Chapter 3
The global and local contexts

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the global, national and local contexts within which the restructuring of Jewish community schools in South Africa can be understood and explained. National education policy after 1994 has been influenced by South Africa's transformation to democracy as well as by the two dialectical global processes described earlier, that is: the force towards marketisation and new managerialism; and the parallel force towards the strengthening of local and national identities. Thus, while the South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) signifies a move towards privatisation and decentralisation, the product of education was envisaged to be controlled by a centrally designed, outcomes-based Curriculum 2005 (C2005). The national curriculum aimed at creating a new South African national identity based, among others, on the democratic ideals of cultural diversity, tolerance, an open society and the teaching of religion instead of religious education.

The emergence of a new national identity has been perceived as a threat to the preservation of Jewish identity in South Africa; an identity that was artificially maintained by the apartheid regime with its emphasis on separate development based on ethnicity (Rubenstein, 1995; Shimoni, 1988; Hellig, 1984). The Jewish community has therefore been caught in the global tension between pluralist/liberal forces that aim to bridge the differences between people by creating "unity in diversity", and forces emphasising the rights of communities for self-preservation and separateness.

The dilemma of the Jewish day schools in the new South Africa has been aggravated by ideological and political processes in the global Jewish world, in particular the tension between Judaism and Zionism. This tension has been amplified in the past decades by the emergence of Jewish fundamentalist-type groups and the decline of Zionist ideology.

In addition, the political conflict in Israel has highlighted the tension between ethnicity and democracy (Aviv, 1993).[1] While ethnicity is exclusive, a democratic nation means equal rights to all citizens (including non-Jewish residents) and the acknowledgement of pluralism and diversity. Democracy is therefore perceived by some as a threat to the Jewishness of the Jewish State that jeopardises its *raison d'etre* as being a

[1] When a Jew is not a Jew. *Mail & Guardian*, 3– 9 January 2003.

homeland for the Jewish nation. There is a contradictory view that keeping Israel Jewish is an undemocratic process that ignores the rights of others (The Jewish Agency for Israel, 2003).

These global and local processes have initiated a crisis of identity for the Jewish community in South Africa; a crisis that has infiltrated its educational institutions and has forced them to change. This chapter therefore provides the contextual explication that will shed light on the text and trajectory of my particular study – the restructuring of the Jewish community schools.

In pursuing such contextualisation, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section sketches the ideological and political context for the Judaism–Zionism debate. A detailed treatment of these concepts goes beyond the scope of my research; I will highlight only the factors that are relevant to my inquiry. I then move on to describe how these global processes have been translated and interpreted by the Jewish community in South Africa. In this context three main historical factors that have shaped the character of the community are underlined, namely: the power of Zionist ideology and institutions; the community's unique expression of religiosity along with a marked hostility towards Reform Judaism;[2] and the pressure towards homogenisation of the community.

The second section deals with the dual educational context within which the schools operate, that is: the Jewish education context; and the South African context. A selective historical overview of the community's educational institutions will demonstrate how both the Zionist–Judaism debate and the policy context in South Africa have shaped the development of these institutions and their expression of Jewish identity. This explication helps to locate the restructuring of the Jewish community schools within the larger transformation of the South African educational system and within global processes.

I end this chapter with a snapshot of the Jewish community and its reaction to the local and global changes occurring at the beginning of the 21st century, during which time the restructuring of the community schools took place.

[2] Reform Judaism (Progressive Judaism) is a religious movement that advocates the modification of Orthodox tradition in conforming to the exigencies of contemporary life and thought. The essential difference between Orthodox and Reform revolves around the authority of the *Hallacha* (the entire corpus of Jewish laws). Whereas Orthodoxy maintains the divine authority of the *Hallacha*, Reform Judaism subjects religious laws and customs to human judgement and thus maintains the right to adapt and change Jewish tradition to make it more relevant to each generation. The Reform movement was formed in Germany in the early years of the 19th century. By the 1990s, it claimed to be the largest of the Jewish religious movements in North America. Leaders of the Reform movement are usually steeped in secular, as well as Jewish, learning. Services are conducted in the vernacular, and women can participate in singing and praying.

The global political and ideological context

Jewish education in South Africa has been shaped by the political, social and economic processes in two geographically distant places – South Africa and Israel – wherein critical events occurred simultaneously.[3]

In 1948, when the State of Israel was established, the first Jewish day school opened its doors in Johannesburg. In that same year in South Africa, the National Party won the general elections and thereafter instituted the apartheid regime and its Christian National Education policy.

During the early 1990s, both nations experienced profound political and social changes. In 1994, South Africa held its first democratic elections and Nelson Mandela was elected president of South Africa. The abolition of apartheid in South Africa meant that the country was moving towards becoming a democratic and multicultural society. This transformed South African society, and the Jewish community had to adapt to a new social and economic order.

In 1993, Israel signed the Oslo Accord which gave Palestinians limited self-rule in Gaza and parts of the West Bank. The strong reactions to the Oslo Accord eventually led to the assassination of the Israeli prime minister, Yitzchak Rabin, on 4 November 1995. His assassin was an Israeli; a right-wing religious student. This gave a clear indication of the deep schism in Israeli society.

It appears, therefore, that in the 1990s, while South Africa was rapidly moving towards democracy and the construction of a national identity (Asmal & James, 2001), Israel was in the midst of both an identity and a national crisis (Rozenthal, 2001; Aviv, 1993). The crux of the Israeli national schism is the question of whether the territories that have been occupied by the Jewish state since the 1967 Six Day War should be permanently ruled by Israel or returned, wholly or in part, to Arab rule in exchange for peace. It is not my intention to debate this issue but rather to understand it as a focal point in the Jewish identity crisis and in the emergence of new fundamentalist-type groups in Israel and in the Jewish Diaspora, including South Africa. However, these processes cannot be understood without first examining the origin and ideology of the Zionist movement and its relation to Judaism; and second, without clarifying the notion of religious fundamentalism or extremism, whose resurgence towards the end of the 20th century has surprised many social

[3] See also Mickelson et al, 2001.

theorists who predicted an opposite movement towards greater secularisation and individualism (Grew, 1997).

Zionism and Judaism

Zionism is a Jewish secular political nationalist movement. It was established in the late 19th century by Theodore Herzl, a Hungarian Jew. The founding congress of the movement took place in Basel, Switzerland in 1897. The Zionists' main argument was that anti-Semitism was the product of the "abnormality" of Jewish life among gentiles and that the existence of a Jewish state, to which all Jews would immigrate, would eliminate hatred towards the Jews and thereby solve the "Jewish problem". The assumption was that once Jews had their own state, they would be able to function as "a nation like all other nations".

Zionism's interpretation of Judaism, Jewish identity and Jewish history has shaped the modern Jewish discourse as a whole and has provided the underlying ideology for the establishment of Israel. It provided Jews with an alternative way of Jewish identity that rebelled against the hegemony of traditional religious authorities. Zionism brought into being a new type of authentic Jew; one who spoke Hebrew and worked the land in Palestine. It rejected Yiddish – the language of the Diaspora – and chose Hebrew as a national language. The young, enthusiastic *Maskilim* (intelligentsia) of the late 19th century – and especially the life-time work of one person, Eliezer Ben Yehuda – started the miraculous revival of the Hebrew language and its transformation into an everyday language. The re-birth of the language corresponded with the re-birth of the nation. In 1905 Ben Yehuda proclaimed:

> Language gives to all beings their own form, it makes them creatures in themselves with their own characteristics and peculiarities. As soon as a community on a particular piece of land speak a particular language, it constitutes a people apart, and the land where that people has settled is the state of that people (Quoted in Dieckhoff, 2003:121).

The Hebrew language helped the Jewish nation to create an "imagined community" based on a sense of common belonging. It was perceived that speaking the same language that was spoken by Moses would further legitimise Zionism. Hebrew also helped to transfer feelings of social togetherness from the religious community to the national one (Dieckhoff, 2003). However, rabbis mostly objected to the secularisation of the Hebrew language on religious and political grounds. Dieckhoff maintains that the rabbis clearly understood that Zionism and Hebrew created an alternative to Jewish identity, which would marginalise religion as the "glue" that ties the community together and substitute it with

culture. Later, some rabbis were able to overcome the perceived contrast between Judaism and Zionism by creating Religious Zionism and its *Mizrachi* movement in 1901, thereby supporting the political but not the cultural goals of Zionism.

By and large most of the Jewish world was non-Zionist or anti-Zionist. Among the latter were members of the *Bund* (Jewish Labour Federation) and other socialist parties, Reform Judaism and Ultra-Orthodox Judaism (Saks, 1998; Patai, 1971). These groups and their rationale for rejecting Zionism will be discussed below:

The social principles of the *Bund* did not favour narrow nationalistic ideals, but rather the worldwide empowerment of the Jewish working class. They also rejected Hebrew and tried to preserve Yiddish as a national language (Sherman, 2000).

Reform Judaism perceives Judaism as a religion, not a nationality. It advocates the integration of Jews into the states and nations where they live. Reform Judaism became popular in the United States and played a central role in the acculturation of Jewish immigrants there. After the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel, their opposition to Zionism turned mostly to support.

The *Ultra-Orthodox* Jews[4] – the *charedim* (literally, "God trembling" or "God fearing") – reject secular Zionism's quest for "normalisation" and maintain that the purpose of the Jews is to be different as Jews were chosen for a special mission in the world. They also believe that Jews can only return to the Land of Israel in the time of redemption when the Messiah will arrive and the Temple will be re-built in Jerusalem.

There are two opposing groups among the *charedim* – the *Chassidim* and the *Mitnagdim*. The *Chassidic* movement originated in the 18th century in Eastern Europe. It was a social movement that rebelled against the elitist religious establishment and its strict attitude towards the law and Torah studies. It emphasised mystical religious expressions and emotional experiences. With the years the *Chassidic* movement has developed its own learning centres, but they continue to keep themselves separate from the secular world. They still adhere to their traditional dress – black coats, black hats, long beards and ear

[4] Ultra Orthodoxy (*charedim*) is a term commonly reserved to those Orthodox Jews who claim not to make any compromises with contemporary secular culture. The *charedim* are subdivided into different groups. As they seek to defend traditional Judaism from erosion they separate themselves from outsiders, especially from secular Jews and prefer to speak Yiddish. The Ultra Orthodox community strives to expand the scope of *Hallacha* to include the public as well as the private realm. It welcomes the imposition of greater restrictions and hardships. It elaborates on details of the law, such as the modesty of women's dress; women are required to wear sleeves which cover the elbows, while the hemline must cover the knees.

locks (*Pe'ot*) – and they organise themselves in communities around their charismatic rabbis. The *Lubavitchers*[5] represent one of the subgroups within the *Chassidic* population.

The second group, the *Mitnagdim* (literally, "the opponents"), were those who opposed the *Chassidim*. They were traditional Jews who maintained the aristocracy of Torah learning. Their leader was the Gaon Elijah from Villna (*Hag'ra*) and most of his followers were from Lithuania.[6]

The *Yeshiva* (institution of higher religious studies) world of the *charedi* groups, both of the *Mitnagdim* and *Chassidim*, had been totally destroyed in Europe during the Holocaust. Many of those who survived settled in Israel, mostly in the ghettos of Mea Sh'arim in Jerusalem and Bnei Brak (near Tel Aviv), and tried to rebuild their *Yeshivot*. Even though they live in Israel, the *charedim* do not recognise the State of Israel since according to their belief, the state can only be legitimised at the time of redemption. However, as citizens of Israel they have a political voice which they have used effectively to secure funds for tens of thousands of seminary students, to exclude them from serving in the army and to preserve their isolation from society (Efron, 2003).

After the Holocaust and in the early years of the State of Israel, Zionism became the consensus ideology. The delegitimisation of Israel by the Arab world, supported by the communist bloc and third world countries, further united Jews around the Zionist idea. The religious population was a minority that mostly looked up to the secular Zionists and admired their idealism and pioneering spirit. As a result, secular Zionism became an ideological alternative to religion. Since the 1970s, with the Westernisation of Israeli society, this approach has changed. The secular, hedonistic lifestyle, materialism, the perceived lack of family values, the high incidence of crime, the liberal sexual behaviour, increased cases of open homosexuality, and mostly the perception that secular Jews betrayed the Zionist ideology, changed the attitudes of the religious community towards secular Israelis and towards the secular expression of Jewishness. Consequently, religious Zionists, from being on the defensive, turned into a community that looked down upon secular values and aggressively criticised those standards. Their goal became to reshape Israeli society and to establish a new level of morality (Sheleg, 2000).

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[5] Lubavitcher was a small town in White Russia where this sect originated. The various *Chassidic* subgroups usually identify themselves by their town or village in pre-Holocaust Europe.

[6] Lithuania was a province of Czarist Russia. It was an independent nation from 1918–1940 until it became reincorporated into the Russian empire in the form of the Soviet Union. Jews from that province were named "*Litvaken*" (Yiddish for Lithuanians).

As a result, a process of political and ideological polarisation began in Israeli society in the 1970s. Whereas the secular public was largely turning left and adopting liberal, democratic and individualist values, the religious public was generally moving to the right towards nationalistic, collectivistic values and religious conservatism with a focus on the settlement of the Land of Israel (Sabar & Mathias, 2003).[7] It is important to note that the meeting point between secular and religious Jews is asymmetrical. The religious Jew, based on a faith view, would like the secular Jew to become religious; while the secular Jew, based on individualism and adopting a liberal and pluralist view, is not concerned how the other lives, as long as it will not impact on his/her secular lifestyle ("live and let live"). Moreover, the dialogue (or rather the two monologues) between the religious Jew and the secular Jew tends to privilege the religious Jew who brings with him/her a closed argument; the secular debater brings with him/her uncertain, unclear Jewish identification (Shamai, 2000; Tsavan, 1999). It is perceived that this absence of a core in the secular Jewish identity has resulted in a counter process in Israel by which secular Jews have turned back to the sources in order to develop a valued secular culture based on Jewish thought, which is not necessarily in the realm of the sacred (Sheleg, 2000; Bekerman & Silverman, 1997).

This political and ideological polarisation was the backdrop to the rise of a fundamentalist-type group within the faction of religious Zionism – *Gush Emunim* (literally, the Bloc of the Faithful) – that changed the face of Israeli politics forever.

Gush Emunim is a minority group even among the religious. Its members live in the settlements that they have established in the West Bank, the Gaza strip and the Golan Heights after the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Recruitment pools for the movement include the religious youth movement *Bnei Akiva*, the religious education system, their network of seminars and learning centres, new immigrants and middle class Israelis with a strong political commitment to an expansive version of Zionism (Lustick, 2003). Their recruits are mostly young, educated and often prosperous people.

Gush Emunim adherents do not reject Zionism, but rather seek to replace the prevailing secular Zionist discourse with a new, religiously grounded messianic Zionist discourse (Sprinzak, 1993). According to them, the Holocaust was an example of God's discipline. On the other hand, the establishment of Israel (1948), the Six Day War (1967) and the Yom Kippur War (1973) showed that God speaks to Israel not only through

[7] Note that in Israel the political "right" and "left" is not always synonymous with the religious "right" and "left".

disaster but also through deliverance. Secular Zionism was perceived as a necessary stage in the redemptive process, but its role was completed with the establishment of the State of Israel. The Six Day War – by which Israel came into possession of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and other core areas of the biblical Land of Israel – awakened in many Jewish hearts the belief that the process of Redemption had begun. The 1973 war, by which Israel was almost defeated by Egypt and Syria on Yom Kippur – the holiest day in the Jewish calendar – was, according to these extremists, a sign from God that the abandonment of the occupied territories will postpone the redemptive process (Lustick, 1993). *Gush Emunim* lost much support after the murder of Yitzhak Rabin, but its members believe that they are the real Jews and the real Zionists (Segev, 2001). Dieckhoff (2003) maintains that the radicalisation of *Gush Emunim* encouraged an opposite trend to the left and gave greater support to the prospect of a Palestinian state adjoining Israel as the best way to keep Israel Zionist. By the 1990s the State of Israel had become polarised between those Jews who prefer to see Israel as a democratic/pluralist nation like any other modern nation, and those who prefer to see Israel as an exclusive Jewish State (The Jewish Agency for Israel, 2003).

The *Ba'alei Teshuva* (literally, "those who return") is another group of religious extremists that was established in Israel after the Six Day War (1967). This was an outreach movement that originated to accommodate new immigrants from the United States who perceived the victory as a miracle that aroused their religious feelings. Some of these immigrants were looking for religious Jewish identity and some were "social misfits" looking for any type of spirituality – a prevalent phenomenon in the America of the "sixties". It was then that some rabbis established the *Ohr Sameach* Yeshiva (religious study centre) and the *Eish Hatorah* Yeshiva in the Old City of Jerusalem to accommodate the needs of these "returnees". These centres still attract many American Jews and substantial funds. After the heavy losses and the trauma of the Yom Kippur War (1973), many Israelis were questioning their own identity. The Zionist agenda was in decline after it was perceived to have achieved its goal of establishing a Jewish state; the Diaspora experience and anti-Semitism were unfamiliar concepts to Israelis. The Israeli-born youth preferred to see themselves as belonging to a nation (Israelis) rather than to a religion (Jews). Moreover, the Israeli army of defence became an army of occupation. The *Ba'alei Teshuva* movements – after the success they had had at converting the American youth in crisis to "authentic" Judaism – were ready to absorb traumatised Israelis and to provide them with "right" and "certain" answers (Sheleg, 2000). *Ohr Sameach* and *Eish Hatorah* later established learning centres throughout the country and outside Israel, including in

South Africa, and aggressively recruited disciples to their *charedi* lifestyle. They therefore became a significant force in the restructuring of the Jewish community schools in Johannesburg – the focus of my inquiry.

Most research on Jewish extremism focuses on Israeli society and culture, but it is assumed that such research is indicative of the Jewish world as a whole (Silberstein, 1993). In contemporary Israel, 78% of the citizens are Jewish ethnically but not religiously.[8] However, Judaism is a way of life for most Israelis who feel a certain nostalgia and respect for the traditional Jewish way of life. It seems that the *charedi* groups depend on this inherent respect for Judaism in their attempt to transform it into active support (Marty and Appleby, 1992). Yet, the *charedim* have many opponents in Israel who perceive them as a tragic aberration of Judaism, far removed from the understanding of the Jewish religion and culture as based on liberal and universal values, such as tolerance and respect for diversity and individuality.

It is observed that conversion to extremism usually results in a personality change, involving the discouragement of critical thinking and the requirement of absolute obedience to group norms. It seems that many new recruits leave their jobs and break with their former social and family ties (Harris, 1999). Furthermore, research has indicated that *Ba'alei Teshuva* tend to be more punctilious in their religious observance than those who have been Orthodox from birth because, having passed from one world to another, they remain continuously aware of the fragile nature of their new lifestyle and are constantly fearing the danger of returning to old habits. In order to eliminate any temptation *Ba'alei Teshuva* prefer to withdraw completely from the surrounding society (Crome, 1993). Crome further maintains that many *Ba'alei Teshuva* take an active part in outreach activities and try to convince others to join, and that they do so partly to convince themselves of the rightness of their views.

Scholars maintain that the phenomenon of *Ba'alei Teshuva* is not only a consequence of social crisis, but is usually motivated by personal crisis in one's secular life (Sheleg, 2000). Sacks (1991), who speaks from an Orthodox Judaism point of view, explains that the *Ba'alei Teshuva* movement is a result of the failure of the secular culture to provide the necessary grounding for human happiness, and for its inability to shape personal identity. He refers to what Emile Durkheim termed *anomie* – the feeling of rootlessness as individuals lose their place in a secure, traditional order. A reaction to that

[8] It is difficult to define who is religious and who is not. Sheleg (2000) based this statistic on the indicator that a religious male is the one who lays *Tefilin* every day and wears a *Yarmulke* permanently.

leads to an intensive search for ethnic or religious roots and to the revival of identities that seem to have been lost in modern society's melting pot. Sacks believes that the Jewish tradition is benefiting from what is known as Hansen's law – *'that the third immigrant generation labours to remember what the second generation laboured to forget'* (1991:5).

