Another Voice in Africa: Towards A New Jewish Identity

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Abstract

Theorising a Jewish role in Africa seems at first glance a futile exercise: the Jewish presence on the continent is tiny and dwindling. There are, nevertheless, important reasons for a continued Jewish presence in South Africa particularly. Jews need a presence in Africa because, if current trends persist and Judaism becomes a religion practiced only in the rich countries of the West, it will lose touch with the experiences and concerns of much of humanity and will be unable to speak fully to the human condition. And Africa may benefit from a Jewish presence because Judaism, like other religious traditions, has specific insights and teachings which enrich Africa's capacity to address its challenges. An appropriate Jewish response to South African realities is possible, however, only if we begin to develop a specifically South African interpretation of Jewish tradition. This paper offers a first attempt at developing South African Jewish thought.

Introduction

What does Africa have to offer the Jews? And what do the Jews have to offer Africa?

It would be easy to conclude that both have decided that the answer is "nothing", for the Jewish presence in Africa is tiny and dwindling: about 88 000 Jews were estimated to remain in Africa at the beginning of 2001 and South Africa is now the only site of substantial Jewish settlement accounting for 90% of this figure (DellaPergola 2001). Even here, the Jewish community is an infinitesimal slice of the whole, numbering some 79 000 of a population of 40m-plus.

In large measure, the Jews seem to have decided that they do not need Africa – and Africa seems happy to get along without the Jews. Despite this, this paper will argue that Jews do need Africa and that, in its turn, Africa can derive benefit from the Jews. Using that claim as a platform, it will seek to spell out the challenge for Jewish identity which this claim presents.

For two reasons, however, it will restrict itself to seeking to develop a peculiarly South African –rather than a generally African – Jewish identity. The one is that, the prejudices of colonisers and the claims of cultural entrepreneurs present and past notwithstanding, Africa is neither politically nor culturally homogenous. The purpose of this paper is to posit a Jewish identity appropriate to a particular social context: if there is no single African context, there can be no single Jewish response. Second, given the realities outlined above, a Jewish response rooted elsewhere in Africa would be purely an artificial exercise. It seems far more appropriate to root the exercise in a place in which Jews actually live. This paper will, therefore, attempt to explore a Jewish identity which would enable Jews to root themselves in South African society – and to remain embedded in their specific tradition.

The General and Particular: The New South Africa and Traditional Values

Before proceeding, it is perhaps worth spelling out some assumptions about particular and general identities which underlie this approach.

Central to this analysis is a commitment to what we might call "Post-fundamentalist" values and their expression in Africa in general, South Africa in particular. In the sense that this term is used here, its values are contrasted with those of fundamentalist religion which we may understand as the notion that: a Divine being communicates directly with humanity and that the will of that Being is therefore revealed to us in a particular text or set of texts. It follows that the creed based on the text(s) expresses the intelligible word of a Superior Being and is therefore to be obeyed without question. By contrast, the post-fundamentalist view places human reason and inter-human responsibility at the centre of the cognitive and moral universe since all claims to truth, including religious ones, must be subjected both to reason and their impact on the needs and rights of human beings. Since it follows from this position that all human beings are endowed with rational faculties,[1] this mode of thinking also implies a generalised commitment to humanity – in other words that particular claims, including those of specific religions, are to be accepted only inasmuch as they can be shown not to imperil a generalised respect for humanity and the rights which each individual bears.

In this context, the "new South Africa" and its constitution could be seen as an important political expression of secular post-fundamentalist values. First, it represents the triumph of general or universal human values over the particular

sectional claims which underpinned apartheid. Second, the constitution is a clear expression of these values, not only in its commitment to non-racial democracy but in its support for gender equality and respect for differing sexual orientation. It is therefore no accident that it has attracted the ire of fundamentalists, Christian, Jewish and Muslim, who see in it an exaltation of human concerns over the law of Divinity.[2]

This background is important for two reasons. First, it grounds a loyalty to post-apartheid South Africa in values rather than in an arbitrary patriotism which enjoins an equally unquestioning (and therefore fundamentalist) loyalty to an artificial political space which we inhabit by virtue of an accident of birth – albeit geographic rather than racial. In this view, the society born in May, 1994, makes claims on our loyalty not because we happen to live here but because it represents a triumph of human values over inhuman ones, of a general commitment to people and their rights to the particular call of race or people.

Second, because it enables us to understand the potential tension between religious adherence and post-apartheid South Africa. If we owe loyalty to our new society's commitment to universal human values, is this compatible with a continuing belief in a particular religion? Certainly, apartheid was a system of racial rather than religious oppression so that there is no necessary conflict between religious loyalties and new South African commitment.[3] But religion is not simply a set of ideas – it is a particular identity, hence the potential conflict with concern for the universal. This is a particularly problem for Jews whose identity is a complex mixture of peoplehood and religiosity – but the gap between Jews and other faiths on these issues may be less stark than they seem.[4] For some Muslims as well as some Jews, government attitudes to Israel and Palestine may be as important as its attitude to the rights of South Africans. And Catholics may have difficulty with the new order's attitude to abortion, other Christians to apparent tolerance of sexual choices which they might find offensive.

This problem has led some from all these faiths, in the manner of Karl Marx – or perhaps more accurately the John Lennon song 'Imagine' which posits a Utopia in which there is neither war nor religion - to insist on an irreconcilable tension between the secular universal and the religious particular. Since, they owe their loyalty to the former, the obvious response is to abandon religious identity for a secular alternative. Again, Jews may be particular prone to this sort of choice – witness the bizarre reality that, of the 7 whites elected to the ANC executive at its 1991 Durban conference, the first after its unbanning, no less than five were Jewish and not one of these would have regarded themselves as a practising Jew.[5] But it is certainly not an exclusive experience – witness the lapsed Muslims serving on, for example the same ANC executive as the non-observant Jews.[6]

This paper, by contrast, both assumes and seeks to show that a post-fundamentalist concern with reason and with humanist universalism is not incompatible with a religious perspective. Or a particular identity. The fundamentalist

approach discussed earlier can be countered, within the religious tradition, by the assertion that the will of a Divine being is unknowable by humanity or alternately, that it can be known not by the uncritical adoption of fundamental texts but through the application of human reason. From this follows the idea that any given religious tradition is compatible with pluralism – tolerance of difference - not only as a fairly trite empirical reality, since we all know that many if not all religions have a "left" and "right" interpretation and much in between, but as a matter of belief and principle: if we do not know but must seek the Divine through application of our reason, we can do so only through differing interpretation. Nor does a post-fundamentalist religious perspective want for religious texts stressing the ethical obligations of humans to one another. These propositions lay the foundation for a religiously grounded post-fundamentalist respect for reason and for humanity derived not from an attempt to mimic non-religious thought but to engage it from a profoundly religious perspective. Similarly, particular cultural identities can be reinterpreted to stress the primacy of the universal. But, since this paper seeks primarily to examine religious identity, it will mention this second aspect largely in passing.

