

**CHAPTER 6**  
**SNAKES IN PARADISE**  
**1910-1919**

The years following the union of South Africa were dominated by power plays between the British Unionists and the Afrikaans nationalists. The political games that so occupied the world were played out on a smaller, but no less deadly, scale at the national level of South African politics. The politicking had serious and dire implications for the many South Africans who were quietly trying to raise their families in the leafy suburbs or the squalid townships of Johannesburg.

The year 1910 saw South Africa go from a spoil of war to a dominion state<sup>1</sup>, which allowed South Africa certain freedoms and liberties within the framework of the British commonwealth but maintained many of its political and economic ties to Britain. The government, as it stood after Union, had at its head a governor-general officially appointed by the British monarchy. The post was held for five years and the governor-general had the power to veto any decisions made by parliament. Parliament in turn was led by the Prime Minister, who was the leader of the majority party. It was, however, the governor-general who had the right to convene or adjourn parliament (Lacour-Gayet, 1977). The structure of the government illustrates the point that the term ‘independence’ could only be used very loosely at this time.

Part of the British project in South Africa was to try and ensure that the White population was 60 per cent British and 40 per cent Afrikaner (Lacour-Gayet, 1977). Milner, put it quite succinctly when he said, “We not only want a majority of British but we want a fair margin, because of the large proportion of cranks that we British always generate and who take particular pleasure in going against their own people” (quoted in Lacour-Gayet, 1977: 229). The reasoning was simple, the more British there were living in South Africa the more control Britain would have. Unfortunately, for the British, the census of 1911 showed that the vast majority of White South Africans were Afrikaans-speaking native South Africans and not, as had been hoped, immigrant English-speakers.

The tension between the English and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans was further exacerbated when the Prime Minister and leader of the South African Party, Louis Botha visited Britain in 1911. His visit may have cemented the alliance between the British government and South Africa but it destroyed Botha’s credibility amongst the majority of Afrikaners (Adams and Giliomee, 1979). The Afrikaner nation needed a new figurehead and it was J.B.M Hertzog who stepped into the breach. Hertzog was a fervent Afrikaner

nationalist. He argued that the Afrikaner nation needed to be protected and promoted in the face of the British power that existed in South Africa (Shimoni, 1980).

By 1912 a split in the party was imminent especially after Hertzog made a number of speeches using the slogan, “South Africa first” (Keppel-Jones, 1975). Hertzog’s speeches were cleverly crafted and he consistently asserted that ‘South Africanism’ was not a linguistic issue but rather a question of national loyalty. As long as individuals were loyal to South Africa above all else then their language or origin was entirely irrelevant. In 1914 the South African Party divided in two, with Louis Botha and Jan Smuts at the helm of the South African Party, and Dr Malan and Hertzog leading the newly created National Party. The Nationalists gradually grew in power and stature until the 1920s when the South African Party finally had to combine with the Unionists in order to maintain a majority in parliament.

The battle for domination between the two main political groupings finally came to a head when Botha agreed to support Britain in the First World War and to send troops into German South West Africa in an attempt to annex it for the allies. That act met with fierce resistance by a small group within the Union who felt that supporting their former enemies against a country from which many Afrikaners claimed kinship was insufferable. As a result a small uprising took place towards the end of 1914, known as the 1914 Rebellion. It was quickly quashed by the 30 000 soldiers that Botha sent in to Johannesburg to quell the riot (Lacour-Gayet, 1977). Botha’s actions were powerful political statements, which clearly said that Botha’s government was more strongly aligned with the interests of the British than those of the Afrikaans-speaking South Africans.

### **Jewish Politicians and Politics**

The politics outlined above certainly did not pass the Jewish community by. As one of the few ethnic minorities in South Africa categorized as White, it could hardly have done so. There was, however, never a Jewish block vote. Each Jewish man (women could not vote at the time) followed the dictates of his own conscience and beliefs.

“On general political issues, those affecting all citizens, the Jews have never acted as a group; each individual has followed his own political line according to his personal convictions. Jews have been elected to legislative bodies only as individual citizens and never as representatives of the Jewish community”

(Saron, 1955c: 374)

The Jewish vote was too small to ever have been seriously courted by any of the main political groups. In 1911 the Jewish population only made up 3.7 per cent of Whites in South Africa and has never achieved more than 4.5 per cent of the White population (Saron, 1960;

Dubb, 1984). Notwithstanding the above comments the majority of Jews favoured the Unionists because of the Jewish population's identification with White English-speakers and the belief that while under British protection their rights and civil liberties would be guaranteed (Shimoni, 1980). The Jewish community suspected that if the Nationalists were allowed to gain control of the country then the Jews would quickly find themselves disenfranchised and regarded, once again, as foreigners in their adopted land.

Jews became actively involved in national politics during this decade. Five Jews were elected to parliament in 1915 and again in 1919. Most of them stood as Unionist candidates with the exception of a single Jew who stood as National Party candidate. Jews were concerned with more than the mainstream English-Afrikaans opposition that existed. They were intimately involved with other racial struggles that were occurring in South Africa. A number of Jews worked with or for Mahatma Gandhi and contributed to the work he did in South Africa (Millin, 1926). Gandhi even commented that in his fight for the enfranchisement of the Indian community in South Africa he was "surrounded by Jews" (quoted in Shimoni, 1980: 81).

Jews also contributed to the growing trade union and labour movements. As discussed in the previous chapter, many of the Jews who immigrated to South Africa after the turn of the century had been heavily influenced by the Bundist movement in Russia and brought with them the ideals and philosophies of socialism. The labour organizations grew and expanded during this time (Adler, 1977). Russian Jewish immigrants Gabriel Weinstock and Morris Kentridge were prominent Labour Party candidates who represented their constituencies in parliament (Shimoni, 1980). Johannesburg was also home to the Yiddish-speaking Branch of the International Socialist League/Bund (ISB) (Fig. 6.1, points A and D) (Mantzaris, 1987).

Socialism appealed to the working masses in principle and meetings were held in Yiddish, the *lingua franca* of the poor Eastern European Jews, thereby making it particularly accessible for the majority of poorer Jews. Many Jews were still living in the slums of Ferreirastown and Marshallstown (Fig. 6.1) barely making ends meet, and 59 per cent of economically active Jews were artisans or small shopkeepers (Mantzaris, 1987). Not surprisingly the centre of the socialist and labour movements continued to be in the Fordsburg-Mayfair area but inroads were made into the slums, generally in an attempt to recruit more people to the socialist cause. Sachs describes socialist leaders and supporters walking through the slums proclaiming their ideologies vigorously in Yiddish, inciting arguments and discussion about the unfairness of the capitalist system and the benefits of socialism (Sachs, 1949).

