

JEWISH AFFAIRS

Winter 2020



MISSION

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.

JEWISH AFFAIRS aims to publish essays of scholarly research on all subjects of Jewish interest, with special emphasis on aspects of South African Jewish life and thought.

It 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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JEWISH AFFAIRS

*Vol. 75 * No. 3 * Winter 2020*

OBITUARY

- Ralph Zulman** 4
David Saks

HISTORY AND HERITAGE

- The effects of the Spanish Influenza Pandemic on the South African Jewish community** 5
Naomi Rapeport, Colin Schamroth
- A Day of Remembrance at the University of Vienna** 22
Isador Segal
- Chagall and the Murdered Poets** 27
Paul Trewhela
- Two Daughters of the Free State and their Poetry: Olga Kirsch and Jennifer Friedman** 36
Brian Josselowitz

ESSAYS AND REFLECTIONS

- Heads or Tails for South African Jewry?** 45
Peter Houston
- Lockdown Pesach 2020** 60
Charisse Zeifert
- The Statue** 62
Charlotte Cohen

OBITUARY

Ralph Zulman



The editorial board of *Jewish Affairs* was saddened to learn of the passing earlier this month of long-serving board member the Honourable Justice Ralph Zulman. Judge Zulman combined a stellar career on the Bench (culminating with his appointment to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court) with over three decades of dedicated service to the Jewish community in various capacities. This included serving a term as National Vice-chairman of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies as well as one several of the Board's most important subcommittees.

In addition to his enthusiastic support for *Jewish Affairs*, both as an editorial board member and frequent contributor, particularly of book reviews, Judge Zulman chaired the Board's Country Communities Department for many years and was a key member of the Board's Constitution & Legislation Subcommittee that did much to ensure the inclusion of anti-hate speech provisions in the new SA Constitution in 1996. The provisions against hate speech have since formed the bedrock of the Board's subsequent work in terms of combating antisemitism in South Africa. Judge Zulman's wisdom and experience, not just in terms of the law and how the South African legal system worked (including the introduction of Equality Courts, in which regard he was centrally involved) but also his track record in the fields of Holocaust education, human rights activism and preservation of the South African Jewish heritage was also invaluable. He was a former chairman of the Yad Vashem Foundation – South Africa.

In addition to his many years of dedicated communal service, Ralph Zulman was had a distinguished legal career, culminating in his serving on the bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court in Bloemfontein. He was a one-time chair of the SA Bar Council and much involved in the training of magistrates for the newly-instituted Equality Courts. In the academic sphere he published numerous scholarly articles in leading legal journals and was an honorary professor at the universities of the Witwatersrand, Pretoria and Johannesburg.

Judge Zulman is survived by wife, Lynette, whom he married in 1965, son Jeff, daughters Adrienne Louise Kaplan and Charlene Hilary Wingrin, and their families.

The effects of the Spanish Influenza Pandemic on the South African Jewish community

Naomi Rapeport, Colin Schamroth

Naomi Rapeport is a retired specialist physician with an interest in South African Jewish Genealogy and Medical History. Colin Schamroth is a cardiologist in private practice in Johannesburg. Both have been extensively involved in the South African medical fraternity being past presidents of their respective societies and have both published widely in local and international medical journals.

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Abstract: In 1918 an influenza pandemic known as ‘Spanish Flu’ swept the world. It had a devastating effect on the South African population. The duration of this pandemic was relatively brief, resulting in a high mortality in October and then abating significantly in the last two months of that year. There is scant information on how the pandemic affected the Jewish community of South Africa. Accessing data from Jewish burials and death certificates, we have identified over 300 Jewish persons who died of Spanish influenza in South Africa and analysed their demographic data. Fifty eight percent of the total deaths of Jewry for the year of 1918 took place during the period of the pandemic. Those identified were on average a decade younger than their non-influenza compatriots who died in the same year, and two-thirds were males. More South African Jews died in the pandemic than did South African Jewish soldiers during the First World War. The residual effects of the pandemic on the Jewish community were major and must have had a lasting effect.

The Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918-1919 killed an estimated 50 to 100 million people globally.¹ It began early in the final year of World War I and claimed four to five times more lives than the war itself. German soldiers termed it ‘*Blitzkatarrh*’; British soldiers referred to it as ‘Flanders Grippe’; however, world-wide the pandemic came to be known as the “Spanish Flu”.²

In Britain, under the Defence of the Realm Act, and the United States, the respective governments suppressed news of the outbreak. Public knowledge regarding the severity of the global health threat was hindered, as many news agencies were barred from writing about it, instead reporting solely on morale-boosting topics. However, as Spain was a neutral party in the war, newspapers were able to report on the effects that the illness was exhibiting in that country. Thus, it was generally perceived that this devastating illness originated in Spain, resulting in the pandemic being incorrectly labelled as “the Spanish Flu”.

Whereas previous pandemics had spread largely along trade routes, the war facilitated spread via the mass mobilisation of military personnel and civilians across the world.¹ There were three waves of influenza. When the first wave began, in the early months of 1918 in the Northern Hemisphere, most doctors believed that they were dealing with an aggressive outbreak of common influenza. While illness rates were high during this initial wave, mortality rates were largely similar to the seasonal outbreaks of influenza.



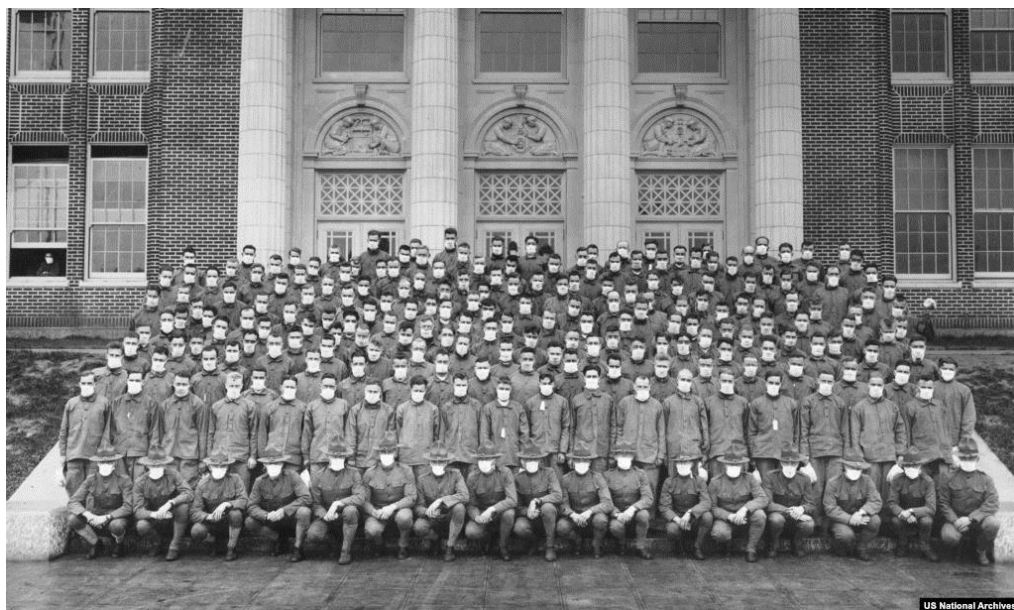
By the time of the Northern Hemisphere autumn of 1918, when the deadly second wave of influenza was hitting populations worldwide, the implications of the disease proved impossible to ignore. Whilst entire battalions were decimated, with both the Allied and the German forces suffering massive attrition, the details of many servicemen's deaths were hidden to protect public morale. Meanwhile, the civilian population was being struck down in their homes.

Although the origins of the milder first wave continue to be debated, the origin of the lethal second wave is generally agreed to be the harbour town of Plymouth in Southern England. From this port, influenza easily spread to the rest of the world.³ On 25 July 1918, the Surgeon General Sir Humphry D Rolleston and Fleet Surgeon Robert WG Stewart arrived in Plymouth to investigate cases of serious illness arising from influenza. In August, the *HMS Mantua*, an armed merchant cruiser, set sail from Plymouth harbour for the British West African Colony (today Sierra Leone). On 8 August, an epidemic recorded as being due to influenza began on board. When the ship made port in Freetown on 14 August, there were 124 sick aboard. Once the influenza arrived at Freetown, it spread across the African continent. Ships that called in for coal at Freetown brought influenza to Cape Town, as well as to the Gold Coast (today Ghana). New Zealand soldiers who stopped in Freetown on their way to and from the war front in Europe facilitated the transfer of the virus to New Zealand.

A third and final wave of the pandemic appeared in many parts of the world in the early months of 1919. This wave generally overlapped the first wave

in terms of geographical distribution; however, it seemed to spare areas where the second wave had been especially severe.

The first report of this influenza-like illness in South Africa was documented in Ladysmith, Natal Province in late August 1918.⁴ It affected people in the Natal interior, and followed the route of the railway lines, reaching the Witwatersrand region in the Transvaal Province by September 1918. This first wave of influenza had a relatively low mortality and it is postulated that this early exposure may have protected those infected from the more virulent second influenza wave. By the end of September 1918 the second virulent wave of the pandemic, brought over on two troop ships which had stopped in Freetown, struck South Africa.^{5,6} Although the troops were quarantined in Cape Town, those without symptoms were allowed to proceed home. They did so via the railways. Within a fortnight the country was overwhelmed by the worst natural disaster in its history. By the time it abated in early December, about 500 000 people had died. South Africa was the fifth hardest hit country worldwide.⁷ Locally, the disaster was subsequently known as 'Black October'. The third, milder influenza wave occurred in August 1919 and largely spared the South African population.



US Army Student Army Training corps members wearing "influenza masks", October 1918

Potentially, the most traumatic experience for South Africans during World War 1 was the enormous loss of life caused by the Spanish Flu and not the direct effects of the war itself.⁹ For nearly eighty years historians virtually ignored this subject.¹⁰ On perusal of local history textbooks, there is hardly a mention of the Spanish influenza pandemic and its effects on the population. Regarding the Jewish community, there are no known documents specifically dedicated to this. Only in the last three decades has

there been an interest in the topic. The effects of Spanish influenza in the larger South Africa society has been extensively researched by Howard Phillips.⁸

Demographics of the South African Jewish Community in that period

There is very little information available regarding the Jewish community at the time of the pandemic. Published books deal predominantly with the period 1880-1910 and the period after 1920. They tend to skip World War 1 and the Spanish Influenza pandemic. However, they do contain some information regarding South African censuses.^{11,12}

In the 1904 census of the four South African colonies, 38 096 Jews were recorded, comprising 3.4% of the white population. The four colonies were incorporated into the Union of South Africa in 1910 and thereafter designated as provinces. In the first census of the Union done on 7 May 1911, which represented the entire population of the country, the Jewish community was 46 926 persons, representing 3.7% of the white population. It had increased by 23.2% from the census of 1904. During this period, the proportion of women in the Jewish community increased from 32% to 41%. The greatest number of Jews were in the province of the Transvaal (25 892), followed by the Cape (16 744), Orange Free State (2808) and finally Natal (1482). A substantial number of Jews lived in smaller rural centres. This was reflected by the number of Jewish places of worship scattered throughout the country, 44 in total of which 21 were in the Cape, seventeen in the Transvaal, four in the Orange Free State and two in Natal.

As a result of the outbreak of World War I, the next census was rescheduled to 1918. It was confined to an enumeration of the white population only, which totalled 1 421 781.¹³ In this census of 5 May 1918, the Jewish community had grown to 58 741, an increase of 25.2% from 1911. The growth was largely due to immigration rather than the Jewish birth rate, which was noted to be lower than that of the general population. There was a steady influx of immigrants until the outbreak of the war. This slowed down substantially during the war years. 1804 Jews entered the country in 1913, 872 in 1914, 193 in 1915, 122 in 1916 and 41 in 1917. No official figures are available regarding immigration for the years 1918 to 1924.

Although a census was undertaken on 3 May 1921, no demographics of the Jewish community are available. The following census of 4 May 1926 showed a total Jewish population of 71 186, an increase of 21.2% from the 1918 census. There were 25 918 Jews in Johannesburg, 11 705 in Cape Town, 2277 in Pretoria, 1502 in Port Elizabeth, 1415 in Bloemfontein, 832 in Kimberley and 679 in East London.

During World War I approximately 3000 South African Jews participated in the war effort, representing about 6% of the Jewish community - a larger percentage than that of the general white population.¹¹ 679 Jewish soldiers are listed as having partaken in the war.¹⁴ The total number of recorded deaths amongst them was 144,¹⁵ including combat-related deaths, accident, malaria and at least eight deaths from Spanish influenza.

Source Documents and Methodology

The names of the deceased were sourced from the records of burials in South African Jewish cemeteries as registered on the website SA Jewish Rootsbank.¹⁴ All deaths recorded in the year 1918 were noted. They were then cross referenced with death certificates obtained from the website FamilySearch, whose images are courtesy of the National Archives of South Africa.¹⁶ Further data was gleaned from the websites of the Genealogical Society of South Africa, the SA War Graves Project and Geni, the genealogy and social networking website.^{15,17,18} Historical notes on the medical aspects of the influenza epidemic were obtained from the *South African Medical Record*, now called the *South African Medical Journal*. Historical notes of the Jews in South Africa were obtained predominantly from two local publications.^{19,20}

For the months of October through to December 1918, deaths that were certified as influenza, with or without the diagnosis of pneumonia, or pneumonia alone were combined. The justification for this was based on documentation from 1918 that many of the deaths from influenza were recorded as pneumonia. The doctors of the time noted that patients' symptoms could change rapidly "from a mild bronchial catarrh to a capillary bronchitis or a broncho or lobar pneumonia".¹⁹ Other doctors reported "The prevalence of 'pneumonia' in South Africa during the past few weeks in which the influenza epidemic has raged throughout the land has been very marked, the appalling mortality being almost entirely due to 'pneumonia'".²⁰ Subsequent literature has confirmed that the deaths were usually due to secondary bacterial infections, causing pneumonia.⁵ In the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) in the USA has taken a similar stance in its statistical analysis; "The CDC deaths due to COVID-19 may be misclassified as pneumonia deaths in the absence of positive test results, and pneumonia may appear on death certificates as a comorbid condition. Thus, increases in pneumonia deaths may be an indicator of excess COVID-19-related mortality".²¹

In many instances, the date of death obtained from cemetery records differed from that noted on the death certificate. In most cases this was by a factor of one day and probably reflects the date of burial being confused with the date of death. Where possible the actual date of death was

recorded. There were also some instances where the date of birth differed markedly; in those instances, the date written on the death certificate was taken to be the correct one.