So the exercise proposed here is one of interpretation, not rejection. Religious tradition ceases to be an obstruction to the realisation of humanist universalism but a vital resource to it. Reinterpretation is justified on two grounds – the failure of secular humanism to create a moral foundation capable of sustaining its objectives (see for example Borowitz (1990)) and the consequent revival of interest in particularist identities as a route to human moral progress – and the pragmatic point that mounting a challenge to prejudice within a religious tradition is likely to speak more forcefully to those whose prejudice needs challenging than a rejection which closes off the shared universe of meaning which may make dialogue possible. This second point is not necessarily an instrumental "marketing ploy" or "change strategy" – it may be born of a principled belief that the religious heritage has indeed tapped into a human search for meaning and that reinterpreting religious tradition may thus be a more appropriate way of conveying humanist concerns than the secular alternative.

In this paper I propose to reinterpret Jewish identity in precisely the manner proposed here. Before doing so, however, it must address the claims made at the outset – the need, on both sides, for a South African Judaism - or Jewish identity.

The Jews and South Africa: Need and Contribution

It is common cause that South Africa's Jewish community has been greatly attenuated by emigration – if the figures quoted above are accepted, with estimates that the community at its height (around 1970) numbered 118 200 (Dubb 1994), numbers may have declined by around one third over three decades. But, while this tends to be seen by some as a peculiarly local phenomenon, it is not.

Indeed, it is part of a trend in which the Jewish presence in the "Third World" is steadily declining.

Thus, over 80% of world Jewry live in two countries, the United States and Israel (DellaPergola 2001) - while the latter is geographically an Asian country, its socio-economic and cultural profile (and the way it is viewed geo-politically by its inhabitants, friends and enemies) is largely that of a "First World" country.[7] Living in it and identifying with it are thus seen by both its friends and enemies as an expression of "Western" identity. The African figure quoted above is 0,7% of World Jewry. If we count the former Soviet Union as part of the "Third World", then 8% of Jews live in the "South"– however, if they are excluded on the grounds that they are European, the proportion drops to below 4%.[8] And even this figure is placed in perspective by the reality that two Latin American countries – Argentina and Brazil - account for most of Third World Jewry outside Europe (53%). Brazil's 86 000 is almost the equivalent of Africa's entire Jewish population.[9]

For those unfamiliar with Jewish history, this may seem unexceptionable: surely Jews have always been firmly rooted in Europe and North America? In reality, the trend is a novelty which presages a major shift in Jewish life. Like the other two major monotheistic religions, Judaism originated in the East, not the West. Once Jews were dispersed, the centre of Jewish religious and cultural thought was Babylon (today's Iraq), where the more influential version of the Talmud originated.[10] Significant Jewish communities emerged in Morocco and Ethiopia, while Jews settled in countries as exotic for Europeans as Egypt, India, Persia (Iran) and Yemen. Even the Jewish European experience has a strongly "Eastern" flavour: the "Golden Age" of Jewish cultural and political influence occurred in Spain until the end of the 15th century, but under Muslim, not Western Christian, rule. And in Christian Europe, it was the East of the continent, not its West, in which most European Jews lived. Jews have, in the past half century, become transformed from a people scattered about the globe but predominantly located in the east (and, historically, in conditions of significant poverty) to an increasingly Western, "First World", people.

The implication is stark and simple – if the trend continues and reaches its logical conclusion, Judaism will be the only world religion which has no presence in the "Third World". On one level, neither the origin nor the implication of this novelty should be a cause for Jewish embarrassment. The origin has much to do with the fact that Jews, unlike the other two great monotheistic religions, did not deploy armies which could be used to induce conversion in far-flung parts. And if we see Jews as a people rather than a faith, then the prospect that it might be bunched up in North America, Western Europe and Israel is of little interest. But Jews, of course, are not only a people. Many share a religion and it is on the religious, not the social or political level, that the Westernisation of World Jewry is ominous.

A Judaism practised only in the West would be attuned to only a part of the

human experience – that lived by people in affluent environments. That means that, while Judaism may continue to speak *about* the poverty, inequality and cultural subordination experienced by the vast majority of humans who do not live in the West, it would then not be able to speak *for* people who experience it directly. That could well create a situation, on a global scale, not unlike that experienced by Jewish or Christian clergy in "white" congregations under apartheid who applied religious teaching to the system only at the peril of alienating their congregants – to put it another way, Westernisation may raise the costs of applying Jewish ethical teaching to the life circumstances of the majority of humanity because doing so will be foreign to the experience of Jews. Even if this barrier can be overcome, the attempt to apply Jewish tradition will inevitably be abstract, removed from the problem, both for those who preach and those who they seek to influence. Religion is not a particularly appropriate medium for the analysis of abstract social problems: it is presumably most powerful when it speaks to the daily concerns of its adherents. And Judaism faces the uncomfortable possibility that the daily concerns of its congregations and those of the overwhelming majority of human beings will differ. In that case, even among religious teachers and clergy enthused with a determination to apply their faith's teachings to immediate problems, the task is likely to be made much more difficult by this distance. While religion may posit ethical universals, the moral agendas of human beings are inevitably shaped by their daily experiences and by the definitions of "them" and "us" which these produce. Just as a well-intentioned priest ministering to a suburban white South African congregation may be expected to be less sensitive (even if no more hostile) to the needs of the poor than one who works in a shack settlement, so a Rabbi or seminary student poring over Jewish tradition in suburban New York or in a "Europeanised" Tel Aviv may be expected to be motivated by very different concerns from those of the East European Rabbis who would break into tears at the suffering of a broken humanity and who would challenge God on behalf of the poor and the despised (see for example Wiesel (1972: 89-112)) - many of whom were their own congregants.

This also threatens to become a self-reinforcing cycle if, as is possible, tension throughout the world between the affluent and the human majority becomes more palpable in the years ahead. Jewish teachers and their audiences, even the most morally sensitive among them, may increasingly come to see those who have as "us", those who lack as "them" and the demands of the latter for bread and recognition less as a cry for justice than as the noise of barbarians at the gates. Already, Jewish voices are heard drawing moral lessons from the horrors of September 11 but none from the equally horrifying events in Bosnia, Rwanda or Kosovo. The problem is not that the response to the events in the United States is ethically dubious but that the moral sensibility seems able to respond – inevitably perhaps – only to events in those places where the majority of Jews live. And if Jews live only in the wealthy countries, then the moral

sensibility will be capable only of understanding reality in those lands.

