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To cite this article: Suzanne Rutland (2013) Research in Transnational Archives: The Forgotten Story of the ‘Australian Immigration Project’, Holocaust Studies, 19:3, 105-130

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2013.11087379

Published online: 17 Feb 2015.
Research in Transnational Archives: The Forgotten Story of the ‘Australian Immigration Project’

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The transformative period in Australian Jewish history was the pre- and post-war migration of Jewish refugees. The Jewish community trebled in size from a tiny community of 23,000 to 61,000. However, whilst the number arriving at the edge of the Diaspora was significant, many more could have benefited. This opportunity was limited because of xenophobic and antisemitic attitudes, which resulted in government quotas and restricted funding. This period signalled the beginning of a partnership between Australian and American Jewry in the enormous task of resettling Jewish Displaced Persons in Australia. A largely forgotten story, it has been preserved in archives in Australia, New York and Jerusalem. This essay draws on this Australian case study to demonstrate the importance of transnational archival research.

Introduction

There has been much debate over the policies of the free, English-speaking world in relation to the issue of its failure to accept significant numbers of European Jewish refugees both before and after the Second World War.¹ In their book, entitled evocatively None is Too Many, Abella and Troper document the discriminatory policies introduced in Canada in the period from 1933 to 1948.² Their title was based on the off-the-record comment by a Canadian immigration official in 1945 when asked how many Jewish survivors Canada would accept. The works of David Wyman³ and Leonard Dinnerstein,⁴ amongst others,

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PUBLISHED BY VALLENGE MITCHELL, LONDON
deal with the negative record of the United States in regard to Jewish refugee and survivor migration over the same period. Other key works claim that the free world was unresponsive in the face of the refugee crisis. W.D. Rubinstein has strongly criticised the works of these various scholars. In his ‘controversial’ 1997 book, *The Myth of Rescue*, he argues that no lives were lost due to the policy of the Allies either in the pre-war period or during the war itself and he claimed that their approach was ‘ahistorical’. Almost a decade earlier, Rubinstein published an article entitled ‘Australia and the Refugee Jews of Europe, 1933–1954: A Dissenting View’, in which he claimed that the issue of Australian discrimination against Jews both during the pre- and post-Second World War periods had been exaggerated and stressed that the picture was not nearly as black as had been painted by other researchers, including Michael Blakeney, Andrew Markus and Paul Bartrop. He also criticised the findings published in *Edge of the Diaspora* as ‘ahistorical’, stating that ‘however correct this view may be on matter of fact, the context of these arguments is misleading’.

However, Rubinstein did not undertake substantial research in the key archives. In his major 1991 volume *The Jews in Australia: A Thematic History, 1945–1990*, Rubinstein continued his line of argument; but in his chapter dealing with post-war Jewish immigration, his only archival reference was when he quoted one reference from *Edge of the Diaspora*. Without in-depth and thorough archival research, one cannot fully understand either the dynamics or the context of this central period in Jewish history. In a critical review of the *Myth of Rescue*, David Cesarani points out that:

This analysis contradicts all recent scholarship and defies the evidence. In November 1936, Chaim Weizmann famously stated that ‘today almost six million Jews in that part of the world [Central and Eastern Europe] are doomed to be pent up in places where they are not wanted, and for whom the world is divided into places where they cannot live and places into which they cannot enter’. But it must be noted that Rubinstein bases himself almost entirely on secondary sources.

As Cesarani notes later in his review, it is always possible to theorise, but without empirical evidence, it is not possible to validate a theory. Much of the key research relating to the role of the free world in terms
of policies both during the Second World War and post-war relating to admitting Jews only emerged in the 1980s when, due to the 30-year rule, key archives became accessible to the public. It was in this period that many of the key works cited above were published.

Taking Australia as a case study, this essay will argue that, for the historian, archives play a key role in providing that empirical evidence. For Jewish Holocaust survivor migration to Australia this involves research in three countries. The triangulation of the Australian government archives, the Australian Jewish community archives and the American Jewish welfare archives provides a wealth of material about post-war survivor migration to Australia. Each archive reveals a different aspect of the topic and also includes information which was kept secret at the time. Thus, it is only through accessing the archives of all three countries that a full picture can emerge.

This essay will first discuss the major archives in Australia, New York and Jerusalem. It will then provide examples to illustrate the crucial nature of this archival research and the ways in which research in the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HIAS) archives help to provide a more nuanced and detailed picture of the story, adding an extra layer of understanding. Firstly the discriminatory policies to Jewish migration will be examined through archival evidence. Then, the assistance provided by the American Jewish welfare organisations will be discussed. Finally, tensions between the different welfare organisations will be described. Without the materials found in the archives of the American Jewish welfare organisations in New York and Jerusalem, the key, global role played by these organisations in assisting the tiny Australian Jewish community to absorb the refugees and survivors in what they called ‘the Australian Immigration Project’ would have been forgotten. Through a discussion of these specific issues, the essay will seek to demonstrate that historians who have not undertaken such research have failed to understand the history of this period.

Transnational Archives: Australia, New York and Jerusalem

Understanding the complex story of pre- and post-war Jewish migration to Australia has involved studying the policies of the Australian government, the Australian Jewish community and the American
welfare organisations. This requires extensive research in archives spread across three continents: in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne in Australia; in New York in the United States; and in Jerusalem, Israel. Research in the American Jewish archives provides a vital link to understanding the cooperative migration endeavour between the Australian and American Jewish communities in terms of European Jewish migration, as well as some of the tensions that existed between the organisations. The American documents reveal additional data, which is not available in the Australian archives in Canberra, Sydney or Melbourne.

