal. Unlike Moses or the Apostle Paul, Mohammad is *more* than human, and so are all of the Imams who followed Mohammad. This gives them the right to rule parentally, not politically.

Islam has won the adherence of millions around the world. In its several forms it animates vast majorities in the Middle East. Khomeini calls his regime an Islamic *republic*, but insists that it is no republic in the Western sense. What does it mean if a *majority* associates rule not with politics in the

strict sense - with reciprocal ruling-and-being-ruled - but with *command*?

This can really mean only one thing: the majority, guided by the clerical elite, will *execute* the divine law and *judge* one another, and all minority groups not as fellow-citizens but as *commanders*. Such a majority will happily vote for the likes of Hamas, a paramilitary organization that seeks the violent destruction of Israel and indeed the annihilation of anything or anyone standing in their way, which (they tell themselves) is God’s way.

Meanwhile, insofar as it attempts to undertake ‘even-handed’ diplomacy towards Israel and its enemies, the West essentially adopts the position of Stephen Douglas: “Let the people decide” their own local ruling institutions and practices, the West says, imagining itself to be fair and dispassionate. Let Muslims rule themselves; let Jews rule Jews. Can’t they all just get along, if only they would respect one another’s majorities?

No, they can’t - or, more accurately, they won’t. Muslims in principle despise such easygoing moral relativism. In Khomeini’s estimation, the ‘imperialists’ of the West are “even more Satanic” than the Jews. No milk-and-toast moralist of amorality, the Ayatollah! Any compromises with Satans great or small amount to tactical maneuvers at best. The only true peace is in submission, the meaning of ‘Islam.’

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## WHAT WILL I TELL MY FATHER?

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Mary Kropman

After his barmitzvah, my Father worked in my Zeida’s trading store in Ngwenya, Eastern Cape. He mastered the Xhosa language and would converse with the customers about their health, their families and their needs. Dad delighted us with his ability to make up rhymes in Xhosa, using only words with clicks.

The shop had a steady flow of customers. The traditional Xhosa people, because they smeared their bodies and clothes with red ochre, were called *Abantu ababomvu*, meaning “Red people”. The Westernized women wore long dresses made from German print. The men wore European style clothing and in the winter, they wrapped themselves in heavy wool blankets to keep out the icy wind. The favorite

blanket for formal dress was the Whitney blanket, which had six purple stripes with a large black stripe in the centre and the edge braided with red wool in a criss-cross fashion.

The Xhosa women cultivated beans, peas, pumpkins, potatoes, sorghum and mealies. They used what they needed and the surplus was sold to the storekeeper. A host of new foods hitherto unknown to them, such as tea, coffee, sugar and canned food were purchased. The shelves in the shop were filled with a variety of products, such as Old Dutch medicine, clothing and cooking utensils. The three-legged black pot was very popular. Huge galvanized baths and buckets hung from the ceiling. Traders helped customers through the lean years by giving them goods on credit.

Like most shop owners the family lacked nothing – they had a roof over their heads, food and clothing. However, there was little money left over to pay for schooling. Dad decided to leave school and find work elsewhere so that he could pay for his younger brother’s school fees. A trader in Newtondale was

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looking for an assistant, so he packed his worn brown leather suitcase and walked over the road to the railway station. The goods train steamed to a stop and loaded on pumpkins for the market in King William's Town. Dad sat amongst the yellow, white and green pumpkins as the train chugged along its way, stopping at the small railway sidings until it reached King late in the afternoon. He spent the night with friends and at daybreak, took a lift with a delivery van filled with hot crusty bread.

On arriving in Newtondale, Dad introduced himself to the owners of the store. He was immediately welcomed by the thin, short, kindly Yiddische Mama, "*Kum arein, kum ziets mir esen friese bruit, mit eier*" (Come in, come sit. We are eating fresh bread and eggs). Her husband added "You look a strong young man and I am sure you are not scared of work".

The days were long and busy. Working in a trading store involved serving customers, weighing and packing goods. My Father could easily lift a bag of mealies weighing a hundred pounds and throw it on to his back. Flour mealies, mealie meal, tea, coffee and salt, had to be packed and weighed into small brown paper packets ready for sale. The smaller quantities were packed into handmade funnel shaped paper containers and the larger quantities were double wrapped in oblong parcels.