For a faith concerned to create universals, this prospect heralds the gravest spiritual and ethical peril. Experience shapes ideas and, despite the richness of Judaism's ethical and intellectual heritage, we face the baleful possibility that the Jewish experience will no longer be capable of generating the ideas which would enable it to speak meaningfully to the majority of humanity.

Can this trend be reversed? As a demographic phenomenon, probably not. Westernisation is not the function of Jewish difference from the rest of humanity, but of sameness. For a set of complex geo-political reasons, the Jews found themselves in a position in which Westernisation was an option – most took it. Perhaps sadly for those of us who hope that religion may persuade humanity to prize ethical concerns over material comfort, people are more inclined to make their lifestyle choices on pragmatic grounds than on a desire to fulfil the aspirations of a moral tradition. The idea that Jews will seek to fulfil a historic ethical mission by peopling places where the majority live, often in distress, is fanciful.

Fortunately, that may be less of a problem than it seems. Perhaps by force of circumstance, numbers have always been less important in Judaism than they may be in political analysis: the influence of ideas did not appear to depend much on the number of followers which their inventors were able to command –while the communities of the Middle Ages had an important influence on Jewish thought, the average size was 100 – 200, with a settlement of 2 000 regarded as "vast" (Roth 1956: 277). A contribution in thought by Third World Jewry may therefore be essential to the survival of Judaism, even if it is generated by a very small group – the richness of the experience can compensate for the lack of numbers. The value of that contribution would lie, at least initially, in its degree of innovation and insight, not on the number of paid-up subscribers it is able to attract.

The Jews need South Africa, therefore, because it adds a crucial potential dimension to the Jewish approach to the world, an experience unobtainable in the West but rooted in the authentic life experience of many human beings which Judaism must either engage or remain incomplete. Without Africa (and Latin America and Asia), Judaism may display great spiritual and cultural beauty on the outside, while remaining hollow on the inside. Since this goal is unlikely to be achieved by a significant Jewish influx into the continent, it may depend rather on the ability of the Jews who still inhabit it to generate a response which can yet ground a strain of Jewish thought in the South African experience.

The Jewish Contribution

But what, if anything, do the Jews have to offer South Africa?

The answer does not lie in claims which rely on the stereotypes many Jews share with Jewish detractors – the notion that Jews possess technical and financial capacities without which South Africa cannot survive. Suffice it to say that

East Asian societies were able to record exceptionally high levels of economic growth without a Jewish population. While a religious- cultural emphasis on literacy may have given Jews unusual access to the professions, Jewish power and wealth is routinely overemphasised by chauvinist Jews and anti-Semites alike. Rather, the belief in the potential importance of a Jewish contribution may be derived from the claim that Jews have experiences and perspectives which are unique rather than superior and that they therefore have the potential to enrich society.

In a very different context, the French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas insisted on the need, both for the Jews and those around them, to "translate (Jewish tradition) into Greek", a metaphor for reinterpreting the tradition in a language which Jews share with those around them. For Levinas, the need is based on two assumptions. One, as suggested above, that returning to our traditional sources is an essential means of expressing our commitment to universality. Thus, as he observed the Nazi juggernaut roll through Europe, he became convinced that the Jew (and by implication any other spiritual being) could respond only by delving into her or his traditional spiritual resources: in an imaginative metaphor, Levinas lit on a seemingly obscure Talmudic injunction – to retire into one's house in a time of plague – to insist that, in a time of moral plague, return into one's own "house" or tradition was the only route to survival (Levinas 1994: 178ff). But this was no retreat from universalism: "For Levinas, the rethinking of the relationship of Jewish to "Greek" sources would have to include the vision of *universality*, of *one* humanity in which all related as equals and in which all participated responsibility. ... The difference now was that, in order for this *one* humanity to come into being, Western sources of spirituality, Western wisdom, would no longer suffice. In order for a genuine human community to emerge, it was *Jewish* wisdom, the *Jewish* version of the human being, which must be understood and made available to everyone else" (Aronowicz 1994: xiii). This perception crystallised into an attempt to discover this: "what teachings about the human being do the Rabbis convey which cannot be found anywhere else but here but which apply to the entire world?" (ibid.: xv). Three examples will seek to illustrate the method.

Covenant and Commitment: The Exodus

First, the Exodus story. At first glance, this is hardly an example any longer of a specific Jewish contribution since the tale has become the common property of several faiths and has served, for example, as an inspiration to the African-American fight for civil rights. But if we delve into the Jewish texts, we find that the Exodus is a master story - a narrative designed to shape our lives – rather different to that which has seized the non-Jewish imagination.[11]

First, its central motif is the notion of covenant – the slaves are freed not

because they passively wait for supernatural redemption but because they perform a variety of ritual acts which symbolically make the point that human beings must take on obligations to redeem themselves but that these do not necessarily entail violence. If, for some, oppression demands a military response, for the Exodus story it demands a religious one – the oppressed do not take up arms but commit themselves to a Higher Power (any parallels with Gandhi's thought are entirely deliberate). The culmination of the Exodus, according to the Rabbis, is not the people relieved of moral constraints by their new freedom. On the contrary, it is the revelation of the law on Mount Sinai where the covenant is formalised – and so the object of freedom is to *voluntarily* assume responsibility, to choose freely to be subjected to a higher morality.

Second and more startling, the traditional Jewish Exodus master story is replete with anguish at the thought that redemption requires the death of the oppressor, in this case the Egyptians. The Talmud, therefore, tells of God silencing the angels who sing as the Egyptians die in the Red Sea with the words: "My creatures are dying and you would sing?"[12] Jews who choose to adhere to this story are also enjoined to perform rituals which signify that their joy at liberation can never be complete if it is won at the expense of the sufferings of others. The teaching is complex because none of this changes the reality that the Egyptians die and that, in the tradition, it is God who kills them. But the notion in both cases that freedom is a rather more complicated matter than we might imagine and that the real dilemmas and responsibilities may come only after we are free may be one of the utmost importance for post-colonial Africa in general, our own country in particular. While some of the ideas in the Exodus master story have been effectively appropriated by both Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jnr (whose embrace of the master story was conscious and direct and whose covenantal actions presumably consisted of a passive resistance aimed in part at ensuring that the slaves were freed without the oppressor's death) one could imagine that an attempt to explore the detailed workings of the Jewish Exodus master story and its impact on the concrete choices of social and political actors in South Africa would enrich not only Judaism but this society too.

