The Kaplan Centre was established in 1980 under the terms of a gift to the University of Cape Town by the Kaplan Kushlick Foundation and is named in honour of the parents of Mendel and Robert Kaplan. The Centre, the only one of its kind in South Africa, seeks to stimulate and promote the whole field of Jewish studies and research at the University with a special focus on the South African Jewish Community. The Centre is multi-disciplinary in scope and encourages the participation of scholars in a range of fields including history, political science, education, sociology, comparative literature and the broad spectrum of Hebrew and Judaic studies. The Centre is engaged in both research and teaching and functions as a co-ordinating unit in the university. Its resources are used to invite distinguished scholars to teach Jewish-content courses within established University departments, to initiate and sponsor research projects, and to strengthen the university’s library holding of books, micro-films and archival sources. These research materials are made available to members of the University and to accredited visitors from the wider academic community. The Centre awards a limited number of undergraduate and graduate scholarships as well as a limited number of research grants. The Centre has a publications programme which brings out monographs and occasional papers. Lectures symposia and conferences are arranged under the auspices of the Centre. In some cases these are organised with the University’s Department of Adult Education and Extra Mural Studies, thereby serving the wider community.

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‘Jewish Journeys’
8-10 January 2007

‘Jewish Journeys’ was the third biennial international conference hosted at All Africa House to be organised jointly by the Kaplan Centre and the Parkes Institute for Jewish/non-Jewish Relations, University of Southampton. Co-ordinated by Milton Shain, Tony Kushner and Sarah Pearce, the conference emerged from the two previous collaborative projects and associated conferences at UCT on ‘Port Jews and Jewish Communities in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centres’ (2003) and ‘Place and Displacement’ (2005). These earlier conferences had been organised as an important element of the Parkes’ Institute’s five-year AHRB project examining the relations between Jews and non-Jews in port cities from 1650-1914, moving in focus from the concept of Port Jews in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through to the wider applicability of this concept across broader chronologies and the importance of place identity in relation to migration more generally in the Jewish experience. During the course of these previous discussions it had become apparent that the associated issue of ‘Jewish journeys’ – be they intellectual, physical or spiritual – had largely been ignored in the scholarly context. That is, while this earlier research provided detailed case studies and theoretical insights into the Jewish experience, they also highlighted a lack of knowledge about the migratory journeys to places of crucial importance that witnessed the emergence of new Jewish communities or the transformation of previously existing communities. ‘Jewish Journeys’ represented the first attempt to fill that gap and the call for papers was intentionally interdisciplinary, inviting a wide range of perspectives drawing on ancient through modern traditions. The eventual programme of 23 papers was drawn therefore from scholars working across a range of disciplines and locations, with delegates travelling from Europe, Israel, New Zealand and the USA, as well as from South Africa itself. Organised across three days, the proceedings were split into eight sessions that were structured thematically, addressing questions of identity, movement, arrival and departure, and including examinations of practical, intellectual and religious journeys. This ensured cohesion across a chronologically and geographically diverse set of papers that explored the Jewish body, ancient Judaism, and the figure of the Jew in mediaeval literature, as well as travelogues of Jewish identity in modern China, Jewish migration in twentieth century Europe, and case studies of Jewish journeys made physically and intellectually by ideas, individuals and communities drawn from a variety of cultural sources including

Continued on following page
The range and strength of the papers was particularly impressive, moving from traditional historical analysis examining the reasons for Jewish migration as well as details of the journeys themselves, to studies of how the worldwide web and other new technologies were being used to develop and maintain Jewish communities and identity in isolated areas of the diaspora.

In addition to the eight sessions, conference participants were taken to see the legacy of apartheid in a tour of two Townships and the District Six museum. Visits were also arranged to the Cape Town Holocaust Centre and South African Jewish Museum courtesy of the Kaplan Centre, while several delegates also learnt of the history of aspects of South Africa’s Muslim community with guided tours of Bokaap and the Simon’s Town Heritage Museum.

The conference was another highly successful example of collaboration between the two centres and thanks are due to all concerned for their contributions, with a particular debt of gratitude owed to the organisers, the continued generosity of the Kaplan family, and especially Janine Blumberg for the care with which everything was arranged. The papers evidenced the quality of work being undertaken in this area and the wealth of material available; the interchange of ideas also provided much for future consideration and this will be continued in 2009 with a conference on ‘The Jewish Family and Migration’.