There was another assistant, and he and my Father shared a room and were company for each other. The owners made them feel part of the family. The days were busy and they were tired at the end of the day. One evening at closing time Dad swept out the shop, ate supper with the family and retired early. The next morning he was awakened by the sound of angry voices. Before he could jump out of bed the owner of the house yanked him out of bed saying,

"Shap, you were the last one in the shop and there's five pounds missing. Take your bags and go".

"I have never stolen anything", Dad tried to explain.

"Not another world, take your case and go".

Tears streaming down his face my Father left. He was deeply humiliated and knew it was all a mistake. He kept saying to himself, "What will I tell my Father? What will I tell my Father?" There wasn't a car in sight. He walked barefoot so as not to damage his only pair of shoes. His feet were blistered and cut by the jagged stones in the road.

After many miles, he came across a black man with a wagon. The man was struggling to lift the heavy wagon wheel, which was lying in a donga. My Father helped the man lift the wheel back on to the wagon. The old man was very happy to give my tired sad Father a ride. They chatted easily in the clicking Xhosa language. With the setting of the sun they camped by the side of the road. The mare drank deeply from a stream nearby and grazed the sweet grass. The two men washed the grime off their hands and faces. They cupped their hands and drank the cool fresh water. The old man lit a fire to boil water and to keep away the animals. They shared his bread and coffee and later his sweaty dusty blanket as they slept under the wagon.

Dad made his way to Ngwenya with a heavy heart repeating "What will I tell my father?" His parents were sad but assured him that they believed him. However, after such an experience who would employ him?

The families met again in the King William's Town Shul before Rosh Hashanah. The first words of the trader were:

"How will you ever forgive me, I made such *tovis*. I wanted to lock the money in the safe. However, a late customer arrived and I was nervous to leave the money in the till. I hid it in the back of a draw and I found it this week when a coin rolled behind the draw. Please forgive me and come back to work for me".

However, by this time, Dad had made many important changes at Ngwenya. He realized that he could make their shop more profitable. Looking through the books, he saw there was a great deal of money owing to them. He saddled his horse, riding from hut to hut, farmer to farmer, asking people to settle their debts. In this way, he collected a substantial amount of money. The business became viable and what had seemed to be a misfortune became a blessing.

**Thank you  
to all  
advertisers  
who identified  
themselves  
with this  
Pesach  
Issue**

# THE FIRE IN MRS. WEINBURG'S FLAT

\*

Charlotte Cohen.

Mrs. Weinburg lived in a flat on the second floor of a block that stood right opposite my grandmother's house.

They had both been immigrants, both spoke Yiddish and English (with a slight accent), both kept a kosher home, did their shopping early in the morning, and cooked themselves a hot midday meal - full of goodness: a stew, or braised chicken or meat with vegetables. (I doubt whether my grandmother ever tasted 'steak and chips' in her life! That, together with things like 'ice-cream and hot-chocolate-sauce', a 'fondue' or 'cooking with wine' were considered alien and rather decadent - and something I doubt whether she would ever have contemplated eating or giving to her family.)

They spoke about 'the *kinde*', about '*shikses*', about 'having *mazel*' - and they spoke about each other behind each other's backs. They never discussed politics, world affairs, sex, or finance - except when the price of potatoes went up. Their lives extended only to their homes, their children, their grandchildren (most important!), how to save money, and centred around the kitchen.

They both rested in the afternoon, attended the same shul, played rummy, kept the Blue Box in prominence and paid cash for everything.

But that's where the similarity ended.

Whereas my grandmother was small and sprightly, Mrs. Weinburg was big and buxom. Granny wore her hair short and permed. Mrs. Weinburg rolled her hair into a big bun at the back of her neck.

Whereas Mrs. Weinburg was known as 'Bobba' to her family, my grandmother was never called that. She was 'Granny' - not only to her grandchildren and sons and daughters, but to her maid, the gardener, the postman, the vegetable man, the grocer and in fact, the whole village. (Actually, as a child, I simply assumed she had been named 'Granny' at birth.)

Whereas Mrs. Weinburg's speciality was cheesecake, Granny's was *teiglach*. And although they apparently did the same things, they had different

views on everything.