Beyond Forgiveness: Reconciliation and Reparation

Second, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. While the TRC is often presented as a collective South African response to the horrors of our past, it may be equally appropriate, as the Muslim thinker Farid Esack did when he appeared before the commission, to analyse it also as an expression of the specifically Christian perspective on how we deal with a collective wrong. The fact that both chair and vice-chair were Christian clergy may therefore have been more than coincidence – it may have shaped the TRC's understanding of collective expiation. The TRC was founded on an ethic which prioritised confession and

forgiveness, the first rewarded by indemnity from prosecution, the second the object of substantial explicit or implicit pressure from the Commission (Simpson 1998). The perpetrators were promised absolution by the commission if they confessed, the victims were exhorted to forgive if they wanted the moral approbation of the commission's leadership. And, if the victims could not bring themselves to forgive, the commission would do so for them.

The Jewish view of reconciliation is rather different. The issue has been discussed in detail elsewhere and it is not necessary to develop the argument fully here (Friedman 1996: 33-36). Suffice it to say that in Jewish tradition reconciliation is pursued not through confession but through reparation, through a concrete gesture indicating a willingness to make amends to the victim.[13] Nor is vicarious reparation possible – so much so that not even God may forgive on behalf of a wronged human being: "The transgressions of man toward God are forgiven him by the Day of Atonement; the transgressions against other people are not forgiven him by the Day of Atonement if he has not first appeased the other person."[14] The repentance which precedes reparation must also include a determination to prevent a repetition of the offending behaviour.

If that view had underpinned the TRC, its *modus operandi* would have been rather different. First, the emphasis would have fallen not on the confessions of the perpetrators but on their concrete actions designed to make amends. This, of course, would have applied on the collective as well as the individual level since reparations, both by specific perpetrators towards particular victims or those near to them, in the manner of former police officer Brian Mitchell who committed himself to working in Shobashobane where he had instigated a massacre , and in an attempt by the society to make material and spiritual amends for the wrong done to them. This "restorative justice" (Simpson 1998) would have entailed a greater emphasis on material reparation, not because money can compensate for death or great pain but because confession without a concrete attempt to heal is meaningless. But it would also have entailed another sort of reparation, focussed on attempts to revive the dignity and self worth of the victims – to a degree, that may have entailed, initially, recognising their right to express anger rather than forgiveness. It would also have entailed an approach which placed the decision whether to forgive or not squarely in the hands of the only party capable of such a decision – the victims or those who had lost them. The Biko family, which disputed the commission's right to forgive on their behalf, or the mother of an IFP member killed in KwaZulu Natal who turned to the commissioners and, through a Zulu interpreter, insisted that they had no right to tell her whether to forgive her son's murderer, understood this. And finally, it would have focussed on building the shared sense of justice which may be our best hope of preventing a repetition because it may enable the expression of anger to lead not to revenge but to a set of common values

For our purposes, we need not debate whether the Jewish approach to for-

giveness and reconciliation is more appropriate to our conditions than the Christian one which dominated the TRC. The question, rather, is whether our understanding of the requirements of truth and social healing after a great wrong has been committed is enriched by the injection into the debate of the Jewish view sketchily discussed here. It seems difficult to argue the contrary – and, therefore, to make the case that Jewish teaching on this question has nothing to offer the new South Africa.

Atonement and the South African Dilemma

Third and finally, an important South African imperative is suggested by the meaning of a ritual mentioned in passing above – that of the Day of Atonement.

Each year, 25 hours, ten days after the New Year, are appointed at which each adult is expected to fast and to publicly acknowledge her or his sins over the past year. Originally the ritual was attended by a mythology which imagined God deciding during the Ten Days of Repentance between the New Year and Day of Atonement whether to inscribe each individual in a book for life or death. Today it is more customary to regard the period as a call to introspection; to an assessment of that within our lives which is in need of correction. It is the most concentrated expression of a more general ethic in which looking inward and examining the degree to which each individual is responsible for that which is amiss in their lives and those of their neighbours is seen as a perhaps the highest mortal act.

The ethic suggests a wider point: that worthwhile morality derives not from ethical cheerleading, a constant emphasis on the virtue in oneself and one's group, on vice of the other, but in a willingness to confess error on one's own part or that of one's group. The collective expression is perhaps best illustrated by the dramatic story of the prophet Amos, who whips up the crowd in Jerusalem by denouncing the sins of the neighbouring peoples – and then is greeted with deafening silence as he applies the same denunciation to his own.[15] The tradition appears to be a warning against that facile morality which enables us to gain the affection of those who are like us by criticising the moral failings of those who are not and a call to that difficult morality which enables us to progress by identifying that which is wrong within us. In South African terms, it is a call to the morality of a Desmond Tutu denouncing necklace murderers or a Beyers Naude decrying the oppression wrought by his people.

It could be argued that this is the sort of morality which made a negotiated end to apartheid possible and which may be our only hope of making the democracy which followed it a success. The Mbeki who demands that whites cease their criticism of majority government may or not be making a valid point, depending on our identity.[16] But the same Mbeki who denounces those on his own side who use the rhetoric of race reconciliation as a vehicle for greed is

arguably the visionary who offers us the prospect of moving forward because he transcends the ethics of identity and applies universal moral standards to his own group.[17] In a political climate in which pointing the finger at the other may be a means of winning support within our own camp or of accomplishing tasks as diverse as stifling dissent in the governing party to capturing the majority of the opposition vote – and in which the long-term costs to the society of these approaches far outweigh the short-term benefit to those who pursue them - the notion of morality as most authentic when it derives from looking inward may be essential to growth and development.

These examples do not demonstrate Jewish ethical superiority. First, elements of them may be accepted by people concerned for post-apartheid society's success, others may be rejected. Second, other faiths can produce insights which may draw our attention to aspects of the South African condition which may escape a Jewish perspective. The test here is whether these Jewish perspectives add something new and whether the society is richer for considering them. If the answer to both is affirmative, then Judaism – or, more accurate, some interpretations of its tradition, indeed has something to offer South Africa even as South Africa has much to offer it.

Third and most important, the understandings offered here are not "Judaism" – they are, more accurately, one among several Judaisms, the outcome of contested interpretations. They are a product of an attempt to locate a strain of Jewish understanding which might help us resolve some of our common dilemmas. It is now appropriate to continue that task by applying it to the broader enterprise of reinterpreting Jewish tradition mentioned above.

Towards a Post-Fundamentalist South African Judaism

The first task identified above in the reconstruction of South African Judaism is the assertion of pluralism. This is at once a matter of principle and of pragmatism.

