

JEWISH AFFAIRS

Chanukah 2013



**Price R50,00 incl. VAT
Registered at the GPO
as a Newspaper**

ISSN 0021 • 6313



9 770021 631019

Taking you to new heights

Crowe Horwath International is one of the 10 largest networks in the world, with more than 150 independent accounting and advisory services firms, in over 100 countries around the world. 'Size', however, has never been on our agenda – "Service Delivery has".

The firm contributes to the success of many medium and large enterprises, in varying sectors of business.

To learn more about our commitment to service delivery, visit www.crowehorwath.co.za

Tel: +27 11 217 8000
Fax: +27 11 217 8001

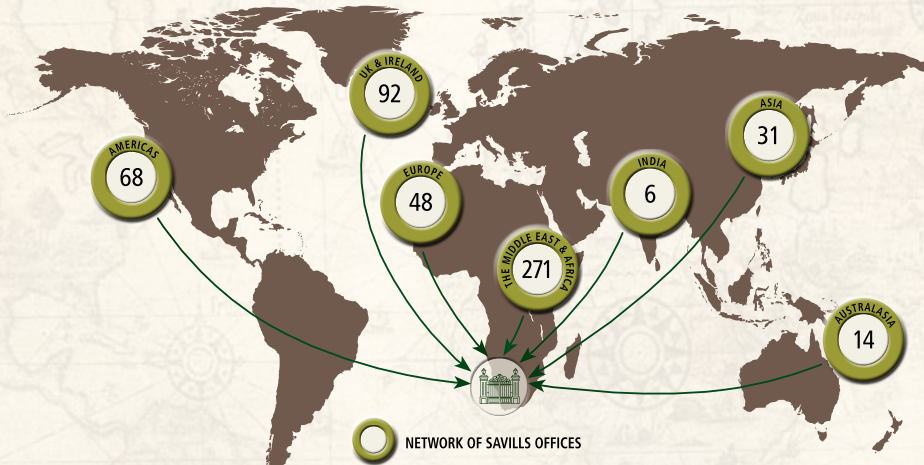
Horwath in Southern Africa has offices in Johannesburg and Cape Town.



Audit | Tax | Advisory

www.crowehorwath.co.za

Welcome, Bienvenue, Välkommen, Dobro požalovat'!, Aloha, 歡迎, Willkommen, Bienvenido, Bem-vindo



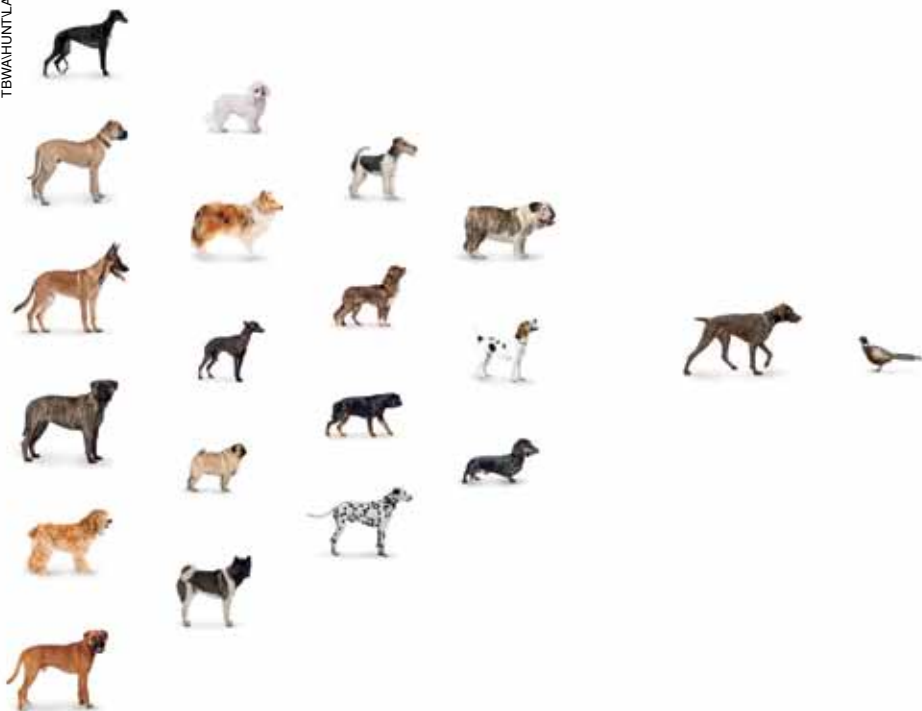
South Africa is once again presenting itself to the World as a lucrative destination for international property investment. As the exclusive African real estate partner to Savills, one of the World's most established real estate brands with a network of over 500 offices worldwide, we are able to offer our clients access to buyers from across the globe.

If you would like to market your home internationally, we would welcome the opportunity to assist.

www.pamgolding.co.za

Atlantic Prestige +27 21 439 1614, Camps Bay +27 21 438 3444, City Bowl +27 21 423 2150, Sea Point +27 21 439 7415, Quadrant +27 21 673 4200, Newlands +27 21 685, Tokai +27 21 701 0191

TBWAHUNT/LASCARIS 314370



Success is finding the right specialist.

A pheasant is a master at concealing itself. Catching it requires an enormous amount of skill. That's if you don't have a specialist by your side.

At Werksmans Attorneys, we offer you lawyers with the appropriate experience, insight and expertise to give you the specific solutions you need for favourable results.

Keep us close

THE CORPORATE & COMMERCIAL LAW FIRM
www.werksmans.com

A member of the LEXAfrica legal network



**NON-FERROUS
METAL WORKS**



Est 1947

Internationally known as a leading quality
producer and distributor of:

Copper and its alloys to all specifications, in shapes of
bars, rods, section, tubes, wire and ingots.
Sheets and strip - flat and coiled.

- Cast Iron • Aluminium •
- Bronze • Specialty Metals • Brass •

Durban:	031 480 7389	• Fax: 031 461 3662
Pretoria:	012 327 0016	• Fax: 012 327 0026
Johannesburg:	011 626 3390	• Fax: 011 626 2396
Cape Town:	021 511 0286	• Fax: 021 511 7538
East London:	043 722 1585	• Fax: 043 722 1607
Port Elizabeth:	041 451 1354	• Fax: 041 451 1567

www.nfm.co.za



The festival of light...

Wishing you and your loved ones a
Happy Chanukah



011 731 0300 | www.firzt.co.za

We'd like you to meet the
Family...



ALL OUR PRODUCTS ARE
KOSHER & KOSHER FOR PASSOVER.

PRODUCED BY:
ZANDWIJK WINES (Pty) Ltd

GAUTENG: Contact Person: Mr. Leslie Berman, Tel: (011) 483 3118 or 084 616 3410, Email: leslie@zandwines.co.za; WESTERN CAPE, KWAZULU-NATAL, EASTERN CAPE: Contact Person: Stephanie Swart, Tel: (021) 863 2368, Email: swart@capegate.co.za

KLEINE DRAKEN



Tel: +27 (0)21 863 2368

E-mail: zandwijk@capegate.co.za

www.kosherwines.co.za

JEWISH AFFAIRS

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. The journal will be a vehicle for the publication of articles of significant thought and opinion on contemporary Jewish issues, and will aim to encourage constructive debate, in the form of reasoned and researched essays, on all matters of Jewish and general interest.

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

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

The SA Jewish Board of Deputies is committed to dialogue and free enquiry. It aims to protect human rights and to strive for better relations among peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds in South Africa.

The columns of JEWISH AFFAIRS will therefore be open to all shades of opinion. The views expressed by the contributors will be their own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor, the Editorial Board or the Publishers.

However, in keeping with the provisions of the National Constitution, the freedom of speech exercised in this journal will exclude the dissemination of hate propaganda, personal attacks or invective, or any material which may be regarded as defamatory or malicious. In all such matters, the Editor's decision is final.

EDITORIAL BOARD

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

David Saks *SA Jewish Board of Deputies*

ACADEMIC ADVISORY BOARD

Professor Marcus Arkin

Suzanne Belling

Dr Louise Bethlehem *Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

Marlene Bethlehem *SA Jewish Board of Deputies*

Cedric Ginsberg *University of South Africa*

Dr Elaine Katz

Professor Marcia Leveson

Naomi Musiker *Archivist and Bibliographer*

Professor Reuben Musiker *SAJBD Library Consultant*

Gwynne Schrire *SA Jewish Board of Deputies*

Dr Gabriel A Sivan *World Jewish Bible Association*

Professor Gideon Shimoni *Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

Professor Milton Shain *University of Cape Town*

John Simon

Mervyn Smith

The Hon. Mr Justice Ralph Zulman

ADVERTISING AND SUBSCRIPTIONS – Shirley Beagle

ENQUIRIES beagle@beyachad.co.za

011 645 2583

TYPESETTING/PRINTING – Bookpress, Johannesburg

© South African Jewish Board of Deputies 2011

Permission to reprint material from JEWISH AFFAIRS should be applied for from

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies

JEWISH AFFAIRS is published 3 times annually

Annual subscription R140 including VAT and postage

Overseas Subscriptions R300

Postal Address: PO Box 87557, Houghton 2041

david@beyachad.co.za

Front Cover Image

Oudtshoorn Jews on an expedition to the Cango Caves, 1908

Original, unpublished essays of between 1 000 and 6 000 words on all subjects are invited, and should be sent to:

The Editor, JEWISH AFFAIRS, PO Box 87557, Houghton 2041,
david@beyachad.co.za

The Editorial Board reserves the right to cut the length of articles accepted for publication, and to make any stylistic changes which it may deem necessary.

JEWISH AFFAIRS

VOL. 68 ♦ NO. 3 ♦ CHANUKAH 2013

Editor: David Saks

SOUTH AFRICAN JEWRY – HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY

“Hate Speech”, the SAJBD and the South African Constitution <i>Mervyn Smith</i>	5
Esme Berman - Doyen of South African Art Criticism <i>Natalie Knight</i>	8
The John Schlapobersky Affair <i>Dovidi Fachler</i>	10
The Cape SAJBD, the Silver Salver and Bertha’s Bill <i>Gwynne Schrire</i>	15

DIASPORA ECHOES

A Brief Journey through English Jewish History <i>Bernard Katz</i>	18
In the beginning was a school: The <i>Alliance Israélite Universelle</i> and its Legacy <i>Anny Wynchank</i>	25
An I.B. Singer Retrospective: The “Family Chronicles”: <i>The Family Moskat</i> (1950) <i>Gloria Sandak-Lewin</i>	33

POST-HOLOCAUST REFLECTIONS

‘<i>Muss I’ Denn</i>’: Curating Jewish Fragments of German Culture in the Cape Town Holocaust Centre’s Permanent Exhibition <i>Michal Singer</i>	37
The Holocaust - Modes of Remembrance and Education <i>Leah Nasson</i>	41
Who Remembers? <i>Shirli Gilbert</i>	45

BOOK REVIEWS

The Jewish Emigrant from Britain <i>David Saks</i>	47
The Organ and its Music in German-Jewish Culture <i>David Klepper</i>	49

NEW POETRY

<i>Charlotte Cohen, Hazel Frankel</i>	50
---	----

READERS’ LETTERS

<i>Gwynne Schrire, Gabriel Sivan</i>	51
--	----

“HATE SPEECH”, THE SAJBD AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTITUTION

*

Mervyn Smith

On a cold Cape winter's night in May 1998 a Muslim community radio station, Radio 786, broadcast a programme entitled 'Zionism and the State of Israel – an in-depth analysis'. This featured an interview with UK academic, Dr Yakub Zaki.

These were some of the extracts from the broadcast:

Speaking about the Holocaust:

... the camps ... were brutal labour camps and anybody who alleges anything else is lying ...

So I accept that 1 million plus Jews died during the Second World War but I dispute the fact that they were murdered, that they were killed by gassing. Those people died like the other people in the camps, from infectious diseases ...

... the Germans, of course, felt a very justified resentment against the Jews ...

... even they, Yad Vashem, have not been able to come up with more than 1,000,000 ... so I would like to ask where are those 6,000,000 Jews that the Germans were alleged to have gassed? ...

And for good measure, speaking about Jews generally:

The Jews in the First World War were sent to the front – I'm talking of the Russian Jews – with orders to lose the war, and not just to lose it but to lose it disastrously ...

In 1914 the Jews were backing both sides of the conflict.

... what was sent through the secret channels – which the Jews had open all during the war – to their brothers, their cousins in Germany, sabotage the German war effort ...

... Smuts had the same links to Jewish finance that Rhodes and Milner ...

Mervyn Smith is a Cape Town attorney and a former National Chairman of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies. He is a member of the editorial board of Jewish Affairs, to which he has contributed a number of articles over the years relating to the legal profession and the Jewish community in South Africa. This article is adapted from his address delivered at the 47th national congress of the SAJBD on 25 August 2013.

... International Jewry declared war on Germany. ... threw South Africa unwillingly into the hands of the Jews and thus the Oppenheims became the real directors of South Africa's foreign policy.

Within a few weeks the SA Jewish Board of Deputies had lodged a complaint with the then regulatory authority, the Independent Broadcasting Authority. This set off a series of endless court cases and public hearings that have still not been concluded. In what was to become effectively a monumental struggle between the SAJBD and the Islamic Unity Convention, the owners of the radio station, this case was to go at least twice to the Constitutional Court, six times to the High Court and twice to the Supreme Court of Appeal. It has become the *locus classicus* of hate speech litigation in this country. It is correct to say that the SAJBD was successful in most of these cases.

Eventually the matter has come to be heard before a tribunal constituted by the Broadcast Monitoring and Complaints Commission of South Africa. This tribunal commenced its hearings in Cape Town in December last year and will continue in March 2014.

Thus far at the hearing, the SAJBD has called as witnesses two eminent academics, one a sociologist and another a historian, as well as a very eminent South African Rabbi and most importantly, the evidence of Eva Schloss, an Auschwitz survivor and the stepsister of Anne Frank. I must say her evidence was riveting. The defence of the radio station, which for many years was not revealed to us (their opposition was always based on procedure rather than substance), now reveals itself as based on the right to freedom of expression (for which you may understand freedom of speech) and a denial that the above extracts constitute hate speech.

What, in fact, does constitute hate speech in South Africa? Our Constitution protects freedom of expression and although there are different provisions under different laws, freedom of expression in South Africa is derived from our Constitution and in particular from Section 16. Section 16(1) states:

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes -
 - (a) freedom of the press and other media;
 - (b) freedom to receive or impart information or ideas;

- (c) freedom of artistic creativity; and
- (d) academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.

But this valuable right which is protected by the Constitution does not extend to -

- (2)
 - (a) propaganda for war;
 - (b) incitement of imminent violence; or
 - (c) advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm

It is this speech in Section 16(2) which is therefore unprotected and usually referred to as "hate speech."

Section 39 of the Constitution provides, (1) When interpreting the Bill of Rights, a court, tribunal or forum- (a) must promote the values that underlie an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom."

International law should also be referred to and here Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression..." The Constitutional Court has held that, "Freedom of expression lies at the heart of a democracy." However, the latter has also held that, "The pluralism and broadmindedness that is central to an open and democratic society can be undermined by speech which seriously threatens democratic pluralism itself."

It must be remembered that our Constitution, given our history of oppression and the violation of human rights, is dignity-centred.

Concerning Section 16(2) the Constitutional Court has stated: "... Section 16(2) therefore defines the boundaries beyond which the right to freedom of expression does not extend."

In analysing Section 16(2)(c) there are five requirements:

First, the advocacy of hatred. It requires more than ordinary speech or expression.

Secondly, the advocacy specifically of 'hatred', not mere dislike or disapproval. It includes stereotyping of people on the basis of immutable characteristics that creates detestation toward them. Advocacy of hatred is effectively to instil detestation, enmity, ill-will and malevolence in another. Mocking or disputing the deeply held convictions of others is unacceptable. The dignity and vulnerability of members of any minority must at all times be protected.

Thirdly, the advocacy must be based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion. This is clear and should not present any particular difficulty.

Fourthly, there must be 'incitement' to cause harm. The impugned speech hence cannot simply be an insult.

Fifthly, there must be 'harm'. Harm is not limited to violence (i.e. physical harm) but can

extend beyond into an attack on dignity. The term 'harm' is broader than physical harm and includes psychological, emotional and other harm.

Accordingly, and stripping it to its essentials, to qualify as hate speech, the speaker must have: advocated/hatred/based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion/that constitutes an incitement/to cause harm. All five elements must be fulfilled for hate speech to be proven.

Another matter in which the SAJBD is involved, relates to Mr Bongani Masuku, International Relations Spokesperson of the Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU). During 2009, at Wits University and in various other ways, the following came from Mr Masuku:

Speaking at Wits, Mr Masuku used the expression "make their lives hell..." on four occasions when referring to what COSATU's intentions were regarding those who supported Israel.

A comment Mr Masuku left on a blog: "We must not apologise, every Zionist must be made to drink the bitter medicine they are feeding our brothers and sisters in Palestine. We must target them, expose them and do all that is needed to subject them to perpetual suffering until they withdraw from the land of others and stop their savage attacks on human dignity ...". (The SAJBD contend that he is not referring to Israelis who live several thousand kilometres away, but to South African Jews).

"... all who deny that occupation is wrong must be encouraged to leave South Africa before they infect our society with much more racism ..."

"... All Jews who have risen above the fascist parochial paranoia of Israel have changed our views on Jews, as we thought all of them are inhumane ..."

In the Masuku matter the SA Human Rights Commission upheld the SAJBD's complaint and found that Masuku was guilty of hate speech. It has now launched a case, defended by Mr Masuku, in the Equality Court in which they seek the following: "The SAHRC has therefore approached this court to make a finding that the statements made by Mr Masuku constitute hate speech and to order that Mr Masuku and COSATU make a public apology to the SAJBD."

This case should come to court in the next few months.

The SAJBD has also instituted a case in the Equality Court against a notorious purveyor of antisemitism in the form of e-mails to various recipients, including many prominent non-Jews. This matter and other successful like matters are not as high profile as the ones already mentioned and I refer to them merely to show that there has been Board activity in this regard.

I now return to the fundamental cornerstone

that freedom of expression is embedded in our Constitutional democracy. It is vital to recognise that it means that criticism of Israel, criticism of Zionism as an ideology or a movement or questioning the legitimacy of the Zionist ideal are quite permissible in South Africa. Combatting these insidious attacks cannot and should not be attempted through a court of law, but rather through the court of public opinion. These views on Zionism and Israel, as unpalatable as they are, are opinions and views to which South Africans are entitled to as freedom of expression and thus they are protected speech.

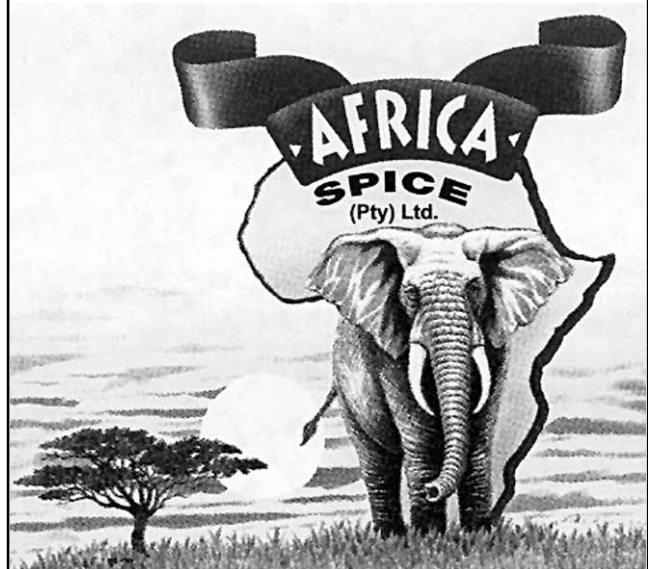
Writing as a SAJBD member as well, it should always be borne in mind that not every expression of antisemitism needs to be chased down relentlessly. Often the lesser expressions of hate speech that have a limited audience obtain larger exposure simply because the SAJBD has brought a case against the parties involved.

As the two cases detailed above show, it does not follow at all that there will be no opposition to actions brought by us in a court of law. However, this should not be a deterrent if we are convinced of the justice of our cause.

6 Vickers Road
City Deep
Johannesburg

Tel: (011) 623-1332
Fax: (011) 623-2188
Email: delia@africaspice.co.za

P.O. Box 86268
City Deep 2049



SUPPLIERS OF: *Spices *Castings *Packaging material and all Butcher Requisites

ANDREA from ANDREA'S ATTIC
BUYS
YOUR TREASURES FOR CASH

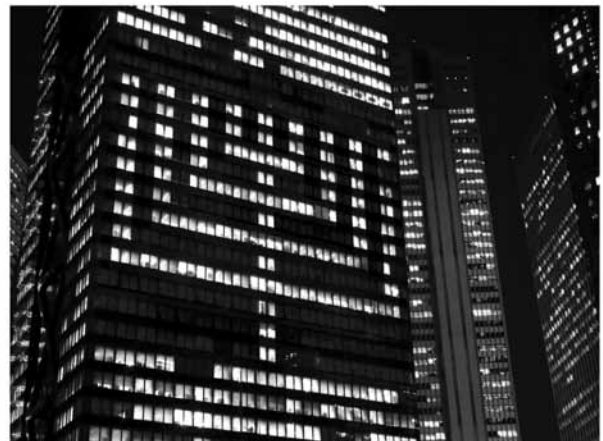
JEWELLERY: Old Gold, Silver & Vintage

COINS : Old SA & Other
Collections

SILVER: Old Hallmarked Silver
Items. Cutlery, Teasets,
Candlesticks, Bowls etc

I come to YOU
So call me

Andrea Bernstein
083 76 00 482
andrea . attic @ gmail.com



Happy
Chanukah!

Best wishes over Chanukah to all our Jewish tenants, partners and friends from City Property. City Property believes urban renewal is transformation in action. In this way we re-invigorate the economic lifeblood of the country and improve the lives of those who live and work in our cities.



CITY PROPERTY
Addressing the Future

PTA (012) 319-8811, JHB (011) 378-3200
www.cityproperty.co.za

ESMÉ BERMAN: DOYEN OF SOUTH AFRICAN ART CRITICS

*

Natalie Knight

My first encounter with Esmé Berman was when I was asked to interview her for a Jewish newspaper. Her reputation preceded her - art historian, critic, lecturer broadcaster and the forerunner in the research and documentation of South African art from the 1960s and 70s. The first edition of her definitive publication *Art and Artists of South Africa* has been referred to as the 'Bible' on the topic. To interview the author of a bible seemed like a formidable task.

Esmé's appearance matched her impeccable credentials. She was perfectly groomed with superb diction and highly articulate. Clearly, she did not suffer fools gladly. Having assessed my lack of experience, she insisted at the end of the interview that I send her the article so she could check it. She phoned me the next day and said that there were several mistakes. Nervously I asked what they were and she replied that I had omitted the accent grave on the second 'e' of her name.

"I am sorry", I said, "and what were the others?"

"You left it off several times" she replied.

That was the beginning of a warm and close relationship. Esmé became a role model and mentor.

In 1973, Esmé suffered a devastating loss - her 18 year-old son was killed in a road accident. The following year her husband, Hi Berman, suggested that she take a month's holiday and go to London and New York.

Esmé phoned and asked me if I would like to join her. My husband, Zamie, immediately agreed and was happy to look after our three young children. We were away for a month - going from museum to museum and also to a few theatres.

In London we met up with one of her close friends, Taubie Kushlick, who invited us to her elegant hotel in Mayfair - a far cry from the London hotel in which we were staying. In New York, Esmé had contacts and for three weeks we stayed in a great hotel overlooking Central Park and near the MOMA Museum of Modern Art.

New York was a life-changing experience. What a way to get a basic art education - at the feet of the master with the best contemporary art in the world. We spent hours and days in the

Museum of Modern art. Esmé was generous with her knowledge and opinions on the art and artists.

Her achievements were well known in New York. She made some valuable connections, which included a meeting with Clement Greenberg, the acerbic art critic whom she later invited to South Africa.

But it was more than an art experience. It was an opportunity to connect with the person beneath the persona. It was during this time that I discovered her qualities as a caring wife and mother and saw a dedication and striving for perfection in whatever she did.

I was on the verge of collapse every time I spoke to my husband or children. She was tall, stately and confident and outwardly always in control. She commented on the fact that whenever we got on or off a plane, there was always a strong young man who offered to carry my bags.

"Why does no-one ever offer to help me?" she complained.

"Well Esmé, it's because you give the vibe that you don't need any help, while I have perfected the helpless look" I replied.

She was very perceptive and pegged me for a commercial career, stating that she was an academic with no commercial bent. We both remember very clearly an incident when I bought a set of ten Vasarely prints. I negotiated a good price with the seller, phoned Zamie in South Africa and did the deal.

"You are going to open an art gallery," she prophesied as I explained that I would sell off eight of the prints and keep the two that I wanted as my profit. It took seven years - but she was proved to be right. (The first exhibition at the Natalie Knight Gallery in 1981 was called *Whatever Happened to Pop art*, featuring Andy Warhol, David Hockney, Jim Dine and Richard Hamilton. We served Campbell's soup and hot dogs and drank a special toast to the inspiration and foresight of Esmé Berman).

In November 1974, Esmé published *The Story of South African Painting*. In *Art and Artists of South Africa* she had evaluated individual painters but in this book, she selected representatives of different styles. Through them she told the chronological story of the development of art in South Africa. She also juxtaposed this with international artists and trends. I was now writing for the *Star*, and in my review of the book commented on the fact that Esmé had illustrated it with art from public collections so that the viewer could relate the original work to the text.