They lived across the road from each other for ten years, but never ever regarded each other as friends - only neighbours. Similar in background and outlook, they nevertheless considered their association as one more of chance than of choice - that they'd been thrown together merely because they lived opposite each other in the same street.

Each morning when they returned from the shops, each would stand in their own kitchen and prepare a hot midday meal. Never once did they sit down to have lunch together. Never once, in the ten years, did Granny refer to Mrs. Weinburg as anything besides here legally married title. They were not on first name terms. It was 'Granny' and 'Mrs. Weinburg'.

Granny would cook lunch for 'the girl' (the English equivalent of 'shikse') as well, and would seat her at the kitchen table at precisely 12.30 a.m. so that Granny could serve it to her. Granny was a creature of habit. Never mind not entertaining Mrs. Weinburg to lunch, Granny never ever entertained the thought of eating lunch any later. One of the main reasons was probably that Granny always felt slightly intimidated that she had domestic help at all, and considered it mandatory that 'the girl' had to 'go off' at 1.00 p.m. - by which time everything used in the kitchen would have to be washed up, dried up and put away.

Mrs. Weinburg always ate her lunch at 1 p.m. It was her theory that this gave one's breakfast time to digest and that it would sustain her longer and that the afternoon would not stretch out so much in front of her.

Being neighbours, they *did* pop in to each other every now and then, to have tea, to complain about their children and boast about their grandchildren. When they did, they always brought something over for the other on a small white china plate. It was hard to imagine how it started: a piece of freshly-baked strudel would be brought over - aimed primarily at a compliment on how good it tasted or how light it was. The plate would then be returned with a piece of ginger cake. And once again, the plate would arrive spread with a little chopped herring. I don't think either remembered whose plate it was originally. Yet each regarded the other's offering with conjecture and suspicion; that it was not any gesture of friendship, but rather that it was 'owed' - and because an old Jewish tradition directed that one should never return an empty plate.

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*Charlotte Cohen is a frequent contributor of essays and short stories to a wide range of South African publications, both Jewish and general. The above first appeared in the 22 March 1985 issue of the Zionist Record and SA Jewish Chronicle and was that year's winner of the Jacob Gitlin Library's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary short story competition.*

For ten years, they remained wary of each other, sizing up and criticizing each other where they could and accepting each other with resignation as a necessary evil.

Every Saturday morning, Mrs. Weinburg would fetch Granny for shul and they would go to God's House together to pray and pay their respects to Him.

When they returned, Granny would always tell me that Mrs. Weinburg had not stopped complaining all the way there and all the way back how her feet were hurting her. And Granny would invariably add that this was entirely Mrs. Weinburg's own fault as she was too mean to buy a pair of genuine leather shoes. And whenever Mrs. Weinburg saw me, she would shake her head and comment how Granny walked almost a mile further down the main road so that she could buy potatoes one cent cheaper. "She's got enough money to buy Africa", she would say, "Does she think she can take it with her?"

And then Granny would tell me how Mrs. Weinburg always asked if she could 'borrow' her newspaper when she had finished reading it, and that Mrs. Weinburg's meanness was getting on her nerves. And Mrs. Weinburg would remark how she found Granny sewing two old dishcloths together to make a washing-up *lappie* – which *she* considered to be the height of meanness when Granny could easily buy Africa if she wanted.

They both regarded the Sabbath as holy. Another statutory law was that one did not spend – or even touch – money on a Saturday. However, Granny loved going to the matinee at the bioscope on the corner every Saturday afternoon. To her, this was also religion: She never got over the thrill of being entertained by Hollywood movie stars, and for just the price of a cinema ticket, being magically transported into a world of comedy, drama, romance and adventure. But to honour the Sabbath, as she had to, and in order not to break one of the ten commandments, Granny had an arrangement with the bioscope manager whereby she could purchase her ticket on a Friday afternoon.

I think Mrs. Weinburg would also like to have gone to the matinee - but she never dared!

To her, what Granny did was illegal. "She's twisting the law to suit herself" she told me.

