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The making of a South African Jewish community on the Rand*

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Viewed from the angle of any of the protagonists, the South African War was a major turning point. It committed Britain to a colonial war against the Boer Republics and became an unexpectedly protracted and costly affair. On the one hand it shook Imperial confidence at home and galvanized renewed policies of internal reform.¹ On the other, it ultimately placed Britain in direct political control of the richest goldfields in the world at the moment when the international monetary system was transformed into a gold standard, and thus confirmed Britain's position at the centre of a world money market. In the African subcontinent, British intervention resulted in a major restructuring of power relations, an entirely new balance of power between the European Imperial nations, and the new foundations for capitalist development in twentieth century Southern Africa. The spotlight now came to bear on Johannesburg, where the British administration under Sir Alfred Milner was based. The administration now embarked on a radical political programme designed to facilitate the emergence of a social infrastructure that was fully compatible with the needs of the mining industry, and directed its energies towards securing a large, cheap, and unskilled non-white labour force for the mines, and a stable, skilled, and Loyalist white proletariat; the twin foundations of the new alliance between mining capital and the state.

The work of Charles van Onselen, Shula Marks, and Stanley Trapido has graphically illustrated how the sheer scope and weight of state intervention significantly altered the geography of class on the

1 Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood", *History Workshop Journal* 5 (Spring 1978): 9–66.

* This text formed ch. 3 of my Ph.D. diss., "Building a Home and Community: Jews in Johannesburg, 1886–1914" (University of London, 1985), with a few cuts by the general editors and updated footnotes. For my reflections on this work, contextualized in Shirli Gilbert, "Scholarship on South African Jews: State of the Field", see my "Writing History about the Ties that bind: Reflections", both in this volume.

Witwatersrand.² However, it is also clear that there was significant tension between the short and long term needs of the state-capital alliance. The Transvaal economy was still dominated by imperial mining, commerce, and subsistence agriculture. In this context, as profits accrued to finance capital and foreign investment, the rising class of local petit bourgeoisie and artisan manufacturers found their economic aspirations thwarted. Belinda Bozzoli has shown how these circumstances gave rise to a national bourgeoisie that styled itself as a class of self-made men and entrepreneurs who saw their future in South Africa, who attacked foreign capitalists who did not invest locally, and who turned to the white working class as its political and economic constituency.³

The largest group of settlers who were committed to making their homes in South Africa was the new tide of Russian Jewish immigrants. They were the first to stabilize as families in Johannesburg, and added significantly to the calls for housing, representative local government, and municipal and social services. But there was no natural place for the Jews in the stark race and class structures of emerging South Africa. They were neither African nor English; neither Boers nor capitalists nor unskilled workers. In this context, their response was to offer a radical solution: to break with the traditions of their past, and construct a South African Jewish community. In the Jewish world, the years around the outbreak of the South African War were also dramatic, although they do not turn around a single event. Instead, this period saw the explosion of a number of issues that had been building up in the acute internal political turmoil in Russia in the preceding two decades. To some extent these were but the continuation of major themes introduced in 1881/2: the persistence of official anti-Jewish policy, the gradual and irrevocable immiseration of the Jewish masses in the Pale, and the emigration of thousands of them each year to the New World.

However, the Russian context now precipitated new responses from the Jewish population: firstly, a generation of official anti-Jewish policy meant that the Jews as a group became overwhelmingly anti-Czar and hopeful of political change. Whereas the 1881/2 crisis saw the Jews looking outwards

2 Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido, "Lord Milner and the South African State", *History Workshop Journal* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1979): 50–80; see also Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914*, 2 vols (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982).

3 Belinda Bozzoli, *The Political Nature of a Ruling Class: Capital and Ideology in South Africa, 1890–1933* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

for their salvation, the following years were characterized by an inward-turning, an intense examination of their position in pre-revolutionary Russian society as Russians and as Jews. In this ferment, two of the major themes of twentieth century Jewish history were born: Zionism and Jewish Socialism, each of which started life as a political movement in 1897. Both Zionism and Jewish Socialism were characterized not by easy political solutions, but by furious internal debate. In Russia, the fissiparous tendencies of these movements, especially that of Jewish Socialism, were contained by the overwhelming need for unity against the Czar. Both political traditions were transferred into the New World, particularly after the catastrophic Kishinev pogrom and the abortive October Revolution, each of which was followed by increased emigration.

In the New World, a number of different factors account for the transformation of East European Jewish political traditions. Firstly, they were buffeted by ideological dissent within their movements – the “Uganda Crisis”, for example, in 1903, and the death of Theodor Herzl a few months later, created a vacuum in international Zionist leadership and ideological direction. Secondly, the new immigrants were still profoundly tied to events in Russia. The Kishinev pogrom, and later the First World War, which caused massive dislocations in Russian Jewish life, galvanized Jewish immigrant organizations to gather their limited resources and funds for Jewish victims in Russia. Thirdly, the impact of a new environment, in Western Europe, America or South Africa – which, in contrast to Russia, was relatively democratic and liberal – opened immigrant Jewish eyes to new and exciting possibilities. The effect was to temporarily remove the coherence, drawn from centuries of religious unity and oppression as a people, from the Jewish experience; but also to challenge the immigrants to respond to the “modern” world, wherever and on whatever terms they met it. However, as Paula Hyman has argued, the survival of Jews as self-conscious groups, even as they acculturated into their new countries of domicile, suggests the need to develop more nuanced definitions of assimilation, integration, and identity which embrace the complexity of minority-group behaviour, even if, as in South Africa, these minorities wield substantial influence and power.⁴

4 Paula Hyman, “The History of European Jewry: Recent Trends in the Literature” (review article), *Journal of Modern History* (1981): 306. The best single work on the transformation of Jewish nationalism and socialism in the New World is Jonathan Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism and the Russian Jews, 1872–1917* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

In England there was an established Anglo-Jewish community with a recently confirmed basis for a relationship with the state. Consequently, the immigrants were rapidly incorporated by the Anglo-Jewish infrastructure.⁵ They ultimately made an impact, especially in terms of Zionism, but nothing quite in proportion to their numbers. In Johannesburg, where a British system was quite suddenly imposed, there was no Jewish establishment; nor, because of the War, was there any indigenous communal infrastructure apart from the Zionist Federation.

The sudden imposition of British rule in the Transvaal had direct consequences for the Jewish population there. Under Imperial government, Jewish religious freedom and civil liberty, the very rights denied by Kruger, were now secured. It was in this context – the absence of any local Jewish tradition; the absence of a *modus vivendi* with the state; the new dominance of East European artisan-craftsmen and their families who were committed to building a future in their new society; and a society that as yet had no space for a “middle class” – that a “South African” Jewish community emerged in Johannesburg. It was, as [Gideon] Shimoni said, “Anglo-Jewish” in the sense that it adopted the forms of Anglo-Jewry: especially the representative community umbrella organization, the Jewish Board of Deputies, and a local newspaper, the *Jewish Chronicle*. But in substance, the South African Jewish community was (and is) radically different from its British parent.

In the critical years before Union, when the foundations were being laid of race, class, and nationality and a South African state, and when the Jewish position was highly ambiguous, a South African Jewish community was born. A leadership emerged in Johannesburg that usurped the Zionist Federation and allayed potential allegations of “dual loyalty”; that removed the Jewish question from the problems of poor whiteism; and that provided for South African Jews an identity that was comfortably urban, English speaking and middle class: that guaranteed for them a place in the sun in a white South African future.

New immigrants in the twentieth century

Many of the new Russian Jewish immigrants were influenced by the varied, volatile, and antagonistic ideas of the territorial Zionists, the

5 Jerry White, *Rothschild Buildings: Life in an East End Tenement Block, 1887–1920* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 16–24.

socialist Zionists or the Jewish Labour movement. In Johannesburg, some Jewish immigrants set up a local branch of the Bund, the Society for the Friends of Russian Freedom,⁶ others were active in worker politics and local trade unions,⁷ still others debated their position as Jewish workers and/or Jewish nationalists and/or Jewish socialists in South Africa. But the impact of immigration on the Jewish community in Johannesburg went beyond the direct transfer of numbers, parties and ideologies across continents.⁸

Lithuania had been one of the strongest centres of Jewish socialist activity before the 1905 revolution.⁹ A small body of literature in South Africa suggests that this tradition continued in Johannesburg, but lost its vitality either because of the greater strength of capitalist transformation which undercut their economic position¹⁰ or because they transferred their energies to the more pressing concerns of general class struggle and the International Socialist League.¹¹ In some respects, these theses need to be stressed, but they also require qualification. While there was a strong Jewish Socialist identity in Johannesburg, calling itself the Society for the Friends of Russian Freedom, it focused on European, especially East European, events, and could not simultaneously bring its class analysis to bear on South African conditions. Moreover, much of the debate about Jewish socialism occurred within Zionism, and the intense argument about the meaning of Zionism in the New World and in South Africa.

From the 1890s, Zionism had been enthusiastically received in the Transvaal, a point used by Shimoni to argue that Zionism always had a special appeal for South African Jews. At the turn of the century, however, Zionism in Johannesburg was ideologically ambiguous. For Samuel Goldreich, and no doubt for Lennox-Lowe, Hertz and other leaders of the Zionist Federation, the appeal of Zionism lay in its “messianic or religious” side.¹² In other words, their adherence to Zionism did not dilute

6 Evangelos Mantzaris, “From the History of Bundist Activity in South Africa”, *Bulletin of the Bund Archives of the Jewish Labour Movement* 3, no. 37 (Winter 1981–2): 1–3.

7 Charles van Onselen, “Johannesburg’s Jehus”, in *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand*, vol. 1: *New Babylon*, 187–97.

8 See Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics*, 463, talking of the American experience.

9 *Ibid.*, 193–200.

