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Shirli Gilbert<sup>1,\*</sup>

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\*Correspondence: [shirli.gilbert@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:shirli.gilbert@ucl.ac.uk)  
<sup>1</sup>UCL, UK

## Scholarship on South African Jews: state of the field\*

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SHIRLI GILBERT

Historical work on South African Jewry is in an equivocal state. The range of new publications, theses, exhibitions, and virtual networks suggests that interest in the subject has never been livelier. A closer look at the creators and content of these initiatives reveals a more chequered picture. Many of the scholars who have shaped academic research in the field over the past four decades are retiring. The institutional infrastructure for academic Jewish studies in South Africa is limited, and few active scholars consider this their main area of work. The research being produced by a handful of young scholars offers promising possibilities for the field's revitalization in the coming years, though the fact that most are based outside South Africa reflects the dearth of local postgraduate students. Many of the newest projects on South African Jewish history, while engaging and thoughtfully produced, are driven by non-professional historians; they are largely disconnected from scholarly conversations, and tend to adhere to longstanding communal narratives rather than interrogating received ideas or tackling unexplored archives.

Given the distinctive landscape of the field, this article is intended not only to describe the themes and debates that have animated it but also to stimulate further engagement. In what is necessarily a broad-brush overview I survey the development of historical work on South African Jews since its beginnings, and point towards what I consider the most fertile areas for growth, in the hope of generating increased attention to a field that raises weighty questions about South African as well as Jewish life, and that offers plentiful untapped resources.

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### Early historiography

On 9 July 1905, the rabbi of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation, Dr Joseph Herman Hertz, delivered a keynote address to the first Zionist Conference in Johannesburg. The Congregation had been established in 1889 to serve the growing numbers of Jews from Eastern Europe who were arriving in the city and altering the foundations of South African Jewish life. Hertz's paper was the first serious attempt at a history of Jews in the country, offering an outline of Anglo-German Jewish settlement in the nineteenth century, the establishment of communal leadership and institutions, and the role of the Jew as "discoverer and pioneer" in the South African colonies. First and foremost, however, his paper was a call to action, urging Jews to write their own history in order to establish themselves as rightful members of South African society. Speaking against the backdrop of ongoing Jewish migration from Eastern Europe, he noted with approval the efforts of American Jews to combat prejudice through historical work:

The Jews of America, some fifteen years ago, began to realise the grave seriousness of leaving [antisemitism] unchallenged. Even if the facts of history seldom change the views of the anti-Semite, it was essential, they saw, that Jews at least should be taught the truth; that they themselves should no longer look upon themselves as interlopers, as exploiters; but rather as active participants in the upbuilding of the national life. Our American brethren set to work and founded "The American Jewish Historical Society". In the twelve volumes that that Society has published so far, is to be found a complete and absolute vindication of the American Jew's position in the national household.<sup>1</sup>

In the two decades before Hertz's speech, around 35,000 Jews had made their way to South Africa, the vast majority of them from Lithuanian territories. Hertz's message to them was clear: If they, like their American brethren, were to gain the respect due to them by society and also to develop healthy self-respect, it was imperative that they publicize their history of "services and . . . sacrifices for this country."<sup>2</sup> Later, visiting Jewish communities in the British Overseas Dominions in his position as Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, Hertz again stressed the role of historical work in combatting antisemitism, echoing a defensive impulse that also underpinned the growth of Anglo-Jewish historiography in this

1 Joseph H. Hertz, *The Jew in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Central News Agency, 1905), 5–6.

2 *Ibid.*, 7.

period.<sup>3</sup>

Hertz's was a crucial initial impetus, and much of the historiography produced about South African Jews in the early decades of the twentieth century followed along these lines.<sup>4</sup> Of course, such ideas had a long lineage. From its very origins in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in nineteenth-century Germany, the historiography of modern Jewry has always been, as Paula Hyman put it, "particularly sensitive to the ideological, political, and cultural trends of modern Jewish life".<sup>5</sup> If Jewish historiography has become increasingly professionalized since the 1950s, however, the South African version has lagged behind its European and American counterparts. To be sure, a considerable body of scholarship has been produced in history as well as the social sciences, literary studies, and other disciplines, as my article will outline. Dynamic events in South African life over the past century have nonetheless continued to have an outsized impact on the scholarship's shape and development. Contemporary concerns loom large, and alongside rigorous scholarly work is an ongoing investment in community-led and what we might call "contributionist" historiographical narratives, which highlight Jews' positive impact on broader society.

More than two decades after Rabbi Hertz's initial plea, the first attempt at a South African Jewish Historical Society was established in 1927 under the presidency of Chief Rabbi J. L. Landau. With the support and financial assistance of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), the Society published in 1929 the *South African Jewish Year Book and Directory of Jewish Communal Organisations*, a volume "clearly intended to present the public face of the community".<sup>6</sup> (Among more than eight hundred

3 J. H. Hertz, "The First Pastoral Tour to the Jewish Communities of the British Overseas Dominions", *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* (hereafter, *Transactions*) 10 (March 1921): 149–92. On Anglo-Jewish historiography see David Cesarani, "Dual Heritage or Duel of Heritages? Englishness and Jewishness in the Heritage Industry", in *Jewish Heritage in British History: Englishness and Jewishness*, ed. Tony Kushner (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 30–35.

4 See e.g. Sidney Mendelsohn, "Jewish Pioneers of South Africa", *Transactions* 7 (1911): 180–205.

5 Paula Hyman, "The Ideological Transformation of Modern Jewish Historiography", in *The State of Jewish Studies*, ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen and Edward L. Greenstein (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 143.

6 Richard Mendelsohn and Milton Shain, *The Jews in South Africa: An Illustrated History* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2008), 100; *The South African Jewish Year Book* (Johannesburg: South African Jewish Historical Society, 1929). See also Naomi Musiker, "The S.A. Jewish Sociological and Historical Society and the SAJBD

prominent South African Jews listed, Riva Krut pointedly observed, only twenty-six were women.<sup>7</sup>) During the 1930s, works by the educationist Louis Herrmann and the historian Samuel A. Rochlin chronicled notable Jewish men and their contributions to South African life,<sup>8</sup> while others detailed Jews' contributions to South African literature and the economy.<sup>9</sup> In the 1940s, a series of pamphlets published by the SAJBD and the South African Zionist Federation documented Jewish contributions to the South African war effort in order to counter allegations of shirking and underscore Jews' patriotism and loyalty.<sup>10</sup>

Two decades after the birth of the first (by then defunct) Historical Society, the more enduring South African Sociological and Historical Society (SASHS) was formed. It seems to have been the urging of the influential Columbia University historian Salo Baron, during a visit to South Africa in 1946, that provided the decisive impetus towards its establishment.<sup>11</sup> The SASHS organized regular public lectures in Johannesburg on subjects of Jewish historical interest, collated and archived source materials, and encouraged research through prizes and grants. Rochlin was appointed part-time archivist and was joined by Dora Sowden in 1951 as part-time Organizing Secretary.<sup>12</sup> At its inaugural meeting in 1947 the SASHS asserted that its vision for South African Jewish historiography was broader than the "Jewish apologetics" articulated by Hertz four decades earlier: "It will be a sorry day for historical research",

Archives", *Jewish Affairs* 59, no. 3 (2003): 89.

7 Riva Michal Krut, "Building a Home and Community: Jews in Johannesburg, 1886–1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1985), 98.

8 Louis Herrmann, *A History of the Jews in South Africa: From the Earliest Times Until 1895* (Johannesburg: South African Jewish Board of Deputies [hereafter, SAJBD], 1935); S. A. Rochlin, "Nathaniel Isaacs and Natal", *Transactions* 13 (1932): 247–70.

9 Dora Sowden, *The Jew in South Africa: A Record of what Individual Jews are doing in the Various Spheres of the Country's Life* (Johannesburg: Century Publishing Co., 1945); J. L. Gray, *The Jew in the Economic Life of South Africa* (Johannesburg: Society of Jews and Christians South Africa, 1940). The Society of Jews and Christians, formed in 1937 to combat antisemitism, published a series of pamphlets to dispel misconceptions about Jews; Sandra Braude, "Combating Anti-Jewish Propaganda: The South African Society of Jews and Christians, 1937–1951", *Jewish Affairs* 46, no. 3 (1991): 31–6.

10 Edgar Bernstein, *Five Years of War: South African Jewry's Contribution* (Johannesburg: SAJBD, 1945); *They Answered the Call* (Johannesburg: SAJBD, 1943); *What Would You Do?* (Johannesburg: South African Zionist Federation, 1946); see also SAJBD, *South African Jews in World War II* (Johannesburg: SAJBD, 1950).

11 Edgar Bernstein, "Union of South Africa (1947–48)", *American Jewish Year Book* 49 (1948): 297–307.

12 Musiker, "S.A. Jewish Sociological and Historical Society", 91.

declared the new chairman, Chief Rabbi and Professor Louis Rabinowitz, “if the study of history lowers itself to become a mere handmaid of self-defence.”<sup>13</sup> While the SASHS established more robust foundations than its predecessor for serious historical work, it remained closely tied to communal leaders and institutions, and was dependent on the latter for financial backing until its dissolution in 1957. The journal *Jewish Affairs*, the official organ of the SAJBD, was the medium through which much of the Society’s work was published, and the SAJBD maintained control over the Society’s archival collections.<sup>14</sup>

That the project of writing South African Jewish history had close ties to the communal establishment in this early period is unsurprising. For several decades, Jews in South Africa had experienced antisemitism targeting both the poverty-stricken immigrants from Eastern Europe and the so-called “Randlords” who dominated South Africa’s diamond- and gold-mining industries before the First World War (among whom Jews were well represented). In the 1930s, antisemitism assumed newly virulent – and, crucially, political – forms. Not only radical right, Nazi-inspired movements like the Greyshirts and the Ossewabrandwag (Ox-Wagon Sentinel) but also mainstream political parties campaigned on anti-Jewish tickets. The Quota Act of 1930 effectively brought Jewish immigration from Lithuania to a halt, but the influx of several thousand Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany after 1933 exacerbated animosities, leading to the passing of the more restrictive Aliens Act in 1937. This rising antisemitism, coupled with catastrophic events in Nazi Europe, left the community feeling insecure and vulnerable. When the National Party – popularly dubbed the “Malanzis”, a play on the name of the party’s leader – won a shock election victory in 1948, Jews felt their position to be precarious. Documenting Jews’ contributions to South Africa was a way of challenging antisemitism and emphasizing Jewish loyalty at a deeply uncertain time.<sup>15</sup>

13 Louis I. Rabinowitz, “Preserving the Record”, *Jewish Affairs* 2, no. 4 (1947): 47.

14 Musiker, “S.A. Jewish Sociological and Historical Society”, 91–3.

15 Milton Shain, “Antisemitism and South African Historiography”, *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 34, no. 2 (1992): 112; see also Richard Mendelsohn and Milton Shain, “Constructing a Usable Past: History, Memory and South African Jewry in an Age of Anxiety”, in *Place and Displacement in Jewish History and Memory: Zakor v’Makor*, ed. David Cesarani, Tony Kushner, and Milton Shain (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2009), 43–52; John Simon, “Towards an Appraisal of South African Jewish Historiography”, in *Festschrift in Honour of Frank R. Bradlow*, ed. Pieter E. Westra and Brian Warner (Cape Town: Friends of the South African Library, 1993), 19–30.

Perhaps the SASHS's most important input to the historical project, firmly in the contributionist mould, was a large volume of essays, *The Jews in South Africa* (1955), edited by the SAJBD General Secretary Gustav Saron and the journalist Louis Hotz, and facilitated by "the continuous co-operation and material assistance" of the Board.<sup>16</sup> Published seven years after the advent of apartheid, the book presented a picture of a community that had retained its distinctiveness but integrated well into South African society, and played a considerable role in the development of the economy and expansion of industry. With nineteen chapters written by rabbis, journalists, and mostly non-professional historians, the book chronicled the foundations of Jewish communal life in the Cape, Jewish involvement in diamond and gold mining and the ostrich-feather industry, and the establishment of congregations in the Transvaal and other provinces, among other themes. With this volume, Saron and Hotz aimed to provide "the first comprehensive picture of the history of the South African Jewish community, a community which has made a notable contribution to the progress of South Africa".<sup>17</sup> Only in the epilogue did Saron address obliquely the preponderance of Jews among opponents of the new regime, echoing the official position of the SAJBD when he noted that "The policies directed towards the various non-European racial groups are part of the very warp and wood [sic] of party politics in South Africa, and the Jews have not as a group identified themselves with any one particular attitude on these issues." Saron noted the new apartheid government's about-turn on antisemitism (a shift motivated in part by the prioritization of consolidating "white" South Africa) and welcomed what he hoped would "prove to be a new and lasting chapter in the policy of the Nationalist Party towards the Jewish citizens of this country."<sup>18</sup>

Saron was the most prominent of several communal figures engaging in historical work at this time. Also published in 1955 was *The Birth of a Community* by Israel Abrahams, Chief Rabbi of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregations and part-time professor at the University of Cape Town. An expanded version of a contribution to the Saron and Hotz volume, Abrahams's book included a laudatory foreword from the first apartheid-era Prime Minister, D. F. Malan.<sup>19</sup> The picture presented in these books – of

16 Gustav Saron and Louis Hotz, eds., *The Jews in South Africa: A History* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1955), "Preface", iii.

17 Ibid., "Introduction", xi.

18 Gustav Saron, "Epilogue, 1910–1955", in *ibid.*, 375, 387.

19 Israel Abrahams, *The Birth of a Community: A History of Western Province Jewry* (Cape Town:

“an industrious, upwardly-mobile, respectable, classless, civic-minded, loyal and uniformly Zionist community, contributing energetically to the commonweal, and generally welcomed by the host society” – came to be, in the view of the historians Richard Mendelsohn and Milton Shain, “the received version of the South African Jewish past”, despite the authors’ minimization or omission of less acceptable elements of the community’s history.<sup>20</sup> As apartheid’s foundational legislation was established and resistance violently suppressed in the 1950s and 60s, much of the work produced about South African Jews displayed similar tendencies.