To Granny's mind, she was not guilty of breaking any laws or twisting anything, and she continued buying her ticket on a Friday afternoon so that she could go to the matinee on Saturday. Mrs. Weinburg spent Friday afternoon getting herself ready and preparing something to take to her daughter, where she went every Friday night for dinner.

..... And then came the night of the fire.

Mrs. Weinburg was fetched as usual by her son-in-law on Friday evening on his way home from work. Granny was already in bed at 7.30 p.m. She always retired early on Friday nights as she was tired from the day's activity in preparing for Shabbat (on Friday afternoon, Granny's kitchen remained open

and in operation until 4 o'clock) and so that she would also be fresh for her walk to and from shul the next morning and for her matinee in the afternoon.

She was summoned by an intrusive, insistent ringing of her front door bell. With much trepidation and demands to know who it was or she'd call the police, she opened the door when the caller identified himself as the man who lived in the flat directly below that of Mrs. Weinburg's. He spoke with great urgency. Did Granny know where Mrs. Weinburg was?

Apparently, someone who had been walking in the street, happened to glance up at Mrs. Weinburg's window and saw a fire.

Getting no reply from Mrs. Weinburg's flat, he reported it to the couple who lived downstairs. They went out to investigate, and also saw "flames leaping from the inside of the window". He said his wife had already called the fire brigade and if Granny knew where Mrs. Weinburg was, could she contact her.

"She's at her daughter's house" Granny panted. She peered behind him into the street and saw a number of people already gathered to watch how the fire was progressing, including all the tenants of the flats who had evacuated their premises.

With hands trembling and heart pounding, Granny grabbed the telephone directory and frantically paged through it for Mrs. Weinburg's daughters name, which she couldn't remember as her mind had suddenly also gone blank. "It starts with a 'Sh'", Granny shouted at the man, "They live in Forest Drive. Sh- ... Sh- ... maybe Shw-"

"Sher?" he suggested helpfully. Granny shook her head.

"Schultz? Schnieder? Shapiro? .."

Granny remembered. "Shulman!" she shrieked, "It's Shulman!"

The man looked up the telephone number and left Granny to call Mrs. Weinburg.

Granny knew that the time for diplomacy and tact had come - *and* to remain calm.

Mrs. Weinburg's daughter answered the phone.

"Good Shabbos," Granny said pleasantly. "Do you think it's at all possible to speak with your mother? I have some important news for her."

Mrs. Weinburg came to the phone. "Hello!, hello!" she said.

"Well, hello, Saily" said Granny (as this was the first time Granny had ever addressed Mrs. Weinburg by her first name, without hearing anything else, this alone would have been enough to place Mrs. Weinburg into a state of shock), "Have you finished your dinner yet?"

"Almost" said Mrs. Weinburg, "We're just on the pudding".

"Your daughter's a good cook, isn't she?" said Granny.

"She's coming on," said Mrs. Weinburg.

"Look, Saily, I don't want you should get upset or anything, but perhaps you should ask your son-in-law to bring you home now, because your flat is just burning down."

Five minutes later, Mrs. Weinburg arrived at

Granny's house in her son-in-law's car and in a state of acute shock. The fire engine had just arrived as well and was parked on the pavement alongside Mrs. Weinburg's window. She took one look at Granny, threw herself into her arms and burst out crying. With tears in her eyes and a stiff upper lip, Granny rose to the occasion.

"Saidy" she said as she patted her, "Just don't worry! The insurance will pay for everything. Have a little brandy. It'll calm your nerves."

Mrs. Weinburg was almost fainting. She was escorted across the street, supported on each side by her daughter and by Granny – resplendent in her old pink wool dressing-gown and a floral doek over her curlers - to keep her 'set' in. Her son-in-law had gone ahead to examine the disaster from the road. There was no doubt. Flickering flames could be seen from the inside of the window. The fire brigade had not lost a second: They were already upstairs and broken Mrs. Weinburg's front door.

Granny, with her arm around Mrs. Weinburg, kept comforting her ..... "You can sleep at my place, Saidy. I've got a spare bed – with linen, and of course, you can eat your meals with me. Your son-in-law will fix up the insurance ... Maybe if they can just save some of your clothes – although you look very nice in what you're wearing ... and a nightie I can always lend you."