In several cases the spelling of surnames differed. Some were Anglicized (e.g. Koren to Coren and Kantrowitz to Kentridge), whilst others had a similar Soundex (e.g. Silberstein and Silverstein, Nathanson and Nathenson), or had been abbreviated (e.g. Leyzerovitz to Lees and Katzin to Katz). In all instances, reconciliation was made using the information noted on the death certificate such as first and middle names, date of birth, country of origin, place of death and age at death, as well as information available from probates from the Master of the South African Supreme Court.

A total of 697 deaths were recorded for 1918 in seventy-two Jewish cemeteries in South Africa. There were 413 males, 244 females, 7 persons of unknown gender, and 33 stillbirths who did not have a gender available. The average age (excluding those below one year) was 37.1 years (males 37.4; females 34.9) with 15 persons of unknown age (Table 1). Of the 84 deaths listed in those below one year of age, forty were stillbirths. Three of the infants were recorded to have died of influenza of whom one was listed as being 'influenza/premature'. In children aged between one and ten years, there were ten recorded influenza deaths.

Within the cohort of 697 deaths, death certificates were available for 539 persons. Of the remaining 158 without a death certificate, most were buried in cemeteries in the Orange Free State. Of this cohort of 158 persons, 98 burials (62%) were recorded in the last three months of the year, when the second wave of the influenza pandemic was raging. Of the total deaths for the entire year of 1918, 58% took place in the last quarter, during the period of the pandemic. Combined certified influenza and pneumonia deaths for the year were 251. All the certified influenza deaths with or without a concomitant diagnosis of pneumonia (210) occurred in the year's final quarter (October to December), and 26 of the 41 certified pneumonia deaths for the year occurred in that same period. Thus, the total used for the analysis of the certified influenza deaths was 236.

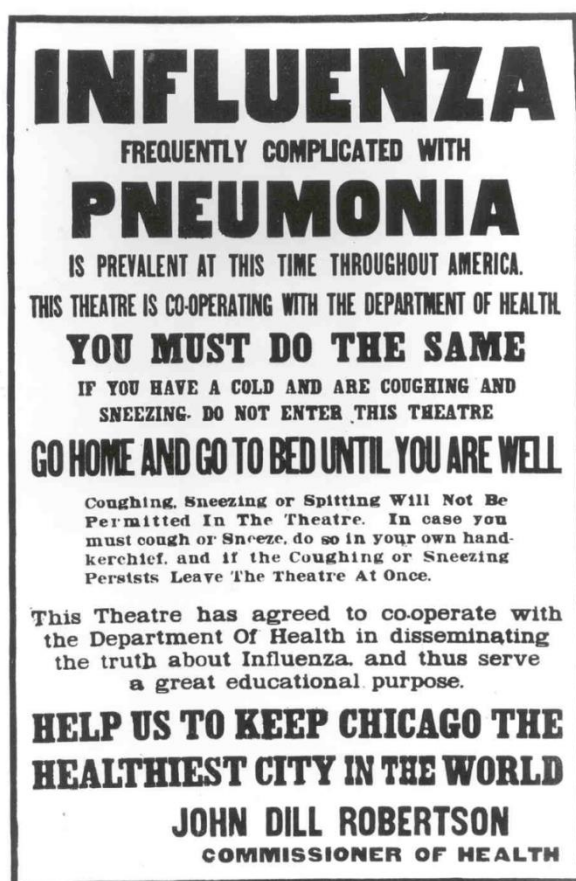
For the first nine months of 1918 the average age of death was 41.7 years (males 43.2; females 38.7, both excluding those below one year of age - Table 1). The average age for those in the last quarter was lower at 34.3 years (males 35.2; females 32.9). Within this group, those who died from influenza had an average age of 31.5 years (males 32.6 and females 29.7). In those who did not have a diagnosis, it was 35 years (males 35.4; females 34.4). Of the 62 deaths with a confirmed diagnosis other than influenza or pneumonia, six were infants below one year and the average age was 44.9 years (males 46.0; females 43.3).

Of the 236 confirmed influenza deaths, 210 (89%) occurred in October, 22 in November and 4 in December (Figure 1). Of the 98 deaths without a death certificate, 76 (77.6%) occurred in October, 13 in November, and 9 in December. There were forty stillbirths in the 1918, of which 14 (35%) occurred in the last quarter of that year.



Of the 147 males with a confirmed diagnosis of influenza, 56 (38.4%) were married, 85 (57.8%) were single, four were children below the age of ten, and two adult males had unknown marital status. Of the 89 females, 68 (76.0%) were married, twelve (13.4%) were single and nine were children below the age of ten. All 68 married women who died of influenza were listed on their death certificates as being housewives. Among the twelve single women, three performed domestic duties, while the occupations of the rest ranged from a music teacher, to tailoress/milliner, a draper's assistant, and a telephone operator. All the married men bar one had a career listed on their death certificate. These ranged from an advocate, to hawkers, general dealers, a cartographer, horse traders, farmers, engineers, and clerks, amongst a wide range of other occupations.

Other causes of death listed throughout the year of 1918 did not show any clustering except for nine cases of poliomyelitis (infantile paralysis). It is worth noting that the first ever documented epidemic of poliomyelitis in South Africa took place in early 1918, with eight of the nine poliomyelitis deaths recorded in these children occurring in the first three months of that year.²² Other medical conditions which are today uncommonly fatal included appendicitis (eight cases), diphtheria (two), dysentery/gastroenteritis (sixteen), scarlet fever (three), and typhoid fever (five).



Discussion

On review of the collated data regarding the South African Jewish community, in the last quarter of 1918 during the Spanish influenza pandemic, many similarities exist between the demographics of those persons with a known diagnosis of influenza and those who had no diagnosis. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the majority of the latter deaths were related to influenza. Thus, the true figure of influenza deaths in the South African Jewish community is probably well over 300 cases.

The demographics of our cohort also correlate with the demographics of pandemic in the white population of South Africa in that it affected younger people, mostly men, and was also associated with a higher incidence of stillbirths.⁸ The influenza deaths occurred in a young population, on average a decade younger than those who died from other causes in the first nine months (31.5 versus 41.7 years - Table 1). Many families were left without breadwinners and many children lost a parent. We recorded an instance of a husband and wife who resided in Carnarvon and died three days apart (12 and 15 October), leaving behind three minor children. The couple were buried in Britstown. A mother and son died within one day of each other in Cape Town (10 and 11 October); a brother and sister in Johannesburg died two weeks apart (14 and 30 October); two brothers in Kimberley died three weeks apart (7 and 31 October); two married sisters in

Witbank died one day apart (17 and 18 October); a mother in Cape Town died one day (14 October) after giving birth to her third child and a mother in Johannesburg died following the birth of a stillborn child on 15 October. The effect of all this on the community must have been devastating.

Census data suggest that the Jewish population in South Africa experienced a reduced rate of growth following the pandemic. The population increase from 1904 to 1911 was 23.2%, from 1911 to 1918, 25.2% and from 1918 to 1926 21.2%. However, as the last census was eight years after the previous one and not at an interval of seven years like the others, the annualized increase in the Jewish population between these censuses was 3.3%, 3.6% and 2.6% respectively. Although World War I could well have had an influence on these figures, the effect of the influenza pandemic must have been much greater due to the greater number of lives lost.

In the Cape Province, the mortality was 61% indicating that it bore the brunt of the pandemic (150 of the 244 deaths for the entire year took place in the last quarter of the year; 117 with documented influenza and 33 with no diagnosis). When looking at the Transvaal, despite the postulate that the first wave of influenza, may have afforded a degree of protection against the second virulent wave of influenza, the mortality was 38% (144 of the 381 deaths for 1918 took place in the last quarter of the year; 118 with documented influenza and 26 with no diagnosis), indicating that the Transvaal was also severely affected (Table 2). As far as individual cities were concerned Cape Town, including the Cape peninsula, experienced a greater number of deaths (77 of 115 deaths for the year), versus Johannesburg (104 of 317).

**EPIDEMIC IN SOUTH AFRICA
TERRIBLE MORTALITY
CAPETOWN ALMOST LIKE A
DEAD CITY**

(Australian and N.Z. Cable Association)

Capetown, Oct. 10.

The town is almost like a dead city. Business is practically at a standstill. Many shops have been closed, and the tram and train services reduced 50 per cent.

The burials yesterday were 250.

The epidemic is now believed to have reached its height.

In Kimberley business has been suspended except by the foodshops and chemists.

Many Transvaal collieries have been closed.

Durban reports state that there are approximately 8000 cases in the city. No fatalities are recorded.

On 24 November 1918, a memorial service for those who died in the pandemic was held at the Great Synagogue of Cape Town. There is a reference to 79 Jews in Cape Town who died.²³ We have been able to identify 77 such persons. Among those listed were “nine Cohens and Mrs Annie Schus”.²⁴ We have been able to find eight Cohens in the Cape Town and Muizenberg cemeteries. On the SA Jewish Rootsbank website only three Cohens are listed in the Cape Town cemetery records as having died in 1918 and two have their cause of death listed as ‘pneumonia’. One woman who died of influenza and is buried in Muizenburg, had the surname Wood, and her maiden name was Cohen. Five other Jewish Cohens were found on inspection of the Maitland Road Cemetery Record of Interments for the month of October and all had a death certificate diagnosis available. When inspecting death certificates of persons with the surname ‘Cohen’ from Cape Town, some were noted as persons of ‘coloured/mixed’ descent and therefore were unlikely to be Jewish and may have been buried in the non-Jewish cemeteries. This issue with the ‘Cohens’ highlights the problem of discrepancies between the archived cemetery records and sourced death certificates.

In Kimberley, Cape Province, twenty deaths are recorded in the last quarter of 1918, all occurring in the month of October. Of these, thirteen had documented influenza, six had no death certificate available, and there was

one stillbirth. The deaths included two military men who were certified to have died from influenza. One, Lieutenant Herman Harry Feinhols, aged 36 years, was a company commander of the Cape Corp depot battalion in Kimberley, the same Corp whose soldiers returned home from the war in the two troopships that stopped in Freetown. He died on 8 October. The other was Corporal Louis Lipschitz of the South African Medical Corp who died a day later from influenza on 9 October, aged 22. His death certificate states that he was an electrician.

In Bloemfontein, Orange Free State, 18 deaths out of a total of 27 for the year occurred between October and December 1918. Unfortunately, there are no death certificates available for the individuals in this cemetery. Sixteen of the deaths occurred during the month of October; two of these persons did not have an age and one was an infant. Fifteen of these sixteen deaths occurred during the height of the influenza pandemic, and they were buried between the 13th and 26th October. It is stated that 64% of the total deaths in the white community of Bloemfontein during the influenza pandemic occurred in those aged 21 to 40 years. ⁸ Eleven of the 16 Jews (69%) buried that month were between the ages of 21 and 40 years, and their deaths are therefore most likely to have been due to influenza. These deaths occurred in a small community that in 1926 had only 1415 persons.

In several towns either all, or most of the burials for the year, took place in the last quarter of the year. These were mostly in the month of October, and the majority of these burials were related to influenza. In the Cape Province, in the towns of Britstown, Prieska and Queenstown all the burials for the entire year occurred during October. In Calvinia 3 out of 5 burials and in Robertson 2 out of 3 burials occurred during October. In East London 4 out of 5 burials occurred during October and November. In the Transvaal province, in Bethal and Standerton all the burials for the year were due to influenza. In both Krugersdorp and Pietersburg 2 out of 3 burials for the year were influenza related. In the towns of Potchefstroom, they were three out of five burials, Pretoria seven out of eleven and Witbank four out of five burials (including the two married sisters). In the Orange Free State, in the towns of Reitz and Vrede, all the burials were in October and early November. Harrismith recorded three out of five burials occurring in October, and in Kroonstad seven out of eight burials for the year took place in the last three months of the year. In Natal, influenza started in late August with the weaker strain. In Durban, there was only one burial in August and one in September in the Stellawood cemetery; neither were related to influenza. Four out of the thirteen burials for 2018 occurred between October and December and only one male had influenza listed on his death certificate. A 64-year old female did not have a death certificate and the other deaths were related to malaria and suicide. The only other town in the province to record a death during this time period was in Volksrust and this death was the only one for the whole year in that town.

The finding of a low mortality due to influenza in Natal correlates with the postulate that the first wave of influenza may have afforded a degree of protection against the second more virulent wave in that province.



Phillips, in his thesis on the Spanish Influenza Epidemic, quotes from sources that there was a belief that amongst those who were afflicted by the Spanish Flu, “whites born in South Africa seemed to be more vulnerable than those who had grown up in Europe”.⁸ The Director of the South Africa Institute for Medical Research surmised that it was probable that most of the latter group may have developed a form of resistance or immunity due to exposure to other earlier epidemics in their home countries. Our data shows that only 65 of the 236 recorded influenza deaths occurred in persons born in Southern Africa, one of whom was born in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The majority of influenza deaths occurred in persons born overseas - 124 born in Eastern Europe, forty from the United Kingdom (33 from England), and seven from other countries. This finding therefore does not suggest that there was any form of immunity or resistance in the Jews who immigrated to South Africa.

Although we have only dealt with the deaths from influenza in the Jewish community, it is estimated that for every influenza death, ten to 35 were infected.^{25,26} Obviously not all were symptomatic, but many must have been severely afflicted. The effects on the community were therefore far wider than the 300-plus individuals we estimate to have succumbed to influenza.

Notable Jews during the pandemic

In Kimberley, the town’s Board of Health appealed to the Public Health Department in Pretoria for medical assistance during the pandemic. The

Union Defence Force's Acting Director of Medical Services, Colonel Alexander Jeremiah Orenstein (1887-1972) was despatched to Kimberley, arriving there on 13 October 1918. Within 24 hours of his arrival he remodelled the city's campaign against the pandemic, converting it into a co-ordinated, well-directed system, the running of which was entrusted to the Board of Health. Three days later, he returned to Pretoria as the dire situation in the town was now under control.²⁷ Orenstein was the son of Russian Jewish immigrant parents and grew up in the United States of America. He came to Johannesburg, South Africa in 1914 where he worked for Rand Mines Ltd to reduce the high incidence of pneumonia and tuberculosis among gold miners. During both world wars, he was Director General of Medical Services in the South African Defence Force.