The National Archives of Australia (NAA) are located in Canberra, Australia’s capital city. The government archives were initially housed in the National Library of Australia, but in 1961 became a separate entity, originally called the Commonwealth Archives Office but renamed the Australian Archives in 1975. Its current name was introduced in 1998. The Archives Act of 1983 mandated the functions of the Australian Archives, and these are set out on the Australian government’s website:

The Archives plays the leading role in the management of Commonwealth records; makes available to the public non-exempt Commonwealth records over 30 years old; encourages and facilitates the use of the archival resources of the Australian Government; and provides leadership in developing and coordinating the preservation and use of the archival resources of Australia. The Archives meets its responsibilities under the Archives Act by developing policy and providing advice to the Australian Government and its agencies on the management, preservation and disposal of Commonwealth records. 15

The NAA’s Readers Room is located in the Old Post Office of Canberra, which has been renovated, creating a very comfortable environment for researchers. Before that, the reading room was located in the Canberra suburb of Mitchell, where most of the government documents are still stored. The NAA also has offices in the various state capital cities. The NAA holds substantial files dealing with Jewish immigration both before and after the Second World War. These files include information about Australian post-war immigration policy, the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) and Australia, and the other mass migration agreements with The Netherlands, Italy and Germany in
the late 1940s and 1950s. They indicate the extent of anti-Jewish feelings resulting in the discriminatory policies introduced by the government, both Labor and Liberal. Both the politicians and public servants sought to conceal and deny the antisemitic nature of these policies, often through the use of bureaucratic language, as seen clearly with the so-called ‘Iron Curtain Embargo’, which explicitly sought to exclude Jews. As is often the case, the handwritten margin comments made by the key public servants involved in the Department of Immigration are often the most revealing in terms of these prejudices, as will be discussed later in this essay.

The archives of the Australian Jewish community complement the government archives. The most important of these is the Archive of Australian Judaica (AAJ) housed in the Fisher Library at the University of Sydney. This archive, established in July 1982, was founded with the aim of halting ‘the deterioration and destruction of records that traced the growth of the Australian Jewish community and to centralise these records in a research repository that would be accessible to researchers in a university setting’. The key proponent and central figure in its foundation was Professor Emeritus Alan Crown, who served as one of its trustees from its foundation until his death in November 2010. He worked with the University of Sydney Librarian, Dr Neil Radford, to acquire a government grant for the Archive’s foundation in 1982. This grant funded the Archive until 1987, after which the Mandelbaum Trust assumed financial responsibility for the Archive, which continued to be housed in the Fisher Library. From its inception, Dr Sister Marianne Dacy has been employed three days a week to run the archive. She has worked hard to search out and acquire as much relevant material as possible, both from community organisations and from individual personalities. However, acquisition and especially microfilming materials has been limited by financial constraints.

The AAJ has key collections relating to pre- and post-war survivor migration. Most important are the correspondence files of the roof body of the community, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ), which was formed in 1944 with one of its main aims being to foster post-war Jewish migration. The ECAJ was responsible for negotiations with the government while the Federation of the Australian Jewish welfare societies was responsible for the reception and integration of the survivors. In addition to the ECAJ Correspondence
Files, the Archive also contains about 40 box files of correspondence relating to the Conference of Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conferences), providing detailed insight into the development of the community. The correspondence files of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies, also housed in the AAJ, contain some relevant material, in particular relating to post-war stateless Jewish migration from Shanghai.

Of the individual collections, the most relevant for pre- and post-war Jewish migration are the Dr Max Joseph files, which were donated by his daughter, Karen Angell. A German Jewish refugee, Dr Max Joseph was interned after Kristallnacht in 1938 for three weeks in Sachsenhausen, while his wife and daughter managed to escape to England. They were able to gain landing permits for the whole family to migrate to Australia and arrived before the outbreak of war. Dr Joseph was interned at Tatura as an ‘enemy alien’ and played a leading role in the formation of the Association of Refugees to fight for the rights of the internees. After the war, it changed its name to Association of New Citizens (ANC) and Dr Joseph remained its president until its dissolution in 1953. He was also active in the formation of the North Shore Temple Emanuel and served as its first president. The Dr Max Joseph Collection contains much valuable material, including the full edition of the ANC monthly newspaper, The New Citizen.

In addition to the Archive of Australian Judaica, there are other Australian Jewish archives which contain relevant material for post-war Jewish migration. These include the Archives of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, housed in Sydney at the Sydney Jewish Museum, and in Melbourne in the LaTrobe Section of the State Library of Victoria, as well as the Archives of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society located in Sydney, Melbourne (currently called JewishCare in these two major centres) and Perth. Much of the Sydney material relating to individual survivors was thought to have been lost, but was discovered about ten years ago. However, the collection had been neglected and was in a bad state. It has been put into storage awaiting funds for the proper maintenance and housing of the material. The proper archiving of this material was recently completed.

The Australian archives are supplemented by the archives of the three main American Jewish welfare organisations: the JDC, the Refugee Economic Corporation (also housed with the JDC Archives), and the
HIAS. The largest of these is the JDC archives, which are housed in both New York (JDC-NY) and Jerusalem (JDC-Jer).19 The JDC-NY Archives were established in 1962, nearly half a century after the formation of the JDC, in response to a comment in 1960 from editor and author, Harold Epstein, to Edward Warburg, JDC Chairman, and Moses Leavitt, JDC Executive Vice-President: ‘Even a quick reconnaissance of that jungle of records, which has grown up though JDC’s lifetime, is enough to indicate that it is practically impenetrable. Only the most intrepid soul would set forth into that forest of papers.’ The ‘intrepid soul’ turned out to be Rose Klepfisz, a survivor of the Second World War, whose husband was a hero of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.20

Klepfisz migrated to the United States in 1949. After liberation, she spent three years in Sweden, where she learnt English, and on arrival in New York she was hired by Dr Philip Friedman, a renowned historian and the Director of the Joint Documentary Projects of Yad Vashem and the YIVO Institute, to work as a staff member of YIVO. One of her early projects was working on the Guide to Jewish History Under Nazi Impact. Reflecting on her initial reactions to her archival challenges in 1962, Klepfisz commented that she was ‘left in a panic. The material was labeled miscellaneous, A to Z. The Joint was founded in 1914. This was 1962. Nobody cared.’21 Her initial task was to create a catalogue, which would enable outside researchers to access files. She noted that the work was painstaking and demanding, requiring patience and organisational skills. She stressed: ‘To me, it was logic. If you get something raw, how you arrange it is by logic.’22 By 1964 she had prepared the ‘Catalogue of the Archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee of the years 1914–1918’, a 41-page compendium, which provided the model for the series of six catalogues that followed, covering the period to 1950.