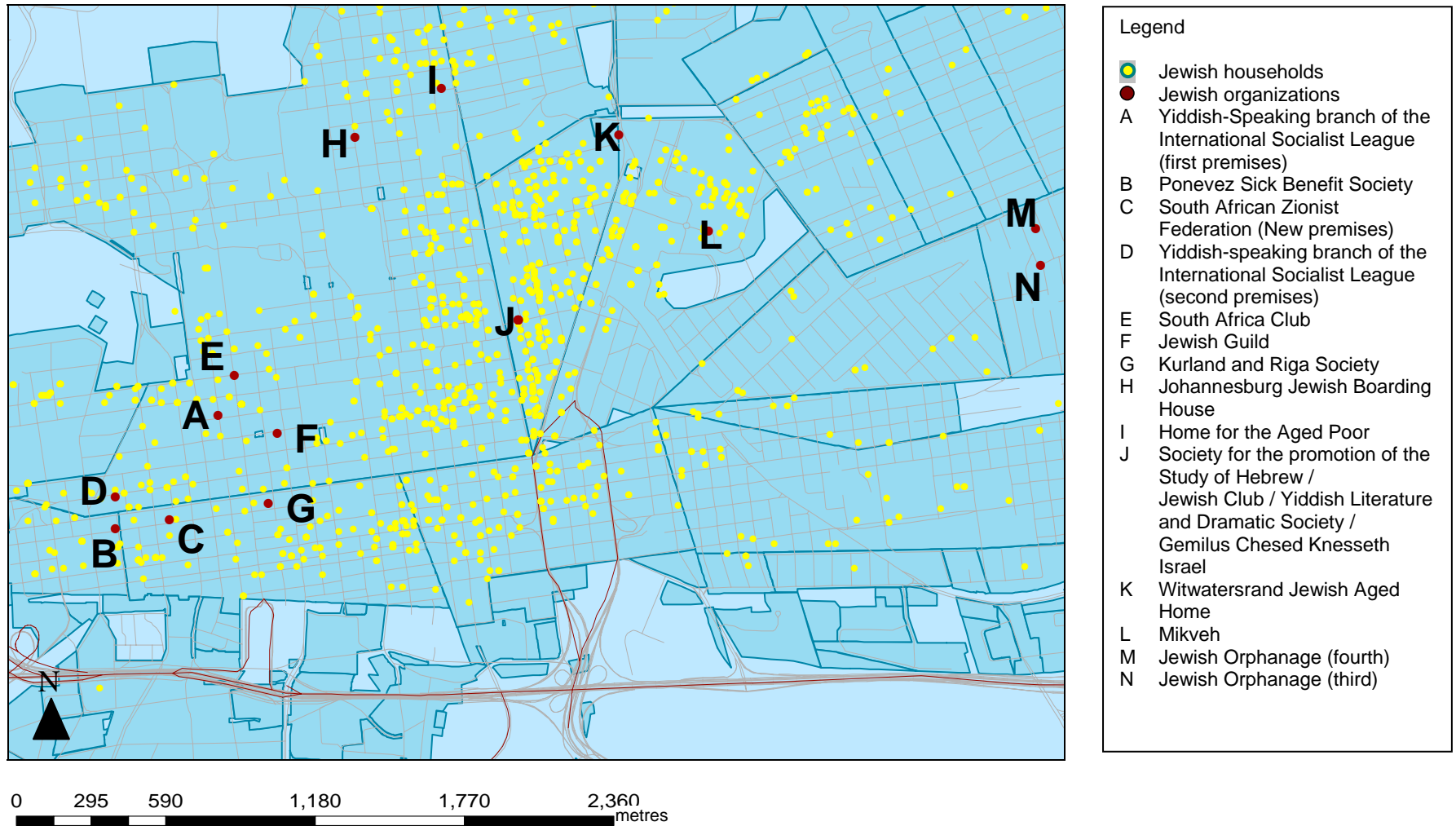


Figure 6.1: Jewish organizations in Johannesburg, 1911-1919.  
(Source: Appendix IX and Appendix X)

“...a little Communist Jew of about five feet in height whose clothes were as ill-fitting as the name Jos. Gray which he carries. Assuming a Napoleonic stance, he would declaim in ringing tones that echoed down the labyrinthine backyards of Ferreirastown, ‘Sklaffen (slaves) why don’t you fight for your freedom?’”.

(Quoted in Sachs, 1949: 85)

These crude measures were effective and inspired many of the Jewish poor to attend the rallies and social functions held by the socialist organizations of the time. Interestingly the Yiddish-speaking Branch of the International Socialist League was violently anti-Zionistic, believing that Zionism was the ideal of the assimilated Western European Jews and the earlier Eastern European Jews who had been corrupted by capitalism (Adler, 1977). This attitude highlights the stratification and dissension that existed within the Jewish community of the time.

### **Workers, World War, and Strikes**

The South African economy, after Union, was dominated by mining and the foreign, particularly British, investment in it (Adam and Giliomee, 1979). Black and Afrikaner agriculture had been ravaged during the *Boer* War, and it had not yet recovered. The continually increasing taxes forced on the rural Black people resulted, as they were designed to, in mass migration of rural Black people, predominantly men, to the cities particularly to Johannesburg (Jeeves, 1985). The hierarchies in the mines had been well-established since before the turn of the century, skilled work was for Whites and unskilled labour was reserved for Black employees (Keppel-Jones, 1975). After Union, however, the hierarchy was further formalized when the government passed the Mines and Works Act of 1911, which required that the higher paying skilled jobs could *only* be held by Whites (Callinicos, 1994).

Notwithstanding the Act, the poorer least-skilled Whites still felt threatened by the Black labourers’ potential ability to undercut their wages. The result was inevitable and in 1913 the White miners decided to strike. Unfortunately the matter got out of hand and shots were fired in the streets of Johannesburg killing 25 strikers (Keppel-Jones, 1975; van der Walt, 2004). Neither the mine-owners nor the politicians of the day had any real experience in dealing with civil unrest. The strike ended when government representatives “ . . . Shutting themselves up with the workers’ leaders in a hotel in Johannesburg ‘surrounded by a screaming, struggling mass of men, threatening to break through the police cordon’, they [the government representatives] signed an agreement which looked very much like a surrender” (Lacour-Gayet, 1977: 253). Generals Smuts and Botha acceded to many of the demands by the strikers: reinstating all miners, and taking their concerns to the heads of the various

mining houses. Nonetheless the presence of soldiers in the city and the use of fire-power, caused a great deal of concern amongst the general populace and eyebrows were certainly raised at the manner in which the State had dealt with what was considered a purely civil matter.<sup>2</sup>

In 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War, South Africa could no longer import the wide-variety of commodities that it had need of from Europe. There was no other choice but to produce its own goods to satisfy the needs of the population. As a result the industrial sector in South Africa grew to over six times its previous size by 1921 (Keppel-Jones, 1975). Once again the poor White proletariat wanted its place entrenched in the newly formed industries and went on strike for the second time in two years. Botha and Smuts having been put over a barrel once before refused the position again and instead of negotiating with the strikers once more sent for the army, isolated the union leaders and deported them to Britain (Lacour-Gayet, 1977). If the military action of 1913 had raised eyebrows, the 1914 show of force raised a number of serious questions regarding the fitness of the government. Not to mention that it further alienated the poor-white Afrikaners from the South African Party thereby giving greater impetus to the nationalist movement sweeping South Africa at the time.

Johannesburg Jewry: consolidation in times of turmoil.

It is against the above economic and political backdrop that Johannesburg Jewry began to consolidate its place in the city. The massive immigration of the last 30 years, in which 30 000 Eastern European Jews had come to South Africa, began to slow down. The next 20 years would see only another 10 000 Jewish Eastern Europeans enter the country via South African ports (Saron, 1960). The Jewish population of the Transvaal exceeded 25 000 by 1911 and the ratio of men to women was estimated to be 1.5:1 (Clouts, 1960; Saron, 1960). The Jewish community had more married men and families and was thus a great deal more stable than most other immigrant communities in Johannesburg (Krut, 1987).