There is a record of the South African nurse, Dorah (Bunny) Bernstein (1888-1918) of Johannesburg, who served with the South African Military Nursing Services during the war. She died of Spanish Influenza whilst serving at the South African Military Hospital, Richmond, England on 6 November 1918.¹⁵

Three Jewish doctors died in the pandemic. Captain Dr Abraham Jassinowsky from Hopetown in the Cape Province was a member of the SA Medical Corp. He served in Windhoek, South West Africa (now Namibia) and died at the age of 29 years of influenza on 23 October 1918 in Windhoek. Dr Philip Roytowski, was a 33 year-old doctor in Potchefstroom who died on 28 October 1918.¹⁹ Dr Simon Alexander Kuny worked at the New Somerset Hospital, Cape Town, and died on 17 October 1918 at the age of 24. All three had trained overseas as the first South African Medical School (University of Cape Town) was only established in 1912, and its first graduates were capped in 1922.

Charles Friedlander, a barrister, co-founded the law firm Friedlander and Du Toit in Cape Town in 1899. The firm subsequently became C & A Friedlander Attorneys (incorporating his brothers, Arthur, Joseph, and Alfred) and it is still in existence. Charles was schooled in the Cape and furthered his education overseas at the universities of Berlin, Leyden, and Oxford. He died on 17 October at the age of 44.²⁸

Jacob Mirvish, a poet and pharmacist, died of influenza in Cape Town. His father, Rabbi Moses Chaim Mirvish (1872 -1947), was rabbi of the Cape Town Orthodox Hebrew Congregation, and wrote two important books in Hebrew, the first of which was called *Zichron Yakov* (In memory of Jacob) published in 1924 and dedicated to his son.²⁹

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INDEX.

| LEADING ARTICLE— | PAGE |
|---|------|
| THE INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC | 317 |
| DISEASES OF THE CEREBELLUM. A. M. MOLL, M.B., CH.B. | 320 |
| OBITUARY— | |
| C. G. TODD; J. M. MACDONALD; D. M. BARRY; J. A. ROUX; SIR A. G. VILJOEN; W. MORTIMER; A. JASSINOWSKY; F. A. WILLE; H. P. JOHNSON; P. ROYTSOWSKI; E. J. MALHERBE; L. S. M. HABICH; G. C. GRANT; J. F. v. d. S. DE VILLIERS; J. BORLE | 324 |
| CAPE PROVINCE MEDICAL COUNCIL | 327 |
| NATAL MEDICAL COUNCIL | 329 |
| DURBAN MEDICAL SOCIETY | 329 |
| PUBLIC HEALTH BULLETINS | 330 |
| PASSING EVENTS | 331 |
| CORRESPONDENCE | 332 |

NOTICES.

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The Influenza Epidemic.

It is hardly possible to go to press with another issue without making a few remarks upon some aspects of this extremely topical subject. That we have not done so before is partly due to the fact that we considered ourselves extremely lucky to go to press at all with whatever happened to be on hand, partly to the fact that we knew the dates when the Post Office would be able to place the RECORD in the hands of our subscribers were extremely problematical, and most of all to the consideration that at an early stage of the epidemic we were quite able to recognize that we had to deal with something quite novel in many ways, about which to write anything would be little more than guess-work. Even now, we desire it to be clearly understood that, in whatever comments we may make on the "Spanish" influenza in South Africa, nothing is further from our thoughts than to even approach the dogmatic attitude, for we know that not only will the collection and recording of the requisite data take a very long time, but that their collection and recording will be a matter of infinitely greater magnitude than is met with in connection with other epidemic diseases, simply because of the extraordinary difficulty of conducting accurate observations whilst the disease is in progress. This is an aspect which must not be forgotten. In face of an epidemic which stands by itself in its explosive nature, in the suddenness of its onslaught, in the rapidity of its spread, in the exceptional way in which it affects the members of the profession, and in the difficulties it presents in the way of differential diagnosis, the obstacles in the way of proper observation are altogether greater than the ordinary. And when, as in this particular epidemic of influenza, the mortality is quite exceptional, both with regard to medical practitioners and ordinary patients, obstacles become even greater from the state akin to panic into which most people, medical or lay, quite excusably fall. It is utterly impossible for medical men to accurately collect data, either under the clinical or Public Health aspects, after the fashion they do in other affections, when a third, or perhaps half, of the population of their neighbourhoods are patients at one time, and their own number of workers reduced to a third or a quarter, perhaps,

Delicious NECTAR TEA, an invigorating beverage.

The leading article from the South African Medical Record of November 2018 regarding the Flu Epidemic

Conclusions

The Spanish Influenza pandemic of 1918 inflicted a high toll on South African Jewry. This is confirmed by the number of deaths recorded during the virulent second wave of the pandemic, being just under half of that for the entire year. The demographics were similar to that noted in the general white population. In terms of the local Jewish community, considering the relatively young age of the cohort who died, many of whom were breadwinners and mothers with families, this pandemic must have left a devastating imprint. This study sheds some light on this epic tragedy.

Figure and Tables

Table 1. Average Age (years)

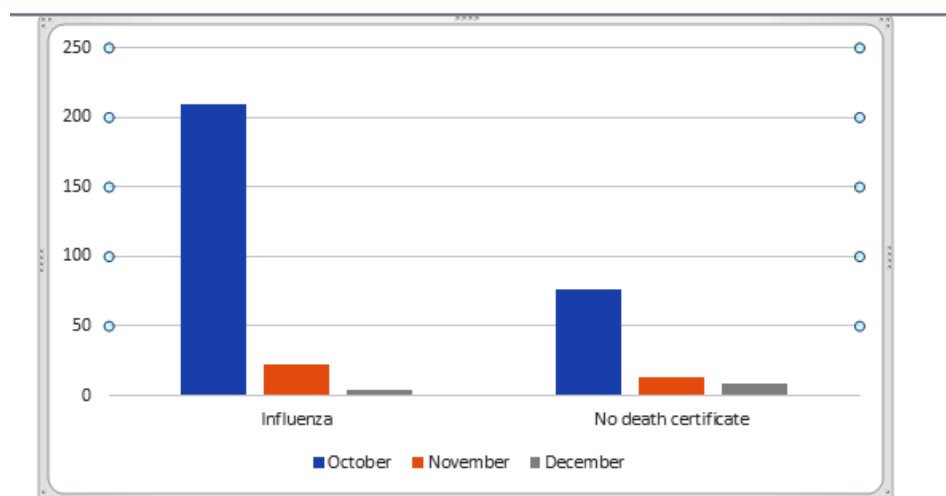
| | Average Age | Males | Females |
|----------------|-------------|-------|---------|
| Entire year | 37.1 | 37.4 | 34.9 |
| First 9 months | 41.7 | 43.2 | 38.7 |
| Last 3 months | 34.3 | 35.2 | 32.9 |
| Influenza | 31.5 | 32.6 | 29.7 |

Table 2. Provincial Distribution of Deaths for 1918.

| Province | Total Deaths | Deaths October to December (%) [*] | Deaths confirmed as Influenza (%) [*] |
|-------------------|--------------|---|--|
| Cape | 244 | 150 (61.4) | 117 (47.9) |
| Natal | 19 | 3 (15.8) | 1 (5.3) |
| Orange Free State | 53 | 37 (69.8) | 0 |
| Transvaal | 381 | 144 (37.8) | 118 (30.9) |
| | | | |
| Total | 697 | 334 (47.9) | 236 (33.8) |

^{*} Indicates percentage of total deaths

Figure 1. Comparison of the number of confirmed influenza deaths and those without a death certificate in the last quarter of 1918.



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A Day of Remembrance at the University of Vienna

Isador Segal

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On the morning of 6 September 1998, delegates to the World Congress of Gastroenterology were invited to a symposium entitled ‘A Period of Darkness - the University of Vienna’s Medical School and the Nazi Regime’, held in an auditorium at the University of Vienna (UV). The lectures were designed to provide a rationale for the Faculty of Medicine of the UV who approved the action whereby teachers and students were expelled, persecuted, exiled or murdered during the Nazi regime for racial and political reasons. Those affected were mainly Jews.

Towards the end of the talks a casually dressed middle aged man stood up and shouted,

“What did you all do when this was happening? It’s words, words and excuses and the worst of it is that it’s still happening now”.

He then got up and stalked out of the room. The audience were shocked into silence.

Who was that man? I asked the person sitting next to me.

“Oh, that’s Bruno Kreisky’s son”.

Bruno Kreisky was the Jewish Acting President of Austria from 24 April 1974 to 8 July 1974, a period of 75 days.

My thoughts turned inward. Here I was sitting in the heartland of antisemitism, a populace that persecuted my forebears. The enduring, endemic hatred was evident from this discussion, in this room, in this environment. At the end of the symposium I was dismayed, stunned and saddened by the events that had occurred.

Following the symposium we proceeded to the courtyard where a memorial plaque was to be unveiled by the Dean of the Faculty. The plaque was dedicated by the Faculty of Medicine to all teachers and students who were persecuted, exiled or murdered during the Nazi regime for racial or political reasons.^[1] Most of them had been Jews. As we were going down the steps of the faculty I noted, on the Honours’ Roll the name ‘Theodor Billroth’, a famous surgeon who was also a

vicious antisemite. In the early 1930s, he had called for restricting the number of Jewish students to be admitted to the Faculty of Medicine.^[2]

Whilst we mingled in the crowd, I noticed Prof. Werner Creutzfeld standing close to the memorial plaque when the Dean delivered his opening address³. At the beginning of his speech he acknowledged the people who had contributed to the Day of Remembrance and emphasised the major role played by Prof. Creutzfeld in organising it.

The cast iron rectangular plaque had been attached to the outside wall of the inner courtyard. As the assembly stood in silence contemplating it, I asked my artist wife if she could try to interpret it for me. She said: ‘The memorial consists of a checker board pattern of squares, many of which are recessed and empty while a number are solid. In the solitude of reflection it becomes apparent that the blank spaces represent an unnerving expression of deep loss and the few solid blocks stand firm. This simple board evokes a moment of heartbreaking futility and grief. It is a moving testament to the medical staff who had disappeared since 1938...’

Following the ceremony, delegates dispersed quietly with reserved farewells, each lost within their own personal memories and thoughts.

This experience brought to mind a visit I had received from Prof. Creutzfeld three years earlier. He was making a rare guest visit, to the Gastroenterology Department at Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto, Johannesburg: the largest hospital in the world, where I then worked. An unexpected visitor, he was distinctively German and I had a strong negative association the moment I saw him. My reception of him was very cool and after a brief discussion I abruptly excused myself due to urgent work. His visit unnerved me and I realised that my behaviour was unacceptable.

Some years later, imagine my shame and embarrassment to discover that Prof. Creutzfeld (as had been his father, Prof. Hans Gerhard Creutzfeldt, 1885-1964) was an exemplar of dedicated decency in the face of often fearful situations in the faculty. My profound regret is that I lost the opportunity to make my personal apologies before he passed away in 2006. I have learned that assumptions and preconceived notions tend to be unfairly judgmental and often prejudice-based. I have been humbled by my experience and hope never to repeat it, whatever the circumstances.

The following footnotes include highlights of the talks delivered at the Day of Remembrance. It also includes a background to prior events and the ramifications preceding the ‘Anschluss’ (unification of Germany and Austria) from 1938, including attempts to rationalise why the medical profession played such a prominent role in the ‘killing machine’.

Discussion

During the 1870s, antisemitism in Vienna became widespread and virulent. The economic decline during the depression of 1873 exacerbated this, with demands for the expulsion of Jews becoming explicit.[3] Karl Lueger, the Mayor of Vienna (1897-1910), protested about the appointment of too many Jews to the faculty of the UV. From the early decades of the 20th Century, German nationalist and right-wing Catholic teachers increasingly organised themselves against their Jewish competitors, often preventing them from receiving positions at UV. After World War I, violent pogroms in Russia resulted in a mass exodus of more than 150 000 destitute Jews to Vienna. The Austrian government demanded their immediate expulsion. In accordance with the official policy of the government, the Austrian populace fully participated in the persecution and despoliation of the Jews.

In Austria, the phenomenon of Nazism was similar to that in Germany. Many celebrated university teachers asserted antisemitic, anti-liberal and German nationalist ideas in their publications.[4] From 1918 onwards, efforts were made by the UV administration to curtail the enrolment of students of Jewish descent. Racial segregation and racial hygiene were called for by members of the medical profession. To further the genetically superior and to exclude the genetically inferior from procreation through sterilisation and other methods were the theories which Austrian doctors applied in practice.[5]

Superiority of the 'Nordic race' over all other races became a core principle of the National Socialist Party, which took measures for the eradication of pathological genotypes. Unethical research and lethal measures were directed against mentally or otherwise disabled adults and children, euphemistically termed 'euthanasia'. Child euthanasia started in 1940 and was only halted at the end of the Nazi regime in May 1945. Relatives of children with hereditary diseases had to have coercive sterilisation. The UV never commented on these events and made no efforts to investigate them. Forced sterilisation was implemented, with the number of individuals affected in Austria ranged from 6000 to 10 000. A new department, named the Eugenics and Racial Hygiene was established. In 1989, research preparations on the brains of nearly 800 murdered children were still being stored; they were finally buried in 1998.[6]

Expulsion of Jews from Vienna and UV

Escalating antisemitism culminated in the complete and systematic expulsion of all Jewish teachers and students from the University. According to UV records, a total of 82 professors and 2324 lecturers, i.e. more than 40% of teaching staff, were dismissed between 1938 and 1945. They were removed from the university and subsequently subjected to further persecution. Many ended up in extermination camps. In the spring semester of 1938, a *numerous clause* for students of Jewish

descent was instituted. After the Crystal Night (‘*Reichskrystalnacht*’), they were no longer allowed to study or even enter the University.[7] The Anschluss also meant that of the 5700 doctors registered in Vienna at the beginning of 1938, 3461 lost their right to practice. Only 368 doctors were allowed to continue practising as Jewish Therapists. The radical brain drain had an extreme effect on the quality and teaching at the UV. Those affected made up 45% of all professors and lecturers, 320 professionals, and 23% of all students: 2300 people and furthermore over 2300 alumni were stripped of their academic degrees. The events described above amounted to a shattering of the Hippocratic Oath.