In addition to preparing the catalogues, Klepfisz supervised other archivists who worked in the archive, and responded to researchers’ queries.23 She retired in 1985, after 23 years of service, providing an important base for researchers. She was succeeded by Sherry Hyman, who worked in the JDC Headquarters in Manhattan, and Shelly Helfand, who was responsible for the bulk of the archives, which had been moved to ‘The Fortress’ in Queens, New York and worked with Misha Mitsel, who looked after the photo collection. After Hyman’s retirement, Mitsel was appointed as the JDC’s senior archivist.
In the early 1980s the JDC-Jerusalem Archive was established to house material from JDC post-war activities in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Located at the JDC Israel Headquarters at Givat Ram, Jerusalem, the bulk of its material was shipped from the JDC offices in Geneva to Jerusalem and these materials are known as the Geneva Files. These files include material from the JDC office in Paris, which operated as the centre of JDC activities in the immediate post-war period, and included the Australian files. There are also separate collections from the JDC offices in Paris, Vienna, Rome, Stockholm and Morocco, as well as records of Malben, of the Cyprus detention camps and of the Jewish migration from Yemen in 1948, known as ‘Operation Magic Carpet’, which were relocated from a warehouse outside Jerusalem to the JDC-Jer Archive.24 In 1998, the JDC mounted a special exhibition entitled ‘On Eagles’ Wings’ to celebrate the rescue of Yemenite Jewry, 50 years after the establishment of the State of Israel.25

The HIAS files for the period until 1960 are housed in the YIVO Archives at the Centre of Jewish History in lower Manhattan. They have been microfilmed. They include a number of reels that contain the personal files of survivors assisted by HIAS. However, accessing these files is problematic, as they are indexed on the basis of the survivor’s HIAS client number, rather than their name. Hence, a researcher needs to know this number – the knowledge of the name is insufficient. In addition, one needs written permission from the person, before accessing their file. The HIAS materials for the period from 1960 have been kept in storage, managed by HIAS. They were catalogued on a voluntary basis and are not easily accessible. It is only through researching in these transnational archives that a full picture of the story of survivor migration to Australia emerges.

Written documentary materials can also be supplemented by oral histories. In addition to the 2,500 Australian testimonies in the Spielberg Archive, now located at the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute, there are also approximately an additional 500 testimonies, located at the Archive of Australian Judaica, the Sydney Jewish Museum, Holocaust Museum, Melbourne and the State Library of NSW. These personal stories add to our understanding of the post-war survivor experience in Australia. The recent opening of the Red Cross International Tracing Service, located at Bad Arolsen, Germany, with its extensive archival collection of DP records, provides further
documentation for future researchers. Some of this material is also stored in repositories dispersed around the globe, including the American archives discussed above.

The importance of this archival research will be demonstrated through a discussion of three different issues: the Australian government’s discriminatory policies; the material assistance American Jewry gave to the Australian Jewish community; and the interpersonal relationships between the different organisations involved in the resettlement of survivors.

Shedding Light on the Australian Government’s Discriminatory Policies

In August 1945, Arthur Calwell, Australia’s first Labor Minister for Immigration, announced that Australia would admit 2,000 Jewish survivors on a humanitarian basis. This announcement was met with a hostile reception, mirroring the anti-Jewish sentiments expressed before the war. Known as ‘anti-reffo’ feeling, this manifested itself in newspapers and statements made by members of parliament. Opposition to Jewish refugee migration was summed up in the words of Henry (Jo) Gullett, Liberal member for Henty, Victoria: ‘We are not compelled to accept the unwanted of the world at the dictate of the United Nations or any one else. Neither should Australia be a dumping ground for people whom Europe itself, in the course of 2,000 years, has not been able to absorb.’26 In response, in 1946 Calwell introduced a policy that limited the number of Jews on any ship coming from Europe to 25 per cent and he later extended this policy to planes. In addition, discriminatory policies were introduced in regard to Jewish immigration from Shanghai.

Archival research is particularly relevant for charting these discriminatory policies against Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) introduced by Arthur Calwell and maintained by his Liberal successor, Harold Holt. Calwell had strong personal ties with the leadership of the Melbourne Jewish community. At the personal level, he did everything in his power to assist relatives of members of his electorate to come to Australia. Hence, when he and his departmental officers insisted that there was ‘no discrimination on the basis of race of religion’, Jewish community leaders were more inclined to accept these
assertions. On the other hand, the American Jewish leadership was more perceptive. They recognised that the antisemitic campaign conducted in Australia against Jewish migration would create problems for Jewish refugees who wished to migrate from Europe and Shanghai to Australia. As JDC representative Charles Jordan commented in January 1947:

There is also no question about the fact that, while the Minister may be a perfectly wonderful man, his ideas about immigration are not very much liked by a large number of people in Australia, and we may find the same difficulties that we have found in other similar situations, namely that it will be difficult to have the policy set by the Minister carried out by subordinate government agencies, except with a great deal of pressure and after many delays.27