10 Van Onselen, “Johannesburg’s Jehus”, 193.

11 Mantzaris, “From the History of Bundist Activity”, 1–3.

12 Rev. Dr. Joseph Hertz arrived in Johannesburg in 1898 and was the rabbi of the old Hebrew Congregation until 1910. He was the spiritual leader of the Johannesburg Jewish

their loyalty to Empire and England.¹³ But for the Eastern Europeans, Zionism was married to a strong Jewish national identity, often to Jewish socialism.¹⁴ This was an extremely important tension, and one which has not received adequate attention in Shimoni's book. Yet the remarkable fact is that throughout the period of greatest "transfer" of ideas from a shtetl in ideological ferment to Johannesburg, Jewish socialism never attained more than a minority following, at least until the 1930s.¹⁵ This is even more remarkable given the difficult economic conditions faced by the immigrants in Johannesburg; conditions which in Eastern Europe had bred a vigorous socialism. There were a variety of reasons for this change: firstly, a contradiction contained within the immigrant community itself, and secondly the impact of the "Jewish issue" on local politics, and the response of the Jewish establishment.

The immigrant Jews who poured into Johannesburg sought out (or created) organizations that could help get them established in their new country. They made connections with those from their home town or district.¹⁶ Together with them it was easier to overcome the emotional and economic barriers that blocked their way at the moment of arrival. Jews from the same shtetls set up clubs (*landsmanschaften*), burial societies and synagogues.

The *landsmanschaften* co-existed with local synagogues – in Jeppestown (1902), Doornfontein (1904), La Rochelle (1906), Braamfontein (1904); local Zionist societies – the Palestine Society (1911); and other benefit societies in areas where the Jewish population clustered.¹⁷ They represented "the map of Russian-Jewish settlement with all its sectional

elite, but also Orthodox, East European by birth, and fervently pro-Zionist. Moreover, he was dynamic and charismatic. He became Chief Rabbi of the British Empire from 1913 to 1946.

¹³ Goldreich commented on these interpretations in 1911; quoted in Gideon Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience, 1910–1967* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1980), 22–3; see 22–6 for a general discussion of the ideological differences between the "political Zionists" and the "practical/cultural Zionists".

¹⁴ "A Tendency to Socialism", *South African Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter, SAJC), 20 April 1906; "Zionism and Socialism" (editorial), SAJC, 27 April 1906.

¹⁵ Taffy Adler, "Lithuania's Diaspora: The Johannesburg Jewish Worker's Club, 1928–1948", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 6, no. 1 (1979): 70–92. These Jewish Socialists were in many cases the children of immigrants.

¹⁶ These are listed in the "Communal Directory", *South African Jewish Year Book* (1929), 279–80.

¹⁷ Listed in *ibid.*, 278–90.

rivalries and regional peculiarities".¹⁸ The Jewish "community" in Johannesburg was potentially splitting apart with an organizational eclecticism that diluted its shtetl coherence. Many of these organizations had no more than a handful of members.¹⁹ Even within these small groups, there were vigorous debates and disagreements about politics, ideology and daily life.²⁰

However, the Jewish community was not left to develop on its own. There were two critical new factors that affected the fate of the postwar community. Firstly they were a different group of Jews from that of the 1890s; secondly, they faced the ambiguous benefits of British rule.

Imperialism and racism

With the establishment of the Reconstruction administration, Johannesburg Jews became subject not only to the broader strategies of social imperialism; they were also at the mercy of an army of local bureaucrats who wielded significant power. A number of key local officials were well-known for their antisemitic views. These included the Medical Officers of Health, Doctors J. Pratt Johnson, Charles Porter and A. J. Gregory.²¹ As late as 1913, Porter commented in the official Johannesburg *Report of the Medical Officer of Health* that "a material proportion of the milk production of Johannesburg is in the hands of low-class Eastern Europeans, who, presumably by reason of their early environment and want of education, have absolutely no idea of the meaning of the word 'cleanliness' as applied to milk production, nor, in some cases, as applied to their persons and dwellings."²² Local government observations and reports were vital

18 Arthur Goren, *New York Jews and the Quest for Community: The Kehillah Experiment, 1908–1922* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 17.

19 It is difficult to extrapolate backwards from the 1929 figures, but these indicate that a Benefit Society could have anything from 30 members (Poshwohl) to 250 (Bertrams Hebrews Society). Most of them had around 50–80 members in 1929; see "Communal Directory", 278–80.

20 Maurice Schmulian indicated that his father's membership of a (Socialist) Benefit Society was a source of domestic tension; unpublished autobiography, Johannesburg 1980, 36–7; copy in my possession and at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Research, University of Cape Town.

21 See [Milton] Shain, "Diamonds, Pogroms and Undesirables: Antisemitism in the Cape Colony, 1890–1906", *South African Historical Journal* (Nov. 1980): 13–28, for a discussion of the Gregory Report, also called the *Report on the Working of the Immigration Act for the Year 1903*.

22 Charles Porter, "Report of the Medical Officer of Health to the Public Health Committee Presenting Report by Dr J. Pratt Johnson on the Circumstances of Milk

to the livelihoods of many Jewish immigrants who needed to have their workshops, butcher-shops and dairies approved by the Sanitary Inspectors; who asked permission to use the backs of their domestic properties for animal husbandry; or who wanted their properties valued for tax purposes or for resale. The Jewish petit-bourgeoisie was particularly vulnerable at these points. The refusal of a licence to trade could mean the loss of an income, and explains the importance to this group of Jewish representatives in local politics, like Harry Solomon, Harry Grauman and Max Langerman. Antisemitism was felt by all members of the Jewish community, whether at the level of statutory discrimination or municipal harassment, a note in the newspaper or a comment in the club.²³

It was to have its most frightening expression in Johannesburg, where Milner's repatriation programme looked set to exclude the immigration or the re-immigration of "Peruvian" Jews.²⁴ In July 1900, a central refugee committee was set up to regulate repatriation and issue permits. Their members included representatives of the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber of Mines, and the Uitlander Committees of Cape Town, Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Not surprisingly, when the repatriation of civilians began, priority was given to representatives of the mining industry, commerce, industry, agriculture, and the professions and service industries. The same permit system also regulated and restricted the immigration of "undesirable" elements. An extensive

Production in and around Johannesburg", in *Report of the Medical Officer of Health, Johannesburg, 1913* (Johannesburg: [municipal printer], 1913), 3. For an earlier comment on Porter's antisemitism, see "Dr Porter's Appointment", *SAJC*, 6 April 1906. This kind of antisemitism could be subtle or more vicious. Jan Smuts was accused of antisemitism because of a casual use of language in a speech to the Rand Pioneers; see *Star*, 9 Oct. 1909; debate in the *SAJC* letters column, 15 Oct. 1909. A [South Africa] *Sunday Times* report in August 1906 contained a libellous caricature of Hertz, and again the Jewish community discussed how to deal with this, *SAJC*, 17 Aug. 1906. For reports on the antisemitism of other local officials see "Jews on the Rand", *SAJC*, 25 Aug. 1905; "Peruvian Jews", *SAJC*, 20 Oct. 1905.

23 The antisemitism of Johannesburg Club life will be discussed below.

24 The term "Peruvian", used pejoratively in South Africa to describe the Jewish *lumpenproletariat* and especially the prominence of Jews in the underworld of prostitution and illicit liquor traffic, was also used to malign all immigrant Russian Jews. The "Peruvians" became, in the words of Charles van Onselen, "Randlords and Rotgut, 1886-1903: The Role of Alcohol in the Development of Imperialism and Southern African Capitalism, with Special Reference to Black Mineworkers in the Transvaal Republic", in *New Babylon*, 74, "perhaps the most visible, dispossessed and unsuccessful group of workers on the Witwatersrand . . . the unhappy recipients of the most vicious class and race prejudice that society could muster."

bureaucracy compiled a “black list” of people whose return to the Rand was not to be allowed.²⁵ It is not certain that they were thereby excluded, but it is clear that Russian Jews faced particular difficulties. Despite the fact that many of them had been naturalized at the Cape, they received no consular representation, and applications from people with “foreign” names were treated with suspicion.²⁶

For Jews in Johannesburg, the major question of the day was whether the exclusion of “Peruvians” was a class or a race issue. Was it a programme that middle class Jews should endorse, in the interests of a “British South Africa”, or was it an illegitimate infringement of the rights of individual Jews under the British constitutional tradition? These were issues which had been raised in pre-war Johannesburg, and which had become even more sensitive in the temporary postwar crisis. As we saw in the pre-war period, even then a minority of Jews had decided that the time had come to deal with specifically Jewish issues, to deal with the Jewish population as a community rather than as a population divided by class and country of origin.

In this situation, the initiative was once again taken by a community leader who had emerged in the 1890s, Samuel Goldreich. As President of the Zionist Federation, Samuel Goldreich represented the Johannesburg Jewish institution with by far the largest following. Moreover, the Federation had acquired a reputation for representing Jews on local issues. Now, Goldreich increased the scope of the Federation even further by effecting a unique coup: he managed to convince Milner that a Jewish committee was necessary to look after Jewish repatriation applications, and to vet them before they were submitted to the Central Committee. In September 1900, Goldreich took up his position as head of the Special

25 [Lord] Milner to [the Colonial Secretary, Joseph] Chamberlain, 9 May 1900, in C. Headlam, ed., *The Milner Papers*, 2 vols (London: Cassell & Co., 1931–3), vol. 2, 142. For an overview of the repatriation policy see M. Streak, *Lord Milner's Immigration Policy for the Transvaal, 1897–1905* (Johannesburg: Rand Afrikaans University, 1969).

