

Emigration of Polish Jews to South Africa during the Second Polish Republic (1918-1939)

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Introduction

The problem of emigration of Polish Jews to South Africa as well as their history in that country remains virtually unrecorded.¹ But traces of Polish Jews in South Africa are going back to the times of the Portuguese explorers (e.g. Gaspar da Gama). In the following centuries Polish Jews made a deeper mark on South African native soil. Because of economic hardships and sometimes even political persecution, South Africa appeared to newcomers as a Promised Land. The biggest number of Jews from the Poland came to South Africa during and just after the gold rush.

In literature and statistics, Polish Jews are referred to by different terms, e.g. Poles, Poles of Jewish origin, Poles of Judaic faith, Lithuanians, Lithuanian Jews, Russian Jews or according to the place of birth, citizenship, religion and own identification (processes of acculturation and assimilation).

The purpose of this article is generally to highlight on the problem of emigration of Polish Jews from Poland to South Africa during the Second Polish Republic. One of the essential aims is to outline the periodization, scale and social stratification of that emigration; to analyse that emigration against the background of the overseas emigration of Polish Jews; and, besides, to point to the impact of the new South African immigration regulations on the scale of immigration and Polish colonial and settlement projects. Regarding the stay of Polish Jews in South Africa between the two World Wars, only their pro-Polish attitude and activity is presented.

The emigration of Polish Jews to South Africa ceased after the Second World War.

Jewish emigration from Poland

After the end of the First World War and the regaining of independence by Poland the pro-colonial tendencies, the difficult economic situation and the complicated nationality structure created the basis for an organized and more numerous emigration from Poland. During the years 1918-1938 about 800.000 people emigrated from Poland to overseas countries. Among these emigrants, Jews represented a remarkably large number (in the 1926-1938 period 44 per cent of all overseas emigrants from Poland were Jews).²

¹ Some remarks on Polish Jews in South Africa are included in such publications as: M. Arkin 1984; L. Herrman 1935; M. Kaplan and M. Robertson 1991; G. Saron and L. Hotz 1955; *The Immigration of Jews into Union (1926-1935)* 1937.

² According to different estimates Jews composed about 7,8; 8,6 or 9,8 per cent of population of the Second Polish Republic, See J. Buszko 1985, 235; J. Zarnowski 1973, 376; J. Tomaszewski 1985, 35.

The main destinations of the Jewish overseas emigration from Poland during the Second Polish Republic were: the United States of America (450.000), Palestine (350.000), Argentine (110.000) and Brazil (45.000).³ Jews decidedly predominated in Poland's overseas emigration to Mexico, Cuba, Uruguay and Australia. In the years 1929-1937 Palestine was the country to which Polish Jews mainly emigrated (43,7 per cent) followed by Argentine (18,8 per cent) and the United States of America (10,9 per cent).⁴

In the period of the Depression about 180.000 people left Poland annually, but of these only 2.336 persons emigrated to the African continent during the years 1926-1934.⁵ Despite its marginal scale, emigration to Africa possessed a much more permanent character than the ones to other parts of the world. South Africa with the exception of the diamond and gold rush was always situated on the main shoulder routes. This held true both about Polish and European emigration in general. All the other British Dominions gained in immigration on a far larger scale.

It is assumed that the number of Poles in Africa at the end of the Thirties was roughly 5.200, and of which 1.900 in the Union of South Africa.⁶ Polonian activist (émigré Polish) and former employee of the Polish Consulate in Cape Town Zygmunt Fudakowski thus described the Polish emigration:

... Before the Second World War, one could speak only about a group of people of Jewish nationality, numbering several thousand, and about individuals who could be defined as native Poles. The first wave of Polish-Jewish population reached South Africa in the Twenties. The following arrived there in the Thirties, after the Hitler gained power.⁷

Other publicists and researchers also underline that the first emigration influx was constituted by Polish Jews who left Poland after 1920 or came to South Africa via Germany or Austria.⁸ Apoloniusz Zarychta noted that "... the percentage of the Jewish

³ A. Tartakower 1958, 44.

⁴ A. Tartakower 1939, 48.

⁵ M. Pankiewicz 1935, 23.