These words proved to be prophetic. In the face of external pressure, bureaucratic procedures were introduced that severely reduced the number of survivors able to migrate to Australia. After the Jewish communal leaders objected to the 25 per cent quota, a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ was reached in December 1948 that the quota would be increased to 50 per cent, provided that no more than 3,000 Jewish DP’s arrive in Australia annually. When the number in 1949 exceeded this quota by around 800, the Labor government imposed the ‘iron curtain embargo’, excluding immigrants from Communist countries, including Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the countries from where most Jews originated.28 This policy, which was supposedly introduced on security grounds, but specifically targeted Jews, succeeded in reducing the number of European Jews able to migrate to Australia and was maintained by the Liberal government after its election in December 1949.29

The ‘iron curtain embargo’ was introduced in 1949 as an administrative decision, which was kept secret and was implemented through the Department of Immigration, rather than as a legal amendment to the Australian Immigration Act in parliament.30 The extent of this discriminatory policy against Jews came to light through research in the NAA. One particularly revealing document dealing with the ‘Iron Curtain Embargo’ stated:
There are a number of ways in which a brake could be put on the number of Jews entering the Commonwealth, viz:

1. for the minister to announce that the number of permits for Jews is out of all proportion to the number sought for other than Jews, having regard to the strength of the Jewish community in Australia, and for that reason applications will not be received in respect of Jews for a period of say, three or six months (Suggested by the C.M.O. Sydney.)

2. to impose a quota

3. to restrict the eligible categories to certain classes of relatives

4. to restrict migration to Australia from countries whose nationals comprise the majority of Jewish migrants.

Methods (1) to (3) inclusive would savour too much of anti-Semitism, but the fourth method involves a number of Iron Curtain countries and good use can be made of the security risks involved in migration from there. 31

This was a clear example of the way the Department of Immigration sought to hide a policy, which they themselves recognised as being antisemitic. Yet, only two copies of this document were located and after that all further references to this immigration policy only mentioned the security risks relating to immigration from behind the Iron Curtain. This placed the Jewish communal leadership in a difficult position, since every time they objected to the new policy, they were assured that it was introduced for security reasons, due to concerns about the Soviet Union, and had nothing to do with race or religion.

In a handwritten comment at the end of the document dealing with the iron curtain embargo, J. Horgan, a departmental official, commented:

Jewish migration is a matter of concern. Jews constitute 0.4% of the population but Jewish migration constitutes 25% of the total alien immigration to this country (excluding displaced persons). The migrants are practically all city dwellers coming to already crowded cities and adding to the acute accommodation problem. It is the Jewish element which has been responsible for the traffic in accommodation guarantees.

As will be seen from the attached memo, the great bulk of
Jewish migrants are coming from ‘Iron Curtain’ countries. Closure of that source would, it is estimated, curtail Jewish migration by approximately 75% and this could be done without giving Jews any opportunity of raising the cry of antisemitism.\textsuperscript{12}

There are many other references noting the small proportional size of the Jewish community in post-war Australia, with the implication that this proportion should not be increased. It is, therefore, important to note that while the Jewish community increased in size from 23,000 in 1933 to 59,000 in 1961 Jews remained only 0.5 per cent of the overall Australian population, achieving the stated aim in secret Australian government documents.

A major reason for the proportion of Jews not increasing significantly after 1945, despite the significant numbers of privately sponsored Jewish survivor migration, was the discriminatory policy towards the inclusion of Jews in the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) programme. Interestingly, Hogan excluded the IRO numbers from his estimate of ‘total alien immigration’, which was referring to non-British migration from Europe. Australian participation in the IRO programme is a key example of the importance of archival research. In July 1947, Calwell travelled to Europe to sign an agreement with the IRO. However, in a secret arrangement Jews were largely excluded from this programme.\textsuperscript{13} As a result of Calwell’s successful promotion of the programme, in the period from 1947 to 1951 a total of 170,000 European non-Jewish DPs (amongst whom were Nazi criminals and collaborators) were assisted to migrate to Australia, paid for by the UN and the Australian government. In 1950 alone, Australia accepted 100,000 non-Jewish DPs, ironically with the majority coming from countries that, by then, were controlled by Communist Parties. In the same period (1947–51) only 13,000 Jewish DPs migrated to Australia sponsored by family (Form 40) or by specific employers (Form 47), paid for by their families or the Jewish community in Australia and the US, with only around 500 Jewish DPs arriving under the auspices of the IRO.

The exclusion of Jewish DPs from the IRO programme can be clearly charted through archival research. When the JDC became aware that ‘not a single Jew’ would be included in the first IRO shipments of 1,800 DPs to leave Europe in October and November 1947, Saul Symonds

\textsuperscript{12} Hogan, R., \textit{The Holocaust in Australia}, 1997, p. 4

\textsuperscript{13} Calwell, R., \textit{The Calwell Plan: An Australian Government Policy}, 1949, p. 4

\textsuperscript{14} JDC, \textit{The Holocaust in Australia}, 1997, p. 4
was cabled immediately. He spoke with Calwell who explained to him that the exclusion of Jews was merely accidental and resulted from the fact that Jews, on the whole, did not fall into the occupational categories required to lessen the labour shortages in Australia. Calwell assured Symonds that in the overall IRO migration scheme 15–16 per cent of people selected would be Jewish, this figure reflecting the percentage of Jews among the DPs.  

This assurance did not eventuate.

While limitations on the various other European nationalities were gradually lifted, discriminatory policies against Jews continued. The early selections were made only from Baltic, Ukrainian, Yugoslavian and Czechoslovakian DPs. In April 1948 Brigadier F.G. Gallegan, head of the Australian Military Mission, Berlin, which organised the selection of DPs, suggested that Poles be included as other groups were diminishing. Departmental Secretary, Tasman Heyes, approved with the proviso, ‘for your confidential guidance (that) Polish Jews should not be recruited unless they are exceptionally good cases and then in limited numbers’. In July 1948, when Hungarians were admitted into the scheme, the same stipulation was made. In December 1949, selection processes commenced among German nationals who had been dispossessed by religious or political persecution during the Hitler regime or who had emigrated from Germany and subsequently been displaced.