There were muted efforts during this period to offer anti-establishment perspectives, most notably in the Yiddish-language work of Leybl Feldman. In addition to poetry and fiction, Feldman wrote five historical works between 1937 and 1967, of which three focused on Jews in South Africa.<sup>21</sup> His translator, Veronica Belling, notes that he “specifically intended to provide an antidote to existing communal history which focused on the social and political achievements of the Anglo-German Jews, while the majority of the eastern European immigrants remained voiceless.” In contrast to the English-language historiography, and enabled by the exclusive medium of Yiddish, Feldman depicted a group that was socio-economically and politically diverse, and that also had delinquent elements.<sup>22</sup> His socialist commitment and opposition to mainstream Zionism as well as organized religion were clearly reflected in his writing. He was disparaging of Lithuanian Jews’ quest for anglicization, calling them “intellectually deprived” and accusing them of passively accepting the “lowly status conferred on them and their language by their Western European co-religionists.”<sup>23</sup> Feldman had little formal education and no training in academic research, and his writing lacked polish,<sup>24</sup> factors that perhaps made it easier to dismiss his work. He was

Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 1955).

20 Mendelsohn and Shain, *Jews in South Africa*, 136.

21 Leybl Feldman, *Yidn in Dorem-Afrika* (Johannesburg: n.p., 1937); Feldman, *Oydtshorn: Yerusholaim d’Afrike* (Johannesburg: n.p., 1940); Feldman, *Yidn in Yohanesburg: biz yunyon – 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1910* (Johannesburg: Dorem-Afrikaner Yidisher Kultur-Federatsye, 1956).

22 Veronica Belling, “Yiddish Writing in South Africa: Leibl Feldman’s Radical History of Johannesburg Jewry”, *Journal for the Study of Religion* 19, no. 2 (2006): 68, 72–3.

23 Joseph Sherman, “With Perfect Faith: The Life and Work of Leibl Feldman”, in Leibl Feldman, *Oudtshoorn: Jerusalem of Africa*, ed. Joseph Sherman, trans. Lilian Dubb and Sheila Barkusky (Johannesburg: Friends of the Library University of the Witwatersrand, 1989), 46.

24 *Ibid.*, 47.



also criticized for the “ideological views” he projected onto his research, views that were – as Saron noted pointedly in a review – “shared by a minority rather than the majority of our community.”<sup>25</sup> The suppression of Yiddish in South Africa after the Second World War doubtless limited not only the reach and impact of Feldman’s work but also the public’s receptivity to its arguments.<sup>26</sup> (It is nonetheless worth stressing that Yiddish at this time was not just a forum for criticism of the organized community: the vast majority of the immigrants, including those who spearheaded the Zionist movement in South Africa, were Yiddish-speaking Jews.)

Another small early intervention was a 1953 article on South African Jews by Phyllis Lewsen, a distinguished historian of South African liberalism. Rejecting the contributionist focus of the Jewish historiography, Lewsen noted that “Jews share actively in every phase of South African life; so that to single out the eminent Jewish writers or artists, for example, is to this extent misleading: their work stems from their South African environment, and in its turn is part of the South African culture.”<sup>27</sup> Addressing explicitly the question of Jews’ political attitudes to the young apartheid government, she wrote: “the great majority believe in segregation and have strong social prejudices against non-Europeans. Those who do not, form part of a small minority drawn from all groups.”<sup>28</sup> Lewsen’s insights were not taken further by historians of South African Jews, however, and her own subsequent research did not substantially engage the subject.

### *Development of the scholarship*

Serious academic research on South African Jews began to develop during the 1970s and 80s. This research originated from two distinct scholarly sources that differed markedly in their practitioners, choices of subject matter, interpretive frameworks, and institutional contexts. On the

25 Saron quoted in *ibid.*

26 Joseph Sherman, “Between Ideology and Indifference: The Destruction of Yiddish in South Africa”, in *Memories, Realities and Dreams: Aspects of the South African Jewish Experience*, ed. Milton Shain and Richard Mendelsohn (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2000), 28–49.

27 Phyllis Lewsen, “The South African Jewish Community”, in *The South African Way of Life: Values and Ideals of a Multi-Racial Society*, ed. G. H. Calpin (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1953), 40–41.

28 *Ibid.*, 41.

one hand, academically rigorous, archivally based research began to be produced by scholars working in the framework of Jewish history and focused on Jewish communal life and identity. On the other hand, several non-Jewish scholars, among them some of South Africa's most influential historians at the time, produced works of social history that considered Jews in a wider frame that included other social, ethnic, and racial groups. While the former scholars came to define the field of South African Jewish history, the work of the latter received little traction within the Jewish community and among those focused on Jewish history, despite its prominence in the mainstream of South African historiography. In short, they developed as parallel and largely separate historiographies, with little if any dialogue between them.

The first major work on South African Jews to be published since Saron and Hotz's 1955 volume was *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience (1910–1967)* (1980) by Gideon Shimoni, a South African historian who had emigrated to Israel in 1961 and earned his doctorate at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the mid-1970s. Shimoni was encouraged and financially supported by SAJBD director Saron, who as we have seen had long been invested in promoting South African Jewish historiography, and valued Shimoni's work as the first "fully academically authorized study".<sup>29</sup> Venturing beyond the narrowness suggested by its title, the book sketched the history of Jewish life in South Africa, including the turn of the century migrations and processes of acculturation, before exploring the role of Zionism in communal life. For Shimoni, the hegemony of Zionism was the community's most exceptional feature: in comparison with communities elsewhere in the diaspora, anti-Zionist organizations hardly gained a foothold in South Africa, and support was widespread from the outset, even among religious leaders.<sup>30</sup> Shimoni's work represented a marked shift towards the professionalization of the field.<sup>31</sup>

29 Gideon Shimoni to the author, email, 18 Jan. 2023. On South African Zionism see also Marcia Gitlin, *The Vision Amazing: The Story of South African Zionism* (Johannesburg: Menorah Book Club, 1950); Chaim Shur, *Shomrim in the Land of Apartheid: The Story of Hashomer Hatzair in South Africa 1935–1970*, ed. Aryeh Palgi, trans. Lydia Gosher (Kibbutz Dalia: Ma'arechet Publishing House, 1998); Doron Isaacs and Wayne Sussman, *Like a Phoenix from the Ashes* (Habonim Dror Southern Africa, 2008).

30 See also Gideon Shimoni, "Tsiyonut be-Drom Afrika", in *ha-Tsiyonut la-azoreha: hebetim ge'o-tarbutiyim, kerekh 3*, ed. Alon Gal (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-toldot Yisrael, 2010), 327–68.

31 See e.g. Shula Marks, "Review of *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience 1910–1967*", *History* 67, no. 220 (1982): 272–3.

This period also saw the an infrastructure beginning to be built in South Africa for academic Jewish studies. The first and most enduring institution, the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town, was established in 1980.<sup>32</sup> Seven years later, the South African Association of Jewish Studies was launched with a conference at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (Wits) and the establishment of a chair in Jewish Civilization at that university, which was inaugurated at the beginning of 1988. Both the Association and the chair, however, were short-lived.<sup>33</sup>

Another prominent scholar at this time was Allie A. Dubb, an anthropologist and sociologist trained at Rhodes University in Grahamstown who emigrated to Israel in 1978. Dubb charted South African Jews' geographic distribution and mobility, educational attainment, religious observance, intermarriage, and other sociodemographic trends in more than thirty publications dating from the early 1970s to the 1990s, including a chapter in an important collection by Marcus Arkin and articles co-authored with the Italian-Israeli demographer Sergio DellaPergola.<sup>34</sup>

Also beginning to work in the 1980s at the University of Cape Town was the historian Milton Shain, who became the preeminent historian in the field and one of the few to remain in South Africa. Seeking explicitly to challenge the existing historiography, which had "underplayed (if not entirely ignored) antisemitism in South African society"<sup>35</sup> and over-emphasized the harmonious relations between Jews and non-Jews,

32 Milton Shain and Janine Blumberg, eds., *The First Twenty-Five Years: The Isaac & Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research*, University of Cape Town (Cape Town: Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, 2005); for a brief institutional history see Helen K. Kim, "Research Updates", *Contemporary Jewry* 37, no. 2 (1 July 2017): 349–51.

33 Reuben Musiker and Joseph Sherman, eds., *Waters Out of the Well: Essays in Jewish Studies* (Johannesburg: Library, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988), "Introduction", 1.

34 See e.g. Allie Dubb, "Demographic Picture", in *South African Jewry: A Contemporary Survey*, ed. Marcus Arkin (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1984), 23–4; Dubb, *Jewish South Africans: A Sociological View of the Johannesburg Community* (Grahamstown: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, 1977); Sergio DellaPergola and Dubb, "South African Jewry: A Socio-Demographic Profile", in *American Jewish Yearbook 1988*, ed. D. Singer (Philadelphia and New York: Jewish Publication Society and American Jewish Committee, 1988), 59–142; Dubb, *The Jewish Population of South Africa: The 1991 Sociodemographic Survey* (Cape Town: Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town, 1994).

35 Milton Shain, "Antisemitism and South African Historiography", *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 34, no. 2 (1992): 111.

Shain showed that antisemitism had taken root at an early stage of Jewish settlement and that rather than being an aberration of the 1930s, it was “deeply embedded in the South African experience.”<sup>36</sup>

While Shain, Dubb, and Shimoni were developing their research, the latter two in Israel, several historians associated broadly with the History Workshop Movement in South Africa began to take an interest in Jews. Their work, too, did much to challenge communal narratives, though their provocations were aired in a different institutional context and were not taken up substantially by scholars of South African Jews.

At the University of Cape Town, the eminent British Africanist Robin Hallett considered Jews alongside diverse others – “Afghan mattress-makers, African dockworkers, German private detectives, Italian musical instrument makers, Afrikaner landowners, prostitutes from St. Helena, Chinese laundrymen” – in an attempt to recover the voices of ordinary Capetonians in the 1900s.<sup>37</sup> Hallett wrote history with a “strong sense of moral purpose”, seeking “to rescue the exploited, the marginalized and the alienated from [in E.P. Thompson’s terms] ‘the enormous condescension of posterity’.”<sup>38</sup> From his vantage point, the Jews of historical interest were not the notable men of the contributionist historiography, but rather the poor immigrants negotiating life in South Africa’s urban centres in a period of rapid industrialization.

Hallett’s ethos echoed that of the History Workshop developing at Wits (taking its broader impetus from the United Kingdom) around the same time, which gave birth to even more substantial work on Jews. By all accounts, History Workshop was an implicitly or even explicitly political project: history in the service of recovering ordinary voices and countering the narratives of the apartheid state.<sup>39</sup> The kind of “engaged

36 Milton Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 3–4. For other early work see Milton Shain, *Jewry and Cape Society: The Origins and Activities of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Cape Colony* (Cape Town: Historical Publication Society, 1983); S. B. Aschheim, “The Communal Organisation of South African Jewry”, *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 12, no. 2 (1970): 201–31.

37 Robin Hallett, “Policemen, Pimps and Prostitutes: Public Morality and Police Corruption: Cape Town, 1902–1904”, in *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, vol. 1, ed. Christopher C. Saunders (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1979), 4–5.

38 Gerald Shaw and Peter Sanders, “Robin Hallett” obituary, *The Guardian*, 8 March 2003, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/mar/08/guardianobituaries.booksobituaries> (accessed 11 Nov. 2022).

39 Deborah Posel, “Social History and the Wits History Workshop”, *African Studies* 69, no. 1 (1 April 2010): 29–40.

scholarship” it afforded was appealing to South African social historians, most of whom were involved in or supported organizations across the anti-apartheid spectrum.<sup>40</sup>

Prominent among radical young South African historians who pioneered this approach was Charles van Onselen. In his seminal book *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914* (1982), van Onselen addressed aspects of the social history of the Rand from the early development of gold mining to the outbreak of the First World War. Focusing on the ordinary men and women, among them Jews, on the margins of the rapidly industrializing city of Johannesburg, van Onselen’s work contested the picture of homogeneity and unity proffered by much of the Jewish historiography, and shone the spotlight on its less salubrious aspects.<sup>41</sup>

While van Onselen’s work incorporated Jews into wider analyses of South African life, the work of Riva Krut focused more closely on the notion of Jewish “community” itself. Krut was working in the early 1980s in London under the supervision of the eminent South African historian Shula Marks, whose seminars at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies were a forum for some of the most exciting developments in South African historiography at the time.<sup>42</sup> Krut emphasized the fractures among South African Jews along lines of class, ethnicity, and language, and highlighted the conscious process through which the Jewish “community” was forged in the early twentieth century. In her doctoral thesis she demonstrated how the Jews of German and British origin who led the newly formed SAJBD in the 1900s deliberately sought “to manufacture a Jewish ‘community’

40 Jonathan Hyslop, “E.P. Thompson in South Africa: The Practice and Politics of Social History in an Era of Revolt and Transition, 1976–2012”, *International Review of Social History* 61, no. 1 (2016): 99.

41 Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914*, vol. 2: *New Nineveh* (Harlow: Longman, 1982). Also writing in the 1980s was the sociologist Evangelos A. Mantzaris, who studied the Jewish working class as part of a broader interest in South African labour history: Mantzaris, “Jewish Trade Unions in Cape Town, South Africa, 1903–1907: A Socio-Historical Study”, *Jewish Social Studies* 49, no. 3/4 (1987): 251–64; Mantzaris, “Radical Community: The Yiddish-Speaking Branch of the International Socialist League, 1918–1920”, in *Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives*, ed. Belinda Bozzoli (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), 160–76; see also Taffy Adler, “Lithuania’s Diaspora: The Johannesburg Jewish Workers’ Club, 1928–1948”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1979): 70–92.