Natalie Knight is an attorney, art critic and freelance feature writer, who further works as an art consultant, curator of exhibitions and lecturer. She is the author of two books on the Ndebele and has written and produced two plays, Barmy Days and There's No Sugar Left.

The book dealt with the progress of modern art in general, defining and explaining the various 'isms' and progressing to Op and Pop art. I was aware of the fact that I had been privileged to share her insights and her erudition in the flesh.

During the intervening years, Esmé had set up the Art Institute (1972-87) - for art education, documentation and publication. She asked me to do some work for her at this time. Her publication *The South African Art Market* was probably the only time that Esmé, the critic, was severely criticized. We were both very upset at this reaction - but Esmé took it on the chin.

In 1976, Hi Berman was elected as Deputy Mayor of Sandton and as Mayor in 1977-78. Esmé was an elegant and effective Mayoress,

David, the Berman's elder son, lived in the States. In 1987, Hi and Esmé immigrated to Los Angeles, where Esmé lectured at the Otis-Parsons Institute, and in the Extension Faculty of UCLA. She also lectured at the University of Judaism (on art, not Jewish topics) and from time to time at Los Angeles County Museum of Art and UCLA Art Museum.

She is particularly proud of her privately published book, *Breakfast With the Bicycle Club*:

That book deals with the remarkable, informal LA group that Hi and I were invited to join on New Year's Eve 1988. The group had been meeting on the beach every Sunday morning, to cycle, followed by breakfast - since 1969. Imagine: not a formal Club. Just a group of friends - together every Sunday, plus monthly potluck dinners, and trips to various other centres together, FOR 30 YEARS!!

Their individual biographies weave together to reflect the story of 20th Century America and the different backgrounds of its population, including survivors of the Holocaust, children of immigrants, born in Europe, American-born citizens and us. It was a very tightly-knit group. No one could simply tag along.

We were the only South Africans invited - and our link was owing to half-dozen of them being followers of my UCLA lecture courses. All were Jews. We saw the New Millennium in together. Hi and I were involved for 14 years. The group took over a restaurant and threw a marvellous celebratory brunch, with Mexican musicians, for our Golden Wedding in 2002.

Esmé and Hi returned to Johannesburg in 2003 after Hi was diagnosed with a terminal illness. They decided to return to South Africa to be close to their daughter, Kathy. Unfortunately, Hi passed away shortly after their return and Esmé was forced to reboot her life alone.

Esmé and I worked together again when I edited the publication *l'Afrique*, a tribute to Dr Maria Stein-Lessing, who had been Esmé's lecturer at Wits and her mentor. Esmé contributed to the publication and gave the opening address

at MuseumAfrica in 2008 when the Spiegel/Stein-Lessing Wing of African Art was unveiled.

When we met recently, she recounted some of the memories, major achievements and highlights of her illustrious career. Her life had been enriched though friendships with such artists as Cecil Skotnes and Larry Scully (whom she had known since her Wits days).

A major recent achievement is a two-volume book that Esmé wrote in collaboration with artist/author Karel Nel. Entitled *Alexis Preller - A Visual Biography*, this was produced to accompany the exhibition curated by Karel Nel of Preller's vast oeuvre at the Standard Bank Art Gallery. During that exhibition Esmé was indefatigable - and her fascinating lunch time walk-about tours of the exhibition proved that she was on top form. She was able to produce an enlightening and intimate account of the artist's life and art as she had known the artist so well over many years and also had access to Preller's personal letters. Her biography of Preller was also published as a single volume. Entitled *Africa, the Sun and Shadows* (2009), the synopsis describes it as "a story filled with drama, told with empathy and skill. The reader accompanies Alexis Preller through the twists and turns of his uncompromising career and passionate private life, tracing the evolution of his fascinating iconography along the way".

Now 84, Esmé is struggling physically but refuses to allow this to prevent her from producing yet another series of five short books on selected South Africa artists. In April 2011, the *South African Art Times* devoted the cover story of its magazine to Esmé Berman. She was called the Grande Dame of South African art - a title which is well deserved.

NOTES

- 1 See Lana Jacobson's article, 'L'afrique: A Tribute to Maria Stein-Lessing and Leopold Spiegel' in the Pesach, 2009 issue of *Jewish Affairs*.



First mayoral reception for a Johannesburg launch of *Art and Artists of South Africa*, 16 November 1970. With Esmé Berman is Mayor Clr Sam Moss.

THE JOHN SCHLAPOBERSKY AFFAIR

*

Dovidi Fachler

In 1992, twenty three years after being branded a terrorist John Schlapobersky, a clinical psychologist working out of his Highgate practice in northwest London, was finally allowed to visit his native South Africa. Looking back at events of the late sixties, he vividly recalls the time he was forced out of South Africa and deported to Israel. He especially remembers the torturous two months that preceded his deportation; two months in which he was beaten, forced to answer accusations by interrogating officers while balancing on a brick for five consecutive days, and thrown into an isolated cell 3 by 7 feet for 23 hours a day. It was a time when his evening entertainment included listening to a chorus of black voices comforting their condemned comrade who was to be hanged the next day.

Detained under Section Six of the Terrorism Act of 1967, informally known as the 'torture clause', Schlapobersky was denied the right to a legal representative, and to a trial for an indefinite period. The subversive activities of which he was accused included belonging to an interracial writers' workshop and running a soup kitchen for indigent black children. Yet his unjust detention did not seem to warrant the attention of South Africa's Jewish leadership. In fact, when two prominent members of the community, who were also public officials, were approached they refused to get involved. It was up to John's mother, the Israeli consul general, and the security police themselves to try to save him.

To understand the different responses of the Jewish community on the one hand and that of the Israeli consulate on the other, some background information is required. In 1966 Balthazar Johannes Vorster, a former member of the pro-Nazi *Ossewa Brandwag*, succeeded the recently assassinated Hendrik Verwoerd as prime minister of South Africa. In an effort at placating his Jewish constituency, he assured its leadership that he would purge antisemitism from the ranks of the National Party. It came as quite a shock, then, when two years later, the Minister of Police and Interior S L Muller, in an address at Potchefstroom University, urged Jewish parents

to quell their children's enthusiasm for leading student demonstrations against South Africa's Apartheid laws. This singling out of the Jewish community prompted the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, through its organ *Jewish Affairs*, to register their protest at the minister's unwarranted comments.¹ They also used the occasion to reiterate their opposition to subversive activities and to civil disobedience. Standing up for John a year later would, perhaps, have been too much to expect from a community whose leadership denied the right of its members to be involved in anything that could be determined as illegal.

As for Israel, during the early 1960s, for geopolitical, and for (allegedly) moral reasons, it did not shy away from demonstrating its repugnance for South Africa's racial policies. It even went so far as to place itself at the forefront of those countries demanding diplomatic and other sanctions against Pretoria. South Africa, for its part, did not conceal its disappointment at Israel's (perceived) mistreatment of it, and relations between these two states became severely strained. In retaliation for Israel's voting record at the United Nations the Republic decided to place strict limits upon the amount of foreign currency earmarked for the Jewish State that could be sent there by local donors. However, after Israel's dramatic victory in the Six Day War convinced South Africa that Israel would act as an effective bulwark against communism it relaxed its stance and allowed significant amounts of monies to be transferred. Two years later, in 1969, neither country was fully represented in the other, but the visit of Israel's first premier, David Ben Gurion, to South Africa paved the way for ties between the two states to gradually improve.

It is against this backdrop that the following narrative, culled from the Israel Foreign Ministry's archives and translated (and edited) from the original Hebrew by the writer, is presented. Marked 'Highly Confidential', it is dated 8 August, 1969, and addressed to Mr A. Lourie, Deputy Director General [of the Israel Foreign Office]. The narrator is the then Israeli Consul General Itzhak Unna (who later was upgraded to full ambassador).

The John Schlapobersky Episode

The above is a 21 year-old Jew, born in South Africa, and a student at the University of the Witwatersrand. Ten years ago his parents emigrated from Johannesburg to

Dovidi Fachler matriculated at Yeshiva College, Johannesburg, and after studying at yeshiva in Israel obtained an LLB (Wits) and LLM (UNISA). He lectured in legal subjects at Boston City Campus before making aliyah in 1999. Since then, he has worked as a translator and researcher, and recently obtained an MA in Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Swaziland because of their critical attitude towards the South African Regime. The father subsequently founded a marketing company in Mbabane. Because they had relocated to Swaziland, all the members of the family received British citizenship.

Four months ago John Schlapobersky's uncle ended his term as mayor of Johannesburg, but he had a very bad relationship with the Swazi branch of the family.

Two months ago John Schlapobersky was arrested on campus by the Security Police on charges related to the Suppression of Terrorism Act [sic], which allows the police to detain a man without trial and without contact with the outside world for an indefinite period.

Schlapobersky's arrest caused a stir in the local (Jewish) community, first because the detainee was such a close relative to the former mayor, and second because he was arrested together with another British subject, Phillip Goldring.

On 23/6/69, John Schlapobersky's parents arrived unexpectedly at my office. They explained to me that they were seeking my assistance in obtaining a temporary discharge for their younger son, who had made Aliyah a few years ago as a member of the Habonim youth movement and who was currently serving as a private in the paratroopers unit in the Israeli Army.

During the conversion the parents confided in me that were upset that they were unable to influence their elder son John to also make aliyah instead of attending university in Johannesburg. I told them that as far as I was concerned if John wanted to make Aliyah, Israel would not object providing the authorities released him from detention.

I must add at this juncture, that from the time I handled (then) MK Ben Gurion's visit to South Africa, which among other things involved security arrangements, I became personally acquainted with the commander of the security police in Johannesburg, Col. Visser, and with his deputy Col. Botha, as well as with other officers. Since that time I have occasionally met them at cocktail parties etc.

A few days after the Schlapobersky couple met with me at my office I come across Colonels Botha and Visser. I told them about the meeting, mentioned that I recommended that the paratrooper brother be released temporarily, and told them that I was prepared to allow John to make aliyah as soon as he was released. Colonel Botha answered me that at present they were trying to capture a large Underground network, and there was thus no justification for releasing John in the foreseeable future.

Schlapobersky's father returned to Swaziland, but his mother stayed on in Johannesburg in order to find contacts that

could assist her in the release of her son. She visited my offices at least once or twice a week in order to pour out her soul to me. No one was prepared to help her, not her brother-in-law (the former mayor), not Percy Yutar, the Jewish Attorney General of the Free State who is known to have close ties with the security establishment, and not even her own friends. Even the British embassy in Pretoria claimed that they were unable to assist, since the authorities did not allow them to visit John in prison.

On Tuesday 29/7/69 Mrs Schlapobersky arrived at my office, and excitedly related to me the following story:

The security police had allowed her to visit her son in jail in Pretoria, which meeting was held in the presence of two police officers, Major Swanepoel, and Major Coetzee. She was telling her son, in front of these two gentlemen, about her efforts to obtain his release, about the ineffectual approach of the British embassy, and about her appeal to the IDF, via the Consulate, to grant a temporary discharge for his brother - the paratrooper. Upon hearing my name Major Coetzee stopped her and said: "We will not allow the British to interfere in this matter, but the Consul General of Israel is well known to us and we put a lot of trust in him. If he is able to make John a paratrooper in the IDF and to drain his head of all this nonsense, we are ready to enter into negotiations with him.

[Just to fill in you in:] The first officer, Maj. Swanepoel is chief interrogating officer of the security police, and it is important to add that of late the South African English press had singled him out, especially since over the course of the last year four African prisoners "under his care" managed to hang themselves in their cells. Newspaper articles have suggested, however, that these inmates may have died from electrocution. Major Coetzee, on the other hand, belongs to the Johannesburg branch of the Security police, and I know him from there.

Obviously Mrs Schlapobersky asked me that I contact Maj. Coetzee immediately in order to negotiate the release of her son. However I was forced to explain to her that since I was the Consul General of Israel and not of Britain I had no right to initiate contact with the security police on this matter, and if the police really wanted to talk to me they know where to find me. However I repeated my promise that after John was released, should he wish to travel to Israel, I would assist him to the best of my ability. I have to admit that at this stage I doubted the veracity of Mrs Schlapobersky's story. It did not occur to me

that Major Coetzee really said the things that she claimed he did.

It appears that I had erred in my judgment of Mrs Schlapobersky's account, for later that day I received a phone call from Col. Visser who invited me to come over for dinner the following week. The date of the call was 29/7/69.

On Friday evening 1/8/69 Col. Visser called me again and asked whether he could come over immediately, since he wanted to speak to me about a matter that could not be postponed until the next week. Of course I agreed, and half an hour later he appeared at my house and related to me the following:

John Schlapobersky has been in solitary confinement for over two months and we are concerned that he may experience a nervous breakdown. You are a father who has children and so am I, and who knows better than ourselves how easy it is for children nowadays to fall into trouble. In truth we do not have any hard evidence against John Schlapobersky but since he was interrogated by us we cannot free him since he is now partly aware of what we know and should we free him we will be unable to prevent him informing others that the police are after them. We also cannot free him until everyone involved is dragged in front of a court, and this will most definitely take another two years. There is a real danger that John will not be able to withstand solitary for such an extended period.

Colonel Visser reminded me that I had mentioned to Col. Botha that I would be prepared to help John make Aliyah the moment he is set free. If that were still the case he had come to ask me if I would be prepared to take John from them at the airport and place him on an El Al plane that was departing the next Wednesday. I answered Visser that I would definitely be prepared to help John make *aliyah* if that is what he wanted to do, but was not prepared to cooperate with them in an illegal deportation. I demanded that before I gave them my final answer, I needed to speak to John in jail so that I could personally assess his character and convictions. Likewise I wanted it confirmed by him that after John made aliyah I was not to be held responsible for his actions or movements after landing in Israel. As far as we were concerned he would be free to travel to whichever country he chose.

Visser replied that he completely understood that I would not be able to act as surety over what John chose to do after arriving in Israel. On the other hand he was reluctant to accede to my request to meet with John in jail since this went against the law, and

even the British had been refused permission. I insisted, and repeated my position that I would not be prepared to cooperate with them in any activity that could be construed as a deportation. Visser then told me that he would consult with his superiors, and would inform me of the outcome, and with that he left my house after midnight.

On Sunday 3/8/69 at around 11 p.m., Col Visser called me again at my home and asked me if I would be prepared to accompany him to Pretoria the next day. I did not ask many questions and readily agreed.

The next day, during the journey, Col. Visser informed me that the national Commander of the Security Police, Brigadier Venter, wanted to have a word with me before deciding whether to permit me to meet with John Schlapobersky.

We reached national headquarters where I found myself in a very odd situation. I was taking part in a meeting that was attended by twelve senior ranking officers chaired by Brigadier Venter. The Security Police is comprised solely of Afrikaners, there is not one English speaking person among the senior ranks, and the fact that I managed to acquire a superficial understanding of Afrikaans, so that they were able to conduct the meeting in their own language, contributed, in my humble opinion, to the friendly and informal atmosphere in which the meeting was conducted. At the end Brigadier Venter agreed to let me see John Schlapobersky, and after that we would all decide his final fate.

The meeting between John and me took place in the presence of Maj. Swanepoel. Obviously at this stage I had already decided to make every effort to release John so that he could be transported to Israel. I will not go into detail about the contents of the meeting for in truth it was no more than a charade. I spoke with John for about ten minutes, and obviously he immediately consented to make Aliyah, and spoke of his future plans in Israel, showing that he had a good grasp of the country (Ulpan, continuing his studies at University, IDF etc.). However it was not difficult to discern that his two months in detention and the interrogation by Maj. Swanepoel had left their mark, and I harbour no illusions - had I offered John a trip to the moon, he would have jumped at the opportunity.

After conversing for about ten minutes I asked if his mother could join us. I then asked her if she would allow John to travel to Israel, and if she and her husband would take care of all the financial arrangements. Obviously she agreed, and she even asked whether she could accompany John in his flight to Israel. I answered that I fully support

such an idea, and there could be no reason to prevent her from flying.

Maj. Swanepoel and I then returned to National Headquarters where a meeting was once again convened with Brigadier Venter. I told Venter that John would be travelling voluntarily, and that from my perspective there would no be reason to prevent his trip. I nonetheless repeated what I had said to Col. Visser that I could only be responsible for what happens to him up until his departure, and I would be unable to assume any responsibility in relation to his actions after he lands. Brigadier Venter accepted my position and thanked me for finding a humane solution to the John Schlapobersky affair.

Since I in any event needed to be at the airport to receive a number of distinguished Jewish gentlemen, we arranged that Maj. Coetzee would arrive together with John half an hour before departure, and from there he would fly with his mother, like any other tourist, on an El Al plane headed for Israel.

That Wednesday I waited at the time and place that I had arranged to meet with Maj. Coetzee and John Schlapobersky. John's parents, brother, sister and fiancé were all waiting there; the mother in order to travel with John, and the rest to say their goodbyes. However Maj. Coetzee and John arrived half an hour late, since the security police had forgotten to issue the release documents, and without them they could not release John from jail.

I suppose there is no need to describe the tension that we all felt when we were waiting for the "man of the moment". The security police provided us with a room in the airport where the family could take leave of John without arousing any suspicion. Even Maj. Swanepoel arrived at the airport to bid farewell to John, and he made the announcement in front of him and in front of all the family: "were it not for the Consul General of Israel you would have spent a lot more time with me".

I managed to speak with John privately for a few minutes. This time he left me with an outstanding impression, and I believe that he has sincere intentions of following in his brother's footsteps and settling permanently in Israel. I explained to John that although I have no control over his future actions and even though I did not give any guarantee to the South African police that he would not be involved in hostile activity towards South Africa, the chances that I would be able to help someone else in a similar predicament was dependent on his conduct. I stressed the need for complete silence, especially when it came to the Israeli Press.

John and his mother boarded the plane and departed, and I gather that before I finish

sending this letter off I will hear from you that they have arrived safely.

By the way, as far as the South African press is concerned I enjoyed reading in the *Rand Daily Mail* the next day that the British Government were doing all that they could, through the British embassy in Pretoria, to obtain the release of the British subject John Schlapobersky, who was presently sitting in a Pretoria jail.

That same day John's fiancé, an English Christian and a qualified nurse, visited me at my office. She came to tell me that she had already bought a ticket to Israel and that she intended joining John, attending *ulpan*, and settling in Israel with him. I explained to her the difficulties that she will invariably encounter because she is not Jewish. I nonetheless gave her my full support.

I will not hide from you the fact that I derived not an insignificant amount of satisfaction from this whole episode, especially from the fact that the South African security police considered that in this situation, one which involved a Jewish man who held British citizenship, it was the Israel Consulate General and not the British embassy that was the correct 'address' for negotiations over his freedom.

Major Coetzee's parting words to John were "I wish you would be a paratrooper like your brother, and then you could beat up the Arabs".

Regards,
Itzhak Unna
Consul General.

P.S. On Friday 8.8.69 (two days after the departure) the British Consul General of Johannesburg, John Marnham asked to see me urgently. He arrived at my office and told me that it had come to the attention of the British Embassy that John Schlapobersky had been released and had departed to Israel and that I was involved in his release. The ambassador asked him to verify these details with me. I told Marnham that indeed John Schlapobersky's mother had come to see me to ask for a visa for her and for her son, and that I had explained to her that since she and her son were British citizens there was no need for a visa. I added that the circumstances of his release were unknown to me.

Epilogue

Much has been said about the special bond between Israel and Apartheid South Africa. It is refreshing, then, to observe some of the more positive aspects of this complex relationship. Faced with a situation where an individual Jew

in distress was abandoned to his fate, Israel incontrovertibly did the right thing in involving itself in his plight and in exploiting its connections to obtain his release. Israel showed that it could, at times, act out the role of protector of world Jewry. Though not uncritical of Israel's foreign policies, and certainly not pleased with the military ties that were forged between Tel Aviv and Pretoria, John was and remains grateful to Israel for saving his life: "Jews need to take care of their own, and in this instance the Jewish State fulfilled my expectations to the letter....I remain committed to the State of Israel and make it a point to visit the country and attend as many conferences as I can".

When conducting the interview with Mr Schlapobersky, the writer was impressed by this erudite man's lack of bitterness towards a community that had shunned him. This notwithstanding, after being pressed for comment on the stance adopted by organised Jewry, he had this to say:

I cannot understand why they refused to have anything to do with me. Even after I had been whisked off to Israel no one even tried to make any contact with me. My family, who had suffered the trauma of my ordeal, and who had been torn apart as a result, were offered absolutely no support by the Board.

After all, unlike other activists, John remains adamant that it was his Jewishness that had motivated his activism:

After having experienced a large dose of antisemitism in a colonial boarding school in



Izhak Unna, Israeli Consul General in South Africa at the time of the John Schlapobersky affair

Swaziland, and after having been at the receiving end of police interrogators who referred to me as *die klein Joodjie* I became more and more devoted to fighting for South Africa's oppressed people. It is no coincidence that the lawyer assigned to me was Jewish, as was the firm he represented. I really feel that as a victimised nation we have a duty to work for the betterment of society's other victims.

Thirty five years after these events, the question that begs to be asked of the South African Jewish leadership is why a member of its community was abandoned in the first place. In light of the regime's pro-Nazi past, the Board of Deputies' reluctance to confront the regime head-on was quite understandable. It makes sense that no official pleas were made on behalf of those radical Jews who had completely dissociated themselves from the community, and who had in fact been involved in subversive activities. If a court of law had found them guilty it may have been unwise for the Jewish community to question the verdict. However, in a case where a trial had not been conducted, where a miscarriage of justice had clearly taken place, and where a mother had pleaded for the life of her son, how does one reconcile the refusal to get involved with normative Jewish practice? This becomes all the more perplexing in light of the fact that the persons approached could have operated behind the scenes and need not have tarnished the public Jewish image.

These questions are asked not for the purpose of passing judgement on any organization or person, especially not on those who are no longer living. Certainly there were many cases where members of the Jewish community had demonstrated, in both official and unofficial capacities, an abundance of compassion and goodwill. This story may merely be an exception to the norm that had prevailed. Possibly, and unfortunately, it may not be. It is this frightening prospect that deserves to be explored, not to purge the past, but rather to ensure that the next time South African Judaism is put to the test it possesses the moral fibre to pass it, unambiguously.

NOTES

1. 'A New Year Message from Teddy Schneider', *Jewish Affairs*, September 1968.

THE CAPE BOARD, THE SILVER SALVER AND BERTHA'S BILL

*

Gwynne Schrire

Few in the year 2013 think it strange that the immediate past Chairman of the SAJBD Cape Council and the current SAJBD National Chairman and National Director, respectively Li Boiskin, Mary Kluk and Wendy Kahn, are women. Today ability, not the possession of a Y-chromosome, is what matters.

That was not always the case. Amongst the artefacts that the SAJBD Cape Council inherited from the former Jewish Museum is a silver salver, whose inscription refers to the fight for women's rights in South Africa. The EPNS tray belonged to one of the first women's rights activists in South Africa. Its inscription reads: "BERTHA SOLOMON MP, *In appreciation* WOMEN'S LEGAL DISABILITIES ACT 1938-1953 *From* WESTERN PROVINCE WOMEN MEMBERS CONSTANTIA CONSTITUENCY".

Bertha, born Schwartz, emigrated from Minsk to Cape Town with her mother and sister. There they joined their husband and father, Idel. A fervent Zionist,¹ Idel Schwartz had, in 1899, been one of the founders of the Dorshei Zion Society (today's SA Zionist Federation - Cape Council),² becoming its secretary and then its president.³ When the Hebrew University was established in 1925 Schwartz, by then a wealthy man, donated a chair of Post-Biblical Hebrew Literature and attended the opening. In the Samson Centre, which houses the Jewish communal organisations in Cape Town, there is a reproduction of a painting *The Opening of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem by the Rt Hon The Earl of Balfour, K.G. 1.4.1925* by Leopold Pilichowski. It was presented by Schwartz to the Dorshei Zion Society.

One Saturday afternoon in 1907 Canon Jenkins, Principal of the Diocesan College (Bishops), called on the Schwartz family asking to see Bertha. Bishops had decided to admit girls to its post-matriculation college and he had come to offer her a scholarship.⁴ Bertha, then fifteen years old, had just matriculated from Good Hope Seminary School for Girls. Although her father believed in education for girls, her mother did not. Furthermore, the family had no money. The

depression that had followed the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 and the departure of the soldiers and refugees from Cape Town had all but wiped out Idel Schwartz's property investments, and only by their sale had he narrowly avoided bankruptcy.⁵ Without telling the family, Idel's friend Advocate Morris Alexander, who lectured in Law at Bishops, had put Bertha's name down for one of the two scholarships on offer.

Apart from interceding to help the gifted Bertha, Alexander was also deeply involved in Jewish affairs. He had, inter alia, been a founder of the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies, of which he was chairman from 1904-1937. The year after the Canon's visit, he was elected to the Union House of Assembly in 1910, and remained an MP until his death in 1946.

Thus, with Alexander's help, Bertha became the only Jew at the Anglican College, with a four year scholarship. There she flourished. She obtained a B.A. degree with honours in Classics, a post-graduate teacher's qualification and an M.A. in Classics. She also made good friends, including her class mate Jan Hofmeyr, Philip Millin, future judge and husband of the novelist Sarah Gertrude Millin, and Morris Alexander's younger brother, Aaron. The latter was to marry



Gwynne Schrire is Deputy Director of the Cape Council of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies. She is a regular contributor and a member of the Editorial Board of Jewish Affairs and has written, co-written and edited various books on aspects of local Jewish and Cape Town history.

a girl he met at Cambridge and move with her to her home town, Cairo, to practise law.