The current turn to religion is not only a Jewish phenomenon. Similar processes can be found among Muslims and Christians (Marty and Appleby, 1992). Sacks (2003) sees the turn towards religion as an indirect consequence of globalisation and the "crisis of identity". For him, religion has become humanity's reaction to the uncertainties induced by the new global economy. Sennett (1998) makes an anecdotal connection between the global economy and religious extremism by describing a process that shifted certain individuals towards the extreme right. In his book *The Corrosion of Character*, Sennett follows a group of former IBM programmers in the United States who were retrenched owing to downsizing and restructuring of the company and were trying to make sense of their experiences. Sennett identifies three stages in the programmers' path to recovery. In the first stage the men believed they were the passive victims of the corporation, betrayed by their company. In the second stage they focused on finding external forces to blame. Sennet suggests that the new Jewish president of the company and the Indian peers who were willing to work for less, aroused their resentment of the "others". This propelled some of them to vote for extreme right wing candidates in the 1994 United States elections; candidates whom they would have found absurd in more secure times. In the third stage, the men restored some of their sense of integrity by speaking about what they could and should have done earlier in their careers in order to prevent their present plight. However, the focus on themselves changed their attitude towards the community. The men subsequently lost interest in civic affairs and dropped out of offices they had previously held in the community, such as school board members or town aldermen. At the same time the men pursued their membership in local churches with even greater vigour. They seemed to have benefited from personal contact with the other church members, especially in the fundamentalist and evangelical forms of Christianity that had been sharply on the rise in their part of the country. Sennett concludes this story by remarking that the men's ethical act of taking responsibility for their life histories in the wake of globalisation had a high price, as it led them to turn inwards and towards fundamentalism.

The term fundamentalism is frequently invoked as people search for analogies to explain subgroups within the Jewish religion, such as the *charedi* or the *Gush Emunim* movements, even though this term has Protestant origins (De Ruyter, 2001). There is,

however, no agreement among scholars as to who fundamentalists are and how to identify them (Marty and Appleby, 1992). Some Jewish scholars tend not to use the term, instead refering to these groups as extremists or *charedim*. Most rabbis, likewise, are reluctant to use the term. Jonathan Sacks, the Chief Rabbi of England, puts it this way:

> Of this I am sure: that every Jew, from *Neturei Karta*[9] to the most Reform, is convinced that he or she is a centrist Jew. Wherever a Jew stands in the spectrum of commitment, those to the right of him are the fundamentalists and those to the left of him are the assimilators. By a miracle of cognitive geometry, the midway point between fanaticism and unacceptable compromise always coincides exactly with wherever the individual happens to stand. 'There are' he or she says, 'so few sane Jews left' (1991:143).

My study will use the terms "*charedi*", "religious extremism", "Ultra Orthodox" and "fundamentalism" interchangeably. Regardless of the terminology, I maintain that these groups possess certain characteristics that separate them from modern Orthodoxy. According to Marty and Appleby (1992) and Silberstein (1993), when we speak about the fundamentalist-type groups, we speak about religious groups that usually have the following shared characteristics:[10]

- Fundamentalists reject modern values, such as human rationalism and Western morals, but they enjoy many of its products, such as transportation, telecommunications, electricity and medical science. This kind of attitude sets fundamentalists apart from other religious groups who try to ward off modernism by wrapping themselves in a religious and cultural cocoon, such as the Amish and certain subgroups within the *charedi* movement.
- Fundamentalists aim to redefine the future and to convert others to their worldview. Lustick (1993) therefore identifies fundamentalism as a political force dedicated towards the rapid and comprehensive transformation of society.
- Fundamentalism is seen as a strategy by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or a group. It emerges in response to a crisis that is perceived to threaten this identity; mostly a crisis in the credibility of the faith for the fundamentalists themselves. It is perceived that in the attempt to strengthen their own faith, fundamentalists transform it to something completely different (Hunter, 1993).

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[9] Extreme *charedi* group that resides in Mea Shearim, Jerusalem.

[10] These characteristics are useful as conceptual tools to identify elements of fundamentalism within the different religious groups, rather than as defining features. They should be regarded with caution in the Jewish context.

- Fundamentalist movements rely on charismatic and authoritarian leadership. The fundamentals are taught with great authority; by adhering obediently to them, believers will be able to resist the seductions of the secular world. Fundamentalists believe in personal leadership as opposed to a belief in pluralism and democracy. *'There is only one version of the truth, one leader, one book, one way – no doubt or self criticism, no development, no change'* (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1993:51). Fundamentalist leaders demand respect and unquestioning obedience (De Ruyter, 2001)
- Fundamentalists resist relativism – the notion that no belief is absolutely true – and pluralism – the support for different expressions of belief. They want people to declare themselves and to commit themselves to a particular interpretation of the religion.
- Fundamentalists tend to see history as part of a cosmic pattern. History is the unfolding of the redemption process; it is God's way of communicating with the world.
- Fundamentalists build effective communities, thereby providing a solution to the extreme individualism and uncertainties of modern times. For liberals, these are the "bad" communities where members are drawn together as a result of strong religious authority or manipulation of the quest for identity and emotional support. Nevertheless, these are strong communities with defined borders and a code of behaviour that protects members from contamination by outsiders.
- Fundamentalists see themselves struggling against the "others". These include secular nationalists or the established authority of their own religious community, which they believe has been compromised by non-believers. Fundamentalists also share contempt for all outsiders or "others" (Lazarus-Yafeh, 1993). The source of this contempt is the fundamentalist's feeling of superiority since his/her source of knowledge is based on divine sanction (De Ruyter, 2001; Davis, 2000).

I have argued so far that the hegemony of the Zionist ideology which shaped the Jewish discourse from the end of the 19th century, began to decline towards the end of the 20th century. With its decline, secular Judaism – which is based on secular Zionism – lost its core and thus the glue that holds it together. At the same time, the emergence of Jewish fundamentalist-type groups – either those based on religious Zionism or those based on the Ultra Orthodoxy's rejection of Zionism – have shifted power relations in the Jewish world and have attempted to redefine the meaning of being Jewish. The question is how the Judaism(s)–Zionism debate has impacted on the Jewish community in South Africa. It has

been argued in Chapter 2 that the local interpretation of global processes depends on the community's/institution's history and context. Consequently, every Jewish centre would respond to these processes in a different way. The unique South African context and its interpretation of the global processes is explored in the next section.

The local context – The Jewish community in South Africa

The South African Jewish community was first established when a large number of British settlers arrived in the country in 1820. Another large influx of East European immigrants, the majority from Lithuania, arrived between 1880–1940.[11] Some immigrants arrived in the 1970s, mostly from Israel and from Southern African countries including Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia. At its peak, in the 1970s, the Jewish population in South Africa was estimated at 118,000 and was spread throughout the country. Emigration from South Africa began in the mid-1970s as a result of political uncertainties and continues to this day. The most popular destinations for immigration are Australia (40%); the United States (20%); Israel (15%); and the United Kingdom and Canada (10%). The current Jewish population in South Africa (2003) is estimated at 80,000–85,000, concentrated mainly in Johannesburg (55,000) and Cape Town (18,000) (Saks, 2003). It is considered to be an aging community due to the emigration of mostly young people (DellaPergola & Dubb, 1988).

A 1998 attitudinal survey[12] showed a very well educated community by South African standards. Most held professional and managerial positions. Only about two percent of the sample was employed in manual and unskilled jobs.

The community prides itself on its low assimilation rate[13] and its well-organised community organisations (Kopelowitz, 1997/8; Aschheim, 1970). These include the following:

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) – established in 1903. The SAJBD is the representative body of the community. It acts as the authorised spokesman for the Jewish community in its relations with the government and other ethnic and religious groups, and is mandated to watch over the welfare of the community and to monitor anti-Semitism.

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[11] The Quota Bill of 1930 and the Alien Act of 1937 restricted Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe and later on from Germany (Shain, 2000).
[12] JPR Report (September 1999). *Jews of the New South Africa: Highlights of the 1998 national survey of South African Jews.* Institute for Jewish Policy Research in association with the Kaplan Centre, Report No.3.
[13] Below 10% in 1998 survey, ibid.

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) – established in 1898. The SAZF's role is to promote Zionism and to maintain strong links with Israel.

Other organisations include the South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE); the Federation of Synagogues of South Africa (Orthodox); the Union for Progressive Judaism; the Israel United Appeal and the United Communal Funds (IUA/UCF) – a fund-raising arm of the community that distributes funds to Israel, to the local community and to other Jewish communities around the world; the Union of Jewish Women of South Africa; Jewish Helping Hand and Burial Society (*Chevre Kadisha*); Jewish Communal Services; *Nechama*[14] for the bereaved; Our Parents' Home, and many others. Other organisations such as ORT and *Tikkun*[15] aid the disadvantaged in the broader community.

The imagined community

The Jewish community in Johannesburg is frequently described as a cohesive Zionist community, whose religious affiliation is based on the *Mitnagdim* Orthodox tradition, owing to its overwhelming Lithuanian origins. This prevalent description has silenced most other voices in the community, past and present, such as the voice of the Yiddish-speaking socialist members of the *Bund* who either joined the Communist Party or gave in to the dominant Zionist discourse (Sherman, 2000); the voice of Reform Judaism that tried to modernise *Hallacha*; and the voice of the radicals, sometime atheists, who fought against apartheid and were ostracised by the community.[16]

I will argue that while South African Jewry in the main is still adhering to the traditional narrative of a *Mitnagdim*/Orthodox/Zionist/cohesive community, the meanings of these terms have changed over the years. The objective of the following section is therefore to explore the development of this narrative and to discuss its three ingredients, namely: the community ethnic cohesiveness based on the centrality of the Zionist discourse; the nature of its religiosity; and its elevation of the notion of homogeneity.

[14] Literally mean consolation.
[15] The name *Tikkun* is derived from the religious concept of "*Tikkun Olam*" – mending the world. The organisation was initiated in 1998 by Chief Rabbi Harris and Jewish philanthropists.
[16] There have been recent attempts to give voice to these radicals, see Suttner, 1997; Shain & Mendelsohn, 2000.

Zionism as ethnic identification

The ethnic cohesiveness of the vast majority of Lithuanian Jews was originally centred on Zionism (Shimoni, 1999a). This ethnicity was further promoted in South Africa for the following reasons:

First, the structure of the South African society as a whole, with its segmentation into racial and ethnic groups, encouraged Jews to revitalise their own cultural and ethnic identity, including Zionism as a prominent component thereof (Steinberg, 1989). Thus while in Westernised countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, Jews avoided joining a Zionist movement for fear of "dual loyalty" allegations, in South Africa the loyalty to one *volk* was not only acceptable, but praiseworthy (Campbell, 2000).

Second, the foundations of the Zionist movement in South Africa were laid in 1898, before any other ideology could develop. Consequently, it became the first *de facto* representative institution of the community and hence the most powerful one: *'to be a good Jew in South Africa meant to be a good Zionist'* (Shimoni, 1980:30). The hegemony of the Zionist movement was such that it even coordinated organisations that in other Westernised societies would have functioned as separate bodies, such as the orthodox religious *Mizrachi* movement.

Third, it is suggested that the later arrival of the Reform movement to South Africa contributed to the dominance of the Zionist discourse because Zionism gave the Jewish community an accepted secular alternative to the Orthodox tradition (Simon, 1995).

Fourth, Aschheim (1970) offers an "insurance policy" theory to explain the Zionist hegemony in South Africa. According to this theory, Zionism is a function of the insecurities of living in a potentially anti-Semitic and explosive multiracial society. Zion therefore became a "reserve homeland" for the threatened Jews of South Africa.

The Zionism of the South African Jewish community has its own characteristics. Shimoni (1980) maintains that this Zionist identification did not include a strong personal commitment to settle in Israel – referred to as *Aliyah* (literally, to "ascend" to the land of Israel) – especially because the Jews in South Africa were confident in the continued viability of their Jewish life-style in South Africa. They therefore identified with the notion of "returning to Zion" without regarding it as directly applicable to themselves. *Aliyah* became a significant factor in South African Zionism after the Second World War, but even then it remained modest in scale and mostly corresponded to the political turmoil in South

Africa.[17] Zionist activity's focused mainly on raising funds and supporting the establishment of the Jewish State. Most significantly, the Zionist youth movement, *Habonim*, had a profound effect on the Jewish identity of the South African-born generation, which resulted in the development of Jewish identification determined by Zionism for the second generation of Jewish youth.

The relationship between the State of Israel and South Africa has vacillated through different phases since 1948, which also impacted on the Zionist inclination of the Jewish community.[18] Afrikaners – in spite of strong anti-Semitic attitudes during the first half of the 20th century and their pro-Nazi sentiments (Shain, 2000) – were sympathetic to Zionism and to the Jewish State, based on their Calvinistic genuflection to the Old Testament. The South African government, under Malan and his successors, allowed the Jewish community to support the State of Israel without the fear of being accused of dual loyalty. However, in 1961, Jewish community leaders were concerned when Israel sided with African countries in condemning South Africa's racially discriminatory policies. But in the 1970s, Israel and South Africa – both politically isolated – improved their trade and diplomatic relations, including the selling of weapons. This generated new tensions in the Jewish community, which by then mostly identified itself with the progressive movement and with the government's *verligte* (enlightened) reform (Shimoni, 1988). In 1987 Israel joined the sanctions imposed by European Common Market countries against South Africa while the Jewish community, like many other white South African communities, supported the lifting of sanctions. The post-apartheid South African government has supported Palestinian national aspirations, while retaining reasonable relations with Israel. However, it has not been uncommon for African National Congress (ANC) leaders to express pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli sentiments.[19] The ANC leaders – who naturally focus on the dispossessed and the disadvantaged – maintain close ties with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) leaders and other Arab countries that were hospitable to them during the apartheid era. It is perceived that the Jewish community is paying the price for the contradictory messages delivered by the Israeli diplomacy towards South Africa.[20]

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[17] Larger numbers of immigrants to Israel were registered after the Sharpeville (1960) and Soweto (1976) riots, indicating that South African Jews tend to go to Israel when they feel under threat. Source: Align Statistics – http://www.jewish.org.za/php/3/community.php3?action=present.

[18] For a detailed accounts on the relationship between Israel and South Africa and its impact on the Jewish community see Shimoni, 2003 and Goldberg, 2002.

[19] SA Jews dismayed over Mbeki's pro-Palestinian stance. *SA Jewish Report*, 17–24 November 2000.

[20] Banners, Beatings and Boycotts. *The Jerusalem Report*, online, 12 February 2002.

Zionist hegemony began its decline in the 1970s partially as a result of the embarrassment felt by many South African Jews over the diplomatic and trade relations that existed between the State of Israel and apartheid South Africa. This mostly affected the more liberal-minded young Jews who had become disenchanted with Israel's foreign policies, and by extension with Zionism. At the same time, the Zionist institutional structures were declining. There was an increasing lack of interest in their activities and the South African Jews that left the country seemed to prefer to go to Australia or Canada, rather than to Israel. The Zionist institutions became demoralised, realising that they had failed the test of time. Moreover, the fact that a significant number of Israeli-born Jews left Israel and immigrated to South Africa compounded this disillusionment (ibid).

The immigration of Israeli-born Jews to South Africa began around the 1970s, following the development of trade relationships between the two countries. According to Shimoni (2003) the number of Israelis never exceeded 10,000, but rumours have always exaggerated this figure. By the 1990s, many of these Israelis had left South Africa.

A single study on the topic by Frankental (1999) describes the Israeli experience in Cape Town, which is not dissimilar to the Johannesburg experience. Israelis came to South Africa as individuals. They did not create an "ethnic enclave" in South Africa nor did they establish Israeli institutions. It is perceived that the Israelis were not welcomed as a source of enrichment to a dwindling Jewish community in South Africa, nor were they interested in participating in Jewish community life. According to Frankental, South African Jews perceived Israelis as a subcategory of Jews "other" than themselves, often referred to as "the Israelis". According to her research, Israelis are often perceived in negative stereotypical terms as being loud and pushy, interested only in making a "quick buck", not community minded and caring little about tradition, etc. For the Israelis, South African Jews have also been the "others" mainly because of the difference in traits. For example, Israelis prefer a more informal, honest and straightforward way of interacting with people. Moreover, secular Israelis seem not to have the same respect that South African Jews have for religious institutions, and tend to describe their increased strictness as "religious coercion".

It therefore seems that the hegemony of the Zionist ideology was on the decline in the last two decades of the 20th century. It is perceived that this disillusionment created an ideological void that was filled by religiosity (Shimoni, 2003). The changes in the community's level of religious observance will be explored in the next section.

From "non-observant Orthodoxy" to Ultra Orthodoxy

The religiosity of the vast majority of the community was based on both the Lithuanian *Mitnagdim* Orthodox tradition (that is, opposition to the *Chasidim*) already weakened by secularisation in the Old Country, and on the lax religious expression of the Anglo Jewry who had arrived in South Africa ahead of the Lithuanians. This resulted in a normative mode of religiosity that has been described by the oxymoron "non-observant Orthodoxy" (Hellig, 1984). Non-observant Orthodox Jews respect the *Mitnagdim* tradition even though they do not adhere to its prescriptions. *Shul* (synagogue) attendance and the adherence to specific Jewish rituals provided only a limited measure of religiosity; it was perceived mostly as an occasion for social encounters and for adopting an accepted form of identification. Many Orthodox rabbis came to terms with this phenomenon with the hope that the community would eventually become more observant (Isaacs, 1995). South African Orthodoxy was therefore traditionally perceived more as a form of identification than as a matter of religious observance (Aschheim, 1970).

It seems that religious affiliation was promoted more by family tradition than by any ideological conviction (Rubenstein, 1995). Rubenstein further maintains that the homogeneity of the community resulted in an elevation of communal unity as the supreme ideological value; there is much community pressure for accommodation and civility between religious groupings. This in turn inhibited the flourishing of any creative Jewish thought. Moreover, the Jews in South Africa are uninformed about modern Jewish movements (Hellig, 1984) and have traditionally avoided pursuing serious Jewish studies, hence the paucity of university graduates in Jewish subjects (Harris, 1995).

When Orthodoxy became stricter, most South African Jews were willing to accept the changes without opposition because of the respect they had for this tradition, and probably due to their lack of Jewish knowledge to deliberate and question this shift. The community also perceived the traditional rabbinate as the only rightful source of religious authority. Consequently, the Orthodox rabbinate, in particular the Orthodox Chief Rabbi and the *Beit Din* (the Jewish court), continued to exercise power over a wide range of issues, such as conversion, *kashrut* and synagogue standards.

The Ultra Orthodox and the Reform movements made relatively little headway in the early days of the community.

The Ultra Orthodox was confined to a small splinter group of German immigrants that in the 1930s had established a congregation known as *Adat Yeshuron*, in the Johannesburg suburb of Yeoville. In 1969 a *Kollel* was formed to provide married men

with intensive Torah studies. The name *Kollel* later came to refer to the entire community of Ultra Orthodox Jewish families (Hellig, 1984).

The Reform movement (later known as the Progressive movement) was introduced to South Africa in 1933. From its inception it encountered strong resistance from the Orthodox rabbinate based on the Orthodoxy's conviction that the *Hallacha* cannot be bent (ibid). The only concession ever given to the Reform movement was to allow a Reform Rabbi to sit on the stage alongside other officials at the annual memorial for Holocaust victims, as well as at other non-religious public gatherings (Shimoni, 2003; Saks, 1999). According to a survey in 1974, 77.1% of South African Jewry supported Orthodox synagogues while 16.6% supported Reform temples (Hellig, 1984). Hellig maintains that the Reform movement never developed further in South Africa since the Orthodox establishment allowed for the participation of non-observant Jews who, traditionally, would have been excluded from such synagogues. She further suggests that the broader religious context in South Africa – especially the "state" Reform Church ethic that was puritan and extremely traditional – did not provide a favourable place for the growth of Reform Judaism. Moreover, the rise of Reform Judaism is usually associated with a high level of intermarriage, and South Africa's low assimilation rate negates this necessity.

South African Reform Judaism is a unique phenomenon especially as it was never anti-Zionist and as it adhered to many of the religious rituals; even though Reform Judaism practices the rites of passage differently from the Orthodox. Reform Jews emphasise the equality of all people, regardless of race, sex, creed and financial status, and therefore they adopt the practice of unassigned seats and mixed seating in their temples, in contrast to the separation of men and women at Orthodox synagogues. They are also outward looking and had thus been traditionally involved in philanthropic work for the disadvantaged broader South African community.

From the late 1950s, after the charismatic Reform leader Rabbi Weiler immigrated to Israel, the movement began to decline. It again suffered a series of blows to its morale and membership in the 1980s and 1990s, mostly related to personality issues. Thus, by 1998, there were only ten official Reform congregations in South Africa, three of which were in Johannesburg. It is currently observed that the Reform movement is an aging community that has failed to attract younger members. According to a 1998 national survey, eight percent of Jews in the Johannesburg area still belong to the Reform movement, which seems to have more burial than marriage ceremonies (Saks, 1999).