The question remains - why did doctors become an integral part of the process of racial-hygiene and euthanasia that resulted in the killing of millions of people, specifically Jews, as well as Gypsies, homosexuals and political dissidents? Drobniewski states: “The Nazi government used a vigorous media campaign, suspension of much legal protection and focussed their campaign on the Jews. They reinforced the conditioning with rewards e.g. seizure of Jewish property. Bigotry and prejudice on the one hand, and the quest for knowledge unhindered by consideration of its source on the other, collaboration to create one of the cruellest episodes of medical history: a depraved philosophy in which doctors were an integral component”.[8]

Has antisemitism decreased in Austria and the UV?

2018 marked eighty years since Kristallnacht and serious antisemitism in Austria still exists, from the right-wing Freedom Party, founded by a former SS soldier, which is allied with the ruling People’s Party. A recent survey indicated that 75% of respondents considered that antisemitism had increased over the previous five years. and that 67% of Austrian Jews who might sometimes wear, carry or display items that could identify them as Jewish now chose to avoid doing so. However, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz has taken a leading role in Europe’s role against antisemitism.[9]

The University of Vienna and Austria, Hitler’s birthplace, has witnessed the ebb and tide of antisemitism, at times placid, at times Tsunami-like, but always simmering. During the Nazi era, the moral force that should have moved doctors to uphold the dignity of man was extinguished and a culture of evil established.

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Chagall and the Murdered Poets

Paul Trehwela

Paul Trehwela is a journalist, author and former anti-apartheid activists now living in Aylesbury, UK. From 1964-1967, he was imprisoned for his political activities, which included editing *Freedom Fighter*, the underground journal of Umkhonto we Sizwe during the Rivonia Trial. He has since written extensively on the lives of fellow Jewish political activists and other aspects of the liberation movement. He is the author of *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the Exile History of the ANC and SWAPO* (Jacana Media, 2009).

If a painter's "hands are tied", what happens to the painter, and the painter's work? The phrase is Marc Chagall's, writing about himself.

Standing alongside Picasso and Matisse, no artist of Chagall's international repute in the 20th Century experienced such intense, specific and long-lasting censorship of his own free expression. He was the friend and colleague of nine (very likely ten) cultural figures – most, though not all, writers – who were specifically murdered or otherwise brought to their deaths by Stalin in the Soviet Union. His two surviving sisters and their families were living in Russia, and were very vulnerable, as were other friends. Chagall was never free of concern that anything he might do should threaten them.

Discussion of this crucial issue in his life and work is still grossly inadequate.

"My tongue is blocked," Chagall wrote from France to Jewish friends in New York, Yosef and Adele Opatoshu, on 24 October 1950, at the height of Stalin's antisemitic purge. (All his colleagues who perished over these years in the Soviet Union were, like him, Jews). "My hands are tied when I think about my poor friends and my sisters..." Concerning two of these writers "and others" then under arrest and interrogation, who were later executed, he wrote to the Opatoshus on 11 September 1951: "I certainly knew [them] very well." Despite living and working in freedom, Chagall felt himself – and remained until he died – a hostage.

After February 1952, in a letter to the Opatoshus, he never again mentioned the names of these colleagues in writing. Thanking the Opatoshus that month for sending him a book of writings by the "Yiddish Russian writers," he wrote, "It is a tragic document how Jewish life (there) is...I lack the words to think, to talk about our calamity, for we live in a world where the ground is missing."

Five of those colleagues were executed in Moscow six months later in the basement of the Lubyanka on the Night of the Murdered Poets, 12 August 1952.

On 8 January 1953, Chagall wrote to Yosef Opatoshu, “every day of the new year we are waiting what ‘terrible’ news they will throw our way. ...The last drop went over (even before the Prague trial).” He was referring to the trial followed by public execution on 3 December 1952 of 11 leading Communists in Czechoslovakia, nearly all of them Jews. The first public announcement of the so-called “Jewish doctors’ plot” appeared in *Pravda* on 13 January 1953, ahead of Stalin’s death on 5 March the same year.

Chagall’s beloved wife, Bella, had died in the New York in September 1944, where they had been living during the Second World War since escaping from occupied France in May 1941, following Chagall’s (brief) arrest in Marseilles as a Jew the previous month. In the middle of the profound crisis caused for him as friend, artist and Jew by the pogrom of Stalin’s last years, his partner of the previous seven years, Virginia Haggard (who was English and not Jewish), left him to marry another man in April 1952, taking away her and Chagall’s young son, David. The death of Yosef Opatoshu in October 1954 – through whom “I loved Yiddish literature and Yiddish writers, among whom he was the finest star” – then removed Chagall’s most intimate correspondent.

Whether in writing about him or exhibiting his work, there is a scandal of silence on the part of the art establishment relating to the crisis for Chagall at this time, with a particular focus on the killing of his Jewish friends by the Soviet state. Chagall’s experience over this period has no equivalent relating to any artist of his stature arising from Nazi Germany.

This is directly relevant to Britain because between June and October 2013, the state-funded Tate gallery in Liverpool staged a major exhibition, *Chagall: Modern Master*, with a superb collection of work ranging from *Birth* (painted by Chagall in St Petersburg in 1910, before his first sojourn in Paris) to the elegiac *War*, painted in France between 1964 and 1966, when he was nearly 80: a most moving evocation of the European tragedy of his lifetime. The exhibition included the seven surviving murals which Chagall painted on canvas in 1920 for the Moscow State Yiddish Academy Theatre (GOSET) in the pinched, starved period of Soviet “war communism”, for the Yiddish Theatre’s earliest productions.



Marc Chagall: Mural in the Jewish State Theater, Moscow, USSR, 1917-1922. (Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery)

During Stalin's Great Purge of 1937 these specifically Jewish paintings were kept hidden. They remained hidden for 50 years, until well after Stalin ordered GOSSET to be closed in 1949, and were not seen abroad until after the downfall of the Soviet Union. Chagall was nevertheless able to sign these large canvases in 1973 on his sole visit to Russia after he, Bella and their daughter Ida were given permission to leave the Soviet Union in 1922 by the Commissar of Enlightenment, Anatoly Lunacharsky.

Almost certainly, that escape saved his life. He died in France in 1985, at age 98. In the Soviet Union he was regarded as a defector, and he dared not return to visit his family. None of his work was shown there after 1937, and the first full-scale exhibition of his work in Russia took place in Moscow only in 1987, on the hundredth anniversary of his birth, and only four years before the end of the Soviet Union.

Though no record has apparently been located so far in the archives in Russia, it is inconceivable that Stalin's secret police and their successors did not keep a file on him. Major areas of Russian secret police archives have never been made public by the successor to the KGB. Yet barely a word of this period of intense trauma for Russia's Jews, and for Chagall, appears in the otherwise well-produced catalogue for the exhibition, published by the Tate gallery in association with Kunsthaus, Zurich, which showed the exhibition prior to its showing in Liverpool, and where Chagall's great painting, *War*, is housed.

The catalogue notes that the revolutions of 1917 "granted full Russian citizenship to the Jewish populace for the first time, dissolving the Pale of Settlement in the process. Chagall welcomed this new-found equality and the artistic revolution that was generated by the Bolshevik political revolution." (p.134) Yet the catalogue provides not a single word of information about the circumstances in which "these masterpieces whose significance cannot be over-estimated" managed to "survive destruction during the Stalinist era" – its single, bland reference to the regime at whose hands five (almost certainly six) cultural colleagues of Chagall, who are mentioned by name in the catalogue, met a brutal death. (p.162)

Their deaths, and the manner of their deaths, are not even mentioned. This is despite the fact that the Selected Bibliography for the exhibition lists four books on Chagall by Benjamin Harshav – professor at Yale of comparative literature, of Hebrew language and literature, and of Slavic languages and literatures – which provide plentiful detail about these atrocities, and it lists also the voluminous biography, *Chagall: Life and Exile* (2008), by Jackie Wullschlager, chief art critic of the *Financial Times*.

An essay in the catalogue by Monica Bohm-Duchen, "Marc Chagall: Russian Jew or citizen of the world?", makes no specific reference to the fates of these Russian Jewish colleagues, even though the murder and execution of two of them are

mentioned in her study, *Chagall* (Phaidon, London, 1998), also cited in the Selected Bibliography.

The Tate catalogue notes that the “well-known actor Solomon Mikhoels” is “depicted numerous times” in Chagall’s mural, *Introduction to the Jewish Theatre*, which it reproduces in colour (pp.160, 164-65) It makes no mention that Mikhoels, who had been sent by Stalin to the United States with the poet Itzik Feffer in 1943 to raise support for the Soviet war effort, was specifically ordered by Stalin to be murdered in January 1948, the murder poorly concealed as a traffic accident, and covered up with a state funeral in Moscow.

Arrested on 24 December 1948, Feffer was executed in the Lubyanka with 12 other members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee on the Night of the Murdered Poets in August 1952. He and Mikhoels had had a brief, joyful reunion with Chagall in wartime New York in 1943. The following year Chagall provided drawings to illustrate a book of Feffer’s poems, which was published in New York. In her study, *Chagall*, Bohm-Duchen notes that Mikhoels and Feffer were “murdered by Stalin” – but says no more than that. (p.251)

Five other Jews also mentioned in the Tate catalogue with no indication as to their fate include Chagall’s art teacher as a youth in Vitebsk, Yehuda Pen, murdered at the age of 82 in his apartment in Vitebsk in 1937, “almost certainly by the NKVD”, as Wullschlager reports. Chagall, in France, had sent a letter to Pen a month previously, which Wullschlager notes was “kept by the authorities”. This suggests the possibility of a revolting revenge killing.

That fate came also to the dramaturge Yikhezkel Dobrushin, who adapted classical Yiddish works for GOSET, pictured with Bella and baby Ida at the far left of Chagall’s *Introduction to the Yiddish Theatre*: arrested in 1948 and died in the Gulag in 1953.

So too the writer Dovid Hofshteyn, who collaborated with Chagall on a book of poems and drawings, *Troyer* (Grief), arrested in 1948, executed on the Night of the Murdered Poets, August 1952.



Victims of Stalin: Itzik Feffer, Solomon Mikhoels, Dovid Hofshteyn

So too the major writer of Yiddish fiction, Der Nister, who had worked with Chagall and Hofshiteyn in an orphanage for homeless Jewish children whose parents had been killed in the pogroms of the civil war period: arrested 1948, died in a prison hospital 1950. (Chagall had illustrated his poems, and inscribed Der Nister's name with those of other Yiddish writers in his *Introduction to the Yiddish Theatre*).

And so too also one of the most celebrated gallery owners and publicists of modernist art in Europe, Herwarth Walden, who brought Chagall to prominence before the First World War at his gallery, Der Sturm, in Berlin. A chapter in the catalogue on Walden, who was Jewish (his birth name was Georg Lewin), notes that as a gallery owner he represented a swathe of the most eminent European artists of his day, including Kokoschka, Klee, Kandinsky, Marc, Macke, Robert Delaunay, Leger, Henri Rousseau, as well as "the Futurists and others". (p.31) In addition to not mentioning the manner of death of Mikhoels, Feffer, Pen, Hofshiteyn and Der Nister – despite references to them in the text – the Tate catalogue neglects to mention that Walden fled from Germany to the Soviet Union in 1932, where he was arrested during the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and died in prison in October 1941.

In a letter for Walden's 50th birthday in 1928, quoted in the catalogue, Chagall had expressed his "highest esteem" for his former patron, as the "foremost and fervent defender of the New Art and, particularly, as the first disseminator of my works in Germany." (p.39) It was Walden's fervent defence of the "New Art" in Stalin's Russia which brought him to grief.

Of three other people whom Chagall knew, shot as "Jewish nationalists" in the Night of the Murdered Poets, one was the Yiddish poet and playwright, Perets Markish. Together with another Yiddish writer, Oyzer Varshavsky, Markish had translated Chagall's autobiography, *My Life*, into Yiddish (with assistance from Chagall) while staying in Paris in the mid-1920s, and Chagall had illustrated the cover of a Yiddish literary journal co-edited in Paris by Markish and Varshavsky with an image of himself, Markish and Varshavsky seen climbing the Eifel Tower.

Also shot that night was the celebrated actor Benjamin Zuskin, who had acted the Fool to Mikhoels's King Lear, taking over the directorship of GOSET after Mikhoels's murder. Zuskin was in the garden of the Chagalls' house near Paris in 1928, along with Mikhoels and the entire GOSET troupe, in a group photograph with the Chagalls shortly ahead of the defection of the GOSET director Aleksei Granovksy, pictured with his head held deep in his hands.

A third, the Communist and Yiddish writer, Dovid Bergelson – like Mikhoels, Feffer, Hofshiteyn and Markish a leader of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee during the German invasion – was arrested in January 1949 and shot on the Night of the Murdered Poets. Chagall had visited him in Berlin in the 1920s, before Bergelson's return to live in the Soviet Union in 1934.

This appalling experience of brutal loss has important consequences for the appreciation of Chagall's later work, representing – in my judgement – many of the most powerful, resonant and universally meaningful images in the whole of his oeuvre.



Marc Chagall painting *Study for Introduction to the Jewish Theater* (1920),

The central importance of the Crucifixion image in the paintings of the last half of Chagall's life, with his numerous evocations of Jesus the Jew as emblem of a suffering humanity, and in particular of Jewish suffering, is now well recognised. A crucial, universalising development in Chagall's conceptual and artistic development over this period came with his re-working of his canvas, *White Crucifixion*, painted originally in 1938, after the horrors in Germany culminating in the destruction of synagogues and killing of Jews at Kristallnacht. Following the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939, Chagall obscured his original painting of a swastika on the armband of a storm-trooper setting fire to a synagogue in the top right-hand corner, as well as the German text "Ich bin Jude" on a placard around the neck of an elderly Jew in the bottom left-hand corner. Clearly, Chagall did this not to obscure the guilt of the German regime but to place its Russian counterpart as equivalent, and so raise the totalitarian horror of that period – and its specific anti-Semitic focus - to a more universal plane.

One of the most important of these later paintings, *Wall Clock with Blue Wing* – painted in 1949, in the period of Stalin's round-up of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee following the murder of Mikhoels – was shown in the exhibition at Tate Liverpool, but with no indication as to its range of resonance. Dark sky, deserted snowy streets, a bouquet of flowers abandoned on the snow, Jackie Wullschlager describes it as "a painting that suggests emotional collapse. Chagall was finishing the work just as news came from Russia of the disappearance of Jewish intellectuals including his friend Feffer as well as Perets Markish...".