The majority of the essential Jewish organizations and institutions required for Jewish communal life were already in place by the time Union was declared in 1910. Zionist, socialist and communal organization had been set up and their protocols put in place in the preceding decades of Johannesburg's development. Thus the community turned its attention to other matters. Education, which had always been of primary importance gained even greater prominence and a number of schools, *chederim*, and *Talmud Torahs* came into existence during these years (Fig. 6.2, points F and H), a *Shechita* Board (a committee to control the ritual slaughter of animals) was finally instituted and three new Jewish newspapers



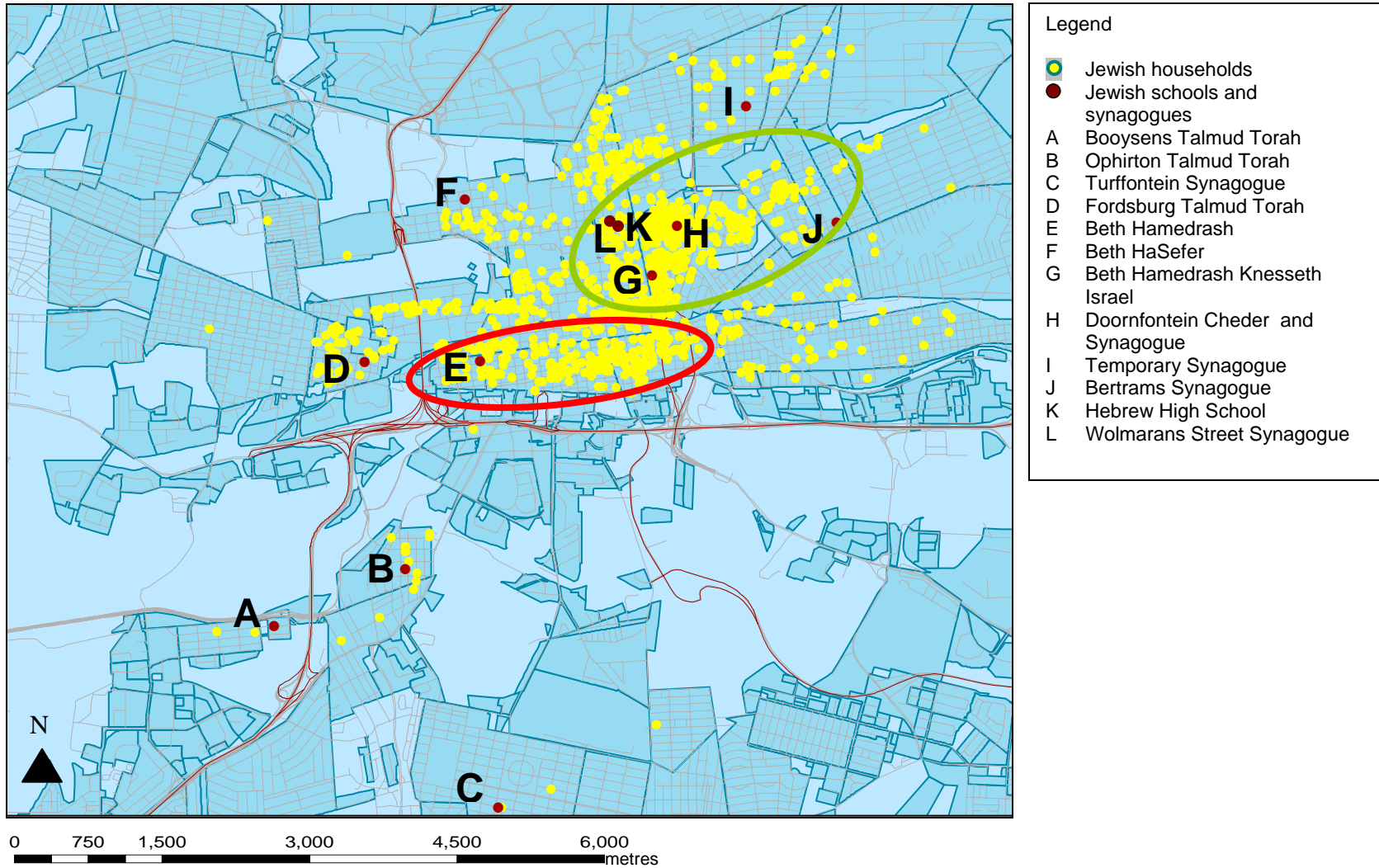


Figure 6.2: Synagogues and Jewish Schools in Johannesburg, 1911-1919.  
(Source: Appendix IX and Appendix XI)

were added to the existing two that had already been set up (Fig. 6.3, A, B, C, D, and E). They centred their premises in the commercial district on the edge of the CBD, close to the other Jewish organizations and the large conglomeration of Jews who still lived in the Ferreirastown district (Barry and Law, 1985). Six new synagogues were built during this decade (Fig. 6.2, points C, E, F, G, H, and J). The community's north and eastward expansion slowed down and areas that were traditionally Jewish were densified. Although the Jewish community of Johannesburg was, in general, flourishing, anti-Semitism was on the rise and new and rather disturbing ethnic stereotypes entered South Africa's imaginary with the continuing development of Afrikaner nationalism in South Africa. The consolidation and compaction of the Jewish community within the Johannesburg cityscape was, at least in part, a reaction to the mounting anti-Jewish feeling that was becoming more and more evident in White South African society, the details of which will be discussed below.

### **Jewish Geography of Johannesburg**

Jews were involved in all sectors of trade and commerce in Johannesburg, prompting Millin to write in 1914,

“...it certainly seems that the public eye is very semitically filled in Johannesburg. The cabmen are Jews, and the fruit vendors. The jewellers are Jews and the pawnbrokers. The variety artists and the audiences. The lawyers are Jews. The stockbrokers are Jews. The millionaires are Jews.”

(Millin, 1914:6)

Two areas of Johannesburg became particularly interesting during the period 1910 to 1920. The first was Marshallstown and Ferreirastown (bounded in red on Fig. 6.2), which became the point of connectivity between the poor Black mine-workers and the poverty-stricken Eastern European immigrants. Immigrant Jews, or ‘greeners’ as they were known toiled away in the slums, working in eating-houses, (which will be discussed in more detail below) or as clerks, and manual labourers. The second was the consolidation of Jewish settlement in the north-eastern part of the city (area bounded in green on Fig. 6.2). The area became solidly middle-class as increasingly those Jews who were financially stable moved north. Many of the Jews who had arrived earlier and had achieved economic security and social status now settled in the north-eastern parts of Johannesburg (Fig. 6.2), giving rise to the Jewish communities of Yeoville and Judith's Paarl. The number of Jewish residents was so high that the suburbs became colloquially known as ‘Jewville’ and ‘Jew's Paarl’.<sup>3</sup>