The relationship between the Reform and the Orthodox communities has remained tense. Disputes have flared up from time to time but have seemingly diminished over the past few years *'with the Orthodox feeling less threatened and the Reform being less militant'* (ibid:72). Recent events, however, point to underlying tensions. In Cape Town, religious leaders avoided attending the 2000 Holocaust Day memorial ceremony as a Reform Rabbi was to be the guest speaker.[21] During that same year, the *SA Jewish Report*, under pressure from the Chief Rabbi, stopped running a weekly column by a journalist who was a member of the Reform movement, because of his harsh criticism of mainstream Orthodoxy and its leaders.[22] The *SA Jewish Report*'s board of directors made it clear that one could only debate Judaism within the discourse of Orthodoxy; and that for the preservation of the unity of the community, different views should not be voiced:

> Allowing for difference of opinion is one thing, but it was never the intention of those who founded the newspaper to provide a platform for regularly attacking Orthodox Jews and Orthodox Judaism. Such a paper, apart from becoming a divisive element, rather than the unifying force it was intended to be, would inevitably be rejected by the mainstream community.[23]

In the 1960s and 1970s – as the more enlightened outward-looking rabbis left South Africa owing to their conviction that to continue living in apartheid South Africa was against their conscience (Shimoni, 2003), and with the resurgence of *Ba'alei Teshuva* movements in the Jewish world – a large number of strictly Orthodox, yeshiva-trained rabbis from overseas arrived in South Africa. It was perceived that most of these rabbis, based on their Ultra Orthodox and non-secular education, tended to be inward-looking and insular. They tended to be concerned only with increased Jewish observance and were detached from any sense of responsibility to the community or wider society. The new rabbis slowly transformed a significant minority of the community through their educational systems, their charisma and their dedication to religious transformation. Some of these rabbis filled positions at a number of mainstream (*Mitnagdim*) synagogues.

The first to arrive were the *Chassidic* Jews. The Lubavitch foundation movement was established in South Africa in 1972 under the control of *Rebbe* Menachem Mendel Schneerson, from his stronghold in Crown Heigths, Brooklyn, New York.[24] The view of

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[21] *SA Jewish Report*, 8 June 2000.
[22] Steven Freedman is arrogant and ill-informed. *SA Jewish Report*, 1–8 September 2000; See also Letters to the Editors. *SA Jewish Report*, 6–13 October 2000.
[23] Paper must reflect Orthodox reality. *SA Jewish Report*, 6–13 October 2000.
[24] The *Rebbe* was laid to rest in June 1994 and is expected to return soon to complete the redemption in his capacity as the messiah (Berger, 2001).

the Lubavitchers is that Judaism involves the totality of the individual. They implemented an effective outreach programme, which attempted to spread the message of *ahavat Israel* – the love of all Jews. Hellig (1984) observes that one of the successes of the Lubavitch movement is its mastery of public relations and the media; a strategy used by many fundamentalist-type groups. They use colourful pamphlets to encourage the performance of *mitzvot* (commandments) and offer many facilities free of charge. They use Yiddish as a medium of communication, they visit the sick regularly and work tirelessly to reach out to all Jews in the community.

In 1986, the Ultra Orthodox *Ba'alei Teshuva* movement – *Ohr Sameach* – established branches in Johannesburg predominantly in the suburb of Glenhazel. *Ohr Sameach* initially catered to young adults by creating a learning centre that encouraged meetings three times a week, held at first in the home of one of the rabbis. The group quickly outgrew the space, its popularity stemming from its ability to establish a trend by which it became not only acceptable but socially advantageous to attend *shiurim* (literally, "lessons") (Kaplan, 1998b). These lectures were delivered by guest speakers from abroad and usually focused on the immediate emotional concerns of the audience, in particular, on psychological issues such as interpersonal skills, relationships, and how to deal with the stresses of modern life.

Ohr Sameach tried to avoid conflicts with various subgroups within the Orthodox community. Yet at the same time it attempted to appeal to as broad a spectrum of Orthodox people as possible. In the 1990s, the organisation established more branches in different suburbs, creating tight religious communities that have become highly influential elements in Johannesburg Jewish life. Furthermore, in 1996 *Aish Hatorah* opened its own branch in Johannesburg, providing more outreach programmes to the community.

The development of the *Ba'alei Teshuva* movement in Johannesburg is connected to a related phenomenon: the growth of the *shtibl* – the small, traditional house of prayer associated with the Eastern European Jews – as an alternative to the large, formal synagogues, which was typical of the British Commonwealth style. Consequently, the big synagogues and the Anglo-Lithuanian tradition were challenged by the proliferations of these small *shtibl*-type congregations. Bernhard, an Orthodox rabbi with strong affiliations to the Lubavitch movement, explains that the advantage of the *shtibl* over the aesthetically pleasing, organised, larger synagogues is their community value: '*Being a smaller congregation, it imparts a greater sensation of belonging than the "Big Shul". There is a distinctive awareness of the individual significance of each person. There is a sense of*

camaraderie, warmth and fellow-feeling' (Bernhard, 1995:79). While in the main the Orthodox establishment welcomed the turn towards religiosity, it objected to the balkanisation of the community, the loss of central control, and the tendency for these *shtibls* to become independent, separatist institutions (Harris, 1999). There was also the possibility of a lack of standards and the danger that they would provide an opportunity for a breakaway from the religious establishment for those members who are contemptuous of it and feel no responsibility towards the larger Jewish community (Bernhard, 1995).

In 1995, Rabbi Bernhard declared that *'virtually every family has been touched by the resurgence of Yidishkayt [the culture that goes with the Yiddish] in South Africa. Everyone knows somebody who is frum [religious]'* (ibid:77). Shimoni (2003) maintains that this move towards greater religiosity should not be exaggerated and that most South African Jews may still be characterised as "non-observant Orthodox". However, the lack of clear consensus and standards by which to measure religiosity, means that both arguments are located in the realm of perception.

The success of the *Ba'alei Teshuva* movement in South Africa is attributed to four main factors:

First, the affinity that the community has to Orthodoxy. Most South African-born Jews have been raised in homes in which there was more sympathy for Orthodoxy than knowledge of it. Thus they were natural candidates for a more intense version of Orthodox Jewish belief and practice (Adar, 1965). Moreover, the Zionist ideology is based on the Jewish tradition; Zionism therefore never rejected Judaism. By and large even non-observant Jews began to conform to the stricter orthodox standards, especially those concerned with various rites of passage and *kashrut*. Shimoni (2003) maintains that this did not take the appearance of a religious "cult" but rather became the norm for the community as a whole. It is perceived that South African parents – even those who practice virtually no Jewish law – accept their children's greater involvement in and allegiance to Orthodoxy (Kaplan, 1998b; Roer-Strier & Sands, 2001).

Second, it is hypothesised that the rapid transformation and the insecurities created by social changes in South Africa after 1994, as well as the increased level of crime, pushed more Jews to escape into the warmth of communal seclusion provided by the religious institutions. They seem to seek the *'spiritual solace and orderly life that comes with submission to the authority of rabbinical mentors and immersion in the all encompassing orthodox code of living'* (Shimoni, 2003:234).

Third, the increase in the level of religious observance in the community went hand in hand with the decrease of the Zionist hegemony, a process discussed earlier in this chapter.

Fourth, while the Ultra Orthodox educational programmes became trendy and popular, alternative scholarly programmes stressing liberal values drew an extremely limited audience. Some researchers tried to explain this phenomenon by looking at the historical and cultural background of the Jewish community. It is perceived that Jewish identity in South Africa was based *'on spontaneous sentiment rather than a deep involvement in religious practice or culture and learning'* (Steinberg, 1989:363). Consequently, it is viewed that the charisma of the speakers, rather than intellectual argumentation, could have had an impact on the community (Kaplan, 1998a). Furthermore, it is perceived that living and being educated under the apartheid regime has trained South African society not to engage in critical thinking processes and to avoid asking too many questions (ibid). Kaplan observes that the creation of an open, democratic order has not changed this mentality but rather initiated a trend among many Jews (and other white groups) to withdraw from general society and to form tighter close-knit subunits. This trend has manifested in the increasing social ghettosation around *shtibls*.

The narrative has so far demonstrated that while Jewish ethnicity based on Zionism was a relatively unifying factor, the perceived unity of the community begun to disperse with the decline of Zionist ideals and organisations and the proliferation of religious activity, coupled with the underlying rivalry between the various splinter groups (Hellig, 1984). Already in the late 1980s there was a clash between those who favoured the continuation of appointing the Chief Rabbi from the *Mitnagdim* tradition and those who wanted a *Rebbe*, who practiced *Chassidism*. The clash was in essence a struggle for control of the community (Kaplan, 1991). Consequently, Kaplan believes that *'the appointment of Chief Rabbi Harris [was] an overwhelming victory for the determination of the majority of the Johannesburg Jewry to maintain the tradition observed from its earlier years'* (1991:252). The appointment of Chief Rabbi Harris, however, has not reversed the transformation of the community towards a more insular, inward-looking and polarised community.

A homogenous community

The third factor that has shaped the character of the Jewish community in South Africa has been its profound pressure to conform (Aschheim, 1970), its inclination to avoid

controversy in the interest of maintaining Jewish unity, and the avoidance of any debate on issues that might come to give Jews a bad name in the eyes of the gentile majority.[25]

The pressure for conformity has been reflected in the official Jewish attitudes towards the National Party and towards those individuals who resisted the apartheid regime.

Most South African Jews came from an environment of oppression in Lithuania and stepped into a society in which their "white" skin colour instantly and automatically made them part of the white minority that ruled over the black majority. Jews accepted these privileges with "both hands" and established themselves in industry, commerce, mining and the professions, fitting well into a comfortable middle class position. The victory of the Afrikaner Nationalists in the 1948 elections was first seen as a threat to the community, based on the Nationalists' inclusion of some Nazi supporters in their ranks, and their record of anti-Semitism, which restricted Jewish immigration in the 1930s and barred Jews from membership in the party's leading Transvaal province (Shimoni, 2003; Shain, 2000). As it turned out the National Party did not adopt an anti-Semitic policy, instead forging a relatively cordial relationship with the Jewish community; albeit with isolated, threatening warnings from government leaders, either out of anger at the anti-apartheid actions of individual Jews, or because of the Israeli vote against South Africa in the United Nations in 1961.[26]

The Jewish community found itself in a dilemma of conscience: should it be loyal to the country that gave them safe haven and prosperity; or should it oppose a system of government that oppressed other people, especially in view of the Jewish history of persecution? The compromise reached by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies – the official body representing the Jewish community – was that Jews as citizens could behave according to their conscience, but that the Board itself would not become involved in the politics of the country (Goldberg, 2002). Shimoni (2003) maintains that deep-seated fears underlay this compromise and that the Jews as a community felt themselves to be hostage to Afrikaner nationalist goodwill. He argues that in this sense the Board of Deputies acted for the benefit of the community whose welfare depended on conformity with the white consensus, and that its actions were '*characteristic of minority group behaviour – a phenomenon of self-preservation, performed at the cost of moral*

[25] Exploration of being Jewish in South Africa. *SA Jewish Report*, 31 January–7 February 2003.
[26] Benjamin Pogrund, A deafening silence, unconscionable or excusable? A look at the actions of the Jewish community in South Africa through the darkest period of apartheid rule. *Ha'aretz* [online] 26 December 2003.

righteousness' (Shimoni, 2003:276).[27] Others argue that Jewish leadership ran scared and that their fears were exaggerated.[28]

The point that I would like to make is concerned with the attitude of the Jewish leadership towards those Jews who stood by their moral conscience and struggled against the apartheid regime. While the vast majority of Jews complied with apartheid (like the rest of the white population) and benefited from it, many white radicals and liberals were Jews (Asmal et al, 2003; Mandela, 1994). The message of the community leaders to those individuals was that they were endangering the community by their anti-government acts. The Board of Deputies and the majority of the community consequently disassociated themselves from these activists, ignored and ostracised them. To be fair, these activists did reject most of the values that the community held dear, and they did not fit into the dominant narrative. They were mostly secular Jews or atheists, socialist, anti-capitalist or anti-Zionist.[29] Subsequently they were often considered as "non-Jewish Jews" who cared for the blacks but not for their own community (Suttner, 1997). It is evident that the establishment did not support liberal thinkers who would not "toe the line" and did not conform to the majority; a practice that, as I will illustrate later, had an impact on the restructuring process.

The case of Claudia Braude demonstrates that the silencing of non-conformists in the community is continuing even after the South African transformation. In 1997 Braude wrote an article criticising the behaviour of Jewish leaders under apartheid. She mentioned in particular Dr Percy Yutar, who was the prosecutor at the trial in which Nelson Mandela was sentenced to life imprisonment, while at the same time being elected head of the United Hebrew Congregation, Johannesburg's group of Orthodox synagogues. The article was not allowed to be published in *Jewish Affairs*, even though Braude herself was on the editorial board of the magazine. She resigned as a result and proceeded to publish her views in the general press; an action that was highly criticised. For Campbell (2000) this is another example of the Board of Deputies' refusal to allow confrontation and open debate even in post-apartheid times. Shimoni, on the other hand, ends the discussion on Braude

[27] In this context it is important to note that Shimoni's book (2003) was commissioned by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies.
[28] Mervyn Smith's presentation at the conference of the Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg, 7 September 2003.
[29] Ibid.

with a patronising statement reflecting the view of those members of the community he claims to have observed at a public meeting:[30]

> In the eyes of the other Jews who were not inclined to be so judgemental, Braude's views, however well intentioned, appeared to be no more than the self righteous harangue of a post apartheid youngster insufficiently mature to appreciate the universal phenomenon of minority group behaviour (Shimoni, 2003:268).

The case of Braude demonstrates that debate could only take place within the defined boundaries of the mainstream community. Braude's case became known simply because she defied the establishment and did not agree to be silenced. For this she was harshly condemned.

It seems that the Jewish community's highest value has been its unity and conformity, which resulted in intolerant behaviour towards those with different or liberal ideas. This was not confined only to the political arena, in which such behaviour may be excused based on never-ending fears of anti-Semitism. As already illustrated in the tension between Reform and Orthodox, the same approach has been used to censor any divergent views within Judaism. It seems that open debate or criticism of the establishment have been curtailed in order not to "divide the community". By silencing dissenting voices the "imagined" cohesiveness of the community has been preserved.

This chapter has so far described the international, ideological and local contexts within which changes in Jewish education can be explained and understood. It demonstrates that the strong Jewish identity with its focus on Zionism, had been shaped by the mostly Lithuanian origins of the community and reinforced by the ideology of apartheid. The latter promoted ethnic and cultural differences, thereby legitimising Jewish separateness. The transition in South Africa set forces in motion that have progressively eroded the unique social structure that had been so successful in artificially maintaining this Jewish identity. At the same time the political and ideological struggles in Israel, which have polarised the Jewish world, further destabilised the Jewish identity of many South African Jews. The dominant discourse of an Orthodox/*Mitnagdim*/Zionist/cohesive community has become infused with different meanings. I doubt whether the *Mitnagdim*/Lithuanian concept is even familiar to many third generation South African born Jews. Expressions of Zionism have become mostly religious rather than secular, and the resurgence of religion has balkanised the community into *shtibls*. *Chassidic* practices and thoughts have permeated the traditional *Mitnagdim* Orthodoxy without the community

[30] Shimoni, 2003:317n73.

at large having enough Jewish knowledge to be aware of the differences. Moreover, the narrative demonstrates that the cohesiveness of the "imagined community" has been maintained mostly by ignoring or silencing different voices – either political or ideological. Consequently, the community has not been exposed to debate and different worldviews, and hence to learning and intellectual stimulation. The emigration of many intellectual and liberal thinkers as a response to the apartheid policies aggravated this situation. South Africa's transformation to democracy has not seemed to open up the community to new possibilities, but has instead made it more inward-looking and insular. The pro-Palestinian attitude of the South African government and its close ties with the Arab world have reinforced this isolation.

It appears therefore that by the end of the 20th century – due to both global and local processes – the identity of the Jewish community in Johannesburg shifted from an identity based on ethnicity to that based on religion. This shift has been facilitated by forces pulling towards the establishment of a homogenous community, which in turn reveals tendencies towards exclusiveness and separateness. The official researcher at the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, an Ultra Orthodox Jew, therefore enthusiastically maintains that:

> Despite ongoing attrition through emigration, which has led to the common perception overseas that the community is one in apparently terminal crisis, in many ways South African Jewry is experiencing *a golden age* in terms of Jewish commitment and involvement. These have been raised to levels seldom equalled and certainly not surpassed by any other Diaspora community (Saks, 2003:10). (My emphasis.)

For liberal thinkers such as Dennis Davis,[31] however, this "golden age" means:

> …*the closure of the Jewish mind*, the creation of "other" within Jewish ranks, a hatred of difference and a consequent rejection of any possible reconciliation between Muslim and Jew, Palestinian and Israeli. Of equal importance, this form of Judaism promotes the group at all costs. The individual is then subsumed under the weight of obligations to the group, Judaism then becomes a custom-made product, and the possibility of individual development implodes (Davis, 2000:209). (My emphasis.)

As the identity of the Jewish community has shifted, the community's educational institutions have played an essential role in both creating and maintaining the shift. The objective of the next section is therefore to analyse how Jewish education in South Africa – and in particular the Jewish community schools – has shaped and has been shaped by the changing political and ideological milieu.

[31] A Professor of Law and a Judge of the High Court in Cape Town.

The education context – the Jewish community schools[32]

The Jewish community schools in South Africa have always been a site of ideological, social and political struggle. The main tension involving the Jewish schools has been their religious/ideological orientation; that is, their position on the Zionist–Judaism debate. Another dilemma has been the schools' position regarding the liberal–community dichotomy – in other words, should the schools encourage pluralism and the notion of "Judaisms" (Kirsch, 2002), or should they perpetuate a single interpretation of Jewish identity? Additional tension has centred around the fundamental issue of faith-based community schools in society; meaning, is it un-democratic and discriminatory to have an exclusive Jewish day school (which is inherently white) and to what extent can a Jewish school become an open school without jeopardising its Jewish ethos? These continue to be core issues that are raised and debated from time to time. Other related tensions have revolved around the funding of the schools and their management. Managing viable community schools is a complex enterprise depending on many factors: some related to the ethos of the schools and their mission, and some related to the economic and political contexts in which the schools operate. The objective of this section, therefore, is to explore these tensions and conflicts and to identify the specific global and local processes to which the schools were reacting. Such an examination, however, cannot begin without a brief chronological overview that follows the development of the South African Board of Jewish Education (the Board) and the growth of the Jewish community schools – the King David (KD) schools.

Historical overview

The Board was established in 1928, on the initiative of the Zionist Federation and the Jewish Board of Deputies.[33] Its main function was to promote and coordinate the fragmented educational provisions that were provided by different institutions all over Southern Africa (including Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo). Jewish education at that time comprised mostly afternoon schooling (*Talmud Torah*) to Jewish children who attended public schools. The objectives of the Board were, *inter alia*, to advise committees and bodies in control of Jewish schools, to secure the adequate inspection of schools, to further

[32] While most of this section is based on articles, reports, newspapers and various publications of the South African Board of Jewish Education (the Board), it is further supplemented by my inside knowledge as a professional officer of the Board and by my access to documentation and people, subject to ethical consideration.

[33] For a study of Jewish education prior to the establishment of the Board, see Kaplan and Robertson (1991).

the training of teachers in Hebrew and religion, and to encourage the preparation of suitable text books. By 1933 most of the Hebrew schools (about 115 schools) were affiliated to the Board (Mink, 1984).

The first Jewish day school, King David Linksfield Primary (KDLP), was established by the Board in 1948 as a "model day school" in order to guide and encourage other bodies to set up similar institutions in which Jewish learning would take place alongside general (secular) studies. There were two underlying principles for the school: its "broadly national-traditional" framework (more about this later); and its commitment to provide a Jewish education to every child that desired it.