In 1923, now Mrs Bertha Solomon and living in Johannesburg with two children, Frank and Joan, she complained to Advocate Millin that she was bored. He suggested that as legislation had just been passed allowing women to practise law she should consider practising the profession, and sent books and newly qualified lawyers to coach her. In due course, she became one of the first women advocates in practice.

Most of Bertha's clients were women, and she was horrified to learn of the legal disabilities under which they suffered as a result of the outdated Roman Dutch Common Law of Marriage. This regarded women as minors and gave to husband's marital power over their wives' money, possessions and children. A feckless husband could spend his wife's inheritance, collect her wages, sell her possessions and furniture and remove the children. And nothing could be done about it. Bertha realised the only way to rescind these legal disabilities was to change the law, and the only way to change the law was for women to have the vote. She thus joined the National Council of Women, threw herself into the suffrage movement, and became a chairman of the Women's Suffrage campaign, a cause which Morris Alexander MP and his wife Ruth strongly supported. The Dutch Reformed Church was firmly opposed to votes for women in the belief that this was in direct conflict with the Word of God.

Finally in 1930, after a heated debate in Parliament (in which it was argued that scientific evidence proved what every male knew - that females had smaller brains) the vote was eventually given to women - but only to white women. It was also made compulsory for them to register as voters. Ruth Alexander at first refused to register for a discriminatory law, but when her husband told her she could be arrested for non-compliance, she agreed to register under compulsion but on the understanding that she would leave him as soon as their children had finished university (which she did).⁶

With the right to vote gained, Bertha was elected first as a member of the Provincial Council in 1933 and then, five years later, as a Member of Parliament. Her maiden speech dealt with women's rights. In time, her daughter Joan qualified as an architect and married Michael Comay, a Cape Town lawyer. Her son Frank qualified as an advocate.

Bertha set about lobbying to change the laws regarding women's rights. Just as she had worked out a plan of campaign to get the law on the statue book, however, the Second World War broke out. Changing laws affecting women was now low on the government's list of priorities, particularly with the opposition of the Dutch Reformed Church and a government divided about South Africa's entry into the war.

Both Michael Comay and Frank Schwartz enlisted and were sent to North Africa. When General Dan Pienaar was told that he was being assigned a Jewish Information Officer, he exploded "No, good heavens man, I don't want a blooming Jew!"⁷ But he soon realised Michael's worth.

After his demobilisation in 1946 Major Michael Comay, Joan and their two children moved to Jerusalem, where Michael was the SA Zionist Federation's official representative to Palestine. Joan, an activist like her mother, smuggled arms for the Jewish underground army. Michael, in order to avoid arrest by the British army, was sent to the United Nations in 1947 to help lobby for world support for an independent Israel. In the 1960s, he became Israel's chief delegate to the United Nations and one of his nation's most influential diplomats, serving as Ambassador to Canada and Britain.⁸ Joan became a popular author of books on Israel, including *Ben-Gurion and the Birth of Israel; Everyone's guide to Israel; Introducing Israel; Israel and the Book; The Diaspora Story: The epic of the Jewish People among the Nations; The Hebrew Kings; The Jerusalem I love; The Oxford Who's who in Jewish history: after the period of the Old Testament; The Routledge Who's who in the Old Testament: Together with the Apocrypha; The Temple of Jerusalem: With the history of Temple Mount; The UN in Action; The World's greatest story: The epic of the Jewish people in Biblical times*. Bertha was also a keen Zionist. Accompanied by Joan, she attended a ceremony at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1958 at which the Idel and Sonia Schwartz Lecture Hall was dedicated. She left a bequest to that university in her will.⁹

Frank joined the artillery, becoming a captain, and was one of the first five South Africans to be awarded the Military Cross at Sidi Rezegh. He was taken prisoner, escaped, was shot in the throat and spent five months in hospital in Cairo, where Aaron Alexander's wife, Morris' sister-in-law, visited him daily.

In 1946 the Cape SAJBD, confronted with additional responsibilities, decided to expand its offices and appoint an assistant secretary to help the Chairman, Leon Segal.¹⁰ The first one to be appointed was Advocate (Captain) Frank Solomon, M.C. His throat wound had affected his voice, so that he sounded as if he had a bad cold. As a result it was the Cape Board - rather than the law courts - that benefited from his expertise. Later he joined an engineering consultancy, and then became an editor for a specialist magazine.¹¹

All this time, Bertha Solomon M.P. continued addressing meetings, arranging for women's organisations to send letters to their MPs, introducing bills, speaking in parliament and mastering the parliamentary rules in order to get the marital powers law changed. It was an uphill battle. General Smuts once quipped, "What this

house needs is more Bertha control.” In 1944, she managed to get a bill passed in the Assembly, only to have it rejected by the Senate. She then asked Prime Minister Smuts to establish a judicial commission to investigate the position of women in South Africa. The commission was horrified at the findings; even the chairman, who had initially been opposed to such a bill, changed his view. However, by the time the commission presented its report, the conservative National Party was in office, and it was more interested in legislating apartheid than in antagonising the church. Finally, the Matrimonial Affairs Act - called Bertha’s Bill by Prime Minister DF Malan - was passed in 1953, giving women legal rights to their property, income and children. One of those who spoke in support of the Bill was a newly elected Member of Parliament, whose maiden speech this was – Helen Suzman.

One of Bertha’s supporters, former *Rand Daily Mail* editor Rayner Ellis, wrote the following “Ode to Bertha”:

Bertha’s Bill is a bitter pill
 To the wretched man without good will
 Who doesn’t treat his wife, his sister or his daughter
 With the love and affection that he really oughter.
 Let Husbands rage and Tyrants glower,
 No longer need the housewife cower,
 For this is the last, the fatal hour
 Of that dreaded bane, the marital power.
 How happy now our womenfolk,
 Freed from old oppression’s yoke
 By a female Solomon in the House
 Who feared neither Minister, man nor mouse!
 Now Bertha’s Bill is the people’s will
 And we all admire her courage and skill.

Having finally achieved what she had set out to do, Bertha retired from Parliament in 1958. She now turned her attention to the equality of women under Jewish law. Here she was not successful, and the battle continues.

In her autobiography, Bertha wrote that the morning after the bill was passed “there came the telegrams, shoals of them from all over the country, many from women I had never heard of. In their gratitude many of the women’s organisations bestowed on me such honours as they could... the Union of Jewish Women gave me an Honorary Life membership... The United Party women of Claremont [sic], under Mrs Waterson’s leadership presented me with a charming little silver salver ‘in appreciation’”.

And this is the salver that is proudly displayed in The Samson Centre.

NOTES

1 His contemporary Harry Schrire referred to him as “the fanatical Zionist [who] had the gift and fervour of a Hyde

Park Corner speaker”, Schrire, Harry, ‘Jewish Life in District Six Before World War 1: A Memoir’, *Jewish Affairs*, Rosh Hashanah, 2008.

- 2 Schrire, Gwynne, ‘Holocaust, History and memorabilia: The SAJBD Cape Council and the Preservation of the South African Jewish Past’, *Jewish Affairs*, Pesach, 2011.
- 3 Solomon, Avram Meir, ‘Abba Eban and Early Cape Zionism’, *Jewish Affairs*, Pesach, 2003.
- 4 Solomon, Bertha, *Time Remembered: The Story of a Fight*, Cape Town (Howard Timmins), 1968.
- 5 Unlike many unfortunate people, including my own great-grandparents who lived nearby in District Six.
- 6 Enid Alexander, *Morris Alexander, A Biography*, Cape Town (Juta), 1953.
- 7 Prosser, Julia, *The Jews of KwaZulu-Natal: A History*, Durban (Fishwicks), 2008.
- 8 Michael Comay, Influential Israeli Diplomat - Chicago Tribune, articles.chicagotribune.com > Featured Articles > *American Jews* Cached You +1’d this publicly. Undo 15 Nov 1987; Michael S. Comay Is Dead at 79; An Influential Diplomat in Israel ...www.nytimes.com > COLLECTIONS > AMERICAN JEWS.
- 9 Katz, Elaine, ‘Bertha Solomon: A Feminist for her time’, *Jewish Affairs*, 1993, 48:2.
- 10 Robins, Gwynne (ed.), *South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Council): A Century of Communal Challenges*, SA Jewish Board of Deputies, 2004.
- 11 Sutton, Joan and Kantey, Mike, *Touching Circles: A Family Chronicle of the Twentieth Century in South Africa*, Cape Town (Watermark Press), 2009.

The only foreign affairs journal coming to you directly from Jerusalem

THE ISRAEL JOURNAL of Foreign Affairs

ISRAELI FOREIGN RELATIONS

Published by the Israel Council on Foreign Relations

www.israeljfa.com

A BRIEF JOURNEY THROUGH ENGLISH JEWISH HISTORY

*

Bernard Katz

Jews probably lived in Britain from as early as mid-Roman times. After the destruction of the Second Temple in CE 70, the Roman world was flooded with Jewish slaves and it is likely that a number of these would have landed up in Britain.¹ It is also possible that in the subsequent Anglo-Saxon period some Jews would have had trading activities extending to Britain, although no evidence exists to substantiate this.² According to Cecil Roth, if such a community existed, at some point it ceased to exist; no permanent settlement was formed, no community was established and no synagogue was built.³

The First Anglo-Jewish Community: From the Norman Conquest to the Expulsion

In 1066, the Normans under William the Conqueror conquered England. The virtual absence of an English middle class and a scarcity of money provided an opportunity for Jews then living in northern France to follow William to England.⁴ This early community was comprised almost entirely of financiers and their dependants.⁵ Roth is of the view that a settled and relatively numerous Anglo-Jewish community owes its origin to the massacres at Rouen in northern France in 1096, although no documentary proof exists to support this.⁶ The Jews were initially treated tolerantly by the Norman kings and it is likely that Henry I (1100-35) issued them a favourable charter. The text of the charter has been lost although it was clearly important for it was referred to for nearly two centuries as a model document.⁷ A notorious first for England, however, was the first recorded blood libel, which took place in Norwich in 1144 following the death of a boy named William.

During the period of Henry II (1154-89) England was at peace and during this time Aaron of Lincoln (c. 1125-1186) was the leading Jew in England, the most outstanding financier and reputedly the wealthiest man in the country. The Saladin Tithe introduced in 1188 to finance the Third Crusade was the first English tax on private property. Jews were taxed at 25% compared to 10% for the rest of the population and Jewish capital at the time is estimated to have comprised

one-third of the mobile wealth of the country.⁸

The crusading spirit of Richard I ended the period of relative tolerance for the Jews. The tragic event in York in 1190 took place soon after Richard's coronation. The Jewish community of York took refuge in Clifford's Tower and after a siege lasting several days Rabbi Yomtov persuaded his community to avoid massacre by dying by their own hands. The following day, the few remaining surviving Jews promised to submit to baptism but after the gates were opened they were all murdered.

By the 13th Century, the Jewish community were regarded only as a source of revenue and were exploited by tallage after tallage.⁹ This merciless exploitation, together with the introduction of laws prohibiting lending (1275), led to the ultimate ruin of the community. By the time Edward I became king the Jews were so impoverished that their importance to the treasury was diminished.¹⁰ After some vacillation on how to deal with the Jewish problem he decided on the expulsion route, which was affected on 18 July 1290 (*Tisha B'Av*). England was thus the first country to expel its Jews – a second notorious first. *Encyclopaedia Judaica* puts the number of Jews at this time as perhaps fewer than 4000¹¹ but Roth quotes a number of around 16000.¹²

Oliver Cromwell and the Jewish return to England

Then followed a period of almost 400 years during which no Jews lived openly in England. Their readmission is dated 1658 and two events combined to facilitate this. Firstly Menasseh ben Israel, a rabbi from Amsterdam who wished to hasten the coming of the Messiah, came to England in 1655 and presented Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector, with a petition requesting that the laws preventing Jewish entry into English be repealed. Cromwell supported the petition and referred it to the Council of State who in turn referred it to a Conference, but given stiff opposition no decision was taken. Of significant importance arising out of the Conference was that its two leading judges advised that there was no law forbidding readmission because the expulsion of 1290 had been an act of royal prerogative and applied only to the specific people concerned; therefore there was no act to repeal. The course of these discussions evoked enormous public

Bernard Katz, a frequent contributor to Jewish Affairs, is a Chartered Accountant who works for an investment bank in Johannesburg.

interest and a number of bizarre rumours did the rounds, including one that the Jews had made an offer of £500 000 for St Pauls Cathedral which they intended to convert into a synagogue and that this transaction would have succeeded had parliament not insisted on increasing the purchase price to £800 000.¹³

Secondly a Marrano living in London, Antonio Rodrigues Robles, had two ships and their cargoes confiscated on the grounds that they were enemy property - at the time England was at war with Spain. Robles petitioned Cromwell on the grounds that he was not a Spaniard but a Portuguese "of the Hebrew nation." His petition was granted but no answer to Menasseh's has been found.¹⁴ The effect of all this was that permission to Jews to settle in England had been granted informally.¹⁵ The benefits of this informality had advantages, since elsewhere in Europe emancipation came with conditions whereas in England there were none.¹⁶

Roth writes that the intensity of Cromwell's personal interest in the question of the readmission of Jews is certain although the complex reasons which motivated him are difficult to fathom.¹⁷ In the period prior to readmission, Puritanism in England had reached its peak and with it an interest in Hebrew studies and the Old Testament. This and the economic revival under Cromwell likely created a favourable attitude towards Jews.¹⁸ Winston Churchill later referred to the expulsion and readmission of Jews in terms of it being a Calvinist (Protestant) ruler who rescinded the ban imposed by a Catholic king.¹⁹

England's Sephardi community grew from about 150 in 1660 to some 600 in 1700. They were soon joined by Ashkenazim, who by 1700 numbered about 300.²⁰ The Sephardim built a synagogue in Bevis Marks in the East End of London in 1701 and in the 1690s the Ashkenazim opened their own synagogue, later known as the Great Synagogue, in Duke's Place near Bevis Marks. Sephardim continued arriving in England in the 18th Century, including from Holland and Italy, where the grandfathers of Benjamin Disraeli and Sir Moses Montefiore came respectively. By the end of the 18th Century, they numbered only about 2000, despite the amount of immigration, from which can be deduced that many had assimilated into the non-Jewish population. By then, the Ashkenazi population had reached 20 000.²¹

The 19th Century: Emancipation, the Rothschilds and Disraeli

The Napoleonic Wars created the opportunity for the Rothschild family in particular to occupy an important place in finance and society. Mayer Amschel Rothschild, who had founded the dynasty in Frankfurt, sent his son Nathan to open a branch in London. Roth describes Nathan as perhaps the greatest financial genius the world had or has yet

known.²² It was he who, attempting to keep up prices on a falling stock market, brought news of Wellington's victory at Waterloo to an anxious prime minister.²³ Nathan fell ill (and shortly thereafter died) at the wedding of his son Lionel to Charlotte, daughter of his brother Karl in 1836. Of the 58 marriages by descendants of Mayer Amschel in the century following the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, exactly one-half were between first cousins.²⁴ When the Rothschilds spoke about "marrying out" they did not mean out of Jewry but out of the family.²⁵

Lionel Rothschild was elected to parliament from the City of London for the first time in 1847 but could not take his seat as he refused to recite the oath which contained the words "on the true faith of a Christian." In 1858, after having been elected by the City of London for the fourth time, a compromise was reached – the House of Lords, which had continuously blocked the enabling legislation, agreed that each House could settle its own oath. The House of Commons was thus able to drop the offending words and Lionel Rothschild took his seat. This event is widely regarded as the completion of Jewish political emancipation with Jews being citizens on the same basis as everyone else.²⁶ In a curious irony, having fought so hard to be admitted, Lionel Rothschild spent 15 years in the House of Commons without making a single speech.²⁷ Lionel's son Nathaniel became the first Lord Rothschild and his son, Lionel, the second. It was the second Lord Rothschild who became a committed Zionist and to whom the Balfour Declaration was addressed.

Sir Moses Montefiore, after amassing significant wealth, devoted himself to Jewish causes. The most public of these was the Damascus Affair of 1840, when members of the Damascus Jewish community were accused of ritual murder, imprisoned and tortured. With the support of the British government, he negotiated the release and recognition of innocence of the nine surviving prisoners of the thirteen imprisoned.

Benjamin Disraeli, who became prime minister in 1868 and again in 1874, was baptised at the age of 13 after his father had had a disagreement with the Bevis Marks Synagogue. He was open and proud of his Jewish heritage, once retorting to an insult in the House of Commons, "when the ancestors of the right honourable gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the temple of Solomon." In a debate on Jewish emancipation in parliament before becoming prime minister he said, "Where is your Christianity if you do not believe in their Judaism?...On every altar...we find the table of Jewish law....All the early Christians were Jews....If you had not forgotten what you owe to this people...you as Christians would be only too ready to seize the first opportunity of meeting the claims of those who profess this religion." It was said that he jeopardised his political career to make this speech.²⁸

Disraeli's purchase of the Suez Canal in 1876 ushered in a quarter of a century of imperial expansion, one unequalled since the conquests of Alexander the Great. In the view of Barbara Tuchman, it made the physical possession of Palestine inevitable.²⁹ When the shares in the Suez Canal became available for sale Disraeli sent his private secretary Montagu Corry to Rothschild to tell him the prime minister wanted £4 million "tomorrow". The story goes that Rothschild asked, "What is your security?" to which Cory replied "The British government" and Rothschild said, "You shall have it".³⁰

By 1881, at the commencement of large-scale immigration from Eastern Europe, there were around 65 000 Jews in England. By 1914, it is estimated that together with immigration of 150 000 and natural increase that number had swelled to approximately 300 000.³¹ The Aliens Act of 1905 initially reduced Jewish immigrants, but after the Liberal Party came to power in 1906 immigration soon increased to its previous levels.³²

Zionism and the Birth of Israel

At the time of the issuing of the Balfour Declaration in 1917, most prominent Jews in England were antagonistic to the Zionist project. Herbert Samuel and his cousin Edwin Montagu became the first two Jewish cabinet ministers. The former was a prominent supporter of the Declaration whereas the latter was a vociferous opponent. The origins of Britain's role in the restoration of Israel, according to Tuchman, "are to be found in two motives, religious and political. One was a debt of conscience owed to the people of the Bible, the other was a strategy of empire which required possession of their land."³³ She writes that when, in 1538, Henry VIII issued a proclamation that the English translation of the Bible was to be placed in every church in England, the moral law of the Hebrew nation became the most powerful influence on English culture and that without the English Bible it is doubtful that a Balfour Declaration would ever have been issued in the name of the British government.³⁴

It is little known that Henry VIII owned a complete set of the Talmud, which he acquired at the time of his desired divorce from Catherine of Aragon. He knew that Jewish law permitted divorce and wished to find support for his predicament. Jack Lunzer, an Orthodox collector of Judaica, discovered these in the library of Westminster Abbey but they would not sell them to him. When he later purchased the 900 year-old title deeds to Westminster Abbey, however, they were prepared to exchange it for the set of Talmud.³⁵

The two leading architects of the Balfour Declaration were Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour and Prime Minister David Lloyd George. The draft put to the cabinet was tearfully opposed

by Edwin Montagu. Weizmann, who had been asked to wait in another room was called for to rebut the arguments raised by Montagu but the messengers sent could not find him and so the draft was withdrawn.³⁶ The compromise watered down the original intent, created ambiguous wording and undermined its ultimate effectiveness. The letter to Lord Rothschild "favour[ed] the establishment in Palestine of a national home."

The motivations of Balfour and Lloyd George have been much debated by historians. Balfour's appears to have been Biblical. His niece and biographer Blanche Dugdale observed that his "life-long" interest in Judaism "originated in the Old Testament training" and that he considered that the "Christian religion and civilization owe[d] to Judaism an immeasurable debt, shamefully ill repaid."³⁷

Weizmann first met Balfour in 1906 at Balfour's request. Balfour was interested to understand why the Jews had rejected the Uganda offer. In his memoirs Weizmann records part of the conversation,

Then suddenly I said, "Mr Balfour, supposing I were to offer you Paris instead of London, would you take it?"

He sat up, looked at me, and answered, "But Dr Weizmann, we have London".

"That's true," I said, "but we had Jerusalem when London was a marsh."³⁸

The motives of Lloyd George were more complex and confusing. Many historians regard them as being political and Lloyd George in his memoirs substantiated this by claiming that it was a reward for Weizmann for synthesizing acetone used in the production of explosives (something Weizmann disputed).³⁹ Lloyd George further argued that the Balfour Declaration was intended as a means of gaining sympathy from Jewish financiers in America and Jewish Bolsheviks in Russia, although these Jews were hardly sympathetic to Zionism. Tuchman is of the view that Lloyd George doctored the facts as in the 1930s, the time in which he was writing, the problem of Britain's Mandate had become acute and he could hardly admit that his decision had been based in large part on sentiment (Biblical).⁴⁰ Weizmann records that Lloyd George advocated a Jewish homeland long before he became prime minister.⁴¹ Balfour had once recounted how he had been told by him that "when Dr Weizmann was talking of Palestine he kept bringing up place names which were more familiar to me than those of the Western front."⁴²

The San Remo Peace Conference in 1920 awarded Great Britain the Mandate for Palestine. In 1922, the Churchill White Paper clarified the Balfour Declaration and excluded the area of Transjordan. In 1937, the Peel Commission recommended the partition of Palestine – a proposal which was accepted with reluctance

by the Jews but rejected by the Arabs. The Chamberlain White Paper of May 1939 abandoned the Peel proposals and limited Jewish immigration into Palestine at a crucial time to 75 000 over five years. The Labour Party described this White Paper as “an act of moral betrayal”; however, after it came to power in 1945 it reversed its previous support of Jewish statehood. Its chief protagonist in this matter was foreign minister Ernest Bevan, who at a Labour Party conference in 1946 dismissed with contempt an American proposal that 100 000 Jews be allowed into Palestine immediately, saying that America’s support was only because they “did not want too many of them in New York.”⁴³

Relations between Britain and the *Yishuv* deteriorated further with the assassination of Lord Moyne in 1944 and the hanging of two British army sergeants in 1947. Eventually, Britain passed the Mandate on to the United Nations in 1947 and abstained from the United Nations partition resolution which established the state. It only recognised Israel in January 1949.

Tuchman asks the question whether Israel exist today because of the British or despite them. In her view, as with the American colonies Britain laid the foundations of a state and then resisted the logical development of what she had done until the original bond frayed out of bitterness and strife. The answer to the question, she concludes, is neither one thing or the other, but partly both – one of those unsatisfactory truths with which history so often defeats its interpreters.⁴⁴

In the 1930s and 1940s a net addition of 55 000 Jewish refugees resulted in the Anglo-Jewish population peaking at around 400 000 in the early 1950s.⁴⁵ Although a smaller immigration than that of the Russian Jews of 1881–1914, it was qualitatively as important as this immigration was mainly middle class and from Central Europe.⁴⁶

Winston Churchill’s official biographer, Martin Gilbert, is a great admirer of Churchill and in particular his unflinching support for Jewish and Zionist causes. In the preface to his 2007 book *Churchill and the Jews*, he records a remark by General Sir Edward Louis Spears, a friend of Churchill’s, who told Gilbert, “Even Winston had a fault. He was too fond of Jews.”⁴⁷

In an article written in 1920 titled ‘Zionism versus Bolshevism’, Churchill wrote, “Some people like Jews and some do not; but no thoughtful man can doubt the fact that they are beyond all question the most formidable and the most remarkable race which has ever appeared in the world.” Later in the same article he continued, “We owe to the Jews in the Christian revelation a system of ethics which, even if it were entirely separated from the supernatural, would be incomparably the most precious possession of mankind, worth in fact the fruits of all other wisdom and learning put together.”⁴⁸

Churchill has been criticised for the White Paper of 1922, which excised the portion that is

today Jordan from Palestine. Yet many Zionists, including James de Rothschild, understood that by removing Abdullah from any control over Western Palestine, Churchill had ensured the survival of the Jewish National Home. Thirty-four years later, Rothschild wrote to Churchill, thanking him: “You laid the foundation of the Jewish State by separating Abdullah’s kingdom from the rest of Palestine. Without this much-opposed prophetic foresight, there would not have been an Israel today.”⁴⁹ Churchill was also scathing towards the Peel Commission partition proposal and viewed the 1939 White Paper as a betrayal of the Balfour Declaration.