42 On these seminars see Alan Cobley, “Does Social History Have a Future? The Ending of Apartheid and Recent Trends in South African Historiography”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (2001): 614–15.

in Johannesburg which removed the Peruvians [a derogatory epithet aimed at low-class Eastern European Jewish immigrants] from public scrutiny, and which assured all its members of a place in white South African society.” Seeking Jewish “respectability”, the Board monitored antisemitism, channelled Eastern European Zionist socialism into a more acceptable politics, and sponsored a complex system of welfare and internal policing – activities that characterized its activities for much of the twentieth century.<sup>43</sup>

South Africa’s historical profession and historiography have long reflected the country’s political and racial divisions. As the editors of the seminal *Cambridge History of South Africa* put it in the second volume (2011), “South African history has always been the continuation of politics by other means.”<sup>44</sup> The radical social history pioneered by the History Workshop was crafted by scholars who were “critically engaged and oppositional”, not partisan but certainly activist.<sup>45</sup> By contrast, the historiography emerging from Jewish studies perhaps reflected the mainstream Jewish community’s reluctance to engage overtly with South African politics at all.

One of the few exceptions to this trend was the pioneering literary scholar and Yiddishist Joseph Sherman, who positioned his work explicitly in the tradition of activist social history. In a chapter published in 2000, he lamented that the neglect of Yiddish sources by the Jewish community’s historians – which he attributed in part to lack of linguistic ability – meant that important aspects were missing from the historiography.<sup>46</sup> In a more strident article published in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* in the same year, he charged South African Jews with continuing to neglect key aspects of their history in the service of communal apologetics: “The fact that the myth-makers of South African Jewish history have almost entirely disregarded this body of [Yiddish] writing is, I would suggest, not solely due to their ignorance of, or distaste for, the Yiddish language. I hope to show that it is in equal, if not greater, measure due to a total recoil from the picture of the development of a South African Jewish identity that is presented there, a picture totally abhorrent to those who for various reasons of self-protection or self-promotion have attempted to

43 Krut, “Building a Home and Community”.

44 Robert Ross, Anne Kelk Mager, and Bill Nasson, eds., *The Cambridge History of South Africa*, vol. 2: 1885–1994 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 12.

45 *Ibid.*, 8.

46 Sherman, “Between Ideology and Indifference”.

display South African Jewry in the most flattering light.” Focusing on the squalid “eating houses” for black mineworkers and the Yiddish-speaking immigrants who worked there, Sherman’s article explored how the latter developed racist attitudes and ultimately came to “[side] unequivocally with the exploiters” in order “to rise by virtue of “race” above the lot that for most Jews had been inescapable in Eastern Europe.”<sup>47</sup>

There have been few sustained attempts in either scholarly or non-professional histories to come to terms with the issues raised in van Onselen, Krut, and Sherman’s work.<sup>48</sup> Within Jewish studies, critical scholarship produced since the 1980s has tended to focus on antisemitism or internal Jewish life and to engage relatively little with the major topics and debates in the broader historiography of South Africa. In mainstream historiography, conversely, apart from some later work in which van Onselen explored the involvement of a “small but distinctive cohort” of Jewish men in organized crime in the Atlantic world,<sup>49</sup> there has been little further interest in Jews since the 1990s. A contributing factor to the latter has doubtless been the declining traction of social history in South Africa since the turn of the millennium, which is attributed both to the rapid political transition (which left politically engaged historians “without clear academic agendas”) and to the broader influence of postmodernist and post-structuralist approaches.<sup>50</sup> The inclusion of a segment of Krut’s unpublished thesis in this special issue is intended to spur renewed interest in this groundbreaking work and to encourage further development of the ideas raised there.

Research in Jewish studies has developed in several directions in the intervening decades. The writing of South African Jewish history has remained a project of community interest and activity, and while much of the work I describe in this article has been produced by scholars for scholarly audiences, there have also been areas of significant crossover. Most academics engage regularly with non-academic audiences, and

47 Joseph Sherman, “Serving the Natives: Whiteness as the Price of Hospitality in South African Yiddish Literature”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, no. 3 (2000): 508–9, 510–11.

48 Shula Marks, “Apartheid and the Jewish Question (Review Article)”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30, no. 4 (2004), 890.

49 Charles van Onselen, “Jewish Marginality in the Atlantic World: Organised Crime in the Era of the Great Migrations, 1880–1914”, *South African Historical Journal* 43, no. 1 (1 Nov. 2000): 96–137; van Onselen, *The Fox and the Flies: The Secret Life of a Grotesque Master Criminal* (New York: Walker & Co., 2007); van Onselen, “Jewish Police Informers in the Atlantic World, 1880–1914”, *Historical Journal* 50, no. 1 (2007): 119–44.

50 Cobley, “Does Social History Have a Future?”, 617–20.

numerous communal figures and non-professional historians have been active in historical production. While much work has moved beyond the overt contributionism of earlier decades, this trend is still evident, particularly in portrayals of Jews under apartheid.

The period of Eastern European migration and settlement at the turn of the twentieth century has attracted much attention. An oral history project conducted by the Kaplan Centre in the 1980s recorded hundreds of recollections of life in Lithuania; numerous personal accounts were also published.<sup>51</sup> The detailed academic research of Edna Bradlow and later Sally Peberdy sought to place the study of Jewish migration into the broader context of immigration to South Africa in that period.<sup>52</sup> Other work focused more narrowly on the process of Jewish migration itself and the migrants' passage via England, including the compilation of passenger lists.<sup>53</sup> Despite the high representation of Jews among the "Randlords", scholarship hardly engaged with their Jewishness, with the notable exception of historian Richard Mendelsohn's biography of Sammy Marks, one of the few detailed biographies of a Litvak immigrant, depicting his entrepreneurial and political astuteness as well as his role as communal figure and patriarch.<sup>54</sup> In other work, Mendelsohn explored

51 For information about the Kaplan Centre interviews see <https://atom.lib.uct.ac.za/index.php/kaplan-centre-interviews> (accessed 5 May 2023). Published texts include Gwynne Schrire, *From Eastern Europe to South Africa: Memories of an Epic Journey, 1880–1937* (Cape Town: Jacob Gitlin Library and Western Province Zionist Council, 2007); A. Sarid, *There Was Once a Home: Memories of the Lithuanian Shtetls Published in the Afrikaner Idishe Tsaytung – African Jewish Newspaper, 1952–54*, trans. Veronica Belling (Cape Town: Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, 2015).

52 Edna Bradlow, "Immigration into the Union, 1910–1948" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 1978); Bradlow, "South African Policy and Jewish Refugee Immigration in the 1930s", in *False Havens: The British Empire and the Holocaust*, ed. Paul R. Bartrop (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), 239–52; Sally Peberdy, *Selecting Immigrants: National Identity and South Africa's Immigration Policies 1910–2008* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2009).

53 Krut, "Building a Home and Community" (1985) was a pioneering effort to connect the records of the Poor Jews Temporary Shelter with the Union Castle Line and Jewish migration to South Africa; see also Caroline Louise Barker, "Jewish Migration to South Africa and the Poor Jews Temporary Shelter, London, 1880–1914" (M.Phil. diss., University of Leicester, 1998); Aubrey Newman, *Jewish Migration to South Africa: The Records of the Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter, 1885–1914* (Cape Town: Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town, 2006); Saul Issroff, *Jewish Migration to South Africa: Passenger Lists from the UK*, vol. 1: 1890 to 1905, vol. 2: 1906 to 1930 ([Cape Town]: Jewish Publications, 2008).

54 Richard Mendelsohn, *Sammy Marks: The Uncrowned King of the Transvaal* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1991).



how Jewish loyalties were shaped by the South African (Boer) War (1899–1902), a key transitional juncture in the country’s history.<sup>55</sup>

The extent to which the migrants’ Litvak background informed the development of a distinctively South African Jewish identity has been the question of some stimulating analysis. Most work has focused on questions of political orientation in an attempt to understand the pervasive espousal of Zionism in South Africa, as well as the disproportionate involvement of Jews in leftist political resistance to racism from the early 1900s.<sup>56</sup> A modest body of work was produced about German-Jewish migration to South Africa in the 1930s: scholars including Jocelyn Hellig, Lotta Stone, Steven Robins, and myself explored the early opposition of the communal leadership to the refugees’ arrival, their experiences of Afrikaner antisemitism, and their integration into South African society.<sup>57</sup> Building on pioneering early work by Shimoni, a small literature has developed around the Jewish supporters of Mahatma Gandhi during his time in South Africa.<sup>58</sup> A study by the anthropologist Sally Frankental

55 Richard Mendelsohn, “The Boer War, The Great War, and the Shaping of South African Jewish Loyalties”, in Shain and Mendelsohn, *Memories, Realities and Dreams*, 50–59; Richard Mendelsohn, “The Jewish War: Anglo-Jewry and the South African War”, in *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899–1902*, ed. G. Cuthbertson, A. Grundlingh, and M.-L. Suttie (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2002), 247–65; see also Claire Hirshfeld, “The Anglo-Boer War and the Issue of Jewish Culpability”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 4 (1980): 619–31; *Jewish Affairs* 54, no. 3 (Spring 1999), special issue; David Saks, *Boerejode: Jews in the Boer Armed Forces, 1899–1902* ([South Africa]: privately published, 2010).

56 See esp. James T. Campbell, “Beyond the Pale: Jewish Immigration and the South African Left”, in Shain and Mendelsohn, *Memories, Realities and Dreams*, 96–162; Gideon Shimoni, “From One Frontier to Another: Jewish Identity and Political Orientation in Lithuania and South Africa, 1890–1939”, in *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 129–54.

57 Jocelyn Hellig, “German Jewish Immigration to South Africa during the 1930s: Revisiting the Charter of the SS Stuttgart”, in *Jewish Journeys: From Philo to Hip Hop*, ed. James Jordan, Tony Kushner, and Sarah Pearce (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010), 146–62; Lotta M. Stone, “Seeking Asylum: German Jewish Refugees in South Africa, 1933–1948” (Ph.D. diss., Clark University, 2010); Steven Robins, *Letters of Stone: From Nazi Germany to South Africa* (Cape Town: Penguin Books, 2016); Shirli Gilbert, *From Things Lost: Forgotten Letters and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017); Gilbert, “Beyond Politics? German-Jewish Refugees and Racism in South Africa”, in *Patterns of Prejudice* (forthcoming).

58 Gideon Shimoni, *Gandhi, Satyagraha, and the Jews: A Formative Factor in India’s Policy towards Israel*, *Jerusalem Papers on Peace Problems* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1977); George Paxton, *Sonja Schlesin: Gandhi’s South African Secretary* (Glasgow: Pax Books, 2006);

focused on Israeli immigrants in Cape Town.<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps the most lively area of research in the 1990s and early 2000s was the “Jews and apartheid” debate. The position of South African Jews under the racist regime had been broached in earlier articles by the American historians Edward Feit and Robert G. Weisbord,<sup>60</sup> as well as in a prominent exchange in *Commentary* magazine,<sup>61</sup> but the subject was first taken up in earnest by Shimoni, initially in *Jews and Zionism* (1980) and then in a 56-page article published in the *American Jewish Year Book*.<sup>62</sup> The background to the article is worth recounting. The *Year Book* had been publishing annual reports on Jewish life in South Africa since 1938. From 1961, however, it shifted to treating South Africa in two parts. The first report, written in New York, covered South African political developments often in highly critical terms without mentioning Jews; the second report, written in South Africa, focused solely on Jewish communal life without mentioning apartheid. This “well-intentioned but utterly misleading policy” was abandoned in 1973, and in 1988 the *Year Book* finally asked Shimoni to “set the record straight”.<sup>63</sup>

In his article, Shimoni presented the core ideas that developed into his seminal 2003 book *Community and Conscience: The Jews in Apartheid South Africa*. Dense and detailed, that study explored the ironic and “poignantly unusual experience” of Jews as part of a privileged minority in a society based on racial discrimination. Shimoni showed that while a tiny minority

James D. Hunt and Surendra Bhana, “Spiritual Rope-Walkers: Gandhi, Kallenbach, and the Tolstoy Farm, 1910–13”, *South African Historical Journal* 58, no. 1 (January 2007): 174–202; Shimon Lev, *Soulmates: The Story of Mahatma Gandhi and Hermann Kallenbach*, *Gandhi Studies* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012); Lev, “Gandhi and his Jewish Theosophist Supporters in South Africa”, *Theosophical Appropriations* (2016): 245–71; Uma Dhupelia-Mesthrie and Jill Weintraub, “Going beyond Gandhi’s ‘Inner Circle’ of Relationships: Satyagraha House, Hermann Kallenbach and Gandhi’s Sons”, *Critical African Studies* 12, no. 2 (3 May 2020): 140–70.

59 Sally Frankental, “Constructing Identity in Diaspora: Jewish Israeli Migrants in Cape Town, South Africa” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 1998).

60 E. Feit, “Community in a Quandary: The South African Jewish Community and ‘Apartheid’”, *Race* 8, no. 4 (1967): 395–408; Robert G. Weisbord, “The Dilemma of South African Jewry”, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 5 (1967): 233–41.

61 Dan Jacobson and Ronald Segal, “Apartheid and South African Jewry: An Exchange”, *Commentary* 24, no. 5 (November 1957): 424–31.

62 Gideon Shimoni, “South African Jews and the Apartheid Crisis”, *American Jewish Yearbook* (1988): 3–58.

63 Jonathan D. Sarna and Jonathan J. Golden, “The Twentieth Century through American Jewish Eyes: A History of the *American Jewish Year Book*, 1899–1999”, *American Jewish Year Book* 100 (2000): 73.

of Jewish individuals were highly active in leftist political opposition to apartheid, and several Jewish organizations engaged in progressive social work, the mainstream communal leadership “steered away as far as it could from any engagement whatsoever with the political struggle against the government’s apartheid program.” The key underlying reason for this behaviour was fear. While the community “hotly debated” possible responses and there were serious “dilemmas of conscience”, the fear of resurgent Afrikaner antisemitism and reluctance to antagonize the government rationalized a policy of communal non-involvement in political matters.<sup>64</sup> In the final analysis, Shimoni argued, “Most detached and objective observers would agree: although there is nothing in this record deserving of moral pride, neither does it warrant utter self-reproach. From a coldly objective historical perspective, this was classic minority group behaviour – a phenomenon of self-preservation, performed at the cost of moral righteousness.”<sup>65</sup>

The debates that Shimoni addressed in his book had been raging in the Jewish public sphere for several years. During the 1990s, numerous scholarly and journalistic pieces sought to evaluate, defend, and castigate Jewish responses to the regime.<sup>66</sup> In autumn 1997, the SAJBD’s journal *Jewish Affairs* published a special issue with contributions from scholars, communal leaders, and other prominent figures focusing on the mainstream community’s lack of participation in the freedom struggle.<sup>67</sup> There was also growing interest in Jewish anti-apartheid activists. A large volume edited by Immanuel Suttner, also published in 1997, featured interviews with prominent figures and focused on Jewishness as a key motivating factor for their activism.<sup>68</sup> The debate took an acrimonious turn

64 Gideon Shimoni, *Community and Conscience: The Jews in Apartheid South Africa* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2003), xiii, 30–33.