The Australian selection teams at first did not accept family units but by late 1948 this provision was no longer workable. The selection teams were informed that family units could be accepted with the exception of Poles, Hungarians, Jews and White Russians. In March 1949 Polish family groups were accepted ‘on the same terms as displaced persons of other nationalities subject to their being non-Jews’. In the cable with this instruction Heyes stressed ‘desire no publicity be given to the exclusion of Jewish persons’. In May 1949 when all nationalities ‘who are of pure European race’ became eligible, ‘Jewish family units of European nationality’ were still excluded and this policy remained in force until the last years of the IRO programme in 1950 and 1951.

In addition, the JDC Archives revealed a secret story relating to IRO funding for individual Jewish DPs travelling to Australia. Until 1948, the IRO was refunding the JDC $500 for each passage paid for individually sponsored Jewish survivors to Australia. However, in a letter dated 2 September 1948 to the ECAJ, Calwell wrote:
The Government does, however, strongly object to funds of organizations, such as the International Refugee Organization, being used to pay the whole or part of the fares of holders of landing permits. The Australian Government’s contribution to the International Refugee Organization is made for the purpose of bringing to this country only such displaced persons, regardless of race or creed, who are resident in displaced persons camps in occupied Europe and who are introduced into Australia under the terms of the IRO Australian Agreement.41

This policy was introduced formally in November 1948 and by January 1950, the JDC calculated that they were owed over one million US dollars for a total of 2,085 claims, and that this amount was increasing all the time. The JDC leadership believed that all these Australian cases were eligible under the IRO’s constitution and should have received funding support. They analysed the IRO agreement with Australia, signed by Calwell in 1947, and could see no evidence that the IRO had concurred that it was the sole agency through which DPs could be admitted to Australia, as stated by the Australian government, and that there was no limitation of categories for which the IRO would give financial assistance.42 A detailed and revealing memorandum dealing with the situation pointed out that the Australian mass settlement programme under the IRO was financed by funds from the United Nations, most of which had been provided by the United States and Canada. Yet, the United States government had not been consulted by Australia about the discriminatory decision to withhold monies from Jewish DPs migrating on an individual basis to Australia. The memorandum stressed: ‘Analysis of the entire question indicates that an arbitrary and discriminatory decision has been recommended by the Minister for Immigration for Australia which IRO has accepted and put into practice.’43

After protracted negotiations between the JDC executives and the IRO, it was decided that the IRO would reimburse the JDC for its outlay, but in such a way that the Australian government would not know about this transaction. In the negotiations the IRO officials requested that the JDC keep this decision totally confidential, and not even inform the Australian Jewish leaders. This information was located in the JDC-NY archives.44 Despite the stress on the need for secrecy in
terms of this arrangement, the Department of Immigration in Canberra learnt of the arrangement and they informed Walter Brand who wrote to Jordan, stating that he did not know all the details of the arrangement. Hence, it was only through detailed research in both the JDC-NY and the Jerusalem Geneva files that the full account of this discriminatory Australian story has come to light.

The IRO programme was not a direct migration programme – the DPs came out as foreign workers on a two-year work contract, after which they could apply to remain in Australia. Calwell promoted the concept of the two-year work contract due to the strong xenophobia in Australia, seen with the Australian immigration policies introduced after federation and known colloquially as ‘The White Australia Policy’. The first IRO cohorts were selected from the Baltic countries, since they were mainly blond and blue-eyed, and would fit easily into the Anglo-Celtic mould. Calwell could also promote the agreement as a temporary programme for foreign workers. However, the vast majority chose to remain in Australia after they completed their contract, even though they were often faced with very difficult conditions on their arrival in Australia and could be sent to work in remote areas of Australia.

The Jewish survivors who were excluded from the IRO programme were better off because they were not tied down by the two-year work contract and could settle in Melbourne and Sydney. There, with the assistance of family, *landsmanschaft* and Jewish welfare (assisted by The Joint, HIAS and Refrecom), they were able to re-establish their lives, often fairly quickly. A major factor in this readjustment was the financial assistance received from the American Jewish organisations. So the Jewish victims of the Holocaust were only able to re-establish themselves thanks to the financial support of other Jews, as will be discussed in the next section. However, the fact that the Jewish DPs were better off when they arrived in Australia does not lessen the significance of the secret discrimination that was carried out against the Jews within the Australian IRO programme, a policy that was only revealed by archival research.

**The Australian Immigration Project**

In order to ensure that the Jewish European refugees and survivors were absorbed easily into their new land without becoming a financial burden
on the Australian government, the Australian Jewish Welfare Society was formed in 1936, with branches emerging in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide. They directly sponsored some of the refugees and acted as a backup service for those who were sponsored privately but required assistance. Boats were met and immigrants were helped with finding employment or setting up in business through interest-free loans. Two different schemes operated to assist orphan survivors of the Holocaust who wished to immigrate to Australia. After 1945 buildings were purchased and converted into hostels for the newcomers. In Melbourne a total of 11 hostels were established, Sydney had five and Brisbane one, so that the housing needs of the newcomers could be met, according to the government’s requirement. Only a very small percentage of the Jewish immigrants were housed in the government migrant camps, such as Bonegilla, where living conditions were very difficult.

These various activities created immense fiscal challenges and communal leaders appealed to overseas Jewish communities, particularly in the United States, for assistance. Already in 1939 the American Jewish community had agreed to provide funds for the Australian Jewish Welfare Society in Sydney. In the post-war era the absorption of Jewish immigrants became a joint enterprise between local and overseas Jewry, especially through three major American welfare organisations: The American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Refugee Economic Corporation (REC), and the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HIAS). It was these three organisations that facilitated what the American Jewish leadership called the ‘Australian Immigration Project’. These developments reflected a Jewish belief as set out in the Talmud that all Jews are responsible for each other (Kol yisrael aravim ze la’ze). Thus, if a Jew is in need, other Jews no matter where they live have an obligation to assist their religious and ethnic brethren. The immigration of Jewish refugees and survivors to Australia illustrated this central Jewish ethic.