Despite the hostility of the British army to a separate Jewish military unit, a 25 000-strong Jewish Brigade was eventually formed in 1944. Johnson writes that the experience gained in the Jewish Brigade, which without Churchill’s support would not have been formed, was critical to Israel’s success in 1948.⁵⁰

When the Labour Party became the government in 1945, an unprecedented number of Jews were elected to parliament – all of whom were Labour except for one Independent Conservative and one Communist. After 1970, the number of Jewish Conservative Party MPs increased while those representing the Labour Party decreased. Of the 28 Jews elected to Parliament in the 1983 election, 17 Jews were Conservative and 11 Labour. In 1986, Margaret Thatcher’s cabinet contained five Jews.⁵¹

The Chief Rabbis, 1913-2013

Rabbi Dr J H Hertz was Chief Rabbi of the British Empire from 1913-1946. His outspoken support of Zionism brought him into conflict with the communal leadership. Israel Brodie became chief rabbi in 1948. The first British-born Chief Rabbi, he had been educated at Oxford and Jews’ College and had served as senior chaplain to His Majesty’s Forces. Chaim Bermant writes that he was an amiable man who at the time of his appointment “lacked a doctorate, a beard and a wife, but quickly acquired all three.”⁵²

Immanuel Jakobovits (later Lord) was Chief Rabbi from 1966-1991. He was brought up in the German tradition of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and remained loyal to the ideology of strict observance combined with an engagement with the outside world. In his inauguration speech he said “I am resolved to preserve the Orthodox traditionsI cannot bend or compromise Jewish law which is not mine to make or unmake, but I can administer it with compassion....”⁵³

Jakobovits’ hard-line stand on social issues and identification with Thatcherism troubled many non-Orthodox Jews. Margaret Thatcher recalled how impressed she was at the remark he made to her during their first meeting. At the time she was Secretary of State for Education. Jakobovits said to her, “You are really the Minister of Defence”⁵⁴

Thatcher regarded him as “her archbishop” having little sympathy with the Church of England at the time.⁵⁵ Jakobovits provoked controversy by being the first Orthodox rabbi of any eminence to speak out against Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.⁵⁶

Jonathan Sacks (also later Lord) served as chief rabbi from 1991-2013. During his term he came under increasing pressure from the rabbinate on the one hand and assertive non-orthodox movements on the other.⁵⁷ In 1995 he was attacked for endorsing the peace process and the principle of withdrawing from the West Bank⁵⁸

Sacks is a prolific author. In *Future Tense*, he bemoans the fact that Jews are either engaging with the world and losing their Jewish identity, or preserving their identity at the cost of disengaging from the world. The book is in essence a plea for a modern orthodox vision of a synthesis and integration between the worlds of Torah and modern culture.⁵⁹ His book *The Dignity of Difference* was condemned by some Orthodox rabbis as being “heretical” with reference to the views expressed on the validity of other religions. A new edition was later issued which altered or deleted a number of passages including “In the course of history, God has spoken to mankind in many languages: through Judaism to Jews, Christianity to Christians, Islam to Muslims,” and “No one creed has a monopoly on spiritual truth.”⁶⁰ In *The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning*, Sacks writes, “To believe in God, faith and the importance of religious practice does not involve an abdication of the intellect....It does not involve reading Genesis literally. It does not involve rejecting the findings of science.”⁶¹

Rabbi Sacks was succeeded as Chief Rabbi by Ephraim Mirvis in 2013. Rabbi Mirvis grew up in Cape Town and was a pupil at Herzlia. His father served as the rabbi at both the Claremont and Wynberg Hebrew Congregations.

Antisemitism in England

In his book *Trials of the Diaspora*, Anthony Julius identifies four distinct kinds of antisemitism in England:

- A radical and intense form of antisemitism prevalent during the medieval period (1066-1290) and specifically from the middle of the 12th Century, characterised by defamation, expropriation of wealth, killings and injuries, discriminatory and humiliating legislation and finally expulsion.⁶²
- A literary antisemitism, which kept antisemitism alive during the period of banishment (1290-1656) and continues to the present time. Jew-hatred is a feature of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* which contains the blood libel accusation and the unflattering depictions of both Shylock in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* and

Fagin in Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*. Other authors accused by Julius of antisemitism include Christopher Marlowe, T S Eliot, Rudyard Kipling, H G Wells, G K Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc.

- A modern antisemitism (1660s–1960s) of insult and partial exclusion, pervasive but contained and characterised by non-lethal or minor antisemitism.⁶³
- A new configuration of anti-Zionism (late 1960s to the present). This emerged after the Six Day War and became pervasive in the 1990s and 2000s.⁶⁴ It takes Israel and the Zionist project as its collective term for the Jews and treats Zionism and the State of Israel as illegitimate Jewish enterprises. It has reinvigorated antisemitism and given it a future which now constitutes the greatest threat to Anglo-Jewish security and morale.

Julius concludes his introduction on a sombre note: “*Trials of the Diaspora* has been written across a period of rising violence and abuse directed at English Jews. Of the present conjuncture, then, my provisional judgement is that it is quite bad, and might get worse. Certainly it would seem that the closed season on Jews is over.”⁶⁵

In 1978, in the presence of the Chief Rabbi and the Archbishop of York, a commemorative plaque was unveiled at the city of York’s Clifford’s Tower. This read, “On the night of Friday, 16 March 1190, some 150 Jews and Jewesses of York, having sought protection in the royal castle on this site from a mob incited by Richard Malebisse and others, chose to die at each other’s hands rather than renounce their own faith.”

It is popularly believed that a *cherem* (ban) was placed on Jews living in York because of this incident, even to the extent of their being discouraged from eating a meal or spending the night there. However, there appears to be no evidence of an official ban and Jonathan Romain, an expert on medieval Jewry, believes that no such ban existed.⁶⁶

Gertrude Himmelfarb, in her book *Philosemitism in England*, states that her motivation in writing it was not to diminish the problem of antisemitism but rather “to complement it by revealing another aspect of Jewish experience – the respect, even reverence, for the Jews and Judaism displayed by non-Jews.”⁶⁷ She observes that the history of philosemitism may well have started with England which, more than any other country, has produced over the past several centuries a rich literature of philosemitism, reflecting the principles and policies that have made modern England a model of liberality and civility.⁶⁸

After the Hellenic period of the 18th Century, an Evangelical Revival ushered in a return to Hebraism in England, with the importance of the Bible in the following century being almost as pervasive as during the Cromwell era.⁶⁹

During the 19th Century, an entirely new genre of philosemitic literature also emerged. This featured “admirable, even heroic Jews”, and included such works as Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, Benjamin Disraeli’s *Tancred* and George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*.⁷⁰ By the time of the latter’s publication in 1876, blatantly antisemitic novels were no longer respectable.⁷¹ Dickens, whose *Oliver Twist* was published in 1838, protested the characterisation of Fagin as antisemitic, arguing rather that it was unfortunately true that “that class of criminal almost invariably was a Jew” and that other wicked characters in his book were Christian.⁷² (Dickens nevertheless made amends later by featuring a saintly Jewish character in his last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*).

Himmelfarb laments that the resurgence of antisemitism is most ominous in England because it is “so discordant, so out of keeping with the spirit of the country.”⁷³ In 1999, William and Hilary Rubinstein concluded that in England, “antisemitism in the mainstream has declined to such an extent that it has virtually disappeared”⁷⁴ yet less than a decade later a new book by William Rubinstein bore the subtitle “The Fall and Rise of Antisemitism.”⁷⁵ In a speech delivered in March 2013, Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks warned of the rising levels of antisemitism in England and Europe. He said “In the Middle Ages Jews, were hated because of their religion. In the 19th and 20th Centuries Jews were hated because of their race. Today....they are hated because of their state....Anti-Zionism is the new Antisemitism.”⁷⁶

Ed Miliband, who as leader of the Labour Party has a realistic chance of becoming Britain’s first Jewish prime minister in modern times, recently had a Q&A session with Britain’s Jewish community. Miliband grew up with a Marxist father and admitted that the family was “not very involved” from a Jewish point of view. He nevertheless described himself as being a Zionist, although this did not mean that he supported everything Israel’s government did, and said that he had “respect, admiration and indeed a debt to Israel.” He also stated that he would oppose boycotts of Israel and was prepared to say so to trade union members who had been at the forefront of the Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions campaign, even though they were also largely responsible for his election as Labour leader.⁷⁷

Anglo-Jewry Today

Historically and still today, some two-thirds of the Jews in England live in London. Immigrants from Eastern Europe primarily lived the East End, where at one time 125 000 Jews lived in an area of 1.5 square miles.⁷⁸ These days, the population comprises mainly Asian immigrants. As the Jewish peer Lord Greville Janner put it, “they’re speaking Hindustani where *mamaloshen* used to be spoken.”⁷⁹

Bevis Marks Synagogue in the East End is the

oldest synagogue in the British Commonwealth. It was consecrated in 1701 and modelled after the Portuguese synagogue in Amsterdam. On the lectern in front of the Aron Kodesh are ten large brass candlesticks symbolising the Ten Commandments. These days the synagogue is lit by electricity but when candles are used on Shabbat it is said that it takes ninety minutes to light them. Twelve columns supporting the gallery symbolise the twelve tribes. The oak benches are from the 1657 synagogue, the first built after the resettlement. A plaque on the current building on that site, located a short distance from the Bevis Marks Synagogue, reads, “Site of the First Synagogue after the Resettlement, 1657-1701.” There is a long-standing, if unconfirmed, tradition in the community that an oak beam from a ship of the Royal Navy was used as a roof girder. Another is that on the day of its consecration Joseph Avis, a Quaker who built the synagogue, returned all the profit he had earned since he refused to make a financial gain on the erection of a “House of God.”⁸⁰

The Marble Arch Synagogue located in the West End is the successor of the Great Synagogue - London’s first Ashkenazi congregation which was destroyed by German bombs in 1941. After the war the decision not to rebuild the synagogue in the East End recognised the demographic changes that had occurred. The British Museum includes many documents from the biblical period, while the Jewish Museum covers the history of the Anglo-Jewry. The *Jewish Chronicle*, established in 1841, continues to appear to this day, making it the oldest continuing Jewish newspaper in the world.⁸¹

Manchester is home to the second largest Jewish community in England, numbering 25 000.⁸² Outside the Jewish Museum is a commemorative plaque which reads: “Dr Chaim Weizmann (1874-1952) Scientist, Zionist leader and the first president of the State of Israel (1948) lived in Manchester 1904-1917”. Further north the Gateshead Yeshiva, founded in the town of that name in 1929, has become a centre of learning of international significance in the Jewish world. Its Jewish population grew by 92% between the censuses of 2001 and 2011, and is now approximately 3000, reflecting the Orthodox composition of the community.⁸³

From its peak of around 400 000 in the early 1950s, the UK’s Jewish population has declined significantly as a result of intermarriage and declining birth rates. Based on the 2011 Census, the Jewish population of England and Wales is estimated to be around 284 000, which reflects a static Jewish population compared to the previous census in 2001. A more detailed analysis of the numbers reveals two distinct demographic processes taking place within the Jewish population, with significant increases in areas of large Orthodox concentrations and substantial contractions in areas of largely non-Orthodox concentrations.⁸⁴

NOTES

- 1 Roth, Cecil, *A History of the Jews in England*, Oxford University Press, Third edition, 1964, p1.
 - 2 *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Keter Publishing House, Second edition, 2007, 6:410 hereafter cited as "EJ".
 - 3 Roth, op cit, p2
 - 4 Ibid, p4
 - 5 Roth, p4 and EJ 6:410
 - 6 Roth, op cit, p6
 - 7 Ibid, p6
 - 8 Ibid, p17
 - 9 "A compulsory tax levied by the Norman and early Angevin kings of England upon the demesne lands of the crown and upon all royal towns" (tallage: meaning and definitions | Infoplease.com <http://dictionary.infoplease.com/tallage#ixzz2iXBJvPIE>).
 - 10 EJ, 6:411
 - 11 Ibid, 6:412
 - 12 Roth, op cit, p91
 - 13 Ibid, p162
 - 14 Lipman, VD, *A History of the Jews in Britain Since 1858*, Leicester University Press, 1990, p3.
 - 15 EJ, 6:413.
 - 16 Lipman, op cit, p4.
 - 17 Roth, op cit, p158.
 - 18 EJ, 6:413.
 - 19 Churchill, Winston, *A History of the English Speaking Peoples, Volume I, The Birth of Britain*, Cassel and Co., 1956, p228.
 - 20 Lipman, op cit, p4.
 - 21 Ibid, pp4-5.
 - 22 Roth, Cecil, *The Magnificent Rothschilds*, Robert Hale, 1939, p23 hereafter '*The Magnificent Rothschilds*'.
 - 23 Lipman, op cit, pp4-5.
 - 24 *The Magnificent Rothschilds*, op cit, p62.
 - 25 Johnson, Paul, *A History of the Jews*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987, p317.
 - 26 Lipman, op cit, p9.
 - 27 Himmelfarb, Gertrude, *The People of the Book, Philosemitism in England, >From Cromwell to Churchill*, Encounter Books, 2011, p79.
 - 28 Tuchman, Barbara, *Bible and Sword, England and Palestine >From Bronze Age to Balfour*, Alvin Redman Ltd, 1956, p141.
 - 29 Ibid, p161
 - 30 Ibid, p165
 - 31 Lipman, op cit, p49
 - 32 Ibid, p73
 - 33 Tuchman, op cit, Foreword
 - 34 Ibid, p52
 - 35 Clarfield, Geoffrey, *The Redemption of the King's Talmud*, New English Review, July 2011
 - 36 Sachar, Howard, *The Course of Modern Jewish History*, Vintage Books, Revised and updated, 1990, p447
 - 37 Tuchman, op cit, p199
 - 38 Weizmann, Chaim, *Trial and Error*, Hamish Hamilton, 1949, p144
 - 39 Ibid, p191
 - 40 Tuchman, op cit, p215
 - 41 Weizmann, op cit, p192
 - 42 Tuchman, op cit, p206
 - 43 Sachar, op cit, p562
 - 44 Tuchman, op cit, p223
 - 45 Lipman, op cit, p232
 - 46 EJ, 6:418
 - 47 Gilbert, Martin, *Churchill and the Jews*, Simon & Schuster, 2007, pxv
 - 48 Churchill, Winston, *The Collected Essays of Sir Winston Churchill*, Centenary Limited Edition, Volume IV: *Churchill at Large, Library of Imperial History*, 1976, *Zionism versus Bolshevism*, p26. Article appeared in the *Illustrated Sunday Herald*, 8 February 1920.
 - 49 Gilbert, op cit, p57, quoting letter of 1 February 1955: Churchill papers 2/197.
 - 50 Johnson, op cit, pp520-521.
 - 51 Lipman, op cit, p236.
 - 52 Bermant, Chaim, *Lord Jakobovits*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990, p67.
 - 53 Ibid, p 87.
 - 54 Persoff, Meir, Compiled and edited by, *Immanuel Jakobovits: A Prophet in Israel*, Vallentine Mitchell, 2002, p269.
 - 55 Ibid, Obituary in *The Times*, p307.
 - 56 Bermant, op cit, p5
 - 57 EJ, 6:428.
 - 58 Ibid, 6:431.
 - 59 Sacks, Jonathan, *Future Tense, A Vision for Jews and Judaism in the Global Culture*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2009, p2.
 - 60 Petre, Jonathan, Chief Rabbi revises book after attacks by critics, *Telegraph*, 15 February 2003.
 - 61 Sacks, Jonathan, *The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2011, p1.
 - 62 Julius, Anthony, *Trials of the Diaspora, A History of Anti-Semitism in England*, Oxford University Press, 2010, p108.
 - 63 Ibid, pp242, 247.
 - 64 Ibid, p441.
 - 65 Ibid, plviii.
 - 66 *Death in York*, www.bbc.co.uk.
 - 67 Himmelfarb, op cit, p3.
 - 68 Ibid, p4.
 - 69 Tuchman, op cit, p116.
 - 70 Himmelfarb, op cit, p84.
 - 71 Ibid, p111.
 - 72 Ibid, p112.
 - 73 Ibid, p3.
 - 74 Rubinstein, William and Rubinstein, Hilary, *Philosemitism: Admiration and support in the English-Speaking World for Jews, 1840-1939*, Macmillan Press, 1999, p189.
 - 75 Rubinstein, William, *Israel, the Jews and the West: The Fall and Rise of Anti-Semitism*, 2008.
 - 76 Sacks, Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan, Speech titled "*The Will to Life*," Delivered to The American Israel Public Affairs Committee ("AIPAC"), 4 March 2013.
 - 77 Shaviv, Miriam, *The Times of Israel*, www.timesofisrael.com, 8 March 2013.
 - 78 Lipman, op cit, p51.
 - 79 Frank, Ben, *A Travel Guide to Jewish Europe*, England, Pelican Publishing Company, Third edition, 2001, p122.
 - 80 Meek, HA, *The Synagogue*, Phaidon Press, 1995, p146.
 - 81 EJ, 6:415.
 - 82 Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2012 Census Results (England and Wales): Initial Insights about the UK Jewish Population, 12 December 2012.
 - 83 Ibid.
 - 84 Ibid.
-

IN THE BEGINNING WAS A SCHOOL: THE ALLIANCE ISRAÉLITE UNIVERSELLE AND ITS LEGACY

*

Anny Wynchank

The Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU)¹ is a Paris-based international Jewish organization. Over 150 years old, it was founded in Paris in 1860 by Adolphe Crémieux and six other prominent French Jews. It is probably the world's oldest non-religious, international NGO, yet it remains little known in the English-speaking world.

The AIU evolved into a most extraordinary social engineering project: a network that eventually would include 216 schools, which transformed the lives of many thousand of Jews in the Ottoman Empire and around the Mediterranean Basin. It is still going strong. While most of its work is now focused on Israel and France, it also has schools in Morocco, Canada, the USA, Belgium and Switzerland.

The AIU celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2010 with a series of festive functions in France, Israel and England. In Paris, the Israeli and French Presidents, Shimon Peres and Nicolas Sarkozy, presided at a gala dinner, the City Hall hosted an extensive historical photographic exhibition and there was a splendid celebration at the Palais des Congrès. A theatrical festival, 'Généralions Alliance', gathered together present and past members of the AIU's schools in France, Israel and Morocco, who recreated important events from the AIU's rich history. A documentary film, *In the beginning was a school*, especially made for the anniversary, retraced the AIU's history and achievements and the French and Israeli Post Offices issued stamps to commemorate the anniversary.

Why was an institution devoted to the education and protection of Jews in many different countries considered necessary in 1860 France? To answer this, some historical background is necessary.

In 1790, the French Revolutionary Government had liberated France's Jews and granted full civic rights to the Jews of Avignon and of Portuguese descent. Napoleon Bonaparte, who came to power

Anny Wynchank is Professor in the School of Languages and Literatures, University of Cape Town. She thanks J-C Kuperminc, Directeur de la Bibliothèque et des Archives of the AIU, both for providing relevant literature and for their very useful discussions.



Commemorative stamps issued by the Israeli and French Post Offices, to mark the AIU's 150th anniversary.

afterwards, was a great admirer and supporter of the Jews. During his Egyptian military campaign against Britain, before becoming emperor, he issued a most remarkable proclamation regarding

them. In Jerusalem, on 20 April 1799, the following address to all Jews was published:

Buonaparte, Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the French Republic in Africa and Asia, to the Rightful Heirs of Palestine: "This great Nation [France] is asking you to take what it has conquered for you. Make haste! This moment will not reoccur perhaps for another thousand years! Reclaim your civil rights, your place as a nation among the nations of the world. You have the right to worship the Lord freely and according to your religion."²

Unfortunately, Napoleon was defeated when Acre (today's Akko) fell to the British. He thus returned to Paris, steadily rising in the government and finally becoming emperor in 1804. It is highly likely that had he not lost both this battle and his Egyptian campaign, a Jewish state would have been established in the Holy Land about a century and a half before the foundation of the State of Israel. Napoleon's Judeophilia went further (although he did express some criticisms of Jews). In 1800 he stated, "If I were governing a Jewish nation, I would rebuild Solomon's Temple."³ After becoming emperor he ensured the passage of laws benefiting Jews throughout France and its Empire. Amongst them was the re-establishment of a Supreme Rabbinical Court (the Grand Sanhedrin). Also, in the many countries that he conquered, he freed Jews from ghettos. In 1807, Judaism was included among France's official religions.

In 1830, the French government placed Judaism on equal footing with Catholicism and Protestantism and thereafter funded rabbis' salaries and the synagogues (these subsidies ended when France formally became a secular state in 1905). French Jews thus became the first in modern times to be fully emancipated. Thereafter they became devotedly and fully French, eager to serve their country. It is hence not surprising that in France the idea of 'civilising' other Jewish communities first appeared. Adolphe Crémieux (1796-1880) was twice the Minister of Justice and the first Jew to become a senator (as well as being, incidentally, the great-uncle of Marcel Proust). It was he, together with six other highly distinguished Jewish Parisians, who founded the AIU.

The following is part of the Manifesto of the AIU, published at its founding in 1860:

To defend the honour of the Jewish name whenever it is attacked; to encourage, by all means at our disposal, the pursuit of useful handicrafts; to combat, where necessary, the ignorance and vice engendered by oppression; to work, by the power of persuasion and by all the moral influences at our command, for the emancipation of our brethren who

still suffer under the burden of unjust legislation; to hasten and solidify complete enfranchisement, by the intellectual and moral regeneration of our brethren: such, in its chief aspects, is the work to which the Alliance Israélite Universelle hereby consecrates itself.

The Charter of the AIU's current Network of schools preserves the principles expressed in this Manifesto:

The Network's schools pass on the core values of solidarity and citizenship underpinning the AIU's founding principles ... They aid pupils to develop their intellectual independence and awareness of their responsibilities as a Jew and citizen.

After receiving the benefits of the Revolution, French Jews believed that less developed Jewish communities should make similar progress. Crémieux was instrumental in a law being passed in 1870 granting French citizenship to all Algerian Jews. Algeria was then a colony, with a large Jewish population. After its conquest in 1830, many Algerian Jews learnt the French language and became Westernised. Soon they proved very useful to the colonial authorities, as minor government officials dealing with the large Muslim population (the Jews' mother tongue being Arabic). The government was thus prevailed upon by Crémieux to grant French nationality to Algerian Jewry.

All the AIU's ideals and intentions are well expressed by the contemporary British historian Lucien Gubbay, whose father was educated by the AIU in Aleppo, once part of the Ottoman Empire:

...the Alliance sought to remake the Jews of North Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans in the idealised self image of the semi-assimilated French Jews of its own day. [...] Once established, the Alliance schools were eagerly grasped as a lifeline by those Jews of the decaying Ottoman Empire able to do so, for it seemed to them that this was the only sure way in which their children could escape from the trough of helpless poverty into which most Jews had by then descended.

Before the coming of the Alliance, Jews could only get European schooling at Catholic or Protestant missionary establishments, which usually did not welcome Jews reluctant to convert to Christianity. And so, it was through the European-style education, provided by Alliance schools, that Sephardim of the Ottoman Empire were able to acquire the rudiments of a secular education [...] So overwhelming was the French cultural influence promoted by the Alliance school system that my own father, brought up in Aleppo and then living in Cairo, told me that

he really felt that he had finally come 'home' on first arriving in Paris. At the peak of its activity before the break-up of the Ottoman Empire, the Alliance was teaching some 40 000 pupils in something like 200 schools.⁴

From the outset, the AIU promoted Jewish self-defense and self-sufficiency through education, even though the word 'education' does not appear in its Manifesto. In effect, all of its good work was accomplished through education, which always included use of the French language and advancing French culture. Also, as will be recorded further on, the AIU interceded to aid victims of anti-Jewish persecution.

The initial programme of the AIU was set out in Article I of its Statutes, whereby it stated it would assist Jews and their Judaism in three ways. Firstly, by providing education, it would work towards the emancipation and intellectual and 'moral regeneration' of Jews. Next, firm support and protection would be provided to Jews persecuted on account of their religion. To this end, appropriate funds were obtained, especially to help Jews outside Europe, and close contacts established with political leaders in Europe and diplomats in countries where Jews were persecuted. Leaders of such countries were pressurised by both the AIU and the European nations to establish human rights and remedy injustices.

Thirdly, not only Europe but European Jewry was alerted to Jewish suffering and injustices by such AIU's publications as the *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle* (1860-1913) and its successors, often in collaboration with the (London) *Jewish Chronicle* using material provided by the AIU.

The AIU always held itself aloof from any direct participation in French or other political stances. Its members' religious opinions (in current terminology, whether orthodox or non-orthodox) were never allowed to influence the AIU's actions or policy. Nor did the AIU wish to disseminate a Jewish variant of French colonialism. It always emphasised its *solidarity* with all fellow Jews. This was clearly demonstrated by its motto, the well-known Talmudic principle כל ישראל ערבים זה בזה (*Kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh* – "all Jews are responsible for one another").

Many appalling incidents in the previous twenty years in part prompted Crémieux and his partners to found the AIU. In 1840, there had been the Ritual Murder accusations in Damascus. After one Father Thomas, superior of a Franciscan Friary in Damascus, went missing, a group of prominent Jews were accused of killing him to obtain blood for use in a Passover ritual. After severe torture two Jews "confessed", another died and one converted to Islam. Crémieux, Sir Moses Montefiore and Solomon Munk, an eminent French scholar of Arabic, immediately went to Egypt to intercede with Syrian ruler Mehemet

Ali. They succeeded and the remaining Jewish prisoners were unconditionally freed. Jewish journals and newspapers in many countries appealed at the time for an institution to be established to defend Jews against injustice.

In 1858, another gross miscarriage of justice generated worldwide publicity and outrage. This was the kidnaping of a six year-old Jewish child, Edgardo Mortaras, from his home in Bologna on the orders of the Papal Government. The reason was an 'emergency' baptism that he had received from a Christian domestic servant some years earlier, because she feared he would die from an illness and could not attain paradise without baptism. She informed the authorities and, because then it was illegal for Jews to raise a Christian child, Edgardo was abducted, raised as a Roman Catholic, adopted by Pope Pius IX and finally became a priest. In spite of liberal press outrage in France and other countries and Emperor Napoleon III's personal intervention, the Papacy retained Edgardo. This disgraceful incident reinforced a Jewish desire for effective protection.

The French acquisition of its Algerian colony in 1830 brought about direct contact with Jews living in a Muslim country. The Central Consistory in Paris now began receiving many reports about anti-Jewish discrimination and persecution in the colony. All Jews in Islamic countries were officially '*Dhimmi*', a form of second class citizenship. An additional tax was exacted from them, the *Djizia*. They were very poor, prevented from following many careers and forced to live in unhealthy, crowded ghettos (or *Mellahs*) often ridden with epidemics. Their humiliation was compounded by, amongst other things, having to wear distinctive garments, being obliged to walk barefoot when near mosques, having the heights of their houses or synagogues always lower than comparable Muslim buildings, being forbidden to allow their laments or songs to be heard in public places, only allowed to own donkeys (not horses) and forbidden to drink wine in public.