⁶ A. Zarychta, *Dwudziestolecie emigracji z Polski 1918-1938*, 59 [manuscript deposited at the Archives of the New Records in Warsaw, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Consular Department (Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, Departament Konsularny)] syg. 9 886; According to the South African statistics in 1921 South Africa's Polish population numbered 1.317 persons. In 1926 it was 1.609, See: *Fourth Census of the Population of the Union of South Africa*, Part VII, Birthplaces and Period of Residence (Europeans), Pretoria 1929, 6.

⁷ Z. Fudakowski 1983 (Documents of the Polish Association in South Africa).

⁸ R. Królikowski 1969, 81.

population in the period of the largest emigration to Africa in the years 1926-1931 amounted to 95 per cent; while the main country for which they were bound was the Union of South Africa."⁹ Another expert on emigration from Poland during the Second Republic Arie Tartakower emphasized that the Jewish emigrants constituted 95 per cent within Poland's emigration to South Africa in the years 1926-1929.¹⁰

Colonial and settlement projects

One of the factors which activated emigration from Poland were colonial and settlement projects. These plans concerned also ethnic minorities in Poland, especially Polish Jews.

Soon after the First World War Jewish organisations were established to help the emigration of Polish Jews. At the beginning of the Twenties, the most active was *Hias* - the Hebrew Sheltering Aid Society of America who organized a large scale action of sending money to relatives in Poland who wanted to emigrate to the United States of America. In 1924 *Hias* was incorporated in the *Central Jewish Emigration Society* based in Warsaw. On the other hand, the *Polish Committee of the Jewish Colonization Association* (established in 1924) supported rural settlement in Argentine, Brazil and Canada. Emigration to Palestine was managed by the *Central Zionist Palestinian Department* in Warsaw which began its work at the end of 1919.

The Polish government more or less officially supported overseas emigration of Polish Jews. On the 11th of January 1927 the Emigration Office convened a conference of welfare societies to coordinate their activity (Ignacy Schipper, a member of Parliament representing the *Jewish Emigration Association (Jeas)* took part in that conference). After the conference state employment agencies were obliged to support welfare societies, as well as the Central Jewish Emigration Committee and the Central Zionist Palestinian Department.¹¹

Also the *Polish Maritime and Colonial League* propagated the overseas emigration of Polish Jews. In the mid 1937 on the inspiration of that organisation and of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the *Union of Social Relief Organizations for Emigrants (Związek Społecznych Organizacji Opieki nad Emigrantami)* was established in Lvov. The Jewish Emigration Association (Jeas) played an active role in that organizational structure.

⁹ A. Zarychta, op. cit. (note 6), 48.

¹⁰ A. Tartakower 1939, 27.

¹¹ *Przegląd Emigracyjny* 1927, Vol. 2, 92.

Officially in the late Thirties, two countries in Africa were designated as potential areas of settlement for Polish Jews: Madagascar¹² and Uganda¹³ In these projects the Jewish Emigration Association "Jeas" cooperated with government agencies.¹⁴

Earlier, in 1926 after a coup staged by the nationalist leader Józef Pilsudski the Maritime and Colonial League together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became interested in the Union of South Africa and neighbouring countries as areas of future settlement of Polish emigrants.¹⁵ In late 1928 and early 1929 Poland's Consul General Michal Kwapiszewski arrived in Cape Town with his secretary Mr. Mielzynski to investigate potential conditions for settlement.

Addressing the *League of Nations* in early August 1936 Józef Beck the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs demanded that Poland be granted territories suitable for Colonisation in South Africa and South America.¹⁶ A Polish Foreign Office communiqué also stated that "... the acute Jewish problem in Poland and her own over-population make it imperative for the Polish Government to claim colonies ..."¹⁷ South African newspapers reacted to Poland's colonial demand with surprise¹⁸ or described that demand as ridiculous.¹⁹ They even wondered tongue in cheek if "vast territories" in South Africa, which were best suited for Polish immigration meant semidesert Karoo or Bushmanland.²⁰ In the mid-1937 the newly created Colonial Department of the Polish Foreign Office intended to earmark 5.000.000 zlotys for settlers from Poland to buy land in Central and Southern Africa.²¹

¹² See: M. Lepecki 1938.

¹³ In the period from December 1938 to May 1939 a Polish mountain expedition under the command of anthropologist Professor Edward Loth investigated settlement possibilities in some areas of Uganda.

¹⁴ S. Golabek 1978, 57.