The argument on principle has been implied earlier – fundamentalism, as understood here, implies a priority to the particular rather than the universal: God speaks to some, not all and therefore the Truth is not common property. It would, for example, require that the South African constitution be judged by its conformity with literally interpreted religious texts rather than by the standards of universal human rights – it is no accident that this author's assertion that the constitution may offer South African Jews greater protection than their communal institutions elicited an angry response from at least one Orthodox Rabbi.[18] It is hard to imagine a fundamentalist Judaism which would also be consistent with the values which underpin a democratic South Africa. But there are also more pragmatic reasons for insisting that South African Jewish identity must be reinterpreted if it is to equip Jews to live full lives here.

At first glance, the resort to pragmatism is far from self-evident since Jewish leadership is at great pains to stress its commitment to this society; the official representative forum of this country's Jewry, the SA Jewish Board of deputies, encourages Jews to contribute to the society, the Orthodox chief Rabbi campaigns against Jewish emigration, while communal leadership has established a social action forum, *Tikkun*, the Hebrew term for the traditional Jewish task of repairing or perfecting the world. The logical stance of those concerned to build a Jewish response to South Africa's moral challenges would seem to be a rallying round the leadership, not a demand of the right to dissent.

There are, however, two important reservations about this official view. First, it seems to have had at best a limited impact on the Jewish South African psyche. While the formal communal positions project an image of Jewish rootedness in and support for post-apartheid South Africa, survey evidence on Jewish attitudes here finds that 42% believe there is *more* racial prejudice in post-apartheid South Africa than under apartheid. More than half (52%) believe that the new South Africa has not benefited the people of this country, fully 61% believe there will not be a substantial Jewish community here in 20 years. And 27% say it is "very likely" or "fairly likely" that they will leave South Africa (Kosmin et al. 1999: 20-25). It could be argued that these expressed emigration intentions are low given the widespread perception of a Jewish exodus, which has become part of communal folklore. But an expressed intention to leave by more than a quarter of the Jewish population is significant.

The second is that the mainstream statements of commitment to post-apartheid South Africa are not accompanied by internal attitudes and practices which are consistent with either the ethos of a democratic society or the universal human values which are expressed by the Constitution.[19] Among the features of the reigning culture and practice are: resistance to any attempt to democratise Jewish institutions by, for example, installing direct election for representative bodies; pressure to maintain unity and thus to refrain from public criticism of the deeds and attitudes of the community and its leaders; strong pressures against the expression of minority, alternative, understandings of Jewish teaching and tradition (the Orthodox Rabbinic establishment seems far more comfortable with atheists than with Jews holding dissenting religious positions, presumably since the former are not seen to be trespassing on the monopolistic preserve of the rabbinate to interpret the tradition); a strict taboo on any questioning of political Zionism[20]; implicit pressure to privilege particular Jewish interests and identities over more general South African ones; inclinations towards the isolation of Jews from the rest of society; strong biases towards the recruitment of leadership from business and the professions rather then other pursuits and occupations; and, perhaps most important of all, a willingness to suppress alternative views should they be expressed through communal media.

It is open to serious doubt, on purely pragmatic grounds, whether this ethos

is compatible with the South African rootedness which communal leadership publicly espouse. Thus one of its effects is to deter the participation in Jewish activity of precisely those Jews whose value systems are most likely to incline them towards supporting post-apartheid South Africa. The result is a loss of talent, a self-inflicted incapacity to benefit from skills and insights which may be essential to safeguarding the Jewish future in this country. The tendencies towards Jewish isolation encourage communal suicide by cutting most young Jews off from the daily contact with their fellow South Africans which might root them in this society; and the often narrow view of Jewish identity offers no ethical or spiritual antidote to the assumption that life in the new South Africa must be judged purely by its capacity to offer a more congenial upper middle class lifestyle than Europe and North America. Finally, the insistence on Zionism as a non-negotiable feature of South African Jewish identity forces local Jews either to express uncritical support for Israel or to drop out of Jewish life – and tells black South Africans who find understandable parallels between the Palestinian condition and their own under apartheid that friendship towards the Jews requires them to endorse what they see as gross human rights abuses.

It is important to stress here that the views and approaches described here are not simply the foibles of a particular group of leaders. They are deeply rooted in South African Jewish practice and, while they may be partly explained by the peculiar conditions of a community which, under apartheid, was afforded full civil rights but was kept at arms length by a National Party leadership which was initially suspicious enough of Jews to lobby successfully for quotas on those fleeing Nazi Germany (Shain 1994), they are also underpinned by an ideology which has strong roots in particular strains of Jewish thought. Since they are deeply inimical to a healthy future for Jews in post-apartheid South Africa, they must be challenged at the level of ideas because an alternative must be rooted in another way of understanding the Jewish condition, a new ethos which must spring from new ideas.

But is this purely an intellectual exercise with little practical effect? A frequent defence of Jewish leaders whose approaches are criticised here is that they are merely reflecting communal attitudes – indeed, the divergence between communal leaders' attitudes to post-apartheid society and the attitudes noted above may be cited as evidence that a fairly enlightened leadership is, against great odds, trying to drag a recalcitrant following into the new South Africa. So why seek a Jewish pluralism if there are no voices outside the intelligentsia seeking to express an alternative? Luckily, despite the evidence reported above, the survey evidence suggest that pluralism may be a far greater reality in the Jewish community than leadership attitudes suggest. Thus, on religious issues, our Jewry is certainly more fundamentalist than their fellow-Jews in Britain or the USA. But it is far less so than its leadership implies. Thus fully 64% are open to the idea that religious tradition is not the actual word of God and thus must be interpreted

(by different people in different ways). Even on Zionism, possibly the nearest to a monolithic preference, 13% feel no special attachment to Israel or harbour negative sentiments towards it, while another 33% feel only a moderate connection, suggesting that they may not demand unquestioning loyalty to Israeli government positions – interestingly, most feel it more important to give charity (an important Jewish ethical obligation) to South African Jewish and non-Jewish causes (in that order) than to Israel. On identity issues and commitment to post-apartheid South Africa, the pluralism is patent. Thus 48% either see the post-apartheid order as an improvement or are neutral towards it; 54% insist that their South African identity is equally or more important than their Jewishness (Kosmin et al. 1991).

Read with the data cited earlier, none of this means that South African Jewry are an enthusiastic new South African community, disproportionately committed to making majority rule work. It is, rather, a fairly unexceptionable white South African community (despite some probably more liberal attitudes to residential desegregation, cross-racial sex and homosexuality (ibid.: 18-19)) whose history has perhaps made it more inclined to worry about particular communal interests and more inclined to express fear for the future by relocating than most others. However, the data does suggest that there is a potential constituency for an alternative, rooted, South African Jewish identity and that the attempt to build it may be more than an intellectual exercise.