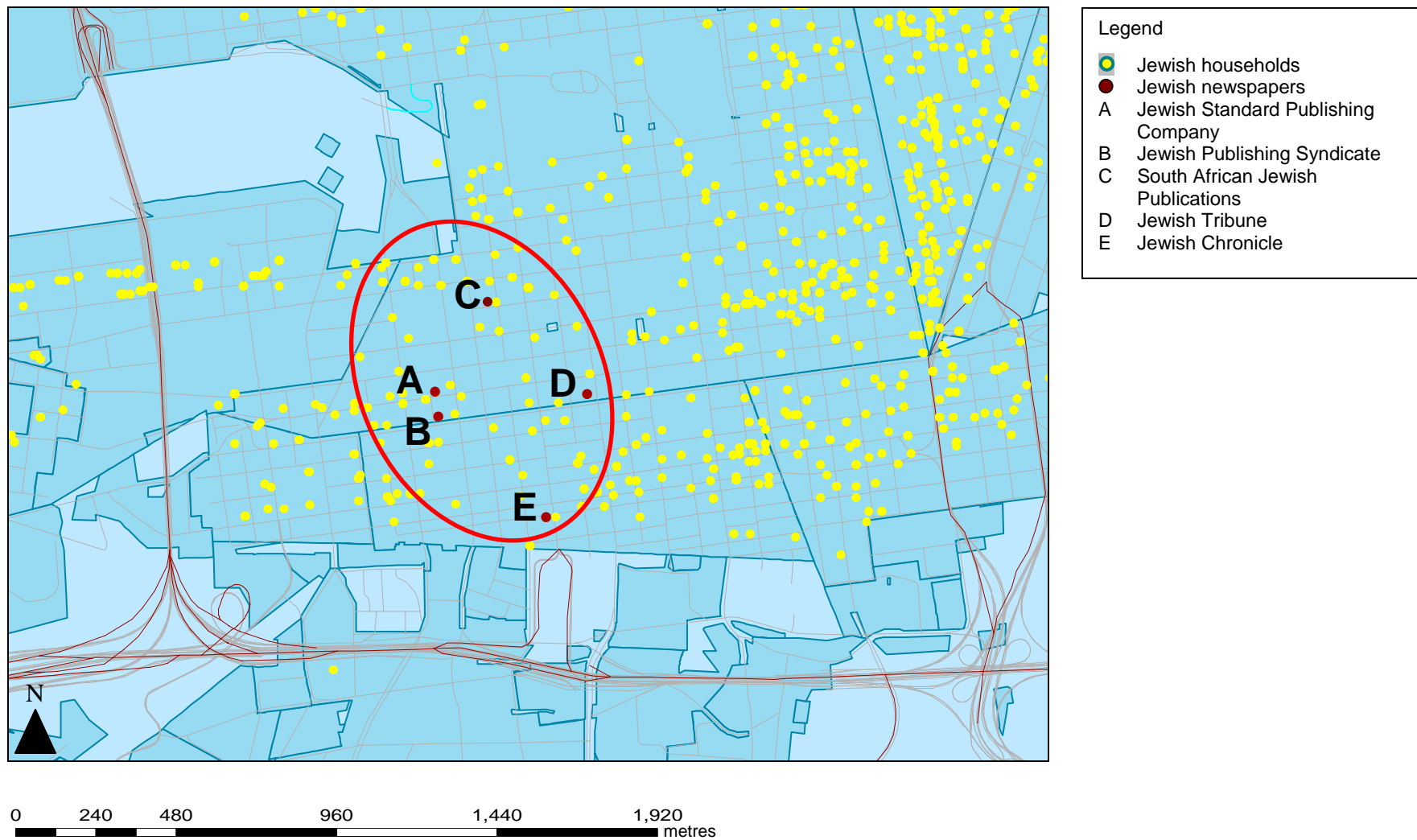


Figure 6.3: Jewish Newspapers in Johannesburg, 1911-1919.  
(Source: Appendix IX and Appendix XII)

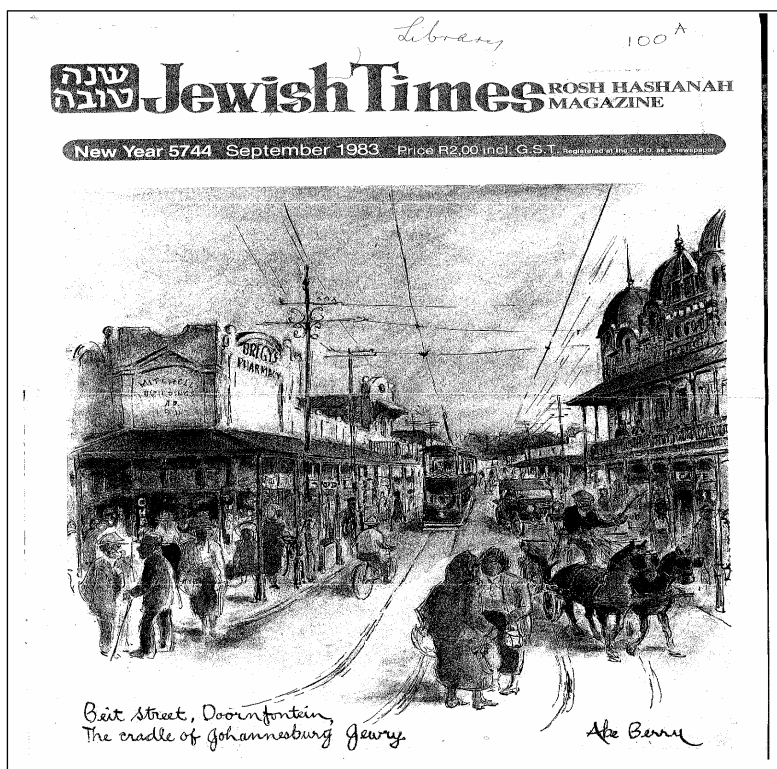
The middle-class move north

Doornfontein, Yeoville, and Hillbrow were beginning to have predominantly Jewish residents and had a distinctly Jewish flavour (Figure 6.4). *Kosher* butcheries abounded in these areas, and Hillbrow alone had three *Kosher* stores (Fig. 6.5, points T, U, and V) while Lorentzville had another (Fig. 6.5, point Z). Over time many of the immigrants who had arrived in South Africa, penniless and unable to speak English, had become fairly successful artisans and shopkeepers (Mantzaris, 1987). As their fortunes improved they were able to move out of the slums and poorer areas of Johannesburg and into the more expensive suburbs of Doornfontein, Yeoville, and Hillbrow. Jewish communities had existed in Doornfontein since before the Boer War, but changing land values now allowed the more successful albeit not yet wealthy Jews to move in. Doornfontein was an intensely Jewish enclave (Fig. 6.4). Wedcliffe, a diarist of the time and who had come to Johannesburg from the more secular and assimilated Jewish community of Edinburgh, described Doornfontein thus,

“For the first time in my life I see in Beit Street what a long Jewish business street is like. Above each shop the placard of the owner is in Yiddish. I hear Yiddish spoken wherever I go. The situation is not what I am accustomed to from childhood: be a Jew at home and a man abroad. Here in an area now so close to me I experience the thrill of being a Jew anywhere and at any time.”