¹⁵ Z. Fudakowski 1983.

¹⁶ Poland Wants African Colonies, *Sunday Tribune* 03.08.1936.

¹⁷ Poland in Search of Colonies. Southern Africa Best Suited for Immigration, *Friend* 03.08.1936.

¹⁸ Poland Also Wants Colonies, *Cape Times* 03.08.1936.

¹⁹ Polish Humour, *Natal Mercury* 03.08.1936.

²⁰ Poland Also Wants Colonies, *Cape Times* 03.08.1936.

²¹ E. Kolodziej 1982, 245-246.

Emigration during the Twenties

At the end of the second decade of the 20th century, a discussion on the future racial structure of the country and related immigration policies was conducted on the columns of South African newspapers. In the years 1900-1920 the white population of South Africa doubled, but in the period between 1910-1920 the increase was only 19 per cent.²² A higher birth-rate was recorded among the black population. South African white journalists and scientists were agreed that in order to maintain the existing proportion between Whites and Blacks or even change to that proportion in favour of former racial group, it was necessary to increase white immigration to South Africa seriously, particularly because of a growing trend of leaving by more and more South African-born Europeans for their native country.²³

The South African economic situation (deep recession, high unemployment, competition on the labour market from cheap African workers) was the reason why South Africa had ceased to be attractive for emigrants from Western Europe. In 1924 a census on migration to and from the Union of South Africa was closed with debit balance of 578 people²⁴, and during the next year changed slightly in favour of arrivals.²⁵ Among newcomers the representation of the East European citizens increased rapidly. During the first months of 1925 they constituted 65 per cent of the whole emigration to South Africa.²⁶ Most of them was of Judaic faith and originated from Lithuania. In the period mentioned above 45 Polish citizens came to South Africa and in June of that year another 17 immigrants from Poland settled there.²⁷

The increasing share of Eastern Europeans among immigrants and of "South Africans of Nordic type" among emigrants led South African political and social organisations (mainly groupings of Afrikaners) to pressure the Government in Pretoria to introduce a quota system because "... the Nordic character of the nationhood of South Africa should be maintained".²⁸ The American quota system limiting immigration was cited as an example. Jewish emigration to South Africa revived as a political issue.

The figures of the South African Office of Census from 1925 confirmed the increasing influx to South Africa of emigrants from Eastern Europe (from 817 people in

²² In 1921 the white population of the Union of South Africa numbered 1.519.488 persons.

²³ See: The Menace to Civilisation. The Imperative Need for White Immigration, *Cape Times* 27.09.1924.

²⁴ Migration Figures. More British Leaves South Africa than Arrive, *Cape Times* 27.05.1925.

²⁵ Union Migration Figures. Exodus of British Subjects Continues, *Cape Times* 29.07.1925.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibidem; Immigration *Cape Times* 11.08.1925.

²⁸ *Cape Times* 04.03.1926 .

1924 to 1.380 in the following year). Among these 113 Polish citizens were reported.²⁹ In 1926 the growing trend among that group of emigrants was maintained, including emigrants from Poland (170 people in 1926).³⁰ In the first half of 1928 177 arrivals of emigrants from Poland were registered and in the second half of that year few emigrants obtained South African citizenship.³¹ In total, in the years 1924-1929 net migration gain from Poland to South Africa numbered 1.450 people.³²

The accumulating economic difficulties from the beginning of the Twenties and a growing political opposition towards immigration from Eastern Europe caused immigration restrictions to be prepared. In an interview with the *Cape Times* in 1924 Sir Alfred Milner, former High Commissioner in South Africa - "... laid stress on the fact that we should consider more carefully in South Africa the quality, rather than the quantity, of our immigration."³³ Such a statement meant the limitation of the influx of emigrants from Eastern Europe. In 1929 total net emigration to South Africa after the deduction of reemigration to home countries numbered 4.008 people, of which 2.748 originated from Eastern and Southern Europe.³⁴ Their material status, level of education and cultural habits were considered undesirable in South Africa.

The introduction of the quota system comprising citizens of Eastern and Southern Europe (mainly from Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Greece) had become an imminent prospect.