65 *Ibid.*, 276.

66 See, among many others, Milton Shain and Sally Frankental, “South African Jewry, Apartheid and Political Change”, *Patterns of Prejudice* 25, no. 1 (1991): 62–74; F. H. Adler, “South African Jews and Apartheid”, *Patterns of Prejudice* 34, no. 4 (2000): 23–36; Shain and Frankental, “Accommodation, Apathy and Activism: Jewish Political Behaviour in South Africa”, *Jewish Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (1993): 5–12; A. J. Arkin, “Jews under the Apartheid Regime, 1948–1988”, *Africana Journal* 17 (1998): 271–88; Shain and Frankental, “Community with a Conscience’: Myth or Reality?” in *Modern Jewish Mythologies*, ed. Glenda Abrahamson (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1999), 57–67; David Saks, “Jews in the Struggle against Apartheid”, *Midstream* 46, no. 5 (2000): 18.

67 *Jewish Affairs* 52, no. 1 (Autumn 1997).

68 Immanuel Suttner, ed., *Cutting through the Mountain: Interviews with South African Jewish Activists* (Johannesburg: Viking Penguin, 1997). See also Milton Shain et al., eds., *Looking*

when the editors of *Jewish Affairs* decided not to publish an article written by the independent scholar (and editorial board member) Claudia Braude, a “scathing denunciation of Jewish complicity” focused on Percy Yutar, the prosecutor in the trial of Nelson Mandela (the essay ultimately appeared in the respected weekly *Mail and Guardian* newspaper).<sup>69</sup> Braude’s critique of Jewish responses to apartheid – and, more pointedly, the ways in which they were being narrated following apartheid’s demise – was renewed in both an article tracing “the denial of the political” in rabbinic writing during apartheid and a review essay in which she charged that South African Jewish historiography had been written by “a handful of scholars who are sustained by prominent community players and organizations and write for a predominantly non-scholarly audience.”<sup>70</sup> To suggest that some of the field’s most prominent scholars were writing at the behest of the communal leadership was clearly provocative, however, and the scholars in question vigorously defended the rigour and impartiality of their work.<sup>71</sup>

Milton Shain’s work in the 2000s continued to examine antisemitism in South Africa. In three substantial volumes he chronicled the origins and development of Jew-hatred from the nineteenth century through to the early twenty-first, analysing its relationship with the dominant colour-based racism and its distinctive manifestations in the South African context. The first two volumes examined anti-alienism following the arrival of the Eastern European Jews at the turn of the twentieth century and right-wing Afrikaner antisemitism in the 1930s and 1940s, respectively; the final volume, published in 2023, takes the study up to the present and tackles among other issues the thorny relationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism, undoubtedly the most troubling issue for the contemporary community.<sup>72</sup>

*Back: Jews in the Struggle for Democracy and Human Rights in South Africa* (Cape Town: Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, 1997).

69 Claudia Braude, “Yutar and ‘Holy Disbelief’”, *Mail & Guardian*, 27 March 1997. <https://mg.co.za/article/1997-03-27-yutar-and-holy-disbelief/> (accessed 5 May 2023).

70 Claudia Braude, “From the Brotherhood of Man to the World to Come: The Denial of the Political in Rabbinic Writing under Apartheid”, in Gilman and Shain, *Jewries at the Frontier*, 259–89; Braude, “Commissioning, Community, and Conscience”, *Safundi* 10, no. 1 (2009): 78.

71 Richard Mendelsohn and Milton Shain, “Response to the Review Article”, *Safundi* 10, no. 1 (2009): 93.

72 Shain, *Roots of Antisemitism*; Shain, *A Perfect Storm: Antisemitism in South Africa, 1930–1948* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2015); Shain, *Fascists, Fabricators*

Zionism and anti-Zionism have been the subject of several additional studies. A rather uneven collection of writings focused on the relationship between Israel and the apartheid government from the 1970s; a small portion touched on the associated question of how South African Jews' relationship with the regime was affected. While some serious scholarly work was produced, the subject also unsurprisingly attracted much journalistic interest.<sup>73</sup> The broader theme of Israel-apartheid analogies and contests over their validity is the subject of a growing body of work, most of it not directly connected to the subject of our overview.<sup>74</sup>

Focusing on the post-apartheid period, a few studies considered Jewish aspects of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and heritage projects, while the impact of Holocaust memory during and after apartheid has been explored in recent work by Roni Mikel-Arieli and myself.<sup>75</sup> Research by Deborah Posel and myself explores contemporary

and Fantasists: Antisemitism in South Africa from 1948 to the Present (Auckland Park, South Africa: Jacana, 2023); see also Jocelyn Hellig, *Anti-Semitism in South Africa Today* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1996); Rebecca Hodes, "'Dibul'ijuda/Shoot the Jew' and the Local Architecture of Anti-Semitism", *Daily Maverick*, 12 Sept. 2013; Hodes, "'Free Fight on the Grand Parade': Resistance to the Greyshirts in 1930s South Africa", *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 47, no. 2 (2014): 185–208.

73 Yossi Melman, "Exposed: SA's Clandestine Nuclear Dealings with Israel", *Sunday Independent*, 4 May 1997; Harry Schwarz, "The South Africa-Israel Relationship Under Apartheid", *Jewish Affairs* 54, no. 1 (1999): 49–51; Chris McGreal, "Worlds Apart", *The Guardian*, 6 Feb. 2006; McGreal, "Brothers in Arms: Israel's Secret Pact with Pretoria", *The Guardian*, 7 Feb. 2006; Sasha Polakow-Suransky, *The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Pantheon, 2010); David Fachler, "The Jewish Factor in Israeli Foreign Policy: The Case of South Africa (1948–1994)" (M.A. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012); Yitzhak Mualem, "The Jewish Community and Israeli Foreign Policy toward South Africa under the Apartheid Regime, 1961–1967", *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 57 (2015): 44–69; Milton Shain, "South Africa, Apartheid, and the Road to BDS", in *Anti-Judaism, Antisemitism, and Delegitimizing Israel*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016), 66–78; Hendrik Snyders, "'A Partnership in the Challenges Facing Us': Apartheid and South African-Israeli Rugby Relations, c. 1948–1989", *Southern Journal for Contemporary History* 46, no. 1 (2021): 86–106.

74 See, among many others, Benjamin Pogrud, *Drawing Fire: Investigating the Accusations of Apartheid in Israel* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014); Sean Jacobs and Jon Soske, eds., *Apartheid Israel: The Politics of an Analogy* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015); Ilan Pappé, ed., *Israel and South Africa: The Many Faces of Apartheid* (London: Zed Books, 2015); Nitzan Tal and Louise Bethlehem, "South African Text; Zionist Palimpsest: Israeli Critics Read Alan Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 19, no. 4 (1 October 2020): 450–71.

75 See e.g. Heidi Grunebaum-Ralph, "Re-Placing Pasts, Forgetting Presents: Narrative, Place, and Memory in the Time of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission", *Research in African Literatures* 32, no. 3 (2001): 198–212; Fran Buntman and Barbara Buntman, "'Old

Jewish identity among South Africans who identify as Jewish but situate themselves outside what they regard as the communal mainstream.<sup>76</sup>

Gender remains significantly undeveloped as an analytical category. Marcia Gitlin included a short segment on women in her 1950 book *The Vision Amazing: The Story of South African Zionism*, and Krut devoted a chapter of her 1985 thesis to exploring women's roles in the development of a middle-class Jewish community, though there were few follow-ups to these early interventions.<sup>77</sup> Some short articles on the subject were published by Sally Frankental and Azila Reisenberger in the late 1990s.<sup>78</sup> Veronica Belling's 2013 doctoral dissertation, the first substantial piece of research on the subject in several decades, focused on Eastern European Jewish women's motivations for and experiences of migration and their adaptation to life in South Africa.<sup>79</sup> More recently, a history of the Union of Jewish Women has been written by Karen Kallmann, the chairperson of that organization's Cape Town branch.<sup>80</sup> Emerging work by Gavin

Synagogue' and Apartheid Court: Constructing a South African Heritage Site", *South African Historical Journal* 62, no. 1 (1 March 2010): 183–201; Shirli Gilbert, "Jews and the Racial State: Legacies of the Holocaust in Apartheid South Africa, 1945–60", *Jewish Social Studies* 16, no. 3 (2010): 32–64; Gilbert, "Anne Frank in South Africa: Remembering the Holocaust During and After Apartheid", *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26, no. 3 (2012): 366–93; Roni Mikel Arieli, *Remembering the Holocaust in a Racial State: Holocaust Memory in South Africa from Apartheid to Democracy (1948–1994)* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022).

76 Shirli Gilbert and Deborah Posel, "The Holocaust, Apartheid, and South African Jewish Perspectives on Victimhood", *Journal of Jewish Identities* 14, no. 2 (2021): 155–70; Gilbert and Posel, "Israel, Apartheid, and a South African Jewish Dilemma", *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 20, no. 1 (2021): 1–21.

77 Gitlin, *Vision Amazing*, 258–66; Krut, "Building a Home and Community", ch. 4.

78 Sally Frankental, "South African Jewish Women", in *Jewish Women 2000: Conference Papers from the HRIJW International Scholarly Exchanges 1997–1998*, ed. Helen Epstein, Working Paper 6 (Waltham, MA: Hadassah Research Institute on Jewish Women, 1999), 71–8; see also Azila Reisenberger, "Status of Jewish Woman [sic] in South Africa: With Special Reference to Apartheid and Post-Apartheid Eras", *Journal for the Study of Religion* 11, no. 2 (1998): 52–61; Reisenberger and Gwynne Schrire, "Balancing Tradition and Transition: South African Jewish Women's Search for Affiliation", *Journal for the Study of Religion* 14, no. 2 (2001): 103–20.

79 Veronica Belling, "When Rivke left Home: Women's Journeys from Eastern Europe to South Africa", *Jewish Culture and History* 11, nos. 1–2 (2009): 70–84; Belling, "Recovering the Lives of South African Jewish Women during the Migration Years c1880–1939" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 2013).

80 Karen Kallmann, *Women of Action: A History of the Union of Jewish Women* (Johannesburg: Union of Jewish Women, 2023); see exhibition at the South African Jewish Museum to coincide with the book's launch, March 2023, <https://www.sajewishmuseum.co.za/courses-1/women-of-action%3A-a-history-of-the-union-of-jewish-women>.

Beinart-Smollan on cookbooks and by Louise Leibowitz on relationships between Jewish women and their domestic workers demonstrates how a focus on women's lives brings fresh perspectives to a historiography that has hitherto focused almost exclusively on prominent men and (predominantly male) formal communal structures.<sup>81</sup>

The subject of religion and religious observance among South African Jews initially attracted relatively little scholarly attention, but the rapid growth of ultra-Orthodoxy particularly in Johannesburg in the past few decades – a phenomenon clearly evidenced in the most recent community survey<sup>82</sup> – seems to have stimulated some new interest. A series of articles published in the 1980s by Jocelyn Hellig examined South African Jewry's "unique blend of religious awareness and secular pragmatism" and attempted to account for its distinctive form of "non-observant Orthodoxy."<sup>83</sup> The American Reform rabbi Dana Evan Kaplan, who served as Rabbi of Temple Israel in Cape Town for several years following the political transition in 1994, published a number of academic articles documenting aspects of both Orthodox and Reform religious life, as well as Jewish education in South Africa; both here and in public forums, he urged Jews to "formulate a theological response" relevant to the new South Africa that combined the eternal teachings of Judaism with a commitment to social and economic justice.<sup>84</sup> The first major study of the Progressive Movement in South Africa, which has remained small within an Orthodox-dominated establishment but has nonetheless punched above its weight

81 Gavin Beinart-Smollan, "Co-Opting Domesticity: Apartheid, South African Jewish Women, and Community Cookbooks", *Food, Culture & Society* (4 April 2023): 1–17; Louise Leibowitz is a Ph.D. student at University College London.

82 David Graham, "The Jews of South Africa in 2019: Identity, Community, Society, Demography" (London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2020).

83 Jocelyn Hellig, "South African Judaism: An Expression of Conservative Traditionalism", *Judaism* 35, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 233–42; Hellig, "The Religious Expression of South African Jewry", *Religion in Southern Africa* 8, no. 2 (1987): 3–17; Hellig, "The Jewish Community in South Africa", in *Living Faiths in South Africa*, ed. Martin Prozesky and John W. De Gruchy (London: Hurst & Co., 1995).