Many accounts of extortion, murders of Jews and other violence directed against them by Muslims were reported in the AIU's *Bulletins*. The AIU aided the victims, not only by establishing schools, but by improving ghetto life where possible, and often achieving greater protection for them. Reacting to pressure from the AIU, the major European nations and the US repeatedly prevailed upon the Moroccan government to punish those guilty of anti-Jewish crimes.

With the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, the AIU's contributed to improve the legal status of the Jews of Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria and Russia. After the pogroms of 1881, it aided immigrants from Russia, collaborating with other Jewish organizations.

During World War II, the AIU Administration left Paris, first for the non-occupied zone of France, then for Algiers. While Jewish children were expelled from French government schools

in Algeria, because of antisemitic Vichy Laws, paradoxically the AIU's own schools continued to function. The AIU was supported by General de Gaulle's Free French Government and after the war it appointed René Cassin as its President. Cassin, a human rights jurist, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1968 for his work with the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. After the war the AIU, aided by American Jewry, resumed its normal activities and dealt with displaced persons and other turmoil affecting Jews. It was also fully committed to supporting the founding of the Jewish State.

The AIU was not universally supported. Some conservative French Jews, including rabbis, opposed it when it was established. They believed it could result in religious ties being loosened and its pupils consequently becoming assimilated. On this, Gubbay comments:

In its enthusiasm for all things French and European it was claimed that the Alliance failed to foster appreciation of the old, that it diminished respect for religion and opened a gulf between secularly educated children and their more pious parents. Of course the Alliance schools - with their vocational training, with their education of girls and women, and with their initial hostility to Zionism, were very different from the traditional religious schools of the poverty stricken Jewish areas of North Africa and the Middle East.

Actually, the AIU always intended its schools to advance Jewish studies. Hebrew, Judaism and Jewish history constituted an important part of all its curricula, both in its schools and in its teacher-training colleges in Paris.

Because it promoted French education and culture, the AIU was strongly supported by the French government. However, as a consequence it was sometimes accused of having a role in French colonial activity. The fact that AIU's education was based on a French model also saw its influence in some regions being reduced after both World Wars since it clashed with the increasing nationalist spirit in certain countries. This was especially the case after the independence of the French colonies and protectorates post-World War II.

Organisation, Finances and Library

The AIU has always had a typically French strong, central structure, based in Paris. Currently its central committee numbers seventy, including representatives from Morocco, Israel, Canada, the UK and USA, with a large majority from France. It has mainly depended on donations for income. Its funds and membership steadily increased till 1884 and then donations decreased. However the French government continued its support in

Morocco until the latter became independent.

In 1868, the AIU's library in Paris received a large donation of 10 000 gold francs and additional running expenses from Benjamin Rothschild. The library became the largest Jewish-owned library in Europe, initially possessing over 130,000 items. In 1940, the Nazi occupiers of Paris stole its holdings and sent them to the German Institute of Research on the 'Jewish Question' in Berlin. After the war, the Russians took some of this material to Moscow. Its presence there was discovered in 1992 and then, little by little and with great difficulty, it was returned to the AIU. In all, the Russians returned more than 900 files containing over 35 000 pages of documents, with the final crates being delivered in 2000. In 1989 the library was enlarged and researchers can now access its material via the internet.

Publications

The *Bulletin de l'Alliance*, the AIU's official organ, was published in Paris between 1860 and 1913. The *Bulletin* was replaced, in 1921, with *Paix et Droit*, which was published until 1940. *Les Cahiers de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle* appeared between 1952 and 2006. The AIU no longer publishes a journal. Instead, it produces a *Newsletter* at irregular intervals and frequently updates its extensive website with newsworthy items.

The *Bulletins* covered in detail most of the important events that concerned Jews everywhere, such as the mass emigration from Russia during the 1880s and the aftermath of the Balkan Wars. Relevant extracts from regular, detailed reports, sent by teachers and school principals to the central committee about the schools, curricula and specific problems with teachers, parents and the local communities were also published. The reports allowed the AIU to function effectively, since without detailed local knowledge it was difficult to work against legal discrimination. Knowing the number of Jewish pupils in each community where the AIU was active, or planned activities, allowed for appropriate funding and determined the numbers of schools and teachers required. Information about the parents, their incomes, occupations, religious practices, etc., was also required for planning and fundraising purposes.

One of the AIU's founding principles was a *mission civilisatrice*, to emancipate and Westernise the Jews of the Mediterranean region by providing French education and culture in their schools. It built 210 schools in sixteen countries, mostly around the Mediterranean basin and to date has educated over one million Jewish pupils. Initially, most AIU schools were primary, some co-educational and a few vocational. Today all schools, including high schools, "believe in the principle of mixed-gender education."

The first AIU school in North Africa was

founded in Tetouan, Morocco in 1862. This was followed by other Moroccan schools, in Tangiers (1864), Fez (1883), Mogador (1888), and Casablanca (1897). There were also girls' schools established in Tetouan (1868), Tangiers (1879) and Mogador (1897). Before World War I schools were established in other North African countries - Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.

In 1928, the French Protectorate Administration in Morocco amicably agreed with the AIU that its schools would become the responsibility of the Public Education Department. The Protectorate Administration supplied financial and other support for the AIU schools, because the French authorities needed educated personnel. To this end they employed bilingual, Arabic and French speaking, AIU-educated Jews. However, before Moroccan independence the AIU's syllabus did not prepare pupils for the French Baccalauréat, the qualification needed for entry into any university. As a result, several professions remained closed to the AIU's Moroccan pupils.

During World War II the AIU continued its work in Morocco, with the support of the Sultan and his government, and after 1945 it thrived. Its 14 000 pupils in 1945 had doubled by 1952, mainly in the large towns (Marrakesh, Fez, Rabat, and Casablanca) and reached 30 123 pupils in 1959. A photograph, taken in the 1950s, shows a pupil in a Casablanca AIU school working at a blackboard on which the same text is written in French, Hebrew and Arabic, indicating how all three languages were being taught. Also in Casablanca, the AIU founded a School for the Blind and an Institute for the Deaf and Dumb (collaborating with ORT and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee). But soon



An AIU classroom scene in Casablanca during the 1950s, indicating that French, Hebrew and Arabic were taught.

after Moroccan independence in 1957, pupil numbers fell steadily, to 13 527 by 1963. In part this was because the Moroccan government integrated some AIU schools into its own school system in 1960. However, the AIU retained some independent schools.

The AIU in the Ottoman Empire and Middle East

The AIU's network of schools made rapid progress in the Ottoman Empire, especially after large donations from Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a francophile German philanthropist. He gave the AIU 2000 000 francs and paid its deficits regularly. Overall, he donated more than £18,000 000. The AIU established schools in the Balkans (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Serbia and Turkey) and in the Middle East (Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Persia and Syria), in addition to the Maghreb. Often, local dignitaries sent their children to the AIU's schools, because of its high academic standards and facilities. However, in 1932 the AIU began to hand over its schools to local communities in the Balkans.

The AIU encountered an upsurge of Arab nationalism in various countries, resulting from anti-colonialism and anti-Israel policies. Maintaining its many schools in the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Iraq, thus became increasingly difficult. Reaffirming its policy and its *raison d'être*, the AIU declared in 1945, its universal character, its attachment to educational work, and that it was determined to "demand for the Jews, who so desired, the right of entry into Palestine, under the auspices of the United Nations and under the responsibility of the Jewish Agency in Palestine".

Jews living in Arab countries suffered much persecution after the establishment of the State of Israel and began a mass exodus. Soon all the AIU's schools in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria were closed. By contrast in Iran, under the regime of the last Shah, the AIU still had 15 schools in 1960 with 6200 pupils, mostly in Teheran, with a few schools in the provinces. Soon after the Shah's fall in 1979, all AIU schools in Iran were closed.

The AIU's work in Israel

The AIU's considerable activity in Israel is carried out under the name *Kol Israel Haverim* (KIAH). It has a very long history in the country and much of its work is now done in close collaboration with the Israeli authorities. In 1870 Charles Netter, a founding member of the AIU, obtained some land in Palestine near Jaffa, from the Ottoman Empire as a gift and on it the AIU opened the Mikveh Israel Agricultural School. This was the first of a network of AIU Jewish schools in Palestine, long before the establishment of the State of Israel. In 1970, when the school

celebrated its centenary, former Prime Minister David Ben Gurion delivered a speech including the memorable words: "It is uncertain that Israel could have come into being without Mikveh Israel. It is then that everything started ..."

This school continues to function as part of the Mikveh Israel Youth Village, which also operates a secular agricultural high school and a religious agricultural high school. Hebrew is now its language of instruction.

The AIU now operates nine schools and a teacher-training college in Israel, although in some, its former French orientation has diminished. Its affiliated-primary schools, although part of the Israeli state education system, still have French as their first foreign language. In the last few decades the AIU has concentrated on secondary education, opening schools in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Bat Yam and Haifa. The AIU network in Israel also includes the School for the Deaf in Jerusalem, catering for members of all religions and also for those who may have additional physical and mental disabilities.

Soon after its establishment the AIU began to train its own instructors. In 1867, the *École Normale Israélite Orientale* (ENIO) was founded in Paris for training of male teachers. (The most famous of ENIO's instructors was the eminent philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. He taught there from 1939 to 1979, except for five years when a prisoner of war in Germany.) By 1872, women were also teaching in the AIU's schools, and the AIU accordingly began teacher-training of women. The latter attended the *École Bischoffsheim*, or one of two private schools headed by Madame Weill-Kahn or Madame Isaac. All three schools provided a rigorous education, using the same curriculum as for male trainee-teachers.

French was the language of instruction in AIU's schools. The curriculum always included the Bible and Jewish history, religious instruction, Hebrew, arithmetic, local and world geography, local and world history, physical and natural sciences, French language and a little literature. (The latter was strikingly demonstrated in the film *In the beginning was a school*. One scene, from 1950, shows a class reciting one of La Fontaine's *Fables*). Other subjects studied at AIU schools were English, gymnastics, design and tailoring and needlework for girls. The local languages (e.g. Turkish, Greek, Arabic) were often taught by locals employed by the AIU.

In its earliest days the AIU expected its teachers to be French. However, French Jews found it difficult to live and work in the poor conditions then prevalent in North Africa and the Middle East. Thus, soon after its foundation, the AIU pragmatically selected the brightest of its 'Orientals' for teacher-training in Paris. These spent four years to obtain French teaching degrees and qualifications and then returned to teach in AIU schools, in their own countries or

elsewhere. Heavy academic demands were made on these 'Orientals', for they took the same final official exams as the ENIO's French students. Thus, ENIO students differed very greatly in background, language and religious practice, coming as they did both from France and from cities in other countries (e.g. Constantinople, Adrianople, Gallipoli, Tangiers, Monastir, Aleppo, Damascus, Beirut and Salonika). Their teaching experience was equally varied, for they were usually not sent back to their places of origin. Studying in Paris strengthened their appreciation of the advantages of the French way of life, which reinforced the general Westernising influence of the AIU's schooling.

The new teachers often needed to improve the social conditions they encountered. In rural Morocco, for instance, they had to teach their pupils how use a chair and table, for the pupils' previous (*Cheder*) education had been conducted with them seated on the ground. Because of extreme poverty in some communities (e.g. at the Sidi-Rahal School, Morocco, in 1949), the AIU sometimes supplied clothing and often provided pupils with food that was usually their principal meal. To teach and reinforce rudiments of hygiene and cleanliness, the AIU supplied combs, soap, etc. as prizes. All this was sent from Paris, together with the necessary educational material.

When newly qualified teachers prepared to leave Paris, often never returning to France, it had become, as one young teacher commented, "a little bit ours." The new teacher's first assignment, normally as an assistant, was often very difficult for many reasons. This was certainly true for Lucie Ovadia, who in 1896 had come to study in Paris from Salonika. A most capable student, whom Madame Isaac believed would make an excellent teacher, the twenty-year-old Lucie was sent to Alexandria in 1899, just two years after the Alliance had opened schools there for girls and boys. But once she arrived in Egypt, she found herself living in a tiny room with inadequate furnishings and teaching in a school which its own principal described as dirty and unhygienic, with generally "deplorable conditions" and also "a problematic student body". Each time teachers were transferred, sometimes after only a few years, and not always to locations they desired, they had to learn the customs and sometimes the language of the new students, as well as finding satisfactory living conditions.

Initially, the AIU did not allow its women teachers to marry. By the time the question of their marriage was debated in the AIU's *Bulletin des Écoles* (1910), however, married women teachers in AIU schools (often with large families) were a *fait accompli*. Predictably, they frequently married male teachers. The AIU's women teachers included some pioneer feminists, who went beyond their purely educational duties. Some were appalled by the practice of child marriage amongst Jews in villages of Muslim lands and

worked to eradicate it by persuading mothers to prioritise their daughters' education over early marriage.

Most teachers were devoted to the AIU. Monique Nahon wrote an enlightening book about one AIU teaching couple, Rachel and David Sasson (respectively Turkish and Persian). This described the extraordinary professional conscience of such teachers who had "forged the destinies of several generations of boys and girls who, thanks to the transmission of knowledge, received the keys to their entry into modernity".⁵

Albert Confino is another example of a teacher's devotion to the AIU, described in his granddaughter, Maryse Choukroun's biography of her grandfather. He was born in Karnabet (Bulgaria) and educated at an AIU school in Adrianople. He then trained at the ENIO, and afterwards devoted seventy years to the AIU, teaching in Tunisia, Persia, Turkey and Algeria and then serving as an IAU schools inspector. His wife also taught in AIU schools. Early in their marriage they suffered great hardship, losing two children to epidemics and inadequate local medical care. Albert Confino later helped René Cassin to administer the entire AIU from Algiers during the Second World War. When he was sent to Algeria to head an agricultural school and a farm - the AIU had acquired 1700ha of land to teach agriculture to the Jewish youth - he had to learn how to grow vines and cereals to do his job successfully. He received much recognition for his achievements, including the Légion d'Honneur from the French Government and a Decoration from the Shah of Persia. Since he was an official representative of France, he was highly regarded by the local authorities - for example in Bulgaria he was given an armed escort when crossing dangerous regions to perform his duties as an AIU Schools-Inspector in remote areas.

At first, the ENIO only trained its future teachers and principals, but during the 1960s its syllabus was broadened. Students were now prepared for additional careers, but always including teaching. It stopped teacher-training in 1970 and then became an AIU Lycée until 1990. In 1993, the AIU founded the *Collège des Études Juives* in Paris. There, lectures, international conferences, symposia, etc. are organised on subjects of Jewish relevance for participants from many countries. In 2011, the Emmanuel Levinas Institute was built on the site of the former ENIO, together with the Alliance's École Gustave Leven, the Médiathèque Alliance-Baron Edmond de Rothschild and a new synagogue of the ENIO. Now for the first time, the AIU has the Emmanuel Levinas Institute which provides facilities for research in Jewish studies and also offers university level courses in this field.

The AIU Today

Following the independence of France's North

African colonies and protectorates in the 1960s, the AIU increased its educational activities in France, where many former pupils from North Africa now live. After 1990, when Jewish immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union steadily increased, the AIU expanded schools and its affiliations in Europe and Israel to accommodate them.

Today there are eighteen AIU schools, which teach at secondary level. Four are in France, eight in Israel, four in Morocco and one in each of Switzerland and Canada. Also, many AIU-affiliated schools operate throughout the world, including seventy in Israel, ten in Canada, four in Spain, two each in France, Belgium, the Czech Republic and Hungary and one each in Italy, Sweden, the UK, Switzerland and Turkey. Their total pupil number exceeds 20 000. In the US, the AIU also has an affiliated school, in Brooklyn, for communities from Syria, Lebanon and Iran. From having lived in those countries, such communities have first-hand knowledge of the AIU's achievements. At a Sephardi Festival of Arts and Culture held in New York in 2011 and attended mainly by US residents, many of the participants were happy and proud to describe their experiences as former AIU pupils in their countries of origin.

All the AIU's schools are now subject to the regulations and the national secondary programmes of the nations where they are located. They prepare pupils for university entry and in France, also for its prestigious '*Grandes Écoles*'. Another crucial AIU school policy is not to promote any specific type of religious Judaism. Schools following orthodox and other traditions are supported. Also (in the words of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle's School Network Charter*, published in Paris, 2013), they attach: "... particular importance to passing on general culture, especially French culture, the awakening of scientific curiosity and foreign languages ... solid and profound links with Israel ... and the mastery of Hebrew ... and its traditional texts, as a priority... The network's schools observe Kashrut, Shabbat and the Jewish Festivals. They enable Jews of diverse sensibilities and from different traditions to bloom in a harmonious climate of mutual respect ... The network's schools benefit from ... exchanges, projects, partnerships, twinnings and pooling of pedagogical resources (Israel, Europe, North America and Morocco)."

In Morocco, there are currently l'École Narcisse Leven, l'École Maimonide and l'École Normale Hébraïque, situated in Casablanca. Pupils at the latter study for the Baccalauréat. Muslims now make up about half of the pupils in the AIU's Moroccan schools. These are the only schools in the Arab world, to my knowledge, where Jewish and Muslim children are taught sitting side by side in a Jewish school. The most famous alumnus of the Lycée Maïmonide in Casablanca is the well-known Moroccan/French cinema actor,

Gad Elmaleh. While being interviewed for the above-mentioned film *In the beginning was a school*, he recalled his experiences as a pupil, saying, “In 1980, the student body included a good number of Muslim Moroccans. The atmosphere was very friendly amongst Jewish and Muslim pupils and the teachers. And it was not unusual to have a Jewish pupil copying the answers to a Hebrew test from his Muslim neighbour!”

Conclusion

The Alliance Israélite Universelle’s 153 year-long existence arose from French Jewry’s solidarity with their less fortunate fellow-Jews suffering discrimination, persecution and enforced poverty in Muslim countries and elsewhere. It was the world’s first supranational Jewish body (and the only such Jewish institution for many years) working for Jews’ human rights. The AIU’s two principal activities were (1) political activity to serve persecuted Jews, particularly for many decades among Jewish youth in North Africa, the Middle East and south-eastern Europe and (2) education to teach the French language and culture, together with a strong emphasis on Hebrew and the Jewish heritage. An important AIU objective, everywhere, is to encourage Jewish inter-community activity, especially between religious and secular youth. So for over 150 years the AIU has educated and protected very many Jews, and increased their appreciation of Western culture by teaching in the French language and presenting the merits of French culture. This was

well summarised in the speech given by André Malraux, then French Minister of Cultural Affairs, on the occasion of the Alliance’s centenary in 1960:

The foundation of the Alliance Israélite Universelle is part of a secular, cultural tradition. In order to uplift their deprived brethren, Jews fought not with the sword but with books. It is laudable, and there is absolutely no doubt about it, that there were men of action, without whom the Alliance would never have existed, who had such total trust in the power of the spirit! And they were able to bring this trust to fruition through education ...

In all its varied activities, the AIU was a pioneer. Its unparalleled contributions to Jewish education and philanthropy certainly merit greater recognition in the English-speaking world as has been the case.

NOTES

- 1 Expressed in Hebrew as “כל ישראל חברים” (*Kol Israel Chaverim*).
- 2 <http://www.mideastweb.org/napoleon1799.htm>.
- 3 Weider, B, ‘Napoleon and the Jews’, 1997, http://www.napoleon-series.org/ins/weider/c_jews.html.
- 4 <http://jewishrefugees.blogspot.com/2010/06/how-alliance-re-made-jews-of-east.html>
- 5 M. Nahon, *Hussards de l’Alliance. Rachel et David Sasson*, Éditions du Palio, Paris, France, 2010.



A Mellah or Ghetto in Tetuan, Morocco, in the early 20th Century.

AN I.B. SINGER RETROSPECTIVE: THE “FAMILY CHRONICLES”: THE FAMILY MOSKAT (1950)

*

Gloria Sandak-Lewin

This is the fourth and final part of a four-part essay on Isaac Bashevis Singer, the first three having since appeared in *Jewish Affairs*.

Before analysing the several plots and stylistic features of the novel, a few comments are necessary. Note that Isaac Bashevis Singer intimates that all three books, *The Manor* (1967), *The Estate* (1969) and *The Family Moskat* (1950), are interrelated - *The Family Moskat* is actually a continuation of the other two books although it was written earlier.¹ He thus apparently considers all three books to be family sagas, with *The Manor* and *The Estate* spreading the events over two novels and *The Family Moskat* containing all the events in one volume.

All three books start with a strong male patriarchal figure - Calman Jacoby in *The Manor* and *The Estate* and Meshusalem Moskat in *The Family Moskat* - although they are very different kinds of characters and personalities, and end with the grandchildren, Moishela, Ezriel Babad's little boy in *The Estate*, and Hadassah and Masha and Dosha in *The Family Moskat*. Also, while the *The Manor* starts with the Polish Uprising against the Czar in 1863 and ends more or less at the turn of the century, *The Family Moskat*, while starting at approximately the same time, ends with the rise of Hitler and the Polish Fascists, and the bombing of Warsaw by the Germans. Finally, it is important to note that *The Family Moskat*, Singer's first work to be translated into English, won international success and brought him instant recognition in America.²

The following is a brief summary of *The Family Moskat*. The novel spans three generations of Moskats, the head of whom is the old, thrice-married Meshusalem Moskat, as well as of the Bannet and Katzenellenbogen and Berman families. The main member of the Bannet family is Asa Heshel Bannet, the most important character

of the novel. The Berman family is headed by the thief and womaniser Koppel Berman, bailiff to Meshusalem who later marries one of his daughters, Leah.

Meshusalem Moskat is a selfish, cantankerous, demanding and in general very unappealing old man. Punctilious in matters of *Halacha* and immensely rich, he spawns a mass of children by his first and second wives, Minna and Yente Malkah respectively. By Minna he has four children, of whom the only one of any importance is Hama. She is unhappily married to Abram Shapiro, a colourful extrovert character who is unfaithful to her and deeply in love with the artist, Ida. By Yente Malkah, he begets Pinnie (who features little in most of the book but comes into his own at the end), Nyunie, a weak character married to Dacha and father of one of the main characters, Hadassah, and Leah, frustrated in her marriage to Moshe Gabriel Margolis and in love with Koppel Berman. Leah and Moshe Gabriel have four children: Meyerl (Mendy), Zlatele (Lottie), Masha and Aaron. Mendy is a successful lawyer in America and Lottie a teacher at an American college. Masha marries the son of a Polish count, Yanek Zazhitsky, who treats her abominably, and Aaron, the youngest, remains with his father Moshe Gabriel in Poland, becomes a Hasidic rabbi and eventually leaves to found a Hasidic colony in Palestine.

As his third wife Meshusalem marries Rosa Frumeti Landau. Through an earlier marriage, she has a daughter, Adele, who becomes the first wife of Asa Heshel Bannet, through mendaciously telling him that the woman he loved and who loved him, Hadassah Moskat, had become betrothed to someone else. After eloping with Asa Heshel, an impoverished teacher of Hebrew, Hadassah returns home alone in disgrace - she has been imprisoned for not having papers and a passport. Her mother forces her to marry Fishel Kutner, a good and wealthy man who loves her but whom she detests. In the meantime, Asa Heshel has married Adele: he is still in love with Hadassah and the marriage is not happy. Hadassah contacts him, they have a tempestuous love affair but eventually he is conscripted into the Russian army in which he spends several years. Before he leaves for the army, Adele informs him that she is pregnant (she has a son whom she names David, whom Asa Heshel hardly ever visits on

Gloria Sandak-Lewin is a poet and writer in Cape Town. She has taught and lectured in English Literature at Herzlia High and the Department of English and the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, University of Cape Town. She has published a long historical poem, My Father's House (1985, 1997), a collection of poetry, My Father's House and Other Poems 1965-1985 (2000), and a collection of short stories, A Separate Life: Tales of a Woman Estranged (2006).

his return).

Hadassah has been writing to Asa Heshel while he is away and she is the first person whom he contacts on his return. She asks her husband for a divorce - he reluctantly grants it and at last she marries Asa Heshel. For a few years they are very happy; but Hadassah, who is herself frail and sickly, has a sickly daughter (Dacha) when Asa Heshel wanted a boy, is a very poor housekeeper and is extravagant. Eventually, she starts complaining and nagging and they quarrel. One night they go to a ball where he meets Barbara Fishelsohn, a Jewess whose father, a missionary, converted her to Christianity when she was very young. Now a confirmed Communist, she entices him away from Hadassah, they have an affair and Hadassah moves out with her daughter to a house on the landed estate in the forest of Shubresov. Asa Heshel then spends his time between the two women and Hadassah, who still loves him, has to accept the situation.

On the eve of the Nazi invasion of Poland Asa Heshel, who for some time has been teaching at a girls' seminary, decides to go on holiday with Barbara somewhere far away in the country. While on holiday war breaks out and he and Barbara return to Warsaw after an exhausting six days' journey. His main concern is about Hadassah's (and his daughter Dacha's) safety and on arriving back in Warsaw he learns from Hadassah's uncle Pinnie (Moskat) that Hadassah is dead: she has been killed by a bomb in Otwotok. Dacha is with the Moskat family, who are planning to leave Poland. At first Asa Heshel does not react to the news but his pain, shock and sorrow are manifested when he and Barbara walk through a bombed-out, devastated Warsaw to his sister Dinah and her family. Dina and her useless Hasidic husband, deeply religious but now almost simple, and their three children are living in abject poverty and Asa Heshel is unable to help them financially. He leaves his distraught, lamenting sister and goes outside to meet Barbara waiting in the streets, furious that he has kept her so long. She informs him that she has made a decision to leave Poland. He is determined to stay.