New Immigration Laws

In early February 1930 the South African Parliament discussed the question of changing the nationality structure of potential immigration. After the debate, the Immigration Quota Act was implemented. That piece of legislation was especially intended to limit immigration from such countries as Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and the Soviet Union³⁵ and was sometimes called "An Act Against Jews". For countries not mentioned in the act (namely countries of the British, Commonwealth, Austria, Belgium,

²⁹ Union Census statistics. Migration during 1925, *Cape Times* 23.04.1926 .

³⁰ Migration Returns. Large Proportion of Lithuanians, *Cape Times* 09.02.1927.

³¹ The National Stock, *Cape Times* 31.08.1928; Our New Nationals, *Cape Argus* 29.01.1929.

³² Nordic Races in the Union, *Cape Times* 13.12.1930.

³³ The National Stock, *Cape Times* 31.08.1928.

³⁴ Newcomers to Union, *Cape Times* 05.03.1930.

³⁵ Bad Day for the South African Party, *Cape Times* 18.02.1930.

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Denmark, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America) a limit of not more than 50 immigrants (men, women and children) was set for each calendar year.³⁶ The new immigration law would come into force after the 1st of May 1930. During the first year after the law was implemented the number of immigrants from Eastern Europe was reduced.³⁷

The problem of halting Jewish immigration to South Africa by the new law became very public. The South African Jewry protested strongly against the Immigration Quota Act and sent resolutions to the Prime Minister, the Minister of the Interior and members of Parliament but without noticeable results. The arguments of these in favour of the law was that Jewish immigrants represented a low standard of living; they were not manufacturers but either middlemen or small artisans; their racial origin was improper.³⁸ Jews were blamed for the collapse of the South African wool market in 1935. Others however, underlined the merits of Polish and Lithuanian Jews who established many sectors of South African agriculture.³⁹ They were the pioneers of the country's iron and steel industry. Polish Jews created the textile industry, and among the biggest importers of South African wool were Polish companies from Lodz and Bialystok. In culture prominent representatives included: writer Sarah Gertrude Millin and sculptor Moses Kotler. It was even said that "...the Poles and Lithuanians (Polish and Lithuanian Jews - A.Z) are among the best linguists in the world."⁴⁰

The provisions of the Quota Act accordingly affected the volume of Jewish immigration very considerably. According to the government's *The Monthly Bulletin of Union Statistics*, in the first half of 1933 permissions to enter the Union of South Africa were obtained by only 25 immigrants from Poland.⁴¹ General decreasing trends in the influx of immigrants intensified during the World Recession. Statistics from the years 1930-1935 informed that 453 Polish citizens settled in South Africa in 1930, 210 in 1931, 222 in 1932, 202 in 1933, 173 in 1934⁴², and 113 in 1935 (after deduction of

³⁶ New Immigrants to Union, *Cape Times* 28.12.1934.

³⁷ In 1930 1.987 immigrants arrived in South Africa of which 1.910 came before (the figure included also 402 Polish citizens) the Immigration Quota Act was in force. See: Fewer Foreign Immigrants, *Cape Times* 30.10.1931.

³⁸ Immigration Bill, *Cape Times* 06.02.1930.

³⁹ Jewish Prominent in Agriculture, *Cape Times* 08.02.1930.

⁴⁰ Immigration, *Cape Times* 15.03.1930.

⁴¹ Loss by British Emigration, *Cape Times* 04.08.1934.

⁴² More Immigrants from Germany, *Cape Times* z dn. 10.02.1934 r.; In 1934 142 immigrants arrived from Poland to South Africa. See: Gain in European Population, *Cape Times* 14.02.1936.

reemigration).⁴³ The first six months of 1936 showed an influx from Europe to South Africa of 964 immigrants, and only of 20 from Poland.⁴⁴ Official figures for 1936 stated that in the last 13 years the net gain of Polish immigrants numbered 2.826 persons, and 8.744 from Lithuania.⁴⁵

The entry into force on the 1st of February 1937 of another immigration law (Aliens Act of 1937) caused further decrease in immigration to South Africa from Eastern Europe. Among other things the new law did not permit immigrants to change their surnames without the consent of the General Governor.⁴⁶ It was common practice not to extend a temporary permit for citizens from Eastern Europe, e.g. publicised case of Polish immigrant Salomon Hausman who arrived in Cape Town in July 1936.⁴⁷

