



KAPLAN CENTRE

JEWISH STUDIES & RESEARCH, UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

The Jews of District Six Another Time Another Place

South African Jewish Museum, 11 November 2012

Extract from the opening address by Rhoda Kadalie

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.

Today it is a privilege to launch this intimate and enlightening exhibition put together by Millie Pimstone and her team. I don't know what inspired Millie to do this but I know that when she gets an idea she goes for it and today we behold the fruits of her labour.

I guess Millie asked me to speak here knowing that District Six was the place of my birth, my childhood, and my youth. It was the birthplace of my mother and all her 12 siblings and of at least 6 of my siblings. It was the place where my father had two parishes and over 15 years we witnessed the mass relocation of our entire maternal and paternal families as well as his congregations.

Even as I grew up, District Six was always shrouded in an enigma many historians and cultural anthropologists are still trying to unravel today. And that is what this exhibition depicts. A life that is almost negated by a local historiography that borders on the politically correct. District Six was both slum and snob-town; it was both pedestrian and grand in its eloquence; it was both crass and deeply intellectual and it was here where the most unlikely people came



together. Great political leaders like Dr Abdurahman from the African People's Organisation and his more radical daughter, Cissy Gool, author and academic Dr Richard Rive, Dr Combrinck, Dr Bennie and Helen Kies. Solly Sachs and Ray Alexander were intimately involved in the labour struggles of coloured and African

people in the Garment Workers Union and the Food and Canning Workers Union. They both knew my Malawian grandfather Clements Kadalie settled here and married my Malay granny Molly.

I have vivid memories of my mother holding my hand and walking down the length and breadth of Hanover Street to buy Christmas clothes for me and my 5 brothers (then) driving a hard bargain with the shop-keepers and traders. She knew them all and they all knew her and I remember very distinctly how embarrassed I was at her persistence for squeezing just any kind of bargain from the shopkeeper.

Frequently my mother would say to a Jewish shopkeeper: "I can get this much cheaper at Ackerman." He would retaliate in his thick Lithuanian accent: "Well go then if you don't want quality – Ackermann is Kakkerman!" My mother's boss at Ensign Clothing factory, where she worked, became a lifelong friend of the family. This Jewish boss invited my father to conduct Christian services during lunchtime for the employees, which he attended with all

GOVERNING BODY

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the Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Three years ago my parents went to his funeral in Pinelands and they discovered he was related to Bennie Rabinowitz!

And so when Millie started working on her exhibition I decided to test my mother and ask her if she remembered any Jewish people who lived and worked in District Six. My mother who is now 83 started rattling off these names: Mr Norwich, Wayniks School Uniforms, Dr Tate, Bank Hiring Supplies, Mr Lang (who was nice coz we could buy clothes on credit), Mr Max (butcher next to the fish shop), Mr Goodman, Globe Furnishings, Jackie Manson (clothing store), Mr Sperber (chemist shop), Mantas Shoes, Jarrats Hair Products, Katzef Clothing, Charles Velkes (wedding store), Rosen Crown (liquor store), Rooi Kop Shop, Mr Schiffman (British Woolen Clothes), Alberts Suits, Glicks, Margolie, etc.

Astounded at my mother's memory, I immediately called Millie to ask her if she knew these names and Millie concurred, so I am excited to see some of the people my mother remembered portrayed here in this exhibition.

When I thought about my own memories of Jewish people in District

Six, Richard Rives' Buckingham Palace came to mind and I went to reread it. He recalls the lives of 5 families living in tenement houses next to each other in the famous Caledon Street. With great empathy he lets us into the lives of brothel-keeper, Mary and the Girls, Zoot, Pretty Boy and Oubaas, and the Abrahams family. He describes their foibles, family troubles, class differences, snobbery, family crises, and job challenges. What united this great diversity of characters in the end melted into one horrible common

experience of forced removals under the Group Areas Act.

The ubiquitous but invisible presence is the landlord, Mr Katzen, with whom his tenants had a love-hate relationship purely because they had to pay their monthly rent come rain or sunshine to Mr Katzen. Mr Katzen an immigrant from Germany loved these people, was kind to them, allowed them to buy on credit, yet they exploited him because he was ignorant of the culture of treachery that was inherent in the working class culture of District Six.

The Jews of District Six were not left unscathed by the Group Areas Act and I guess it reminded many of them of their own experiences of exile hence many were kind to the coloured people and felt an affinity for what was happening. If it were not so, Rive, who was scathing in his politics, would not have portrayed the landlord in his novel as kind.

When Katzen suddenly falls ill, his tenants decided to go and to visit him in hospital, fully cognisant of the class and race obstacles they would encounter. And here I want to read from the book what happens when this ragtag of District Six riff-raff goes to visit Mr Katzen in hospital.

This scene typifies for me what District Six was all about – its essence – so often lost by cultural historians. Mr Katzen defied race. Jew was used to ascribe status, specialness, and it was seldom derogatory. That is why the story of Cissy Gool told in that quote over there is instructive. That was District Six. We all had Jewish landlords, doctors, political friends, and shopkeepers.

In putting together this exhibition, Millie is restoring that history to all of us at a time when government apartheidists are trying their damndest to drive a wedge between Muslims, Christians and Jews. They negate the cordiality that existed amongst people regardless of race and class. That does not mean there was no tension – but it was hardly of the kind that we see today. Like the apartheid racists, ANC apartheidists are dead set on separating us again and instilling the fear of the Other through their BDS, anti-Israel, anti-Semitic hostile campaigns. This exhibition negates the ANC's propaganda about Jews and our relationship with them; it portrays a past under apartheid and even prior to that that tells a different story. We must remember that the ANC is very much a movement founded elsewhere and their ignorance about the Western Cape and its politics is astounding. This exhibition casts a lens onto a different past and corrects some of the national ignorance about our fellow citizens that could have disastrous consequences if repeated.

