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The Impact of Melbourne's Yiddishists

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The Impact of Melbourne's Yiddishists
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I. IMMIGRANTS 1933-1950

Carlton, the gritty inner city section of Melbourne, served as a first point of entry for many new immigrants to Australia, my father among them. It also was a center of intellectual activity emblematic of the emerging Jewish culture in Australia in the 1930s and 40s. Its cheap rents and proximity to public transit and the city center made it a logical place for immigrants to cluster as they strove to secure their footing in Australia. The immigrants stuck together for support, companionship, and common language, as the cultural gap yawned between new Polish and German immigrants and most established Australian Jews. The Kadimah center, located in Carlton, was an important focal point of this community – founded as it was by European immigrants and oriented toward Yiddish secular culture. For a brief period Carlton was the epicenter of this burgeoning immigrant Jewish life in Australia. My father's childhood home was one of many stars in the constellation of vibrant Yiddish cultural life there.

'Who is going to start Jewish life anew?' wondered Pinchas Goldhar (1901-1947) toward the end of his life. He mourned the loss of millions of lives, but also of Jewish culture, of Yiddishkeit, which had nourished the vibrant communities of Eastern Europe.

> I am not very old but it was in my days when Jewish life in Europe started its way uphill. I saw before my eyes our spiritual renaissance with a sudden rejuvenation of our social and national hopes and ambitions. And all this is now in ruins.[1]

Goldhar saw among migrants to Australia like himself a failure to translate the fullness of their lives from one location to another. 'The hard bread of an immigrant in a strange, far-away country, many thousands of miles from the pulsating Jewish life severed from Jewish creativeness, had indeed a bitter taste.'[2] He felt a terrible pessimism, and feared that he was witnessing the demise of Jewishness, even as individual Jews survived.

Even before the destruction in Europe, a different kind of anxiety about the future was shared by some Australian Jewish community leaders in the 1920s and early 1930s. The pressures to assimilate fully into Australian society had shunted Jewish identification into ever shrinking areas of life, largely centered on the synagogue. Divisions between established Jews and newcomers were stark. Exogenous marriage was at its highest among the established community, and religious education and practice at a low ebb. While Rutland describes the period 1850 - 1920 as a 'golden age' the implication is that this was a period of social prominence and material success for Anglo-Australian Jews assimilating structurally into Australian society. Jewish representation in government was much higher than its proportion of the population. It seemed that the Jewish community aspired to attain 'English middle class values & respectability' and at this they were highly successful.[3]

The parameters of Jewish life in Melbourne then began to shift as a stream of immigrants began arriving from Europe. Over time the immigrants of the 1920s, 30s and 40s remade Australian Jewry entirely.

> They brought with them a Jewish civilization, a set of religious, social and communal values which had been unknown to this continent previously and which was to alter every aspect of the Jewish community's social, religious and communal life. [4]

Immigrants from Eastern Europe brought with them Jewish secular culture, an orientation toward

literary and artistic expression, and ideals of social activism which had flourished in pre-war Poland.

The story often told is that European Jewish culture was wiped out by the Nazis and the modern state of Israel is the powerful phoenix reborn from its ashes. 'Yiddish has become emblematic of a way of life rejected and superseded by Zionism.' [5] But this discourse elides several interesting developments which the Australian experience exemplifies; namely, the continuation of Yiddish culture in multiple forms, both secular and religious, even in conjunction with the embrace of Zionism. Furthermore, Australian Jewry was utterly transformed by its growth in numbers as well as by increasing group identification. This shift had wider implications for Australian society as a whole, as the seeds of multicultural Australia were nourished in the Jewish inner city neighborhood of Carlton and the social conscience of this immigrant generation was brought to bear on issues particular to Australia such as Aboriginal rights.[6] Multiculturalism became official government policy in the 1970s.

Goldhar, had he lived longer than his brief 46 years, might have witnessed another small scale revival of Jewish life, this one in Australia, as immigrants from Europe helped to create a vibrant Australian Jewish community which embraced its particularity and built the necessary scaffolding to support continued Jewish life in multiple forms.

II. THE BUILD-UP TO WAR

With Hitler's rise to power in 1933 living conditions for Jews in Germany began a steady decline. The effects of his policies and rhetoric began to be felt even outside of Germany proper across Central and Eastern Europe. Increasing anti-semitism, legal and economic restriction, and simply a growing menace could be felt. After the *Anschluss* in March 1938 and *Kristallnacht* in November of the same year, there was little doubt that Jews had to take refuge where they could. This period of upheaval led to a worldwide refugee problem of increasing severity.