In a report written after his visit to Australia in 1949, American emissary, Emery Komlos, described his wonderful reception by the Jewish community, commenting ‘who wouldn’t be with Three Rich Uncles’. He was referring to the JDC, REC and HIAS. The American Joint Distribution Committee was formed in 1914 and headed by Felix Warburg (1914–32), and later his son Edward (1941–66). After 1945,
the JDC played a major role in Jewish resettlement, providing financial assistance and logistical skills. Leonard Dinnerstein concluded: ‘no other voluntary agency, Jewish, Gentile or non-sectarian, could compare with the JDC in accomplishment’. The Refugee Economic Corporation (REC) was formed in 1934 to aid in the resettlement and rehabilitation of refugees from Nazi Germany and, subsequently, from other parts of German-occupied Europe. The prime mover of the REC was JDC founder Felix M. Warburg, who led the organisation until his death in 1937, when Charles J. Liebman succeeded him as president. Unlike other agencies involved in refugee work during this period, the REC operated on a business model rather than on that of a philanthropic organisation. According to its 1949 annual report, it avoided ‘short-term relief’ in favour of investment in long-term resettlement projects that were ‘self-liquidating’. This investment often came in the form of loans to business enterprises that employed refugees and allowed them to develop and showcase skills seen as useful by the governments of host countries. In 1953, after the majority of survivors had been resettled, the organisation amalgamated with the JDC.

HIAS was founded in the USA in 1902 by newly arrived Russian Jews to assist their fellow immigrants who were fleeing economic misery and pogroms. After restrictive immigration quotas were introduced in 1924, HIAS began to concentrate its efforts on other activities, aiding immigrants in settling in other countries and working more closely with international Jewish aid agencies to give training and support to European Jews in preparation for emigration. Compared with the JDC, HIAS was smaller in size and its leadership was more exclusively focused on assisting Jews in Eastern Europe. In the aftermath of the Second World War, it was particularly active in Poland. At times its activities overlapped with those of the JDC, although efforts were made to avoid duplication.

In the post-war era, the Jewish relief agencies had the most significant resources of all organisations assisting DPs in Europe, both in terms of funding and personnel. They sought to meet the needs of Jews in DP camps, not only in terms of relocation, but also in providing food, clothing, childcare and schooling, until the refugees were able to leave Europe. Although some scholarly work has been undertaken on the reception of Jewish refugees in the United States itself, until recently very little had been written about the ways in which American
Jewry assisted the Australian Immigration Project. There is almost nothing about JDC assistance to Australia in the major history of the JDC by Yehuda Bauer. The same is true of the histories of HIAS. A major reason for the lack of knowledge of this cooperative endeavour is that throughout the project, key officials insisted on maintaining secrecy regarding American Jewish assistance to Australian Jewish welfare organisations for fear that this information would play into the hands of the anti-Jewish immigration campaign in Australia. In May 1947 at a meeting between the REC’s president, Charles Liebman, and key JDC officials including chairman Edward M.M. Warburg, Liebman stressed: ‘no leak in New York [concerning American funding to Australia] should occur since it will embarrass the present Australian government very much’. In response, Louis H. Sobel, speaking on behalf of the JDC, assured Liebman that the JDC would not publicise the aid it would give. This stress on secrecy was repeated throughout the period until 1954.

Only by utilising the relevant sources in American, Australian and Israeli archives can this little-known story of international cooperation finally be brought to light, adding a new dimension to our understanding of Jewish survivor migration in the immediate post-war period. For example, in the JDC-NY archives there are financial files which list the amount of money sent each month to Swiss banks to pay for passengers travelling by ship to Australia. All European Jewish holders of Australian landing permits had to be transported to the port of embarkation – initially Marseilles with the French shipping line, *Messageries Maritimes*, and later to Genoa or Trieste in Italy with the *Flotta Lauro* line. Their passages had to be paid up front and they often had to be housed in hotels or boarding houses until their ship was ready for boarding. The financial files indicated the ongoing nature of this assistance. For example, a JDC financial file for the period 1951–54 listed the following financial transactions for January 1951, as summarised in my notes:

- 19 January 1951
  Accounting Letter – from Herbert Katzki and S. Shargo – to pay US$30,000 to Messrs Dichmann, Wright & Pugh, 44 Whitehall Street, New York, NY, for *Flotta Lauro*, Naples ‘representing the first advance for approximately 150 passengers on the SS
Surriento sailing from Genoa to Australia on 15 February 1951. Chargeable to ‘Emigration to Australia’.

- 19 January 1951
  Accounting Letter – from Herbert Katzki and S. Shargo – pay US$30,000 to American Lloyd Inc. (Bank Julius Baer & Co., Bahnhof, Zurich Switzerland) for second payment on SS El Misk, sailed from Marseilles to Australia on 20 December 1950. Chargeable to ‘Emigration to Australia’.

- 24 January 1951
  Cable – Pay 1898 to Fotis G. Poulides Societies Banques Suisses Geneva US$20,000 first advance SS Cyrenia, 10 March 1951, Genoa to Melbourne. Chargeable to ‘Emigration to Australia’.

- 31 January 1951
  Accounting Letter – from S. Shargo – to pay US$1158.54 to Messrs Dichmann, Wright & Pugh, 44 Whitehall Street, New York, NY, for Flotto Lauro, Naples in behalf of passages arranged with Poloris, Paris (general agents for Flotto Lauro). This amount is on account of SS Napoli sailing of 20 January 1951, from Genoa to Australia. Chargeable to ‘Emigration to Australia’.

These extensive files for the period from 1946–54 clearly indicate the high level of financial assistance being offered for the ‘Australian Immigration Project’.