The book ends with Asa Heshel's visit to an old friend, Hertz Yanovar, who proclaims in Polish that the Messiah is dead. (It is significant that, despite her decision to leave, Barbara has once again accompanied him, although she says that it is on her way.) It is also significant that Adele has had to return to Poland, her ship having 'wandered' in the seas for a long time and having then been debarred from allowing its passengers to disembark. The question is: what happens to Asa Heshel after his decision to remain in Warsaw and does Barbara stay with him or leave Poland for Russia? Or does he return and reconcile with his first wife, Adele? How does he live? Does he survive? And where does he live - with his sister or alone? Singer keeps one guessing and asking questions about the future of the main character

even after the book has ended.

The plot of this huge, sprawling novel is very involved, and at first it is difficult to identify the vast entanglement of characters. Three genealogical tables at the beginning of the three main families involved - those of Meshusalem Moskat, Bannet and Katzenellenbogen and Koppel Berman - help the reader to sort out the complicated interrelationships of its various characters.

One of the most interesting features of the novel is the intricate interweaving of the personal histories of certain characters and the social history of the times. Unlike in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, where individual chapters separate the personal lives of the various personae from the descriptions of the military-related events, Singer subtly interlaces personal and social mores and features. For example, early in the novel the young Asa Heshel Bannet shows an interest in reading secular books - mostly on philosophy, especially on Spinoza - much to the alarm, distaste and condemnation of his grandfather, a rabbi. Such books were hard to come by in the religiously observant country communities of early-to-mid 19th Century Poland. Later, we see the contrast between Asa Heshel, a penniless young teacher in Warsaw, and the affluent, sophisticated Adele Landau, stepdaughter of Meshusalem Moskat, who has been educated in Switzerland, speaks French fluently, plays the piano and dresses in "modern" fashionable clothes. Later still, we see Asa Heshel as a conscript in the Russian army tramping through various villages, including his own village (*shtetl*) Tereshpol Minor. There, he has the opportunity to visit his grandfather's house, which has been taken over by a gentile pig-farmer with a part of the house being used to scour, scald and skin the pigs. Then there is the comparison between the Hasidic-garbed Jews with long ear-locks and wives wearing wigs, still practising Judaism in the old ways, and the modern secular Jews in 'gentile' clothes, the women showing their own hair or wearing hats, trying to be as Jewishly inconspicuous and fashionable as possible.

Finally, although the earlier part of the book records merely the separation of the Jews from their Polish neighbours, it gradually reveals the terrible antisemitism amongst the Polish people. An example is the violently antisemitic attitude of Count Zazhitsky towards Masha even before she has married his son, Yanek, and the latter's extreme and growing antisemitism during their marriage that eventually compels her to leave him.

As the book progresses and the Nazi occupation approaches, two facts stand out in sharp relief to the normalcy of Polish society. One is the existence of the Polish Fascists, known as Nara - Polish students who stand outside Jewish shops to warn prospective customers that the owner is Jewish and that therefore they should not do business there. This happens to Nyunie

Moskat. The other is the shocking custom of making Jewish students stand during lectures at the university or sit on separate benches, known as “ghetto benches”, during lectures, in the case of, for example, one of Pinnie Moskat’s grandsons.

Undoubtedly the outstanding feature of I. B. Singer’s novels and short stories is his exceptional story-telling ability combined with the striking realism of his descriptions of places, situations and events and his ability to ‘get inside’ his various characters - from the intricate and at times puzzling complexity of his protagonist Asa Heshel to the coarseness and criminal astuteness of the thief Koppel Berman; from the pure loyal and unswerving love of Asa Heshel by Hadassah Moskat to the selfish, deceptive and beguiling love of his first wife Adele Landau; from the colourful, extrovert, almost Falstaffian exuberance of Abram Shapiro to the intrinsic goodness, devoutness and uprightness of Moshe Gabriel Margolis, first husband of Leah Moskat. Towards the end of the book Pinnie, the oldest surviving Moskat, and Leah are slightly more fully drawn. Pinnie maintains a firm adherence to Judaism and asserts himself as the head of the Moskat family while Leah, temporarily forgetting the secularism she has learnt in America, enthusiastically and nostalgically helps with the Passover preparations on her second return visit to Poland.

Singer’s facility for story-telling is evident in the twists and turns, sudden surprises and unexpected shocks in the skilful development of his various intricate plots and his ability to “hold on” to the changing events in the lives of his multiple characters. Who, for example, would have thought that Asa Heshel, after years of loving the beautiful and loyal Hadassah, would suddenly become involved with the unappetising converted Communist Barbara Fishelsohn? And who would have thought that Leah would give up her good and devout (albeit dull and uninspiring) husband for the calculating and dishonest Koppel Berman?

Then there is the realism of *place*: see, for example, the following almost pictographic description of Warsaw after it had been bombed by Hitler, seen through the eyes of Asa Heshel as he and Barbara walk through its streets:

The street was crowded - Asa Heshel could not remember ever having seen such mobs on Iron Street. People jostled each other on the sidewalk and in the middle of the road. They carried valises, packages, bundles, rucksacks. One tall man held a floor lamp in one hand and a basket in the other. In an open place on which timber lay scattered a crowd of Jews and gentiles were digging a wide trench. The Chasidim [sic] threw up the earth with quick, eager strokes and wiped the sweat from their brows. Somewhere in the vicinity a bakery was open; Asa Heshel saw women carrying fresh loaves. Many of the passers-by were in semi-military clothes: girls had soldiers’

capotes on; men in civilian clothes wore helmets. Nurses, stretcher-bearers, and scouts wove their way through the throng. Here and there civilians carried gas masks slung over their shoulders. In the midst of the confusion two tall nuns stood arguing. Barbara clung to Asa Heshel’s arm, afraid of losing him.⁴

Note the reference to the two nuns, immediately juxtaposed with the mention of Barbara: is this I. B. Singer’s way of reminding us that she was a converted Jewess - converted to Christianity by her father?

After visiting Pinnie, Asa Heshel and Barbara set out to see his sister Dinah on Franciskaner Street. Planes are roaring overhead, machine guns rattling, bombs exploding and houses burning. People are fleeing in every possible type of conveyance: “...on foot, platforms on wheels, carts, droshkies, motorcycles, buses, and taxis. A limousine was tangled in the traffic.... The half-shattered church on Gzhybov Place, opposite Reb Meshusalem Moskat’s house, had been converted into a hospital, where nuns attended the wounded. The broad flight of steps was sprinkled with blood.”⁵

Or, again, Asa Heshel’s heart-breaking impression of his grandfather’s house in his home town as he and his regiment march towards the front:

Before the Purim season Asa Heshel’s regiment was sent to the front.... For three whole days Asa Heshel was even able to stay in the town of his youth, Tereshpol Minor. A gentile swine-slaughterer had moved into his grandfather’s house. In the yard stood a wooden tub in which the pig was scalded after it was killed. The study house was being used as a storage space for fodder. On the day Asa Heshel arrived the ovens were being lighted in the ritual bath house, and the village gentiles were entering. It was strange to see Tereshpol Minor emptied of Jews.⁶

Then there is the shock and unexpectedness - though one is filled with a sense of foreboding - at the news of Hadassah’s death. On his return to Warsaw after his holiday with Barbara, “Asa Heshel telephoned Nyunie [Hadassah’s father, his father-in-law], but there was no answer. He looked up Pinnie’s number and called him:

Pinnie answered; his voice was hoarse and quavery. ‘Who is that?’

‘This is Asa Heshel, Hadassah’s husband.’

Pinnie was silent. Asa Heshel continued: ‘I telephoned my father-in-law, but no-one answered.’

At last Pinnie said: ‘Your father-in-law has moved in with us.’

‘Can he come to the telephone?’

‘He’s just gone out.’

‘Can you perhaps tell me where Hadassah is?’

Pinnie began to stammer something, broke off, coughed, and then said, reproachfully: ‘We thought you were going to stay out there.’

‘I got back last night.’

‘How did you manage it? But it doesn’t matter. Hadassah is dead.’

There was a long silence at both ends of the line. Finally Asa Heshel asked: ‘When did it happen? How?’

‘In Otwotk. The first bomb.’

Again a long silence. ‘Where is Dosha?’

‘Here, with us. Do you want to speak to her?’

‘No. I’m coming right over.’”⁷

One cannot conclude this essay without including Asa Heshel’s reactions to Hadassah’s death which are perhaps the most poignant, moving, beautiful passages in the book. He is enduring intense anguish and sorrow:

Asa Heshel walked with bowed head. He was prepared for the worst. Perhaps Dinah [his sister], too, was dead. He recalled the verse of the Psalmist: *For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me.* His heart was contracted as though squeezed in a fist. Fantastic! He had had a foreboding the last time that he would never see Hadassah again. She had looked at him so strangely, so timidly. If she died, she said, she wanted to be buried with her mother. It had never occurred to her that she would be buried in Kartchev....

It is noteworthy that throughout the novel Singer arouses the readers’ curiosity and keeps him/her in suspense and guessing right till the end: after Asa Heshel’s visit to his friend Hertz Yanovar, we do not know whether he and Barbara ever part (note how she clings to him - how desperate and vacillating she is, and also how selfish, begrudging him the short time that he has spent with his sister). We do not know what becomes of Asa Heshel himself. And what becomes of the Moskat family, gathered, their luggage packed and ready in Pinnie’s house? Do they succeed in leaving Poland and starting a new life elsewhere? Do Leah and her daughter Masha manage to return to America? Does her son Aaron, the Hasidic rabbi, succeed in returning to Palestine? Singer does not answer these questions: readers are kept guessing, having to work out possible solutions for themselves.

One final point: unlike his two later novels, *The Manor* and its sequel *The Estate*, there is an underlying didacticism in this earlier Singer novel. This didacticism is not overt but implicit: with a few exceptions (Dinah’s husband whose Hasidism - and poverty - has made him almost feeble-minded; Moshe Gabriel’s absentmindedly lighting his cigarette at the flame of the *or tamid*

and later, when he sees his daughter Lottie in Poland after her mother Leah has brought her from America to Poland to see her other children, he half pushes her away because she is a female and he turns away guiltily to make sure that no-one sees him alone with his daughter when she wants to discuss a private matter with him), Singer is at pains to point out the negative consequences of deviating from Judaism and becoming more modern, assimilated and secular. Witness in this regard Asa Heshel’s turning away from the strict but secure Judaism of his grandfather’s home and his gradual divestment, literally and metaphorically, of his Judaic habiliments and upbringing, how though he teaches Hebrew for a living, he turns to philosophy and ultimately embarks on two adulterous relationships. And there is the prime example of Leah’s children, two of whom, Meyerl and Zlatele, are quickly absorbed into American culture on their arrival there while their siblings left behind in Poland, Aaron and Masha, become respectively, a Hasidic rabbi and an apostate. Nor does Masha’s charm, erudition, sophistication and elegance help her when she marries into a viciously antisemitic Polish family.

Perhaps, then, the only certainty at the very end of the novel is Hertz Yanovar’s proclamation in the face of the devastation caused by Hitler on the eve of the Holocaust: “The Messiah will come soon ... death is the Messiah. That’s the real truth.”⁹

NOTES

- 1 *The Family Moskat* (1950) ... though “written a few years earlier, ... is in a way a continuation of the same saga.” (I. B. Singer, “Author’s Note” at the beginning of *The Estate* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970.)
- 2 Isaac Bashevis Singer (1904 to 1991) - pseudonym Warshofsky: the source is www.kirjasto.sci-fi/ibsinger.htm
- 3 His affinity with Tolstoy has been asserted in a review for the *Sunday Telegraph* on the inside back cover of *The Estate*: I came to the same conclusion before reading the review.
- 4 Isaac Bashevis Singer, *The Family Moskat*. Translated from the Yiddish by A.H. Gross. A Borzoi Book. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950), p.604.
- 5 I. B. Singer, *The Family Moskat*, p.606.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p370.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p603.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p607.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p611.

‘MUSS I’ DENN’: CURATING JEWISH FRAGMENTS OF GERMAN CULTURE IN THE CAPE TOWN HOLOCAUST CENTRE

*

Michal Singer

In 2011 the Cape Town Holocaust Centre (CTHC) introduced its Heritage Project, with the aim of creating new channels for research and preserving the memory of the victims of the Third Reich, along with other victims of genocide, prejudice and xenophobia. The project seeks to bring the stories of the Holocaust out of the archive and into the present through connecting living memory of oral histories with the artifacts, letters and documents which serve as indelible fragments of the past. It further aims to bring the CTHC’s archive in line with proposed South African policy on the digitization of heritage resources.¹

The project has culminated in the development of a permanent display on the deep sense of cultural attachment and patriotic fervor of German Jews serving in the armed forces, contrasted with their subsequent betrayal and dislocation during the rise of the Nazi Party in the early 1930s. In this way, this work seeks to engage with and contribute to discourse around the role of the museum in reflecting ‘ethical concerns over human rights abuses and political or ethnic violence.’

Curating Jewish fragments of German life

Since the project’s inception two years ago, the family history archival collection of the Schragenheim family from Berlin has emerged as one of the most striking and significant opportunities to implement this vision.

Work on the Schragenheim Collection began with regular and ongoing interviews and meetings with the donor, Julian Schragenheim, and continued with accession the vast and varied collection. This involved acknowledging that it would not be possible to use the familiar ways in which we have been taught to consider this material “without looking to the fragments themselves to help us construct a new frame.”² The open-endedness of this oral history methodology took into account the influence of generation, gender and language in the way information was imparted and received.

The meetings culminated in the official launch of the Heritage Project in June 2012, with Schragenheim sharing with the Cape Jewish

Seniors’ Friendship Forum the story of his father Bernhard and mother Rosie, with whom he departed from Berlin in 1934.

This was also the first time he was able to share publicly the fate of his aunt, Elsbeth (Hansi). She had remained behind to take care of her parents, in spite of unsuccessful efforts to secure exit visas for them by Bernhard and his two brothers, Erich and Arthur. After her parents’ deaths in 1940 and 1941 respectively, attributed largely to the privations of Jewish economic and cultural isolation and segregation, Elsbeth was left alone in Berlin. On hearing about the final roundups of Jews in the city, she committed suicide on 16 November 1942. This story, told through memories, photos and letters, brought to light the exceptional vulnerability of Jews in war-time Germany. On the eve of the war, 266 000 Germans classified as Jewish by Nazi legislation had fled, but the proportion of men who were able to flee into exile was greater than that of women. Above all, elderly and single women remained behind.³ In 1941, two-thirds of the aging Jewish community were past middle age.⁴

Unlike many victims of the Final Solution, whose bodies were burnt or buried in mass graves, Elsbeth and her parents are buried in a Jewish cemetery in Berlin. But the distance and dislocation make it difficult for the bereaved to mourn from across the seas. The nature of the deaths has resulted in “a total void filled with pain, and no mourning time.”⁵ There was little detail about her life, other than the news in letters she wrote to her brother. I was moved by her reference to the German folk song ‘*Muss I’ den*’ in a letter written from Hamburg in February 1939, after she had accompanied her sister-in-law’s parents to the vessel that would lead them to the distant shores of South Africa:

Last night I returned happily from Hamburg. Had really lovely days with parents R. We got along so very well, as never in the previous years. I was allowed to board the ship and was glad to see their lovely cabin and bathroom ... as the boat started leaving and the band played *Muss i’ den, muss I’ den*, I had thick tears running down my face.⁶

Reference to the German folk song underlies Elsbeth’s moving efforts to remain positive in correspondence to her family. The song serves as

Michal Singer is Heritage Coordinator, Cape Town Holocaust Centre, South African Holocaust and Genocide Foundation.

an emotional trigger for her close identification with the German cultural issues concerning separation, from which she had been largely excluded. This paper serves as a critical reflection on the process of curating this poignant story. It highlights the fragility of transcultural identity through reference not only to the experiences of German Jews seeking refuge in South Africa between 1933 and 1945, but also to the plight of those who remained behind.

Seeking refuge

The educational philosophy of the CTHC serves not to reduce the European Jewish narrative to one of victimhood, but rather places emphasis on the importance of individuality in historical remembrance. Accordingly, the story of the Schragenheim family reflects the unique and particular experiences of a single family affected by prejudice. The story of German Jewish refugees in South Africa was represented in 2003 in the travelling exhibition entitled 'Seeking Refuge', designed and compiled under the auspices of the CTHC. With the presentation of some 35 narratives of individuals and families who fled Nazi Germany and settled in the Cape, it sought to provide a very personal context".⁷ Some of these stories have been included in the new display. This reflects the impact of this exhibition over the past decade in raising awareness of the history of Jewish refugees in South Africa. These were particularly challenged after the promulgation of the Aliens Amendment Act of 1937, which stipulated that "no applicant ... who is of Jewish parentage shall be deemed to be readily assimilable."⁸ The exhibition also examined Germany's own efforts to reconcile with the legacy of the Nazi regime.

The new permanent display thus served as an anchor around which to frame the fragmented story of the Schragenheim family and their experiences under the Nazi regime. In personalizing the experiences of individual family members, the deep sense of loss and betrayal experienced by the hundreds of thousands of Jews who fled during the 1930s is told through the display of artifacts and pictures. The 'historical residue' of the experience of German Jewish refugees becomes a means by which to memorialize those they left behind. It further serves to educate others about the sense of cultural alienation and emotional trauma experienced by refugees in this country. The new display thus is a useful counterpoint to the examination of the micro-historical record of the neglected realm of Jewish culture in German history.

The pertinence of portraying the lives of European Jewish refugees in South Africa is underscored by the ongoing existence of prejudice in the country – in particular, the ongoing stereotyping and scapegoating leveled against African and Asian refugees, where xenophobia

remains a "ticking time bomb."⁹ The permanent exhibition's educational tour provides an historical framework for engaging with xenophobia as a vociferous and deadly form of prejudice, one that in May 2008 led to an explosion of violent xenophobic attacks in South Africa resulting in over sixty deaths.¹⁰ By removing the stigma of the 'other' as depicted by various South African manifestations of xenophobia, the panel seeks to contribute to cultural openness and respect for diversity, which form part of the broader ethos of the CTHC.

The panel is placed amid a series of framed original photographs reflecting the quotidian experiences of European Jewry before the Holocaust. It focuses on the nature of familial ties and national involvement in Germany before the Nazi disenfranchisement of Jews from public German life.

The collection's donor, Julian Schragenheim, argues that by the late 19th Century, the particular cultural interweaving of Jewish and German cultural identity was seamless, particularly in Berlin. He refers to the role of 19th Century rabbinical leadership, including Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch and Azriel Hildesheimer, in adapting to the needs of post-Enlightenment Germany. These rabbis, he said, had "cleaned up German Jewish Orthodoxy, and what was left was a genuine combination without any psychological pressure at all, of a Jewish religious attitude on the one hand and German citizenship on the other hand. They succeeded in establishing a situation where there was no conflict."¹¹ The racial persecution of German Jewry after 1933 presents a stark contrast to this former life of relative cultural integration and diversity.

This project involved a fusion of various research methods adapted from my academic and professional training as an historical researcher, as well as attention to the therapeutic narrative required within the framework of the painful process of remembering the past.

Fighting for the Fatherland

The original vision of the new display was to showcase the artifacts belonging to Bernhard Schragenheim – in particular, the military decorations he received in the First World War. This is an attempt to show how far German Jews identified with their German national identity before and during that war, and the extent to which they were ensconced in the social, cultural and military paradigms of German society.

The display explores the complexity of cultural and national identity through the telling of the Schragenheim family story and sharing the wealth of evidence of a fragmented narrative that is, ultimately, German. After all, Bernhard and his two brothers, Erich and Arthur, along with their cousins, Ernst and Iwan, had served in the German forces in WWI. Bernhard served in the Reserve

Regiment No. 48, fighting in the trenches on the Russian and French fronts. Twice decorated for bravery, he made rapid progress through the ranks and by the war's end was a Commander for one of the three Companies in the two Regiment 48 battalions.¹² Julian was duly influenced by his father's stories of serving in the Great War – surreal and distant in the context of his new life in South Africa:

He told me that day after day they made him crawl through the mud; that the first uniform they issued to him still had the bullet holes from the original battles in 1914. They had taken the uniform off a corpse - I presume they washed it. He said they pushed them through the mud for a couple of months and then they sent him to Russia.¹³

Bernhard Schragenheim's stories about the Great War provide a valuable account of the Jews' allegiance to Germany's war effort. The two Iron Crosses which he was awarded, along with the field and dress epaulettes, and Jewish prayer book (in German and Hebrew) are displayed under a wall of field postcards portraying images of life in the trenches..

Other notable items in the collection pertaining to Bernhard Schragenheim's military experience include button hole pins with Iron Crosses on them, over one hundred and fifty field postcards, a field diary (dated between 1914 and 1918, which has not yet been translated), and the following letter, written from the trenches to his family in the event of his death:

Today's reason for my writing is a special one; the letter is to give my last thoughts and feelings in case that God has decided that I shall not see you all again. May the dear God hear our prayers so that this letter, which I will hand to our company scribe ... to send on if necessary ... But I must now be prepared ... I beg you from my heart not give in too much to mourning. Just the thought of it puts a weight on my heart. I hope my diary will be handed to you.¹⁴

Julian discovered this letter in late 2012, when the content of the panel was being finalized. Excerpts have been included in the panel, revealing how far Jewish identity was integrated into German national identity.

Translating cultural fragments of history

Julian Schragenheim was born in Berlin in 1923. His testimony serves as a powerful articulation of the experience of a young Jewish boy born into a Germany in flux. The interviews with him provided the cohesive element required for curating the Schragenheim Collection. Over the past eighteen months, we met for lunch and

discussion in the sun room of Highlands House, the Jewish Retirement Village. Facing the impossibly beautiful view of Table Mountain, the serene atmosphere provided the space for deepening engagement with the dark memories and silenced narratives of the Berlin of Julian's childhood. The interviews involved handing over documents, letters, artifacts and photographs whose resonance cannot be reduced merely to academic terms. The methodological considerations emphasized the healing role of narrative therapy, allowing the interviewee some release from the burden of forced separation, departure and loss – and the sense of need to uphold the memory of family and the life that was left behind. According to Volkan, "there is no typical grief reaction, because the circumstances of a loss are varied, as are individual degrees of internal preparedness to face significant losses."¹⁵ Julian was faced with the unique circumstance of safeguarding the family papers providing evidence of a former life in Germany, and those left behind.

Bernhard had "made desperate attempts in 1939 to get his parents and his sister out, which [sic] he did not succeed in doing."¹⁶ For Julian, upholding the memory of his family no longer involved holding onto an exceptional form of mourning, but rather putting emphasis on, and making a special effort toward commemorating their lives.

According to curator Yehudit Inbar, "couplehood and family are the basis of human society," reflecting "a psychological need."¹⁷ For Julian, the process of handing over his family papers to the CTHC helped to satisfy this need. One volunteer was tasked with the translation of a set of letters sent between 1936 and 1940 from Berlin, a task she accomplished notwithstanding the difficulties of deciphering early 20th Century High German cursive. The translations of these letters were both moving and informative. They were sent from Julian's paternal grandparents, Zerline and Moses, and his aunt, Elsbeth (Hansi). Julian later argued that "you are bringing not only some facts... back to life, but you are actually bringing our family history back to life."¹⁸

During the mid-1930s, Julian was being schooled in English at Marist Brothers College in Johannesburg – he had a new life. For him, during the course of this project, the experience of rediscovering the content of otherwise encoded correspondence by the adults who hovered above him as a child provided some of the greatest moments of personal revelation. On one occasion, he described how for the first time he actually felt the warmth of his grandmother's personality. On 9 November, 1936, Zerline had written to Julian to send him wishes for his bar mitzvah:

I don't need to write many words and define my feelings about not being able to be present at Julian's Honor Day, where he will be accepted into the community according to

our lawsit causes us pain and is bitter but the thought that you are all well and that you, thank God, can live as free people makes up for many things.¹⁹

For the Schragenheims in Berlin, leaving was not a possibility owing to their poor health. By March 1939, Elsbeth reported that her father's condition had so worsened that he could "neither dress or undress himself, or walk on his own. A journey with him is quite unthinkable to me. As you may know, we are not allowed any longer to either use a sleeper in the train or in the dining room. So far I have not given notice in the office ... lots of work is the best medicine against too much thinking ... I hope you are all healthy and happy. Thousand greetings, Your Hanslein."²⁰

In April 1940, as the Schragenheims were celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary, Zerline reported that "the state of dear Father's mental and physical state is such that a large celebration would not be suitable."²¹ Indeed, in adversity, the psychological need for family is reflected in her references to Elsbeth – who was their "only consolation" without whom she "would not want to live anymore."²² As the years passed, the letters provided further insight into the devastating conditions of privation faced by those Jews trapped within the Third Reich after the outbreak of the Second World War. Moses Schragenheim died in his bed in Berlin in 1940, followed by his wife in 1941.

In conclusion, the universality of Bernhard's experience, despite its historical specificity, provides a striking contribution to the use of the exhibition as an educational tool through clearly demonstrating how racial discrimination is an agent leading toward the loss of both personal and group identity. The panel removes the stigma of the 'other' as depicted by various South African manifestations of xenophobia through showing empirical evidence of its nefarious influence. In so doing, it seeks to contribute to cultural openness and respect for diversity, which in turn forms part of the broader ethos of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre.