Not in Heaven

The first requirement of this new identity is a rejection of the notion that human beings are privy to revealed Divine authority.

This may seem an absurdly abstract issue in which to root a profoundly practical task. However, it has been implicit in these analyses that, unless the notion that a healthy Jewish community has multiple voices is accepted, there is no prospect of beginning a serious ethical or spiritual debate on the nature of Jewishness or Judaism in post-apartheid South Africa. And this principle is repeatedly obstructed by the assumption that some members of the Jewish community have a monopoly on the authentic expression of Jewish identity. Opposing it is the key to building a new identity and the battle must be joined on several fronts.

First, the religious. The claim that Judaism mandates a single set of moral precepts which can merely be imparted by communal leadership without debate can be successfully countered from within the Jewish tradition. The prime source book of Jewish law and teaching is the Talmud; its authority is almost equal to that of the Pentateuch, the books of Moses. However, contrary to popular belief, the Talmud is not an arid list of laws – it is a debate between scholars, leading one contemporary philosopher to assert that the *raison d'être* of Jewish spirituality

is reasoned argument since it is through this activity that the sages of Jewish tradition attempted to arrive at the truth (Rose 1993: 1-10). Indeed, the primacy of human intellect over claims of received Divine authority is expressly asserted in a famous Talmudic passage in which a debate over the purity of a ritual oven turns into a test in which the Rabbis, with Divine approval, assert that neither the ability to perform miracles nor the capacity to conjure up a voice from Heaven are sufficient to win an argument. The climax of this passage is reached when one of the Rabbis declares that the right to interpret the law is no longer in Heaven since God himself has decreed that these questions will be decided by majority vote of the scholars.[21] This passage takes on added meaning if we understand its historical context – it was a reaction against the tradition which held that the interpretation of the law was the prerogative of the priesthood: by asserting that the right to decide rested with a majority vote among adult scholars, the Talmud also established the principle that human reason is the arbiter of Jewish spiritual and ethical understanding. [22]

Equally or more significant, is that spiritual majority rule in the Talmudic tradition does not eliminate the rights of the minority: in an equally famous passage, a voice from Heaven declares, in a major dispute on law between two contending factions, that, while the law is in accordance with the position of one of the contending groups, the position of both are the words of the living God. [23] And one of the more curious features of the Talmud is that, while the majority principle is asserted, very few disputes actually get settled by a vote. Rather (and particularly on matters of spiritual or ethical conviction rather than religious practice), the text presents an open-ended debate which is never resolved – even on some of the most crucial questions of belief such as the Messiah (Handelman 1991; Levinas 1990: 59-98). This provides a foundation to posit a Jewish ethic in which, not only is diversity encouraged, but the clash between contending schools of thought is eternal and unresolved – the intellectual foundation for a radical pluralism.

Second, the cultural – understood in a broad sense. For a variety of historic reasons, South African mainstream Jewry has built a set of often implicit understandings of the respectable Jew – among its features would include participation in business or the professions; Zionism and strong Jewish cultural identification; choice of a heterosexual Jewish marriage partner and participation in 'normal' family life. This implicitly violates some of the key ethical assumptions behind the constitution – respect for difference in lifestyle choices – and violates Jewish ethical principles because it potentially (and often actually) causes pain to those who do not conform. It is also a practical constraint since, as noted above, it excludes from full participation in communal life people who do not meet the stereotypes. Positing a Judaism which respects difference in conviction and lifestyle choice is therefore an urgent route to communal healing. But perhaps most important is the task of projecting the Jew rooted in South Africa as a

role model worthy of respect – because, as I have argued elsewhere, the Jewish response to this society is deeply conditioned by mainstream cultural mores and assumptions which assume a temporary Jewish presence here and which must therefore be challenged if the notion of a viable South African Jewish identity is to become a reality (Friedman 1997: 60-62).

Fortunately, again an exercise in alternative identity construction is possible because it can be demonstrated that tolerance and understanding for other life-style choices are to be found in the Jewish tradition – both in the Talmud and in practice: historically, the leadership figures were, for example, not business people or professionals (in the latter case, this would have been impossible since anti-Semitic edicts banned Jews from professions) but the scholar.[24] Texts supporting engagement in and commitment to the societies in which Jews find themselves are also part of the tradition. If participation in South African Jewish life is to become both more inclusive and more sustainable, alternative role models are desperately needed – but fortunately, Jewish tradition provides more than adequate material for the construction of an alternative.

A Long One Hundred Years: Zionism and its Alternatives

There is perhaps no aspect of the South African Jewish cultural canon which has become as hegemonic as political Zionism – the notion that Jews require an ethnic state. Indeed, one source described this view as "the national liberation movement of the Jewish people" (Kosmin et al 1999: 15).

Clearly, a position which obliges people, in order to express their religious and cultural identity, to support a particular political programme which is identified in the minds of many South Africans with the suppression of the rights to self-determination of others is to place severe obstacles in the way of a Jewish identity firmly rooted in South Africa. In principle, this mainstream view may not cause inexorable difficulties for South African Jewish identity. It is possible to espouse Zionism and take issue with the actions of those Israeli governments which prefer confrontation to reconciliation. Perhaps predictably, local Jewish leadership embraces a particularly narrow and chauvinist understanding of the Zionist programme and support for a more benign form of Zionism may well be in keeping with the ethos and values of the new South Africa.

However, it is extremely important to assert the possibility of a non-Zionist Jewish identity. First, however Middle Eastern politics play themselves out, political Zionism is based on the notion of an *ethnic* Jewish state and therefore a set of assumptions which are troubling to those loyal to non-racial values. Second, it opens options for those Jews who, for reasons of conscience, wish to give priority to the new South African project described above rather than the interests of a state in the Middle East. Third, as long as the spectrum of South African Jewish debate ends only with those who support an ethnically defined Jewish

state but wish it to live in harmony with its neighbours, then the space to apply Jewish ethical precepts to Israel will be limited. If support for the new South Africa rests on an ethical commitment rather than emotive patriotism, it is hard to see how it is possible to build a Jewish identity which insists on applying ethical standards to this society – and, indeed, all others on earth – but issues a blanket ethical exemption to one. Fourth, Israel's image and self-image, noted above, as a Western society in the Middle East surely makes it an unlikely repository for the emotional energies of people concerned to build a Jewish identity rooted in the "Third World".