Mrs. Weinburg looked catatonic. She remained like that even when her son-in-law emerged from the front entrance of the building, with two firemen in tow. They appeared completely overcome.

"There's no fire!" they announced.

The words were uttered with a mixture of relief and disbelief – mainly the latter. Everyone stared at them with only disbelief.

But it was true!

After breaking into Mrs. Weinburg's flat, all they had found burning were Mrs. Weinburg's two Shabbos candles, which she had religiously lit before she left and which were still flickering on the sideboard in front of the window- which is where she always kept her candlesticks.

It was true she had forgotten to close the curtains, and that in the night, from the street, the reflection of the light on the window pane, *did* make it look like flames. No one could be blamed for thinking it looked like a fire, and acting accordingly.

But from that night, things were different! False alarm or not, real or imagined, the fire remained as authentic as if it had actually happened.

Mrs. Weinburg and Granny had now suffered adversity together. They had undergone the same trauma. Both had shared the experience of helplessness in the face of catastrophe; and of needing a friend and being a friend. Mrs. Weinburg had turned to Granny in her time of trouble – and Granny had offered and strengthened her with her consolation.

Someone once said: "The same flame that melts the butter, makes the iron hard" – which has no real relevance to this story, except that it's a nice line. .... But from that night, Mrs. Weinburg (Saidy) and Granny, became friends.

I never heard Mrs. Weinburg complain about Granny again, or vice versa. They took pride in each other's 'achievements'. They emulated each other whenever they could.

Granny told me that Mrs. Weinburg's daughter had given her an old dress, which Mrs. Weinburg had let out and lengthened slightly and moved the buttons and taken off the collar and which now looked better than new! And did I have any old dresses that Granny could renovate for herself for summer?

And Mrs. Weinburg told me of this wonderful idea of Granny's of saving all the old bits of soap and putting them all into a little bag, which one could then soak with the washing to save using washing powder.

And Granny told me that if I had a *simchah*, I should order the cheesecakes from Mrs. Weinburg because there was no one in the whole of Africa who could make them better.

And one day, after coming out of shul, Mrs. Weinburg reached the conclusion that it would actually be quite legal to go to bioscope on a Saturday afternoon - provided you walked there and back *and* bought your ticket on a Friday, like Granny did - *and* didn't tear any paper.

She always, therefore, made sure that she went to the toilet at home before accompanying Granny to the matinee.

..... And so, although there had never been a real fire in Mrs. Weinburg's flat, the light from her flickering Shabbos candles continued to shine and burn brightly in their lives for all the years that followed. They never lost the warmth that they found on that fateful night.

**Alone, I See**

I sit with my companion,  
my blind friend.  
I say, "Look, Chanie, look -  
Look at the shadows and the trees.  
See how the light dances in and out  
of the leaves as they sing their strange songs  
in Praise of Hashem!"  
She looks and says, "Very nice".

I sit with my companion,  
my bored close relation.  
I say, "Look, Rifki, look -  
Look at the puddles of the water.  
They are the signatures of the clouds  
they are the music of the raindrops  
singing in low voices.  
She looks and says, "Right".

I sit with my companion  
the oblivious world.  
I say, "Look, world, look!  
*Mi Chamocha ba'eilim Hashem!*  
See the dewdrops sparkling on the grass  
and the light that turns them to crystal fire  
and the music in the deep earth.  
They look and say, "Uh".

I turn to my companion  
my lonely self.  
I say, "Look, me, look!  
See this wonderful world  
hear the music of the wind and the water  
watch the shadow and light, Birth and Rebirth,  
and the beauty so unforgettable.  
Alone I say, "I see it".

*Tamar*

**Burning Words**

*Berlin: May 1933*

It is a night so dark  
that roaring fires  
serve only to inflame  
the dark  
a night of shattered glass  
and bitter dreams  
and shrivelling leaves.  
Amidst the megaphonic shrieks  
and cawings of black-shirted boys  
stream doctors, lawyers, men of rank,  
their hearts ablaze with ire,  
their arms piled high  
with books  
destined for the ravenous flames.  
As the books take fire,  
the pages writhe and scream with pain  
And through it  
there is heard  
the dying Heine's sigh:  
"Where books are burned,  
there men will also die".