"For Chagall it was the last disillusionment about Soviet Russia....Doubts and grief about Russia, therefore, fed into *Wall Clock with Blue Wing*." (pp.449-50)

No clue as to the context of this major work was provided by the Tate.

In the same way, one is free to read Chagall's major painting, *The Fall of Icarus* – painted in 1975 when he was nearly 90, with Icarus poised to tumble to earth among the houses of old Vitebsk – as a parable on the over-reaching hubris of young Jews like himself and his perished friends who had embraced the ethos of the revolution.

It is ironic that in a large exhibition in 2010 with the very questionable title, *Picasso: Peace and Freedom*, Tate Liverpool similarly provided no adequate information about Stalin's anti-Jewish pogrom when it showed Picasso's late work, with his celebratory image for the dictator's birthday in November 1949, inscribed *Staline, a ta Sante* ("Your health, Stalin!"), as well as Picasso's romanticised portrait produced for the front page of the French Communist newspaper, *Les Lettres Francaises*, within days of the dictator's death in 1953.

During "these nasty, murderous (non-Jewish) times", as Chagall described this period in a letter in July 1950 to Abraham Sutzkever, a Yiddish-speaking friend and poet then living in Tel Aviv, it was at a lunch near Antibes on France's Mediterranean coast that his break with Picasso took place, an event defined along the line of fracture between Stalin and the Jews.

As Wullschlager reports, Picasso asked Chagall why he never went back to Russia.

"Characteristically, he touched the rawest nerve: at just this time Michel Gordey [at the time, Ida Chagall's husband] had gone on a journalistic assignment to Moscow, meeting Mrs Feffer and seeking news of Feffer, whom Chagall now knew to be alive but imprisoned....

"But to Picasso he only flashed a broad smile and suggested that as a member of the Communist Party, he should go first, for 'I hear you are greatly beloved in Russia, but not your painting.'"

The first-hand account of the interchange cited here by Wullschlager comes from Francoise Gilot, Picasso's then lover, who was present at the lunch. Following Chagall's response about the painter's Communist Party membership, Gilot continues: "Pablo got nasty and said, 'With you I suppose it's a question of business. There's no money to be made there.'"

Business...money...Jew.

That "finished the friendship, right there," writes Wullschlager (pp.455-56) A fuller account from Francoise Gilot appears in Monica Bohm-Duchen's *Chagall*. (p.286)

Chagall had long since in his work replaced his image of Lenin doing a handstand (in his 1937 painting, *Revolution*) with a crucified Jesus the Jew: probably the most

definitive image of Chagall's late paintings, appearing in numerous works, including his epoch-defining *War*.

With its shocked and agonised white ram as witness to the cruelty inflicted on humans by humans, Chagall's *War* is a painting to consider alongside the wounded horse of Picasso's *Guernica*. There is a full-scale embroidered reproduction of *Guernica* at the Whitechapel Gallery in London, and it would have been illuminating to see these works together.

However it was beyond the capacity of the Tate even to suggest this, even though the significance of a modernist (and Jewish) artist restoring the crucifixion to its central place in the iconography of Western culture as a means of conceptualising its 20th century horrors is strongly argued by Jonathan Wilson in his brief monograph, *Marc Chagall* (Schocken/Jewish Encounters, New York, 2007). While primary attention is given to the Holocaust, Wilson gives inadequate attention to Chagall's re-evaluation as a painter of the Soviet experience of his native Russia.

It is not out of place to note that the Russian contributor to the Tate catalogue, Ekaterina L. Selezneva – a former deputy director of the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, and author of an essay titled “Chagall's murals for the Yiddish Chamber Theatre in Moscow” – is listed on its back cover as Head of the Department of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation: in other words, an official of the government. It is legitimate to wonder how a contemporary Russian government official might be able to investigate the atrocities of the Russian government of 70 years ago, and how appropriate it was for the Tate to have Chagall's heritage of pain explored for British viewers in this way.

It is difficult to imagine how Chagall might have evoked the horror in Russia, had he not been so conscribed. As he wrote concerning “the unfortunate Jews in Russia” to his friend, Kadish Luz, the Speaker of the Knesset in Jerusalem, in December 1970, “I have to – alas – restrain myself in many ways” so as not to harm his sisters in Russia, and their families. “I have ‘restrained’ myself like this for 50 years. What can you do?”

As Arno Lustiger, a Polish Jewish survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, notes in his study, *Stalin and the Jews. The Red Book: The Tragedy of the Soviet Jews and the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee* (Enigma Books, New York, 2003), Mikhoels's daughter Natalia asked Chagall to create illustrations for her biography of her father, after she and her sister Nina were permitted to emigrate to Israel in 1972. Chagall “rejected her request with the explanation that he did not like to support projects critical of the USSR.” (p.329) It is not hard to guess his interior reasoning. In her biography, translated into French as *Mon Pere, Salomon Mikhoels: Souvenirs sur sa Vie et sa Mort* (Montricher, Switzerland, 1990, written in Russian and first published in Israel), Natalia Vovsi-Mikhoels describes her father and Chagall as having a “mutual understanding worthy of telepathy”. (p.28)

Just as in the music of his contemporary, Dmitri Shostakovich, Chagall's post-war Russian trauma was constrained to wear a mask and be oblique.

Yet it is possible to consider the spooky, white-faced musicians in Chagall's *Saltimbanques in the Night* (from 1957, and item 89 in the catalogue) as ghosts of the Moscow Yiddish Theatre, murdered by Stalin, and with it the Renaissance of Eastern European Yiddish culture - the anguished spirits of Mikhoels and Zuskin, Dobrishin, Markish, Der Nister, and their colleagues. Chagall's deeply individual imagination, with his range of symbolic meaning derived from theatre and from circus, could find tragedy in Fool's clothing. The antics of Mikhoels could be seen in *Mauve Nude* (1967), the last work in the exhibition, clothed – disguised - as Harlequin,

None of this finds expression in the catalogue.

The Tate's exclusion of the Stalin terror in its effect on Chagall, through the murder of his friends and its repression of Jews, must be accounted a severe moral failure. Given the amount of information available to the curators, this came perilously close to a form of censorship on the part of Britain's premier state-funded art institution, with a very damaging effect for understanding of this Jewish artist's work.



Marc Chagall, *Music* (1920), tempera, gouache, and opaque white on canvas. State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

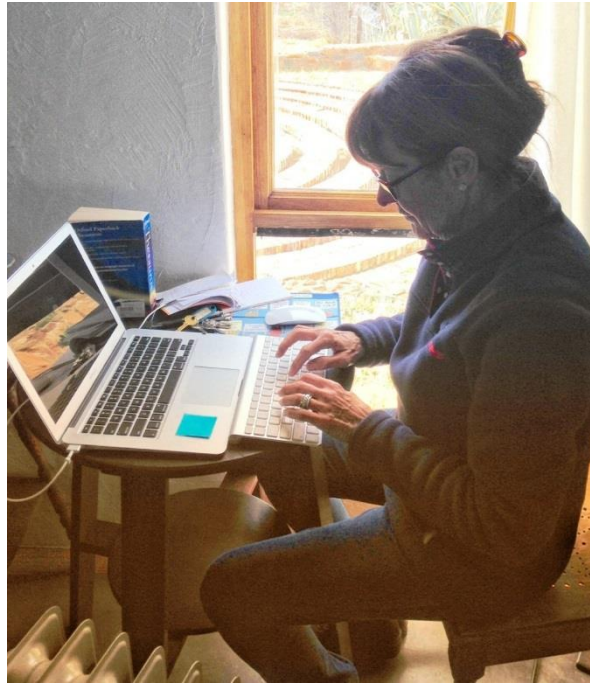
Two Daughters of the Free State and their Poetry: Olga Kirsch and Jennifer Friedman

Brian Josselowitz

***Brian Josselowitz** has worked in the newspaper industry, as a journalist, sub-editor and editor for some fifty years, including for the Weekend World, Business Times, Sunday Times and Caxton. After moving to Cape Town, he launched a community newspaper for the northern suburbs at the behest of The Argus Company (now Independent Media), and at the time of his retirement from the Independent after nineteen years was news editor of fifteen community newspaper titles. He continues to contribute to Independent titles around the country.*

Dr Egonne Roth, a lecturer at Bar Ilan University and biographer of Olga Kirsch¹, was surprised to learn that Jennifer Friedman, author of the childhood memoir *Queen of the Free State* and its follow-up *The Messiah's Dream Machine*² also writes Afrikaans poetry. She had thought that Kirsch (who had strong ties to *Jewish Affairs*)³ was the only South African Jewish woman who did so. There are other similarities too: Kirsch and Friedman both grew up learning and speaking Afrikaans in the then Orange Free State, Kirsch in Koppies and Friedman in the Philippolis area, now Xariep, where her grandparents owned farms and her father was the first Jewish pharmacist in the area. Friedman lived in Cape Town for five years and, as Kirsch did, in Israel while her husband Alan Hendler was setting up a factory for the family business. She now lives in Australia but often makes visits back home.

Friedman, much against her will and despite her mother's promise not to send her, went to boarding school in Cape Town, attending the Good Hope Seminary High School for Girls in Sea Point. "In retrospect, I guess it was because she and my father had decided to sell up and leave the Free State, a decision they certainly didn't share with me," she says. In *The Messiah's Dream Machine* she refers to her Alma Mater as the Good Hope Cemetery. According to her, it was predominantly Jewish. Kirsch, by contrast, from the age of 13 attended Eunice High in Bloemfontein, where there were a number of Jewish children, because she wanted to study Latin. This, soon after her father Sam died following complications from a hernia operation in Johannesburg.



Jennifer Friedman working on 'The Messiah's Dream Machine' while staying at the Van der Post Writer's Retreat, Philippolis (Free State)

Of her parents, Friedman says, “My mother was undemonstrative, but my father could on occasion appear warm, hearty and affectionate. He was an artist; an exceptionally good sculptor. He sculpted a very fine head of my grandfather, his father-in-law”.

Friedman says she has written poetry in Afrikaans all of her life: “It’s the way I’ve always expressed my thoughts and ideas; invariably, habitually, as a poem. I’ve no idea how many I’ve written”. She has had about two dozen poems published in mainly academic journals such as *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, *Wetenskap en Kuns* (as did Kirsch), *Standpunte*, *Buurman*, and the popular Afrikaans magazine, *Rooi Rose*, among others. “My poetry is about the farms, the Free State, different countries I’ve found myself in, longing, love, my children, politics – whatever thought comes into my head. I don’t choose the subjects for my poetry – they choose me”.

Kirsch too wrote about the people she loved and the experiences she had. She also had a fraught relationship with her mother Eva, who died in 1981. In one of her poems about Eva, she indicates that her philosophy about how to bring up children was in keeping with the community in which they lived. It was not a community that pampered children. They believed children should learn that only through hard work and diligence could success be achieved.

Although Sam had a car and employed a driver the children had to walk to and from school - quite a walk. Often they would stop at the store for something to

eat and drink. Eva believed that they were a cut above the rest. As far as she was concerned the children had everything they could dream of: “There was no reason to complain. However, these emotional and behavioural restrictions resulted in polite but shallow family relationships. Contentious issues could never be discussed and therefore went unresolved”.

Friedman has not as yet published an anthology of Afrikaans poetry. “But the thought recently occurred to me – I’ve added a few Afrikaans poems in the third book I’m writing” she says. There is a difference between writing poetry and prose: “For me, writing poetry is spontaneous – the images just appear, whereas when I write stories, I have to sit down and really think about content and structure. I had no idea writing prose was such hard work”.

Continues Friedman, “I grew up in the Free State speaking Afrikaans. It was the language of the Free State, and it seemed a natural choice when I started writing about the Free State. It was never a conscious decision to write poetry. I saw the world in the form of a poem and that's how the words fell upon the paper.

“Afrikaans poetry was part of our school curriculum. I was educated in Afrikaans, at an Afrikaans school. But I don't think I was ever influenced by any other poet. I just wrote as I perceived the world around me. It was a form of writing that appealed to me, and seemed to perfectly contain and express how and what I wanted to say. Poems mostly just present themselves to me and I mess around with them until I’m satisfied with their form and content – especially their rhythm and the shape of their images. When I need to write anything down, I'll write on any piece of paper I can find, words and ideas, phrases and images. That said, I also don't go anywhere without a notebook and a pen, but often also while I'm cooking or flying a plane.

“Olga Kirsch was a Free Stater too, born in Koppies. She was a contemporary of my mother's, and amongst the many hundreds of books in our house were my mother's copies of her anthologies, *Die Soeklig* and *Mure van die Hart*. It's many years since I read her poetry, but I do remember that I found her writing clear, and easy to understand. I think we both felt the same way about Afrikaans as a language, and our attachment to South Africa”.

Concerning *Queen of the Free State*, Friedman explains that she hadn't intend writing a memoir: “Having previously written poetry exclusively in Afrikaans, many years after being transplanted to Australia, I thought I'd try my hand at writing short stories, sketches in English, about growing up as a Jewish child in a predominantly Afrikaans environment. Growing up in the Free State provided me with a different sort of childhood, and a wealth of fascinating personalities and events. I loved writing the stories, but once I'd completed *Queen of the Free State* – against my will, it has to be said – I was persuaded to have them published in the form of a memoir.

“People identified with *Queen* as well as its follow-up, *The Messiah's Dream Machine*. They responded very warmly to both, and I received only positive comments,” she says. *Queen of the Free State* didn't identify the locale where Friedman grew up. However, it was the Philippolis area (“I didn’t feel that the precise location was that important in either book, but once the area had been identified during an interview, the cat was out of the bag”).



On her visit during the launch of *The Messiah's Dream Machine*, Friedman observes, “The village has hardly changed – the same lovely Victorian houses, the dusty back roads. Even the trees lining Voortrekker Street, the main road running through the town, are still there. The cemetery where I spent so many happy hours pretending has become an absolute disaster – disgracefully overgrown, with gaping graves and sheep and goats roaming free. My cousins maintain the Jewish section where so many of our family members are buried, and that’s as neat and tidy as it ever was. The veld and the koppies are immutable – of course they’re affected to a certain extent by drought or good rains, but in my mind’s eye, they remain as they’ve always been – the most beautiful jewel in the crown”.