The school was established amid opposition from many communal leaders and organisations, as well as from certain religious quarters (Mink, 1984). Most parents opposed such a venture for different reasons: some felt that Jewish studies were old fashioned and obsolete; other feared that the school would turn their children into rabbis. Some opposed the establishment of the schools on practical grounds, namely, the financial burden that the community would have to bear (Hayman, 1988). Some parents were concerned about ghettoisation and segregating children from their gentile neighbours. It was perceived that parents usually preferred to send their children to schools where they could mix with other South Africans in order to facilitate their integration into the broader community (Sherman, 2000). The marketing of the schools had to convince the parents that their children would gain and not lose in a Jewish environment. Eventually, through the work of some dedicated individuals, such as Rabbi Avida-Zlotnik, the first KD school eventually opened in 1948 with seven pupils and ended the year with 26 pupils.[34]

The years from 1948–1980 were years of remarkable expansion for the Board. In 1955 the first high school was established – King David Linksfield High (KDLH). KDLP was later divided into a primary school (grades 4–7) and a junior school (grades 1–3) (KDLJ). A second King David primary school was established in Victory Park (KDVPP) in 1960 to serve the needs of the burgeoning Jewish population in the western and northwestern regions of Johannesburg. A few years later a high school (KDVPH) was established there. In 1982 another primary school, King David Sandton (KDS), was established to accommodate the young Jewish population moving to the northern suburb of Johannesburg, Sandton. Cape Town had its own administration, but later became affiliated to the Board. Durban, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth maintained Jewish day schools affiliated

[34] *History of the SA Board of Jewish Education*, unpublished document, SABJE, 21 March 1991.

to the Board. By 1967, 14 day schools were affiliated to the Board catering for 30% of the Jewish population of school age (5,500 pupils). By 1980 the percentage was estimated at 60%, and by the year 2000 it exceeded 80% (Shimoni, 2003). The expansion of the Jewish day school movement echoes the trend in other countries such as the United States (Wertheimer, 1999; Kasoff, 1993) and the United Kingdom (Miller, 2001).

The success of the Jewish education system in South Africa can, to a significant extent, be regarded as the product of South African society (Steinberg, 1989). A combination of factors contributed to its success, both "push" (away from public education) and "pull" (towards Jewish education) factors. The most significant "pull" factors include the following:

- The destruction of European Jewry and Jewish culture had produced a feeling – sub-conscious or conscious – that all surviving Jewish communities were heirs to those who perished and therefore had a duty to pass on their tradition and heritage (Katz, 1980). At the same time, Jewish identification was enhanced by the creation of the Jewish state (Hayman, 1988). Sherman (2000) further suggests that Israel's military successes and the outburst of anti-Semitism from the Afrikaner government – especially around 1961 when Prime Minister Verwoerd cut off South African Jewish funds to Israel in reprisal for Israel's vote in the UN against South African racism – encouraged the Zionist feelings of otherwise indifferent Jewish parents.
- Uncertainty about the future prompted many South African Jews to consider *aliya* (emigrating to Israel); hence the importance attached to a sound Hebrew-based education for their children.
- The advocates of Jewish day schools argued that only a Jewish atmosphere – where a child can build his/her Jewish identity and experience a complete sense of belonging with no minority inhibitions – could produce a well-balanced and harmonious person (Shimoni, 2003). This resonated well with the deeply rooted ethnic identification of Jews and other ethnic groups in South Africa.
- Some parents were attracted to the sound academic standards and the Jewish day schools' small classes.
- Some parents sent their children to the schools because of social pressure, or simply because it had gradually become fashionable.

The most significant "push" factors include the following:

- The fear of assimilation as well as the wish to avoid anti-Semitic encounters.

- Dissatisfaction with educational standards at government schools.
- As a response to official South African government policies concerning education, specifically the enforcement of the Calvinist doctrine of Christian National Education at public schools.
- The failure of the afternoon schools to attract pupils beyond *Bar/Bat-Mitzvah* age and the perceived lack of commitment to Jewish learning at these institutions. It seems that pupils resented the afternoon schools which they were forced to attend, in addition to normal secular schooling (Casper, 1972).

By the late 1970s and 1980s the KD schools grew in spite of emigration and the dwindling Jewish population. There are a few reasons for that paradoxical growth. First, it became increasingly common for Jewish parents to send their children to a private Jewish day school. Second, demographic changes shifted most Jews from the small communities scattered around South Africa into the cities of Johannesburg and Cape Town, thereby affecting the growth of the Jewish day schools. Third, the community was concerned with the enactment of a National Education Policy Act in 1967, which required that all education in state schools would have a "Christian character".

During these years the Board had to face some fierce competition from private colleges such as Eden and Damelin, which offered (even guaranteed) better academic results in the matriculation examinations (Katz, 1980:420). Over the past two decades these schools have become less attractive to Jewish parents, while the KD schools consistently produced a 100% matriculation pass rate.

With the decline of the Zionist ideology in the late 1970s and the emergence of religious activities, religious schools such as the Zionist-Orthodox Yeshiva College became a viable alternative for some KD parents who wished to have their children educated along stricter orthodox-traditional lines. Yeshiva College differed from the KD schools regarding the extent of the Jewish studies programme. Central to the curriculum are the *Limudei Kodesh* (literally, sacred studies), which are separated from *Limudei Chol* (secular studies). As the *Ba'alei Teshuva* movement grew, it established schools for its communities. The proliferation of these schools perceived to reflect the "balkanisation" of the Jewish community (Rubenstein, 1999). These institutions were established around the Glenhazel area. The Lubavitch *Chassidic* movement established its own school in 1982, known as Torah Academy, which caters for hundreds of pupils. *Sha'arei Torah* is a *charedi* school in

the *Mitnagdim* tradition. It was established in the suburb of Yeoville in 1978 and has served the Ultra Orthodox community. It was taken over by *Ohr Sameach* in 2002.[35] There is less emphasis on secular studies at these schools, while religious studies take priority (Hayman, 1988). By the late 1990s a number of small Ultra Orthodox schools were operating in Johannesburg. The different Jewish views of these schools created a situation where in the year 2000, 60 high school boys were spread among four *charedi* schools. All were reliant on the community for financial support.[36]

In spite of competition from the other religious schools, the early 1990s were years of further expansion for the KD schools. After South Africa's transformation to democracy in 1994, concerns about overcrowding and falling standards in public education pushed white middle-class families to seek alternatives. Subsequently, parents who may not have been especially committed to Jewish education nonetheless saw the Jewish day school as the best option. Table 1 shows that the schools' enrolment peaked in 1996.[37]

Table 1 – Enrolment figures

Year	KDLNS	KDLJ	KDLP	KDLH	KDVPNS	KDVPP	KDVPH	KDS	YFNS[38]	Total
1984	300		922	1136	162	666	542	305		4033
1985	315		840	1126	141	624	582	361		3989
1986	306		757	1090	163	536	572	340		3764
1987	309		721	1162	147	475	559	374		3747
1988	331		763	1214	169	429	564	383		3853
1989	330		872	1218	161	428	532	433		3974
1990	350		908	1268	151	442	518	521		4158
1991	345	443	501	1264	150	451	522	580		4256
1992	353	429	563	1221	145	434	511	630		4286
1993	306	461	552	1071	136	427	405	673		4031
1994	325	474	565	1078	141	422	464	660		4129
1995	352	507	648	1052	132	448	512	670	109	4430
1996	**354**	**492**	**651**	**1110**	**138**	**454**	**545**	**657**	**116**	**4517**
1997	340	452	591	1067	130	455	565	602	106	4308
1998	302	425	575	1037	134	437	558	572	104	4144
1999	293	423	551	1023	130	412	544	519	111	4006
2000	292	427	523	1048	123	396	529	455	116	3909
2001	195	479	511	997	86	422	445	405	114	3654
2002	182	484	485	985	76	374	423	386	120	3515
2003				860		343	386			

[35] New Sha'arei Torah opens its door. *SA Jewish Report*, 15 February 2002.
[36] Chief Rabbi Harris, Task Force Report, the South African Jewish Day School System. Comments by Chief Rabbi Harris. Unpublished letter, 21 October 2002.
[37] See also: Full days schools reflect optimism. *Jewish Times*, 26 January 1996.
[38] Yiddish Folk Nursery School (YFNS) joined the Board in 1994.

But the expansion was not evenly distributed among the different KD schools. There was a noticeable decrease in the number of pupils attending KDVP. The declining numbers were attributed to demographic changes – Victory Park became an aging community and young couples were settling mainly in the Sandton or Linksfied areas. Furthermore, children from KDS – a feeding school for both high schools – preferred to go to Linksfield, owing mostly to the better sporting facilities, the social appeal of a bigger school and accessibility (a highway connects the Linksfield and Sandton areas). In order to have a more balanced distribution of pupils in the high schools, the Board instituted a zoning policy in 1994 whereby children from designated suburbs would have to go to Victory Park High School. This policy was highly contested and was withdrawn after two years. It was perceived that it encroached on parents' freedom of choice, and that the Board made too many exceptions and did not adhere to its own rules.[39]

The growth of the Jewish community schools in the 1990s echoed a global (Tooley, 2001) and a local (South Africa) growth of independent schools, especially religious schools and schools for-profit (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2002; Du Toit, 2002; Henning, 1999). The growth of the latter pointed to the fact that there were many entrepreneurial individuals and corporations interested in making a profit by tapping into the strong quantitative and qualitative demand for education in South Africa (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2003). One such example is Crawford College. The Crawford Colleges boast modern amenities and highly qualified teachers, which they recruited from other schools (including the Jewish day schools) by offering them attractive packages. Moreover, the Crawford schools target specifically Jewish children by offering them Jewish and Hebrew Studies as well as *kosher* food.[40] The College also came to an agreement with Jewish communities in Durban and Pretoria and purchased their schools, which were previously affiliated to the Board.[41]

After 1996 the KD schools began to lose pupils at an average of about four percent of their enrolment a year. The number of Jewish pupils at public schools was significantly reduced and the schools lost this source of new recruits. The KD schools had to face some new and old problems. The old ones included the burden of rising costs and the nature and extent of the Jewish education that the schools should provide. The new problems included the influx of pupils who traditionally would not have attended the Jewish community

[39] Transcript of meeting at King David Primary School, Sandton, 2 May 1995; Letter to parents, 11 September 1995.
[40] Rounded Jewish Education at Crawford College. *SA Jewish Report*, 3–10 July 1999.
[41] Carmel Pretoria drops out of the Jewish Day Schools. *Jewish Times*, 2 December 1994.

schools. Those included pupils with learning disabilities, and those whose families could not afford the fees.

With the political transformation in South Africa, the Board also had to confront some new dilemmas; namely, whether the Jewish day school's policy of admitting only Jews – and hence white students – would be regarded as discriminatory,[42] whether the schools would continue to receive subsidies and what degree of state intervention, if any, there would be on the curriculum and school policy (Rubenstein, 1995). In that transitional context the Board had to resolve its own internal tensions and conflicts while simultaneously adapting to the transformation of South Africa from a divided society to a united and democratic nation. The new South African government was largely antagonistic towards the independent sector on financial, ideological and political grounds (Herman, 2003). The Board therefore had to face its challenges in an environment that was perceived to be increasingly hostile to its existence. The feeling was that the Board, as an independent school, *'will increasingly have to look to itself to provide the resources and services that were hitherto the responsibility of the state'* (Rubenstein, 1999:74).

The Jewish ethos of the KD schools

The central challenge for the Board was to agree on the type, and extent, of Jewish education that the institutions under its control should provide. Should they reflect the Zionist/secular/national aspect of Judaism or should they reflect the Orthodox/religious/ traditional Jewish ethos? The religious diversity of the homes from which pupils are drawn has militated against any clear declaration regarding normative patterns of observance. This lack of clarity has been criticised, with people saying that the schools are not in essence "Jewish schools", but rather "private schools for Jews".

A few dichotomies need to be balanced in order to determine the Jewish ethos of the schools, namely the dichotomies between:

- the secular and the Jewish curriculum;
- the national/secular/Zionist and the traditional/religious aspects within the Jewish curriculum;
- Hebrew as a modern communicative language for the national/Zionist/secular purpose and Hebrew as a sacred language for religious/traditional and ritual purposes; and

[42] Jewish Education in SA under a new government. *Zionist Record*, 24 June 1993.

- Jewish Studies for ethnic identification (history and customs) and Jewish Studies for religious experience (Jewish practices and laws).

Bridging these dichotomies depends on internal and external factors, on financial viability and on a strong management that can hold these tensions in balance. The following sections will elaborate on these issues.

Balancing the dual curriculum

The paradox of the Jewish day schools is that in spite of the rhetorical commitment of parents to Jewish education, achievements in secular studies and sports are the most important criteria by which the schools' success is measured. From the 1980s, however, the increased competition from other religious schools motivated the schools to assess their own religious programme. It was realised that Jewish learning had a low status at the schools and that Hebrew and Jewish Studies teachers were demoralised, feeling that their contributions were not appreciated. It seemed that general teachers *'looked down upon their colleagues in the Jewish field and upon Judaism. One snide remark on the part of a good general teacher can wipe out a year's work'*.[43]

In order to bridge this dichotomy the Board decided in the 1980s that *'general teachers must be Jewishly educated … they must be invested in … they must understand what Judaism is all about, and what the Jewish school stands for'*.[44] Subsequently, many general teachers were reskilled in content and teaching techniques for the integration of Jewish-related topics into the general curriculum.[45]

Still, secular subjects are paramount in the curriculum at the KD schools, while Hebrew language and Jewish Studies fit into the general timetable without occupying a specified portion of the day. Out of an average of 40 teaching periods a week in the primary schools, about 10–12 periods (each of 30–35 minutes' duration) are dedicated to Jewish subjects. In the more religious schools, such as Yeshiva College or Sha'arei Torah, considerably more time is dedicated to Jewish Studies, particularly to the more traditional kind, namely *Torah*,[46] *Mishna*,[47] *Gemara*[48] and *dinim*.[49] At these schools there is a clear

[43] A short summary of the proceedings of a seminar for lay leaders and professionals of the SABJE, Feb 1983. Unpublished document compiled by Mazabow and Isserow.
[44] ibid.
[45] Hoffman, A.D. Report on Consultation to South African Board of Jewish Education, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem. November 11–19, 1983.
[46] A term applied both to the entire corpus of sacred literature and to the first section of the Hebrew bible, that is the *Chummash* or the "five books of Moses".

separation between the Jewish, *Limudei Kodesh*, and the secular, *Limudei Chol*, subjects. There are usually two principals, each responsible for one part of the dual curriculum. At the KD schools there is one principal, while the Head of Hebrew occupies a deputy or vice-principal role. Jewish Studies generally falls under the auspices of the Hebrew department at the primary schools, but functions as an independent sector at the high schools.

Balancing the Jewish ethos

As mentioned earlier the Board was formed on the initiative of the Zionist Federation and the Jewish Board of Deputies. From its inception Jewish education was therefore not conceived purely as a function of the synagogue, but was aimed rather at integrating Zionism with the traditional mode of Jewish identity. This reflected the community's normative mode of ethnic identification as described earlier. Achieving the balance was, however, a subject of sometimes-heated controversy. The *Mizrachi* (the religious Zionist movement) demanded a full commitment to Orthodox observance and the total exclusion of Progressive Judaism's (Reform) schools. It also rejected the superficial religious content and the lax approach to Orthodox observance at the Board schools. Zionist members on the Board wanted to include all those who desired a Jewish education. Undoubtedly, the underlying debate was around the question of "Who is a Jew?". In those early idealistic years preceding the creation of the State of Israel, the Zionist members of the Board wished to emulate the Zionist dream of the return of all Jews:

> My difficulty is that [the strictly traditional-national formula] excludes some Jews and the Board of Education is a board of education for the whole of South African Jewry, and I am troubled because I would like to know what would be the consequences if similar policies on a similar line were adopted in other fields of activity; if we Zionists, for instance, excluded Jews who are not religious Jews, from Palestine? Should we insist that Jewish life in Palestine be built only on the traditional way, or do we say to ourselves that all Jews must come to Palestine, whether they be the left or the right, religious or irreligious, whatever they may be? As long as they say that they are Jews they must come to Palestine, and the Zionist Organisation follows that in the Diaspora. The Board of Deputies represents and embraces all Jews in this country. It is not going to say that this is a "kosher" Jew and this is not a "kosher" Jew. You must not allow yourselves … to exclude even ten Jews, because they are still Jews … it is no use Rabbi … saying that members of the Reform congregation are not Jews. They are Jews.[50]

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[47] The Oral Law compilation dated approximately 200CE, which serves as the foundation text for Talmudic law and tradition.
[48] The usual designation for the commentary and discussions on the *Mishna*. The *Mishna* together with the *Gemara* make up the *Talmud*; that is, the collected teachings of the major Jewish scholars who flourished between 200 and 500CE.
[49] Religious laws.
[50] Minutes of the fourth session of the 7th national conference of the SA Board of Jewish Education held on Sunday evening, 8 p.m., 4 March 1945.

A compromised formula was reached on the 7th conference of the Board in 1945 between the proponents of "strict traditional-national" (meaning Orthodox-Zionist) education on the one hand, and of a laxer and more secularised national (Zionist) outlook on the other. It was decided that the Board would promote and coordinate *'Jewish education based on broadly national traditional lines, it being understood, however, that the Board will render educational services to any institution which requires and applies for such service'*.[51]

This compromised formula did not satisfy the needs of the leaders of *Mizrachi* who had unsuccessfully fought for the wording to be "*strict* national traditional lines" but they had succeeded in ensuring that Reform Judaism would have no voice on the Board of Education or in the formulation of the curriculum. In 1952 the *Mizrachi* movement, as mentioned earlier, established its own school – later known as the Yeshivah College campus. Significantly, even though the *Mizrachi* movement did not consider the community school adequate in a religious sense and subsequently opened its own school, it did not abdicate its role as the guardian of the Orthodox-religion component of education at the Jewish community schools and still retained its voting power on the Board.

The formula of *'Jewish education based on broadly national traditional lines'* was the brainchild of Rabbi Isaac Goss, the Board director and intellectual mentor from 1949 to the 1970s, who managed to hold the diversity in balance. Thus the "traditional" facet of the formula aimed to expose pupils to a modicum of observance and knowledge of basic texts, concepts, rituals and values of Orthodox Judaism, while the "national" facet aimed to foster identification with the Jewish national revival, epitomised by the Zionist movement and Israel. The adoption of the adjective "broadly" instead of "strictly" signified a tolerant and uncoercive attitude towards the question of actual observance, thereby reflecting recognition of the rather lax mode of observance in most pupils' homes and the South African Jews' normative code of identity.

Accepting the compromised formula did not put an end to the ideological disagreements amongst the members of the Board, which was exacerbated by the clash of personalities among the leadership. For this reason the Board invited Professor Zvi Adar, a notable educationalist at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, to study and assess the Jewish education provided by the Board, to identify its problems and to suggest solutions (Katz, 1980). Adar was a pure educationalist and was not interested in politics. He was

[51] Ibid.

therefore highly critical of the tensions within the Board, and the exclusion of the Reform movement. He argued that this meaningless and arid so-called ideological struggle had impeded educational work. Adar also pointed to the inherent contradictions in the national-traditional formula and questioned its achievements. The report was not welcomed by most of the new rabbis who began arriving in the country at that time, demanding that the schools become more religious. It was not published in South Africa and was not open to public scrutiny (Katz, 1980) even though many of its recommendations were followed by the Board. Moreover, the report was written in Hebrew and therefore had a limited readership anyway.

In the 1980s local educationalists continued to debate whether the national-traditional formula was still suitable or representative of the community. This was expressed in an address to community leaders by a principal of the Jewish day school in Cape Town:

> This question of definition and application is thrown into sharp focus when we consider that the bulk of our community are neither national – witness the exodus of most émigrés to Diaspora countries rather than to Israel, neither they are traditional – our empty synagogues testify to that … (Kaplinsky, 1987:11).

While the debate continued it is safe to say that at least until the late 1980s the Zionist/national/secular ingredient of Jewish education played a formative role in developing the Jewish ethos of the schools. As mentioned earlier, this was reinforced by South African society, which fostered and legitimised a Zionist mode of Jewish identity.

During this time, the Orthodox rabbinate consistently expressed its concerns about the shortcomings in the religious character of the schools. The main issue was whether the schools should mirror the normative behaviour of society, or assume the role of challenging society. For the rabbinical establishment the answer was clear:

> The school must adopt an active and constructive role of teaching, of seeking to change and improve, of raising standards … therefore … we must give it to [the pupil] even if his parents cannot or will not give it to him (Casper, 1972:186–187).