26 For details of these events see Shain, “Diamonds, Pogroms and Undesirables”; Diana Cammack, “The Politics of Discontent: The Grievances of Uitlander Refugees, 1899–1902”, *Journal of Southern African History* 8, no. 2 (1982): esp. 255–6, 264; Milner to Walter Hely-Hutchinson, 15 Nov. 1902, in *Milner Papers*, vol. 2, 378. There is a fascinating fictional account of Jewish refugees in Lourenço Marques [Lorenço Marques, now Maputo, Mozambique], in Victor Barwin, *Millionaires and Tatter-demalions: Stories of Jewish Life in South Africa* (London: Edward Goldston, 1952), “Subjects of the Czar”, 115–53. See also “Jewish Refugees”, *Transvaal Leader*, 5 Sept. 1902; “Expatriated Jews: Refugees at the Coast” (letter to Editor), *Transvaal Leader*, 14 Sept. 1902.

Committee.²⁷ Within a few months, this committee had secured the repatriation and immigration of 13,000 Jews to Johannesburg.

The efficiency of the special Jewish committee was remarkable. It brought in far more Jews than might otherwise have been allowed, and actively promoted the rapid stabilization of Johannesburg Jews after the war.²⁸ However, its success should not be over-emphasized. In each of the years 1903, 1904 and 1905, hundreds of “foreign” Jews entered Johannesburg illegally and were deported by the city authorities, with the tacit approval of the Jewish establishment.²⁹ It was not that Goldreich shared, or endorsed, the assumptions of the Imperial administration. It was that he could do no other. It was a delicate, no doubt a difficult, position for Johannesburg Jews to occupy. As Jews, they were increasingly aware that their position as citizens in British Colonial society was precarious, contingent on their being able to account for their “community”. By all “community history” accounts, Goldreich’s repatriation work was appreciated not just by Milner, but by all sections of the Johannesburg Jewish population³⁰ – although we must assume this gratitude was not shared by those who were deported.

As East European Jewish immigration increased after the war, so the Zionist movement in the Transvaal expanded. New societies sprang up in Standerton, Vereeniging, Germiston and Heidelberg, and the older Zionist groups were resuscitated. Dr Hertz was re-admitted to Johannesburg, Theodor Herzl wrote an encouraging letter instructing “the South African [Zionist] organization” to recover the ground lost in the war, and “take up its tasks again with renewed zeal”;³¹ and Kessler, who was now settled in England, went to the Fifth Zionist Congress and called for closer contact between the Actions Committee and the South African Zionist Federation.

27 Gustav Saron, “The Long Road to Unity”, in *The Jews in South Africa*, ed. Gustav Saron and Louis Hotz (Oxford University Press), 228; Marcia Gitlin, *The Vision Amazing: The Story of South African Zionism* (Johannesburg: Menorah Books Club, 1950), 86–9.

28 The SAJC estimated that Jews made up a fifth of the city’s (white) population in 1906; “Dr Porter’s Appointment”, SAJC, 6 April 1906.

29 The evidence on deportations is not detailed enough to make more precise calculations possible. I have drawn my information from Saron, “Long Road to Unity”, 228; Shain, “Diamonds, Pogroms and Undesirables”, 22; “Not Guilty: Their Work or Not?”, editorial, SAJC, 20 Oct. 1905.

30 Saron, “Long Road to Unity”, 228; Gitlin, *Vision Amazing*, 77; Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 14.

31 Herzl’s letter, n.d., [?1901], quoted in Gitlin, *Vision Amazing*, 77.

According to [Marcia] Gitlin, the period directly after the war was the time when Zionism reached a peak. In 1902 there were 400 members of the Transvaal Zionist Association; by mid 1903 this had doubled to 800 members, and had moved out of its small premises in to a large hall in the centre of Ferreira, still the centre of East European Jewish life. At the beginning of 1904 the first Ladies' Zionist Society was established in Johannesburg, also consisting largely of East European Jews, and it had 400 members by 1905.

The new Zionist Hall, "one of the liveliest gathering-places in the city", was a "ceaseless" hive of activity, but one which remained enclosed within an East European Jewish world. It was ignored by "uptown" Jews from Doornfontein or Parktown, and even vice-president Harry Solomon hardly ever crossed its threshold. For many Jews, particularly those who were concerned only with their own commercial or political aggrandisement, "Zionism was merely the madness of those who did not understand realities." But for some uptown Jews, the popularity of East European Zionism represented an unsettling presence – partly because it provided political coherence to the "foreign" Jews; and partly because they objected to the political direction East European Zionism began to take.³²

As East European Jews continued to arrive, it became clear that the "Practical" Zionism they espoused was gaining strength, and would soon provide the dominant ideological direction to Transvaal Zionism. "There is ground", commented the *Chronicle* darkly, "for looking on the Russo-Jewish immigrant, especially the younger and more educated, as a revolutionary actual or potential . . . and the Zionists in particular are actively propagating socialism."³³ Although the *Chronicle* never made direct reference to it, it is clear that Practical Zionism did lay the community open to charges of "dual loyalty",³⁴ especially in the critical eyes of the British administration in the Transvaal. In this context, the initiative for communal representation was dramatically and forcefully removed from Goldreich and the Zionist Federation, by a group determined to make a place for themselves in the new political dispensation.

32 Gitlin, *Vision Amazing*, 77–82.

33 "Zionism and Socialism," SAJC, 27 April, 1906.

34 In England, the Anglo-Jewish establishment was highly sensitive to this, and resisted Practical Zionism and British pro-Zionist initiatives leading up to the Balfour Declaration. For a concise summary of their views see "Conjoint Committee of British Jewry", letter to *The Times* (London), 24 May 1917, in *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, ed. Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 456–7.

*A representative body for the “community”:
the Jewish Board of Deputies*

In the absence of an existing incorporative communal infrastructure to “represent” the Jewish community, the Anglo-Jews had to act quickly and decisively. They did the sensible thing in the circumstances: they looked to their English kinsmen for advice. Happily, there was a direct family connection. Max Langermann, prominent mining capitalist and Empire loyalist, was a relative of Lucien Wolf, a leader of the Anglo-Jewish Association in London. On a visit “home”, Langermann received a mandate to start an Anglo-Jewish Association in Johannesburg. Fired with enthusiasm, he returned to the Rand in March 1903, enlisted the aid of the ubiquitous and ever-energetic Reverend Hertz, and together they called a meeting to establish an alternative “representative” Jewish body in Johannesburg.³⁵

At a series of meetings through April 1903, members of the Johannesburg Jewish middle class hammered out a definition of a Jewish “community”. They decided not to take up Langermann’s suggestion for the establishment of an Anglo-Jewish Association in Johannesburg, but to apply to the Board of Deputies of Great Britain to set up a similar body in the Transvaal, with a similar mandate: “to watch and to take action in matters affecting the welfare of Jews as a community”.³⁶

The initiative of establishing a Board of Deputies to represent the Johannesburg Jewish “community” was taken directly in the face of the Zionists. Zionism, with its appeal to the Yiddish-speaking socialists, was simply too ideologically ambiguous to those men who were keen to establish their credentials as South Africans, and who were committed to political stability and economic security.

The new leadership had a number of advantages. It included among its numbers the Reverend Hertz, who took with him his congregation of the Old Hebrew Synagogue: as Vice-President of the Zionist Federation and credited communal leader, he would also have carried important weight among the Eastern European population. It included many prominent members of the Johannesburg Jewish establishment who had shown

35 Saron, “Long Road to Unity”, 230; “Max Langermann”, in *Dictionary of South African Biography* (hereafter, DSAB), ed. W. J. de Kock and D. W. Kruger (Cape of Good Hope: Tafelberg-Uitgewers Ltd, 1972), vol. 2, 384.

36 Saron, “Long Road”, 234.

themselves willing to work with their less fortunate brethren: men like Max Langermann and Harry Solomon. It had the backing of [the] strong Anglo-Jewish tradition of communal infrastructure. These leaders were aware of the powers and the importance of controlling a communal newspaper and having a good press.

From the beginning, the *Jewish Chronicle* explained the establishment of the Board as a legitimate move to prevent Goldreich's personal aggrandizement, and the communal prominence of Zionism.³⁷ The tactic to discredit Goldreich has been taken up in the histories of the Jewish community: it is personality rather than ideology which is seen as the point of fracture in the works of Gus Saron and in Gideon Shimoni's book.³⁸

The new Jewish initiative in Johannesburg was immediately contested. The second meeting of the group, planned for 5 April, intended to discuss the formulation of the Board. By this time, the East European Jews had got wind of their intentions. Goldreich boycotted the meeting as a sign of protest. But rank and file Zionists were determined to register their dissent in a more direct form.

En masse, they attended the meeting in the prestigious Rand Club.³⁹ Very quickly, the meeting threatened to dissolve into disorder. In defence, the Anglo-Jews pulled out their trump card – the Reverend Hertz. From his familiar position on the podium, Hertz argued that although he was vice-President of the Zionist Federation, Zionism did not “embrace all Jews”: Transvaal Jewry was in need of a “thoroughly representative body”, a Board of Deputies.

However, this audience was not easily won over, even by their favourite preacher and even if he addressed them in Yiddish. As Hertz warmed to his point, the “alien element” loudly voiced their objections, and effectively disrupted the meeting. Marcia Gitlin provides a graphic description of the scene:

There were shouts and boos from sections of the audience and shouts and boos from others in reply. Soon nothing could be heard above the shouting. The meeting developed into a brawl. Men stood on their chairs to make themselves heard and others pulled them down before they had opened their mouths. Appeals from the more moderate that at least a

37 *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter, JC), 8 April 1903, quoted in *ibid.*, 231.