NOTES

- 1 Duggan, J. 'Update: National Policy on the Digitisation of Heritage Resources, News' – Archival Platform, 14 February, 2011, www.archivalplatform.org/news/entry/update_national_policy/, Accessed 20 February 2013.
- 2 Zaprunder, A. *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers' Diaries of the Holocaust*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2002, p10.
- 3 Distel, Barbara, 'The Persecution and Murder of German and German-Jewish Women between 1933 and 1945', in Hertzog, E. *Life, Death and Sacrifice: Women and Family in the Holocaust*, Green Publishing House, Jerusalem, 2008, p126.
- 4 Kaplan, M., 'Jewish Daily Life in Wartime Germany', in Bankier, D. *Probing the Depths of German Antisemitism: German Society and the Persecution of the Jews, 1933-1941*,

- Yad Vashem and the Leo Baeck Institute, Jerusalem, 2000, p395.
- 5 Greenfield, H. *Fragments of Memory: from Kolin to Jerusalem*, Gefen Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1998.
- 6 Letter from Elsbeth Schragenheim to Bernhard Schragenheim, Berlin, 17 February 1939.
- 7 Osrin, M. Foreword, 'Seeking Refuge: German Jewish Immigration to the Cape in the 1930s, including aspects of Germany confronting its past', designed and compiled by Linda Coetzee, Myra Osrin and Millie Pimstone, Cape Town Holocaust Centre, May 2003.
- 8 See Union of SA Aliens (Amendment) and Immigration Bill of 1937, CTHC Archival Collection, p2.
- 9 Ramothwala, Peter, 'Xenophobia might come back', *The New Age* (online), 14 February 2013, http://www.thenewage.co.za/83109-1009-53-Xenophobia_might_come_back, Accessed 26/2/2013.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 Interview with Julian Schragenheim by Michal Singer, 22 September 2011, Cape Town
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 Interview with Julian Schragenheim, by the author, 22 September, 2011, Cape Town
- 14 Letter from Bernhard Schragenheim, addressed to Moses and Zerline Schragenheim and his siblings, Arthur, Erich and Elsbeth, in the event of his death in combat, 17 June 1918
- 15 Volkan, V.D. 'The Next Chapter: Consequences of Societal Trauma', Gobodo-Madikizela, P. & Van der Merwe, C. (eds.) *Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness: Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, United Kingdom, 2009.
- 16 Interview with Julian Schragenheim by the author, 18 December 2013, Cape Town.
- 17 Inbar, Y. *Spots of Light: To Be a Woman in the Holocaust*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2007.
- 18 Interview with Julian Schragenheim, by the author, 11 September, 2012, Cape Town.
- 19 Letter from Zerline Schragenheim to Bernhard Schragenheim, Berlin, 9 November 1936.
- 20 Letter from Elsbeth Schragenheim to Bernhard Schragenheim, Berlin, 1 March 1939
- 21 Letter from Zerline Schragenheim to Bernhard Schragenheim, Berlin, 9 November 1936.
- 22 Letter from Zerline Schragenheim to Bernhard Schragenheim, Berlin, 7 April 1940

JEWISH AFFAIRS

**AFRICA'S ONLY JEWISH
CULTURAL JOURNAL**

**WHY NOT TAKE OUT A
GIFT SUBSCRIPTION?**

**Contact Shirley on 011 645 2583 or
email: beagle@beyachad.co.za**

THE HOLOCAUST - MODES OF REMEMBRANCE AND EDUCATION

*

Leah Nasson

“The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting,” says Mirek, a character in Milan Kundera’s 1978 novel, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. He says this, Kundera writes, “to justify what his friends call carelessness: meticulously keeping a diary, preserving his correspondence, compiling the minutes of all the meetings where they discuss the situation and ponder what to do [...] to hide and feel guilty would be the beginning of defeat”.¹ What the fictional character does to fight both the pernicious tide of future amnesia as well as to escape the insidious, omnipresent tentacles of the communist Czechoslovakian state is central to our understanding of memory as a political and social force. Mirek’s commitment to recording his present, however politically dangerous it may prove to be, demonstrates a key facet of the debate over using History teaching as a vehicle through which the principles of citizenship and social justice can be conveyed. In other words, Mirek’s statement shows that remembering is not a *passive* act; rather, it requires an *active* engagement with one’s present as well as one’s past, coupled with conscious, voluntary participation in the collective process of constructing memory. However naïve it may sound, it is perhaps only through this binary attachment to both the present and the past that we can imagine a future in which the oft-repeated declaration “never again” holds true. One need only glance at some of the horrifying, large-scale human rights abuses of the past two decades, from the Balkans and Rwanda to Darfur and beyond, to see that prejudice and persecution remain ubiquitous in our societies. The question, therefore, is *how* the act of remembering can be used as a tool in a responsible manner, such that the themes of social justice and citizenship exist in equilibrium with a critical understanding and interpretation of the past.

Leah Nasson holds BA (Hons) in Italian and History, an MA in Italian and a PGCE. She currently teaches History at Chesterhouse International School in Cape Town. The above essay received, in 2012, the inaugural Marlene Silbert Prize for Holocaust and Human Rights Education, awarded to a post graduate student from the educational faculties of the Universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch and the Western Cape and the Cape Town Holocaust Centre.

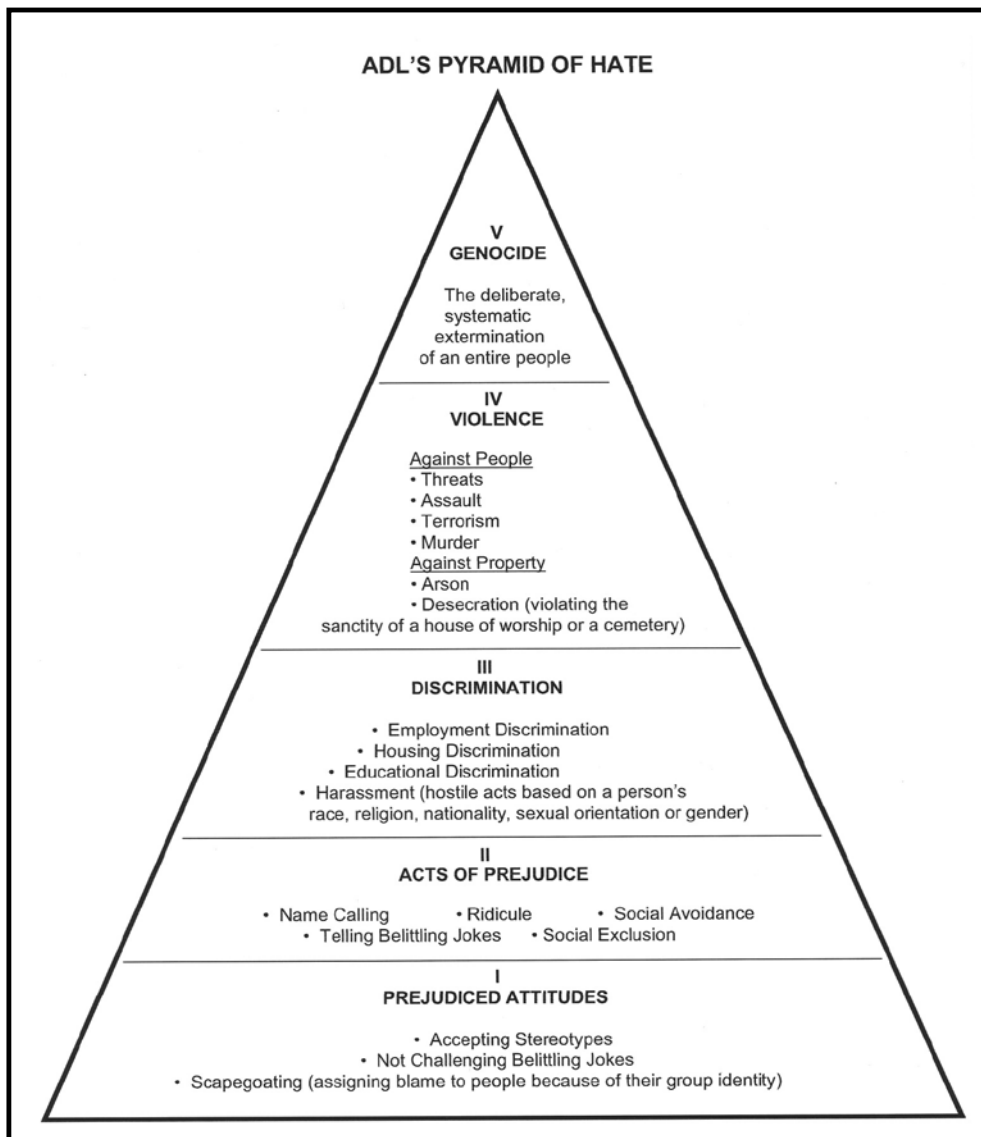
In transposing this somewhat nebulous area of contested memory and meaning onto a blank canvas of a History classroom, there are multiple challenges that emerge for educators. Most pertinently, there is the challenge of finding a balance between promoting a deep understanding of historical context while also exploring ways in which prejudice, discrimination and bigotry have led to gross violations of human rights. In doing so, the principal intention in teaching the Holocaust seems to be to incite young people to reflect on the choices they make in their present². These choices, to be clear, can stretch from deciding to stand up against discrimination in their school environment – whether in the form of bullying, peer pressure or name-calling – to choosing to become young activists for broader socio-political, cultural or environmental causes. Through looking at the present through the relatively transpicuous lenses of the past (and *vice versa*), one hopes that young people learn how to engage with their immediate milieu on a more meaningful level; that, in effect, they learn to make conscious decisions to resist oppression, to stand up for the principles of a free and democratic society, to recognise their own prejudices, and to take active responsibility for their role as citizens in society. In short, human rights education through the historical study of racism and genocide challenges student “to become more competent at understanding the complex world before them and to see themselves as participants in a global community [...] to develop greater empathy for the suffering of their neighbours and to be courageous enough to stand up for the common good”.³

In classrooms worldwide, the watershed historical period encompassing Nazi Germany and the Holocaust is used as a case study for exploring themes of moral and ethical turpitude, of unimaginable – Yet very real - human rights abuses, and of the complex relationship between perpetrator, victim and bystander. Not only does the state-sponsored mass-murder and persecution lend itself to detailed study, given that it is exceptionally well-documented, but it also embodies the full spectrum of choices in human behaviour. As such, its issues defy simplification or superficial treatment⁴ and resonate deeply at the crux of human conscience and consciousness. In essence, while fixed in set historical circumstances, the lessons of the Holocaust and universal, crossing national, cultural, religious,

linguistic, political and socio-economic frontiers. It is for this reason, *inter alia*, that in more recent decades and in many school curricula the study of the Holocaust has extended beyond merely concentrating on an examination of its legacy for the purpose of remembering those who perished at the hands of the Nazis. Indeed, explicit links have been drawn between the past and the present and the study of the Holocaust “has often been a critical catalyst in the further development of teaching and learning about human rights. As students and teachers understand the significance of knowing the pattern of the Nazi genocide, they begin to think about methods for prevention *before oppression reaches genocide proportions in the present and future* [own italics]”.⁵

Here, one must on course be wary of falling into the restrictive and reductive trap reflected by the pervasive aphorism (or rather, cliché) that “History repeats itself”, which tends to constrain the discussion to rather populist lines. In saying that “History repeats itself”, one effectively negates the role of the individual in resisting,

perpetrating or simply resigning him/herself to the status quo. Ultimately, it denies the presence of *choice*⁶. In effect, in seeing History or historical events as existing apart from us, or beyond our control, we are absolving ourselves of a collective duty to protect and actively defend the human rights of our fellow global citizens. Within the ambit of human rights education, it is hence essential that we be guided away from apathy and powerlessness towards reflecting upon what forms our actions, and that we inculcate in students a profound sense of what is a morally and ethically sound response to any form of discrimination. The act of remembering the Holocaust and the study of genocide in the classroom forces students to grapple with issues related to “ethnocentrism, relativism, universalism, responsibility, conflict and justice”.⁷ However, simply grappling with these issues does not necessarily lead to recognition that prejudice, bigotry and acts of bias, however “trivial” they may first appear to the student (jokes, stereotyping, name-calling and the like), can form the foundation for more



severe, formalised systems of oppression and persecution. It is for this reason, therefore that the pyramid of hate is often used as an effective pedagogical tool in studying the Holocaust.

The visual impact of the pyramid of hate forms an apposite point of departure for a deeper exploration into the Holocaust and human behaviour. It is, no doubt, most effective when used in conjunction with a visit to a Holocaust museum or memorial, such as the Cape Town Holocaust Centre, where one is immediately faced with the harrowing consequences of systematic persecution and discrimination. The interactive nature of the museum facilitates the shift from abstract historical information and impersonal statistics to the realities of human experience⁸. In doing so, it counters the danger of students perceiving the genocide solely in terms of black and white print on school textbooks, as “just another event to study”. The multifaceted educational value of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre is embedded in the vision it presents to the visitor: it is a vision that consciously moves beyond memorialisation in its objectives, and opens up the critical debate on *how* and *why* people behaved in the way in which they did. Moreover, the permanent exhibition urges us to reflect on South Africa’s own iniquitous policies of segregation under the apartheid regime, so preventing a perception that the seeds of hatred at the heart of Holocaust could only have been sown in Nazi-ruled Germany. Those seeds, in many ways, continue to germinate in South Africa’s adolescent democracy. A visit to the museum, therefore, has the obvious potential to frame our response to current popular socio-political and cultural discourse.

That said, however, one needs to be cautious with the manner in which the material is presented, interpreted and explored. In other words, one has to be open to analysing *all* sources (oral, written and visual; primary and secondary), and further encourage the critical thinking that is so central to historical enquiry. For example, we enter potentially dangerous territory when broad and often vague comparisons between apartheid and the Holocaust are drawn, which seems to be somewhat *de rigueur* in public discourse. While conceptually, it is a useful link to make when teaching South African students, it is equally important that the crucial differences between the two historical events are underlined. Apartheid was not genocide, and to draw on circumstantial similarities between apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany undoubtedly denies the complexities of both state-mandated systems of mass persecution. Indeed, Alice Perrigrew argues, one needs to be wary of over-simplifying a discussion on the pyramid of hate and hence removing the Holocaust from the political and socio-economic conditions of Nazi Germany. In looking at the escalation of antisemitic sentiment in Germany, students should be made aware that of

course bullying, stereotyping and name-calling *do not* necessarily lead to genocide. The boundaries are not as blurred as some may like to think they are. She states that:

[...] it is important that students are offered a framework from which they can act and arguably the micro-level of school-based bullying offers an instructive and empowering opportunity for students to feel able to ‘make a difference’ [...] Perhaps the lesson that ‘it all starts with bullying’ [...] fails adequately to engage with all the many times throughout history that expressions of prejudice and discrimination have not led to extreme, state-sponsored violence or genocide. More importantly, it detracts from the particular social, economic and political context of Nazi Germany, and the wider context of a modern Europe and its long and convoluted histories of antisemitism and racialization, in which the Holocaust did in fact take place.⁹

What emerges through Perrigrew’s extract is that the study of the Holocaust requires not one, but multiples lenses of analysis. On one hand, the act of remembering certainly has the potential to instil a sense of active citizenship in students – that they may feel able to ‘make a difference’ – and as such, it empowers individuals to stand up against any form of prejudice. On the other hand, there nevertheless remain questions as to the extent to which this pedagogical framework deprives students of a properly contextualised historical analysis. Teaching the Holocaust hence requires maintaining a fine balance between recognising and exploring its uniqueness, such that it is not simply seen as an adjunct to the Second World War,¹⁰ while examining significant broader and complex historical context with a critical eye. As Perrigrew continues to argue, the salient moral and ethical lessons that emerge from teaching the Holocaust cannot be packaged easily as fixed, uncontested and resolved, but rather from part of the deep and complex fabric of our present and past society. She notes that in using contained, straight-forward and seemingly uncontentious ‘lessons’ such as ‘racism is dangerous’ and ‘prejudice is wrong’, there emerges a risk that “teachers and their students may be encouraged to distance themselves or deny the inevitable and on-going challenges and potential tensions that a twenty-first multicultural democracy necessarily entails”.¹¹ Thus, it is evident that there are multiple layers to the debate over the extent to which using the act of memory as a safeguard against human rights violations, and that the question cannot be simplified into neat, ‘safe’ packages for transmission.

Before concluding, there is one more dimension to the debate that is briefly worth mentioning: that of the contested nature of memory, which

is frequently used as a socio-cultural or political tool for nefarious ends. Often disguised in a seemingly anodyne veil of a proto-nationalist folk song or carefully-selected source material in a museum, the act of remembering can also prove to be divisive. The resurgence in recent years of extreme right-wing groups in Europe, for example, is often coupled with an over-emphasis (or rather, distortion) of the past in order to buttress neo-Fascist or neo-Nazi ideological ends. Habitually well-versed in emotive language of nostalgia, these groups, whether formally recognised as political parties or marginalised on the fringes of society, recognise the potential of appealing to memory – collective or otherwise – to promote (and not prevent) discrimination and prejudice. Moreover, as Davies and Brown note, in recent decades there has been extensive research into the nature of historical objectivity, and that “history has been characterised as being concerned with the promotion of doubt. *If this is appropriate, then it is possible, unless firm moral frameworks are established, for inappropriate revisionism to take place unchecked* [italics added]”.¹²

In conclusion, there is a certain opacity to a discussion on the potential of historical memory to safeguard against human rights violations, and it is clear that there are manifold (and often contentious) threads of interpretation that should inform our response to this debate. Its seemingly straightforward appearance betrays its fundamentally complex form and substance. This is not, however, to argue that the human rights angle should be removed from the study of the Holocaust, but rather that it needs to be carefully deconstructed and clearly rooted in its historical context. When using historical events to demonstrate the *contemporary* relevance within the sphere of social justice, one should be specifically cautious to not blur the boundaries between the “then” and the “now”. The lessons of the “then” can certainly inform our reactions to the “now”, but the two are not one and the same. Within this context, perhaps the most valuable prism through which to view the act of remembering as a tool for safeguarding against human rights violations is to explore the roles of perpetrators, victims and bystanders. Indeed, arguably it is the seemingly innocuous and often ambivalent role of the “bystander” – whether individuals, nations or even the UN – that most needs to be explored and contested in History classrooms, such that future generations may see no need to look back on gross human rights violations, and think “How could we have let this happen?” As we continue today to be flooded by images of Syria, where civilians are increasingly pounded by the ruthless state-sponsored terror of al-Assad’s regime, this should resonate deeply within our collective conscience. Ultimately, it is in moments such as these that the act of remembering as means of safeguarding against human rights violations becomes particularly

poignant and pertinent. Because, put quite simply, we cannot afford to forget.¹³

NOTES

- 1 Kundera, M, (1996), *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. London: Faber & Faber, p4.
- 2 This is reinforced by the results of a survey of History teachers conducted by the University of London’s Instituted Of Education, in which an overwhelming majority (67.%) of teachers responded that the primary aim in teaching the Holocaust as ‘To develop an understanding of the roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping in any society’ (Perrigrew, 2010:51) See further examples: Appendix B
- 3 Shiman, D. & Fernekes, W, ‘The Holocaust, Human Rights and Democratic Citizenship Education’, *Social Studies*. 90 (2), 1999, p55.
- 4 Sleeper, M, Stern Strom, M, & Zabierek, HC, ‘Facing History and Ourselves’, *Educational Leadership*, 48 (3), 1990, p85.
- 5 Gatens, R, & Johnson, M, ‘Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Education: Learning Political Competencies for 21st century citizenship’, *Journal of International Social Studies*, 1 (2), 2001, p37.
- 6 It is important to bear in mind that the idea of choice in itself is not as clear-cut as many may assume it to be explored in all of its intricacies in the classroom, and from various angles: what leads people to make specific choices (fear, pressure, personal decision, individuals’ histories etc.) It is a delicate topic that, if not managed correctly, can quickly descend into the dangerous area of imposing judgment onto the past.
- 7 Shiman, Fernekes, p55.
- 8 That said, nevertheless, we should be cautious of treating memory and the so-called realities of human experience in History as an uncontested space. Rather, of a greater educational value is an exploration of the role that memory plays in the discipline, as well as the strengths and weakness of oral testimonies or witness accounts, coupled with a discussion how (if at all) Oral History interpretation should be placed in a different interpretative framework from ‘traditional History’. Alistair Thomson and Alessandro Portelli’s work on memory and history come to mind, but there is a wealth of scholarship available on these debates.
- 9 Perrigrew, ‘A, Limited lessons from the Holocaust? Critically considering the ‘anti-racist’ and citizenship potential’, *Teaching History* (141), 2010, p53.
- 10 Brown, M, & Davies, I, ‘The Holocaust and Education for Citizenship: the teaching of history, religion and human rights in England’, *Educational Review*, 50 (1), 1998, p79.
- 11 Perrigrew, p54.
- 12 David, Brown, p81.
- 13 That said, nevertheless, we should be cautious of treating memory in History as an uncontested space. Rather, of a greater educational value is an exploration of the role that memory plays in the discipline, as well as the strengths and weakness of oral testimonies or witness accounts, coupled with a discussion how (if at all) Oral History interpretation should be placed in a different interpretative framework from ‘traditional History’. Again, one thinks of Alistair Thomson and Alessandro Portelli’s work on memory and history come to mind, but there is much more scholarship available on these debates.

WHO REMEMBERS?

*

Shirli Gilbert

The first time South African Jews commemorated the Holocaust, it didn't yet have a name. In December 1942, barely a year since the first Nazi death camp had begun its grisly work at Chelmno, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and SA Zionist Federation called a nationwide Day of Mourning. Packed services were held at shuls in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg. "Women wept and looked dumb with agony", reported one local newspaper. Less than half of the Jewish community at that time was South African-born. The rest had come directly from Eastern Europe, and what was happening there – in their hometowns, to their communities, to their family members – was beyond the capacity of imagination to grasp. Through 1943 and 1944, while the gas chambers continued to ceaselessly operate, and rifle fire rang out in ghettos and towns and forests from Berlin to Bialystok, South African Jews protested, mourned and remembered.

The Allied armies' victory in 1945 eventually came and went, and millions of soldiers and Displaced Persons across Europe returned to their homes and families. Meanwhile, Jews awoke slowly to the immensity of their loss. Entire branches of family trees had been abruptly and violently severed. Vital institutions of communal and spiritual life had disappeared with few traces. The genocide wrought tectonic shifts in Jewish life and identity that were not easily comprehended or addressed. What was the Jewish world without its wellspring in Eastern Europe? Who would be its rabbis, its intellectuals, its politicians, its leaders? Was it now in America? In Palestine? From our present-day perspective, it is difficult to understand the depth of the existential uncertainty this caused for a tiny community at the tip of the African continent. South Africa was at that time in the throes of its own vicious racial and political wars, which would culminate in the victory of the National Party just three years after the end of the war. For Jews in this country, the rise to power of the so-called 'Malanazis' was a frightening blow to their already deep sense of weakness and vulnerability.

In my work as a historian of the Holocaust I have traced how our community has remembered the *Shoah* since these early wartime years, and my words today are shaped by the many things I have discovered and learned. But it is only partly

as a historian that I offer you my thoughts about the significance of remembering, seventy years almost to the day since the Warsaw ghetto rose up in the flames of Jewish resistance. The *Shoah* was a quiet but constant presence in my childhood Johannesburg home, evident in the prohibition on throwing away any morsel of food, the ingenious economy with which every part of the chicken was used, and the periodic Yiddish references to what had happened 'over there' – *dortn*. My mother's parents, young newlyweds full of hope and promise when they arrived in Warsaw from the *shtetlach*, were imprisoned in the ghetto along with hundreds of thousands of their fellow Jews in 1940. Like many others, they endured hunger, deprivation, and unthinkable loss – of a child, parents, siblings, community and entire existence. Unlike most, they managed to make it out alive through a combination of initiative and sheer luck, though in my childish awareness their story felt curiously distant: bombs dropping over Warsaw, illicit border-crossings, Siberian labour camps. The photographs on my grandmother's wall evoked a vanished world that I spent hours trying to imagine, but by the time my flood of questions about 'over there' was unleashed, she was no longer around to answer. It is her memory and the memory of millions of others like her that has motivated my work over the past fifteen years, and that serves as a constant reminder to me that in addition to its courageous fighters, the Warsaw ghetto housed hundreds of thousands of ordinary Jewish men and women, no different to you or me, whose prime resistance was enduring from one day to the next as best they could, in circumstances they could never in their wildest imaginations have conceived.

South African Jews began to remember the *Shoah* sooner, more widely, and more prominently than almost any other Jewish community in the world. The *Shoah* became a central part of how we understood ourselves and our place in the world, as human beings, as South Africans, and most of all as Jews. As the years and decades passed, and as our existence here strengthened and deepened, so too did our remembrance. Our guiding lights were the heroes of the Warsaw ghetto uprising and their likeness in the soldiers of the state of Israel, who refused to entrust the Jewish future to an impassive and indifferent world. Each year, we remembered how millions of Jews had been taken to their deaths while the world stood by and watched. Each year, as today, we sang the partisans' song, *Zog nit keynmol az du geyst dem letstn veg* ("Never say that you are on the final road"), with its proud affirmation of Jewish

Dr. Shirli Gilbert is Karten Senior Lecturer in History and Jewish/non-Jewish Relations at the University of Southampton. This article is based on her keynote address at the 2013 Yom Hashoah ceremony in Cape Town.

endurance: *Mir zaynen do!* (“We are here!”).