On arrival in Australia, if the Jewish DPs did not receive assistance from their relatives, they had to be provided accommodation in community hostels for their first six months. In order to assess the financial needs of Australian Jewry five emissaries visited Australia between 1946 and 1953, and their detailed reports are deposited in the JDC/HIAS archives. These various activities required close interpersonal relationships between the different organisations involved in Australia and America, and various tensions often emerged, as will be discussed in the next section.

Tensions between the Organisations

Despite the importance of American funding for Australian Jewry, archival research reveals ongoing tensions between the JDC and HIAS,
as well as between the Sydney and Melbourne branches of Jewish welfare and also with the Americans often being highly critical of their Australian colleagues. In mid-1947, it was reported that HIAS was planning to charter a boat for 700 Jewish DPs to travel to Australia, ignoring the 25 per cent quota limit set by Calwell. This report was based on the detailed negotiations that Lewis Neikrug, the HIAS official in Paris, was conducting with Arne Larsson to purchase the SS Tidewater, then located at Rotterdam.³⁹ When the JDC officials heard of these plans, they were very distressed and asked Edward M.M. Warburg, JDC Chairman, to intervene. He wrote to Samuel A. Telsey, HIAS President, stressing: ‘In view of the very serious situation that might possibly result from such a step, on the basis of informal discussion which our representative had with the Australian delegate to the IRO, it seemed so important to us that I felt I ought to write to you directly and ask you to give this your personal attention.’²⁰ Telsey responded almost immediately assuring Warburg that any decision taken by the executive ‘will not be adverse to the benefit of the Jewish migrant, or in contravention or in violation of any law or regulation of the immigration country. HIAS will not knowingly do or permit anything to be done that may be prejudicial to the people we both are interested in helping.’²¹ The personal communication between the presidents of these two key organisations indicated the importance they placed on the Australian Immigration Project.

The Tidewater set sail in September with a group of Jewish survivors on board. The initial number on board was over the quota and, after objections from Australian officials, the group was reduced to 100 adults and 17 orphan children – just 17 over the quota. HIAS had to guarantee that the group on the next ship would be 17 under the quota.²² Following this incident, an acrimonious debate developed between the Sydney and Melbourne branches of the Welfare Society, with the Sydney Jewish leadership also being highly critical of Neikrug.²³ Research in the different archives of the Australian government, the Australian Jewish community, HIAS and JDC enables the historian to develop a full picture of this incident with its broader ramifications of prejudice and discrimination in regard to Jewish survivor migration, as well as the interplay and internal tensions between the Jewish communal bodies involved at a transnational level.

The Americans were often critical of Australian Jewish welfare
activities, believing that they were not well organised and that the Australians should manage without American financial assistance. The JDC officials were also very dissatisfied with the ongoing conflicts between the Sydney and Melbourne Jewish communities, seen with the Tidewater incident. The Australian Jewish welfare societies in the capital cities of Sydney, Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide formed a Federation, but the Melbourne-based Australian Jewish Welfare and Relief Society insisted on functioning separately. The JDC leadership wanted to deal with one central body for Australia, and believed that the Federation was the correct body, but Melbourne opposed this suggestion. There was also an issue of accountability, with the JDC complaining that Melbourne had drawn down £18,700 against the JDC trust fund without New York authorisation and that the Melbourne leadership had refused to account for this expenditure. Despite their efforts to resolve this matter, it had reached an impasse. These tensions tended to reduce the effectiveness of survivor reception in Australia. They are important to document as part of this story.

Conclusion

JDC official, Zerah Wahrhaftig, commented in 1946 that Jews were not wanted before the war in the free world, and they were not wanted after the war. In terms of Jewish migration from Shanghai to Australia, these words were strongly echoed by another JDC official, Charles Glassgold, when he wrote:

I have to transmit to you some information which should by now not be shocking to any Jew, but which nevertheless still horrifies one. From a most unimpeachable source there comes to me a statement made by the new Australian Consul in Shanghai that casts the pall of futility over the prospect of Australian migration. The Consul said to my informant substantially the following:

‘We have never wanted these people in Australia and we still don’t want them. We will issue a few visas to those who have relations there as a gesture.’

The archival research discussed above proves the veracity of this statement, in terms of the post-war period. It highlights the importance
of such research and the problematic approach for those who only base their work on secondary sources.

In the period from 1945 to 1961, Australian Jewry absorbed over 25,000 survivors – doubling the size of the community, although as noted Jews remained 0.5 per cent of the population as a result of the discriminatory policies discussed. As archival research has clearly demonstrated, no government funds were to be spent on Jewish immigrants for travel, accommodation, assisting with establishing businesses or finding employment. The Australian government even objected to the IRO reimbursing the American Jewish welfare organisations for their outlay to assist the Australian Jewish community. Without American Jewish funding the large number of survivors who found refuge in Australia could not have done so. Access to the JDC archives in New York and Jerusalem, as well as the HIAS archive in New York, in addition to the Australian archives, enables full documentation of this story – both positive in terms of rehabilitation and Jewish cooperation at a transnational level, but negative in relation to the Australian discriminatory policies towards Jewish DPs.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Sister Dr Marianne Dacy, who runs the Archive of Australian Judaica, Fisher Library, University of Sydney for her ongoing assistance and support over many years; Carolyn Connor of the National Archives of Australia; and the JDC archivists, Sherry Hyman, Shelly Helfand, Misha Mitsel in New York and Dr Sara Kadosh in Jerusalem for their willing assistance. I would also like to thank Emeritus Professor Konrad Kwiet for his support and advice.

NOTES

1. For a good overview of this literature, see Kelly, review of Louise London, Whitehall and the Jews.
2. Abella and Troper, None is Too Many.
4. Dinnerstein, America and the Survivors of the Holocaust.
5. Marrus, The Unwanted.
7. Blakeney, Australia and the Jewish Refugees.