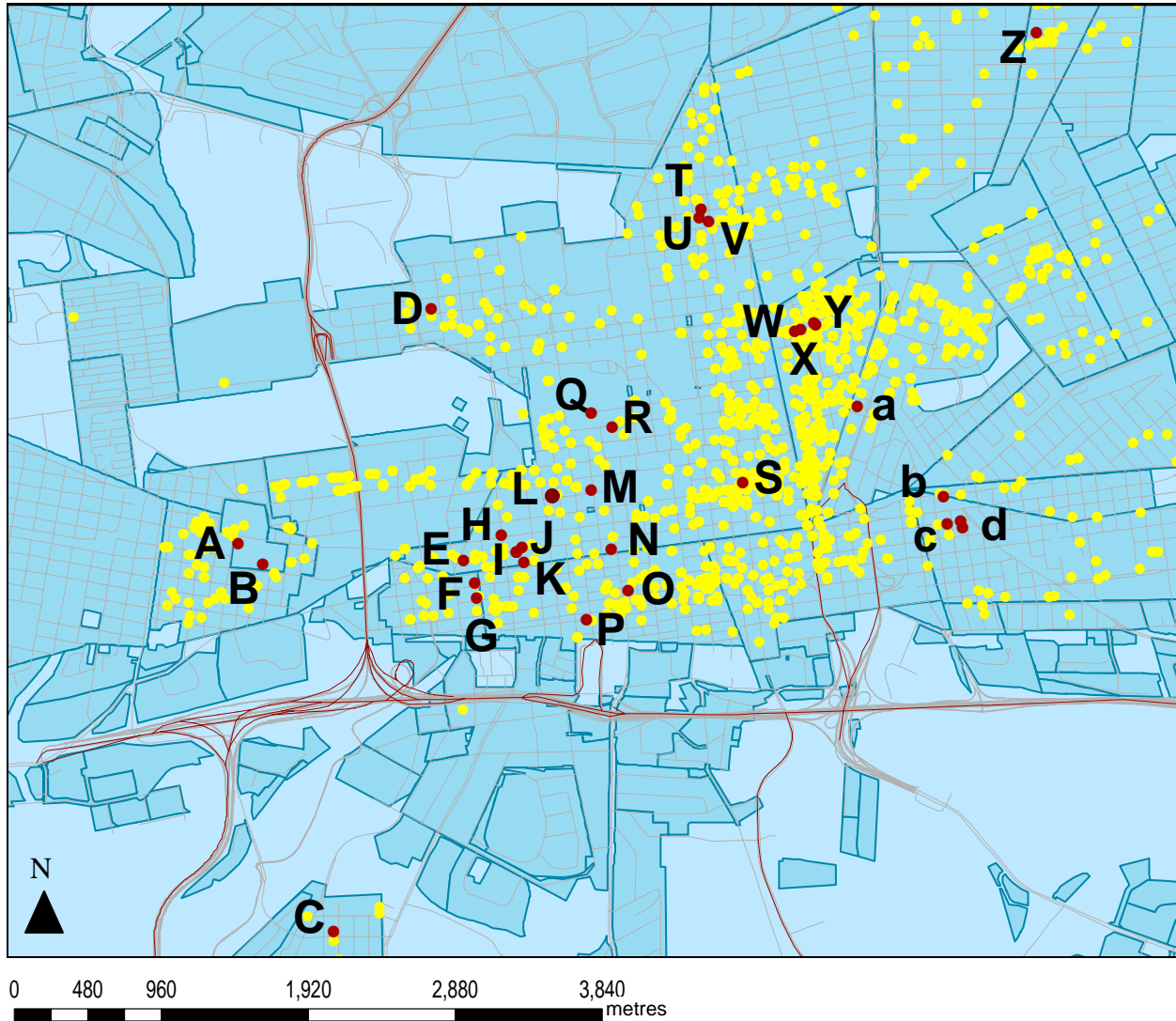
(Wedcliffe, 1979: 9)

Doornfontein became the heart and hub of the middle-class Johannesburg Jewish



community (Fig. 6.4). The area was mainly settled by families and to that end new schools were needed to cater for the children’s Jewish education. Although it had always been a priority for the Johannesburg community the ability to provide it had been severely curtailed during the past decade when the Transvaal Education

FIGURE 6.4: Reproduction of a Doornfontein street scene, circa 1915. (Source: *Jewish Times*, 1983: Front cover)



- Legend
- Jewish households
  - Jewish businesses
  - A S. Frank Kasher Butchery
  - B M. Segal's Kasher Grocers
  - C Berman's Kasher Butchery
  - D S. Soblotzky Kasher Butchery
  - E Max Kupishock Kasher Butchery
  - F Ferreira's Kasher Butchery
  - G Jacob Shochet Kasher Butchery
  - H T.W. Beckett Kasher Produce
  - I Max's Kasher Restaurant
  - J Jewish Standard Publishing Co.
  - K Jewish Publishing Syndicate
  - L South African Jewish Publications
  - M Russia Kasher Delicacy Store
  - N Jewish Tribune
  - O Mrs Weinberg's Kasher Delicacy Store
  - P Jewish Chronicle
  - Q Russia Kasher Delicacy Store (second premises)
  - R J. Rondi Kasher Bakery
  - S Tauchum Meyer's Kasher Butchery
  - T New Crown Kasher Butchery
  - U Berea Kasher Butchery
  - V C. Livingstone Kasher Butchery
  - W L. Rabinowitz Kasher Butchery
  - X Rand Kasher Meat Market
  - Y New Kasher Meat Market
  - Z Sundelsohn's Kasher Butchery
  - a Kadishewitz's Kasher Butchery
  - b O. Katz Kasher Butchery
  - c Jeppe Kasher Butchery
  - d Goldfield's Kasher Meat Market

Figure 6.5: Jewish businesses in Johannesburg, 1911-1919. (Source: Appendix IX and Appendix XIII)





(left to right)

Back row: S. Goldberg, Brother Columbine, Mr H Garvin, P. Goldberg;

Middle row: W.Hitge, H. Wasserzug, F. Israel, H.Levy;

Front row: M.Franklin, F.Estill)

FIGURE 6.6: Members of the Marist Brothers Boy's Soccer Team, 1909.  
(Source: Marist Brothers Archive).

Ordinance of 1907 prohibited religious instruction and denominational schools (Peltz, 1984). As a result the Jewish Government School (Fig. 5.7, point I) was forced to close down. There were, however, afternoon *chederim*, where children were taught Hebrew and Jewish studies. Marist College (Fig. 5.7, point K) and the German School both allowed the community to use their premises in the afternoon.<sup>4</sup> (Katz, 1980).

In fact the Marist Brothers College had included a number of Jewish students since its establishment in 1889, and it had educated quite a few Jewish notables, Issie Maisels, Siegfred Raphaely, and Gustav Hartog, to name just a few (Hartog, 1929, Maisels, 1998). The first matriculating class was composed of three Jews and three Catholics and later records indicate the prevalence of Jews hosted by the school.<sup>5</sup> A photograph (Fig. 6.6) of a school soccer team in 1909, gives an indication of the number of Jews in the school (although why the team is three players short, remains a mystery). In 1911 the ordinance was repealed and the Jewish Government School, under the name of the Hebrew High School (Fig. 6.2, point K), was re-formed in Wolmarans Street, close to the newly ‘colonized’ suburbs of Doornfontein and New Doornfontein.<sup>6</sup> It was well within walking distance of those families settled in the north and provided a Jewish and secular education to its scholars (Peltz, 1984).

(left to right)

Back row: S. Goldberg, Brother Columbine, Mr H Garvin, P. Goldberg;

Middle row: W.Hitge, H. Wasserzug, F. Israel, H.Levy;

Front row: M.Franklin, F.Estill)

FIGURE 6.6: Members of the Marist Brothers Boy’s Soccer Team, 1909.  
(Source: Marist Brothers Archive).

The second important Hebrew school that opened was the *Talmud Torah* in Doornfontein (Fig.6.2, point H). It was an afternoon *cheder* that catered for the 200 Jewish children who attended the Doornfontein Primary School on the adjoining property (Norwich, 1988). Daily instruction in Hebrew and Jewish studies was offered to the children, especially to boys who were preparing for their *Bar Mitzvahs*.

Although there was a large Jewish presence in the Doornfontein area, the community only had the Doornfontein Synagogue to cater for its religious needs until the middle of the decade when the Doornfontein *Talmud Torah* Synagogue (Fig. 6.2, point H) was built. The synagogue was the place of worship for the families of the children who attended the Doornfontein *Talmud Torah*. The number of children attending the school and the size of the building, which took up three plots, gives a fair indication of just how many Jewish families were in the area and their level of devoutness. The community grew to such an extent that another synagogue was planned at the end of the decade, the Beth Hamedrash Kneseth Israel (Fig. 6.2, point G). Unfortunately, for the congregation, the synagogue was never built and

the congregants used a series of temporary synagogues for their festivals and communal activities (Cohen, 1924).

A further sign of the degree of religious zeal among the population of the area was the establishment of the *mikveh* or ritual baths (Fig. 6.1, point L). They were built adjoining the Doornfontein swimming pool and formed an important part of Jewish spiritual life as they were used for ceremonial cleansing purposes before the Sabbath and Jewish festivals (Norwich, 1992). Doornfontein could also boast four *Kosher* butcheries (Fig. 6.5, points, W, X, Y, and a). A number of Jewish organizations had moved into the area, although they had mainly communal and care functions. Two homes for the aged (Fig. 6.1, points I and K) existed in the area to take care of the Jewish elderly (Perk, 1966). The homes were located within the Jewish enclaves so that the relatives of the residents could easily visit their kin. There was also a Jewish Boarding House (Fig. 6.1, point H) which provided *Kosher* meals and a sense of 'home' for Jews living in Johannesburg without their families.