*Sandra Lee Braude*



**Eva's Diary**

One is famous, one forgotten;  
Both, however, had to sup  
Hegemony's *sauerbraten*  
And to drain its bitter cup.

Every unconnected layman  
Knows that 'Anne' belongs with 'Frank';  
Should you mention Eva Heyman,  
Though, he'll only draw a blank.

If it's framed as an enquiry,  
You can answer that, like Anne,  
She confided in a diary  
When her holocaust began,

Though she didn't find an attic  
In Varad (near Budapest),  
Making rather less dramatic,  
Though it hastened her arrest.

Her opinions – so observant,  
Of a world so inhumane –  
She'd entrusted to a servant,  
Ere they thrust her on the train.

They had been a living treasure,  
Not a bundle in a drawer,  
If she'd only had the leisure  
To record a hundred more.

*[Eva Heyman began her diary in February,  
1944. Less than four months later, she was  
deported to Auschwitz and put to death]*

*Peter Austin*

**Last Wish**

My anger is so bitter  
The honey of heaven will not sweeten it  
More likely hell will refine it with fire  
Control it with never-ending hours of torture  
Direct it back on the only person that matters  
ME  
Feeble and reminded of my daily crimes  
I wish to be reborn close to the sun and  
BURN

*John Yarbrough*

## READERS' LETTERS

\*

I read the article by Alexander J. Groth in the Chanukah issue of *Jewish Affairs* ('Sir Martin Gilbert: The Holocaust in a Sanitized Interpretation') with considerable interest. I have read much of Sir Martin's Holocaust writing and have never had the impression that he was an apologist for the Allies. Certainly, Groth quotes chapter & verse for his thesis but I felt that he does not limit his argument to the facts but seems to allege that Gilbert deliberately acted as an apologist for the Allies. Thus he writes about "Gilbert's sanitizing method", "respectable scholars and historians who distort..." and so on. But he goes further. He says: "Gilbert has gone to great lengths to *disguise, obscure, and distort*....and has resorted to *gross misrepresentation*...." (my emphasis).

This sort of language was what gave rise to David Irving's unsuccessful libel action. What has caused me to write to *Jewish Affairs* for the first time in a very long readership is that Robert N. Rosen (*Saving the Jews-Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Holocaust*) is to very similar effect as Gilbert in those very areas which Groth criticises the latter. I therefore suggest that fairness dictates that *Jewish Affairs* should give Gilbert the opportunity to respond to Groth's article. Fairness apart, just think what interesting reading his reply would make.

*Alan Magid*  
*Durban*

---

As a recent subscriber to *Jewish Affairs*, I am intrigued by two articles in the current issue. The first, by Alexander Groth, castigates Sir Martin Gilbert's defense of the Allies on the question of assistance to Jews in Europe during World War II. The second is a congratulatory review of Sir Martin's 'History of *Kristallnacht*'.

Was Gilbert consulted on Groth's article and given a right reply and is the juxtaposition of the two articles arbitrary or intended to show the objectivity of your Editorial Board?

*A. Sugarman*  
*Cape Town*

---

*The editor responds: Professor Groth's article was also preceded by John Simon's review of Martin Gilbert's Churchill and the Jews in the Rosh Hashanah, 2008, issue of Jewish Affairs. This took a highly favorable view both of the author and his subject. Groth's diametrically opposed take on the same subject (and I take Mr. Magid's point that certain words and expressions he uses were indeed overly strong, and unfair to Martin Gilbert) made for an interesting contrast.*

---

I have a couple of additions to Reuben Musiker's interesting essay on Jewish Booksellers and Bookshops of Johannesburg (*JA*, Chanukah 2008).

The one is **City Bookshop** in Lister Building opposite the Jeppe Post Office. This was owned by Ivan Gordon, whose wife started **Books Unlimited** and then sold out to Lou Hyman. Ivan had a brother Barry, who owned Barry Gordon's Bop Shop - the then mecca for 45 and 33rpm Jazz records.

I was a customer of both brothers, and eventually taught Ivan's children at King David High School in Victory Park. I still have and treasure numerous books (and records) from that era. Ivan was a very helpful, jocular man who had a most kindly way of dealing with young bookworms, who were intrigued by engineering, motorcars, aircraft etc!

