Anyone who has witnessed the progress of a Zionist meeting, or has even overheard it in passing by, will know that singing is a prominent feature of the service. The frequency with which the congregation has recourse to song throughout the meeting is ample testimony to its importance as an inescapable ingredient of Zionist worship. The fact that it is often accompanied by drumming underscores its rhythmic quality, so that it surpasses mere vocal expression and flows at times into bodily movements of hand-clapping, swaying and, occasionally, outright dancing and other forms of locomotion. Its prevalence and expansiveness within the meeting is therefore beyond doubt. The question is: wherein precisely does the significance of singing reside for Zionists? In Zionist thinking, it is another form of prayer; a type of meritorious action (Jules-Rosette, 157). But in terms of performance, we may ask what exactly is the role (or roles) of prayerful song in the conduct of a meeting, what contribution does song make to the totality of this social event and experience? The answer is to be sought in an analysis of the themes of Zionist hymns and of the usages to which they are put; in other words, by attending to their content and their context.

I have made a complete inventory of all the hymns that I heard and noted in the course of attending the services of twenty-two Zionist congregations in KwaMashu, Durban, over a period of two years. Of course, within the flow of participant observation of a fast-moving meeting, I was able to register only the opening line(s) of each hymn rather than a full account of its expression. But this was normally enough to establish its theme and, as will be clear presently, there is good reason to think that this is sufficient for my purposes (cf. note 5). My list runs to 117 different hymns, 40% of
which were not confined to one congregation; in order of frequency of rendering, twenty hymns occurred twice, nine three times, ten 4-5 times, four 6-7 times and one ("Lord, we are gathered together in your house") no less than nine times. Two other hymns recurred so frequently that they must be considered standard practice, being concerned with the specific actions of distributing and gathering the staves towards the beginning and end of a meeting. These are "Arm yourselves with the weapons, says the Lord of Hosts" and "Put away the weapons, says the Lord of Hosts", obviously adaptations of a single hymn and sung to the same refrain. It seems then that, apart from a small number of hymns which could be considered fairly common (occurring four or more times), each group relies largely on its own repertoire which it has built up independently of others. This holds true between congregations of the same church as well. Not that congregations compose their own hymns. The stock resource for all is the American Board (Congregational) Hymnal, occasionally supplemented by Wesleyan and Anglican borrowing, and it is the selection made by each group from these sources that accentuates its distinctive hymnody. The relatively small fund of common hymns are drawn heavily upon to sustain joint meetings of several congregations.

Besides this inventory of thematic content, I have also a fairly accurate record of usage, at least for the latter part of the research when I was more familiar with what was going on. From this I can plot the outline of which hymns were introduced at which structural point of the meeting and by which category of person, together with the circumstances surrounding each musical performance. This is an activity field in which actors make decisions as to what to sing and at what moment to do so, while others must decide whether to join in or not. From these myriad decisions some pattern or regularity may be observed to emerge, though it may not be presupposed, and attention here must be focussed on the question of what interests or purposes are being served by the introduction of hymns within the discourse of a meeting. Similarly, in addressing the themes or content of hymns, one should attempt to identify the recurrence of strong or dominant themes and, if possible, to link these to the major concerns which prevail among Zionists in general; in particular, one should look for any sign of concordance between themes and the particular circumstances in which they are given voice. These are the questions I wish to address in this paper.