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Volume 19 Winter Number 3
copyright Vallentine Mitchell
10. Rutland, _Edge of the Diaspora_.
14. Cesarani writes that Rubinstein relied ‘on logically coherent arguments that unfortunately rest on fundamental empirical fallacies’. Ibid., 1260.
15. The functions are set out in this website: http://www.directory.gov.au/directory?ea5_ljz99_120.&organization=Unit&aaf23310-4c92-48c0-9ac9-c0e19be27677.
17. Dr Dacy retired in December 2013.
18. For a detailed study of Dr Max Joseph in German see Kwiet, ‘Max Joseph – Lebensweg eines deutsch-jüdischen Emigranten’.
19. See http://www.jdc.org/about-jdc/history.html, which deals with the history of the JDC, and http://archives.jdc.org/researchers/using-the-archives.html, which provides detailed information about the JDC archives in both New York and Jerusalem.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 7.
25. Ibid.
27. Letter from Charles Jordan to Moses Leavitt, 6 January 1947, marked ‘confidential’, 45/54, #97, JDC-NY.
28. ‘Immigration of Jews’, No.19/3/77, 24 October 1949, Department of Immigration, CRS A445, item 235/1/24, NAA.
29. Rutland, ‘“The Unwanted”’.
32. J. Horgan, Memo no.19/3/77, 20 October 1949, noting that up till 31 December 1949 of 71,679 IPs issued to individual non-British Europeans, 21,584 were for Jews, constituting 30.1 per cent of total aliens, ‘New Policy for Enemy Aliens 1948, Pt II’, Dept of Imm., CRS A445, Item 235/1/24. The same document is also in CRS A445, Item 235/3/4, NAA.
33. Rutland, ‘Subtle Exclusions’.
34. Symonds to I. Rosen, Director JDC, Paris, 10 October 1947, Box E5, ECAJ Corres. Files, AAJ-Syd.
39. Ibid.
40. Berlin Instruction no.39, 26 May 1949 to members of the Australian Selection Team, provided by a member of the team (name withheld on request).
41. Calwell to Saul Symonds, ECAJ President, 2 September 1948, JDC AR 45/54 #95, [formerly 45/64 #144], JDC-NY.
43. Ibid., 7.
44. James P. Rice (Geneva) to Jordan (Paris), 21 January 1950, JDC AR 45/54 #95, JDC-NY.
46. For a more detailed discussion of this incident, see Rutland and Encel, ‘No Room at the Inn’.
47. Rutland and Encel, ‘Three “Rich Uncles in America”’.
48. The phrase comes from Emery Komlos to Charles Liebman, 16 September 1949, in JDC AR 45/54, file 96, JDCA-NY.
51. On the history of HIAS, see Wischnitzer, Visas to Freedom; and Sanders, Shores of Refuge.
52. Dinnerstein, America and the Survivors of the Holocaust, 202.
53. Ibid., 201–2. The task of absorbing survivors in the United States itself was carried out by the United Service for New Americans (USNA), which was created in 1946 following the merger of the National Refugee Service and the National Service to the Foreign Born of the National Council of Jewish Women. Its activities of purchasing hostels, finding employment, providing relief and loans, and assisting the integration of survivors into American society were paralleled by efforts of the welfare societies in Australia. In the years immediately following the war, USNA became the second largest voluntary social service agency in the United States, after the American Red Cross, and in the period from 1946 to 1951 it had a total budget of $34 million, which was spent primarily on relief services in the United States. See Ibid., 203.
54. See Burstin, After the Holocaust, 66.
55. Bauer, Out of the Ashes, 77, 199 and 256; Wischnitzer, Visas to Freedom, 226–8; Sanders, Shores of Refuge.
56. ‘Notes on meeting with Charles Liebman’, 16 May 1947, in JDC AR 45/54, file 97, JDCA-NY. The stress placed on secrecy was ongoing. For example, see Charles Malamuth to JDC, 20 September 1947; and Charles Liebman to Moses Leavitt, 14 October 1947, stating: ‘In my opinion, as well as that of the Australians, it would be disastrous if anything got on the wires of Australia that American Jews were encouraging Jewish immigration to Australia.’ Both letters are in AR JDC 45/54, file 97, JDCA-NY.
57. In all, there were five transactions for 31 January 1951 ‘Australia, Financial 1951–1954’, JDC AR 45/54 #92 formerly [#141] and [#142], JDC-NY.
58. These emissaries were: Gertrude van Tijn (1946), Charles Jordan (1947), Emery Komlos (1949), Adolph Glassgold (1951) and Leslie Prince (1953). Prince represented the Jewish Territorial Organisation (ITO), located in London, as well as the American welfare organisations.
59. Detailed negotiations were carried out between June and August 1947. HIAS MKM 19.47, Series – II, France IV, Folder 440, HIAS Archives.
60. Warburg to Telsey, 13 August 1947, JDC AR 45/54 #97 Australia, Immigration, 1946–1947 [formerly #146], JDC-NY.
61. Telsey to Warburg, 16 August 1947, JDC AR 45/54 #97 Australia, Immigration, 1946–1947 [formerly #146], JDC-NY.
62. The story of the Tidewater provides a clear case study of all the issues relating to post-war survivor migration to Australia. There is extensive documentation on the issue in all the
different archives of the Australian government, the Jewish community in Australia, HIAS and JDC-NY. See Memo re *Tidewater*, F.J. Blakeney, 3 October 1947, A1067, Item 1C/46/31/1/14, NAA and correspondence in Box E5, ECAJ Corres. Files, AAJ-Syd.

63. Symonds to Fink, 8 October 1947, Box E5, ECAJ Corres. Files, AAJ-Syd.


65. Adolph Charles Glassgold, American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), Shanghai, to Walter Brand, General Secretary, Australian Jewish Welfare Society (AJWS), 2 December 1948, Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) Correspondence Files, Box E30, Archive of Australian Judaica, University of Sydney.

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