38 Saron, “Long Road”, 228; Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 4.

39 Saron, “Long Road”, 231.

hearing be given to the case for the Board were lost in tumult. "Only over our dead bodies!" shouted Isaac Caplan, a member of the Federation's Executive.⁴⁰

But in the end, the new leaders did not need a democratic consensus, nor did opposition prevent them forging ahead. The first meeting of the Board of Deputies of Transvaal Jews was planned for 15 April 1903.⁴¹

In his essay on the establishment of the Board of Deputies, Saron described the men at the first meeting as representatives of "the oldest institutions in the community and presumably (those) considered to be sufficiently representative of the settled population". The [six] organizations represented were the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation, the Orthodox Hebrew Congregation, the South African Zionist Federation, the Transvaal Zionist Association, the Witwatersrand Hebrew Benevolent Association, the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation. Langermann and Samuel Bebro were present as independent observers. These were, in Saron's words, the most prominent and powerful Jewish voices of the day.⁴² They were certainly not the most representative. When the Board of Deputies was set up in June 1903, it did not include representatives from the *landsmanschaften*, the trade unions, the Bundists, the Goldreich supporters of the Zionist Federation, or any of the Jewish women's organizations – in other words none of those organizations considered "irresponsible" and "undesirable" were present.⁴³ The Board of Deputies was the result of a carefully constructed petit-bourgeois Jewish initiative, whose main aim was to establish their rights and status in white, South African, middle-class society.

Appropriately, it was Lord Milner who made the speech at the inauguration of the Johannesburg Jewish Board of Deputies, held at the Wanderer's Hall on 28 July 1903. Before an estimated audience of 2,500, Milner's words were an apt reminder of the terms under which they were embraced into Empire and South African citizenship. He argued that the intentions of the Board were natural and legitimate, that Jewish race-loyalty was not incompatible with the most "thorough-going of British patriotism". For his part, he was glad to be dealing with one "representative" voice rather than with a cacophony of confusion. It

40 Gitlin, *Vision Amazing*, 95.

41 Saron, "Long Road", 234–6.

42 *Ibid.*, 235–6.

43 "The Board of Deputies", SAJC, 22 March 1907.

was natural, he continued, that the immigrant Jews should look to their English Jewish brethren for support, guidance and leadership. The New World offered them an opportunity to participate in a new and progressive culture and society: a British one. He warned that they should drop the “evil influences” of atavism and the ghetto, and promised that they would then be admitted “at once . . . to what we consider the greatest benefit of all, to the high privileges of British citizenship”.⁴⁴

After the pomp and ceremony, the press coverage and the statements of intent, what happened? In the opinion of Gus Saron – nothing. For the next decade, until the establishment of a national South African Board of Deputies, the Johannesburg Board apparently did very little. They expanded their bureaucratic scope to include the Jews of Natal; they elected representatives; they bickered among themselves; they dealt with problems when they came up. They failed to achieve a rank and file base. At some meetings they even failed to attract a quorum and had to adjourn because of poor attendance. Top heavy and sluggish, they slid slowly and inexorably into debt.⁴⁵ In fact, the Board might not have been taking an active public role, but it was certainly establishing a position, carefully and with a great deal of diplomatic and political skill. And part of that position was precisely that they appeared to be doing nothing, particularly as regards the “Jewish question”.

The new leadership

Who were the men who had assumed control of the community? They were clearly different from the individuals among the elite who had “represented” Jewish issues in the 1890s. The Board of Deputies was launched not by the elite, but by the new aspirant Jewish middle class in Johannesburg. In one sense, the formation of this class is a theme which belongs to a general history of the emergence of an indigenous national bourgeoisie in the Transvaal, a history which has yet to be written. Yet in another sense, the creation of a South African Jewish middle class cannot be subsumed in an analysis of the development of class relations in twentieth century South Africa. Their participation in white South African middle class life could not be taken for granted.

The new Jewish bourgeoisie which was trying to make a space for itself

44 The meeting was described in detail in Saron, “Long Road”, 237–41; Milner quoted 240–41.

45 *Ibid.*, 241–5; editorial, SAJC, 3 Aug. 1906.

in the new society confronted not only the structural problems of capital accumulation in a notoriously under-capitalized Transvaal economy; it also faced the obstacles of racial prejudice directed against them as Jews. The manufacture of a Jewish “community” served two purposes. It provided the material basis for the emergence of a middle class, through the encouragement of intra-community economic ties. It also fostered a Jewish “community” compatible with the needs of the new middle class, which explicitly excluded the “Peruvian” from the definition South African Jew.

At one level, the Jewish bourgeoisie identified themselves as *white* South Africans, and tried to indicate that the fate of the “Peruvians” would decide the destiny of white South Africa. To the outside world, the Jewish establishment couched the problem in terms of “assimilation”. But it was clear that there was no “natural” progression from being “Peruvian” to being “South African”. Moreover, from the problems they had experienced themselves, in applying for admission into the “South African” middle class, it was clear that they could not take their own “South African” status for granted. The means through which a South African Jewish community was established can most visibly be seen through the creation and use of a “representative” community institution, the Board of Deputies, and a “representative” community mouthpiece, the *South African Jewish Chronicle*.⁴⁶ It is perhaps not too much of a caricature to point out that whereas in the prewar period, the majority of Jews could be represented via the voice of [Emmanuel] Mendelssohn, editor of the *Standard and Diggers News*, this position was usurped in the twentieth century by a man who had been a journalist for the *Star* in the 1890s, and who now took over the *Chronicle*: Manfred Nathan. Apart from Nathan,

46 The SAJC was a child of the *London Jewish Chronicle*, and was no more “representative” of the community than the Board, although it was more responsive to popular feeling. It went into liquidation in October 1907: see “The S. A. Jewish Chronicle in Liquidation”, SAJC, 18 Oct. 1907. It was not discontinued, but took up a more overtly Zionist platform. In 1907 the SAJC Publishing Company was formed, and Lionel Goldsmid and Gus Bonas were added to the Board of Directors. In 1913 it combined with *Die Yiddische Fohn*, as South African Amalgamated Jewish Press. The Directors were Lionel Goldsmid, Benzion Hersch, Bernard Alexander, A. Kofsky and David Alexander. See Joseph Abraham Poliva, *A Short History of the Jewish Press and Literature of South Africa from the Earliest Days to the Present Time* (Johannesburg: Prompt Print Co., 1961), 13–14. In 1917 there was a disagreement between the Board of Deputies and the SAJC and the Board tried to dissociate itself from the paper; South African Jewish Board of Deputies: Executive Council Meeting Minutes, 23 Aug. 1917, archives of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (hereafter, BoD), Johannesburg.

on the Board of Directors of the *South African Jewish Chronicle* were Adam Alexander, Bernard Alexander and Richard Rosenthal. All of them were active on the executive of the Board of Deputies.⁴⁷ They did not all speak with one voice, nor was the South African Jewish identity in the process of manufacture made up of easily agreed upon constituent elements. But by 1914, they had largely accomplished their mission: the creation of a Jewish South African identity, and a South African Jewish community, committed to a future as part of the urban, English speaking white South African elite.

Max Langermann, founder and first President of the Johannesburg Jewish Board of Deputies, was typical of the new breed of communal activists who now took the lead in the manufacture of a Johannesburg Jewish community and a South African Jewish identity. Born in Bavaria in 1859, he made his fortune on the Witwatersrand as a property dealer and financier. In the 1890s he had consistently demonstrated his Empire loyalty. Langermann had been one of the Uitlander signatories to the request for British intervention in December 1895, which served as part of the justification for the Jameson Raid.⁴⁸ He was among those arrested for their complicity in the Raid and was fined £2,000. In postwar Johannesburg, Langermann was active in civic politics: he was elected a member of the Town Council in 1904 and entered the Legislative Council in 1907 as a government nominee and representative of *Het Volk*. In Jewish affairs, Langermann became one of the four vice-Presidents of the South African Board of Deputies when it was established in 1912. He also joined the Territorial Zionists, in what was probably an attempt to appease the Zionist faction which opposed the Board of Deputies. For many years, he

47 Adam Alexander was born in Germany in 1870, educated at Gray's Inn, and became a notary and solicitor of the Supreme Court of the Transvaal. He was a member of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, the German Club, and the *Het Volk* party. In Jewish affairs, he was a member of the Board of the Old Hebrew Congregation, and their delegate to the Board of Deputies; *South African Who's Who*, 1908, 6. Bernard Alexander, brother of Adam, was born in Germany in 1872, and educated at the Inner Temple in London. He was on the Executive of the Witwatersrand Hebrew Congregation, and in 1912 was vice-Chairman of the Transvaal and Natal Jewish Board of Deputies; DSAB, vol. 4, 32. Richard Rosenthal was Secretary of the Board of Deputies 1906–1910 and a member of the South African Zionist Federation; Saron, "Long Road", 259.

48 The Jameson Raid (1895) was a short-lived and failed raid by the British colonial administration under Cecil Rhodes, to overthrow Kruger's Afrikaner South African Republic. Its failure was an embarrassment for the British government. Rhodes was replaced as prime minister of the Cape Colony. Boer dominance of the Transvaal and its gold mines was strengthened. The raid was a cause of the [South African] War (1899–1902).

was President of the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation. He was also a founder and benefactor of the South African Jewish Orphanage in Johannesburg, and of the masonic lodge, the Hebrew Order of David.⁴⁹

Langermann was also one of the men, among whom were others from the Board of Deputies – David Starfield, Manfred Nathan and the Reverend Harris – who lost no time in challenging the grassroots support of East European Zionism. In 1904 this group formed the Herzl Zionist Society, and elected as president an English Jew who had arrived in Johannesburg two years previously as headmaster of the Jewish Government School. The Herzl Zionist Society, quickly dubbed the “white-gloved” society by the downtown Zionists, never attained a popular following, and co-existed uneasily alongside the Zionist Association until its demise in 1911.⁵⁰

Consistent with the position of the Board, the Herzl Zionist Society supported Territorialism⁵¹ – the rights of Jews to a homeland as a political solution to antisemitism, which was a form of Zionism that did not insist on Jewish national rights to Palestine, and did not lay them open to charges of dual loyalty. Although the Herzl Zionist Society never captured an East European constituency, it should be emphasized that 1904 was a highpoint for Zionism that was not sustained. As already indicated, the years 1903–4 were traumatic for Zionism in general, with the ideological rift between the East European “Practical” Zionists and the Territorialists over the “Uganda option”, and the death of Theodor Herzl soon after. In this context, the Herzl Zionist Society was only one of many initiatives taken by the new Jewish leadership in Johannesburg to establish its hegemony, and it was the combination that provided the decisive ideological direction for the community.