The other book emporium was **Technical Books** which was situated corner Harrison and Commissioner Streets. This was owned and run by a second cousin of mine, Isaac Rimer. His sister Fanny and later on his nephew Russell Freedman joined him, with the latter eventually becoming a partner. Technical books, one of the best in Motorcar and Motorsport and general Hobby books kept enthusiasts up to date until the early 1980s. It closed due to their building being torn down to make way, for a carpark in the mid eighties. Russell



Freedman still trades in exclusive collector wildlife books to this day, situated out in the Kyalami area.

If I may add a third dealer, there is myself. For a time, from the latter 1970s, I dealt in books and paraphernalia to the Motorcar Fraternity specializing in motor history, motor racing and antique and vintage vehicle restoration. My business was titled variously as **M.H.R.G.** [Motor History Research Group] and latterly **The Old Car Shop**. It exists to

this day, owned/run by an old friend and ex-partner, Cedric Pearce (not Jewish). It was run on a part-time basis upstairs in an old building in Fox Street, behind His Majesty's and then later on in Jules Street, Malvern.

*Mo Skikne  
Johannesburg*

---

Reuben Musiker's article on Jewish bookshops was most interesting and appreciated. Omitted, however, was Pilgrim's Booksellers, Victoria Mansions. The "Mecca of Booksellers", it was owned by Mrs Zion, whose brother, Joe Zion, subsequently opened a shop in Cape Town.

*Nina Jacobsberg  
Cape Town*

---

Whilst I have nothing but praise for Reuben Musiker's comprehensive coverage of the subject of Jewish Booksellers and Bookshops in Johannesburg, I must confess that I felt a measure of pique that my own considerable contribution to the spread of books of Jewish interest had been completely overlooked.

My first venture into the sale of books of Jewish interest was in a suite of offices on the fifth floor of an old building at 100 Market Street opposite the municipal buildings. My stocks included books of Jewish interest published in the US. But in addition, and this I believe was the first such enterprise in South Africa, I imported about 500 volumes of Hebrew books and despite the limited number of Hebrew readers, this innovation was well patronized.

The fifth-floor offices in an old building, where the elevator was often inoperative, was a considerable deterrent to customers. I therefore moved to a street-level store in Commissioner Street, which I called The Jewish Book Centre. My stock was considerably expanded and included the usual ritual concomitances – *T'fillin*, *Mezuzoth*, *Talithoth* et al. It was at this point that I decided to introduce a Jewish equivalent of the well-known American Book-of-the-Month club. I called it the Jewish Book Guild and it proved eminently successful. In the course of several months intensive promotion the membership reached close to 3000. The books I selected were all of Jewish interest and for many of the members it was their first exposure to the works of Sholom Aleichem, Sholom Ash, Mendele, Peretz etc.

On a business visit to New York, I spotted an advertisement in the *New York Times* advising that a bookshop in Manhattan was about to close and a close-out sale of the stock was to take place. I examined the stock and the idea was born that if it could be shipped in its entirety to Johannesburg, a gigantic sale never before held in the city could prove a commercial success. I approached the owner with a proposal that he ship the entire stock to Johannesburg, thus saving him the expense of proceeding with the sale in NY with its attendant expenditure of rents, advertising etc. The idea appealed to him and after a close inspection of the stock we arrived at an agreed price of \$30 000.

On my return home I immediately set about planning the sale. The first problem was the venue. Fortunately a large store known as the Dee Bee Bazaar which occupied a two-storied building in the centre of the city (Bree Street) had closed down and the premises were available for hire. The owners agreed to a two-months rental and without delay we set up counters in anticipation of the arrival of the books, which reached us after six weeks. To assist me in sorting the books I engaged two young ladies who were former employees of the public library. We organized the counter displays in accordance with subject matter – sport, art, music, health, biography, travel, religion (which included a large selection of Judaica), fiction etc.

Whilst traveling to the store on the opening day, I experienced acute anxiety - If the sale failed I would be ruined financially. On reaching the store at about 8.15, I breathed a sigh of relief – there was already a long queue awaiting the opening. By noon, the store was crowded and I requested the municipality to send two traffic officers to control the vast crowd outside awaiting entrance. Though I had committed myself to two months, we were almost totally sold out within a few days of the end of the first month. It was a daring venture but to quote the old adage – nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Having regard to the above, I can well claim to have been included in the article in *Jewish Affairs* on the subject of Jewish booksellers.