> All too frequently one meets the absurd fear lest "too intensive" a Jewish education will make the pupils "too Jewish". This is a reflection of a wide-spread desire to keep the community going along an even, mid-way, course, shunning extremes, having a regular nodding-acquaintance with religious institutions but careful not to take them too seriously except maybe occasionally. This is the "status quo" which many would like to see perpetuated. But this cannot be (ibid:194).

The Board continued to resist the application of more Orthodox norms and practices and insisted on continuing with its more liberal approach. It advocated the notion that the

schools meant to accommodate children *'representing all sides and degrees of Judaism, from traditionally orthodox families and Reform, from Zionist and Jewish-culture-orientated units as well as those from homes with no Jewish commitment at all'*. It is therefore necessary for the Jewish schools to be democratic, *'otherwise anger and resentment would flow from any dogmatic statements or actions'* (Sarzin, 1982:32). A flexible attitude therefore prevailed in the Jewish community schools, despite the fact that official religious ethos was that of Orthodox Judaism (Steinberg, 1989:371).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s the status quo had begun to shift as the community began turning towards greater religiosity, as well as with the appearance of charismatic rabbis and competition from other religious schools. The Board gave in to pressure to reinforce the traditional ingredient of the ethos. In the inner circles it was observed that the then Director of the Board, Mr Zimmerman, an ardent Zionist, was constantly "looking over his right shoulder".

In 1995 the designated new Director of the Board, Rabbi Rubenstein, still repeated the "broadly national-traditional" credo as uniquely suited to the values and perspectives of South African Jewry. Nonetheless, he argued that the schools perpetuated *'a strong uncomplicated Jewish identity, but little content knowledge'* (Rubenstien, 1995:55). Rubenstein observed that students usually cooperated and adhered to the Jewish-practice dimension of the daily routine, and thus they mirrored the tolerance and the respect that the Jewish community held for Orthodox Judaism. He expressed the need to re-evaluate the Jewish Studies curriculum, but complained that the headmasters of the schools, who did not have a sense of crisis in that area, received this suggestion with scepticism. He further argued that the transformation of South African society after 1994 would change the forces in society that had been so successful in artificially maintaining Jewish identity. He predicted an increasing pressure to conform to an overarching South African identity, and a delegitimisation of primary allegiance to an ethnic-national group. Energised by the euphoria of the 1994 election Rubenstein urged for a broadening of the credo in order to accommodate those marginal Jews who were active in the struggle against apartheid and had been "rediscovered" by the community. In a frank comment Rubenstein conceded that:

> It is clearly in the interests of the Jewish establishments to acknowledge as Jews those who are now in a position of authority, power or favour owing to their participation and sacrifice in the years of the "struggle" – as much as it was in its interests to distance itself from them during the years of apartheid. It is interesting to speculate as to whether these high profile Jews, who will increasingly be co-opted by the community, will ultimately have the effect of changing the generally held conception of what a Jew is, or more importantly, what he does Jewishly. The community could be nurturing new Jewish role models, which stress

> human rights and morality – with weak, if any, ethnic religious roots – and primarily South African orientation (Rubenstein, 1995:57).

While attempting to reinforce the traditional ingredient of the ethos, Rabbi Rubenstein reaffirmed the role of the Jewish community schools in ensuring that all the Jews of South Africa – those who were moving towards stronger Jewish commitment as well as those slowly drifting in the opposite direction – *'remain at the centre of things, offering a comfortable home to as broad a range of children as possible'* (1999:76).

At the same time the Chief Rabbi continued to express his dissatisfaction with the level of Judaism practiced at the schools. He maintained that the schools were not achieving their goal of instilling the "national-traditional" ethos, and blamed this failure mostly on the families:

> The key failure rests with the motives of the parents. The axiom that Jewish parents send their Jewish children to Jewish schools to obtain a sound Jewish education is simply untrue. The real reasons for their choice revolve around ethnicity – to mix with fellow Jewish children; fear – to avoid anti-Semitism; and secular educational ambitions – to attain university entrance; but not – please not – that their children should be given a sound Jewish education! (Harris, 1995:51).

The narrative so far has demonstrated that while the national/secular/Zionist ingredient of the Jewish ethos of the schools was predominant until the 1980s, in the 1990s the balance shifted towards the traditional/religious ingredient of Jewish education. South Africa's transformation to democracy and its search for a national identity have produced two conflicting forces in the Jewish community: one pulling towards democracy by broadening the community of the Jewish schools to include Jews that have been marginalised before owing to their liberal and anti-apartheid stance; and another contrary force pushing towards ethnicity and exclusivity and towards a stricter expression of Jewishness in the schools.

This ideological struggle over the function and type of Jewish education found its practical expression in the syllabus and teaching styles of two subjects: Hebrew and Jewish Studies – that is, between Hebraic education and Judaic education. Each subject is, however, imbued with tensions and conflicts, as the following sections will demonstrate.

Balancing the Hebrew curriculum[52]

As alluded to earlier, Zionism was defined, to a large extent, in linguistic terms through the revival and transformation of Hebrew from a written to a vernacular language (Dieckhoff, 2003; Shohamy, 1999). Hebrew was therefore a symbol of the new Jewish identity. It was believed that Hebrew would unify and standardise all segments of Jews under one common roof, with one common identity. Hebrew language nowadays is perceived to be an indispensable key to understanding and appreciating Israeli society and culture. Moreover, to know Hebrew is to enjoy direct access to the Jewish culture, since the Bible and the works that followed – the *Talmud* and the *Mishna* – are written mostly in Hebrew.

Yet the application of language identity manifested itself differently in Israel and in the Diaspora. While in Israel Hebrew has become the hallmark of Israeli identity, in the Diaspora, the role of Jewish language in maintaining identity is minimal and decreasing rapidly (Shoamy, 1999). It is English rather than Hebrew that emerged as the *lingua franca* of the Jews towards the end of the 20th century. It is perceived that most Jews in the Diaspora maintain their identity without maintaining a Jewish language and that Hebrew has become only one symbol of identity along with other symbols such as education, affiliation to a synagogue, religious observance, etc. (ibid). This phenomenon occurred despite efforts to make Hebrew a language of communication and despite the fact that the teaching of Hebrew was considered as the *raison d'etre* of the Jewish day schools and the "nerve centre" of Jewish learning (Goss, 1964; 1985). Five decades after the establishment of Israel, many Hebrew schools have abandoned their commitment to the teaching of Hebrew. Teaching Hebrew in the Diaspora has been regarded as a '*dismal failure*' (Breakstone, 2002:9).

To explain this phenomenon Shohamy (1999) differentiates between contextual and pedagogical factors. While the quality of the pedagogy is very important to the success of learning language, the context may override or affect pedagogical factors. It is often believed that while it is possible to change the pedagogical factors there is little that can be done to change the context. Among the contextual factors Shohamy includes the relation to Israel as paramount. She maintains that the adoption of Hebrew as the language to be taught in Jewish schools in the Diaspora was motivated to a large extent by identification

[52] While this section is based on documentation as much as possible, it is also based on my intimate knowledge of the topic as I worked in managerial positions for the Department of Hebrew Studies at the Board from 1993 and headed it from 1998 to 2001. During that time I conducted conversations with experts worldwide and attended workshops on the topic of Hebrew teaching. Some of the information was either not documented or the documentation was not available while writing this dissertation.

with Zionism, reflecting the centrality of Israel within Jewish communities in the Diaspora. While the relationship between Israel and Diaspora communities was close at the time of the establishment of the State, this is changing drastically. This change is clearly reflected by the loss of the centrality of the Hebrew language as a symbol of Jewish identity. At the same time the failure of most children to acquire even minimal fluency in the language contributes to growing disappointment and frustration among parents and children. Shohamy argues that these feelings must undoubtedly impinge upon pupils' self-regard and confidence as learners, their motivation to study additional languages, their perspectives on Jewish Studies, and their general attitude towards the Hebrew language, and thus towards Zionism.

The history of the KD schools exposes a similar struggle and failure to make Hebrew the "nerve centre" of Jewish education. Based on the Zionist orientation of the schools, Hebrew was a compulsory subject at KD since its inception, and pupils were expected to choose Hebrew as a matric subject. Problems arose in the high schools when some pupils refused to do this. These were often pupils who had moved from public schools to the Jewish day schools and therefore had no background in Hebrew, or those pupils who struggled academically and were in the remedial or special groups. It was, however, not uncommon for bright pupils to fail Hebrew intentionally so as to be allowed to drop the subject in matric. Although the figures vary, Mink (1984) reported that in the early 1980s already 25% of pupils did not study Hebrew at matriculation level. By the late 1990s the number of dropouts in Hebrew had increased to about half. The problem that the Board faced was what to do with pupils who refused to take Hebrew for matric. The decision as to whether a pupil could drop the subject was in the hands of the school and the Board and it often depended on the personalities and power of those involved. Subsequently, some pupils had to leave the school, some were forced to continue with Hebrew, while others managed to stay on at the schools and to take another subject for the matriculation examination. This resulted in a loss of income for the schools, the loss of good pupils and growing antagonism towards Hebrew as a subject.

Until the 1990s, the refusal of the National Party to allow Jewish Studies to become a matric subject helped Hebrew to retain its privileged position (more about that later). But once Jewish Studies was recognised as a matric subject (in 1994) it became a viable alternative. Still, it was up to the school and the Director of the Board as to whether a pupil would be allowed to drop Hebrew. The Hebrew department was keen to keep the stronger pupils who could achieve distinctions in the matric exam, while it was willing to allow the

weak and difficult pupils to take Jewish Studies for matric. At the same time there was pressure from various stakeholders to give pupils a free choice of subjects. This attempt at free choice, however, failed for two main reasons: first there was a fear that making Hebrew optional would eventually marginalise the language as fewer pupils would opt to study it for matric,[53] and second, it was perceived that there were still enough experienced Hebrew teachers who could teach at matric level but very few Jewish Studies teachers who could prepare pupils to take the final exam.

The Hebrew curriculum at KD schools attempts to represent both the national and traditional ingredients of the Jewish curriculum. The curriculum therefore includes the teaching of Hebrew as a modern communicative language as well as the teaching of the Bible, prayers and other Jewish texts. For this reason it was regarded as a *'compromising syllabus'* (Goss, undated:27). It was, however, perceived that the Hebrew curriculum was biased towards the Zionist/national ethos:

> The dictate of Rabbi Goss [Director of the Board from the 1940s to the 1970s] determined that there was to be only Hebrew with a Zionist slant in South Africa's Jewish day schools. Indeed, it often seemed to members of my generation that learning modern Hebrew was more important than studying our scriptural and liturgical heritage (Sherman, 2000:35).

A practical expression of the importance of modern communicative Hebrew was the introduction in 1963 of an annual *Ulpan*[54], whereby Grade 10 pupils were sent to Israel on an intensive three-month Hebrew Studies course, supplemented by educational tours and work on a *kibbutz*. The *Ulpan* programme had two major drawbacks: one was the escalating costs which excluded those pupils who could not afford the payment; and the second was the lack of agreement regarding the level of religious observance on this programme, which was perceived by the religious establishment as being too secular (Casper, 1972). The argument was whether pupils should experience religious observance in Israel or rather experience the secular/Zionist Israel – Israel as a modern country.

Hebrew and Zionism were also inculcated in an informal way through the celebration of Jewish festivals. This was mostly the role of the Hebrew Department, which gave much emphasis to national milestones such as Israel Independence Day, and less emphasis to minor Orthodox festivals.

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[53] This was the case at other Jewish day schools. Once Hebrew became optional very few pupils chose it as a matric subject.

[54] An immersion programme in Hebrew designated for new immigrants in Israel. In South Africa the word *Ulpan* describes a programme for learning communicative modern Hebrew.

A major concern for the Board was the recruitment and training of Hebrew teachers, as well as their level of religious observance. There were three main sources of teachers with most being the product of the local seminary. The Board established a seminary in 1944 in order to train Hebrew, and later (mid 1980s) Jewish Studies, teachers for the schools. The three-year programme was recognised by the Israeli Ministry of Education and by the South African Department of Education. The graduates were either South African or Israeli-born women who happened to reside in South Africa. The seminary was, however, officially closed in 1997 owing to a paucity of students and a shortage of finances.[55] At the time of its closure the seminary still continued to train Jewish Studies teachers, but it was housed at the pedagogic centre adjacent to the Board's offices. Later on, in 1999, another course for Hebrew teachers was initiated. This was an abridged two-year programme, and the students were all Israeli women. By that time there were new regulations in South Africa with regard to teachers' qualifications and the Board was unable to receive recognition for the course.[56]

The second source of teachers was from among the *shlichim* (emissaries) from Israel. With the chronic shortage of Hebrew teachers and the problem with finding local expertise especially to run Hebrew departments at the high schools, the Board tended to bring in senior teachers from Israel. These *shlichim* had to meet three basic requirements: they had to be observant; Hebrew speaking; and qualified teachers – of any subject, not necessarily of Hebrew (Sherman, 2000). There were a few drawbacks with this approach. First, the teachers came for a short period of three to four years and they were usually not qualified to teach Hebrew as a foreign language. As soon as they adjusted to the South African milieu they had to return to Israel, thereby breaking continuity (Mink, 1984). Second, the declining value of the rand made this practice expensive. Third, South Africa was not an attractive destination for top Israeli educators who preferred less turbulent Western countries.[57] I think it is safe to say that since 1990 there have been no Israeli *shlichim* from Israel teaching Hebrew at the KD schools.

The third source of teachers was the graduates of the Hebrew departments at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and the University of South Africa (UNISA). However, both these departments closed in the 1990s, and another potential source of teachers dried up.

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[55] SABJE, Twenty Fifth National Conference, 7– 8 March 1998.
[56] The South African Council of Educators, SACE Act, 2000 (Act 31 of 2000).
[57] *Jewish Education in South Africa, Proposal to joint programme for Jewish educators – World Zionist Organisation.* Document dated 26 August 1986.

From the 1990s the profession was therefore depleted, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Furthermore, the shortage of Hebrew teachers is a global phenomenon and Australian Jewish day schools have been known to approach Hebrew and Jewish Studies teachers in South Africa with an offer of moving to their country.

The religious observance of the teachers was another bone of contention between the liberal and conservative voices in the community. From the beginning the *Mizrachi* leaders demanded that the teachers and educationalists who taught Jewish education should be religious men. It was perceived that religious observance should be taught by example, and that little value could be achieved *'by insisting upon an observance which the pupils know is not shared by the teachers and principals and guides'* (Casper, 1972:195). The demand was opposed by the Zionist leaders (Shimoni, 2003). The Board eventually decided that *'as long as [the Hebrew teachers] are not anti-religious they need not necessarily be observant'* (Casper, 1972:195). It was perceived that progress in Jewish education at that stage would be achieved by concentrating on raising the qualitative and pedagogical skills of the teachers rather than by indulgence in *'barren controversy'* about their level of observance (Goss, undated:27). This debate continued, but for practical reasons the seminary and the schools had to accept non-observant candidates.

In the late 1990s it became apparent that KD graduates were not Zionistically inclined, and the Hebrew Department was blamed for this perceived failure. The Chief Rabbi pointed to the Israeli teachers for the failure of the schools to instil a national-traditional ethos:

> Yet Israeli teachers, mostly *yordim*,[58] are not in a position to advocate positive Zionism, let alone *aliya*. Nor can a traditional worldview or Jewish lifestyle be transmitted by teachers with no personal predilection or association with them (Harris, 1995:51).

The Director of the Board, adopting a pragmatic approach, was concerned that this supply of teachers would be threatened with the return of this population to Israel (Rubenstein, 1999).

To sum up, it is clear that the Jewish day schools in their first 40–50 years of existence stressed Hebrew language and Israeli-orientated subject matter, thereby emphasising the Zionist/secular/national ingredient of the Jewish ethos. Despite huge efforts, the success of these programmes has been debateable. A parents' questionnaire administrated by the PTA of KDVPPS concluded that too many hours were dedicated to

[58] An outdated term used to describe those Israelis that left Israel with a clear undertone of betrayal of the Zionist dream, placing personal, selfish needs above national loyalty and higher values.

Hebrew and prayers, which the parents regarded as one of the least important subjects.[59] Yet in a meeting at the high school parents expressed their wish to continue with Hebrew as long as it became more communicative.[60] It seems that Hebrew has maintained some status as the "imagined community" for South African parents in rhetorical rather than practical terms, indicating their continued loyalty to the Zionist ideology. At the same time, the pupils were perceived to have remained comparatively ignorant of the religious aspects of Jewish life (Steinberg, 1989). This criticism was voiced regularly at conferences of the Board.[61] In the 1990s, however, with the community turning towards greater religiosity and the South African government shifting its emphasis from ethnicity to multiculturalism, the status of Hebrew Studies began to decline while that of Jewish Studies improved.

Balancing the Jewish Studies curriculum

Jewish Studies as a subject was introduced in 1975, comprising Jewish history, laws and customs, Jewish thought, the history of Israel and *Mishna*. The advantage of Jewish Studies was that it was taught in English; however, the subject was also imbued with contradictions and tensions.

The first issue was the status of the subject within the schools. Jewish Studies did not achieve recognition as a valid matriculation subject until 1994, despite frequent representations to the provincial authorities and the Joint Matriculation Board in this regard.[62] This led to a number of results. Some pupils related to Jewish Studies as an impractical extra burden while others developed expectations that it be an informal, "inspirational" subject – since it would not be formally tested. It appeared that pupils became progressively less interested in Jewish Studies as they "moved up" into and through their high school years.[63] Moreover, much of the reputation of the KD schools rested on its perceived ability to get "results" from students as far as matriculation grades and university entrance were concerned. The matriculation exam functioned, among other things, as an organiser of status and hierarchy within the high schools. The Hebrew

[59] King David VP Primary School, *School Survey*, April 2001.
[60] I observed that meeting at KDVPH as a parent, yet cannot recall the date.
[61] Saron, G. The struggle over 'Religion' in South African Jewish Education. *The Federation Chronicle*, Rosh Hashanah, 5741(1980). 14-15; 27-29.
[62] According to the ex-Director of the Board, Mr Zimmerman, the government excuse was that if they were to agree with this request, '*they would have to do the same for the host of other ethnic groups*'. Quoted in Jewish Education in SA under a new government. *Zionist Record*, 24 June 1993.
[63] Dr Rosenak, M. Reflection on my visit to Johannesburg on behalf of the SA Board of Jewish Education. Unpublished document, June 1982; Dr Dawn Butler (assisted by Prof. Pam Christie), Survey of Jewish Studies at King David Schools, November 1994.

departments at the high schools, being responsible for a matric subject, held themselves somewhat apart from the Jewish Studies departments. The lack of contact between the Hebrew and the Jewish Studies departments was a source of concern in the 1990s.[64] The separation was explained by the composition of the teachers, and by the reluctance of the Hebrew departments to relinquish their status:

> While the Jewish Studies department is manned almost exclusively by native-born South Africans who represent various shades of religious observance, including some "born again" Jews, the Hebrew staff, on the other hand, is constituted by entirely different "types": Mostly Israeli-born women with no particularly traditional backgrounds. The members of the two groups, then, would not "naturally" interact. To this may be added the fact that the Hebrew department prepares students for a matric exam well into Grade 12, while Jewish studies instruction stops after Grade 11 and in 1992 was not directed to any matric exam. This would seem to lend the Hebrew department at least some status, a commodity which one would not expect them to wish to share too readily.[65]

The second issue was the content of the Jewish Studies curriculum and the recruitment of suitable teachers to deliver the national-traditional ethos. Initially, the Jewish Studies curriculum was perceived to be too secular in its approach (Steinberg, 1989). Teachers were criticised for using an "objective" and almost totally informative approach to Jewish teaching, which functioned mainly to "cover" the material. The very normative approach to "tradition" was perceived to add a further element of objectification:

> "Judaism says" becomes an opening phrase for the imparting of objective information which is not exposed to serious questioning.[66]

By the 1980s Jewish Studies at both high schools was perceived to be in a state of crisis with regard to syllabus, available materials and teaching.[67] The imparting of Jewish knowledge was described as *'a casual affair'*.[68]

To complement formal Jewish education the Board introduced an Informal Jewish Education division. In 1986 the division introduced an encounter programme whose objective was to expose KD students to "fun Judaism" (Shimoni, 2003). The Informal Education division emphasised the effective experience of Judaism, that is, the observance of *mitzvot* (commandments) and *dinim* (laws), especially *Shabbat*. The programme was supervised by young Orthodox workers, mostly connected with the *Mizrachi* youth

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[64] Dr Jonathan Cohen – Report to the South African Board of Jewish Education, 1994.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Dr Rosenak, M. Reflection on my visit to Johannesburg on behalf of the SA Board of Jewish Education. Unpublished document, June 1982.
[67] Hoffman, A.D. Report on Consultation to South African Board of Jewish Education, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem. 11–19 November 1983.
[68] Rosenak, M. Reflection on my visit to Johannesburg on behalf of the SA Board of Jewish Education. Unpublished document, June 1982.

movement – *Bnei Akiva*. This in turn resulted in a flow of KD pupils into the *Bnei Akiva* youth movement. At the same time, the secular-Zionist youth movements, *Habonim* and *Betar*, were undergoing rapid decline.