In many ways, Langermann represented the “new men” who came to control the emergence of a Jewish community in Johannesburg in the years before Union. Clearly, the time of men like Mendelssohn and Goldreich was over. Goldreich remained active on the Johannesburg scene for a few more years. He was prominent on the executives of the Zionist Federation, the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Ladies’ Communal League, but he

49 “Langermann”, DSAB, vol. 2, 384.

50 Gitlin, *Vision Amazing*, 82–3.

51 Langermann was very enthusiastic about the Uganda possibility, and wrote to Herzl offering his services; *ibid.*, 130. These were declined. Langermann was in London working with the Territorialists when the International Territorialist Organization, the ITO, was founded, and he was appointed South African member of the International Council of the ITO. When he returned to South Africa in 1906 he became the dominant figure in the Territorialist movement in South Africa; *ibid.*, 133.

had served his turn. In the postwar depression he lost most of his money, drifted to Australia and then back to England, where he committed suicide in 1921.⁵² Mendelssohn, too, remained visible in Johannesburg for a few more years, but lived mainly in England until his death in 1910.⁵³ The new men in Johannesburg were no longer those who had made their wealth in the heyday of the 1890s (and managed to keep it). The city was now the terrain of those whose fortunes were sound rather than spectacular. These were men of commerce and the professions – solicitors and stockbrokers – the products of solid public school educations.

The new Jewish bourgeoisie was remarkably homogeneous. They were typically of English, German or Cape origin. After their education at public schools in the Cape or in England, they had gone on to receive undergraduate degrees from Cambridge, and professional qualifications from Lincoln's Inn, Gray's Inn or the Inner Temple in London. They came to Johannesburg after the South African War, between 1901 and 1906, where they became active participants in civic politics, and in the club world of English society life.

"Old boy" networks were vital in the establishment of the "new men" in the city. Manfred Nathan and Fitz Adler had been to school together at Gill College in Somerset East. Nathan was one of the few of this group who did not go to England for a higher education. Fitz Adler, Adam Alexander, Bernard Alexander, Max Cohn, Alfred Louis Cohn and Emile Nathan all received their training in law at a London school. In Johannesburg, they joined the Rand Club, the Athenaeum, the New Club, and the Pretoria Club in Johannesburg.⁵⁴ They were the professional intelligentsia, the "new men" who were to form the basis of the national bourgeoisie in South Africa.

There were two structural obstacles which impeded the emergence of a Johannesburg Jewish middle class. The first was the cut-throat intersectoral competition they confronted within the rising middle class. As is shown below, it was in the Clubs, and no doubt elsewhere, that they faced antisemitism. This prevented their entry into the private networks necessary to reproduce a vigorous, out-going national bourgeoisie. The second obstacle they faced was the problem of where South African Jews fitted in the emerging class-race divisions of their society. "It is the Jews", argued an editorial of the *South African Jewish Chronicle* in May 1905, "who

52 *Ibid.*, 51–3.

53 "Emmanuel Mendelssohn", *DSAB*, vol. 3, 599.

54 See the biographies of all these men in *South African Who's Who*, 1908.

here, as elsewhere, stand for individualistic effort in the field of trade and industry, and thus belong to the middle class which is being crushed out between the capitalistic combinations above, and the coloured element below".⁵⁵

As representative of one group in the South African emerging national bourgeoisie, the Jewish middle class saw itself as a group which had to transcend the stark Manichean structures of South African society. In this role, they were developing an ideological and economic space for themselves between the "capitalistic combinations" and the "coloured element"; a space for a "middle class". The ideology of the national bourgeoisie was centrally concerned with the stabilization of the Rand and the creation of a "civilized" South Africa and Johannesburg. The life of the new Transvaal, it was argued, was bound up with the manners and the fortunes of the "middle class", the class which they exhorted to take the leadership in civic affairs. This "middle class" was quite specifically defined. It included Englishmen, Scotsmen and English-speaking Jews. It excluded the "motley crowd" of "Indians, Chinese, Greeks, Italians and Yiddish-speaking Jews". It also excluded the "colonials" – the men who had no intention of re-investing their profits for the national good.⁵⁶ However, at the same time as the Jewish middle class stressed its allegiance to white South Africa, its Jewishness placed it in a contradictory position on the "race" question. It was clear that its rights of entry into the middle class was being blocked because it was Jewish; because its number included not only English Jews, but also "Peruvians".

The position of the Jewish middle class became especially acute when dealing with the issue of citizenship and the franchise. For was South African citizenship to be decided on the basis of colour or class? If it was

55 "Editorial Notes", SAJC, 5 May 1905.

56 "Editorial Notes", SAJC, 5 May 1905. See also the important editorial, "Prosperity", SAJC 15 June 1906, which argued against the sectionalism of Boer or British, the futility of class conflict between whites; and which criticized the (British) 'trekvoegel' (migrating birds) and 'grabbers', who showed no loyalty to South Africa; and "Municipal Life and Honours", SAJC, 1 Sept. 1905. Note that this could incorporate an anti-Imperial line. In "The True and False Imperialism", SAJC, 23 March 1906, the editor castigated Milner for his lack of commitment to "home life" in the Transvaal. This insistence on ideological autonomy would have been consistent with their position as a national bourgeoisie on the periphery; see Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London: NLB, 1977), "The Modern Janus", 340. The theme deserves greater exploration in this period in South Africa than it has received; see Isabel Hofmeyr, "Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and 'Ethnic Identity', 1902–1924" (M.A. diss., University of London, 1983).

decided on the basis of colour, it would include the Jews, but exclude many people who, by any test of “civilized standards”, should have had the vote. The group most affected by this was the British Indians. If the dividing line became one of class, then many Jews, particularly the “Peruvians”, would have been excluded. At more than just face value, argued the *South African Jewish Chronicle*, there was much to recommend the British Indian, and not much to recommend the “Peruvian”. For both groups, the decision on franchise qualifications was vitally important to their prospects in the country. But, argued the *Chronicle*,

there is every reason to suppose that the class on which the light of criticism will beat most fiercely, and the verdict on which the whole white population will stand or fall, is that of the Russo-Jewish immigrant. This is the most prominent section of those who stand on the borderland between white and coloured. The raw Russian Jew is, of all Europeans, the one who had the least of the European and the most of the Oriental about him.⁵⁷

The “Peruvians” were held up as the litmus test for white South Africa. In taking this stand, the Jewish middle class made race divisions an inextricable part of their ideological framework. The maintenance of strict racial divisions, they argued, was a crucial premise to the making of a white South Africa. It was a principle which transcended politics. [The *Chronicle* continued:]

The Jews of the Transvaal, if they wish to live up to their name, are pledged to maintain the superiority of the white man in this country. As Jews, they object to being put on the same level as the coloured races. And those of their brethren, who are willing to be classed with the coloured races, they stigmatise as “Peruvians” and treat with scant courtesy . . .

It may seem strange that this comment should appear in a Jewish paper of all places, but in reality it is quite fitting. It is the Jews of the Rand who are primarily concerned in this question, and will be among the first to be affected by the levelling process going on between white and coloured.⁵⁸

57 “Editorial Notes”, SAJC, 5 May 1905, my emphasis; see also “The Russian Jew versus the Civilised Indian”, SAJC, 20 April 1906; “The Jew in Local Politics”, SAJC, 9 March 1906.

58 “Editorial Notes”, SAJC, 5 May 1905 [my emphasis]. Note that this was the opinion that came to prevail, but it was contested, even within the pages of the SAJC. See e.g. letter from “A Disgusted Jew”, SAJC, 27 April 1906. The SAJC responded with editorials, “Are We Ungrateful?”, 4 May 1906; “The Russian Jew and Politics” and “Morality and Politics”, 25 May 1906; “Special Article: Are the Jews Superior to the English?” and “An English View” (letter), SAJC, 30 Oct. 1908.

*Expanding their horizons: the concentric circles of the clubroom
and the commercial world*

The emergence of the new middle class was constructed on the carefully created myth of the individual, the free play of market forces, and the idea that success came through persistence and hard work. In fact, the “new men” were aware that commercial success was not attained in an open market. Commerce had to be removed from the street, to the more discreet, and certainly more comfortable, environment of the Club. In a period when class relations were in flux, when the new bourgeoisie was trying to establish itself as a class, the Clubs of Johannesburg became a crucial arena for the making of new alliances. In the Clubs, it was possible to initiate a business contact or to conduct an affair with people one did not want to meet in the street. Here, a man could be introduced to a business contact, could establish networks of “push”⁵⁹ which would support his business ventures, guarantee his loans, provide “inside” information on the state of the stock market, and generally expand his horizons.

Club life was the site of the working out of new class relations. It provided an arena for members to meet and negotiate. It was particularly important for the emerging middle class, for here they could not only meet each other, but meet members of the haute bourgeoisie, and establish social and material links with the older elite. As the Club world expanded, it became clear that a man would be judged by the company he kept, and the clubs he belonged to. The Club literally functioned to extend the credit of the new middle class.⁶⁰

The Club provided an environment which was deliberately kept shuttered. It was a place where a man could not only make his reputation, but where his reputation would be protected. It is rare to find cases

59 In the vocabulary of the Johannesburg Clubland, “push” meant influence, especially influence with a certain clique. See Max Epstein’s evidence in his divorce case, in “Epstein Divorce”, *Transvaal Leader*, 21 Aug. 1906.