84 Dana Evan Kaplan, "Judaism and the Jewish Community in the New South Africa", *Judaism* 45, no. 3 (1996): 355; see also Kaplan, "Controlled Panic in the New South Africa: The Impact of Social Changes on the South African Jewish Community", *Jewish Spectator* 62, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 10; Kaplan, "Jewish Educational Trends in South Africa Today", *Journal of Jewish Education* 64, no. 3 (Dec. 1998): 26–36; Kaplan, "South African Orthodoxy Today: Tradition and Change in a Post-Apartheid, Multiracial Society", *Tradition* 33, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 71–89; Kaplan, "Is there a Future for Jews in South Africa?" *Congress Monthly* (Nov./Dec. 1999): 6.

especially in the sphere of social justice work, was published in 2019 by the veteran journalist Irwin Manoim.<sup>85</sup> David Saks, Associate Director of the SAJBD and editor of *Jewish Affairs*, documented the establishment of Adath Jeshurun, an ultra-Orthodox synagogue established by German-Jewish refugees in 1936, and emphasized its influence on the later growth of observant Judaism and the Ba'al Teshuva movement.<sup>86</sup> The latter phenomena are explored in recent studies including a University of Cape Town doctoral dissertation by David Fachler.<sup>87</sup> Increased communal interest in religion is also reflected in the publication of numerous rabbis' memoirs and biographies<sup>88</sup> as well as historical accounts of synagogues.<sup>89</sup>

While much of the scholarship on South African Jews has focused on internal communal life, there has also been some fruitful work on transnational and comparative themes. A 1983 volume by Daniel Elazar and Peter Medding systematically compared Jewish "frontier"

85 Irwin Manoim, *Mavericks Inside the Tent: The Progressive Jewish Movement in South Africa and its Impact on the Wider Community* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2019).

86 David Saks, "The German Shul: The Contribution of Adath Jeshurun to Orthodox Judaism in South Africa", *Africana Notes and News* 30, no. 4 (1992): 133–40; Saks, "The Yekkes of Yeoville", *Jewish Affairs* Summer (2002): 14–16.

87 David Fachler, "Tradition, Accommodation, Revolution and Counterrevolution: A History of a Century of Struggle for the Soul of Orthodoxy in Johannesburg's Jewish Community, 1915–2015" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 2022); see also John Ian Simon, "A Study of the Nature and Development of Orthodox Judaism in South Africa to c.1935" (M.A. diss., University of Cape Town, 1996); Pinchas Zekry, "Conversion to Judaism in South Africa" (D.Litt. et Phil. diss., University of South Africa, 1999); Roberta G. Sands and Dorit Roer-Strier, "Ba'Alot Teshuvah Daughters and their Mothers: A View from South Africa", *Contemporary Jewry* 21, no. 1 (2000): 55–77; Elli Kriel, "Jewish Converts, their Communities and Experiences of Social Inclusion and Exclusion in Post-Apartheid South Africa" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 2016).

88 Moshe Silberhaft and Suzanne Belling, *The Travelling Rabbi: My African Tribe* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2012); Mrs Marcia Beryle Tanzer, *The Call of Africa is Heard in Brooklyn: A Memoir about Rabbi Avraham Tanzer* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013); Geoff Sifrin, ed., *Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris* (Johannesburg: Chief Rabbi Harris Memorial Foundation with Batya Bricker Book Projects, 2015); Geoffrey M. M. Ramokgadi, *My Covenant: The Honorary Jew* (Johannesburg: Geoffrey Ramokgadi, 2018); Barry Sidelsky, *The Adventures and Experiences of a Once upon a Time South African Rabbi* (Jerusalem: Mazo Publishers, 2018).

89 Solly Berger, Howard Phillips, and Charles Melzer, *The Centenary of the Great Synagogue, Gardens 1905–2005* (Cape Town: Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 2005); Amy Bach, *The Country Community Synagogues: From Cape Town to Calvinia, Wellington to Wynberg* (South Africa: [privately published], 2014); Gwynne Schrire, "The Green and Sea Point Hebrew Congregation from its Origins to 2010 [Web Exhibition]", 2021, <http://www.kaplancentre.uct.ac.za/kaplan/web-exhibitions/green-seapoint>.



experiences in South Africa, Argentina and Australia during the periods of initial settlement.<sup>90</sup> The theme of Jews in frontier societies was further explored in a wide-ranging volume of essays edited by Sander Gilman and Milton Shain covering South Africa, Australasia, North America, China, North Africa, and Brazil.<sup>91</sup> Jews' comparative responses to racism in South Africa and the American South have been the subject of work by Shimoni as well as Adam Mendelsohn.<sup>92</sup> Mendelsohn has also developed the idea of an Anglophone diaspora, exploring the ties between English-speaking communities in the United Kingdom, the United States, and outposts of the British Empire such as Australia, Canada, and South Africa.<sup>93</sup> Sarah Abrevaya Stein's innovative work on Jews' roles in the ostrich-feather trade between South Africa, London, New York, and elsewhere offered an excellent model for fully transnational historical work.<sup>94</sup> Hasia Diner's study of Jewish pedlars in the New World explored the experiences of immigrants in South Africa, Ireland, the United States, and elsewhere.<sup>95</sup> Under the auspices of a longstanding partnership between the Kaplan Centre and the Parkes Institute for Jewish/non-Jewish Relations at the University of Southampton (UK), projects on port Jews, Jews and colonialism, Jews and space, and others have engaged scholars from South Africa, the UK, Australia, the United States, Israel, and Europe and resulted in several conferences and edited volumes.<sup>96</sup> For the most part, however,

90 Daniel J. Elazar, *Jewish Communities in Frontier Societies: Argentina, Australia and South Africa* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983).

91 Gilman and Shain, *Jewries at the Frontier*.

92 Shimoni, *Community and Conscience*, 268–70; Adam Mendelsohn, "Two Far South: Rabbinical Responses to Apartheid and Segregation in South Africa and the American South", *Southern Jewish History* 6 (2003): 63–132.

93 Adam Mendelsohn, "Tongue Ties: The Emergence of the Anglophone Jewish Diaspora in the Mid-Nineteenth Century", *American Jewish History* 93, no. 2 (2007): 177–209.

94 Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Plumes: Ostrich Feathers, Jews, and a Lost World of Global Commerce* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

95 Hasia R. Diner, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015).

96 David Cesarani, ed., *Port Jews: Jewish Communities in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centres, 1550–1950*, Parkes-Wiener Series on Jewish Studies (London: Frank Cass, 2002); Cesarani and Gemma Romain, eds., *Jews and Port Cities, 1590–1990: Commerce, Community and Cosmopolitanism*, Parkes-Wiener Series on Jewish Studies (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006); Cesarani, Tony Kushner, and Milton Shain, eds., *Place and Displacement in Jewish History and Memory: Zakor V'makor* (Edgware: Vallentine Mitchell, 2009); Shirli Gilbert and Avril Alba, eds., *Holocaust Memory and Racism in the Postwar World* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019). For relevant conferences and programmes see <https://humanities.uct.ac.za/kaplan-centre/scholarship-conferences/programmes>.

while such volumes have included case studies of South Africa alongside other communities, genuinely comparative work is limited, and South African Jews remain largely absent from the mainstream of modern Jewish historiography.

Beyond historiography, a modest body of scholarship has focused on South African Jewish literature and arts. Claudia Braude compiled and wrote an extensive introduction to the significant anthology *Contemporary Jewish Writing in South Africa* (2001).<sup>97</sup> Yiddish literature was the focus of scholarly studies and translations by Joseph Sherman as well as work by Astrid Starck and Hazel Frankel.<sup>98</sup> Veronica Belling produced studies of Yiddish theatre and translations of important historical texts.<sup>99</sup> Dan Jacobson, one of the most important South African authors to focus on Jewish themes, was the subject of several studies by Sheila Roberts and others.<sup>100</sup> Marcia Leveson studied representations of Jews in South African

97 Claudia Braude, ed., *Contemporary Jewish Writing in South Africa: An Anthology* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2001).

98 Joseph Sherman, *From a Land Far Off: A Selection of South African Yiddish Stories in English Translation* (Cape Town: Jewish Publications South Africa, 1987); Sherman, "South African Literature: Yiddish and English", in *Encyclopedia Judaica Yearbook 1990/1991* (Jerusalem: Maxwell-Macmillan-Keter, 1992), 401–4; Sherman, "The Image of Apartheid in South African Yiddish Prose Writing", in *Yiddish and the Left: Papers on the Third Mendel Friesman International Conference on Yiddish*, ed. Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov, *Legenda Studies in Yiddish* 3 (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2001), 299–314; Astrid Starck, "South African Yiddish Literature and the Problem of Apartheid", *Jewish Affairs* 50, no. 2 (1995): 39–45; Starck, "Apartheid and the Yiddish Novel: Faivl Zygielboim's 'The Uhamas' (1971)", *Jewish Affairs* 51, no. 4 (1996): 49–55; Starck-Adler, "Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in South African Yiddish", *Studia Rosenthaliana* 36 (2002): 157–69; Hazel Frankel, *Holocaust and Home: The Poetry of David Fram from Lithuania to South Africa*, *Studies in Yiddish* 18 (Oxford: Legenda, 2021).

99 Veronica Belling, *Yiddish Theatre in South Africa: A History from the Late Nineteenth Century to 1960*, Jewish Publications – South Africa (Cape Town: Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, 2008); Belling, "The Making of a South African Jewish Activist: The Yiddish Diary of Ray Alexander Simons, Latvia, 1927", *Jewish Culture and History* 15, nos. 1–2 (2014): 110–23; Leibl Feldman, *The Jews of Johannesburg (Until Union – 31st May, 1910)* trans. Veronica Belling (Cape Town: Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, 2007); Yakov Azriel Davidson, *Yakov Azriel Davidson: His Writings in the Yiddish Newspaper, Der Afrikaner, 1911–1913*, trans. Veronica Belling (Cape Town: Jewish Publications, 2009); A. Sarid, *There was Once a Home . . . : Memories of the Lithuanian Shtetls published in the Afrikaner Idishe Tsaytung – African Jewish Newspaper, 1952–54*, trans. Veronica Belling, Jewish Publications – South Africa (Cape Town: Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, 2015).

100 Sheila Roberts and Bernth Lindfors, *Dan Jacobson* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984); Roberts, "A Way of Seeing: Dan Jacobson's Heshel's Kingdom", *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 10, no. 1 (1 January 1998): 57–73; Geoffrey V. Davis, "'A Deeper

fiction,<sup>101</sup> while more recent work explores the Afrikaans-language poetry of Olga Kirsch<sup>102</sup> and South African Jewish photography.<sup>103</sup> There is a much more substantial literature on the eminent South African writer Nadine Gordimer and the artists William Kentridge and Irma Stern, though Jewishness is not a major focus. The lack of Jewish subject matter in Gordimer's writing makes this unsurprising in her case, but in the cases of Stern and particularly Kentridge there remain rich opportunities for further work.<sup>104</sup>

There is also a small body of social-scientific research focused on South African Jews. Since the late 1970s, numerous sociodemographic studies have been conducted under the auspices of first the SAJBD and later the Kaplan Centre, some in partnership with the Institute for Jewish Policy Research in London.<sup>105</sup> In addition, aspects of South African Jewish life have been explored in small-scale studies in the disciplines of psychology

Silence': Dan Jacobson's Lithuania", in *Africa Writing Europe: Opposition, Juxtaposition, Entanglement*, ed. Maria Olausson and Christina Angelfors (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 39–66; Amy Simon, "A Commentary on Dan Jacobson's Holocaust Writings", *Jewish Historical Studies* 47, no. 1 (2015): 7–27; Hella Bloom Cohen, "The Old Radical and the New Conservative: Generational Incarnations of Racial Trauma in Jacobson's 'The Zulu and the Zeide'", *Journal of the African Literature Association* 12, no. 2 (2018): 166–79; M. Baumgarten, "Dan Jacobson's 'Mattering Map': Heshel's Kingdom as a Split-Screen Family Album", *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 19, no. 2 (2021): 349–59.

101 Marcia Leveson, *People of the Book: Images of the Jew in South African English Fiction, 1880–1992* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996).

102 Andries Wessels, "The Outsider as Insider: The Jewish Afrikaans Poetry of Olga Kirsch", *Prooftexts* 29, no. 1 (2009): 63–85; Egonne Roth, "Lessons in Writing the Biography of the Crossover Poet, Olga Kirsch", *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 54, no. 1 (2017): 63–76; Roth, *Olga Kirsch: A Life in Poetry* (Cape Town: Naledi, 2018).

103 Karina Simonson, "Historical Memory in the Work of South African Litvak Photographers", in *Art in Jewish Society*, ed. Jerzy Malinowski et al. (Warsaw and Toruń: Polish Institute of World Art Studies, 2016), 249–54; see also Terry Kurgan, *Everyone is Present: Essays on Photography, Memory and Family* (Johannesburg: Fourthwall Books, 2018).

104 Claudia Braude, "Beyond Black and White: Rethinking Irma Stern", *Focus* 61 (June 2011): 45–59; Katherine Graham and Suné Raubenheimer, *A Passionate Vision: The Story of Irma Stern* (Lansdowne, South Africa: Vine Publishers, 2017); Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, *Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

105 Dubb, *Jewish Population of South Africa: 1991*; Barry A. Kosmin et al., "Jews of the 'New South Africa': Highlights of the 1998 National Survey of South African Jews", 1999; Shirley Bruk, "The Jews of South Africa 2005: Report on a Research Study", 2006; A. S. Caplan, "South African Jews in London", 2010; "Attitudes and Perceptions of Black South Africans towards Jewish People in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg", 2017, all Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research (Cape Town); Graham, "Jews of South Africa in 2019".

and sociology, among others.<sup>106</sup> There have been several studies of South African Jewish migration to Australia, Israel, and Canada and the migrants' experiences of integration.<sup>107</sup>

The subject of education has garnered particular interest. The South African Jewish community supports a robust network of day schools attended by about 75 per cent of school-aged Jews, and the rise of observant Judaism has generated even further interest and investment in Jewish education at various levels. These trends and others have been analysed in several graduate dissertations and published studies, including an extensive history of Jewish education in South Africa from 1841 to 1980 by Myer Ellis Katz, and a trenchant critique of growing managerialism in Jewish day schools by Chaya Herman.<sup>108</sup> At least ten new studies were produced between 2020 and 2022 alone by South African graduates of the new online masters course in Jewish education offered by the London School of Jewish Studies, which has been well patronized by South African students.<sup>109</sup>

The connection between historical production and communal inter-

106 Jennifer Altschuler, "Migration, the Family and Apartheid: Journeys that span Geographic Space, the Life Course and Responses to Political Change" (Ph.D. diss., Open University, 2008); Tracy Rori Farber, "Integrity versus Despair: The Experience of Traumatized Child Holocaust Survivors" (Ph.D. diss., University of the Witwatersrand, 2019).