In the 1990s the Board recruited instructors for the Informal Education division from the Ultra Orthodox *Ba'alei Teshuva* movement – *Ohr Sameach*. Consequently by the mid 1990s, the director of the Informal Education division, the Linksfield campus rabbi and some Jewish Studies teachers had come through the ranks of *Ohr Sameach*. This was perceived to threaten the "broadly national-traditional" ethos of the schools:

> These appointments reflect a new willingness on the part of the community to allow very traditional elements an expanded base of activities, even if they might have *charedi* overtones (or undertones). … this bespeaks a kind of turning inward on the part of the community. With events in the surrounding society proceeding in an unpredictable manner, people have a tendency to fall back on the "old verities" while subjecting those who would enthusiastically propound such verities to very little critical scrutiny. … This signifies a definite change in the emphasis in the kinds of Jewish messages being sent abroad at KD. *I would go so far as to say that the above trend represents the beginning of the erosion of the national traditional consensus that has been the guiding light of educational policy at KD since its inception* … While the technological trappings of modernity may be tolerated and instrumentally used for purposes of persuasion and attention getting, this is still a far cry from a serious engagement with the best that the West can offer. Similarly, while there may be much warm feeling for the land of Israel and the Jews who live there, this is not the kind of religious embrace of Israel as a modern state that has always characterised religious Zionism.[69] (My emphasis.)

In an open debate some parents expressed their fears about *'the fundamentalism which is creeping into the schools via teachers aligned with the Chabad (Lubavitch) and Ohr Sameach movements'*. The Director, Mr Zimmerman, maintained that *'the schools broadly mirrored the community, and as the community drifted towards the religious right, so did the schools'*.[70] Rabbi Rubenstein, the director designate, while acknowledging that *charedi* orientation would mark a departure from the overarching ethos of national traditional-education, conceded that a significant number of the better Jewish educators *'could be described as charedi to one degree or another'*. He argued that what was needed was *'to provide those educators with a clear understanding of what the schools do and do not stand for'*.[71]

The national-traditional debate has also been expressed in the Jewish Studies syllabi, which reflect an uneasy compromise between two trends: positive ethnic identity;

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[69] Dr Jonathan Cohen – Report to the South African Board of Jewish Education, 1994.
[70] Day Schools drift to religious right. *The Jewish Herald Times*, 11 March 1994.
[71] Rabbi Isadore Rubenstein, Working document on the report to the South African Board of Jewish Education by Dr Jonathan Cohen, August 1994. Jerusalem Fellows, September 1994.

and religious experience. In practical terms, should the students learn Jewish history, festivals and folklore, or should the teaching direct the students to a greater observance of the commandments? This conflict is clearly explained in the following excerpt from the report by Cohen:

> There were those who felt that a positive attitude to tradition and Jewish culture should be fostered with the aim of strengthening the Jewish self-concept of the student, while leaving "existential decisions" as to religiosity and observance to the individual. Others felt that the cultivation of a specifically religious dimension of experience should figure among the overall aims of the syllabus (the student should be made aware of 'God's expectations of him' or 'the presence of God acting in Jewish history', etc.). This latter group did not wish to see these religious dimensions as emanating from the student's "existential choice". … Tensions exist among the Jewish Studies teachers … there are those who see Jewish history and Zionism as forming the basis of Jewish Studies for the contemporary young Jew who may not be committed to the *Hallacha*. There are those who see Jewish studies more in terms of Jewish practices or Jewish beliefs. Some have the tendency to be more dogmatic, limiting student discussion and debate, although they might not think of themselves as such. Others give students the sense that they can express themselves freely in the classroom, and therefore that "Judaism isn't narrow minded". Most of them have pretty good rhetorical skills, although many do tend to monopolise the floor, perhaps in the fear that open discussion may cause discipline problems.[72]

The controversy extended further into the content of Jewish history. There seemed to be a focus on the history of Zionism and the Holocaust, which *'is liable to instil in the pupils a somewhat morbid view of Jewish history'* (Harris, 1995:5), while the teaching of modern and contemporary Israel was found to be the least successful area of the curriculum, leaving young graduates unable to defend or understand the political dilemmas in Israel from a Jewish perspective.[73]

The recruitment of teachers and their pedagogical skills was another constant concern. While in the past Jewish Studies teachers at the high schools were recruited from among the qualified history teachers, the new teachers tended to be *Ba'alei Teshuva* whose main qualification was the completion of the two-year programme at a seminary. It was therefore perceived that not all Jewish Studies teachers would be up to the task of preparing pupils for matric and that they would need to be retooled in order to teach the subject at that level.

Another problem that emerged once Jewish Studies became a matric subject, was the tendency of many matric examinations to be information-orientated, rather than thought-orientated. This was seen to spill over into the Jewish Studies area as well, making

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[72] Dr Jonathan Cohen – Report to the South African Board of Jewish Education, 1994.

[73] SA Board of Jewish Education, Strategic Planning, 1993. Unpublished document, 21 July 1993; Dr Jonathan Cohen – Report to the South African Board of Jewish Education, 1994; Rubenstein, Plan for the Development of Education in the Controlled Schools of the South African Board of Jewish Education, 1997–2000. Unpublished document.

both the exam and instructional preparation for it, incorrigibly dry. Jewish Studies teachers were criticised for using the "note system" which was prevalent at the KD schools, whereby students had become accustomed to having note summaries of lessons prepared and handed out to them by their teachers. The "note system" was perceived as particularly undesirable for Jewish Studies since pupils were getting pre-digested interpretations of Jewish sources masquerading as the authoritative tradition itself.[74] In other words, pupils were getting Judaism "third hand"[75] and were rarely given the chance to encounter a primary source, comparing conflicting traditional interpretations by offering their own interpretations.

The narrative has traced the transformation of Jewish Studies from being seen as "too secular" to becoming a base for Ultra Orthodox activities in the schools. It also follows the struggle of Jewish Studies – representing the traditional/religious ingredient of the Jewish curriculum – to achieve its status alongside Hebrew – the national/Zionist/ secular ingredient of the curriculum. The changes in South Africa, the decline of Zionism and the Jewish community's shift to religion, all changed the status quo, which until the mid 1990s had tended to privilege Hebrew Studies. At the same time it brought new challenges to the Board; namely, to set the goals and objectives for teaching the subject, to devise a curriculum that matched these objectives and to recruit and skill a suitable teaching force. It seems that while the Hebrew Department was perceived to have failed to achieve the national objectives of the ethos, the challenge was for Jewish Studies to achieve the traditional goals.

Exclusivity versus inclusivity

While the community and the schools seem to have turned inwards in the 1990s, democratic voices in South Africa began to question the exclusivity of the schools and whether or not they function as a white privileged institution, reminiscent of the apartheid regime. While Jewish communities worldwide tend to pursue democracy and liberalism as a safeguard for Jewish continuity, it also poses the danger of either assimilation or intermarriage. The challenge for the Jewish community was to invest in the new South African democracy without compromising its identity (Rubenstein, 1995). There was a recognition that:

[74] Dr Rosenak, M. Reflection on my visit to Johannesburg on behalf of the SA Board of Jewish Education. Unpublished document, June 1982.
[75] Dr Jonathan Cohen – Report to the South African Board of Jewish Education, 1994.

> We [the Jews in South Africa] pay a price for raising our children isolated and insulated from other racial and cultural groups. The fragmentation of the apartheid years is now in transition into a multicultural, multilingual, and multiracial society. Our children, like our community, remained cocooned, with little stimulus or opportunity to learn to relate to others. It is our educational responsibility to compensate for this and to construct opportunities for them to grow and realise that a strong Jewish identity is a solid foundation from which to look outwards with tolerance, understanding, compassion and commitment (Rubenstein, 1999:75).

Historically, the admission of non-Jewish pupils was a relatively minor issue for the KD schools, mainly because there were not many applications of this sort. The Orthodox and Ultra Orthodox Jewish schools have a clear policy of accepting only those who comply with their religious standards (Yeshiva College does, however, accept non-observant Jewish pupils). The KD schools, as well as the other mainstream Jewish day schools in Cape Town did not have that type of policy. These schools were open to gentile applicants, subject to the requirement of compliance with Hebrew Studies and other Judaic aspects of the schools, as well as non-eligibility for fee subsidies.[76] The schools made no distinction between the statutory racial groups as defined by apartheid legislation. However, in the Transvaal, special permission was required before black pupils could be accepted. In 1985 the Board's application to admit 10 black pupils was rejected by the Provincial Education Department. The Board could not take a clear stand on the issue. On the one hand, some Catholic schools admitted black pupils even without permission, and on the other hand the Board's executives were not ready to defy the authorities. Besides, there was always the fear that accepting a significant number of gentile pupils would compromise the Jewish ethos of the schools. The option of restricting admittance of gentiles by using a quota was unappealing to Jews who were historically the victims of quota systems. When in 1986 the Transvaal Provincial Education Department conditioned that subsidies would only be granted to schools that complied with the regulations debarring blacks or allowing only a certain quota to attend, the Board pursued a moral stand and declined the subsidies. This stipulation was, however, withdrawn in 1987 and 10 black pupils were admitted to the KD schools (Shimoni, 2003).[77] The admittance of gentile students was not constitutionalised but rather left to the discretion of the Board. There was, however, an implicit unofficial policy that while the children of gentile employees at the schools and the siblings of gentile pupils already in the system would be viewed sympathetically, all other gentile enrolment

[76] The Herzlia schools in Cape Town are still open to non-Jewish pupils. In 2000 they had 60 non-Jewish pupils out of 1700. Minutes of the executive committee meeting, 8 August 2000.
[77] The only source for this narrative is Shimoni (2003) who was quoting from the minutes of the executive committee meetings of the SABJE.

would be discouraged. As it happened there were more gentile students at the VP campus than at the other campuses, but their number was still relatively small.[78] In May 1990 the Board decided that leaving the decision to the discretion of the chairman and director was unsatisfactory and that in future no gentile pupils would be accepted. Those who were already in the schools and their siblings were not affected. According to Shimoni this resolution was predicated on the conviction that KD parents have the right, like any other religious community, to educate their children in their own private schools and that this approach is compatible with the democratic and culturally pluralistic principles of the much anticipated new South Africa. By 1998 there were about 18 gentile children at the VP campus and their number was declining.[79]

A study by an ex-principal of Carmel school in Durban (Workman, 1997) explores the attitudes of the Jewish community towards opening the schools to non-Jewish pupils. A decision was made in 1994 to fill the Jewish day school to capacity with gentile students. At the time of the investigation Carmel College had an almost 50% gentile population and had therefore implemented a multicultural education programme which Workman regarded as being counterproductive to the goals of Jewish education. Jewish Studies teachers complained of feeling inhibited in their classes because they were sensitive to the feelings of the gentile children, while parents did not seem to be aware of the problems of teaching Judaism in a multicultural environment. Parents would have liked the proportion of Jewish to non-Jewish student enrolment to be monitored, yet they believed that children needed to learn to mix with other cultures and to learn tolerance and understanding. Workman argues that opening the school to gentile pupils had the potential for cultural discord and lack of unity within the school as well as assimilation. He maintains that there was little provision at the school for multiculturalism and as a result gentile students were recipients of a curriculum that lacked relevance and was foreign to their needs.

The debate about opening the schools to non-Jews was raised again at the Board when a VP parent, who was also a member of the PTA at the primary school, became an honorary officer in April 2000 with the sole purpose to debate this issue.[80] The parent was an ex-KD pupil, a member of the Reform movement and had been an anti-apartheid activist. The issue was raised at an executive committee meeting in August 2000. The parent suggested opening the KDVP campus to gentile pupils for financial and political

[78] There was big intake of Japanese pupils into VP in the 1980s.
[79] David Saks's interview with the Board's financial director, 1998.
[80] Minutes of the SABJE executive committee meeting, 16 May 2000.

reasons. Financially, he expected VP to become more viable and thus able to compete with other schools in the area. He reported that there was a circle of professional Jewish parents who did not send their children to the KD schools because of the exclusivity of admitting only Jewish children. There was an implicit notion that opening the schools to gentiles would also help families of "mixed" marriages that were sometimes denied access to the schools.[81] On political grounds, he argued that the notion of an exclusive school in the new South Africa was a political embarrassment. He is quoted in the minutes as saying that:

> He had been at KD for 12 years of his schooling at which time there had been some non-Jewish pupils in the school. It had been a liberal island with a liberal approach at that time as a challenge to authority during the apartheid era: then in 1994 when there had been democratic elections we changed the policy and closed the schools to non-Jews. This did not make sense to him and was a political embarrassment.[82]

None of the other participants on that executive committee was in favour of the suggestion, but they expressed a willingness to continue with the debate.

This debate was another example of the perennial conflict in Jewish education: that is, how to be democratic and Jewish at the same time; and how far the "borders" of the community schools could be broadened without losing their essence. Furthermore, the debate raised the crucial question of who has the power to decide what is inside and what is outside the borders of the community. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

Funding the Jewish community schools

Wertheimer (1999), writing about the American context, maintains that what all Jewish day schools have in common is ongoing financial worries. He identifies two main reasons for this: one, the dual curriculum that inevitably brings a number of added expenses, such as a longer school day and a larger teaching and administrative staff complement to teach both Jewish and general studies; and two, the commitment to provide subsidies to families unable to afford tuition fees.

The history of the Jewish day schools in Johannesburg reveals the same continuous struggle to find resources to establish and maintain the schools. It was perceived that since the establishment and subsequent expansion of the schools, the Board had *'drifted into a state of chronic financial crisis, interrupted now and then by an urgent appeal to the community'* (Katz 1980:434).

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[81] A child is considered Jewish when born to a Jewish mother. Problems are created when only the father is Jewish.

[82] Minutes of the SABJE executive committee meeting, 8 August 2000.

The question was who should fund Jewish education. The main income sources for the schools were fees, private donations and community funds. In 1960 the Board set up a commission under the chairmanship of Mr Justice S M Kuper to investigate ways of funding the Board's activities (Katz, 1980). The Kuper Commission recommended that both the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) should provide direct assistance to the Board of Education. The paradox in those years was that the community collected huge funds for the welfare of Israel while its needs went unfulfilled. For the Zionist leaders in South Africa, Israel's needs were greater than the needs of the mostly affluent local Jewish community. The winning argument was that Hebrew education is a Zionist duty and the schools were therefore entitled to receive funds from the Israel United Appeal (IUA), the funding arm of the Zionist movement. The SAZF agreed to assist only the national activities of the Board. However, the SAZF began dedicating some funds for Jewish education in 1974. This figure peaked at R1 million in the late 1970s, but then declined to R500,000 in 1982 (Shimoni, 2003).

In 1978, the Board announced a financial crisis with total liabilities of R5.5 million and a yearly deficit of R1.3 million. It was claimed that these deficits were caused by subsidies that were estimated at 20% of income (Shimoni, 2003). Moreover, the KD schools had lost a total of 288 pupils in 1977 (about eight percent of their enrolment) to emigration and "cram" colleges (Eden and Damelin). Staff was cut back (note that 75%–85% of the Board's expenditure went to teachers' salaries), but this saving was almost entirely wiped out by the losses incurred owing to the sudden drop in enrolment (Katz, 1980:610).

By 1985 the crisis was even greater.[83] The Board's chairman warned that unless a target of R20 million was reached within a few months, the schools under its control would be closed or would drastically limit their intake. Community leaders launched a "debenture campaign" by which funds were raised either by outright donations or pledges that provided interest-free loans over a ten-year period in return for debentures underwritten by the Standard Bank of South Africa.[84] Only R13 million was collected,[85] but many of the contributors voluntarily wrote off the money owed to them, and the collapse of the Board was thus averted for the time being (Shimoni, 2003).

[83] Jewish education crisis is far from over. *Zionist Record and SA Jewish Chronicle*, 1 February 1985.
[84] Defunct bonus bonds may save day schools. *The Jewish Herald*, 5 March 1985.
[85] Jewish schools still need R7 million. *The Star*, 1 August 1985.

The financial crisis seemed to cause a rift in the community. The Board was accused of mismanaging funds, but it maintained that the crisis was due to school fees not keeping up with increases in teachers' salaries, high inflation as well as the higher interest rates charged by the banks.[86] Some parents refused to contribute unless the present management committee was changed. The parents of Reform pupils maintained that the committee had no compunction in asking them for money while not allowing Reform rabbis to participate in any way at the schools.[87] Community leaders, however, stood firmly behind the Board and accusations of a split in the community were denied.[88]

Some relief was obtained when the South African government in 1986 introduced graded subsidies to private schools based on the cost to the state of educating pupils at public schools.[89] The first government grant was received in February 1987, though the amount was disappointing.[90] Nevertheless, by 1990 the financial situation of the Board was stabilised. The chairman announced that fees in the previous year had amounted to R25 million; the United Communal Fund (IUA/UCF),[91] the government grant and other fundraising activities had contributed R5 million each (Shimoni, 2003).

While Jewish education found itself for the first time in stable conditions, the transitional context in South Africa at the beginning of the 1990s was working against it. As was mentioned before, increased emigration caused the KD schools to lose pupils and income. The loss in numbers was mostly offset by the flight of many Jewish pupils from government schools into private education. However, the loss in income was irreversible, especially since the families that had left the country were mostly those who could afford to pay full fees. Moreover, the perceived success of private profit-making schools like Crawford College attracted a significant number of families who could afford paying full fees.

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[86] SA Jewish board hits back in education cash row. *Sunday Express*, 3 March 1985; Facts behind the R10m school crisis. *The Jewish Herald*, 26 March 1985.
[87] Jews split by row over schools fund drive. *Sunday Express*, 24 February 1985.
[88] No community split, says Board. *Jewish Times*, 8 March 1985.
[89] The De Lange Committee's Report (1981) shifted government's attitude towards independent schools from animosity to one of grudging acceptance, especially as these schools were seen as useful "pressure valves" to cater for, and marginalise, troublesome pupils and non-racial tendencies. In keeping with this utilitarian attitude, the Private Schools Act of 1986 introduced compulsory registration for private schools, as well as subsidies for many schools at a 15% to 45% level (Hofmeyr & Lee, 2002).
[90] Govt plans subsidies for private schools. *The Star*, 24 May 1985. Subsidies expected for Jewish schools. *Jewish Times*, 27 September 1985.
[91] In 1986 the IUA (Israel United Appeal, the funding arm of the Zionist organisation) merged with the UCF (the United Communal Fund). Subsequently, it was managed under the Board of Deputies. This resulted in a further decline of the Zionist Federation in South Africa.

The tacit assumption that the community (mostly through the UCF/IUA) should fund the schools was also reversed in the 1990s. There was an implicit new expectation that the Board would raise its own funds to support needy students and specialised programmes.[92] At the end of 1996 a special King David Schools' Foundation was created to cater for needy students. There was, however, a subsidy shortfall, which affected a handful of families who decided to leave the system. In 1996 the Board had to reduce its fee assistance programme from R10 million to R5 million. The hostel was closed, the pedagogic centre allocation was reduced and some teachers were retrenched.[93] The government still provided some subsidies, but these were gradually cut back.[94]

In 1998 the Board was beginning to face major financial challenges, though there was no perception of crisis.[95] However, by 2000 the debt was growing and a feeling of *'gloom and doom'* had spread among the school community.[96]A process of restructuring was started whereby there would be a reduction of 85 staff across the board by the end of March 2001.[97] This restructuring seemed, however, to be too slow as there was *'a very clear commitment not to disrupt the schools … and to try and keep [education for the children] intact and wherever possible, to try and reduce the auxiliary things, but to try and keep teachers in classrooms teaching happily'*.[98] By the end of December 2000 the closing overdraft of the Board was R19.5 million.[99] It was announced that the banks were unwilling to continue with that level of debt, and that the Board could not afford to service the overdraft anymore. Crucially, the community withheld its support. By the beginning of 2001 it was announced that a financial crisis had hit the schools and *'subsidy cuts force[d] pupils to leave [the schools] for the first time in 50 years'*.[100]

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[92] David Saks's interview with the director of the SABJE, 1998.
[93] King David to peg fees for 97. *The SA Jewish Times*, 21 February 1997.
[94] The National Norms and Standards for School Funding of 1998 (NNSSF) provided the criteria of eligibility for subsidy, and the principles of allocation. It outlined a sliding scale of state subsidies, whereby the poorest independent schools would receive the most state funding and the best resourced schools would obtain no subsidy at all. Schools with the lowest fees received 60% per capita of the average expenditure by the province on a public school learner. No subsidy has been paid to independent schools, such as KD, whose fees are more than 2.5 times the average provincial per capita expenditure at public schools (NNSSF section 151).
[95] David Saks's interview with the financial director, SABJE, 1998.
[96] Minutes of the executive committee meeting, 6 February 2001.
[97] Minutes of the executive committee meeting, 20 June 2000. See also minutes of the Employee Forum meetings held between 19 June 2000 and 12 February 2001, at which negotiations were taking place.
[98] Other stakeholder, 10 January 2001. [Document 7:122 (380:394). Codes: Previous restructuring].
[99] Minutes of the executive committee meeting, 6 February 2001. The annual financial statement for the year ended 31 December 2001, indicated that the overdraft was actually R23,709,309.
[100] Money crisis hits KDS. *SA Jewish Report*, 26 January 2001.