60 For work on the political and economic importance of Club life see Lewis A. Erenberg, *Stepping Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); I would like to thank Tina Simmons for this reference; see also R. J. Morris, “Voluntary Societies and British Urban Elites 1780–1858: An Analysis”, *Historical Journal* 26, no. 1 (1983): 95–118; thanks to David Feldman for this reference. For working class Club life see Stan Shipley, *Club Life and Socialism in Mid-Victorian London* (London: History Workshop, 1972). Note that these male networks also had a “political” function, but far less economic power than the middle and upper class clubs.

where the Club world was exposed. In Johannesburg, there were two major cases in mid-1906 where the world inside the Athenaeum Club was made public, and both cases shed light on the complex position faced by the Johannesburg Jewish middle class. The one case was the Epstein divorce [dealt with in a subsequent chapter of the thesis]. The other was a delicate subject of a public appointment going to a man well known for his antisemitic views and for blackballing Jews who applied for membership of the Athenaeum Club. At exactly the time that the world of commerce and the clubs was being created, and was providing the basis for the emergence of a new Johannesburg bourgeoisie, aspirant Jewish members found their route into the new middle class was blocked. [. . .]

As the pages of the *Chronicle* made clear, antisemitism of this order was not infrequent. It was subtle and pervasive, and it meant that South African Jews could not comfortably expect to “assimilate” into white, English-speaking South African society. At the same time, they were unwilling to accept in public that antisemitism was an indicator of race prejudice, for fear of drawing attention to the Jews as a distinctive race group in South Africa.⁶¹

This was a complex paradox to incorporate into the identity of the South African Jew. Men like [Richard] Goldmann and [Harry] Graumann were aware that individual merit and economic power were not adequate guarantees of a position in the new South African bourgeoisie. In public, they upheld capitalism, liberalism and the rights of the individual. In private, they harboured no illusions about the democracy of market forces. They were acutely aware that capital did not flow freely, and that it would not fall naturally into their pockets. In this environment, the South African Jewish bourgeoisie adopted a radical tactic. They eschewed the “assimilation” model of the older established Jewish middle class in Paris and in London.⁶² They manufactured a South African Jewish identity which was Jewish and South African. They created an identity which

61 “Was it said?”, SAJC, 10 Aug. 1906.

62 This perceived vulnerability was characteristic of middle-class Jews elsewhere. Michael Marrus, *The Politics of Assimilation: A Study of the French Jewish Community at the Time of the Dreyfus Affair* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 196, makes the point that French Jewry as a group ignored the Dreyfus Affair. It was a landmark in their steady march towards the goal of assimilation. [Goldmann and Graumann were prominent among the wealthier European Jews in postwar Johannesburg “club” society. Goldmann alleged he was a victim of antisemitism in not being appointed to the position of Johannesburg’s town Valuation Committee.]

confirmed their allegiance to their country, their class, and their colour. They constructed the “South African Jewish community”.⁶³

Constructing a “South African Jewish community”

Externally, the “new men” retained the facade of being middle class South Africans. The Board of Deputies and the *South African Jewish Chronicle* continually reiterated that “the Jew has no politics”.⁶⁴ But internally, the rising Jewish middle class was aware that its aspirations would be thwarted if left to the “free” play of market forces. In the same way that the English middle class constructed a private sphere in the world of the Clubs, the Jewish middle class created an enclosed “community” which was designed to reproduce their class. It is difficult to establish the precise mechanics of this network and how it operated to reproduce and enlarge the South African Jewish middle class.

The “network” certainly included “jobs for (Jewish) pals”: the *Chronicle* carried articles about Jewish shops and factories, Jewish merchandise and Jewish services.⁶⁵ But over and above this, it developed a strong argument which rejected assimilation, which established the need for a community of Johannesburg Jews:

In espousing the cause of the Russo-Jewish immigrant we *are* espousing our own cause. If we do our best to open a path for them here, we are not merely acting charitably, we are consulting our own interest. In securing rights for alien immigrants, we shall at the same time be securing rights for ourselves; and it is doubtful if we can secure such rights in any other

63 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); see esp. Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions”, 1–14; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

64 See Annual Report of the BoD, 1907, cited in Saron, “Long Road”, 258; see also “The Jew in Local Politics”, *SAJC*, 9 March 1906; “Prosperity”, *SAJC*, 15 June 1906.

65 “Another New Draper”, *SAJC*, 2 March 1906; “Random Notes”, *SAJC*, 6 April 1906; note about Madame Mosinger, corsetiere, in *SAJC*, 18 May 1906. “An Interesting Portrait” *SAJC*, 7 June 1907, advertises Messrs. Kaufman and Co., house decorators; “For Jewish Parents: Possibilities for their Boys”, *SAJC*, 30 Aug. 1907, interviews Mr. Beart, a Jewish “Foreman Passer” trained in northern England, who was proposing to “employ white boys instead of Kaffirs for ordinary shopwork and for the delivery of parcels . . . Try to imagine the difference between £36,000 going to 9,000 Kaffirs at £4 per month, and the same £36,000 going straight to the homes of white lads who can and will take the place of Kaffirs. The money which goes to the Kaffirs goes out of our community”. The *SAJC* ran articles and advertisements of this sort on a regular basis.

way. For us there can be no question as there is for the Jews in England, no such conflict between sentiment and interest, between sympathy for our oppressed brethren and fear of their becoming a burden on us.⁶⁶

The “South African Jewish community” was of course not manufactured from nothing. Its building blocks were Jewish traditions and experiences, in the “Old World” and in Johannesburg, which created Jewish “communities” before and since. The “community” envisaged by the Reverend Hertz in the nineties, for example, was an incorporative community for all Jews in Johannesburg, and appealed particularly for the suspension of class differences between “co-religionists”. The Bundists, the Society for the Friends of Russian Freedom in Johannesburg, had conceived of a “community” based on a Jewish working class identity. There was also a Johannesburg Jewish community which had begun to act together, under the leadership of Goldreich and Mendelssohn just before the outbreak of war. There were other traditions too: Practical Zionism and Political Zionism, the experience of migration, the memories of the shtetl. All these fed into the “South African Jewish community”, but the “community” when it was constructed represented something more and different than the sum of these parts.

Like the ideologies of the national bourgeoisie elsewhere, the “South African Jews” drew on past traditions, and looked forward to new ones, in the style of the “modern Janus” described by Tom Nairn.⁶⁷ It was a tactic which was effectively grafted onto the Johannesburg Jewish experience. They emphasized their shtetl backgrounds and they reclaimed the “Peruvian” as part of their heritage. They juxtaposed the (past) rags with the riches that came to those who worked hard, played fair, and above all, who persevered. There was, of course, always a tension between being “South African” and being “Jewish”, and the tension was not always resolved. At the same time as it was necessary to become white, English-speaking “South Africans”, it was also crucial that they broadened their constituency and that the enlarged “community” worked to reproduce itself: “The Jews of Johannesburg cannot be content that only those of the rising generation should become tailors, or petty dealers should remain Jews or clerks, while those who become lawyers, or doctors, or wholesale merchants, should

66 “The Police as Persecutors”, SAJC, 13 April 1906.

67 Nairn, *Break-Up of Britain*, 348–9.

forget their race . . . Above all, it is necessary for the community to make up its mind that it is going to be an educated community. By this means only can it retain its position in what is on the eve of becoming, in the true sense of the term, a 'White man's country'."⁶⁸

They criticized the tendency towards assimilation, they rebuked Jews who "married out", or who "Anglicized" their names: "They may change their names", warned a columnist in the *Chronicle*, "but they can't change their noses".⁶⁹ At the same time, they encouraged the dissolution of shtetl culture and Yiddish. Yiddish became a language of the past, the subject of occasional anthropological comment.⁷⁰ Much more frequent was a concern to remove the taint of the shtetl from the Johannesburg Jew. The *Chronicle* stressed the need to drop "foreign" accents, and sponsored initiatives within the community to "Anglicize" the "aliens".⁷¹ They also drew a careful distinction between the South African Jewish "community", and the "community" of the shtetl.

In the shtetl Jewishness had been all-encompassing, a way of life, a political and religious and ethnic identity. In South Africa, the *Chronicle* adopted a vision of Jewish identity that to some extent followed Western European, "emancipated" lines. For them, "Jewishness" was only a religion, "insofar as religion enters into the consciousness of practical life".⁷² To be Jewish was therefore compatible with a South African nationalism. It was, in the words of an historian of nationalism, an "urban secular vision parading as a religion and feeding off some of the latter's symbols and emotions".⁷³ In South Africa, the Jewish "community" fed off

68 Editorial, SAJC, 25 Jan. 1907.

69 "An Adopted Patronymic", SAJC, 18 May 1906; "The Iniquity of Inter-marriage", SAJC, 25 Oct. 1907; "In Praise of Inter-marriage", SAJC, 20 Nov. 1908 (which attacked the practice).

70 This was not easily accomplished, partly because of the strength of Yiddish within the immigrant community, and partly because the new South African Jewish middle class did not want to erase it, but capture it as cultural artefact. They argued that Yiddish was to the Jewish "community" what Afrikaans was to Het Volk: an earthy, highly moral pre-modern culture which was understandably but needlessly suspicious of an English urban "progressivism"; see "The Taal and Education" and "Further about Yiddish", SAJC, 12 July 1907. More generally, Yiddish was not seriously confronted, but dealt with as past, as "culture"; see e.g. "The History of the Yiddish Stage", SAJC, 16 Oct.; 30 Oct.; 6 Nov. 1908.

71 See SAJC, "Editorial Notes", 9 June 1905; "Random Notes", 17 Aug. 1905; "Municipal Life and Politics", 1 Sept. 1905; "The Slangful Woman", 19 Nov. 1909.

72 "Hebrew in Jewish Education", SAJC, 26 Jan. 1906.