There were a number of Jewish children who required care and guardianship, the Communal League (a Jewish charitable organization) established the South Africa Jewish Orphanage in 1903. The original institution was in Hillbrow but with the changing times and increased number of children needing homes it was eventually moved to Kensington, changing locations (Fig. 6.1, point N) until it settled at point M on Figure 6.1 in 1909 where it stayed until the early 1920s (Kaplan and Robertson, 1991).

The Jewish community continued to expand toward the eastern part of the city, moving into the newly developing middle class suburbs on the eastern side of town (Fig. 6.5). The Bertrams Synagogue serviced the Jews who had moved into the lower middle-class suburbs of Judith's Paarl, Lorentzville, and Bertrams (Norwich, 1988). It was the centre of the community in the area and provided a communal meeting place, a *Talmud Torah*, and later a venue for the Zionist Society. In the suburbs just north of the CBD, the Braamfontein-Wanderers View Jewish community had also expanded. The Park Street Synagogue, one of the first places of worship erected in Johannesburg, had been declared unsafe and most of its congregants had moved north or east. As a result the Wolmarans Street Synagogue (Fig. 6.2, point L), later known as the Great Synagogue, was built (Jewish Affairs, 1984). After many years of negotiations the two congregations of the New and Old Hebrew Congregations combined to form the United Hebrew Congregation in 1915 which was then quartered at the Wolmarans Street Synagogue (Abrahams, 2002).

By the middle of the decade the north-eastern quadrant of Johannesburg became a densely occupied Jewish area, it had five synagogues, numerous *Kosher* facilities, schools,



Jewish organizations, and institutions. The population had increased overall, and it would seem that the Jewish enclaves became more and more densely populated, not only with Jewish families but also with what may be called the ‘ramparts of holiness’ (Meyer, 1979). The cultural artefacts and associations that allow and promote traditional Jewish life occurred with greater prevalence in the area. There are number of reasons for such a pattern to take shape but as will be argued below, the increasing anti-Semitism had a role to play in the changing form of the Jewish community on the Johannesburg landscape.

Doornfontein was not the only area that was consolidating, the congregations in the ‘deep south’ of Johannesburg, discussed in the last chapter, were also conglomerating and densifying. Booyens, Ophirton, and Fordsburg synagogues established *Talmud Torahs* on their sites, to serve the needs of the stable and growing communities (Fig. 6.2, points, A, B, and D respectively). Another congregation was added to the ‘southern’ Jewish communities - Turffontein and Forest Hill Hebrew Congregation was established in the early part of the second decade of the twentieth century. The Turffontein Synagogue (Fig. 6.2, point C) was built in 1916 to service the 100 Eastern European Jewish families who lived in the area (Norwich, 1988). It was a small enclave that never really grew or developed and by the late 1930s had basically disappeared

The old slums - the more things change the more they stay the same

Although large numbers of immigrant Eastern European Jews had ‘made good’ and had moved socially up a rung, and geographically north and eastward, there were still a number of Jews living in the slums of Ferreirastown and Marshallstown that they had been inhabiting since the end of the *Boer* War. It is recorded that,

“By 1913 the biggest concentration of Jews was in Ferreirastown. The worst slum area was opposite Ferreira Mine. Here was Cohen’s Yard or West Anderson Chambers, which consisted of single storey rooms on three sides opening into a yard in the middle in which the tenants did their work.”

(Quoted in Barry and Law, 1985: 28)

The cheap rent and well-established Jewish community made the district a useful place for new immigrants to initially settle and find their feet. The majority of *landsmanschaften* were still located in this area and two new *landsleits* were formed between 1910 and 1919, *viz.*, the Ponevez Sick Benefit Society and the Kurland and Riga Society (Fig. 6.1, points B and G). The Yiddish-speaking Branch of the International Socialist League, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, was also located in the area, close to its members and target audience (Fig. 6.1, point A). The first Beth Hamedrash had faithfully served the orthodox Jews living in the slums but by the middle of the decade it was too small to accommodate the

influx of 'traditional' Jews from Lithuania who required a house of prayer. The first Beth Hamedrash was demolished and rebuilt on a larger scale to facilitate the growth of the community (Fig. 6.2, point E) (Norwich, 1988). The Beth Hamedrash remained the centre of Jewish life for the Marshallstown and Ferreirastown Jewish community. It not only held religious services but was also home to the Chevra Mischna U'gemara (or Brotherhood Society to Study the Oral Law), an organization that was devoted to learning and discussing religious texts. The synagogue had a *mikveh* adjacent to it for the use of the very devout congregation who lived in the area and started a *Talmud Torah* for the children of the congregation so that they could learn the laws and customs of the very orthodox form of Judaism practised in Ferreirastown and Marshallstown.

The Jewish community was still served by a number of *Kosher* butcheries and produce stores, which had not moved and were, for the most part located in the commercial district around Commissioner Street, between Harrison and Von Wielligh Streets, in very much the same position that they had been in a decade earlier (Fig. 6.5, points E, F, G, H, I, and O). Johannesburg did not have an official institution dealing with the provision of *Kosher* meat (animals slaughtered according the rituals and rules of Judaism). Between 1903 and 1905 the Beth Din (or ecclesiastical court) had concerned itself with *Kosher* permits but did not have the capacity to deal with the flourishing *Kosher* food industry (Fig. 6.7) and was marred by internal politics and religious disputes. By 1905 the Beth Din was no longer responsible for regulating and monitoring the laws of *Kosher*. A system was established to replace the *Beth Din* whereby each synagogue had its own *shochet* (a man trained in the traditional method of ritual slaughter) and the congregants would pay him to slaughter animals in the correct way. By the end of 1910 this was deemed unacceptable as there was no controlling body to decide if an individual was properly trained as a *shochet* or not.<sup>7</sup>

A *shechitah* board was established which controlled the training and certification of *shochets* and liaised with the City Council on matters concerning the use of the abattoir.<sup>8</sup> The certified butchers could affix the title '*Kosher*' to the names of their butcheries thus assuring their patrons of the ritual purity of the food within those stores. There were *Kosher* butcheries in all areas that had high concentrations of Jewish households but the largest number was still in town around Marshallstown and Ferreirastown. The period 1911 – 1919 saw the greatest increase and number of *Kosher* facilities in Johannesburg (Fig. 6.7). The increase during this period was due to the fact that there was by 1911 a sizeable Jewish population that demanded and could afford to buy *Kosher* food was in existence in Johannesburg.