Stakeholders started to ponder where the money had gone. Speculation was rife that some members of the Board had used school funds for personal gain, that there was gross mismanagement and that the Board granted subsidies whimsically. A closer look at the data, however, suggests a more complex set of factors:[101]

Dwindling number of pupils

The constant drop in the number of pupils at the KD schools did not always translate into a reduction in the running costs of the schools (Rubenstein, 1999). As the following excerpt demonstrates, rational thinking was not always the answer:

> You know, when you are losing 100–200 kids a year that adds up to a lot of revenue. And you know the problem here – in an ideal world, in 1999 only children in Grade 7 would emigrate. And in 2000, children in Grade 5 would emigrate. But it doesn't work like that. You know, it's across the whole system. So one can't be as responsive to changes as ideally one should be. You can't just say there are 10% less children – let's cut 10% of the teachers.[102]

Pupil:teacher ratio

Keeping the pupil:teacher ratio in line depended on the vigilance of the lay leaders (the chairperson and the financial committee), the professional officers and the principals. An ex-chairperson suggested that keeping this ratio under control was one of his main concerns:

> I know that every single month, when I was Chairman of the Board, there had to be a pupil:teacher ratio report. And I used to say, 'it's out – I don't care how – I want it back to where it has to be'. And there used to be complaints: teachers are sick, teachers are on leave … etc. I said, 'not interested – that's the situation'… It's a management situation. … You have to have a certain mark-up if you sell goods. You have to have a certain pupil:teacher ratio to balance your income with your expenditure.[103]

Another ex-chairperson described the constant fight to keep the pupil:teacher ratio at 14:1.

> We used to cut it to what we thought was 14, and we used to find it was 13.1. The next time we checked it, it was 12.8. But we were always aiming at that target [14:1]. And always checking.[104]

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[101] The following analysis is based on my knowledge of the system; on the minutes of the executive committee meetings and my participation at these meetings from January 1999 to April 2001; on the interviews I conducted for the research and on secondary analysis of previous interviews with Board members; on the report by Brian Isaacson in *Aligned Leadership* (22 March 2001), titled 'South African Board of Jewish Education – Re-positioning, Review and Recommendations', Unpublished printed copy of slides; on recorded consultations with the CEO; and on written suggestions for cost-cutting measures given by the administrative director, the financial director and the human resources officer to the CEO (May 2001).
[102] Manco member, 5 August 2002. [Document 16:45 (122:145). Codes: Reason - depleting numbers].
[103] Community leader, 8 May 2002. [Document 10:31 (390:393). Codes: Reason - pupil:teacher ratio].
[104] Other stakeholder, 28 October 2002. [Document 30:13 (552:577). Codes: Chairman - role; Reason - pupil:teacher ratio].

It was the duty of the director to ensure that a viable ratio was maintained, and to provide a reasonable explanation or solution when this ratio was too high. The director in turn depended on the principals to adhere to the ratio. It seemed, however, that there was not enough control and that the goals of efficiency were often compromised by ideological, social and educational imperatives:

> And to the best of our ability we did try and control it. I think we did … because the headmasters will do what is convenient for them. You could not know everything that is happening at the schools at Board level. … there always has to be some fat; we gave more fat to the Hebrew Department than we did to anything else, because we were there and it was important to us … I think that [the principals] need a bit of fat. It's just a question of where you allow it. So … as a director, you know 85% of what's going on in the school. The principals should know 100%, and they drag, of course they drag, but it is OK. But when it reaches a stage where there are just too many, then things fall apart. It implodes … if you are paying so many salaries and you haven't got the numbers to support it.[105]

The schools advocated an ethos of care and integrated curriculum; class teaching was the preferred mode of delivery at the primary schools while subject teaching was only introduced in Grade 7. Moreover, small remedial classes in secular and Hebrew Studies provided more individualised instruction. All these contributed to the maintenance of an unfavourable pupil:teacher ratio at the schools.

It seemed that a viable pupil:teacher ratio could be achieved if there was less emphasis on individual needs, if there was cooperation between the schools and the Board and if lay leaders constantly monitored the situation and asked the right questions. Towards 2000 it seemed that control over the pupil:teacher ratio had been lost and the ratio was reported to be standing at just under 9:1.[106]

<u>Increased demand for fee assistance and the non-payment of fees</u>

The schools were obligated to accept children regardless of financial or educational ability. As discussed before, special provisions were made but those were not always sufficient. The Board had supplemented the shortfall as well as administrated the subsidies. So for example in 1999, R1.5 million out of the R8 million in subsidised fees came out of the budget.[107] In 2000, R7 million was budgeted for, but R13 million was in fact used for subsidies.[108] It was perceived that some of the shortfall was created because the Board used

[105] Other stakeholder, 15 July 2002. [Document 25:23 (582:628). Codes: Reason - pupil:teacher ratio].
[106] New CEO for SABJE. *Davidian Star*, July 2001. In 2000 the average pupil:teacher ratio at public schools in South Africa was 33.4 and at independent schools, 17.1. (Source: Education Statistics in South Africa at a glance in 2000, Department of Education, 2002.)
[107] Minutes of an executive committee meeting, 26 October 1999.
[108] Minutes of an executive committee meeting, 12 September 2000.

– in addition to the formal procedure of estimating the needs of the recipients of the subsidies – another informal system based on the close relationships among the members of the community:

> …and then Chaim would bump into [a past financial director] and said: 'Look I've gone *mechulla* (bankrupt) and he [the past financial director] would say, '*Oi Gevalt* (Oy, how terrible), don't worry about the school fees'… [And] I'm sure in many of those cases, it was justified … [but] how would he [the financial director] investigate? So he would phone his friend Marti, and say, 'Marti, has Chaim gone *mechulla*?' and Marti would say 'Yes'. And that's the way the deficit grew … .[109]

The flight from public schools after 1994 and economic recession in the 1990s brought into the system more pupils whose parents could not afford the fees. Parents reneged on arrangements that were made. Staff members who telephoned parents to try and bring in fees were often subjected to verbal abuse. Cheques were returned; credit cards payments were rejected.[110] According to Jewish law, the Board could not charge interest on overdue accounts. This was seen to be another reason why parents were not too concerned about late payments.

With the appointment of a new financial director in September 1999, attempts were made to restrict the subsidies to match the level of donations. A matrix was designed to assess the level of subsidy. This, however, did not achieve the desired outcomes and a perceived gap between theory and reality was noted.[111] Moreover, attempts to enforce strong discipline on subsidies or fee payments were usually challenged by emotive pleas from the executives such as *'it would be tragic if even one child had to leave'* or *'it was a heartbreaking situation for Jewish pupils to have to leave the Jewish day school'*.[112]

<u>The withdrawal of the government grant</u>

The complete withdrawal of the government grant in 2000 resulted in an income cut of R6–7 million per year.[113] The government grant was used to cover the running deficit, even though it was not meant to do so, and in a way it became *'a sword of Damocles over the head of the Board because when it … was withdrawn, all of a sudden you had this huge*

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[109] Other stakeholder, 10 January 2002. [Document 7:52 (1090:1103). Codes: Reason - subsidies].
[110] Minutes of the executive committee meetings throughout 2000 repeatedly described the difficulties in getting parents to pay their fees.
[111] Minutes of an executive committee meeting, 27 September 2000. In the minutes from the 21 November 2000, it was reported that the Board had received 2000 calls in 10 days (many of them repeats) from parents and others pleading their case regarding the assessments.
[112] Minutes of an executive committee meeting, 21 November 2000.
[113] Gloomy financial picture of the plight of Jewish day schools painted. *SA Jewish Report*, 18 August 2000.

hole in your budget, and the structure could no longer be sustained'.[114] At the same time additional expenses, such as the Education Development Programme[115] and the government legislated Skills Development Levy, burdened the Board with further financial commitments. Security was also a significant expense as the Board had to face two main threats: one from growing crime in Johannesburg; and another from being a Jewish school in an era when Jewish institutions had been threatened or attacked in Israel and in other countries.

Competitive school fees

The level at which school fees were set was a delicate issue. There was ongoing debate as to whether the schools should charge market-related prices and have more subsidised students, or if they should lower their prices, thereby making it easier for more pupils to pay the fees. It seems that the Board was reluctant to increase fees.[116] KD school fees were lower than those at all the other Jewish schools and at most of the private schools in the area, with one or two exceptions. Notwithstanding the fact that lower fees were attractive to prospective parents, it has also been argued that the honorary officers on the executive, whose role it was to agree on the fees, were mostly parents who were reluctant to agree on a price increase that might impact on their financial situation.[117] Thus the two large fee increases of 20% and 11% in 2000 and 2001 respectively, increased the tension that existed between the honorary and the professional officers, and more generally between parents and the Board.[118]

Competition with other schools

Being private, the Jewish community schools stand in a market relationship with the parent clientele. As private suppliers of education, schools are vulnerable to the preferences of parents as consumers. Moreover, they must continue to offer a considerable range of activities in order to compete with other private schools that offer a wide variety of choices and modern facilities. For example, matric subjects with limited appeal, such as French and Drama, were maintained. Specialist Art, Music and Drama teachers were employed at each primary school. Information Technology (IT) and computer systems needed to be

[114] Honorary officer, 13 August 2002. [Document 45:4 (165:169). Codes: Reason - government grant].
[115] EDP – outreach programme for less advantaged black schools. In 2000, transport costs for the EDP alone was R281,000. Minutes of an executive committee meeting, 4 April 2000.
[116] Gloomy financial picture of the plight of Jewish day schools painted. *SA Jewish Report*, 18 August 2000.
[117] Other stakeholder, 12 February 2003. [Document 61:3 (54:71). Codes: Reason - school fees].
[118] Minutes of an executive committee meeting, 27 September 2000.

constantly upgraded. Small Hebrew classes were created to allow all pupils to learn the language at their level of proficiency and Grade 0 classes were added when the government introduced the new school entry age of seven years.[119]

Teachers' remuneration

The schools consisted of mostly loyal, long-serving teachers; some of them were ex-pupils, and most had educated their children within the system. In direct relation to the time served by the dedicated, though aging, population of teachers and administrators, their salaries were relatively high. In addition, teachers were granted various perks, like a 50% fee subsidy for their children, medical aid, pension and a long leave. The long leave comprised 12 paid days a year, which the teachers could accumulate.

It is evident that teachers in a small system such as the Jewish community schools cannot advance much in their careers. In order, therefore, to acknowledge certain exceptional teachers, a disproportionately large middle management tier was created consisting of heads of departments, deputies and vice principals. Moreover, over a long period of time, stakeholders in academic and managerial positions negotiated themselves into all sorts of arrangements, some money-wise and some related to timetables. This all depended on their personalities, their relationship with management, their bargaining skills, their social or financial position and their perceived worth to the system. So, for example, a number of teachers worked on a part-time basis, while some were working more hours than others. Some teachers were paid for extra hours, while others were not. Some teachers took extra-mural activities and helped children free of charge, while others only gave extra lessons for a fee paid by the Board or the parents. As there was a dearth of Hebrew, Jewish Studies, Science and Maths teachers, those working in the system could negotiate favourable conditions. Principals taught very little or not at all. At times, even a deputy did not have a teaching load. Sick or bereaved members of staff were granted special consideration and the Board was reluctant to retrench or pension off widows or single women who relied heavily on their salaries. It was argued that these people would be a burden to the community anyhow, so they should rather work and earn a salary. This sometimes created paradoxical situations whereby their salaries were higher than those of the more productive staff members. Moreover, in some cases teachers negotiated conditions directly with the director, bypassing principals and thereby escalating conflicts

[119] *Government Gazette* notice 647/2000, 18 February 2000.

between the schools and the Board. Another expense was created by the tendency of the Board to give retired directors or principals "a golden parachute" when they left their positions; they were sometimes kept on the same salary scale or conditions but in a lesser capacity until their retirement. In another case, an attempt by the Board to retrench a rabbi whose job was perceived as redundant was negated by the threat of an appeal to the Jewish High Court, who viewed unfavourably any changes in rabbis' working conditions. All these factors had created the situation of an over-staffed Board and schools, with no parity in salaries or conditions of employment; and a management that was aware of the situation but was unable to put an end to it.[120]

It is important to note that while this situation had created a nonviable system, it gave certain stakeholders the feeling that they were cared for. The following quotation illustrates this perception as the informant was unsure whether the financial deficit was caused by mismanagement or because the system was just too compassionate:

> It was total mismanagement, I think things were done – it wasn't run as a business, it was much more compassionate and much more caring in those days, I think. People like the [previous director] nurtured everybody and there was that kind of feeling of, this is your family and you belong here, and you felt quite secure and comfortable. For me personally, every time I asked for something it was always given to me without any consideration of the financial results; and when I think back on how much money was really wasted – there was no limit.[121]

Emphasis on professional development

The past directors of the Board, who were educators themselves, saw professional development as vital for quality Jewish and general education and continued to invest in professional development despite the growing financial deficit. Some programmes were sourced overseas and were relatively expensive, especially with the devalued rand. When Jewish Studies became a matric subject, the director invested considerable sums in developing the Jewish Studies teachers and curriculum, while attempting to keep the same level of investment in the Hebrew teachers and curriculum. There was also investment in the development of lay and professional leadership, the absence of which was of great concern to the director.[122] There was no agreement between stakeholders whether the investments were necessary, whether the programmes were beneficial or whether the best-

[120] Honorary officer, 13 August 2002. [Document 45:4 (150:180). Codes: Reason - government grant; Reason - the system structure].
[121] Manager, 25 June 2002. [Document 17:15 (496:502). Codes: Reason - the system was too compassionate].
[122] Rabbi I. Rubenstein, Plan for the development of education in the controlled schools of the South African Board of Jewish Education, 1997–2000.

suited educators attended them. Some teachers who were selected to be sent on an expensive leadership programme in Israel felt that, on their return, their progress was blocked by managers who were neither consulted nor agreed with the director's choice of candidates. Even at the height of the severe financial crisis in 2000, the Board spent R998,392 on professional development.[123]

Remedial and social services

As the schools offer remedial services, a great number of parents whose children had learning disabilities wanted their children to attend the schools, even when it was clear that academically or socially it would be a disadvantage to them. It was perceived that as a direct result of the marketing campaign in the early 1990s and the flight from public schools, the number of children with learning difficulties grew. Notwithstanding parents' wish to keep their children in a Jewish environment they were also attracted by the absence of stigma in attending a regular school as opposed to a remedial school. Moreover, the subsidy programme that the schools offered was not available at ordinary remedial schools.[124] Though information on subsidies was confidential, certain remedial teachers observed that a great number of children in the remedial programme came from broken homes and poor households. Additional social services, such as psychological assessments and consultations, were also funded by the Board. A situation therefore emerged whereby an expensive programme was set up in order to care for the needs of the less well-to-do members of the community.

The structure and function of the Board

The legacy of the Board was that of a national body responsible for all South African Jewish schools. However, as discussed earlier, that was hardly the case in the late 1990s, although the Board carried some expenses of a national body, such as organising the conference on Jewish Education. It was argued that the management structure was not necessary for a normal day school system such as KD. There was a growing perception that it would be more efficient for each school to become an independent body, managing its own expenses. On the other hand, there were those who believed that some functions should be centralised. The following quotation exemplifies the uncertainty as to whether the Board structure was necessary or redundant:

[123] *South African Board of Jewish Education, Annual Financial Statements*, 31 December 2000.
[124] Minutes of an executive committee meeting, 26 January 1999.

> Some people saw it [the Board] as top heavy – as a huge bureaucracy that didn't warrant its size in the comparative schools they were running … I didn't see for example why they needed an administrative director and an executive director. You know – I thought one would suffice … Okay the executive director took Jewish Studies under his control, which was fine. But you know, there was Hebrew, and Hebrew is an integral part of the school – I saw the need for that. I didn't see a need for so many of the other support systems for the administration of the schools. But in the areas like social – well not social services – but the Social Work Department – they needed a director. They needed it in Jewish Studies. But many of the other things – you know, I didn't have an opinion. So there I thought there was need for change.[125]

The informant failed to name any other departments that needed to be changed except for the general studies department. Stakeholders' perceptions of the Board and their limited understanding of its functions undoubtedly influenced their perspectives of the restructuring, as will be demonstrated in chapters 5 and 6.

Reduced community support

Many of the schools' traditional benefactors had emigrated, causing the schools to lose much financial support. The remaining donors have had to support the growing needs of the community, such as the homes for the aged and the burial society, as well as the needs of other charitable organisations that support disadvantaged groups in South Africa. It was also perceived that the fluctuating equity market and the weak rand affected some donors who occasionally retracted their pledges. Moreover, as mentioned before, the fragmentation in the community exacerbates the financial crisis, as each organisation looks after itself leaving the communal institutions without adequate resources. Subsequently, the United Communal Fund (UCF) gradually reduced its contribution to the schools.[126] It was perceived that commitment to the schools had waned significantly, such that parents were reluctant to spend extra money to subsidise other children, as one informant lamented: *'There was never a problem because there was that holistic view and I think that's gone. I think people are very inward'*.[127]

Nevertheless, it was observed that there was significant new money in the community, and that the Board failed to enlist a new generation of benefactors.[128] The vice-chairperson, a significant fundraiser, approached the Chief Rabbi to host a cocktail party at which top donors in the community would be urged to rescue the schools from the looming

[125] Other stakeholder, 12 July 2002. [Document 24:20 (498:528). Codes: Reason - the system structure].
[126] Gloomy financial picture of the plight of Jewish day schools painted. *SA Jewish Report*, 18 August 2000.
[127] Honorary officer, 22 July 2002. [Document 37:21 (215:217). Codes: Reason - community - financial support].
[128] Minutes of an executive committee meeting, 12 September 2000.

financial crisis.[129] This gathering scheduled to be held at the beginning of 2001 was, however, postponed until the Board got *'its house in order'*.[130]

One donor explained that he had lost confidence in both the lay and professional leadership:

> So when they came to me – when they approached me about the morass that they were in … we sat down with their leaders – [another donor] and myself – and they asked for help and we said to them: 'Look, you don't even know what you are asking us for. Your situation is so poor, that you have no idea where you are and where you are going, so how can we even respond to you? First get a handle on your condition – tell us what your business plan is, and then we will respond. How did this arise? How did it come to this state?'[131]

With the lack of communal support, the vice-chairperson approached her husband, who was a prominent donor, to personally secure a loan at a private bank so that the teachers could get their December (2000) salaries and bonuses.[132] By controlling the funding of the schools the vice-chairperson was effectively controlling the schools and could therefore impose her own solution to the crisis.