The extent of emigration from Poland to South Africa for citizens from Eastern Europe did not differ at the end of the Thirties in comparison with the preceding years. In 1937 107 persons emigrated in that direction⁴⁸, and in the period from the 1st of February 1937 to 31st of December 1938 that number was 122 persons.⁴⁹

In spite of the considerable decrease in immigration from Eastern Europe to South Africa at the end of the Thirties, the supporters of the Afrikaner National Party organized meetings against "unlimited and injudicious mass immigration of Jews".⁵⁰ In the South African Parliament the members of the National Party exerted pressure in that matter on the government, but above all on Minister of the Interior R. Stuttaford.⁵¹

After 1930 many Polish Jews wrote to the Governor General of South Africa or even to King George VI requesting permissions to be allowed to enter the Union of South Africa. Nearly all of them had relatives there.

A great positive role in the process of adaptation of new Jewish immigrants in South Africa was played by the *Board of Deputies*, the *United Hebrew Congregation*, and later the (Transvaal) *Federation of Synagogues* in which the ecclesiastical court was headed

⁴³ Net Gain by Immigration, *Cape Times* 28.06.1936.

⁴⁴ Net Gain by Migration, *Cape Times* 04.08.1936.

⁴⁵ Union Migration Figures, *Cape Times* 23.11.1937.

⁴⁶ M.B. Steinberg 1978, 36.

⁴⁷ Permit Granted to Immigrant, *Cape Times* 20.05.1937.

⁴⁸ Migration to Union, *Cape Times* 04.07.1938.

⁴⁹ Where Alien Immigration Came From, *Cape Times* 02.02.1939.

⁵⁰ Paarl Protest Meeting, *Cape Times* 05.11.1936.

⁵¹ Where Union's Immigrations Came From, *Cape Times* 09.03.1938.

by Rabbi I. Kossowski from Poland. Valuable assistance to newcomers was rendered by local religions and social societies.

Social stratification of emigrants

The period of the Depression and the restrictive immigration laws of the biggest overseas countries in the Twenties had a severe impact on Jewish emigration from Poland. Unemployment and hardships were primarily experienced by the Jewish lower middle class⁵² which became impoverished.⁵³ The material status of Polish Jews was just as low as that of other ethnic groups or even lower.⁵⁴

It is assumed that a relatively high degree of education, high position in socio-professional structure, resistance against assimilation, wide contacts with the outer world caused Jewish emigration mobility to occur. Jews left Poland for South Africa mainly as a result of a magnetic force of tales of fabulous opportunities and wealth in South Africa.

The professional structure of emigrants from Poland who settled in South Africa in 1930 was as follows: agriculture: 5 persons, industry: 118, trade: 53, the learned professions: 12, domestic service: 9, dependants: 49, : 13, others: 10.⁵⁵ Corresponding figures for the years 1926-1929 were nearly the same: agriculture: 17 persons, mining: 2, industry: 387, trade, trade: 117, transport: 2, the learned professions: 48, domestic services: 18, others: 39.⁵⁶ The professional structure of Polish Jews who emigrated to South Africa in that period and later differed from other Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe (especially when occupation of posts in industry is considered). Compared with Russia and Lithuanian Jews, Polish Jews came from a more industrialized country and were generally better educated.

In the years 1926-1937 the proportion of active to passive labour work force in emigration from Poland to South Africa showed the predominance of the former group. Out of 1.104 immigrants who entered South Africa 634 persons (57 per cent) were part of the active labour work force, 354 (32,1 per cent) passive labour work force and others amounted to 116 (10,5 per cent).⁵⁷

⁵² According to J. Zarnowski the Jewish lower middle class in Poland in 1931 numbered 1.88 m., the Polish lower middle class 1.21 m. and others 0.24 m., See: J. Zarnowski 1973, 249.

⁵³ A broad study of the social situation of Polish Jews in the period between the two World Wars presented by S. Bronsztejn 1963.

⁵⁴ S. Bronsztejn 1963, 98.

⁵⁵ J. Budny 1934, 163. This work is a thesis written under the supervision of Prof. J. Loth at the Main School of Commerce in Warsaw (Główna Szkoła Handlowa w Warszawie).

⁵⁶ A. Tartakower 1939, 35.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 34.