73 Anthony Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth, 1983), "Preface to Second Edition", 28.

much more. It was not enough to create an external image for a (public) parade. It also had to create, internally, a sense of being a “South African Jew”.

Men like Sammy Marks came to epitomize the “South African Jew”. Marks’ reputation incorporated the eclectic facets of his personal history, which were arranged so that they emphasized the rewards of personal effort and a shrewd business sense. Marks was elevated to the status of a myth, but a myth who was Every (Jewish) Man. Anecdotes abound, and they draw on a pace, a vigour, and a wit which is unmistakably “Jewish”. When Rhodes died, goes one story, it was suggested to Marks that “the mantle of Rhodes should descend upon you.” Marks shrugged his refusal: “I’ll tell you,” he said, “I used to deal in old clothes. I know they never fit.” When offered a peerage, he was said to have commented, “peerage, shmeerage. I came in steerage.”⁷⁴

These comments are significant indicators of a change in perspective. They address a Jewish past, and a South African Jewish future. The “past” experience, the shtetl, the steerage class passenger, the smous, all these are located in the past: “I used to deal in old clothes”; “I came in steerage”. These images of the Jewish “past” must be separated from Jewish history, or Jewish tradition. In the construction of a South African Jewish identity, elements of this “past” were captured and reified. As late as 1958, a South African journalist wrote of Sammy Marks that he was “a Jew as bright-eyed and shining as the Sabbath candles; a Russian as piquant as a pickled cucumber; neither Boer nor Briton, but a formidable patriot”. The description works because it draws on metaphors and images which are part of an imagined South African Jewish experience: the “shining Sabbath candles”, the Russian-ness of a “piquant pickled cucumber”. These talk to a “community”; they confirm, and in a sense construct, a common “community”. The nature of this change is clear in the new attitude that emerged towards the “Peruvian”.⁷⁵

74 Both quoted in Mary Kropman, “Sammy Marks”, mimeograph, Pretoria, 1981.

75 Marks is one of many that effected this transformation and became the Jewish elite. At a meeting of the Maccabean Club and Jewish Working Men’s Club, the speakers each outdid the other in listing names of “Jews in Public Life”, and included Sam Heymann; the Rev. Dr. Hertz; Saul Solomon and [Richard] Rosenthal, early pioneers and merchants in the Cape; [Jonas] Bergthal, Natal legislative assemblyman; M. de Vries, public prosecutor and in 1872 chairman of the Volksraad (“People’s Council” of the Transvaal South African Republic); Daniel Kisch, auditor-general of the Transvaal and adviser to the Matabele chief Lobegula; the mayors Hyman Lieberman (Cape Town), William Sagar (Kimberley), Franz Ginsberg (King Williamstown), Isaac Baumann and W. Erlich (respectively mayor

The South African Jewish community did not excise the “Peruvian” from their history. Rather, he was transformed from the “alien” to the “Oriental”, and like his language, Yiddish, celebrated as part of a rich “cultural tradition”.⁷⁶ At the same time, the “community” concealed a large measure of ambivalence about the “Peruvians” in their midst. Whereas they could comfortably be incorporated into a mythology about their past, the South African Jewish community was far less romantic about their future. When they looked forward, the South African Jewish community was far less secure, far less mythical, and much more programmatic. In reality, it did not hold out much hope that the “Peruvians” could reach the “civilized standards” required for entry into the “South African way of life”. But, it argued, what could not be achieved by the immigrants, could be achieved in the next generation: “The experience of every civilized country proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that, whatever the Russian Jew may be himself, his children possess a marvellous power of assimilation.”⁷⁷

The “Peruvians” could become “South African Jews”.⁷⁸

Prostitutes and “Peruvians”: policing the “community”

There were two areas where the Jewish image was most vulnerable: the problems of the “Peruvians” and Jewish involvement in prostitution in the city. In both these areas, the Board’s work was invisible but effective. Inside the community, their methods combined patronage and policing, coaxing and rigid control. As “community watchdog”, the Board set up intricate and inconspicuous internal vigilance committees. Each week, the committees reported back to the Board Executive. The subject was so close to the bone that no more than a sparse outline of their operations was

and deputy mayor of Bloemfontein); the governor of Natal, Sir Mathew Nathan; Harry Graumann.

76 “Oriental”, SAJC, 9 June 1905.

77 “The Russian Jew versus the Civilized Indian”, SAJC, 20 April 1906. See also Arthur Lourie, “South African Jews in the Universities”, in *South African Jewish Year Book*, 1929, 263–4: “By far the larger number of Jews in South Africa originate from Eastern Europe, and nowhere is the adaptability of this class of immigrant more strikingly exemplified than in the record of their children at universities”. A similar argument was made about the “special” aptitude of immigrant-alien Jews for assimilation by middle class French Jews; see Marrus, *Politics of Assimilation*, esp. ch. 5, 86–121.

78 Rabbi Mark Cohen, “Special Article: The Poor Jewish Alien. Nothing Like as Bad as He is Painted”, SAJC, 20 April 1906.

actually minuted in the Executive meetings. Nevertheless, it is clear that trusted members in the “community” carefully monitored the movements of all “suspicious”, or potentially “suspicious”, Johannesburg Jews. These included single women who arrived in the city, “foreign” Jews who were, or had been, involved in liquor dealing, and cases of Jewish individuals being watched by the South African police. These were all included under the general description of the “Peruvian problem”.⁷⁹

There is no doubt that the Board was motivated by the best of intentions. In the wake of allegations about the internationally coordinated White Slave Traffic, and the horrific forced prostitution of many vulnerable single Jewish women, the Board established contact with the South African Police, the Jewish Society for the Protection of Girls and Women in London, and the National Conference of Jewish Charities in New York City.⁸⁰ Within this broad network, the Johannesburg Board of Deputies was effectively able to monitor the movements of the suspicious and the vulnerable among the single women emigrating from Eastern Europe to South Africa.

It should be emphasized that the Board was not over-reacting to the problem, nor exaggerating its proportions. Even if they “saved” only a handful of women from forced prostitution or desertion, it justified their concern. Their connection with Jewish agencies and with the police authorities gave them unique and far-ranging powers. They traced and chased Jews to and from all corners of the globe. Wife deserters were traced as they ranged from New York City to Krugersdorp.⁸¹ Photographs and files of individuals of “bad reputation” circulated between the local South African Police, the Johannesburg Board of Deputies and the Societies in London and in New York. The Board assisted in the deportation of

79 The information in this section was drawn from Minutes of the Meetings of the Johannesburg Jewish Board of Deputies, 1912–21; “Trapping File”, File no. 227, archives of the BoD.

80 See e.g. Executive Council Minutes, 1 Feb. 1913, BoD.

81 See Edward Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight against White Slavery, 1870–1930* (New York: Schocken Books, 1983). For the work of the London agency see V. D. Lipman, *A Century of Social Service, 1859–1959: The Jewish Board of Guardians* (London: Routledge, 1959), Appendix 1, “The Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls, Women and Children, 1885–1946”, 247–55. For the American work see Ari Fridkis, “Desertion in the American Jewish Immigrant Family: The Work of the National Desertion Bureau in Co-operation with the Industrial Removal Office”, *American Jewish History*, 81, no. 2 (1981): 285–99.

unwanted Jews and they checked that every single woman who left Europe bound for South Africa arrived safely, was met at the boat in Cape Town and the train in Johannesburg, and was housed in the city.⁸²

In most cases, the police concern was with the men who were operating the prostitution networks. But the Board's concern went further than that. It copiously investigated and "attended to" scores of cases of single women without family or visible means of support.⁸³ In the case of prostitutes, many were sent to England for "rehabilitation", i.e. sent to one of the Homes established by the Jewish Society for the Protection of Girls and Women.⁸⁴ Like the Society in London, the Board concerned itself not only with women who had become prostitutes but also with single mothers, and female victims of criminal assault.⁸⁵ Of course, the intervention of the well-intentioned was not always appreciated. There was a subtle distinction between intervening for the benefit of a woman susceptible to the worst possible harm to her health, her reputation and her morality; and being just plain nosy and interfering. On a number of occasions, the Board saw fit to make decisions as to the "suitability" of relationships between couples who wished to marry.⁸⁶

These decisions inevitably created strain between the "community" representatives and their flock. It was stress which characterized the relationship between the "representatives" and the "rank and file" in the "community" in the pre-war years. The "Peruvians" looked to the establishment for aid, and appreciated it when it was offered. Neverthe-

82 See the case of Mr Barnett, BoD, 8 April 1913.

83 For deportations see the cases of Jessie Erlstein and a woman called "New"; BoD, 18 Nov. 1913, 14 July 1914. For evidence of communication with the South African Police and the Jewish organizations in New York and in London see BoD, 1 Feb. 1913.

84 E.g. BoD, 14 July, 13 Aug., 9 Sept., 18 Nov. 1913. This concern persisted through the following years.

85 BoD, 12 Jan. 1913. The Board would have been working through policing networks established in the early part of the century; see Cape Archives, GH 35/218: "White Slave Traffic", esp. correspondence between Downing Street and the Colonial authorities, 27 Oct. 1905. The BoD Minutes contain no direct references to Jewish pimps and prostitutes, and it was difficult to establish more precise information about the operation of these networks; [. . .] see "Minutes of the Meetings of the Jewish Ladies' Communal League", 8 Dec. 1903.

86 This concern with saving "respectable" women before they "degenerated" into "immorality" was shared by the middle class in Johannesburg and London. Charcroft House was established for precisely this purpose; see Jewish Association for the Protection of Girls and Women, *Annual Report*, 1927 (London, 1927), 53.

less, they were reluctant to accept some of the terms of establishment Jewry. This was equally obvious in the other arena of Board activity in this period, that of the “illicit liquor trade”.