Following the example of previous years, the proceedings are to be published by Vallentine Mitchell in book form and as a special issue of the journal Jewish Culture and History.

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‘Jewish Journeys’ 8-10 January 2007

The Centre also funded in part the publication of Worlds Apart: The Re-Migration of South African Jews, by Peter Arnold, Colin Tatz and Prof Gillian Heller. World’s Apart examines South African Jewish expatriates in Australia.
On the morning of the 14th of December 2007, the book, The Jews of Johannesburg, until Union 31 May 1910, Veronica Belling’s English translation of Yidn in Yohanesburg biz Yunyon, 31 May 1910, by Leibl Feldman, was launched in the foyer of the Kaplan Centre.

Veronica Belling has been the librarian of the Jewish Studies Library, part of U.C.T. Libraries and the Kaplan Centre since its inception in 1981. She is the author of Bibliography of South African Jewry (Kaplan Centre, 1997) and Yiddish Theatre in South Africa (Kaplan Centre, 2008) an adaptation of her U.C.T. Masters dissertation in Jewish Civilization.

Yidn in Yohanesburg biz Yunyon, is part of the small but rich body of Yiddish literature that flourished in South Africa, after the establishment of the South African Yiddish Cultural Federation in 1947. The author, Leibl Feldman, a Johannesburg businessman and ardent Yiddishist who emigrated to South Africa from Lithuania passed away in 1975. His niece, Mona Berman, the daughter of his brother, Richard Feldman, also a Yiddish author, came down from Johannesburg to be present at the launch that was attended by about 50 people, colleagues and friends, among them several well known Cape Town Yiddish enthusiasts and experts.

Milton Shain, Director of the Kaplan Centre, introduced the proceedings. Thereafter the rafters of the Centre rang with the sound of Yiddish in a speech by Mona Berman about the life and work of her uncle, Leibl Feldman. Mona Berman, herself a published author emphasized that her uncle was dedicated to the Yiddish language. Her talk was followed by Veronica Belling’s discussion of Yidn in Yohanesburg, published in 1956 by the South African Yiddish Cultural Federation, just a year after the publication of the first major work of South African Jewish historiography, The Jews in South Africa, edited by Gustav Saron and Louis Hotz. Unlike The Jews of South Africa, however, that presents an image of a classless and uniformly Zionist Jewish community, Feldman’s history of early Johannesburg, explained Belling, is informed by his radical socialism and anti-Zionist ideology. It presents a picture of Jewish Johannesburg that is clearly divided between the eastern European immigrants and the Anglo-German Jewish establishment. Feldman lauds Jewish radical leaders and trade union activists. He also indicts of the Transvaal government’s treatment of the Africans while exploring Jewish attitudes to the Africans. Had it been written in English it is doubtful whether it would have been published at that time.

Feldman describes the immigrant neighbourhood of Ferreirastown in downtown Johannesburg with the Palmerston Hotel, the Zionist Hall, the Besmedresh of the grines (synagogue of the greenhorns), Shames Yard, where the very poorest immigrants lived, the Minsk Café, and the Plungyaner Boarding House. This was a neighbourhood where two Yiddish theatre companies vied for audiences and where men far outnumbered women. Feldman quotes at length from the early Yiddish press, to which he devotes the longest chapter in his book. It is these quotes that open a rare window into the initial impressions of the eastern European immigrants before their senses had become dulled to the ironies and hypocrases of Jewish life in South Africa. Herein lies the greatest value of this work. Informed by a wealth of material, it will help to fill out the picture of Johannesburg Jewry in its formative years.

Yidn in Yohanesburg is a rare example of Jewish immigrant writing inspired by ideologies that have been marginalized in South African Jewish historiography. It is the third work translated from the Yiddish that has been published by the Kaplan Centre.
Public Lectures:

Professor Jonathan Goldstein (University of West Georgia) Comparative Zionisms: Singapore and Manilla. 5pm Thursday 11th January Auditorium S A Jewish Museum Hatfield Street

Professor Emeritus Neville Dubow In the Field of Memory: The Berlin Holocaust Memorial – Whose Memory? Tuesday 9th October, 8pm Kramer Law Lecture Theatre no. 3 UCT Middle Campus (in association with the Holocaust Centre)

David Cesarani O.B.E. (Royal Holloway College, University of London) The war on terror that failed: the British in Palestine, 1946-1947. 8pm, Wednesday 17th October, Auditorium, S A Jewish Museum