Friedman’s cousins still own farms in the area: Benjamin, now married is there. His brother Wilfred and his partner live on one of the adjoining farms, and his sister Rochelle and her husband live on another.

Olga Kirsch’s father Sam came to South Africa from Plunge, Lithuania, at the age of 23. Friedman’s father also came from Lithuania, but as a small boy. However, her mother was a second generation South African and at one stage edited a newspaper in Standerton. Her paternal grandparents were Benjamin and Leah Fletcher. Her maternal grandfather, a farmer, was born in Lithuania

and her grandmother was born in South Africa of English parentage. Their names were Moritz and Leah Jacobson.

Farming full time didn't appeal to Olga's father, so he started life as a peddler and headed north where few travellers went. He had a shop in Groenvlei but lived in Koppies. A few years later, then aged 32, he opened a store there with a bookkeeper, Gordon, and it was accordingly called Kirsch and Gordon. A Jewish trader, Silver, told Sam about a beautiful young woman named Eva Nathenson, aged 19, in Volksrust. And so the match was made.

Unlike Olga, Friedman received absolutely no religious instruction at home: "We went to shul only on the High and Holy Days – Pesach, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We often used to spend them with my grandparents or with my uncle and aunt on the farm – occasions of great solemnity, broken by my uncle's fox terrier howling under the table in competition with my grandfather, a well-known baritone, and his brother, my great-uncle John, both trying to outdo one another in the *chazonnes* stakes. The synagogue was opened for Pesach, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and sometimes for the lesser holidays too. But my parents only took us to shul for the most important ones, though I remember being given a huge slab of Cadbury's chocolate to eat by all by myself. On Wednesdays the back section of the synagogue was opened for our *cheder* class, which was held in what I remember as a very cold classroom," Friedman said, and added that her grandfather employed a *shochet* and a Hebrew teacher when she, her siblings and cousins were young.

The Kirsch children's education was not limited to secular activities. For Sam, who grew up in an Orthodox milieu and attended a Yeshiva, it was important that they have religious instruction. Attached to the Koppies synagogue was a *cheder*. Olga learnt basic Hebrew and lessons were taught by Rev Gertner. Sam also employed the father of a Jewish dentist, Oscar Koren, who had trained in Talmud and Midrash to prepare Henry, his older son, for his Barmitzvah, which he celebrated in the Koppies shul in August 1935.

After Sam died, Eva took over the running of the business and proved to be very capable. While the care and upbringing of her children was a central value in her life, she was not an emotional mother given to showing affection in the obvious ways. As with Friedman, Kirsch too had a fraught relationship with her mother. As an adult she nevertheless reached a new understanding of her, a new empathy for the suffering she had experienced as a child. This is reflected in a 1981 poem.

According to an aunt, Eva's father, Baruch Nathenson, was friendly with Paul Kruger, the then president of the ZAR. If he had asked Kruger for help, he would have given it, according to the aunt. But he wasn't a man to take advantage of his good relations with people in high places so he and his family struggled financially. They lived in Gravelotte, a small mining settlement, then in Vryland and lastly in Groenvlei, where they had a small shop. As there was

no shul they davvened at home on Shabbat. On Yom Tov the family trekked to Volksrust where there was a shul and stayed with their friends, the Kunys.

Friedman's Great-Uncle John, her grandfather's youngest brother, was one of John Vorster's guards at Koffiefontein where Vorster, a General in the Ossewa Brandwag, was interned for his Nazi sympathies. Uncle John didn't speak to her about those experiences. However, years later there was an uproar in the town when it was disclosed that Vorster, then South Africa's prime minister, was coming to visit because his only daughter was marrying a wealthy farmer from the district. Vorster knew Uncle John was "a Yid - they all did, you know". In the event Vorster singled him out in the crowd and thundered, "*My jene, John, is dit jy?*" Uncle John, so the story goes, stood on tiptoe, looked the president in the eyes, and said, "*Nee, Meneer-die-President, aikona. Ek ken Meneer van g'n kant af nie.*"

Friedman said she had good friends at primary school. "I wasn't aware of not fitting in. Some of my classmates bullied me, or tried to, and one or two teachers too. But after my dramatic introduction to '*Yoshke Pandras*', as my grandfather referred to him, I made friends who remained friends for all the years I went to the school in the Free State. My parents were the ones who really made me feel different. They isolated me at school and prevented me from fitting in more so that the children, who would have been perfectly happy, I think, to have included me in their Children's Circle, Sunday School and the Voortrekkers. I wasn't allowed to attend religious instruction if it concerned the New Testament. The teacher was instructed to send me out of the classroom, but I had nowhere to go. Of course, I couldn't attend any of the church functions my friends were so involved in. The antisemitism I experienced often came directly from teachers and other adults, and those children who made my life difficult at school only knew about antisemitism from their parents".

The Kirsch family too, experienced antisemitism. Olga's good friend, Arnold Shapiro and her brother Bernard "Boggie" recall that there had been antisemitism in the little village. Jewish shops had pro-Nazi symbols painted on their windows. Olga's sister, Janette, recalled that a swastika had been painted on Sam's shop window. Boggie and Arnold said that as youngsters they had often been beaten up by local boys because they were Jewish.

One of Friedman's biggest disappointments was when South Africa was about to become a Republic. "I had been chosen to represent the school at a gymnastics display for the Republic Day Festival celebrations in Bloemfontein, and was beside myself with pride and excitement. My parents initially refused to allow me to take part. When they eventually relented, I suddenly developed an acute appendicitis on the way home from a gymnastics practice and had to have an emergency appendectomy. I was devastated".

Friedman said her parents wanted her to speak Afrikaans like an Afrikaner, to do well at school and make friends. However, "they didn't want me to become

an Afrikaner, and being the only non-Afrikaans Jewish child in the school, life, through no fault of my own, was often difficult". She continues, "Growing up where and how I did made me who I am today. I could say that I might have wished for parents who loved me unconditionally; for a father who praised and encouraged me, instead of beating and emotionally abusing me. For a mother who was warm and understanding. But if wishes were horses... My life such as it was, gave me the ability to survive. So what would I change? Nothing. I am who I am".

Friedman is a licensed pilot: "I obtained my Australian Private Pilot's Licence a few years after my husband died. It was the worst day of my life when he was diagnosed with cancer. It was difficult, getting a licence, a lot of hard work, determination and dedication. I wanted to fly for the first time I went up in a glider which ended in a crash landing. I was hooked on flying forever. I knew that being up in the air was the place where I belonged, and where I felt safe. I feel safe and happy; it's where I can breathe. I fly mostly wherever the sun's shining, and within a day's reach. I can fly North or South up and down the coast, or out West across the Great Dividing Ranges to small country towns for lunch. A friend and I have been doing this for almost twenty years – the local cabbies don't even ask for a destination – they know where we want to go".



Jennifer Friedman at Cameron Corner, where boundaries of New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia meet (picture: John Freenan).

Although she has done a commercial pilot licence course she never wanted to fly the big jets, either: "I've only wanted to fly for myself".

Friedman lives in a small town on the Central Coast of New South Wales. It's a quiet area. The house looks out over a reserve and a mountain, and in the still

of the night, she can hear the sea. Her house is crammed with books and interesting artefacts brought back from her travels: "Paintings, Persian rugs, books. An antique piano. More books. Silver. A very full pantry".

From the study Friedman works in she can see flowers, trees and shrubs, but prefers to work facing away from the window as "there are too many distractions".

Friedman's parents are both deceased. "My children have grown up. Adam lives quite close by, and often drops in. Leah lives in New York – too far to just drop in. I'm not particularly observant, but I do celebrate the High and Holy days. I live in the back of beyond, and there's no synagogue to be found within 100km, so no, I don't attend services". Friedman is busy with her third book. The working title is, for the moment, *And So On, and So Forth*, one of her grandfather's favourite expressions. It will include more Afrikaans poetry.

Roth's new book, the unpublished English work by Kirsch has recently been published by Naledi under the title *Olga Kirsch: Her English Poetry*, March, 2020. Of this Roth says, "It should open up a whole new discussion on her English oeuvre. There will be those critics who will try to prove that many of these poems are nothing more than translations. But I firmly believe this is total nonsense given the size of her English work" [see also *Egonne Roth's article in Jewish Affairs, Vol. 73, No. 3, Chanukah 2018 – Editor*]. In her foreword to the book, Antjie Krog describes the poetry as beautiful in its simplicity. In the book, appearing for the first time is the poem 'Nevertheless', which paints a tableau of the first years of the State of Israel. Roth, who selected the work was the first person outside the family to see 'Nevertheless' in its entirety said she was mesmerised by it: "I found it beautiful and deeply moving." Other chapters are Poems to Ada (her daughter); Poems to Joe (her husband) and Poems to Life.

Although Roth was reluctant to do so she offered some criticism of two poems Friedman provided and signed Jennifer Fletcher Friedman. The poems are:

(1): *In hierdie braakdroe wynland gloei my liefde vir jou robyndiep trek my hart se verlange hemelsmyle ver - wees lief vir my - Jy is die reen en die lewe bo die wingerd.*

(2): *Philippolis - Ek loop spoekvoet deur die strate van my jeug tas lomp na skadugesigte. Die pad vernou krimp na die spits van die kerk einde van die horizon. Krans van koring en wolk. Die saambreel skadus van dennebome val hier verder oor die rande, oor verrimpelde gesigte wat blindstom na my staar. Ons kyk bymekaar verby in hierdie vreemde voorskou van die vervgevorderde nag.*

Of the first, Roth says, "The first little poem seems the writing of a very young poet - something in the use the red wine image is too sweet and the pleading voice makes me think of teenage love". On the second, she comments, "In

contrast I find the second poem much stronger, the images are fresher and more unexpected and something of the small town atmosphere is caught beautifully. I instantly see so many rural villages with their church steeples being the highest point drawing the village to itself is lovely”.

NOTES

[1] *Olga Kirsch: A life in Poetry*, Naledi, 2018

[2] Published 2017 and 2019 respectively, both by Tafelberg, NB Uitgewers/Publishers.

[3] Working under the then editor Henry Katzew, Kirsch was responsible for finding material from Afrikaans sources that was of interest to the Jewish community. In a tribute to her after her death in 1997, Katzew said the material “was vital, plentiful and disturbing; often church publications pressing the cause of National Christian Education, a smell in Jewish nostrils”. She was, briefly, editor of *Jewish Affairs* in 1946 but left after a disagreement with the SAJBD. Of Kirsch's time at *Jewish Affairs*, Egonne Roth writes, “Sadly when I approached them for info, they said they had no record of her working there as the archive only went back to 1950. Luckily Katzew wrote about their time at *Jewish Affairs* in his unpublished autobiography and also in some of his articles about Kirsch”. It was in early 1946 while working at *Jewish Affairs* that Kirsch published her sonnet, *Die Wandelende Jood* in the second edition of *Standpunt*, to much acclaim from writer Uys Krige.

Heads or Tails for South African Jewry?

Peter Houston

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Abstract

Islamophobia and antisemitism are likened to two sides of the same coin. While there are considerable similarities in definitions, such as a fear-based response to the Other, the implications differ considerably between countries. Under certain conditions, antisemitic attitudes turn into actions. The current convergence of these dynamics, combined with the social, political and economic stressors of the COVID-19 national lockdown, raises a warning flag. This paper argues that if the metaphoric coin is flipped, thanks to the religious weighting of the church and political weighting of the apartheid Israel narrative, it will in all probability land facedown to the detriment of South African Jewry.

Introduction

The notion that Islamophobia and antisemitism are two sides of the same coin is popular. Contemporary expressions are both rooted in a form of racism. The term 'Islamophobia' is a relative newcomer to the discourse and does not have the longer history and acceptance of terms such as 'racism' or 'antisemitism.' [1] Brian Klug provides a useful dissection of both terms, asserting that:

'Jew' and 'Muslim' share the logic of the Other. Sharing the same form, they share the same general logic. The specific logic of antisemitism and Islamophobia, however, is determined by the content of the concepts. That is to say, in each case, there is a particular bigoted discourse, and this discourse is shaped by the particular traits that make up the figures of 'Jew' and Muslim' respectively. [2]

Early definitions of Islamophobia, as with many definitions of antisemitism, have been critiqued for being particularly unwieldy and impossible to quantify. The UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary

Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance defined Islamophobia as: “A baseless hostility and fear vis-à-vis Islam, and as a result, a fear of, and aversion towards, all Muslims or the majority of them. [Islamophobia] also refers to the practical consequences of this hostility in terms of discrimination, prejudices, and unequal treatment of which Muslims (individuals and communities) are victims and their exclusion from major political and social spheres”.[3] This definition captures the fear of Muslims from earlier definitions but picks up on the practical consequences that Muslims face. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation’s Observatory on Islamophobia, the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, the Open Society Institute, Center for American Progress, Runnymede Trust and individual academics continue to seek better definitions.[4] In many respects, Islamophobia cannot be separated from modern antisemitism because they share remarkably similar traits, most noticeably racism based on perceived racial features, ethnic appearances, and cultural practices.[5] Reuven Firestone makes the link to fear, noting that although Islamophobia is a recently coined term, it refers to a long history of fear and hatred of Muslims in the West that, like antisemitism, has had a long time to become implanted into the collective Western psyche.[6]

A definition of antisemitism is equally hard to quantify, but the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief recommends the use of the following working definition adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA): “Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities”.[7]

While this discussion on defining Islamophobia and antisemitism can be prolonged and show how they are two sides to the same coin, yet have differences, the aim of this paper is to delve deeper into the context of antisemitism to demonstrate why, if the metaphoric coin is flipped in South Africa, it is likely to fall facedown to the detriment of the Jews.