Some interesting proportions were indicated by the gender structure in the emigration from Poland to South Africa (see table 1). After 1929 statistics considering the emigration of Polish Jews to South Africa were discontinued.⁵⁸

Table 1
Gender structure of emigration from Poland to South Africa in the years 1926-1938 (in percentage):

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE
1926	64,1	26,8
1927	55,2	44,8
1928	64,9	35,1
1929	65,2	34,8
1930-1938	n/a	n/a

Source: A. Tartakower, *Emigracja żydowska z Polski*, Warsaw 1939, p. 28.

During the inter-war period Polish Jews like other Eastern Jews generally looked to the English way of life in the process of acculturation. In the next decades they continued to identify themselves with the English-speaking community. Differences in language, cultural background and even, to some extent, religious tradition between them and West European Jews produced a certain amount of frictions. However, considering the relation between the inter-war emigration of Polish Jews and the earlier wave of Jewish settlement from Eastern Europe as well as Jews from Britain and Germany no explicit conclusion could be formulated.

Pro-Polish activity

Polish Jews who settled in the Union of South Africa manifested a diversified attitude to their country of birth and to Polish problems.⁵⁹ They generally wanted to become South African citizens possessing full rights.

Polish Jews who came to South Africa before the First World War from the Białystok, Vilna, Novogrod and Polesie provinces were derived from the poorest milieu

⁵⁸ Ibidem, 29.

⁵⁹ According to the estimates of the Polish Consulate in Cape Town from 1934, South Africa had a population of 10.000-15.000 Polish Jews, See: Archives of the New Records in Warsaw (abr. AAN), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (abr. MSZ), syg. 10371, c. 28.

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and the lower middle class. In a relatively short period of time they grew rich. Their links with Polishness were weak: "Their denationalization came easy (...) almost completely the knowledge of the Polish language was lost and only dim memories of Poland remained, more family nature than of patriotic nature."⁶⁰ In the Sixties Roman Królikowski, a Polish émigré activist in Johannesburg, wrote about that wave of emigration and the next one: "That group of people, especially the elderly who still spoke fluent Polish after a while lost all links with Polonia (South Africa's Polish community - A.Z)."⁶¹

The next emigrants from Poland were Jews who settled in the Union of South Africa after 1918. They originated from the same areas as their predecessors, with a small percentage of people coming from Central Poland (mainly Warsaw and Lodz) and the Malopolska region. The economic conditions existing in South Africa and certain pressures exerted in different forms by the South African authorities prompted them to obtain the local citizenship.⁶² Quoting difficulties in practising a profession they often changed their surnames from Polish-sounding to English-sounding surnames. However, in South Africa a part of Polish Jews underlined their contacts with Poland and became spokesmen of Polish interests in that country. A confidential report of the Polish Consulate in Cape Town included the following remark on the subject:

Many individuals, especially from the younger generation who came relatively recently, are very patriotic disposed. They speak Polish and wish themselves to use the Poland's care and cultural assistance. The elderly who settled here several decades ago and who live more or less prosperously, have already very little in common with Poland, though on many occasions you can encounter vital signs of sympathy for us.⁶³

Pro-Polish activity of Polish Jews concentrated in South Africa's two biggest cities: Johannesburg and Cape Town. In the former, in the first half of the Thirties the *Polish-Hebrew Benevolent Association* was established under S.S. Reubenson as Honorary Secretary. According to an account by working secretary L. Palca (whose original Polish surname was Pelka): "This is an association whose aim is to come to the assistance of Poles. It is composed mostly of English Jews of Polish origin and also of Polish Jews who have been here for 30-40 years and have lost their command of Polish."⁶⁴ Within the framework of that association a literary circle and a library of Polish books with 200

⁶⁰ AAN, MSZ, Embassy of the Polish Republic - London (abr. Amb. RP Londyn), syg.480, c. 25.

⁶¹ R. Królikowski 1969, 82.

⁶² AAN, MSZ, Amb. RP Londyn, syg. 480, c. 25.

⁶³ AAN, MSZ, syg. 10371, c. 29.