So congratulations Millie on a wonderful slice of history that has the potential to lead to many more exhibitions. Today, I just looked at Iris Berger's Threads of Solidarity about women in industry in SA from 1900 to 1980 and the role Jewish communists played in trade union struggles – here is more material for another exhibition.



Adrienne Folb, Angela Tuck, Gavin Morris, Millie Pimstone and Milton Shain



Milton Shain, Robert Kaplan, Millie Pimstone, Adrienne Folb and Gavin Morris

Scholars explore the personal and political at Holocaust conference

Over a dozen leading scholars in the field of Holocaust studies explored Holocaust historiography and their personal place within the field during a three-day conference hosted in August by UCT's Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies & Research, in association with the South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation.

Under the theme *Holocaust Scholarship: Personal Trajectories and Professional Interpretations*, scholars inserted their own biographies into their work in the wake of decades of research and reflection. Among the luminaries was Christopher Browning – renowned for his work on the evolution of the 'Final Solution' as well as the behaviour of "ordinary men" during war – and Sir Richard Evans, Regius professor of history at Cambridge University.



Not in denial: Prof Milton Shain, director of the Kaplan Centre, with Sir Richard Evans.

Almost all the participants had been guests of the Kaplan Centre sometime or the other over the past 15 years, where they had taught both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Director of the Centre, Professor Milton Shain,

explained that having been exposed over the years to UCT students, it was time for these scholars to engage with one another on changes and trajectories within the field.

In his keynote address, Evans reflected on his role as expert witness in the famous David Irving versus Penguin Books and Deborah Lipstadt trial – in which Irving had sued the publishers and Lipstadt who, in her book *Denying the Holocaust*, had called him a Holocaust denier – in London in 2000.

As Evans explained in *Lying about Hitler*, his book on the trial, historical scholarship can "reach reasoned conclusions about the Nazi extermination of the Jews on the basis of a careful examination of the written evidence".



Karl Schleunes



Alex Boraine, Richard Freedman, Lina Spies, Milton Shain



Steve Katz



Doris Bergen, Bob Ericksen, Susannah Heschel



David Cesarani



Antony Polonsky, Bob Ericksen, Michael Marrus, Steve Aschheim, Milton Shain



Chris Browning, Michael Marrus, David Cesarani



David Welsh



Milton Shain, Antony Polonsky, Bob Ericksen



Visiting Professors

Prof Tudor Parfitt (University of London), a leading scholar on 'Black Jews' in Africa. He is currently doing research on Judaizing and Israelite developments and movements in Africa and its diasporas. Prof Parfitt was Visiting Fellow from 9 January to 9 February 2012.

Dr Stephen Muir (University of Leeds) is Lecturer in Music at the University of Leeds, UK. He is investigating British and imperial synagogue choral activities. Dr Muir worked on South African synagogues.

Tudor Parfitt

Stephen Muir



International Conference

International Conference, *The Holocaust and Legacies of Race in the Postcolonial World, 1945 to the present*, held jointly with the Department of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish Studies,

University of Sydney, and the Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/non-Jewish Relations, University of Southampton in Sydney from **10-12 April 2012**.



Milton Shain and Tony Kushner signing the Memorandum of Agreement



Milton Shain, Avril Alba, Tony Kushner, Shirli Gilbert, James Jordan and Suzanne Rutland

Kaplan Centre events for 2012

PUBLIC LECTURES

Tudor Parfitt (University of London), *Black Zion – the story of Africa's Black Jews*, **6 February**, Auditorium, SAJM

Stephen Muir (University of Leeds), *Jewish choral music through the ages*, **14 February**, Auditorium, SAJM

Susannah Heschel (Eli Black Professor of Jewish Studies, Dartmouth College) *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Abraham Joshua Heschel as Theologian and Father*, **1 August**, Auditorium, SAJM

Sir Richard Evans (Regius Professor of History and President of Wolfson College, University of Cambridge) *Grappling with Holocaust Denial: Reflections on the Irving/Lipstadt Libel case, January-April 2000*, **21 August**, Israel Abrahams Hall.

Annual Helen Suzman Lecture, Professor Jonathan Jansen (University of the Free State) *The Mathematics of Democracy* **22 November**.

FACULTY SEMINARS

Tudor Parfitt (University of London) *Bible, Race and the evolution of Black Jews in America and Africa* **Tuesday 7 February**, Beit Midrash

Benjamin Pogrund and Bassem Eid, (Bassem Eid is the Director of the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group and Benjamin Pogrund former founder director of the Yakar Center for Social Concern) *The*

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problems in making peace: A Palestinian and an Israeli view, **29 February**, Beit Midrash, Kaplan Centre

Robert Kaplan (University of Wollongong) *Three Very Unusual Jews: Joseph Lis, Trebitsch Lincoln and Jack Ruby*, **4 May**, Beit Midrash, Kaplan Centre.

CONFERENCES

Holocaust Scholarship: Personal Trajectories and Professional Interpretations. In association with the South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation. International Conference **20-22 August 2012**, Nelson Mandela Auditorium, SAJM.

Holocaust and Genocide Education, To Remember and to Prevent, UNESCO (United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). In association with African Studies and the Cape Town Holocaust Centre, **12 September**, The Gallery, Centre for African Studies.