God Bless Palestine, Free All From Oppression

On 26 September 2019 the provincial synod of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA), condemning in the strongest terms all forms of Islamophobia and antisemitism, passed a resolution calling on Anglicans to

support the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanction (BDS) movement, noting that the situation in Israel and Palestine can be described, in some respects, as being worse than apartheid South Africa. Central to the argument is that ‘the current political nation state of Israel and Israel in the Bible should not be confused with each other, and neither should the ideology of Zionism and the religion of Judaism be conflated.’[8] Anglicans were asked to adapt the Prayer for Africa (‘God bless Africa, guide her leaders, guard her children and give her peace. Amen’) and pray, ‘God bless Palestine, Free all from oppression; and bring justice and peace. Amen.’ BDS-SA quickly leveraged the ACSA resolution to their cause, stating that ‘Palestinian Christians, descendants of the first followers of Christ, insist that they, together with all Palestinians, share the same suffering under Israel’s regime of Apartheid.’[9]

This is not isolated. I have Anglican clergy colleagues making statements like ‘Jesus is a Palestinian’ and ‘the earliest followers of Jesus were Palestinians.’ They frame the Palestinians as being the indigenous people or first nation of Palestine by asserting that the modern Jews of Israel are not the Jews of the bible. An elderly minister told me that today’s Jews stem from Judas, which is an ancient antisemitic teaching of the church and a longstanding stereotype found in Christian religious art.

South African Chief Rabbi, Warren Goldstein angrily condemned the ACSA resolution as being morally offensive and the Anglican support of BDS as antisemitic. Most offensive seems to be the church deciding what is biblical or not, hitting an ancient nerve. Goldstein remarked, ‘This is beyond the pale. The audacity to make pronouncements on what Judaism is and is not is beyond their right.’[10] But it is a right that the church has presumed to exercise from the earliest of times and on this I want to dwell to show why Islamophobia and antisemitism in South Africa cannot be equated.

Acknowledging My Personal Bias

As a personal aside and to acknowledge my own bias, I grew-up thinking that the Jewish Jesus of the Christian church was just like me, a white-Western English-speaking male. My Sunday school upbringing formed this stereotype. Before I embarked on a personal journey in relation to antisemitism, my understanding of Christianity and Judaism would have confirmed Abraham Joshua Heschel’s assertion that my faith reflected a ‘dejudaization of Christianity, affecting the church’s way of thinking and its

inner life.’[11] What Heschel goes on to describe in detail, I grew up believing, that:

Judaism is a religion of law, Christianity a religion of grace; Judaism teaches a God of wrath, Christianity a God of love; Judaism a religion of slavish obedience, Christianity the conviction of free men; Judaism is particularism, Christianity is universalism; Judaism seeks work-righteousness, Christianity preaches faith-righteousness; The teaching of the old covenant a religion of fear, the gospel of the new covenant a religion of love. The Hebrew Bible is preparation; the gospel fulfillment. In the first is immaturity, in the second perfection; in the one you find narrow tribalism, in the other all-embracing charity.[12]

This is still the message coming from many contemporary church pulpits, while very little is ever said about Mohammed (PBUH) and Islam, because our belief systems do not intersect nor do our sacred scriptures. If Islamophobia does exist in churches, it comes from more indirect sources, perhaps when praying for persecuted churches and noting the plight of Christians in some Muslim countries. Something I have had to be confronted with is what Marvin Wilson outlines: “In today’s Church, the often sordid and self-indicting story of animosity, enmity, and strife directed by Christians toward Jews remains generally untold. Perhaps this is the case because the history of the Church is about as long as the history of the evils directed towards the Jews – if not in the overt acts of Christians, certainly in their guilty silence”.[13]

The Church and the Denigration of Judaism

Both anti-Judaism and antisemitism have occupied a major portion of Jewish history.[14] In the narrowest sense, anti-Judaism is a religious viewpoint towards Jews and Judaism. Antisemitism, on the other hand, is a term that originated in the latter half of the 19th Century and described anti-Jewish campaigns in Europe.[15] It has negative racial connotations. It came to describe retrospectively the hostility and hatred directed towards Jews since before the Christian era but especially in the history of the church. Anti-Judaism and antisemitism are twin phenomena that feed off each other; Christian religious hostility towards Judaism correlates to societal hostility towards Jews.[16]

In the B’rit Chadashah the anti-Judaism polemic was an intra-family device used by Jews to win other Jews to the Way (fledgling Christian movement),

whereas in the hands of the goyim in the second century onwards it became antisemitic.[17] When the early Jewish believers of the Way addressed their Jewish brethren with the harshest words of the Jewish prophets, they did so in the tradition of Jewish self-criticism.[18] This changed when the preaching passed into the hands of goyim who did not have a deep sense of solidarity with Israel.[19] A shift occurred towards the negation of all things Jewish.[20] Oskar Skarsaune notes the fragility of the Christian position once it became largely goyim: The Christians were newcomers with no pre-history, and they were painfully aware of it. The rabbis handed on a tradition of scriptural exegesis which could claim the authority of generations of excellent teachers, reaching all the way back to Moses on Mount Sinai... and there was a basic consistency in their approach to the bible: they not only recognized the Torah as Divine, they also observed it.[21]



Ecclesia and Synagoga ('Church and Synagogue'), Strasbourg Cathedral

Thus it was impossible for a religious movement coming out of Judaism to expound Christianity without reference to and comparison with Judaism.[22] This required an encounter with Judaism on doctrinal grounds as well as from the standpoint of history and contemporary relations, whereas Judaism could be expounded without theological reference to, or comparison with, Christianity.[23] This latter observation about Judaism equally applies to the encounter between Christianity and Islam, where both can co-exist without needing to reference the Other.

Judaism was consigned to the scrapheap of church history, behind Christianity's advancement. Heschel notes this reality and is worth quoting at length for the force of his argument: "The Christian message, which in its origins intended to be an affirmation and culmination of Judaism, became very early diverted into a repudiation and negation of Judaism; obsolescence and abrogation of Jewish faith became conviction and doctrine; the new covenant was conceived not as a new phase or disclosure but as abolition and replacement of the ancient one; theological thinking fashioned its terms in a spirit of antitheses to Judaism. Contrast and contradiction rather than acknowledgment of roots relatedness and indebtedness, became the perspective".[24] Christianity thus distanced itself and dis-identified itself from Judaism.[25] But moreover, an anti-Jewish attitude formed an integral part of the testimony and self-identity of the Christian church.[26]

Marcion was one of first serious heretics of the church. He wanted a Christianity free from any vestige of Judaism.[27] In combating Marcion, the church accentuated its anti-Jewish stance by emphasising it was because the Jews were particularly prone to sin that God dealt with them differently in history.[28] Christian apologetics against Marcion resulted in a heightened hostility towards the Jews.[29] This would not be the last time Jews would be caught up and become victims of intra-church conflicts. The argument from history was the church's trump card. Keith summarises it as follows: Christians made this the centrepiece of their argument, contending that the hand of God had been made manifest in history since the time of Jesus in various calamities that had befallen the Jews and the successes that had attended the Christian gospel in the gentile world.[30]

Robert Michael argues that the Jews served several important functions for the Church Fathers as they re-interpreted history with respect to the existence of the church:

The failures of the Judaism of the past was utilized to supply Christianity with an unimpeachable history and with a prestige the new church otherwise would not have possessed.[31]

Rendering the persistent Jews hateful was done in order to keep the faithful from being attracted to Judaism: the patristic writers employed the words of the Christian scriptures against the Jews and the texts of the Jewish Prophets themselves to falsify the whole of Jewish moral history -

announcing that the Jews are, have always been, and will always be evil.[32]

Provided a way for the church to explain away the contrary evidence in the emerging history that the kingdom of God had arrived in Christ by making Jews the scapegoat and cause of the continued evil at work.[33] (Interestingly, Muslims were similarly characterized as satanic forces when Islam gained military and political power over Christians.[34])



'Judensau' (folk art image of Jews in obscene contact with a large sow), Minster of Bad Wimpfen

The triumphalism of the church went beyond the bounds of religion to influence legislation and became a major preoccupation of Byzantine intellectuals.[35] The anti-Jewish trend of the Byzantine legislation is an echo of the anti-Jewish thrust of the church: it has no independent source.[36] The Church Fathers used a process called value-inversion to destroy Judaism's historical and biblical credibility by attacking the traits and ideas most identified as Jewish (covenant, monotheism, synagogue, kosher rules, circumcision, Promised Land, Jerusalem and temple).[37] Eusebius of Caesarea juxtaposed the political and religious destinies of both Christians and Jews. Augustine of Hippo argued that this would be the situation to the end of the age.[38] He wrote that the Jews no longer bore positive witness to their relationship to God's goodness but were likened to Cain – to serve as a warning of disobedience and deicide.[39] This value-inversion in the re-interpretation of history and appropriation of Christian meaning is present in the teachings of Gregory of Nyssa, Hilary of Poitiers, Pseudo-Cyprian, Tertullian and others.[40]

The denigration of the Jews was not limited to written works alone but was preached from the pulpit. Eusebius of Alexandria began every paragraph in the first half of a sermon on the resurrection with a negative statement about the Jews.[41] Jerome linked the Jews with Judas in his preaching.[42] John Chrysostom wrote and spoke in this tumultuous era of changing politics and power struggles both within and without the church. He was perhaps the most bitter of the Church Fathers in regard to the Jews.[43] His polemic was the most violent and tasteless of the anti-Judaic literature within the patristic era.[44] Chrysostom vilified the synagogue, arguing that to go there was no better than visiting a brothel, a robber's den, or any indecent place.[45] He contributed a profound sense of rage to the anti-Jewish polemic and influenced Emperor Arcadius to issue anti-Jewish edicts.[46] Destructive stereotypes about Jews thus became deeply entrenched in the psyche of the church and had practical consequences for the treatment of Jews.[47]

According to Chesler, 'At the close of the 3rd Century, the Jew was no more than a special type of unbeliever; by the end of the fourth, the Jew was a semi-satanic figure, cursed by God, marked off by the [Christian] State.'[48] Robert Michael summarises it as follows: 'It was the Christian Roman emperors who, under the powerful influence of their faith and of the church, were the first whose Jewish policy was based on discrimination, that is, that Jews deserved less protection under the law than Christians.'[49] Post-Chrysostom there was a hardening of attitudes toward the Jews, especially in the late Medieval period.

The stereotype of Jews as Christ-killers and as a despised, subservient, sub-human people beyond hope of atonement took root in ordinary Christian people. Jews were accused of murdering Christian children to incorporate their blood into unleavened bread for Passover,[50] of blaspheming the Christian faith in their sacred literature[51] and for causing the Black Death (plague) that swept across Europe.[52] Manifold ways were sought to exploit the social inferiority of the Jews, to which the teaching of the church pointed.[53] The Inquisition sought to purge the Roman Catholic church of heretics, especially conversos who were suspected of still practicing Jewish customs.[54] Even Humanism fared little better. Renaissance humanist, Erasmus, wrote to an Inquisitor, 'If it is Christian to hate the Jews, here we are all Christians in profusion.'[55]



“the Martyrdom of St. Simon of Trento for Jewish ritual murder” by contemporary artist Giovanni Gasparro

Missed Opportunities, Tragic Consequences

It would be convenient for my Protestant theology if antisemitic attitudes could only be linked to the Church of Rome. But the Reformation did little to improve Jewish-Christian relationships. The antisemitic diatribes of Martin Luther are notorious. Luther viewed it as a pastor’s duty to warn his flock against the Jews and to urge the secular rulers to take appropriate action.[56] The appropriate action was, *inter alia*, that synagogues be burnt to the ground and if anything survived, that it was to be buried so that no trace remained; that the houses of Jews be destroyed, because of the significance of the home in their religion; that Jewish prayer books and Talmud be confiscated; that Jews be denied the right to travel on the highways of the Empire; and finally, that all able-bodied Jews be required to undertake hard manual labour.[57] he proposed one of the most extensive and humiliating of anti-Jewish measures ever suggested up until that time.[58] But Luther was not alone in his Reformation thinking towards the Jews. He had a notable parallel in the more moderate Martin Bucer who only wanted no new synagogues to be built, but his underlying rationale was the same.[59] There were others who sought a more positive perspective of the Jewish question, such as Justus Jonas and Andreas Osiander, but given the antisemitic cultural climate of the day, Osiander’s work had to be published anonymously.[60]

Anti-Jewish agitation did not diminish after the Reformation, which reflects the weakness of Protestant theology in this regard. Roland de Corneille sums up the missed opportunities and tragic consequences thus: “Any opportunity which Protestantism had to rectify the past, or at least to establish a segment of the Church on a new footing, was lost. This widespread failure to seize the second chance that history offered contributed, in a very real sense, to the church’s inability in Germany under Hitler to stir from its dumb silence”.^[61]

The Anglican Church is not excluded from this charge of failing to seize the second chance. Jews first settled in England in the eleventh century at the time of the Norman conquest, were later expelled and then invited back under various rulers but faced several challenges to gain equal citizenship. A Naturalization Bill was submitted to parliament in 1753 to enable Jews to acquire land. It was initially adopted in both the House of Lords and the Commons but six months later was repealed.^[62] Cohn-Sherbok remarks that: “In this rejection of Jewish emancipation, the dark forces of traditional Christian prejudice against the Jews came to the surface: medieval conceptions of the demonic Jew polluting Christian society thwarted all efforts to grant the Jewish people the full rights of man.”^[63]

Jews were prevented from being admitted to the English parliament until the mid-nineteenth century. Between 1830 and 1858 fourteen separate attempts were made to remove this legal disability against Jews.^[64] The House of Lords dismissed twelve of the proposed Jewish Relief Bills, the most important influence on the voting being Anglican episcopal opposition with the debate being dominated by speeches from bishops and archbishops.^[65] Institutional and theological evidence of deep-seated antisemitism within Anglicanism therefore tends only to be revealed in topical responses to issues such as the Jewish Relief Bill and in our time, the ACSA support of BDS in relation to Israel-Palestine.