Australia was an attractive option with its distance from Europe, its vast landscape, and its tradition of democratic rule. Thus the Australian government found itself inundated with applications for permission to immigrate, and under great pressure to relax its restrictive immigration policy.

Domestically, debate raged over the issue of whether to accept refugees. Most surprisingly however, segments of the Australian Jewish community echoed some of the more hostile sentiments in the debate. Some feared being overrun by 'backward' Polish Jews with whom they had very little in common, and who might pose an economic threat in already difficult circumstances.

> The established Jewish community, pre-occupied with what Rabbi F. L. Cohen of Sydney termed its "happy standing," feared too great and too sudden an influx of unabsorbable Yiddish-speaking Jews.[7]

From the immigrant's perspective, this hostility was evident. Pinchas Goldhar describes the experience thus:

> The life of the Jewish immigrant was one of sheer loneliness, helplessness, and disappointment... Still more unpleasant was the coldness and even contempt that was displayed towards the immigrant by the old established sections of the Jewish community. There was an abyss of distrust and, quite often, of enmity between the two sections, the newly arrived immigrants and the older Jewish circles. The new arrival was compelled to take his first steps in an atmosphere of aloofness and reluctance.[8]

Due in part to these divisions, recent immigrants began to form their own organizations. Kadimah had

been an early example (established in 1911) of such initiative in Melbourne, in 1926 a group of Polish immigrants formed the Welcome Social Club Jehudea, and in 1934 the Polish Jewish Relief Fund. These organizations aimed to assist newcomers by helping them to secure housing, employment, English classes, and even providing childcare while parents worked.

Despite Goldhar's sentiments and the overall climate of hostility, it is not that case that immigrants were uniformly abandoned by the established community. Some prominent community members became involved in relief efforts for Polish Jewish immigrants, even as they may have avoided social contact with them.[9] It was in everyone's interest to see immigrants become employed and integrated. Immigrants were encouraged to take up a diverse range of occupations, to avoid overcrowding in petty trade. Furthermore, agricultural pursuits were encouraged as an antidote to the perceived problem of urban clustering.

Territorialist groups, such as the Freeland League, based in London, began circulating proposals for possible Jewish colonies in underdeveloped areas, though ultimately these ideas were discarded because of the encompassing prejudice against group settlement of any kind. The most influential proposal of this type in Australia was to build an autonomous Jewish settlement in the Kimberleys region of Western Australia. Melech Ravitch had been an early proponent of this plan, which had I. N. Steinberg as its leader and forceful advocate. He was extremely successful at publicizing and promoting this scheme, winning support from many corners of Australian public life. The project met with some early successes in winning regional governmental approval, but ultimately was rejected by Labor Prime Minister John Curtin in 1943 whose decision reflected the desire for Jewish immigrants to disperse themselves in order to more easily assimilate.[10]

The debate over inter-war immigration also forced Australian Jews to confront and evaluate the content and meaning of their Jewish identity.

> I do not want this place overrun with foreigners, no matter where they come from. I can't stand them, their outlook, or their methods of living. I live Australian, think Australian, and play Australian. My kids are Australian and won't have a bar of foreign kids. Maybe that seems intolerant; but I want to make it clear that I am an Aussie of the Jewish religion.[11]

While this hostility represents an extreme view, it coincides with the more widely held value of complete structural assimilation. H. Rubinstein terms it a virtual 'cult of inconspicuousness' and she describes two motivations: first the fear of stirring up widespread anti-semitism and secondly the desire to preserve ties of cooperation with the government and military authorities. Thus according to Rubinstein, the conservatism evident in the position of the Australian Jewish leadership, its very establishment-oriented nature, enabled it to enjoy the trust and cooperation of the Government. In particular this meant not exerting undue pressure on the government to allow large groups of Jewish immigrants.[12] Rutland and Blakeney, on the other hand note a pattern of specifically anti-Jewish measures in the crafting of immigration policy, and see a degree of complicity in the Jewish community's identification with the establishment over their fellow Jews.

Established Australian Jews tended to see their Judaism in purely religious terms, and as representing no barrier to full integration in Australian society. Their efforts to assimilate immigrants were so intense that during this period each ship was met by officials of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society who provided these directives:

> Above all, do not speak German in the streets and in the trams. Modulate your voices. Do not make yourself conspicuous anywhere by walking with a group of persons all of whom are loudly speaking in a foreign language...Remember that the welfare of the old-

established Jewish community in Australia as well as of every migrant depends on your personal behaviour. Jews collectively are judged as individuals. You personally have a grave responsibility.[13]

This acute pressure to conform to perceived norms of conduct only deepened the rift between newcomer and the established community.