By the early 1990s, the Holocaust was no longer our property alone. As our nation began the long process of coming to terms with its own racist and violent past, the Holocaust was a fundamental point of reference. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was about restorative justice, in explicit contrast to the punitive justice of the Nuremberg trials. Experts on Holocaust trauma were brought in to facilitate rehabilitation workshops with victims of apartheid. Research on the psychology of Nazi perpetrators was used as a basis for examining the motivations of apartheid’s perpetrators. Our history was now on the national stage, and the lessons it taught were universal: the destructive consequences of racism, the value of tolerance and mutual respect, and our obligation as individuals and as a society to protect democracy and human rights. In one of his first public acts as president, Nelson Mandela proclaimed: ‘By honouring [Anne Frank’s] memory [...], we are saying with one voice: Never and Never Again!’

In our early 21st Century world, more people than ever remember the genocide, and they do so by many names: the *Shoah*, the *Churban*, the Holocaust.

The UN has designated 27 January, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz, as an international day of Holocaust commemoration. Each year, dozens of new courses are offered and hundreds of new books published. A recent count came up with more than sixty five Holocaust museums and education centres around the world, from Washington D.C. and Sydney to Fukuyama and Buenos Aires. In our own country, the Holocaust is an integral part of the national curriculum, and new museums have been created in Durban and Johannesburg, in addition to the original in Cape Town.

But amidst this abundance of memory, we are also quietly aware of the dwindling few who actually, directly remember. Only a small number of survivors remain among us, and they are gradually passing from our midst. For some survivors, even their own tireless efforts to recall and recount were never enough to convey what had happened to them, whether or not the world was listening. ‘The destruction [...] was not told by anyone,’ wrote the Italian survivor Primo Levi. ‘We, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. [...] We are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it, or have returned mute, but they are [...] the drowned, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance.’ Levi’s words were echoed by the survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, who wrote: ‘Those who have not lived through the experience will never know. Those who have, will never tell; not really, not completely. The Past belongs to the dead.’

So what is the legacy with which we are left?

Can we remember? And if, by commemorating the *Shoah* as we do today we affirm that we should continue to remember as best we can, how should we do that? Should we remember as Jews, ever alert to the threats directed against us by bigots of every national and religious stripe? Should we remember as Jews, wary of the blurry line between anti-Zionism and antisemitism? Or should we remember as South Africans, mindful of what it means to subjugate, deprive and dispossess a people solely on the basis of the colour of their skin? Should we remember as South Africans, having witnessed ourselves the persecution of another community in our midst? Or should we remember as human beings, conscious of the dangers of racism whatever form it takes, and the need to teach our children the necessity of tolerance and open-mindedness, both towards the familiar and that which has been designated to us?

Despite what we may have been told by our intellectuals, our rabbis, our politicians, and our leaders, these questions have no obvious answers. We should do well to listen once again to the inimitable words of Primo Levi, who opens his memoir with the following plea to us, the future generations:

You who live safe
 In your warm houses,
 You who find warm food
 And friendly faces when you return home.
 Consider it this is a man
 Who works in mud,
 Who knows no peace,
 Who fights for a crust of bread,
 Who dies by a yes or no.
 Consider if this is a woman
 Without hair, without name,
 Without the strength to remember,
 Empty are her eyes, cold her womb,
 Like a frog in winter.
 Never forget that this has happened.
 Remember these words.
 Engrave them in your hearts,
 When at home or in the street,
 When lying down, when getting up.
 Repeat them to your children.
 Or may your houses be destroyed,
 May illness strike you down,
 May your offspring turn their faces from you.

Each of us will decide for her- or himself what meaning to draw from the *Shoah*, so increasingly far from our present and yet still so fundamental to how we understand ourselves and our place in the world, as Jews, as South Africans, and as human beings. The past belongs to the dead, but it also – unavoidably, inescapably, necessarily – belongs to us. It is our responsibility not just to remember it, but to choose how we remember it to our children, and to our children’s children after them.



THE JEWISH EMIGRANT FROM BRITAIN, 1700-2000

*

David Saks

At the beginning of the last century, the proportion of world Jewry whose home language was English was little more than 5%. Perhaps half of the total would have been living on the European mainland, mainly in territories under the regime of Tzarist Russia – today's independent states of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine, as well as in Russia proper. Another sizable percentage were living in Muslim-majority - largely Arab-speaking - territories, in North Africa and the Middle East. The Anglophone Jewish communities, as is the case today, were found in the US, Canada, the UK, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, but their numbers were comparatively very small in 1900.

A century later, the situation had changed dramatically. Out of an estimated world Jewish population of 14 million, the proportion living in English-speaking countries is now a little under 50% of the total and over 80% of the Diaspora. This includes 5.4 million in the US, 315 000 in Canada, 260 000 in the UK, 100 000 in Australia, 75 000 in South Africa and 7000 in New Zealand.

The reasons for this extraordinary shift are not hard to identify. In the course of the 20th Century, some three-quarters of mainland European Jewry were annihilated in the Holocaust, persecution in the wake of Israel's establishment saw an almost whole-sale Jewish exodus from Jews in Arab and Muslim countries and the majority of Jews in the Former Soviet Union, after being subjected to decades of anti-Jewish discrimination that had significantly reduced their numbers, emigrated after 1990.

There was, however, another reason for the huge increase of the English-speaking Jewish population – both proportionately and in terms of actual numbers - and this was the great influx of Jewish immigration into Anglophone countries from the late 19th Century onwards. Of these, only a minority came from Britain proper, but

the process of Jewish emigration from England and other parts of the UK had in fact begun several centuries before at the very dawn of British colonial expansion. These immigrants, while numerically far inferior to the later Jewish influxes from Eastern and Central Europe, were nevertheless the pioneers of Jewish community life in the US and the Dominions of Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand and did much to pave the way for future Jewish settlement on a larger scale.

The story of Jewish emigration from Britain, one that has to date received surprisingly little scholarly attention, is the subject of *The Jewish Emigrant from Britain, 1700-2000*, a volume of essays edited by Dr Gabriel Sivan and published under the auspices of the Israel Branch of the Jewish Historical Society of England (JHSE). Sivan is a long-serving chairman of both the JHSE's Israel Branch and of the World Jewish Bible Association. For good measure, he is also a long-standing member of the editorial board of and frequent contributor to *Jewish Affairs*. In addition to editing the volume, he has contributed a substantial chapter on Jewish immigration to the US, from the first few scattered individuals arriving in the mid-17th Century through to the post-World War II era, when by 1960, about a quarter of a million British Jews had relocated there. As is the case with the other essays in the book, the chapter essentially begins as a story of individuals and proceeds from there to one of formally organised communities as the Jewish population gradually increased.

The Jewish Emigrant from Britain was brought out in memory of Lloyd Gartner, who passed away in 2011 after having served for over three decades as founder-chairman of the JHSE's Israel Branch. The subject was chosen because it well complemented Lloyd's own ground-breaking work, *The Jewish Immigrant in England, 1870-1914* (London, 1960). The aim of the book would be to "investigate the reasons why Jews left the British Isles for North

David Saks is Associate Director of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and editor of Jewish Affairs.

America, Southern Africa, Australia and New Zealand, providing case histories and statistics wherever available". It would further examine the little-known phenomenon of Jews returning to Russia and pay special attention to those who settled in Israel.

The subject of this volume is naturally of considerable relevance to South African Jewish historiography. Time and again, one sees the experiences of the first Jewish immigrants to this country paralleled by very similar developments in other pioneering colonial societies. These include the initial lack of religious facilities and clergy and the inevitable attrition that occurred through intermarriage and sometimes conversion to Christianity. In Canada and the US, as in South Africa, there were initial social and cultural tensions between the Anglicised establishment and the numerically dominant Yiddish-speaking immigrants from Eastern and Central Europe. One sees also how despite their small numbers, Jews were disproportionately involved in the development, economic or otherwise, of the territories in which they settled (the achievements of the small New Zealand Jewish community are particularly striking in this regard). The Australian experience was somewhat different, in that for the first six decades following the British arrival, most of the Jews who arrived were deported convicts rather than free settlers. Jews were also thus present, if unwillingly, at the very commencement of European settlement in Australia. This was not the case with the other major countries featured, where Jews began arriving at a somewhat later stage.

The chapter on immigration to South Africa, as well as to both Northern and Southern Rhodesia (today's Zambia and Zimbabwe), was contributed by Gwynne Schrire, whose name will be familiar to readers of this journal through her numerous articles on aspects of the South African Jewish experience over many years. It is a lively account, replete with interesting episodes that Schrire has herself unearthed over the years and written up in these pages. For example, we are told of the difficulties experienced by the young Jewish community's first minister, Reverend Isaac Pulver, whose dissatisfaction with the low standards of religious observance contributed to his early departure to Australia several years later. There is also reference to the Jewish criminal class, and to the Jewish prisoners who were held in Cape Town's Breakwater Gaol. Schrire shows how strong and lasting has been the Anglo-Jewish influence in the emergence of formal Jewish communal structures and modes of religious worship, despite the subsequent arrival of the numerically preponderant East European immigrants after 1880. Institutions like the Chief Rabbinate and the SA Jewish Board of Deputies are amongst the lasting legacies of this early influence.

The South African interest in this book goes

beyond this one specific chapter. Since 1976, some 40 000 South African Jews have left the country, with some four out of five moving to Australia, Canada, the US and the UK itself (as well as, albeit in much smaller numbers, to New Zealand). The fact that these were English-speaking countries was a decisive factor in their choice of destination.

Schrire further sketches the rise and effective demise of the once substantial Jewish communities of Zimbabwe and Zambia, from their establishment in the 1890s onwards through to the post-colonial period. Zimbabwe Jewry today numbers around 260 souls, down from a peak of over 7000 in the 1960s, while perhaps a few dozen remain in Zambia where once there were well over a thousand. During their heyday, however, these were vibrant and highly influential communities, about one-third of whose members comprised immigrants from the UK. One of the noteworthy contributions of this book is that it brings to a wider readership the story of these now largely vanished centers of African Jewry and help to ensure that their part in the greater saga of Jewish peoplehood does not slip into obscurity.

The chapter on Jewish immigrants to the UK who either chose or were compelled to subsequently return to Russia adds a new, and hitherto largely unknown aspect to the Jewish immigration experience. Available evidence suggests that such returnees constituted just over 15% of the total. Of those who did not die in the Shoah, the majority were condemned to live under the Soviet jackboot until the fall of Communism.

Although the book's subject is Jewish migration from Britain, the editor has also included an essay by the late Lloyd Gartner entitled 'The Great Jewish Migration, Myths and Realities, 1881-1914'. This is a sensible decision, since it puts the whole phenomenon of mass Jewish immigration during those years into better context. It also highlights some of the important findings of Gartner's research, amongst them his exposure of the fallacy that pogroms and persecution were primarily behind the Jewish exodus from Europe in those years.

The Jewish Emigrant from Britain constitutes a very thorough and scholarly contribution to a still rather neglected subject, and significantly adds to our understanding of how and why the modern Jewish Diaspora came about. It is certainly a worthy vehicle for perpetuating the life and achievements of a distinguished Jewish historian, for which its editor and all others involved deserve much credit.

The Jewish Emigrant from Britain 1700-2000: Essays in memory of Lloyd P Gartner, edited by Gabriel A. Sivan, published by the Israeli Branch of the Jewish Historical Society of England, Jerusalem, 2013, 228pp.

THE ORGAN AND ITS MUSIC IN GERMAN-JEWISH CULTURE

*

David Klepper

Tina Frühauf, born to a non-Jewish German family, developed an early interest in music and decided to become a keyboard performer, with emphasis on the organ. She then discovered an old print of German-Jewish cantorial parts in the University Library of Bochum, Germany. This excited her curiosity, and inspired many years of research culminating in this very readable, thorough and loving description of a culture wiped out by the Holocaust. Being someone who moved from Reform to Orthodox Jewish practice, conventional wisdom would suggest that this reviewer would be uninterested in a culture associated with Reform Judaism in the country where the movement started. As a lover of good music, however, I must recognize that the culture produced a very large and fine body of music (only a fraction of which survives). The sincere efforts of Tina Frühauf to assist in preserving what remains of this, chronicle its history and bring it to wider notice is to be applauded.

Frühauf has a good understanding of organ design and construction, and there is a wealth of detail on this. She has profound knowledge of music theory, and the book contains thorough and clear descriptions of music compositions. Some readers may wish to skip these sections, but will not lose the overall continuity of the story. That story is largely the progression from music similar to the traditions of the Christian Church to a blend of modern serious creative musical thinking and traditional Hebrew chants and melodies. The book has many mini-biographies of German-Jewish musicians of the time. The reader will obtain understanding of the degree to which these considered themselves Jewish and German and how they attempted to blend the two cultures under varying circumstances.

The penultimate chapter, dealing with the Nazi era, records how those Jewish organists, choral directors and composers (many being all three) who survived immigrated, in the main to the United States and Israel, as well as to a lesser degree to the UK. In making new lives for themselves, these musicians often found employment in synagogues, while those in Israel earned a living primarily as teachers. Both in Israel and in North America, they returned to composing new music, influenced by their new

surroundings.

Some may be surprised to learn that there are Orthodox congregations with organs. At one extreme, Shearith Israel in New York City, North America's oldest Jewish congregation, has the small reed-organ left behind by George Gershwin upon his move to Hollywood. The West End Synagogue in Frankfurt has a large Walcker pipe organ on the style of the many organs by that firm that were destroyed during *Kristallnacht*. In both cases, these are used for special events, but not for accompanying worship. Other cases are discussed, including one synagogue that welcomed the Sabbath with organ accompaniment but did not use the organ during the Sabbath itself. The above notwithstanding, the controversy concerning the use of the organ continues to be one of several bones of contention between Orthodox and non-Orthodox modes of Jewish worship.

What is striking is the resilience of German Jewish music under the Nazis. Music continued to be composed, with composers now being drawn more to specifically Jewish themes, from worship chants and folk music. Concerts were presented, including organ recitals. The last such concert took place as late as 1941!

Because her main interest is in the organ and its music, Frühauf's treatment of German Reform Jews and their assimilationist tendencies is objective; she has no 'axe to grind'. This in itself is an excellent reason for reading this book. For the individual specifically interested in organs, there is access to the publisher's website and descriptions of all known European synagogue pipe organs. The list of organ compositions by German and Austrian Jewish composers within the book is comprehensive and formidable.

The only area that needs some addition or correction is the mention of the historic Jewish musical notation for chanting from the Torah, other sacred texts, and prayers. The text shows familiarity only with Ashkenazi use, but the author may since have learned that Sephardim and also the Yemenites use these signs, but with other musical values.

Frühauf now teaches at Columbia University, New York, and is continuing her research. It is to be hoped that her future books will be as fine as this one.

Dave Klepper is a student at Yeshivat Beit Orot, Jerusalem. He is former President of Klepper Marshall King Associates, Ltd. White Plains, NY

The Organ and Its Music in German-Jewish Culture by Tina Frühauf, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006, 284pp.

new POETRY

Likht

Der tate hot aropgenumen
dem opgehitn khanuke lomp,
shvarts baflektn,
kroyn un leyb,
odler un toyb
farigelt tsu zeyer palats,
akht brunems leydike,
oysgedreyte knoytn shtayf
mit eyl fun far a yorn
di naynstn brumen der shames,
der oyfze'er, der ontsinder,
der eyl ladish shteyndik leydik.

Er hot avekgeleykt papir
in kikh afn tish,
funandergemakht dem lomp,
avegeleykt di shroyfn mit di rigln,
yeder eyner keseyder,
gebrumendik hot er gearbet,
geshushket an faryorike filosofie,
mir gerlangt di shmate,
mir gezogt ikh zol es opputsn,
shtik bay shtik.

Af droysn
nito keyn blumen,
dos groz groy,
der himl leydik fun bloy;
ge-otemt vi in volkns,
opraybendik di hent
antkegn di kelt.

Lebn tsum fayer
hob ikh zikh shtil gearbet,
unter der oyg fun dem odler,
ver hot oysgeruft tsu mir,
beys mir hobn yeden zikorn polirt,
biz es hot geglantst,
es vayter tsurekhtgemakht
biz es iz geshtanen vi a mol
keseder,
in geherikn ort,
leyb mit kroyn,
odler mit toyb,
dekl mit brunem,
eyl mit knoytl,
yeder tsu zayn tsvek.

Yene nakht hobn mir ongetsundn dos ershte likhtl,
maoz tsur gezungn,
Yehudah's fartsaytische nitsokhndike gezang,
unzere eygene neys:

mayn tatns gayst,
mayn tatns flam.

Hazel Frankel

The Pillowcase

Strong linen
Beautifully embroidered
Small pointed blue petals
Made for me by my mother
When I married

It was torn
Ripped from the washing line
By someone who did not care
I carefully darned the tear
But the repair remained
As it does today -
Obviously there

It is called 'downsizing'
Going into a smaller space
Disposing of everything
That made up my life
Until now ...
Furniture, paintings, books,
Clothing, crockery, cutlery
Bric a brac
And linen ...

This morning, I held that pillowcase
Made from sturdy white linen
And studied the finely embroidered petals
White now with age -
Each one perfectly stitched and in place.

Why now?
Why has it taken so long?
Why after all these years
Do I see how much love and care
Was embedded into every thread?

The embroidery is faded - but intact
The rend I tried to mend remains
But the linen is as resolute as ever

And of all things to which I will say farewell
And dispose of and leave behind
This pillowcase will not be amongst them
This tough, torn pillowcase
Will be kept
Despite the damage
And despite the years
As a reminder of the strength
Which stays steadfast in the fabric
And the strength that lies in love.

Charlotte Cohen.

(Author's Translation: My father took down/the cherished Chanukah
lomp/tarnished black,/crown and lion,/eagle and dove,/bolted to their
palace,/eight wells empty,
twisted string wicks stiff/with last year's oil,/ninth well for the
shames,/the overseer, the lighter,/the oil jug upright and empty. .. He
laid paper/on the kitchen table,/dismantled the lamp,/placed screws
with bolts,/each in order,/hummed as he/worked,/whispering an age-
old philosophy,/passed me the rag,/bade me polish./piece by piece.
.. Outside,/wildflowers were gone,/grass was grey,/sky was empty
of blue:/our breath came in clouds/as we rubbed our hands together/
against the chill. .. Beside the fire/I worked silently/under the eye of
the eagle,/whose call sang to me/as we polished each memory/until it
shone./put the whole back together./so that it stood as it always had./in
its right order,/in its right place./lion with crown,/eagle with dove,/lid
with well,/oil with wick,/each according to its purpose. ..That night
we lit the first candle,/sang maaz tsur,/Judah's old triumphant song./
our own miracle:/my father's spirit,/my father's torch.)

READERS' LETTERS

*

I was most interested to read Rose Norwich's article 'Johannesburg's Beth Hamedrash Hagodol and its Legacy' in your Rosh Hashanah 2013 issue. In it, she mentions that the Johannesburg Orthodox Hebrew Congregation rented the residence of Harry Filmer at 42 Fox Street in Ferreirastown from 1891 until 1 February 1893 until their own premises were ready.

Visiting Nazareth House Aged Home in then-Salisbury in 1969 for a research project, I met Harry Filmer's son, also called Harry Filmer. The younger Harry had been born in Johannesburg in 1888, one of the first English children born to parents who had married in Johannesburg. Now an O.B.E., he gave me an inscribed copy of the book he had written about his father, called *Reefs of Fortune*.

Harry Filmer Snr. was orphaned when he was eight and learnt the new skill of shorthand. He was brought to Natal from London aged 16 to use his shorthand to record speeches in the Natal Legislative Council. When gold was discovered, he moved to the Witwatersrand in 1885, where he became friendly with Solly Joel and Barney Barnato and made - and lost - six fortunes, moving houses as his fortunes waxed and waned.

Harry stood for the Sanitary Council against Sam Fox, after whom Fox Street was named - a popular man with a wooden leg - and won. This council developed into the Johannesburg Town Council on which he also served.

There is no mention in the book of Harry letting his house to the shul at that time, but one hopes that the support from the shul members helped him get elected that year.

Gwynne Schrire
Cape Town

As usual, I was most impressed by the latest issue of *Jewish Affairs*, especially David Saks' incisive article on 'Contemporary Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism'. David Sher's essay about the Great (Wolmarans Street) Synagogue and its history reminded me of attending *Shaharit* there one morning in 1981. I was on my way back to Israel after conducting *Yamim Nora'im* services in Harare, Zimbabwe, and Chief Rabbi Bernard Casper, who spotted me, ensured that I received an aliyah. His son, Lionel, and I were once fellow residents at Jews' College and we met up again years later in Jerusalem.

I would like to correct a few mistakes in Sher's otherwise well-researched contribution. First of all, J. H. Hertz had served as rabbi of the congregation in Syracuse, NY (New York State, not New York City). Secondly, he left South Africa in 1911 to become rabbi of the Orthodox Orach Chayim (not "Ozar Yisrael") Congregation in New York. Curiously enough, his place there was taken by Dayan Moses Hyamson, the unsuccessful candidate for the British Chief Rabbinate. Thirdly, J. L. Landau could not have been "proclaimed Chief Rabbi of the UHC in 1945" -- three years after his death! [*A slip of the keyboard on my part – the correct date, of course, is 1915 – Ed.*].

Incidentally, the *Minhag Anglia* 'tradition' to which Mr Sher refers has been dealt with in extenso by my old friend, Rabbi Raymond Apple, former Chief Minister of the Sydney's Great Synagogue. What particularly intrigued me in this article was the fact that the late Cantor Israel Alter has a grandson who now officiates as *hazzan rishon* in Sandton, Johannesburg. I have an old LP of Israel Alter's German- style *hazzanut*, recorded while he served in pre-Nazi Hanover. After moving to the U.S. in 1961, he became a faculty member of the School of Sacred Music at Hebrew Union College (Reform) -- a very different career from the one he had followed in Austria, Germany and South Africa.

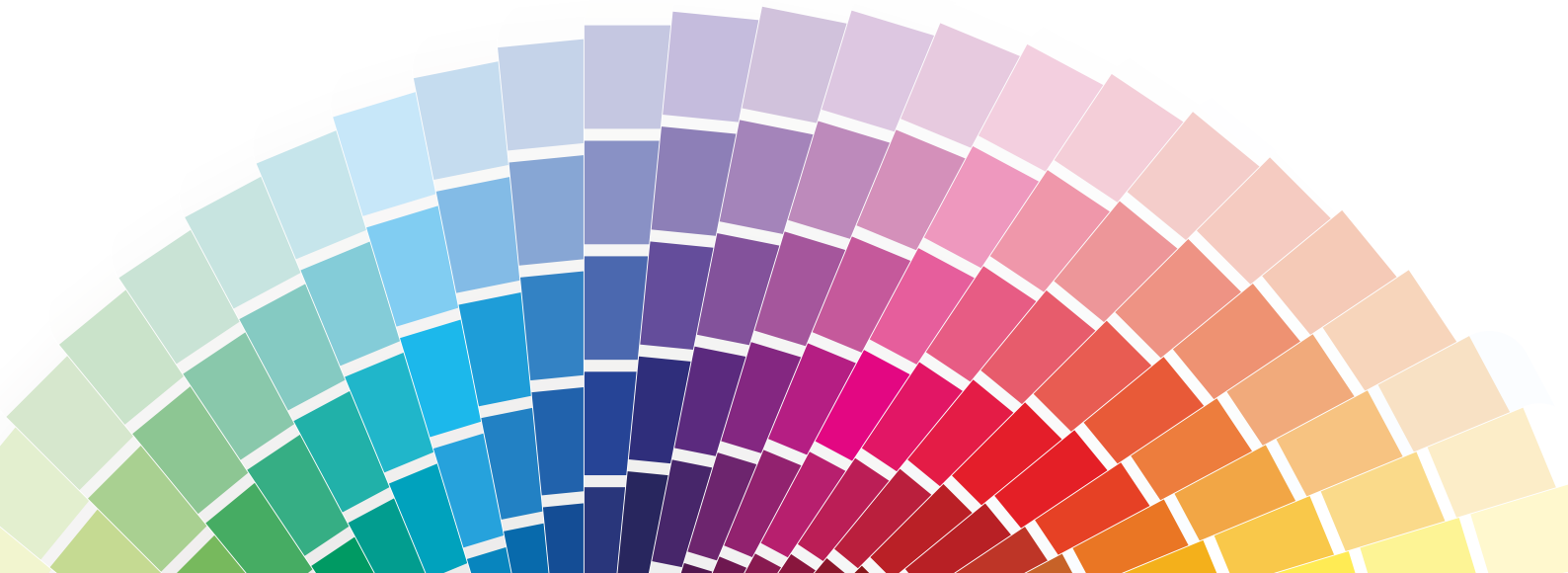
Gabriel Sivan
Jerusalem



Charlie Fine Printers



copystat
instant print services



FOR ALL YOUR PRINTING NEEDS

TEL: (011) 493-8522 / 493-4726

FAX: (011) 493-0235 / 493-4727

EMAIL:

laurel@molale.co.za | printworld@iafrica.com

roland@molale.co.za | printw@cybertrade.co.za



Wishing you a

Happy Chanukah



SERVICE CENTRES SA

This Chanukah
take a new turn
on how to grow your
business and manage
your wealth



Wishing all our clients, staff and
friends a happy Chanukah



sasfin bank

a partner beyond expectations

www.sasfin.com | 0861-sasfin(727346) | info@sasfin.com