⁶⁴ AAN, MSZ, Amb. RP Londyn, syg. 902, c. 88.

members were active.⁶⁵ Besides, evenings of Polish poetry and patriotic songs, and gala events on the occasion of independence anniversaries were held. The Polish-Hebrew Benevolent Association made plans for expanding its membership in the future to all Polish-speaking people in Johannesburg.⁶⁶

One of the most active representatives of the Polish-Jewish colony in Johannesburg was architect Jan Gliksman. During the Polish Soviet War of 1920-1921, he fought in the "Warsaw Children" 23rd Infantry Regiment.⁶⁷ When Jan Gliksman settled in South Africa, he joined every pro-Polish campaign. He was a co-founder of the first South African Polonia association: The Association of Polish Settlers in South Africa (established in 1948). In the second half of the Forties he also designed a Catholic Convent for Polish nuns in Lyndhurst, then a Johannesburg suburb⁶⁸ and "...greatly helped Polish immigrants who came after the war."⁶⁹

In Johannesburg there also lived the Gonski family (former surname Gaska) from Lodz. They took part in the works of the Polish-Hebrew Benevolent Association. They cooperated with the Polish consular posts, and through their own company "Max Gonski & Sons" developed trade exchange with Poland. During the last World War the Gonski family "... every Thursday hosted dinners for Polish girl students and disabled soldiers."⁷⁰

Among other interesting representatives of Johannesburg's Jewish immigrants from Poland are: the Laubow family, the Levitz family, Tadeusz Katelbach, Jagoda Levin, Mr Finder, Mr Gorynski and Rabbi I. Kossowski.⁷¹

The social and cultural life of Polish Jews in Cape Town who felt affinity with Poland was focused around the local Polish consulate and the Federation of Polish Jews in the Cape headed by chairman A. Jacobs and vice-chairman L. Kantor.⁷² Active in

⁶⁵ Ibidem, c. 93-94, 97.

⁶⁶ AAN, MSZ, Amb. RP Londyn, syg. 902, c. 89.

⁶⁷ Interview with Zygmunt Fudakowski conducted by the author in Johannesburg on the 7th of May, 1990.

⁶⁸ Interview with Jerzy Wallas (former chairman of the Polish Association in South Africa and the Federation of Poles in Southern Africa) conducted by the author in Johannesburg on the 4th of May, 1990.

⁶⁹ Z. Fudakowski 1983.

⁷⁰ R. Królikowski 1969, 81.

⁷¹ Por. AAN, MSZ, Amb. RP Londyn, syg. 482, c. 505-510; syg. 902, c. 88-89.

⁷² See: AAN, MSZ, syg. 312, 167.

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the social, cultural and economic field in that city were: the Berezowski brothers (wood and textile agents), B. Kopelowicz (textile agent) and Mr Centner (jeweller).

A positive role in the stimulation of the pro-Polish activity of Polish Jews in South Africa was played by the Polish Consulate in Cape Town (established in 1929) and the Consular Agency in Johannesburg (established in 1938) as well as expanding foreign trade between the Republic of Poland and the Union of South Africa, in which Polish Jews were deeply involved.

Conclusion

Most Polish Jews were either able to take advantage of the possibilities offered by South Africa or successfully adopted to the harsh conditions during the Depression. They actively took part in South African economic, social and cultural life and contributed their own share to the development of their new home. They became well known businessmen, tradesmen, inventors and civil servants.

The majority of Polish Jews made efforts to assimilate into the English speaking community while maintaining some parts of Jewish tradition, religion and culture. However, some of them did not forget their country of birth. They felt Polish and cultivated native Polish culture without forgetting their Jewish roots. The emigration of Polish Jews to South Africa during the Second Polish Republic enlarged existing communities, and helped to form new ones.

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Summary

The term "the wandering Jew" could be properly referred to the situation of Polish Jews during the Second Polish Republic. Polish Jews constituted the largest separate ethnic group within overseas emigration from Poland during the years 1918-1939. They left Poland mainly for economic, and later for political reasons. The settlement schemes were supported and sponsored by Polish governmental agencies and Jewish societies in Poland and abroad. During the years 1918-1939 about several thousand Polish Jews emigrated to South Africa. A new immigration law implemented after 1930 had seriously reduced the influx of Polish Jews to South Africa. That emigration had a very permanent character and included mainly members of the lower middle class.

From the great variety of social, cultural, religious and professional activity of Polish Jews who settled in South Africa a pro-Polish attitude and activity was only evident in a tiny proportion of immigrants. The pro-Polish activity of Polish Jews was focused in Johannesburg (e.g. The Polish-Hebrew Benevolent Association) and in Cape Town (e.g. The Federation of Polish Jews in the Cape). An integrating role in that activity was played by Polish consular posts.