During the war years, Jewish refugees from Germany, Austria and her allies were interned and classified as enemy aliens along with non-Jewish Nazi sympathizers. German Jewish internees in Britain were then transported to Australia aboard the infamous ship *Dunera* under harsh and abusive conditions. The Association for Jewish Refugees was formed to advocate for the needs of these immigrant internees. The AJR eventually won the consent of the government to change their status to 'immigrant alien,' thus lifting onerous legal restrictions and acknowledging the contribution of those who assisted in the Australian war effort as well as recognizing that German Jewish emigrés were no supporters of the German regime. This concession was achieved by the immigrants' own efforts through the AJR, and without the assistance of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society, who deeply resented having been bypassed.[14]

III. LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

The development of communal structures to meet the needs and interests of new immigrants proceeded and a range of social and cultural and religious organizations were born. The introduction of Liberal Judaism in Sydney and Melbourne as well as the gradual strengthening of Orthodoxy occurred with the arrival of communal leaders who were more in touch with developments abroad in Jewish thought and practice.[15] Furthermore, there was a recognized need to improve Jewish educational resources, though opposition to separate schools persisted. In 1942 the first Jewish Kindergarten was established in Sydney. In Melbourne, Melech Ravitch led a group of community members in organizing a Yiddish School. Ravitch had been an emissary of the TSISHO (Central Yiddish Schools Organization) schools of Poland, sent abroad to raise funds. He was a vigorous advocate of the institution and inspired local leaders to make it a reality. In 1935 the Yiddish Sunday and Afternoon School in Melbourne was founded with the goal of teaching Yiddish language and literature after school hours. After a decade of growth it became necessary to split off into two separate campuses, the I.L Peretz School remained in Carlton and the Sholem Aleichem School opened in the neighboring suburb of St. Kilda. After Ravitch's departure, Chaim Benzion Gurt, my grandfather, served briefly as its director, and more permanently as one of its teachers. Principal Josef Giligich hoped that Yiddish would 'serve as a link to bind the growing generation to the Jewish people.'[16] In addition to teaching youth, the school also established adult courses in Yiddish literature, offering the community open functions in collaboration with Kadimah, such as lectures on child-rearing, Yiddish folklore, and great Yiddish writers. Music and theater were an integral part of this educational model, and the choir of the Yiddish School was featured regularly in performances, some of which were broadcast across Australia. [17]

The Young Men's Hebrew Association in Sydney, B'nai Brith (charter est. 1944), the Australian Jewish Historical Society (est. 1938), and Kadimah in Sydney are all examples of Jewish organizations which grew and thrived on the participation and leadership of recent immigrants.

The Jewish press expanded and diversified in this period as well, reflecting the concerns of the immigrant populations. In June 1939 the *Sydney Jewish News* began publishing in English with a Yiddish language supplement. It was welcomed as a progressive paper in contrast to the perceived conservatism of the established *Hebrew Standard*.[18] It was an offshoot of the *Melbourne Jewish News*

(est. 1930) and strove to provide a forum for refugees to discuss issues of concern. In addition to these weeklies, the *Australian Jewish Forum* was established with the aim of providing a space for intellectual exchange, especially with regard to the Kimberleys settlement proposal (the force behind this scheme, Dr. I. N. Steinberg, was the editor of the *Forum* for its first two years.) With the ultimate failure of the settlement proposal and the foundation of the State of Israel, this publication folded, its raison d'etre defeated.

The Melbourne *Kadimah* had been founded in 1911 by newly arrived immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia and served as a cultural center for the Jews of Melbourne, with a library, meeting space, lectures and theater. The proliferation of organizational support for Jewish culture of varied description was directly attributable to the influx of refugees from Eastern and Central Europe.

Within Kadimah as throughout the Jewish community the emergence of new dynamics of power and identity were not without conflict. In describing the birth of Kadimah Dafner says, 'right from the start...the disparate member factions began wrangling over the languages and character of the new institution.' [19]

The factiousness continued through the early 1920s with some groups supporting the Balfour declaration and Zionist ideology, and others promoting the Russian Revolution. Détente was reached, it seems, as *Kadimah* emerged from an uneasy partnership with the Zionist *Hatchiya* organization. The reestablishment of *Kadimah* in 1926 as an independent organization, as well as it's relocation to Carlton, marked the beginning of a 'new, dynamic, Yiddish dominated era,' according to Dafner.

In this period the *Kadimah* began publishing Yiddish language periodicals as well as literature including the work of Pinchas Goldhar. It expanded its offerings to include lectures, concerts, debates, theater and youth activities in addition to its growing library. Kadimah as a multi-faceted organization served as a vital center of the changing community.