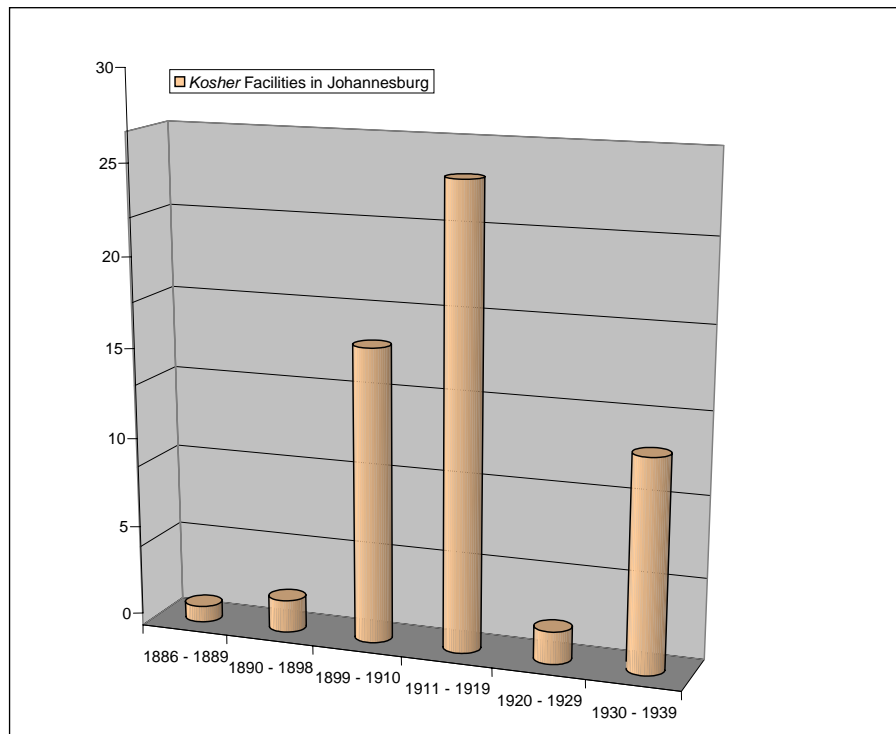


FIGURE 6.7: Additional *Kosher* Facilities in Johannesburg per decade, 1886-1939.

FIGURE 6.7: Additional *Kosher* Facilities in Johannesburg per decade, 1886-1939.

#### Native eating-houses and the laws of *Kosher*

One of the greatest ironies of the decade under discussion was the increased attention on the laws of *Kosher* and at the same time the predominance of Jews, who owned, ran and worked in native eating-houses<sup>9</sup> or ‘kaffireatniks’ that sold all manner of non-*Kosher* meat (Sherman, 2000). Thousands of poor Jews were involved in the industry in one way or another, “. . . his [Jewish eating-house owners and workers] were so commonplace [that] the *eatnik* [a Jew who worked native eating-houses] is a celebrated figure in South African Yiddish writings and formed an important part in the making of a South African Jewish community” (Rogerson, 1988: 23). There were a large number of eating-houses within poor areas inhabited by Jews and Blacks alike (Fig. 6.8) and in 1924 an estimated 58 per cent of all new eating-house applications came from Jews (Rogerson, 1988). The native eating-houses supplemented the diet of the Black miners living in the mine compounds (Sachs, 1958). The food was cheap and its origin and age were to be polite, suspect, the levels of hygiene were to all intents and purposes completely absent (Sherman, 2000). Leibowitz, in his book, *Bereh*, describes the process of food preparation in these eating-houses.

“...when the intestines start to stink so badly that even the tomcats start sneezing...[Bereh] carries them out into the yard, shoves them into old tin cans, around which fat golden flies from half of Africa are buzzing, washes them, sews together the decomposed pieces, cuts the rotten parts which are beyond repair into small bits, adds to them pieces of meat, onion, rice and potatoes, sprinkles handfuls of strong curry and white pepper over the mixture, boils it in paraffin tins and dishes it out on metal plates to hungry Black workers.”

(Quoted in Sherman, 2000: 516)

The eateries were generally staffed by poor Eastern European Jews who were recent immigrants, unfamiliar with either English or Afrikaans, and desperate for work. They worked 16 – 18 hour days, six days a week, and were paid very little but were generally provided with room and board by the eating-house owners (Titlestad, 1991). The fact that people were willing to live and work in these places is an indication of just how desperate the times were. Working in native eating-houses placed these Jews in a highly marginal position and created a subculture within the already confined ‘Litvak’ community, they were a group apart. The majority of Whites saw them as a class of untouchables, Europeans who had inverted the ‘natural’ order of things and served Blacks. The Blacks realized that within the racial hierarchy that existed the White eating-house employees still had dominion over them (Titlestad, 1991; Sherman, 2000). There are recorded events of Jews taking advantage of the Black miners, short-changing them, or even going so far as physical abuse and trusting to

their status as Whites to protect them from any repercussions (Tabatznik, 1987). Most immigrants did not remain eating-house assistants for the rest of their lives. Many of them used the eating-houses as a springboard and a way of entering the urban economy and learning the social practises of their adopted country, and certainly their children attained higher levels of education and better paying jobs than their parents (Titlestad, 1991).

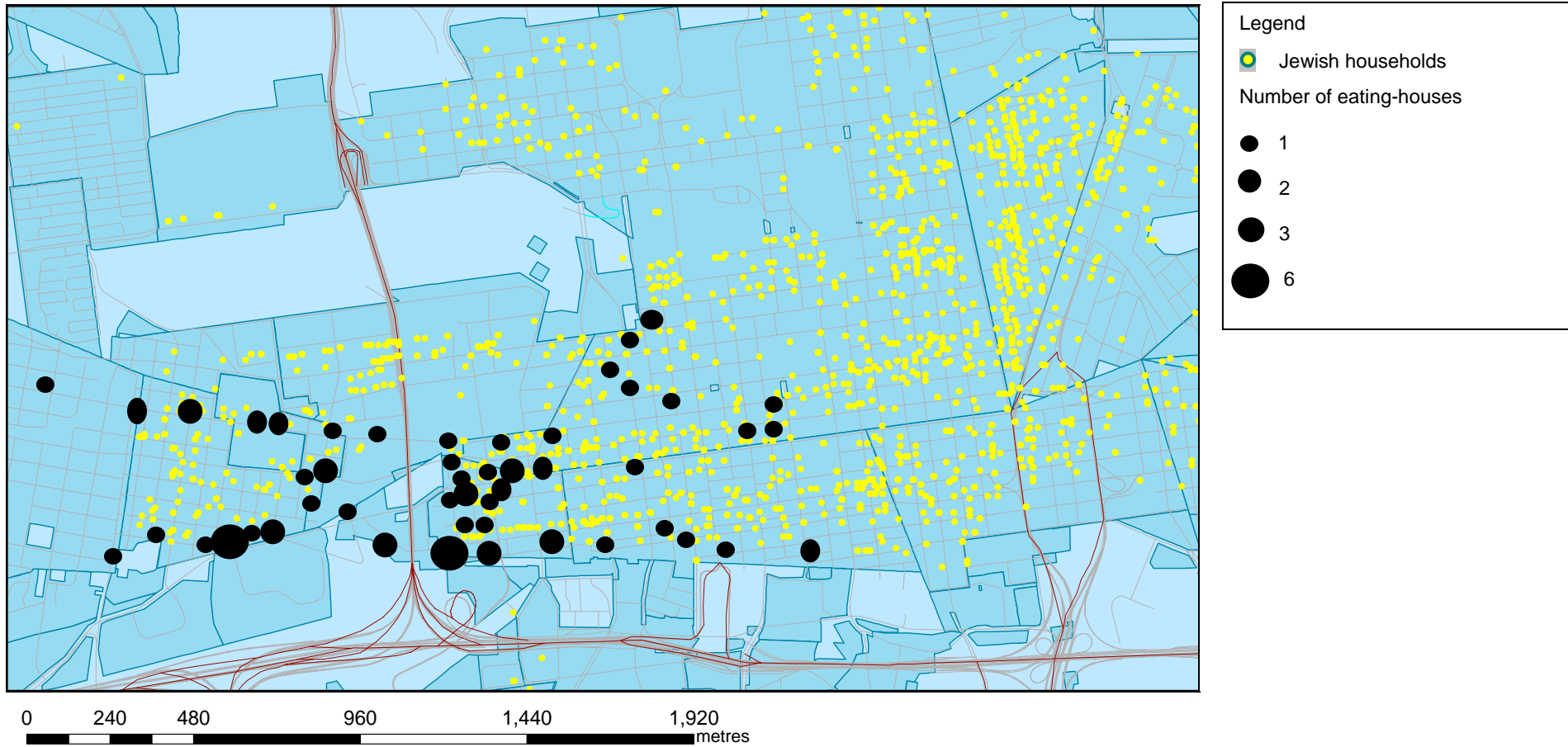


Figure 6.8: Sites of eating-houses in Johannesburg compared to the location of the Jewish community in the same areas, 1900-1920. (Source: Appendix XIV)