Again, the good news is that there are strong currents in Jewish history and teaching which make the current status of Zionism less unassailable than it may seem. As I have argued elsewhere,[25] *political* Zionism is only about 100 years old. And, until the Nazi terror, it was hardly a majority position. Besides its rejection by many Orthodox Jews and Reform Judaism (and, of course, by Jewish socialists, although they obviously would not cite the religious tradition in their support), the political Zionists were subject to considerable scorn from cultural and spiritual Zionists who supported the revival of Jewish nationhood but did not endorse the creation of a Jewish state.[26]

The claim that Zionism is the 'national liberation movement' of the Jewish people is based on the frequent references to the promised land in the Bible and in Jewish tradition. But it is not at all clear that this is an exhortation to a political programme. Thus some Jews – a tiny handful today, but probably the majority for much of the last 2 000 years – identify the Jewish aspiration for a homeland with the coming of the Messiah. While this may seem like a quaint piece of folklore, it is possible to understand it in a way which makes a profound ethical point: since the age of Messiah is for some Jews a time in which society will be sustained by human harmony rather than coercion (Levinas 1990), then the implication is that a Jewish state will only become ethically possible when violence no longer rules human affairs – that such a state would not be a secular political entity but a reflection of a new human spiritual consensus is implicit.

It is also possible to respond to Zionism in a way which turns its claims to express Jewish identity on their head. Zionists often describe their Jewish critics as consumed with "self hatred": in other words, people who would much rather not be Jewish and express this longing to be something else by condemning the state which expresses Jewish peoplehood. But in an ingenious interpretation, the scholar Daniel Boyarin invites us to think of the Zionists, not their critics, as the self-haters (1997: 271-312). Boyarin's argument is that, for some 1 800 years, Jews, because they had neither a state nor an army, created an alternate value system in which violence – and the armies which perpetrated it – were seen as expressions of barbarism.[27] The Jew thus had no wish to fight, preferring to rely on the intellect and the spirit. For assimilated Jews in Western Europe – chief among them the founder of political Zionism, Theodore Herzl, and his intellec-

tual ally Sigmund Freud – this was shameful. They longed to be like all the non-Jews around them but despaired of ever winning acceptance. They concluded that the only way to be like everyone else – and thus fully endorse the values of the non-Jewish world - was to acquire a state and an army like everyone else.

Boyarin's analysis is offered here not only because it enables us to see how alternative narratives to the Zionist story can be built among Jews who revere their tradition. It is also a brilliant demonstration of the ways in which identities can be re-interpreted to underpin understandings and aspirations very different from those of the mainstream but which enable those who differ to remain within their tradition. It is precisely this reinterpretation of tradition which must lie at the heart of a South African Jewish identity which is both proudly Jewish and deeply South African.

Offspring of a Single Being

The final task in our exercise in Jewish reinterpretation is to posit a Jewish identity applicable to post-apartheid South Africa.

This task will not be attempted in great detail here since a beginning has already been made above : the notions of covenant and commitment or of reconciliation and reparation or of atonement understood as a social ethic are not only potential Jewish contributions to the South African post-apartheid project – they also demonstrate ways in which Jews can seek to reshape their understandings of their tradition in ways which turn it into a resource for understanding the new environment in which they live. There are many other actual or potential exercises in "translating into Greek" which might serve as a resource for Jews trying to understand their choices in this society – and for a society trying to illuminate its options.

The key point here, however, is the assumption underlying this exercise. Like other religious traditions, Judaism has both universalist and particularist strains. Because the Talmud is a debate, it is possible to find within it teachings which reject any distinction between human beings – of which the most famous is the idea that humans are descended from a single ancestor so that no race may say that its lineage is superior.[28] But it is also contains instructions to hate idolaters,[29] which can be interpreted by those so inclined as a commandment to religious intolerance. The exercise proposed here stresses the universal – it seeks to develop a Judaism which speaks to the South African human condition. But it aims to do so not by isolating that in Judaism which is common to other traditions but, on the contrary, to seek to locate that which is unique to the Jewish tradition, for it is that which adds something hitherto uncomprehended to our knowledge.

Religious liberalism has tended to try to encourage tolerance by stressing that which the religions hold in common; the exercise is an important antidote

to those who see in their faith a universal truth to impose on others. But it is also necessary to supplement it by identifying that which, in each tradition, is unique for it is only in this way that we can enable each tradition to broaden our moral understanding by adding its own unique perspective. Much work still awaits the Jewish scholar seeking the unique messages which lend themselves to "Greek" translation in the unique South African reality.

It is also worth noting here that, in South African conditions, the most important ethical Jewish contribution may lie less in what Jewish tradition can teach than in what Jewish experience may bring. It has become trite to point out that Jews share with black South Africans –indeed, with black people in many parts of the planet – a history of suppression and of discrimination. First., both have suffered collective trauma: much may be learned from an honest exchange of experiences. While surface appearances may suggest that Jews have coped well with the catastrophe inflicted by the Nazis while black people may still be suffering the ravages of slavery, colonisation and apartheid, it is at least conceivable that closer examination may reveal that the wounds of the Nazi period remain open and that much of the average day's headlines from the Middle East may reflect an unresolved collective trauma. The Jewish experience may, therefore, have as much to learn from the black equivalent as to teach it.

Equally importantly, both have experienced, in conditions of formal emancipation, the lingering effects of pressure to conform to the dominant culture (Boyarin 1997) (of which, ironically, Zionism may be one Jewish expression). Again, mutual empathy could form the foundation of a common attempt to come to terms with the effects of collective discrimination on self esteem and with the psychic costs of attempting to conform to a dominating culture.

Conclusion: Reclaiming that Which is Ours

This paper has tried to show how the teachings of the major religion with the smallest presence in Africa, Judaism, can be interpreted in a manner which seeks both to enrich the South African understanding of moral challenges and choices – and to deepen and broaden Judaism's spiritual and intellectual reach by seeking to apply its tradition to South African debates and dilemmas.

It is worth reiterating what this exercise does *not* seek to do. First, by insisting that there are aspects of Jewish experience and wisdom which may enrich the search for a new South Africa, it makes no claims about the superiority of either. Second, by arguing that particular conclusions can be drawn from Jewish tradition it is not claiming that its favoured positions are the 'authentic' Jewish stance. The two points are, of course, related.

A religious tradition is not akin to a political party programme – a clear set of positions which are meant to be distinguished from those of rivals. Claims that, for example, Judaism prioritises justice, while Christianity stresses love, fail

to explain why the command to love one's neighbour as oneself is critical to Jewish teaching or why some Christians have died for social justice. Religious ethics are attempts by a wide variety of people in a range of situations spreading over centuries to make sense of our spiritual obligations and so they will contain diverse perspectives. For that reason, a claim that one religion's teaching is superior to another is rendered absurd by the reality that each has a range of teachings. And it is precisely for that reason that this paper does not claim that the version of Judaism posited here is any more "genuine" than those of its critics.