*Sol Liebgott  
Israel*

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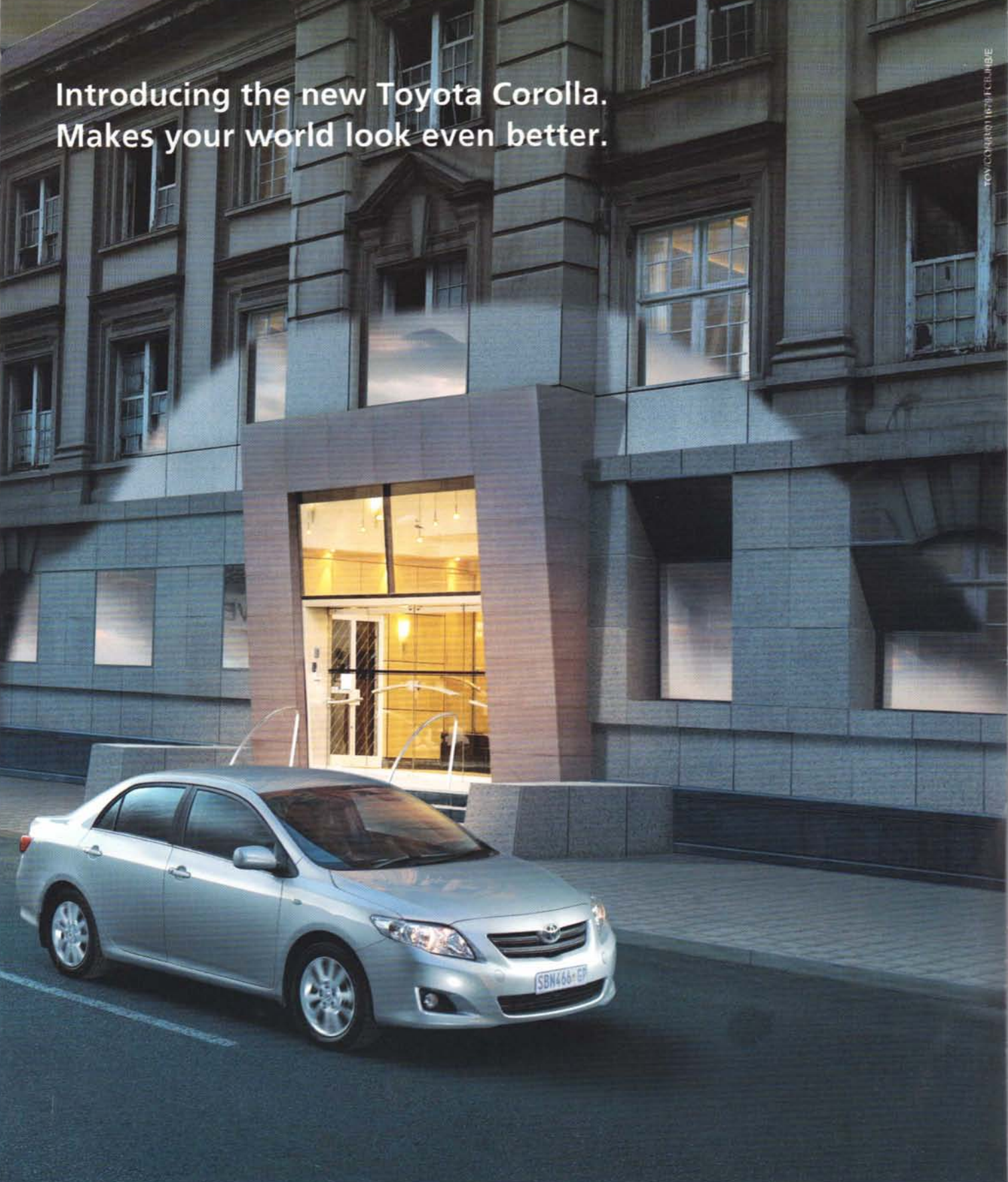
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