107 Allie Dubb, *Building Cocoons: South African Jewish Emigres Abroad* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1993); Shale Horowitz and Rabbi Dana Evan Kaplan, "The Jewish Exodus from the New South Africa: Realities and Implications", *International Migration* 39, no. 3 (2001): 3–32; David Saks, "The Emigration Phenomenon and its Impact on the South African Jewish Community", *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 79, nos. 2–3 (March 2003): 139–43; Stuart Schoenfeld, Joan Schoenfeld, and Gail McCabe, "From Diaspora to Diaspora: The Immigration of Jews from South Africa to Canada", *Canadian Jewish Studies* 15 (2007): 99–128; Colin Martin Tatz, *Worlds Apart: The Re-Migration of South African Jews* (Dural, N.S.W.: Rosenberg, 2007); Peter C. Arnold and David E. Lewinsohn, "Motives for Migration of South African Doctors to Australia since 1948", *Medical Journal of Australia* 192, no. 5 (2010): 288–90; Julie Kalman, "Mansions in Maroubra", *History Australia* 11, no. 1 (2014): 175–96; Rebeca Rajjman, *South African Jews in Israel: Assimilation in Multigenerational Perspective* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016); Tamsyn Robyn Halm, "From South Africa to Australia: South African Emigration (1976–2008)" (M.A. diss., Stellenbosch University, 2019).

108 Meyer E. Katz, "The History of Jewish Education in South Africa 1841–1980" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 1980); C. Herman, *Prophets and Profits: Managerialism and the Restructuring of Jewish Schools in South Africa* (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2006).

109 For an extensive recent bibliography see J. Burke and C. Moch, "Bibliography of Jewish Education in South Africa (1995–2020)", *South African Digest of Jewish Education* 2, no. 1 (2021): 19.

ests is evident in many of these examples. Some of those who have published books and articles are also active in communal activities and organization. In addition, research topics are often intended to shed light on contemporary community concerns, especially in the areas of religion and education. History is of interest to many members of the community, and scholars such as Milton Shain and Richard Mendelsohn are well known, the former particularly in his earlier role as Director of the Kaplan Centre.

Alongside this, history aimed explicitly at popular audiences has become an increasingly active and vibrant area of work. Some of this work is scholarly but much of it is produced by non-professional historians and communal figures. The beginnings of this trend were evident in the late 1980s and 1990s, when several exhibitions were mounted presenting aspects of Jewish life and history. Some were aimed at broad public audiences, most prominent among them *Anne Frank in the World*, which opened on the eve of South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994. During this crucial period when post-apartheid memory narratives were beginning to be forged, the Holocaust became a powerful way for the Jewish community to assert its identification with and commitment to the new democracy.<sup>110</sup> In the wake of *Anne Frank's* success came the establishment of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre (1999), with additional centres later opened in Durban (2007) and Johannesburg (2008).<sup>111</sup> While these museums focused on the Holocaust rather than local Jewish histories, as public interventions they were deliberately intended to situate Jews in the nascent memory narratives of the "new" South Africa (the centres were established and are strongly supported by the Jewish community, but they also have many non-Jewish patrons and financial backers).<sup>112</sup> In the early 2000s, parallel *Seeking Refuge* exhibitions

110 Gilbert, "Anne Frank".

111 Lloyd Pollak, *A Place of Memory, A Place of Learning: The First Ten Years of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre*, ed. Max Du Preez (Cape Town: HANDS-ON Media, 2008); Tali Nates, "The Presence of the Past: Creating a New Holocaust and Genocide Centre of Education and Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa", in *Remembering the Holocaust in Educational Settings* (London: Routledge, 2018); Nates, "New Developments in Holocaust and Genocide Education in South Africa: The Case Study of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre", in *Conceptualizing Mass Violence: Representations, Recollections, and Reinterpretations*, ed. Navras J. Aafreedi and Priya Sing (New York: Routledge, 2021); see also B. M. Casper, *Aspects of Jewish Life in South Africa: Three Lectures* (Johannesburg: Friends of the Library, University of the Witwatersrand, 1980), 1–14.

112 Shirli Gilbert, "Remembering the Racial State: Holocaust Memory in Post-Apartheid

in Johannesburg and Cape Town celebrated the lives and contributions of German Jewish refugees in those cities, accompanied by public events and glossy publications.<sup>113</sup> Scholars were involved in some of these initiatives, but they did not drive the work.

In 2008, Mendelsohn and Shain published *The Jews in South Africa: An Illustrated History*, the first general history of the community since Saron and Hotz's 1955 volume and an ambitious attempt to straddle scholarly and popular narratives. The book covered the early Anglo-German settlement, the large Lithuanian migrations, and the consolidation of Jewish life before, during, and after apartheid. Clearly intended for a broad audience, it was written in accessible prose without footnotes and accompanied by beautiful photographs and archival reproductions. Unlike its hagiographic predecessors, however, it presented a nuanced and complex social history grounded in the authors' academic research. It confronted contentious aspects of the history including Jews' role in the illicit liquor trade and prostitution in early Johannesburg, internal divisions around apartheid and religion, and the relationship between the Israeli and apartheid governments. At the same time, it presented a portrait of a successful and well-integrated community, and celebrated the contributions of dozens of prominent Jewish individuals to South African life.

In a less scholarly vein, growing numbers of publications celebrated the achievements of communal organizations including social welfare institutions, synagogues, and the SAJBD itself. Many were authored or produced by insiders, though there were also some attempts at analysis.<sup>114</sup>

South Africa", in *Holocaust Memory in a Globalizing World*, ed. Jacob S. Eder, Philipp Gassert, and Alan E. Steinweis (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2017), 199–214.

113 Linda Coetzee, Myra Osrin, and Millie Pimstone, eds., *Seeking Refuge: German Jewish Immigration to the Cape in the 1930s including Aspects of Germany confronting its Past* (Cape Town: Cape Town Holocaust Centre, 2003); Jocelyn Hellig, Myra Osrin, and Millie Pimstone, eds., *Seeking Refuge: German Jewish Immigration to Johannesburg in the 1930s, including Aspects of Germany confronting its Past* (Johannesburg: South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2005).

114 See, among others, Solly Berger, Howard Phillips, and Charles Melzer, *The Centenary of the Great Synagogue, Gardens 1905–2005* (Cape Town: Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 2005); David Solly Sandler, *100 Years of ARC Memories: Celebrating the Centenary of Arcadia (South African Jewish Orphanage) 1906–2006* (Wanneroo, W.A.: David S. Sandler, 2006); Gerald Mazabow, *The Quest for Community: A Short History of Jewish Communal Institutions in South Africa, 1841–1939* (Johannesburg: Houdini Publishers, 2008); Ronnie Gotkin, *Herzlia Today* (Cape Town: United Herzlia Schools, 2010); Sandler, *Memories of Oranjia: The Cape Jewish Orphanage (1911–2011). The Memories of Many Generations of Children who were in the Care of Oranjia together with the History from Oranjia's Past Publications* (Wanneroo, W.A.: David

Histories of local communities proliferated, among them the extensive and ambitious “Jewish Life in the South African Country Communities”, a decades-long project to document Jewish life in more than 1,550 towns and villages across the country. Six volumes have been published by the South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth and one is still in development.<sup>115</sup> In the past two decades alone, individual studies have also been published of Jewish communities as far afield as Potchefstroom, Montagu, Brakpan, Limpopo, Kwazulu-Natal, and Namaqualand.<sup>116</sup> Gwynne Schrire

Solly Sandler, 2014). For earlier publications see Eric Rosenthal, *The Story of the Cape Jewish Orphanage* (Cape Town: Oranjia Cape Jewish Orphanage, 1961); Bernard Sachs, ed., *The Fordsburg-Mayfair Hebrew Congregation, 1893–1964* (Fordsburg: Fordsburg-Mayfair Hebrew Congregation, 1972). For contributions from scholars in this area see Veronica Belling, *From Cape Jewish Orphanage to Oranjia Jewish Child and Youth Centre: A Hundred Years of Caring for Our Children, 1911–2011* (Cape Town: Oranjia Jewish Child and Youth Centre, 2014); Belling, *Highlands House Centennial Volume 1916–2016* (Cape Town: Highlands House, 2016); Howard Phillips, *Cemeteries and Synagogues: The Foundation of Organised Jewry in South Africa* (Cape Town: Kaplan Centre, University of Cape Town, 2018); see also Susan Tananbaum, “From Local to International: Cape Town’s Jewish Orphanage”, *Transactions* 46 (2014): 75–105.

<sup>115</sup> <https://jewishcountrycommunities.co.za/>; Adrienne Kollenberg, *Jewish Life in the South African Country Communities*, vol. 1: *The Northern Great Escarpment, the Lowveld, the Northern Highveld, the Bushveld* (Johannesburg: South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth, 2002); Kollenberg, vol. 2: *Boland, Bushmanland, Central Karoo, Fairest Cape, Griqualand West, Kalahari, Koup, Namaqualand, Swartland, West Coast* (Johannesburg: South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth, 2004); Kollenberg and Rose Norwich, vol. 3: *Camdeboo, Cape Midlands, Garden Route, Langkloof, Little Karoo, North-Eastern Cape, Overberg, Settler Country, Transkei, Griqualand East* (Johannesburg: South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth, 2007); Kollenberg and Norwich, vol. 4: *Coastal Region and Pinetown, Midlands, Northern Natal, Zululand* (Johannesburg: South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth, 2011); Kollenberg and Norwich, vol. 5: *Goldfields, Mountain Route, Riemland, Southern Free State, Western Free State* (Johannesburg: South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth, 2012); Kollenberg and Norwich, vol. 6: *East Rand, Midrand, Southern Great Escarpment, Southern Highveld* (Johannesburg: South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth, 2020).

<sup>116</sup> Rudi Allmayer, *The Community that disappeared [On the Jews of Montagu]* (2019), <https://montagumuseum.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Part12ndCopy.pdf>; Phyllis Jowell, *Into Kokerboom Country: Namaqualand’s Jewish Pioneers* (Vlaeberg: Fernwood Press, 2004); Julia Judith Prosser, *The Jews of KwaZulu-Natal: A History* (Durban: Julia Prosser, 2008); Charlotte Wiener, *The Jewish Country Communities of Limpopo/Northern Transvaal* (Charlotte Wiener, 2016); Maurice Skikne, *The Social History of the Brakpan Jewish Community* (Wandsbeck: Reach Publishers, 2017); Paul Cheifitz, *The Jewish Community of Potchefstroom: A History* (Rondebosch: Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, 2019); see also Daniel Coetzee, “Fires and Feathers: Acculturation, Arson and the Jewish Community in Oudtshoorn, South Africa, 1914–1948”, *Jewish History* 19, no. 2 (1 June 2005): 143–87; Hedy Irene Davis, *Muizenberg: The Story of the Shtetl by the Sea* ([South Africa]: Hedy I. Davis, 2014); Simone Friedman Herring, Haley Abrahams, and Ingrid Gavshon, “From Parow to Presidents: In Memory of Mendel, 1936–2009”, *Family Wires* 20 (privately published, Kaplan-Kushlick family, 2010);

(Robins), a longtime member of the Cape Town Board of Deputies and stalwart of the Cape Jewish community, has published numerous articles and books on various aspects of South African Jewish history, including several compilations of personal accounts and testimonies.<sup>117</sup> In the past decade, several dozen memoirs and biographies have been published of South African Jews, both prominent and “ordinary”.<sup>118</sup>

Some of the work produced in this period was explicitly contributionist. Mendel Kaplan, a prominent industrialist and communal leader, published *Jewish Roots in the South African Economy* (1986) as well as a co-written book on the early development of Johannesburg Jewry (1991), both focused on the contributions of prominent men and institutions.<sup>119</sup> More recent publications in this vein have focused especially on Jewish participation in the anti-apartheid struggle. The books *Madiba: A Tribute from South African Jewry* (2010) and *Jewish Memories of Mandela* (2011), both produced under the auspices of the SAJBD, showcased the contributions of Jewish activists, and emphasized that the Jewish community “continues in this tradition of contributing much more than its fair share to the

Millie Pimstone and Milton Shain, *The Jews of District 6: Another Time, Another Place*, Jewish Publications – South Africa (Cape Town: Isaac and Jesse Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, 2012).

117 Carmel Schrire and Gwynne Schrire, eds., *The Reb and the Rebel: Jewish Narratives in South Africa 1892–1913* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2016); Gwynne Schrire, *From Eastern Europe to South Africa: Memories of an Epic Journey, 1880–1937* (Cape Town: Jacob Gitlin Library and Western Province Zionist Council, 2007); Gwynne Schrire, ed., *In Sacred Memory: Recollections of the Holocaust by Survivors living in Cape Town* (Cape Town: Cape Town Holocaust Memorial Council, n.d.). Schrire has also published numerous articles in *Jewish Affairs*, on whose editorial board she sits.

118 See, among many others, Ruth Weiss, *A Path through Hard Grass: A Journalist’s Memories of Exile and Apartheid*, Lives, Legacies, Legends 11 (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2014); Roger Cohen, *The Girl from Human Street: Ghosts of Memory in a Jewish Family* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Daniel Browde, *The Relatively Public Life of Jules Browde* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2016); Jennifer Friedman, *Queen of the Free State: A Memoir* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2017); Robert J. Gordon, *The Enigma of Max Gluckman: The Ethnographic Life of a “Luckyman” in Africa* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018); Brian Sherman and A. M. Jonson, *The Lives of Brian: Entrepreneur, Philanthropist, Animal Activist* (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2018); Sidelsky, *Adventures and Experiences*; Barry Marcus, *My Story* (Amberley Publishing, 2019); Roy Isacowitz, *Telling People what they don’t want to hear: A Liberal Life under Apartheid* (Tel Aviv: Kibbitzer Books, 2020); Denis Hirson, *My Thirty Minute Barmitzvah: A Memoir* (London: Pushkin Press, 2023).