These disclaimers enable us to identify precisely what this exercise does seek to bring to the discussion of a new South African identity. Those of us who wish to remain within a religious tradition but who take our religion seriously enough to want it to help us understand and contribute to post-apartheid South Africa, cannot achieve our goals by creating a new fundamentalism, based on the assumption that our religion offers a ready made "package" of ethical precepts and programmes tailor-made for the new South Africa. The result would be a religion as artificial and as oppressive as that which fundamentalism seeks to assert. Rather, the goal is to find elements and strains within our religion which can be applied fruitfully to our situation. What is offered here is not "Judaism" but 'a Judaism' which is no more authentic than any of the other versions on offer. The test it must pass is whether it has a secure grounding in the tradition and whether it enables us to live out our South African identities within a religious understanding firmly rooted both in our tradition and in our society.

Similarly, the claim that Jewish tradition has something important to offer our society is based on the assumption that, while religious traditions are diverse, they also have unique features because the differing experience of their adherents will impel them to address different questions and thus to generate unique answers. There are many examples – but the point is perhaps illustrated by the observation that a Judaism forged in centuries of statelessness will obviously relegate some questions crucial to Christianity and Islam – such as how to exercise power in an ethical manner – and enhance the priority of others – such as how to build a religiously meaningful life in an alien culture. And the logical consequence is that religious traditions, stemming as they do from differing experiences, will thus have unique contributions to make to our response to our society's choices.

It is also worth repeating that Jewish identity is more than a religion – it is also a peoplehood in which history and culture combine with or substitute for faith in constructing a group's sense of who it is. Given that, the exercise proposed here is not only one of religious reinterpretation to reclaim those strands of a tradition which clarify our current dilemmas. It is also an attempt to reconstitute an identity in a manner which may be relevant to other group – white Afrikaners are the most obvious but hardly the only example – seeking to develop a consciousness appropriate to this society, without surrendering their identity.

The key argument of this paper is, therefore, that there need be no contradiction or conflict between our particular identities – religious or cultural – and that demanded by a non-racial democracy. And, if that thesis is accurate, we have no need to give up our particular understandings of who we are in order to identify with a general citizenship and the values which accompany it. But, if our identities are to support a post-apartheid democracy rather than create new obstacles to it, we need to reinterpret our particular identities to ensure that they are a universal asset.

Notes

1. This view is not incompatible with a Jewish religious perspective "... all logical thought is based on the assumption of one mind, one way of logical thinking: the same pathways to error are open to all the children of man" (Agus 1963: 32).
2. For the Jewish objection see Rabbi Ben Isaacson *Jewish Report* 29/9/00.
3. There certainly were anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim strains (as well as hostility to Catholicism) in Afrikaner Nationalist thinking. But it quickly became clear that white solidarity was afforded preference over Calvinist identity. See Moodie (1975) and also Shain (1994).
4. In traditional Jewish law, a Jew is anyone whose mother is Jewish, regardless of their religious affiliations. Not only are atheists Jews within this definition, but so is the Catholic Archbishop of Paris who was born Jewish! But Jews are not a race or ethnic group since there are black and brown as well as white Jews and a cultural divide between Sephardi (loosely, Eastern) and Ashkenazi (Western) Jews. And, to confuse matters further, some Jewish thinkers have posited Jewish religious tradition as an indispensable part of the cultural identity of Jews, regardless of their spiritual beliefs. For an overview see Rosenthal (1981: 235-248).
5. See Report of the Independent Electoral Commission, *www.anc.org/ancdocs/history/conf/iecrep48.html.*
6. Given the point made in note 4, these Jews cannot 'lapse' – they do not identify themselves as Jews but are so identified by Jewish law. And it is perhaps worth mentioning here that the nature of Christian identity differs from that of, for example, Jews and Muslims since one does not necessarily acquire a Christian identity at birth, even if one is born into a Christian family.
7. Given the South African penchant for seeing sport as a bellwether of just about everything, it may be worth noting that Israel plays its football in European competitions, not those of the region it inhabits. The choice is, of course, not entirely voluntary, since it originates from the refusal of its neighbours to include it in their competitions. But it does serve as one marker of an identity, even if we see it as one shaped by force of circumstance.
8. Author's calculations from DellaPergola (2001).
9. Author's calculations from DellaPergola (2001).

[10] The Talmud is a compilation of Rabbinic rulings and debates. There are two – the Jerusalem and the Babylonian. The latter is more frequently cited as a source of spiritual and religious authority.

[11] For the Exodus as "master story" see Goldberg (1995).

[12] Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Megillah* 10b

[13] For a thorough and profound treatment of this topic see Levinas (1994: 12- 29).

[14] Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Yoma* 85a-85b

[15] *Amos* Chapters 1 and 2

[16] Thabo Mbeki "Statement of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki at the Opening of the Debate in the National Assembly on Reconciliation and Nation Building", National Assembly, Cape Town, 29/5/98

[17] Thabo Mbeki "Statement of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki on the Occasion of the Debate on the Budget Vote of the Office of the Deputy President" Cape Town, National Assembly 3/6/98

[18] Isaacson, "Jewish Report".

[19] See David Benatar and Milton Shain "The Closing of the South African Jewish Mind" *Jewish Spectator* 62, no 2, 1997. See also the controversy in the pages of the Johannesburg Jewish newspaper *Jewish Report* and *Mail and Guardian* 15/9/00

[20] See responses to the author's article in *Business Day* 6/9/01 on this topic.

[21] Babylonian Talmud Bava Metzia 59b-60a.

[22] The Rabbis were not asserting the right of *everyone* to decide. Women were excluded – see Boyarin (1997), as were those who had not been admitted to the Rabbinic circle. But their project remains central to the reconstitution of Jewish identity since it established the right to difference and so created the preconditions for the extension of that right from the male Rabbinic elite to all.

[23] Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Eruvin* 13b.

[24] For a discussion of these alternative 'role models' and their implications see Boyarin (1997).

[25] *Business Day* 6/9/01.

[26] See discussion of Simon Dubnow and Ahad-HaAm in Rosenthal (1981).

[27] There are echoes of this argument in the view of the German Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, who argued that the Jews were 'outside history'. See Rosenzweig (1985).

[28] Jerusalem Talmud *Sanhedrin* 4:11. For other examples see Silver (1956: 224-242).

[29] See for example *List of 613 Mitzvot* www.jewfaq.org based on the code of Maimonides.

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