### **Anti-Semitism and Afrikaner Nationalism**

Wedcliffe's joy in being "a Jew anywhere any time", is perhaps a nostalgic view of how Jews were perceived in Johannesburg at the time (Wedcliffe, 1979: 9). The Afrikaans-speaking community was in the process of constructing its own identity in a post-Union South Africa. Led by Hertzog and Malan, they were trying to carve a place for themselves in the rapidly industrializing and globalizing economy. Part of the construction of a new Afrikaner nationalism was to create an ideology around who had the 'right' to wealth and power in South Africa. Since the *Boer War* the Afrikaners felt as if they were not given their due, as evidenced by the various strikes and moments of social unrest. As such they believed it was time to wrest power from the hands that were not 'true' South Africans and thus did not deserve it. In this case it was the British and those associated with the British, including Botha and Smuts, and the Jews (Library of Congress, 1996b).

Shain describes that in addition to the pre-Union construction of Jews as 'Peruvians' further stereotypes were added. For example, that of the Jew as 'Hoggenheimer', meaning a Jewish capitalist who profited from the honest labour of the poorer classes. The stereotype persisted because of the uncertain economic conditions that existed at the time and the general perception that the Jews were in control of the mining houses and some of the bigger industries (Shain, 2000). Anti-Semitism was also exacerbated by the rumours that Jews were not "enlisting [in the South African army] in sufficient numbers".<sup>10</sup> The idea that Jews were not only robbing the country of its natural resources but also not contributing to the war effort refused to go away. The truth, however, was quite different as ten per cent of the able Jewish men in the community enlisted, a higher average figure than in the other communities (Saron, 1955c).

A third anti-Semitic image appeared on the scene after the 1917 Russian Revolution. Strangely enough it was in direct contrast to the figure of Hoggenheimer and was that Jews as dangerous Bolsheviks were intent on anarchy and the destruction of the political system (Benson, 1987; Shain, 2000). The Jewish community had to defend itself against allegations that it was, as a whole, involved in the promotion of socialist ideals, "The fact that the Jewish element is so prominently associated with the control of the Bolshevik Government is natural enough...", reported *The Star* newspaper.<sup>11</sup> The general perception was that the majority of Russian Jews were Bolsheviks due to their mistreatment under the 'old' Russian government and had carried their resentment and ideology with them to South Africa. In order to quell this rumour the South African Board of Deputies put out a statement in the *Zionist Record* that certainly not all Russian Jews were socialists and that rumours to that effect were unjustified.

Although it must be queried how effective a statement like that was considering the *Zionist Record's* circulation was almost totally Jewish.<sup>12</sup>

In the face of these unfounded and bizarrely contradictory accusations, the Jewish community had the first portent of the more virulent racism and anti-Semitism that was still to come in South Africa. The community not only responded to these rather strange accusations by using their communal mouthpieces but reacted by closing ranks and creating ever denser and more Jewish spaces in the city. The Jewish enclaves would have provided a safe haven away from the worst of the anti-Jewish sentiments and would also have provided a sense of security and stability. By entrenching their position so firmly on the landscape, there was a tacit statement that they were a part of South African society. The geography of the Jewish community in Johannesburg reflected both their fear of the rising Afrikaner nationalism and their stubborn refusal to be seen as anything other than what they were, an integral part of South African life.

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The period directly after Union was a time of great political and economic change. The influence of different political factions fighting over power and the impact of the war on South Africa at large meant that the position of the Jewish community in South Africa became very insecure. In Johannesburg the Jewish community at this time moved into even closer proximity to each other than ever before. Ferreirastown and Marshallstown became more over-crowded necessitating that the community living there build a new synagogue as well as re-building the old one to accommodate the increased orthodox Jewish population. Doornfontein increasingly became the centre and hub of middle-class Jewish life in Johannesburg, housing not only two new synagogues and new *Kosher* amenities, but also a number of institutions established to care for the more vulnerable members of Jewish society. The enclaves in the southern part of Johannesburg were enlarged and stabilized to the extent that schools had to be built to cater for the need for Jewish education. The general north and north-eastern migration meant that synagogues, schools, shops, and organizations all followed the general spatial growth trend. As fortunes improved Jews moved to better and more expensive addresses in the city but their decision of where to live was further influenced by the political tensions and social turmoil brewing at the time. The community moved closer together for mutual strength and support to face the increasing portents of the coming storm.

## Notes for Chapter Six

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- <sup>1</sup> South Africa actually became a self-governing state but it was not independent of the British crown. Its *de jure* independence only really came about in 1931 when the British parliament agreed and promulgated the legislation granting South Africa full independence.
- <sup>2</sup> The News, 1913: Untitled article, *The News*, (Marist Brothers quarterly publication) 7<sup>th</sup> January 1913, Marist Brothers Archive.
- <sup>3</sup> Millin., S.G., 1914: The Jewishness of Johannesburg, *The Zionist Record* (weekly newspaper) 15<sup>th</sup> December 1914, Johannesburg, SABJD Library.
- <sup>4</sup> South African Jewish Chronicle, 1908: Classifieds, *South African Jewish Chronicle*, (weekly magazine) 7<sup>th</sup> February 1908, Johannesburg, SABJD Library.
- <sup>5</sup> Marist Brothers Examination Results Book, 9<sup>th</sup> October 1889, Marist Brothers Archives.
- <sup>6</sup> Transvaal Leader, 1915: The Jewish Government School, *Transvaal Leader*, (daily newspaper), 29<sup>th</sup> April 1915, Johannesburg, SABJD Archives.
- <sup>7</sup> Transvaal Leader, 1911: Shechitah, *Transvaal Leader*, (daily newspaper) 14<sup>th</sup> February 1911, Johannesburg, SABJD Archives.
- <sup>8</sup> South African Jewish Chronicle, 1912: The Shechitah Board, *South African Jewish Chronicle*, (weekly magazine) 12<sup>th</sup> September 1912, Johannesburg, SABJD Archive.
- <sup>9</sup> There is a fair body of literature devoted to native eating-houses and their role in the economy and society of Johannesburg, further reading can be found in: Freund, B., 1985: The social character of secondary industry in South Africa, 1915-1945, unpublished seminar paper presented to the Africa Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1985; Hellmann, E., 1936: Urban native food in Johannesburg, *Africa*, 9, April, 277-290; and, Rogerson, C.M., 1986: Feeding the common people of Johannesburg, 1930-1962, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 12, January, 56-73.
- <sup>10</sup> Extract from a transcript of an interview with B.I. Joffe by Dora Sowden, for the South African Jewish Sociological and Historical Society interview series, January 1952, SABJD Archives.
- <sup>11</sup> The Star, 1919: The Aliens Bill, *The Star*, (daily newspaper) 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1919, Johannesburg, SABJD Archives.
- <sup>12</sup> The Zionist Record, 1919: Congress of the South African Board of Deputies, *The Zionist Record*, (weekly newspaper) 14<sup>th</sup> July 1919, Johannesburg, SABJD Archives.