119 Mendel Kaplan, *Jewish Roots in the South African Economy* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1986); Kaplan and Marian Robertson, eds., *Founders and Followers: Johannesburg Jewry, 1887–1915* (Cape Town: Vlaeberg, 1991).



welfare and advancement of South Africa in virtually every sphere of life.”<sup>120</sup> Another recent book titled *Mensches in the Trenches: Jewish Foot Soldiers in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (2021), commissioned by the SAJBD, is explicitly intended to pursue the Board’s “mission to build bridges of friendship and understanding between Jews and all other peoples of South Africa, while also preserving and educating the wider public about the history of the Jewish community and the part its members have played in the unfolding story of their country.”<sup>121</sup> The eight-part historical audiovisual documentary *Legends and Legacies*, first aired in July 2021, highlights “the remarkable contribution the Jewish community has made in South Africa”.<sup>122</sup> Perhaps the most high-profile version of the contributionist narrative is on display at the South African Jewish Museum, which was officially opened by Nelson Mandela in December 2000. Conceived and supported by Mendel Kaplan, the Museum reaches broad audiences of domestic and international tourists with its inspiring narrative of the community’s origins and history.<sup>123</sup>

Alongside museums and exhibitions is a range of lively forums curated by South African Jews and, it seems, intended primarily for the consumption of Jews both inside South Africa and abroad. *Jewish Affairs* publishes three issues per year devoted to topics of South African and wider Jewish interest, including popular introductions to aspects of Jewish history and culture and many individual stories and accounts, including obituaries, biographies, and personal recollections.<sup>124</sup> The website of the Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group (SA-SIG), edited by the London-based South African Saul Issroff, is evidence of an active and enthusiastic community of genealogists from across the world.<sup>125</sup> Both the Kaplan Centre and the South African Jewish Museum continue to expand their online presentation of South African Jewish

120 South African Jewish Board of Deputies, *Madiba: A Tribute from South African Jewry* ([Houghton] South Africa: Hilly Golombick, 2010); David Saks, *Jewish Memories of Mandela* (South Africa: South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2011), iii.

121 From the dust jacket of Jonathan Ancer, *Mensches in the Trenches: Jewish Foot Soldiers in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (Johannesburg: Batya Bricker, 2021).

122 <https://astoryofacomunity.com/> (accessed 3 Nov. 2021); see also “Legends & Legacies: A Story of a Community”, *Cape Jewish Chronicle*, 1 July 2021.

123 <https://www.sajewishmuseum.co.za/>; see also Oren Baruch Stier, “South Africa’s Jewish Complex”, *Jewish Social Studies* 10, no. 3 (2004): 123–42.

124 <https://www.jewishaffairs.co.za/>.

125 <https://www.jewishgen.org/SAfrica/>.

history in the form of exhibitions and articles.<sup>126</sup> A new venture launched in 2022, Community History Online (CHOL), bills itself as a forum for “for those involved with preserving the footprint of South African Jewish communities in digital format for future generations”.<sup>127</sup>

The vast majority of these projects are initiated and led by non-professional historians and philanthropists, some of them associated with the communal establishment in a professional, lay, or clerical capacity. Academics are not detached from the conversation: the Kaplan Centre in particular (formerly directed by Shain, currently by my *Jewish Historical Studies* co-editor Adam Mendelsohn) constitutes an important base for academically grounded public history work. Shain authored annual entries on South Africa for the *American Jewish Year Book* for many years, and both he and Mendelsohn have been involved in facilitating exhibitions “to educate the public about South African Jewish history”, commissioning sociological research to support communal organization and planning, and supporting the publication of “books of historical value”.<sup>128</sup> Scholars are not driving the most lively conversations about South African Jewish history, however, nor are they central to their content or conceptualization.

One motivating factor for the growth in popular initiatives is a strong urge to preserve the community’s history. While collection is not unique to South African Jews, the Kaplan Centre archivist Kathrine Garrun suggests that “there is something distinct in collecting for a group of people who have witnessed so much historical upheaval.”<sup>129</sup> Popular history forums often serve as a space for memory work that helps South African Jews to connect with aspects of their personal histories, either the original locations where their families settled in South Africa or their Lithuanian roots. Much, though not all, of the interest they draw comes from émigrés who now live in the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, Australia, and elsewhere. The CHOL website, for example, features extensive resources on local communities – at the time of writing, forty cities and towns across South Africa – produced by former residents, and virtual gatherings often include cross-continental reminiscences.<sup>130</sup>

126 <http://www.kaplancentre.uct.ac.za/>.

127 <https://www.chol.website/index.htm>.

128 Kim, “Research Updates”.

129 Kathrine Garrun, “A Living Archive for South African Jewry”, <https://www.dafkadotcom.org/home/a-living-archive-for-south-african-jewry> (accessed 24 Jan. 2023).

130 <https://www.chol.website/index.htm>. For other popular virtual forums related

Nostalgia for Lithuania is also evident in popular forums. Rhoda Rosen has observed that Jews in post-apartheid South Africa have sought to emphasize their Lithuanian roots “as a source of radicalism, ethical behavior, and intellect” in order “to assert how intrinsic they were and remain to a democratic South Africa.”<sup>131</sup> Beyond the emphasis on Jewish radicalism, the increased interest in Lithuania as a site of communal origins and identity (as opposed to a space of death and loss) is evident in popular films, magazines, and amateur historical publications.<sup>132</sup> This interest has in part been fuelled by opportunities for travel since the 1990s, as well as South Africans’ increasing interest in acquiring European passports, but is doubtless also an attempt to craft coherent narratives of identity and belonging against a backdrop of repeated displacement and migration.

The strong community interest in history is also, as we have seen, the continuation of a longstanding trend. For many stakeholders, how South African Jewish history is narrated is not a neutral or academic question but is perceived to have profound implications for Jewish life in the present. Anxiety about Jews’ place in society was at the core of early South African Jewish historiography, as it was in Europe and America, and in the intervening decades we have seen the professionalization and increasing sophistication of scholarship. In the South African case, however, that anxiety remains closer to the surface than perhaps it is elsewhere. Even at its peak this has always been a small community, and given its

to South African Jews see <https://keidaner.com/category/south-africa/>; <https://www.dafkadotcom.org/>; <https://habo2020.com/hed-recordings/>; <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/Home.html>; <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/muizenberg/Shul.html>; <http://zjc.org.il/showpage.php>; <https://www.jewishcemetery.co.za/>.

<sup>131</sup> Rhoda Rosen, “The Making of an Eastern European Jewish Legacy in Contemporary South Africa”, *Shofar* 25, no. 1 (2006): 79, 84.

<sup>132</sup> See, among others, *The Snowball Rolled South*, produced by Leva Balsiunaite (Lithuania, 2018); Akvilė Naudžiūnienė, “The Litvaks”, *Passport Journal* 3 (2021), <https://www.passport-journal.com/en/product/the-litvaks-english/>; David Solly Sandler, *Our Litvak and South African Jewish Inheritance: The History, Life and Times of South African Jews* (Wanneroo, W.A.: David Solly Sandler, 2016), vol. 1; Sandler, *Keidan: Our Town in Lithuania* (Wanneroo, W.A.: David Solly Sandler, 2017). For academic reflections on this see Aušra Paulauskienė, “Memory of Lithuania in South Africa”, *Darbai Ir Dienos*, no. 54 (2010): 127–35; Claudia Braude, “Repairing Cracked Heirlooms: South African Jewish Literary Memory of Lithuania and Latvia”, in *The Edinburgh Companion to Modern Jewish Fiction*, ed. David Brauner and Axel Stähler (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 318–31; Karina Simonson, “Baltic Jewish Photographers in the Republic of South Africa (1930–1976): Leon Levson and Eli Weinberg” (Ph.D. diss., Lithuanian Culture Institute, 2018).

ongoing demographic decline and Jews' sense of precariousness – as (overwhelmingly) Zionists under a government with deep historical ties to the Palestinian cause, and as “whites” in a volatile state still in the process of transformation – it is perhaps unsurprising that many remain deeply invested in how its history is written. At a conference co-organized by my UCL department and the Kaplan Centre in October 2022, Gideon Shimoni remarked that where his historical findings “disturbed the conventional memory”, they were not easily accepted by South African Jewish audiences or communal leaders. More pointedly, he observed a persistent adherence among South African Jews to certain communal narratives even when they are not supported by the historical evidence.<sup>133</sup> At the same conference, one South African Jewish institution expressed strong objections to some of the research being discussed, and attempted to prevent one presenter's participation, an example that reflected a more pervasive conflict between the objectives of historiography and communal memory. These tensions seldom come into open conflict, but they persist.

#### *Where to from here?*

The growing dominance of popular history is perhaps in part also a reflection of the small numbers of scholars working in the field of South African Jewish studies today. Unlike other small fields such as Australian, Canadian, and Latin American Jewish studies, the South African one does not have a scholarly society, a journal, an annual conference, or awards. The Wits Department of Jewish Studies was closed during a major rationalization in the late 1990s. There are few university courses or academic jobs, though positions for archivists and museum professionals are more numerous. A visiting scholar from Tel Aviv University observed back in 1988 that academic Jewish studies was of much less interest to South African Jews than religious learning,<sup>134</sup> a trend that has become even more marked with the rise of Orthodox religiosity over the past three decades.<sup>135</sup> To be sure, we have seen a steady growth of work in the field

133 Gideon Shimoni, discussion, “Jews in South Africa: New Directions in Research”, conference, University College London and University of Cape Town, 12 Oct. 2020.

134 Jacob Joshua Ross, “Foreword” in *Waters Out of the Well: Essays in Jewish Studies*, ed. Reuben Musiker and Joseph Sherman (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1988), viii–ix.

135 Nadia Beider and David Fachler, “Bucking the Trend: South African Jewry and their Turn towards Religion”, *Contemporary Jewry* (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12397-023-09501-1>.

since the 1990s, and the Kaplan Centre continues to facilitate exchange with international scholars. It nonetheless remains difficult to speak about different schools of historiography or even major scholarly debates beyond the public spats of the late 1990s. The major (overwhelmingly male) scholars are retiring, and few new local scholars are rising through the ranks, although some promising scholarship is being produced by young scholars mostly based outside South Africa. One urgent prerequisite for the continued growth of the field is thus the nurturing of a new generation of scholars with the necessary training and languages. Also key is financial support that allows for knowledge production beyond communal narratives and gatekeeping. A robust conversation among stakeholders about the distinct nature and aims of scholarly and communal histories is essential, though perhaps unlikely in the current political climate.

Numerous areas of South African Jewish history await fuller exploration. We have much to learn about how notions of religion and identity have changed and been reimaged across time: in the years of mass migration at the turn of the century, in the decades following the destruction of European Jewry, in the wake of apartheid's demise, and beyond. How has Jewish self-understanding shifted as successive generations became more established? How have ordinary Jewish men and women understood and responded to their circumstances? To what extent have Jews understood themselves as a "community"? What have been the internal fault lines? What have been the experiences of Sephardim and others whose origins or identities diverge from the Litvak norm?<sup>136</sup> What has been the role of communal leadership and philanthropy in shaping South African Jews' views and priorities?

Memory is another fertile area. Post-apartheid communal narratives have tended to foreground Jewish opposition to apartheid, despite the reality that activists represented only a tiny minority of the community and were often ostracized by the communal establishment. This is but the most prominent of many instances of South African Jews re-crafting their story in ways that align with shifting communal as well as public priorities. There is also growing interest in the role of the "Litvak legacy", which Shimoni casts as a highly speculative "mythic collective memory

136 Mathy Joffe, *From Rhodes to Cape Town: South Africa's Sephardi Jews and their Heritage* ([1992]).

construct”,<sup>137</sup> as well as the question of how Jews have chosen to represent their past internally compared with in the public realm.

Relationships between Jews and non-Jews have to some extent been studied with regard to the apartheid period, but even then largely around questions of resistance, complicity, and conscience. Jews have engaged with South African life in manifold and complex ways that go far beyond these narrow analytical categories. How have Jews related to their many non-Jewish neighbours – Afrikaners, Muslims, others – beyond the frames of apartheid and antisemitism? What have been their encounters, their mutual perceptions, their alliances? Apartheid limited social links, but what about economic and other ties? We have much to learn, for example, about Jews’ relationships with non-whites in the domestic sphere (the primary site of contact particularly for Jewish women), the commercial sphere, and the workplace. How have social relationships changed since the advent of democracy? How have Jewish South Africans engaged with the project of the “new” South Africa in comparison with other ethnic minorities and other “whites”? How have they constructed and navigated their “whiteness” across time? And how might these issues be informed by categories such as age, class, geography, sexuality, and gender?

Intellectual history is another under-explored area. Some suggest that South African Jews have a longstanding anti-intellectual bias that is reflected in the contemporary trend towards ultra-Orthodoxy.<sup>138</sup> Even here, however, little work has been done to explore the development of Jewish religious thought in South Africa despite the existence of copious source material. In the sphere of political thought, we know little about Jews’ approach to liberalism, which faced attacks both during and after apartheid but also had numerous prominent Jewish advocates. Little, too, is understood about the influence of Habonim and other Zionist movements on Jews’ engagement with South Africa.<sup>139</sup>

Further exciting research possibilities emerge when we move beyond a contained focus on the community itself to consider how the story of South African Jews intersects with other histories. Despite always being

137 Gideon Shimoni, “Where we are, Future Directions”, keynote address, “Jews in South Africa”.

138 Chaya Herman, “The Jewish Community in the Post-Apartheid Era: Same Narrative, Different Meaning”, *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa* 63 (2007): 34.

139 A short history produced by Gideon Shimoni for the 90th anniversary of Habonim Dror begins to broach these questions: “Ninety Years of Habonim-Dror: A Short History” (unpublished Ms., 2022).

a small minority in South Africa, Jews have had a significant impact on the country's history. They were key actors in the modernization of South Africa during the mineral revolutions of the nineteenth century; they were also, unlike Eastern European migrants to more established cities in the New World, integral co-founders of the new "City of Gold", Johannesburg. As discussed earlier, however, scholarship on this early period hardly broaches the significance of the migrants' Jewishness. The work of the social historians of the 1980s and 1990s provides a foundation for thinking through more deeply Jews' role in the creation of the South African economy, particularly consumer culture, and the co-construction of South African identity in the crucial decades around the turn of the twentieth century.