Conference:

Jewish Journeys

8th to 10th January 2007

Venue: All Africa House

Monday 8th January 2007

Session 1: The Nature of Jewish Journeys 9.00 to 10.30

Chair: Tony Kushner

Henrietta Mondry (University of Canterbury, Christ Church, NZ) Fantasy Places and Fantasy Bodies

Greg Walker (University of Leicester) Spiritual Journeys? The Jews in the Croxton Play of the Sacrament

Sarah Pearce (Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/Non-Jewish Relations, University of Southampton)

Journeys in ancient Judaism: the migrations of the ancestors

Session 2: Leavings 11.00 to 12.30

Chair: Milton Shain

Veronica Belling (University of Cape Town) When Rivkah left home: Women's Journeys from Eastern Europe to South Africa

Tony Kushner (Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/Non-Jewish Relations, University of Southampton)

Iceberg or Goldberg? Jewish and Non-Jewish Narratives of the Titanic

Michael John (University of Linz)

Forebodings: Leaving Austria – Jewish Journeys 1933-1938

Session 3: Identities 2.00 to 3.00

Chair: Albert Lichtblau

Gemma Romain (The National Archives, Kew, UK)

Who do you think you are? Journeys and Jewish identity in the narratives of David Baddiel and Stephen Fry

Kristy Warren (The National Archives, Kew, UK)

It’s bigger than hip hop

4.00pm Depart for S A Jewish Museum

Walk through the Jewish Museum: Mendel Kaplan

Opening Dinner: Café Riteve

8.00pm Lecture: Mendel Kaplan: From Riteve to Ranana via Cape Town

Venue: Jewish Museum Auditorium

Tuesday 9th January 2007

Session 1: Passages 9.00 to 11.00

Chair: Saul Issroff

Tobias Brinkmann (Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/Non-Jewish Relations, University of Southampton)

Going East – Coming Home? Jewish Journeys in Eastern Europe before 1939

Nicholas Evans (University of Cape Town)

Keeping Kosher: Policies deployed by British and German shipping companies to develop the transoceanic Jewish passenger business.

Jonathan Goldstein (University of West Georgia)

The Role of Travel in Jewish Identity Formation: The Olmert Family Sojourn to China as a Case Study

Jocelyn Hellig (University of the Witwatersrand)

German Jewish Immigration to Johannesburg during the 1930s

Session 2: Return 11.30 to 12.45

Chair: Nicholas Evans

Saul Issroff (University of Cape Town)

Visiting der Heym! The significance of Jewish ancestral visits

Fiona Frank (University of Strathclyde)

Hannah Frank’s Glasgow Jewish Journey: from the Gorbals to the South Side

2.00 Leave for Township Tour (4 hours)

Wednesday 10 January 2007

Session 1: Decisions 9.00 to 10.30

Chair: Sarah Pearce

Rose Lerer Cohen (The Lithuanian Memorial Foundation, Jerusalem)

Aliya-Jewish Journeys to Israel. The Southern African Oral History Project

Albert Lichtblau (Universitat Salzburg)

Galician Journeys

Ruth Leiserowitz (Free University of Berlin)

Litvak Migratory Decisions in the second half of the 19th C and their consequences

Session 2: Identities 2 11.00 to 12.30

Chair: Jonathan Goldstein

Phil Sandick (Maru-a-Pula School, Botswana)

Maintenance of Jewish Diasporal Identity: Ancient and Modern Methods of ‘The Travelling Rabbi’

Hilda Nissimi (Bar-Ilan University, Israel)

Layers of Identity in a Jewish Community: from Crypto Faith in Mashhad to ‘Mashhadilban’, USA

David Patterson (University of Memphis)

A Reflection on the Jewish Journey from Exile to Redemption

Session 3: Journeys and endings 2.00 to 3.30

Chair: Gemma Romain

Jessica Roitman (University of Leiden)

Sephardic Merchant Journeys

Noam Zadoff (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem)

Sephardic Merchant Journeys

Noam Zadoff (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem)

Sephardic Merchant Journeys

Noam Zadoff (The Hebrew University, Munich)

Travelling to the Past, Creating a New Future: Gershom Scholem’s Journey to Germany in 1946

James Jordan (University of Southampton)

“What we have gained is infinitely more than that small loss". Rudolph Cartier at the BBC

Conclusion and closing comments 3.30 to 4.30

Tony Kushner and Sarah Pearce