From the above analysis of the various factors for the financial crisis it is evident that the management of viable community schools is a complex enterprise, in which diverse needs have to be constantly balanced and managed. It seems that ideological, humanitarian, moral and personal concerns took precedence over managerial and economic considerations. Even though business people led the organisation, it was never expected that the schools should be managed like a business; rather, there seemed to be the notion that *'whatever we were doing – we were there to deliver education to children, and that must be the priority'*.[133]

With the years the system had become clumsy and complex and was not reacting fast enough to the changing conditions. Previous restructuring attempts had added various functionaries and departments, which did not disappear even when perceived as redundant. The community schools had difficulty applying strict control measures even when those were deemed necessary. The question is whether these problems are inherent to community schools with multiple goals, as well as private and public agendas, or whether it is clearly a management issue caused by mismanagement and by the bureau-professionals' inept

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[129] Minutes of an executive committee meeting, 6 February 2001
[130] Minutes of an executive committee meeting, 27 March 2001.
[131] Community leader, 18 July 2002. [Document 23:13 (269:297). Codes: Reason - community - financial support].
[132] Manco member, 20 August 2002. [Document 41:18 (521:532). Codes: Reason - banks pressure].
[133] Other stakeholder, 10 January 2002. [Document 7:122 (380:394). Codes: Previous restructuring].

understanding of business principles and their adaptation to the educational arena. The following quotation elaborates on this issue:

> You see, I can never work out whether – is the Board of Education financially mismanaged because of incompetence, or because people are trying to achieve certain goals? … I mean it's quite clear that there is appalling incompetence, but the kind of people who take these decisions, are sort of fancy businessmen. Presumably their companies don't collapse in the same way. They are not just doing this because they don't know how to run a financial organisation. You see, it can be all sorts of things. It can be wrong priorities, it can be an inability to see change coming, and it could be – benign neglect.[134]

The objective of the next section, therefore, is to open the "black box", that is, the Board, and to explore how decisions concerning the management of the schools were made and who was making them.

The Board

The Board is governed by its 1928 Constitution, which has been amended from time to time at the biannual conferences. The Board comprises representatives of the controlled and affiliated institutions who are entitled to vote or be nominated for the executive committee (Constitution, section 5). The latter controls and manages the Board (section 8.1).

The affiliated institutions include *'any school or other institution which wished to become a controlled or affiliated institution of the Board'* (section 15.1). Representation at conferences is given to institutions that represent both the national and the traditional aspects of the community such as:

- honorary officers and life honorary officers (section 16.5.6-7);
- the PTA of each controlled institution or affiliated school (one delegate for 100 pupils) (section 16.5.1);
- each synagogue (Orthodox) is represented by one delegate for each 100 members (but not more than six delegates in total);
- affiliated synagogues with fewer than 100 members are also entitled to one delegate;
- other Jewish organisations are represented by one delegate;
- the Zionist Federation and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies are represented by five delegates each (section 16.5.5).

[134] Parent, 8 November 2002. [Document 32:16 (564:580). Codes: Reason - mismanagement].

The executive committee that is nominated by the delegates comprises honorary officers and professional officers (section 8.2). The chairman of the executive committee is the chairman of the Board (section 8.3). The executive committee appoints the director and any other professional officers *'as the executive committee may from time to time deem it expedient to appoint in order to further the objects of the Board'* (section 9.1). The honorary officers comprise the president, vice-president, chairman, vice-chairman, treasurer, assistant treasurer and 10 additional members. In addition there are honorary life presidents, honorary life vice-presidents and honorary vice-presidents. By the year 2000 there were 35 honorary and life honorary members on the executive committee. In practice the life honorary members are only involved in the conferences or special executive committee meetings. The decision-making process is the responsibility of the executive committee. Decisions are taken by a show of hands. Professional officers are excluded from the vote.

Since its inception and until the 1980s the Board could be fittingly described as the "South African Board of Jewish Education". However, by the 1990s there were only 14 Jewish day schools affiliated to the Board and nine of them were Ultra Orthodox schools that did not look up to the Board for any direction. It was soon realised that:

> The title South African Board of Jewish Education is a misnomer geographically, since it devotes most of its resources to the activities of Johannesburg schools, predominantly the King David Schools … .[135]

The change in the Jewish education milieu in the country forced the Board to redefine the role and the function that it should assume in the community, and what structure would meet the changing conditions. This was an issue that was revisited by most consultants and strategic planners.

Following the 1985 crisis, strategic planners recommended re-organising the Board and improving its efficiency as a decision-making body by introducing more full-time professional management. There was a suggestion to differentiate between national and regional issues of the Board, and to delegate more authority and accountability to the schools. The Board was urged to improve its image amongst pupils, parents and the Jewish community as well as to improve communication. The honorary officers were advised to devote their time to policy formulation and advisory functions, while allowing the

[135] A Strategic Plan for the South African Board of Jewish Education, 1986–1990. Unpublished document dated December 1985.

professionals to manage the schools. The report signified a transition from honorary officers running the Board to bureau-professionalism.[136]

In 1993, in the run-up to the transition in South Africa, and with a drop of over 200 pupils in the enrolment figures for that year, the Board embarked on another strategic planning programme in which it reviewed the 1985 strategic plan. Questionnaires were sent to a wide spectrum of participants and meetings were conducted. It was perceived that some of the objectives of the 1985 strategic plan – specifically those related to the image of the Board and to its communication with other stakeholders – were not achieved. There was a perceived lack of understanding of how the system worked and knowledge of the people who made it work. The Board staff was perceived as being disinterested and aloof.[137] Following the strategic planning the Board embarked on an aggressive marketing drive (both for the schools and itself)[138] and established its own fundraising office (the KD Schools Foundation). Anticipating the changing educational context in South Africa, a decision was taken to broaden the remedial services that the schools provided and to incorporate pupils with special needs into the mainstream. Another decision was to embark on an outreach programme for black schools from disadvantaged areas in order to *'be seen to be active and committed to contributing to the remedying of educational inequalities in South Africa'*.[139]

Following the above decisions additional positions were created at the Board, such as coordinator of special needs (for Hebrew and secular studies), coordinator for gifted education and public relations officer. The latter two positions were terminated two years later. The role of the coordinator of special needs in Hebrew was incorporated into the role of coordinator of Hebrew Studies in 1998.

At the same time, there was a growing demand to split the national function of the Board from the day to day running of the KD schools.[140] It was then that the idea of devolving power from the hands of the Board to the schools began to take root, and the language of market-led restructuring emerged. The *'thinking has as its basis … that the closer you bring the source of the funds to the point at which they are spent, the more*

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[136] Ibid.
[137] SA Board of Jewish Education, Strategic Planning, 1993. Unpublished document, 21 July 1993.
[138] Aggressive campaign to market schools. *Zionist Record*, 15 September 1993.
[139] SA Board of Jewish Education, Strategic Planning, 1993. Unpublished document, 21 July 1993.
[140] As the representative body of all the Jewish schools in South Africa, the Board was authorised to coordinate policy and to speak on their behalf to other Jewish national bodies as well as with the government. It also organised a biannual conference. However, its main function was to channel the communal funds to the different schools. As the funds and the government grant had dried up by the 1990s, this function became almost irrelevant.

efficient use of the funds is obtained'.[141] Moreover, in 1998 a financial consultant was approached by an independent group of Jewish businessmen to conduct an independent survey into various Jewish organisations that were facing financial difficulties. He advised the Board that the schools should be *'a commercial place of business with its main business being education. The school must be financially self-sufficient and be controlled and managed by business people'*. He further recommended that *'membership of the Board be confined to those who qualified on the basis of the size of their donations'*.[142] The documents and minutes that were available to me failed to show any serious engagement with these managerial ideas.

In 2000, the looming financial crisis and the perceived lack of leadership in the organisation[143] (both professional[144] and lay), prompted a move towards further decentralisation and the empowerment of parents. It was envisaged that the national functions of the Board would be dealt with by representatives of all the Jewish day schools, while the governance of the KD schools would be addressed by a newly established management council – the King David Schools Management Committee (Mancom). This council aimed at bringing together relevant constituents of the schools, such as PTA chairpersons, principals, professional officers at the Board and only selected members of the executive.[145] However, a few months later, *'some executive members were unhappy as they saw deviation from their role and felt excluded from processes'*.[146] A decision was taken to disband the council and to revert to the status quo whereby the executive remained the highest decision-making body.

The leaning towards centralisation is in sync with the American trend whereby central agencies prospered in the late 1990s after turbulent times at the beginning of that decade. It was suggested that:

> If central agencies of Jewish education did not exist, they would have to be invented so that they could carry out both at present and into the next century the task of initiating, facilitating, coordinating and supporting the programmes which have as their focus the transmission of our Jewish heritage and securing meaningful Jewish survival (Lasday, 2001:19).

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[141] Unpublished and undated document (probably 1998/9) written by a Board member.
[142] Jewish education – an independent survey. *SA Jewish Report*, 3 July 1998.
[143] Rubenstein, Plan for the Development of Education in the Controlled Schools of the South African Board of Jewish Education, 1997–2000. Unpublished document.
[144] The director was on a five-year contract before his imminent *Aliya* (emigration) to Israel in mid-2002. The principal of the high school at Linksfield was due to retire at the end of 2001. Two of the primary school principals were close to retirement age.
[145] Minutes of an executive committee meeting, 16 May 2000.
[146] Minutes of an executive committee meeting, 6 February 2001.

However, it was also found in 2001 that central agencies still struggled with the challenge of status, and that the general Jewish community still lacked a solid understanding how central agencies contribute to education. It seems that while the community is aware of certain visible programmes delivered by boards of education, those are often mistaken for the totality of services that they offer to the community, therefore:

> Services such as community planning, teacher training, curriculum development and coordinating and convening of educational programmes are all important services that take place behind the scenes and so are invisible to the general community (Lasday, 2001:25).

The only act of the management council of the KD schools was a mini-conference that took place in October 2000, at which a wide range of stakeholders discussed the way forward. Considering the imminent financial crisis, a suggestion was made to engage the services of a consultant to address issues about the overall structure of the organisation and the relationships between the schools, the staff and the parents.[147] Thereafter a corporate consultant who had some minor experience with school governance was engaged. The choice of consultant was met with suspicion by some honorary officers. Ironically, it was the director who welcomed it, not realising that with this move he created the pretext for his own dismissal.

The consultant presented a *'compelling case for change'*.[148] His report advocated the idea that the schools *'should run as a business'* and that parents should be getting better value for money. The word *business* was underlined repeatedly, and the sentences in which it appeared were circled. Emphasis was also given to the words *'correct management' 'bold, credible initial steps for sustainable change'*, as well as to accountability and performance. The report concluded with three main recommendations: first, to devolve coordination and to outsource specialists; second, professional leadership, which should be based on the combination of an educationalist and a businessman, was critical; and third, to diminish lay involvement at Board level and to have a small, empowered executive.

The consultant, based on selected individual and focused group interviews, without any proper sampling procedure, quickly arrived at the conclusion that the director and the administrative director were the main reasons why things had gone so bad. Even before the report was concluded and without the knowledge of the executives, the vice-chairperson and the chairperson had identified whom they thought would be the right person to turn the

[147] Minutes of the executive committee meeting, 21 November 2000.
[148] Brian Isaacson, Aligned Leadership (22 March 2001). *South African Board of Jewish Education – Re-positioning, Review and Recommendations*, Unpublished printed copy of slides.

financial situation around. By recommendation of *'an anonymous philanthropist'*[149] they approached the Jewish owner of the for-profit Eden Colleges and the founding director of Educor Limited at the time of its listing on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.[150] The decision was supported by the Chief Rabbi and by some ex-chairpersons who were members of the executives. It seems that the ex-chairpersons endorsed the choice with heavy hearts:

> The financials were revealed very very explicitly, and it was obvious that something very dramatic had to be done … There were two or three meetings and there was a lot of resistance to [the CEO], because many of us had had experience with him – and were not very enamoured with him, quite honestly. But when one looked at the overall situation, [it] seemed to be the only short-term solution that was available … So eventually this group voted unanimously that they should go ahead with that. And why did they do it that way? *Because they were scared that if they took it the normal democratic way … and took it through the Board, it would create chaos, and there would be a lot of dissention and there would be a lot of wars and there would be a lot of difficulties – and all that would happen was that they would destabilise the whole community*. And I think in that they were correct. So they adopted this undemocratic way of doing it … They never even reported back to this steering committee. This committee has never met again, or had any further say.[151] (My emphasis.)

> It was a rubber-stamp job. All the ex-chairmen were called to a meeting and it was a *fait accompli* already. … And they [chairperson and vice-chairperson] went, I think, for the wrong advice. Advice was given to them – they saw it as a lifeline and they grabbed it with both hands instead of debating the issue … They might – they will save the school financially, but I'm not sure they are going to save Jewish education as it is or was.[152]

> So I think what happened … was probably a very necessary, if unfortunate – you know, if difficult or painful exercise – and it could only be done by bringing in an outsider – because everybody – internal – you know – it was very difficult … you know the people on a very personalised level. It's very difficult to change a structure when you are so intimately involved.[153]

A more critical view of the ex-chairpersons' consent was their assumed accountability for the financial crisis and their perceived guilt for "keeping a blind eye" on the situation, a topic that I will return to later.

The designated CEO had a reputation as a shrewd businessman who understands the business of education. On a personal level, the aforesaid was also known as being a *'harsh operator'*[154] – an attribute that was considered paramount in order to achieve the

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[149] Mammoth plan to save King David Schools has been put in place. *SA Jewish Report,* 1 June 2001.
[150] Profile of CEO. *Davidian Star,* July 2001.
[151] Honorary officer, 28 October 2002. [Document 30:4 (94:144). Codes: Process - employing CEO].
[152] Honorary officer, 8 May 2002. [Document 10:73 (539:549). Codes: Process - employing CEO].
[153] Honorary officer, 13 August 2002. [Document 45:2 (92:107). Codes: Process - employing CEO].
[154] Community leader, 18 July 2002. [Document 23:37 (752). Codes: CEO - Henchman].

extreme cost-cutting goals of the restructuring. Ideologically, he was involved with the *Yeshiva Maharsha* community and *Ohr Sameach*,[155] both *charedi*-type communities specialising in bringing young people back to authentic *Torah* Judaism,[156] and on the extreme right of the Jewish community schools. The director was told that he was no longer in charge of the organisation, and the restructuring of the KD schools (the focus of my inquiry) began in April 2001.

In summary, while the national functions of the Board were increasingly minimised, there was resistance from within the executive committees to decentralise the decision-making process and to share the governance of the community schools with the parents and the schools. In reality the executive committee had very little say in the running of the schools. Decisions were usually made by an informal management committee (Manco), comprising the chairperson, vice-chairperson, treasurer, director and other professional officers on the Board, while the members of the executive committee were '*faced with a* fait accompli *and asked to ratify the decisions [of the Management Committee]*'.[157] These frictions within the executive committee turned it into a weak, centralised structure incapable of managing the critical ideological and financial dilemmas that the organisation was facing. This was in sharp contrast to the financial crisis in 1985 when a strong lay leadership joined forces to rescue the Jewish day school system. The current restructuring began with manipulation, secrecy and rumours; with one person – the CEO – given a free hand in financial and educational matters. While his conditions of employment were not disclosed it was announced that he '*would only be remunerated if he turned the organisation from debit to profit*',[158] thereby connecting his performance pay bonus directly to the cost-cutting objectives of the restructuring. Open debate was curtailed in order to keep the perceived unity of the community, and the executive committee endorsed yet another uninformed decision.

This chapter provided the local and global contexts for the restructuring of the Jewish community schools. It shows that by the turn of the 20th century the schools were facing financial, ideological and managerial crises. It seems that the organisation was no longer in sync with its environment and was unable to balance the dichotomies inherent in its complex terrain. These dichotomies included the tension between being an exclusive

[155] Profile of CEO. *Davidian Star*, July 2001.
[156] Jewish Identity. *Mitzvot Fact Sheet Series*, SABJE, July 2000.
[157] Minutes of the executive committee meeting, 21 November 2000.
[158] Minutes of the executive committee meeting, 24 April 2001.

Jewish school in the new democratic South Africa; the tension created by the need to provide for a religiously diverse Jewish community while various factors were pulling the organisation towards the extreme "right"; and the tension between keeping an "island" of secular/Zionist ethos in a community that had moved towards either religious Zionism or non-Zionism. Moreover, with depleting financial and human resources there was very little energy and capacity to manage these tensions. For those who were managing the organisation it seemed as if control had been lost. The survival of the Jewish community schools became dependent on a managerial solution and its promise to rescue the organisation from chaos. Subsequently, the lay leaders chose a "saviour" to sort out the schools' complex ideological and economic problems, unwittingly shaping the future of the Jewish community in South Africa.

The backdrop to all these conflicts and tensions was the uncertainties and fears experienced by the Jewish community in the face of local and global changes. I therefore end this chapter by highlighting the political, social and economic forces in the community at the beginning of the 21st century, during which time the restructuring of the Jewish community schools took place.

The Jewish community in Johannesburg at the beginning of the 21st century

Emigration and crime were believed to be the two factors that impacted most on the community during this period. It is perceived that there is hardly a Jewish family who has not been affected by crime (Shimoni, 2003) or who does not have at least one member living abroad (Saks, 2003). Demographic shifts within Johannesburg led to the closing of some Jewish institutions and the opening of others, mostly in and around the eastern Johannesburg suburb of Glenhazel,[159] which became the centre for religious and communal activity. A cut in government subsidies resulted in a serious financial crisis for the homes for the aged and other institutions that cared for the needy. It was perceived that fragmentation in the community and the move towards right-wing orthodoxy, started a trend by which each group developed its own community structure and avoided contributing to the mainstream. On the other hand, the mainstream community was often called on to help the small fringe organisations when they ran into financial deficits.[160] The Chief Rabbi announced that the community is "haemorrhaging in the middle", leaving the

[159] Glenhazel is in close proximity to King David Linksfield. That suburb and others surrounding it are currently referred to as "the bible belt" because of the high percentage of observant Jews and Jewish communal institutions in the area.
[160] Fragmentation exacerbates community financial crisis. *SA Jewish Report*, 23 March 2001.

elders in the care of the community[161] and urged Jews to stay in South Africa.[162] Security concerns were put high on the agenda. Moreover, the global world was on the brink of recession; stock markets started to plummet and the boom in the information technology sector seemed to have come to an end. All this impacted negatively on middle-class Jewish households in South Africa. Consequently, *'a profound despondency had overtaken the community due to emigration, crime, economic hardship, and a diminishing donor base for essential welfare and educational institutions'* (Shain, 2001:467).

Internationally, the *Intifada* was a constant reminder that peace in the Middle East was not forthcoming, and anti-Semitism had again reared its ugly head, especially in France and other European countries.[163] South African Jewry was the least affected, but there was an increase in the numbers of reported incidents of anti-Semitism, including offensive comments on radio talk shows, letters to the press, inflammatory caricatures, incidents of vandalism to Jewish property, the desecration of Jewish graves, denials of the Holocaust, etc.[164] Anti-Zionist sentiment, largely as a result of ongoing violence in the Middle East, has been blurred with traditional anti-Semitic rhetoric (Saks & Kopelowitz, 1999). Most notable was the World Conference Against Racism, which took place in Durban during September 2001 and became a forum for extreme anti-Israel and anti-Semitic demonstrations, mostly emanating from elements within sections of the Muslim community (Saks, 2002; 2003). Moreover, as a response to globalisation and modernisation there has been a resurgence of Islamic consciousness and fundamentalist groups, coupled with a great sense of hostility towards Western democracies, Israel included. This has been described as "the clash of civilisations" and is expressed in the widespread violence around the world involving Muslims (Huntington, 2002). The media has begun to ponder Israel's fate. *Newsweek* dedicated a special issue to the question: "*The future of Israel – How will it survive?*" (1 April 2002). The acts of 9/11 invoked the United States' attack on Afghanistan and the Taliban in the search for Osama bin Laden. Later, in March 2003, the war on Iraq began. In South Africa many pro-Palestinian presenters and callers used radio talk shows to air unmonitored speeches, spreading rumours that Israel and the Jews were behind the 9/11 attacks,[165] and later on, the instigators of the war on Iraq. It has been perceived in the

[161] Community 'haemorrhaging in the middle' could spell problem in long term. *SA Jewish Report*, 1–8 September 2000.
[162] Harris, C. Perform a Mitzvah, stay in SA. *Business Day*, 23 March 2000.
[163] Anti-Semitism, How bad is it? *Time*, 17 June 2002.
[164] Anti-Semitism low in SA. *SA Jewish Report*, 7–14 February 2003.
[165] Lies and conspiracy theories. *SA Jewish Report*, 22–29 November 2002.

community that the image of Israel in the media has changed from that of the "brave David" of the 1948–1967 era to the "brutal Goliath". There were talks about a global Jewish network, linking Israel and the United States, that aims to control the world. These perceptions and events have further intensified feelings of helplessness and frustration in the Jewish community in South Africa and provided the backdrop to the restructuring of the Jewish community schools.