More than any other issue, the “liquor question” galvanized the Jewish establishment into activity. The visibility of Jews in this trade in the pre-war years had drawn a great deal of adverse attention, and had made their re-immigration to Johannesburg extremely difficult. Their rights to re-immigration were inevitably tied up with the question of Jewish rights as citizens, and with the issue which gained importance in the years 1902–7, the question of the franchise. From the earliest days of re-immigration concerned communal activists like Manfred Nathan had informally made it their task to “represent” Jewish cases which came before the criminal courts.⁸⁷ But clearly, the problem was a larger one than could be dealt with by personal initiative.

Nathan’s work proved in court that many Jews had been falsely “trapped” by black and “coloured” police agents who claimed to have bought liquor from his clients. But he did not succeed in separating the “Jewish issue” from that of the illicit liquor trade. Instead, cases other than his received the full attention of the press and the public.⁸⁸ Nathan and his fellows became convinced that the Jewish establishment would have to initiate a more effective means of dealing with the problem.

Soon after the establishment of the Board of Deputies, Nathan and other members of the executive organized a committee specifically to deal with cases of illicit liquor dealing which involved Jews.⁸⁹ The informal operation of this committee worked together with an extensive propaganda campaign designed to remove the “Peruvian” from public discourse, and to make Jewish criminality, where it was proven, an issue of individual culpability rather than a racial or national trait.⁹⁰ Simultaneously, the Board and the *South African Jewish Chronicle* widely

87 “Expatriated Jews. Refugees at the Coast” (letter to the Editor), *Transvaal Leader*, 4 Sept. 1902; “Jewish Refugees”, *Transvaal Leader*, 5 Sept. 1902, which commented that “the Refugee Permit Committee will, no doubt, have nothing to do with such characters (as were involved in the illicit liquor trade before the war) even though they protest their reformation”.

88 “What is Truth”, *Transvaal Leader*, 12 July 1902.

89 E.g. “Fracas in a Shebeen”, *Transvaal Leader*, 16 Sept. 1902; this reported that the courts were packed for the duration of the trial of three Russian Jews.

90 Letter from Max Langermann, Chairman, inviting specific individuals to join the new committee, “False Trapping File”, 18 May 1906.

publicized cases where Jews had been falsely accused of illicit liquor dealing.⁹¹

That Jews were involved in the illicit liquor traffic was indisputable. But in the public mind, and in the minds of the city authorities, the illicit liquor trade was virtually run by Jews. Many of the cases brought before the courts involved Jewish storekeepers and merchants. But as far as the Jewish population was concerned, the involvement of some Jews in the sale of liquor to black and “coloured” people was not a specifically Jewish phenomenon, and certainly did not warrant the kinds of underhand tactics the police were using to “trap” the sellers. In many cases, Jews who were not even storekeepers found that black members of the [Central Investigation Department] CID would come round to their homes on the pretext of looking for work, steal liquor from their homes, and then call in the white detectives to make an arrest for the “sale”.⁹² One not untypical case involved the residents at 29 Marshall Street. All were hardworking Russian Jewish immigrants: Israel Winer and his wife Rosa, Lazarus Goldstein and Harry Levine. They operated a bakery and a butchery from their small home. In October 1908, a man came round and offered to do some jobs around the house. He was employed for the day, and when he left he took the Passover wine with him. Soon afterwards, the Police arrived and arrested the Winers. They were obliged to undergo the indignity of arrest and body-searches, and had to make the detectives taste the wine before they could be released. Even after that they had to stand trial.⁹³

Reverend Hertz and like-minded members of the community, including many of the Zionists, were sure that there was nothing “Jewish” about illicit liquor dealing, and that the corruption had to be excised at the root, by which they meant by the officers of the [CID]. In a widely reported public lecture, Reverend Hertz harangued against “the doings of the liquor department [which] would have been a disgrace to Russia, a blot on Tammany Hall, and even worthy of the iniquities of Sodom”.⁹⁴ But the new leaders of the community showed themselves increasingly impatient with these tactics. Whereas Hertz’s pulpit-bashing may have suited the style of fervour popular in the 1890s, he was now severely admonished

91 “The Board of Deputies and the Trapping Commission”, SAJC, 3 Aug. 1906.

92 E.g., “Russian in Johannesburg. Astounding Allegations. The Cruel Case of the Cohens”, SAJC, 22 Jan. 1909; “The Police as Persecutors”, SAJC, 13 April 1906.

93 Winer case, “False Trapping File”, Oct. 1908.

94 “The Trapping Investigation Commission. A Remarkable Sermon”, SAJC, 2 June 1906.

in the editorial columns of the *South African Jewish Chronicle*.⁹⁵ On another occasion, they criticized the “pulpit sensationalism” of members of the rabbinate who “prostituted” the “dignity” of their pulpits.⁹⁶

As far as the Board was concerned, such tactics were not only unsuitable, they were ultimately counter-effective. It was far more appropriate, they argued, to police the matter internally than to have the “Peruvian” washing aired in public. The members of the Board of Deputies Trapping Committee were some of the most important figures in the new “community”: they included Max Langermann, Manfred Nathan, Richard Rosenthal and Harry Solomon.⁹⁷ For this group, it was vital that the image of respectability be maintained, and particularly that the “grounds” for antisemitism were removed.

Throughout 1906–8, the Trapping Committee took up a number of cases where Jews had been accused of illicit liquor dealing. In many of these cases, the lawyers put up by the Board were able to have the suit dismissed, at no cost to the accused.⁹⁸ But at the same time that the Board was performing this valuable function, they were determined that they would only serve the “community” they were trying to mould. Thus they did not defend cases where the Jews were likely to be found guilty, nor did they show much sympathy to members of the Jewish population who were forced to engage in occasional liquor-selling in order to survive. [. . .] Before they would put their time, energies and reputations on the line, the committee carefully investigated the cases before them, and made decisions as to which cases they should invest in.⁹⁹ This meant that the Board of Deputies was almost assured of a high success rate in their “community”. The cases that they did win were undoubtedly important for the people involved. But for the Committee and for the Board, what was as important as righting wrongs against individuals in the community was the propaganda they could make out of their activity.

Cases which were won were widely publicized in the *South African Jewish Chronicle*. Of course, there was a subtle balance that had to be maintained, between “proving” that Jews had been falsely accused and “proving” that

95 “The Board of Deputies and the Trapping Commission”, SAJC, 3 Aug. 1906.

96 “Death of Pulpit Sensationalism”, SAJC, 6 March 1908.

97 Letter from Max Langermann, 18 May 1906, “False Trapping File”.

98 E.g. Rex vs. Diamond and Meltz, 26 Jan. 1908; Rex vs. Chaim Levitow, 11 Nov. 1908; see list of cases investigated by the Board, in Alex Benson to C. Cooper (Kuyper), 7 May 1906.

99 List of “false trapping” cases being investigated, 7 May 1906, “False Trapping File”.

the civil authorities were corrupt and antisemitic. To its frustration, the Board found that it had to be content with quiet self-congratulation.¹⁰⁰ Their intervention on behalf of Jewish Johannesburgers accused of illicit selling remained a matter of upholding liberty and individual rights. In the same way that they, as members of the middle class, had to defer to the judgments of the gentile world, accept antisemitism and face it as individuals, they asked the same of their community. Externally, the definition of “Jewish” remained a matter of personal preference, compatible with liberalism and rights as citizens. But internally, the definition of who among the Jewish population was allowed into the “community” had very stark margins.

Ultimately, there was a large measure of agreement within the Jewish population that it was easier to face the gentile world from an enclosed community. It was clear, for example, that the problems of Jewish poverty and crime worried all classes of Jews, particularly the immigrants. What was important about the leadership initiative and the creation of a “community” was that it related primarily to their needs, and was proffered on their terms. Moreover, it meant that their generosity was not extended at the time of greatest need in the community, but when the upwardly mobile community “representatives” felt their position to be most vulnerable.

The Jewish “community” gave strength to the emerging Johannesburg Jewish middle class. It was larger, more complex, and more varied than the “community” of the Club world. It gave the Jewish middle class a substantial base on which to build their home in South Africa. Externally, the “community” minimized their political importance. In public, they were passive, even apathetic. They emphasized that middle class white South African English-speaking Jews were self-made men: hard-working, patriotic, and important contributors to society and economy in their country. At the same time, this strong public image was being created and reproduced in the enclosed and private sphere of the “community”. As important in the manufacture of the “new men”, the new South African Jews, was a second and equally enclosed private sphere, the home.

100 In the cases of *Rex vs. Henoeh Osrin*, and *Rex vs. Israel and Rosawina Winer and Harry Levine*, the Board wrote to the Commissioner of Police asking if they would acquiesce in the Board’s making public the “false accusation” of members of their community. In both cases, the Commissioner of Police, through the offices of the Attorney General, declined this permission; see BoD to Commissioner of Police, 7 Oct.; the reply, 10 Oct. 1908; see a similar exchange, 4 Nov. and 23 Nov. 1908; “False Trapping File”.

It should be reiterated that the creation of a “community” of South African Jews was a complex process which involved more than internal policing networks. Even though the Board’s political position came in for much criticism, it is clear that there were not many who would have disputed the choices made inside the Executive of the Board, that the “community” was white, urban and middle class and as such virtually guaranteed of a place in the sun in the new South Africa. Further, coercion alone could never have created a community which was able to pull itself up from its murky “Peruvian” beginning to pure white “South African”. The major area of active socialization of the Russian Jewish immigrants was in fact not through a policy of policing but through patronage, not by coercion but through welfare policies. This area was far more subtle. It was the much broader programme of education, philanthropy and welfare that moulded the Jewish “community” in its early years of formation and that was ultimately to confirm it in its present form. This work was not achieved through the offices of the Board of Deputies. Welfare, as we shall see in the following chapter [of the thesis], was women’s work.