Jews played a prominent role in the history of apartheid, but the specific question of activists' Jewishness and its impact has tended to remain limited to Jewish circles. Many activists rejected a specifically Jewish motivation for their activism, in part because such an idea resonated uncomfortably with apartheid notions of ethnic separateness. There is nonetheless rich scholarly potential in exploring how Jewishness informed not only their individual impulses (as the work of James Campbell, among others, has already fruitfully done) but also the broader thinking and work of the liberation movements.<sup>140</sup> Wider historical discussions of "race" and "whiteness" in South Africa have also seldom included Jews.<sup>141</sup>

One of the few areas of South African historiography where Jews figure notably is in histories of immigration. In particular, Jews were central in conflicts around immigration policy in the early 1900s and with the Quota (1930) and Aliens (1937) acts. Jews are viewed in these studies not only as narrow targets of antisemitism but also as integral to wider debates about South African nationality and citizenship that were crystallizing after the South African War (1899–1902) and in the late 1920s and 1930s.<sup>142</sup> Over the

140 On the latter, see most recently Tom Lodge, *Red Road to Freedom: A History of the South African Communist Party 1921–2021* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2022).

141 See e.g. Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Deborah Posel, "Race and Common Sense: Racial Classification in Twentieth Century South Africa", *African Studies Review* 44, no. 2 (2001): 87–113; Melissa E. Steyn, "Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be": *White Identity in a Changing South Africa* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Natasha Distiller and Melissa E. Steyn, eds., *Under Construction: "Race" and Identity in South Africa Today* (Sandton: Heinemann, 2004).

142 Saul Dubow, "South Africa and South Africans: Nationality, Belonging, Citizenship", in Ross, *Cambridge History*, 17–65; see also Bradlow, "Immigration"; Peberdy, *Selecting*

past ten years or so, research has begun to emerge that incorporates Jews into studies of anti-fascism in South Africa,<sup>143</sup> as well as consideration of wider contemporary legal, educational, and economic questions.<sup>144</sup> All this work offers fruitful models for the fuller integration of Jews into South African historiography.

If South African Jews feature minimally in the historiography of their own country, they feature even less in modern Jewish historiography. The Jewish experience in South Africa nonetheless constitutes a rich field for the exploration of some of the most pressing themes of contemporary Jewish scholarship. One of these themes is Jews and colonialism. Many scholars have noted the longstanding rift between the disciplines of Jewish studies and colonial/postcolonial studies, a rift rooted in political motivations but with profound and long-lasting intellectual impact.<sup>145</sup> Stimulating new scholarship is beginning to study the vast unexplored terrain where these disciplines intersect, challenging us to rethink the sources, assumptions, and conceptual frameworks that have informed both, and highlighting rich spaces of interconnection and entanglement.<sup>146</sup> While the complex questions that Zionism and Israel pose to this intellectual project are widely acknowledged, in the South African case the undisputed anti-Zionism of the contemporary academy – and indeed

Immigrants; Clive Glaser, “Portuguese Immigrant History in Twentieth Century South Africa: A Preliminary Overview”, *African Historical Review* 42, no. 2 (2010): 61–83; Glaser, “White but Illegal: Undocumented Madeiran Immigration to South Africa, 1920s–1970s”, *Immigrants & Minorities* 31, no. 1 (2013): 74–98.

143 *South African Historical Journal* (2022), special issue.

144 See e.g. David Bilchitz, “Why Incitement to Harm against those with Different Political Opinions is constitutionally Impermissible: *Masuku v South African Human Rights Commission Obo South African Jewish Board of Deputies* 2018 ZASCA 180 (4 Dec 2018)”, *Journal of South African Law/ Tydskrif vir die Suid-Afrikaanse Reg* 2 (April 2019): 364–74; see also N. Deokiram, “When does the Non-Recognition of Religious Holidays constitute Unfair Discrimination in the South African Workplace?” (M.A. thesis, University of Johannesburg, 2017); Gregory Fine, “Social Structure and Tertius Iungens across the Phases of Entrepreneurial Activity: A Social Network Analysis of the Johannesburg Jewish Community” (M.A. thesis, University of Pretoria, 2017); Anthony Robin Cawood, “Religion, Solidarity and Identity: A Comparative Study of Four South African Schools with a Religious Affiliation” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cape Town, 2018).

145 Bryan Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 39–40.

146 Ethan B. Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Maud S. Mandel, eds., *Colonialism and the Jews* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2017); Stefan Vogt, ed., *Colonialism and the Jews in German History: From the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).



the public realm – perhaps explains why scholarship in this vein has been especially slow to emerge from within South Africa itself.

The belated imperial turn in Jewish studies has nonetheless begun to bring South Africa into the orbit of historians working on Jews in imperial contexts. Elizabeth Imber's doctoral dissertation at Johns Hopkins University, for example, explores the development of Jewish politics in the context of British imperialism, focusing on Jewish elites in South Africa, India, and Mandate Palestine after 1917.<sup>147</sup> Jennifer Reeve's dissertation at the University of East Anglia, which studies British colonial responses to Jewish refugees through case studies of Kenya, Northern Rhodesia, and Cyprus, contains substantial discussion of South Africa.<sup>148</sup> Historians of colonialism who begin from a non-Jewish perspective have also begun to engage more deeply with Jews' in-between position amid colonizer and colonized – beneficiaries to some extent of the colonial racial system but also objects of antisemitic discourse. The work of the British historian Rachel Bright, for example, uses the case study of Jews in South Africa as one among several to explore the imagination and construction of citizenship in the British Empire.<sup>149</sup> Moving beyond the imperial frame, the work of the African historian Lynn M. Thomas on the history of skin lighteners includes a focus on the Jewish Krok brothers, who made their millions with products marketed at South African blacks in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>150</sup>

Related to this is the theme of Jewish racial liminality and ambivalent “whiteness”. The complex role of “race” in Jewish identity, social positioning, and relationships with other minorities across time is explored in a growing body of work on the United States, Argentina, the

147 Elizabeth Imber, “Jewish Political Lives in the British Empire: Zionism, Nationalism, and Imperialism in Palestine, India, and South Africa, 1917–1939” (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2018).

148 Jennifer Reeve, “Liberalism, Race and Humanitarianism: British Colonial Policy and Jewish Refugees 1938–1943” (Ph.D. diss., University of East Anglia, 2016); see also David Feldman, “Jews and the British Empire c.1900”, *History Workshop Journal* 63 (2007): 70–89; Adam Mendelsohn, “Great Britain, the Commonwealth, and Anglophone Jewry”, in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 8: *The Modern World, 1815–2000*, ed. Mitchell B. Hart and Tony Michels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 133–63.

149 Rachel Bright, “Migration, Naturalisation, and the ‘British’ World, c.1900–1920”, *History of Global Arms Transfer* 10 (2020): 27–44; see also Graham Dominy, “The First Jewish Governor in the British Empire, Sir Matthew Nathan: An ‘Outsider’ in Africa and Ireland”, *Transactions* 49, no. 1 (2018): 162–87.

150 Lynn M. Thomas, “Skin Lighteners, Black Consumers and Jewish Entrepreneurs in South Africa”, *History Workshop Journal* 73 (2012): 259–83.

Caribbean, and elsewhere.<sup>151</sup> Apart from Riva Krut's work, however, South African Jewish scholarship has hardly broached these questions. Scholarly work on the Lemba people – so-called “black Jews” who equally and simultaneously assert their connections to Jewishness and to South Africa – has hardly any connection with South African Jewish scholarship, and does not explore the substance of what constitutes the Lemba's “Jewishness” or the complex issues that arise in the encounter between “black” and “white” Jews.<sup>152</sup> There is thus rich scope both for empirical research on South Africa and for comparison with Jews in other racialized colonial and postcolonial settings.

Yiddish-language texts remain an important source for such questions, not least because of the openness with which they address their audiences. They exist in substantial quantities, including a lively succession of newspapers from across the political spectrum as well as numerous published works of fiction and non-fiction.<sup>153</sup> Recent work by younger scholars suggests this is a fertile area for further research. Eli Rosenblatt's study of racial language in modern Yiddish literature takes South Africa as one of its case studies, while Roni Masel's postdoctoral project highlights how interwar Yiddish culture was partly shaped by an imperial frame of reference as it circulated in South Africa, Europe, and North America.<sup>154</sup>

151 Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews became White Folks and what that says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Sander L. Gilman, “Are Jews White?” in *Theories of Race and Racism*, ed. Les Back and John Solomos (New York: Routledge, 1999), 294–302; Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Sandra Mcgee Deutsch, “Insecure Whiteness: Jews Between Civilization and Barbarism, 1880s–1940s”, in *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, ed. Eduardo Elena and Paulina Alberto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 25–52; Sarah Phillips Casteel, *Calypto Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

152 Gina Buijs, “Black Jews in the Northern Province: A Study of Ethnic Identity in South Africa”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 4 (1998): 661–82; Tudor Parfitt, “Constructing Black Jews: Genetic Tests and the Lemba – the ‘Black Jews’ of South Africa”, *Developing World Bioethics* 3, no. 2 (2003): 112–18; Noah Tamarkin, *Genetic Afterlives: Black Jewish Indigeneity in South Africa, Theory in Forms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); see also Marla Brettschneider, Edith Bruder, and Magdel Le Roux, eds., *Africana Jewish Journeys: Studies in African Judaism* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019).

153 Many Yiddish newspapers have well-preserved archives in repositories in South Africa, Israel, and the UK; see e.g. C. J. Ginsberg, “End of an Era? Forty Years of Dorem Afrike and Yiddish Kultur in South Africa”, *Journal for Semitics* 20, no. 1 (2011): 44–86.

154 Eli Rosenblatt, “Enlightening the Skin: Travel, Racial Language and Rabbinic Intertextuality in Modern Yiddish Literature” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2017); <https://complit.berkeley.edu/people/faculty/roni-masel>.

Further studies might also fruitfully explore the extent to which the dynamics of Jewish life in South Africa compare with patterns elsewhere. Here, while I join scholars of other “marginal” communities in calling for greater inclusion in the mainstream of Jewish studies,<sup>155</sup> I would also emphasize the generative potential of comparative work among and across “marginal” groups. How have Jews in such communities confronted antisemitism, related to majority and other minority populations, and maintained Jewish infrastructure far from larger centres of Jewish settlement? And what has happened when they move between these spaces?

We also have more to learn about how South African Jews have shaped the wider Jewish world, particularly given the sizeable emigration that has taken place over the past sixty years. Preliminary studies have explored the impact of South African Jews on communal life in Israel and Australia;<sup>156</sup> similar studies on other destinations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada would enrich our understanding both of the migrant groups and the societies into which they have settled.

For those who wish to take on the urgent challenge of studying South African Jews, materials are plentiful. Samuel Rochlin’s work for the South African Sociological and Historical Society in the 1950s laid the foundations for the indispensable archival collection housed today on the SAJBD premises in Johannesburg. One of Rochlin’s most valuable contributions to the archive was the creation of the Press Digest, a newspaper-cutting project originating from the SAJBD’s need in the early 1930s to monitor items relating to Jews; the project continues to this day and covers all major newspapers on a weekly basis.<sup>157</sup> Sizeable archives supported by the Kaplan Centre include paper collections hosted at the University of Cape Town and digital material compiled in partnership

155 Raanan Rein and Adriana M. Brodsky, “On Kosher Hamburgers, Yiddish Tangos, and Non-Affiliated Jews: Writing Jewish Latin America into the Americas”, *American Jewish History* 103, no. 3 (2019): 345–63; Orit Bashkin et al., “Roundtable: Jewish Identities in the Middle East, 1876–1956”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 3 (2014): 577–605.

156 Raijman, *South African Jews in Israel*; Suzanne D. Rutland, “Creating Transformation: South African Jews in Australia”, *Religions* 13, no. 12 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13121192>.

157 Archive catalogue accessible at [http://www.kaplancentre.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image\\_tool/images/151/2022/Guide%20to%20the%20archival%20collections%20in%20the%20SAJBOD%20archives.pdf](http://www.kaplancentre.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/151/2022/Guide%20to%20the%20archival%20collections%20in%20the%20SAJBOD%20archives.pdf). See also M. Geffen, “A Researcher into the Past of South African Jewry: The Late S. A. Rochlin”, *Jewish Affairs* 16, no. 12 (1961): 28–30; John Simon, “Towards an Appraisal of South African Jewish Historiography”, in *Festschrift in Honour of Frank R. Bradlow*, ed. Pieter E. Westra and Brian Warner (Cape Town: Friends of the South African Library, 1993), 19–30.

with the South African Jewish Museum. The Kaplan Centre's website includes links to additional resources, including numerous platforms for those interested in genealogical research.<sup>158</sup> The sociodemographic studies produced by the Kaplan Centre await fuller exploration by scholars. There are also numerous published memoirs, biographies, and autobiographies documenting the lives of South African Jewish individuals including politicians, activists, rabbis and communal leaders, intellectuals and artists, businesspeople, refugees, and Holocaust survivors. These publications and many more are listed in Veronica Belling's comprehensive *Bibliography of South African Jewry*, soon to be released in an updated version, a thorough and meticulous compilation of earlier bibliographies as well as archival sources, books, articles and dissertations.<sup>159</sup>

The field, then, is wide open. Building on what is already a substantial and nuanced body of scholarship, there are opportunities for work in a variety of disciplines, drawing on wide-ranging and linguistically diverse source bases, and in dialogue with Jewish studies, South African and African historiography, "race" and "whiteness" studies, and other disciplines. I hope that this special issue of *Jewish Historical Studies* as well as the broader mission for the journal articulated by the new co-editors in our Introduction will help to spur renewed interest and raise fresh questions for a new generation of scholarship.

158 <http://www.kaplancentre.uct.ac.za/kaplan/research/archival-research-inquiries;>  
[https://sajmarchives.com/;](https://sajmarchives.com/) <http://www.kaplancentre.uct.ac.za/kaplan/resources/jdap>.

159 Veronica Belling, *Bibliography of South African Jewry* (Cape Town: Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, 1997).