Conclusion

There is a convergence of views in the Anglican Church that delegitimizes the Jewish claim to their historic homeland. Evangelical theology and liberation theology, conservative voices and liberal voices, that have usually countered each other, are speaking the same message: the land of the bible is not the land of the modern state of Israel. Liberation theologians advance the narrative that ‘Jesus is a Palestinian’ and that the earliest Christian

believers were Palestinians, reinforcing the notion that modern Jews are not the indigenous people. The term Palestine is used in clergy sermons and writings so as not to give legitimacy to the current state of Israel. Evangelical theologians have arrived at the same conclusion via a different route. John Stott, a prominent and influential Anglican evangelical, is on record as saying: “Is the setting up of the State of Israel a fulfillment of prophecy? It is a reasonable view to hold, and many do hold it, and we regard them with respect and love. Others, among whom I number myself, do not hold that view. There is risk of ignoring the justice of the Palestinians’ cause...”[66]

Peter Walker says, “The land, however important as a theme within previous biblical faith, has now been caught up into a new understanding. It is given a quite new meaning, one that fulfils and yet eclipses its former role within God’s purposes”[67] and further that “The New Testament blessings, which are found now ‘in Christ’ and not ‘in the land’, must be presented to all those in the Holy Land”.[68] Colin Chapman argues that “There is no suggestion that the apostles believed that the Jewish people still had a divine right to the land, or that Jewish possession of the land would be an important part of God’s plan for the world.”[69] He goes even further to say, “Jerusalem has lost the centrality that it once had and that Jesus has replaced Jerusalem as the centre of the Jewish faith”.[70] Palmer Robertson applies the same thinking to Jerusalem: “By the conclusion of the apostolic era, the focal point of the redemptive working of God in the world had shifted dramatically from Jerusalem to places like Antioch, Galatia and Ephesus...The Jews were inhabiting Jerusalem, but obviously it was no longer the ‘city of God’ as it had been under the typological administration of the old covenant”.[71] A final voice saying the same thing, Naim Ateek comments, “So in the light of their universal fulfilment in Christ, the narrow Old Testament promises regarding the land have acquired a new meaning. They are now seen to be transitory and provisional in their intention. They are time-bound, and because of their completion in Christ, have become theologically obsolete”.[72] Therefore, Ateek argues, contrary to Judaism, Jesus has offered an inclusive message to counter the exclusive, primitive and discriminatory claims of the Old Testament.[73]

While none of these voices are South African, our context only acts to amplify the theological trends that denigrate and invalidate Judaism and by extension, the Jews themselves. The theological delegitimizing of the

Jewish claim to their historic homeland of Israel feeds into the same political aims of the BDS. Wherever the BDS movement has gained traction in South Africa, and as Israel Apartheid Weeks have grown on university campuses, so antisemitism has been exposed.[74] The apartheid struggle song, ‘Shoot the Boer’ on at least one occasion was reworded and sung as ‘Shoot the Jew.’ [75] Students from the African National Congress (ANC)-affiliated Congress of South African Students (COSAS) put a pig’s head in the meat section of Woolworths, targeting South African Jewry.[76] Tony Ehrenreich, Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) Western Cape Provincial Secretary and an ANC leader posted on his Facebook page, “The time has come to say very clearly that if a woman or child is killed in Gaza, then the Jewish board of deputies, who are complicit, will feel the wrath of the People of SA with the age old biblical teaching of an eye for an eye”. [77]

This is why there is not equivalency between Islamophobia and antisemitism in South Africa. The Church Fathers used value-inversion to destroy Judaism’s historical and biblical credibility in Christian eyes by attacking the ideas central to Judaism. The contemporary church mothers and fathers, preachers and theologians, continue in the same vein. This denigration of Judaism is not only found in the resolutions of modern Anglican Church hierarchies but is reinforced by sermons from the pulpit.

This becomes profoundly problematic with a population that is largely Christianized and one that wants to rally against anyone identified with being a proponent of apartheid. Notwithstanding whether it is justified or not, Jews can be vilified as former white apartheid oppressors who are still unrepentantly supporting the white settler invasion of Palestine. This can happen despite what David Saks has noted, that a startlingly disproportionate number of Jewish community members played a role in the anti-apartheid movement.[78] On the other hand, Muslims in South Africa, like the Jews, are also a minority but are identified with being on the right side of the apartheid struggle both in terms of historic South African apartheid and contemporary Israeli apartheid narratives.

The results of a survey on antisemitism conducted by the Anti Defamation League (ADL) in late 2019 ranked South Africa as second only to Poland, but the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the Kaplan Centre in Cape Town were quick to disparage the ADL’s methodology, accusing it of Eurocentrism.[79] Yet, the findings of the ADL survey are consistent with a

survey conducted by the South African Human Sciences Research Council in 1994 which showed that nearly one in three respondents considered the Jewish community to be ‘mostly a liability’ and a Pew Global Attitudes Survey in 2008 that found two-thirds of South Africans disliked Jews in the extreme.[80] Milton Shain argues not to discount these underlying attitudes in South Africa because, under specific conditions, antisemitic attitudes can turn into actions.[81] Firestone notes the same concern that antisemitism and Islamophobia remain in latent forms until triggered by economic, political or social stress.[82]

The national COVID lockdown resulting in the closure of businesses, loss of employment and the several years forecast for an economic recovery is providing major stressors on all levels - social, political and economic. The convergence of these dynamics should raise a warning flag regarding antisemitism. Therefore, even if contemporary Islamophobia and antisemitism are two sides of the same coin, if that coin is flipped in the South African context, thanks to the religious weighting of the church and political weighting of the apartheid narrative, it will in all probability land facedown to the detriment of the Jews. My apologies for being pessimistic, but history has not been kind on this score.

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Lockdown Pesach 2020

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*“This is true freedom: Our ability to shape reality. We have the power to initiate, create and change reality rather than only react and survive it. How can we all educate our children to true freedom? Teach them not to look at reality as defining their acts but to look at their acts as defining reality” -- Yaacov Cohen, **Lockdown Pesach 2020***

Before lockdown, life is busy. Work, schlepping, the usual.... But life is good. My mother helps. She and her scotty dog are always here. She fetches, helps with homework, picks up all the pieces I drop. But lockdown is coming. It's over Pesach. Our life as we know it, is about to change. And Pesach looms.

We're in the shops. I see a friend with a trolley overfilled with goodies. She's stockpiling. My daughter looks at me. "Shouldn't we be stockpiling too" she asks? "Absolutely not", I say. "There's no need. And anyway, our home is small. Where would be put any extra stuff?

My boss sends me home. "Do we get a laptop to work off?" She looks at me incredulously. "Where we will get the money for that from? Take your desktop" she responds. "But where will I put it?" I whine. Her suggestion is to move in a trestle table and it's my turn to look incredulous. Where would I get a trestle table and where would I put it? My home is small.

Nonetheless I find a spot in the lounge, secure my computer to the plug in the wall, get the wifi working. I have settled in and am set to go. My son sets up his work station in the lounge not too far from me. In the upcoming weeks we will get to know each other's lives quite well.

My daughter, for her part, sets up her work area in the kitchen. In the upcoming weeks she will become an excellent cook and baker. My husband is the last to be sent home from work. He is optimistic he will go back to the office soon. In the meantime, he is happy to set up his office in the bedroom. We are good to go. But I am constantly conscious of the fact that my mom is not with us. She is alone at home with scotty dog. And Pesach looms.

On the last day before lockdown starts we say our goodbyes. My mom, who is the strongest person I know, has been there for all of us every step of the way. She is fearless and kind. Her volunteering work will come to an end. Now, she looks small and vulnerable. She will be all by herself, and Pesach looms. My heart aches. I fight back the tears. We are not allowed to hug. We don't usually hug. But now we are not

going to see each other for three weeks, even though we will be in the same city. It feels wrong. We hug. We say goodbye. “No hugging!” says my husband. And Pesach Looms.

We start preparing for Pesach. Alcohol was declared a non-essential item just before lockdown started. We rush from shop to shop to try and get some wine but are out of luck. My daughter looks at me reproachfully. “No Wine. No worry”, I say. We will manage with grape-juice. We’re sorted. After all, different times call for different measures”.

We start plotting on how we can break lockdown to ensure my mother is with us for the Seder, but just can’t do it. My sister-in-law suggests Zoom. Then we all can participate. My mom is in. My brothers are in. One lives in Australia and he too will join. Just a slight hitch: My family are religious. They have to consider. I can use my computer. Except I can’t. It is stuck to the wall in the lounge. My home is small, but not so small that I can conduct a zoom call from the lounge to the dining room. I find a selfie stick (my daughter won it in a bingo competition at school) and convince one of my kids to let me use the phone. We set everything up before Yomtov. Sorted!

Pesach is tonight. We start preparing. I open the tap. No water comes out. I check my phone. There’s a message posted on our neighbourhood group whatsapp: it reads as follows: “Johannesburg Water: #EmergencyShutdown. Reason: replacement of 300mm valve; Impact: No water: Time: 0900 – 21:30”. Seriously? No water?! No problem! I acknowledge my privilege and send my son shopping for bottled water. My daughter’s kneidlach are the best ever. Huge and fluffy. Through major huffing and puffing and pull it all together. The table looks beautiful. The appointed time comes, and for once, technology works beautifully.

My mom is brave. She has set her table beautifully. My brother in Australia looks tired but happy. Why had we never thought of zooming him before for all family simchas, I wonder? It is the first time since he left the country that we are all together as a family on Seder night. We read the Haggadah. We reminisce about tunes from our youth. Our kids sing new tunes. We compare food that we are eating. It turns out to be an excellent and meaningful evening indeed.

Afterwards, we clean up as best as we can (without water). I feel a huge sense of relief. And then, KABOOM!!!! There’s a huge explosion. The lights go out. My husband runs outside. He congregates with other men in the neighbourhood to see what has happened. I am praying there’s no fire. Again, I remember that we have no water to put it out. Turns out a transformer has blown. The indications are there will be no electricity in the upcoming days. I crawl into bed and sigh. No electricity? No stress! We’ve survived the first night of Pesach in lockdown.

Ma Nishtana halaila hazeh...? If you have to ask, then I don’t know where you’ve been these past five months.

The Statue

Charlotte Cohen

Charlotte Cohen is an award-winning short story writer, essayist and poet, whose work has appeared in a wide variety of South African publications since 1973. She is a regular contributor to Jewish Affairs.

Let us presume 'The Truth' was represented by a statue.

You stand in front of the statue. I stand behind it; and we both write down exactly what it is that we see. Yet it will never be the same: You will see the forehead, the nose, the mouth and whatever else is visible from the front. I will see the back of the head, the shoulders, etc. And even though what each of us describes is accurate and honest, consensus will never be reached - simply and logically, because we are not seeing it from the same view point.

Only if I walk over to where you are (standing in the front of the statue), or vice versa (you join me where I am positioned at the back of it); or were we to meet half-way and look at the statue in profile, would we see it from the same perspective and with like-minded eyes.

The statue could also be viewed from above, were we on a balcony - or from below, presuming it were on a glass table. And once again, either looking up at it or down on it, it would present a different image.

Yet the statue is *one object* - which we are presuming is representative of 'the truth'. or 'our truth'.

Therefore, only were we able to observe the statue from all angles and know that the person with whom we are countering, had done likewise, would we be then able to debate its merits and demerits. And even then, taking it a step further, we may *still* not agree on aspects of what we had seen: We may have differing opinions as to which feature of the statue was the most prominent, the most useful, the most beautiful etc. ... But at least we would be able to compare, to consider - even compromise, by reaching some rational settlement on points relevant to us both.

So, when it comes to the truth as we see it, before continuing to argue with no equitable outcome, the answer would be to walk around the statue together, examine it from all comparable angles - finally reaching unanimity or being able to contest pertinent issues.

Of course, certain things are obvious:

One cannot declare the statue to be made of clay, were it obviously made of copper. Nor can one say the statue was red if it were painted white (unless one were blatantly lying or instructed what it is that one is to repeat or even made to believe) or unless, of course, taking every possibility into consideration, the back and front of the statue were actually painted in different colours or composed of different materials.

Taking this scenario even further into supposition: What if two people *did* view the statue from exactly the same angle - but with different coloured lenses in their spectacles? ... Again, the statue would appear different to each of them and again, there would be no consensus.

Finally, we have also to take inference into account: You may have perceived the statue to be that of a nude male. I could have perceived the statue as that of a woman or a child fully clothed. However, no description of the statue was given at the start of this article. Therefore, we now also have to add assumption into the mix.

But, in any event, no matter how we perceived the statue to be, it was never real.

The image of a statue only ever existed in our imagination.

Bearing all this in mind and to take it to its ultimate dogmatism, "None so blind as those who will not listen."



**Just because you
are right,
does not mean,
I am wrong.
You just haven't seen
life from my side.**

What if one were not prepared to move? ...There are many people who insist on remaining in one designated spot and who simply refuse to view things differently.

There are also many who, even being persuaded to walk around to the other side of the statue, would do so wearing a blindfold - only removing it when they were again back in their original position; thereby seeing or accepting nothing else.

Taking all these factors into account, our 'truth' is often our interpretation of it or how we have been instructed or indoctrinated to think about it. People are induced through perverted, inculcated belief systems to unequivocally declare, even though the statue were obviously made of wood, that it was made of marble and even further, to deny, discount and disparage anyone who dares disagree with them.

In other words, where our common goal should be only for communal good - for love, tolerance, knowledge and understanding - we have, in many cases, not been taught *how* to think - but rather how we have been *programmed* to think - without the freedom of working it out with our own ingenuity and intelligence.

It is this unseeing, unbending, brainwashed insistence, this uncompromising resistance that often results in hostile, hate-filled, horrifying acts of violence. It bears out the truth that what we make our reality, often stems not only from our perception or experience of it - but how we have been indoctrinated.

INDOCTRINATION
The human brain
the most gullible
the most malleable
the most impressionable
after having been distorted
by bigoted fanatical hatred
degenerates into
the most dangerous
the most treacherous
and the most iniquitous
imaginable

Our impotence stems from being taught what we *ought* to think - instead of *how* to think. It is being left bound, blinkered and not able to think freely, that keeps us chained and disavowed from being able to see things from another side, from what constitutes both our own and another truth and from life's miraculous possibilities.

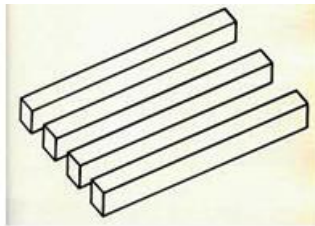
We face a new dawn every day We look back and hopefully learn from our mistakes . We look forward to a new view of our capabilities and possibilities ... Sometimes with the news that keeps confronting us, we do not think there could ever be a change in mindset. But who knows, what each day will bring?

We do not need to look further than the effect that the Corona virus has had on the world and the dramatic changes it brought with it

Yet sometimes, at our lowest point, and as well as when we least expect it, something may again enter our domain which brings us renewed hope and fortitude. A cure may be found; a broken relationship fixed; we are able to explore a different avenue ... And we are presented with another way forward. ... a new dawn ... and another truth.

It is never too late to discard thinking that may have kept us chained and fettered; and to open our minds to the possibilities of a new world and a new way of thinking.

IT HAS FOUR ENDS



IT HAS THREE ENDS