The expansion of institutions centered on the particularity of Jewish culture represented a shift in the way Australian Jews saw themselves. W.D Rubinstein characterizes this as the growth of a 'non-universalistic community.' [20] It represented an emerging self-awareness which formed the bedrock of Jewish life in the Antipodes. However, this diversification of Jewish organizations emerged out of a struggle for control over the communal destiny. The established community and the newcomers often found themselves in conflict over issues of representation, goals, and outlook.

The struggle for inclusive leadership of the community was a full-throated one with refugees determined to 'unseat the autocratic oligarchy which controlled' officially recognized communal institutions.[21] This goal was ultimately achieved with the formation of the umbrella organization the ECAJ in 1944 which brought together Eastern European immigrants with established Australian Jewish leaders, and whose first president was a European immigrant Paul Morawetz.

The intra-communal wrangling exposed the problems with the Anglo-Jewish ideology of assimilation. In the *Australian Jewish Forum*, George Berger characterizes the negative impact of this strategy, in an article in which he claims that the 'lack of Jewish consciousness in the Australian Jewish community demonstrates the futility of seeking peace and toleration through concealment, appeasement, and cowardice.'[22]

This gradual process of strengthening Jewish identity through increased numbers, confidence, variety of experience, and contact with outside sources ultimately shaped the Jewish community both internally and in its relationship with other Australians.

IV. POST-WAR IMMIGRATION

The story of Jewish immigration to Australia continued well after the Second World War and demonstrated both continuity and a change in the government's approach to policies controlling inflow.

The war had made plain Australia's need for increased population, both for economic development and defense of its vast landscape. In terms of economic development the focus was on manpower rather than capital and the policy of requiring that immigrants possess landing money was scaled back to reflect that artisan types rather than businessman were deemed more desirable.[23] In part this change was based on an unfavorable assessment of pre-war immigrants and their degree of assimilation.

The immediate post-war program of resettlement of displaced persons, under the auspices of the International Refugee Organization allowed significant numbers of Europeans whose lives had been disrupted by war assisted passage to emigrate. However many of the same prejudices which we saw operating in pre-war immigration policy-making continued to do so, and in fact, became increasingly systematic.

IRO Selection teams in Europe were making their decisions with 3 criteria in mind: applicants should have a healthy appearance, should be assimilable, and should help meet specific labor needs in Australia. Apart from other regulations directly disallowing them, these three criteria alone virtually guaranteed exclusion of Jews, since most Jews who had survived the war had suffered severe privation and were lucky to be alive at all let alone in good physical condition.

While newly appointed Minister for Immigration Arthur Calwell was sympathetic to the humanitarian cause and was friendly with leadership of the Jewish community, he was also under great pressure from other groups to limit Jewish immigration. His compromise position was to allow 2,000 close relatives of already present immigrants to receive permission to settle. This plan was also to include applicants from among the 18,000 stateless Jews who fled to Shanghai immediately before the outbreak of war in 1939, but who were being expelled by Chinese Nationalists.

The announcement of Calwell's agreement to allow 2,000 Jewish refugees was met with resounding opposition, in Parliament, among returned service members, and in the press. These protests reflected concerns that Jewish refugees were receiving preferential treatment, when shipping was in severely short supply, and many returning servicemen were yet unable to secure passage. An acute housing shortage only made matters more difficult, fraying tempers. The opposition, however, also reflected base anti-Jewish feeling, as H. B. Gullett, Liberal Member for Henty, Victoria declaimed, 'We are not compelled to be a dumping ground for people whom Europe has not been able to absorb in 2000 years.'[24] Yet another factor stoking public hostility was the situation in Mandatory Palestine, in which Jewish para-military groups were attacking British forces. This provided a convenient reason to resist Jewish immigration under the banner of keeping 'Jewish terrorists out of Australia.'[25] Proponents of this position also aimed to cast doubt on Australian Jews' loyalty as British subjects.

The extent of government complicity in discriminatory practices surrounding immigration is quite surprising. Rutland has presented extensive documentary evidence of bureaucratic guidelines designed to exclude Jews, as well as evidence of the desire to conceal this very policy of exclusion.[26] An unfortunate corollary of these same policies which kept Jewish refugees out, was to allow in many Nazi collaborators and war criminals to Australia.

In total post-war Jewish refugee immigration numbered approximately 16,300 between 1946 and 1954 with an additional 8,000 or so coming in the years through 1960.[27] The total Jewish population of Australia in 1933 numbered approximately 23,553, while in 1954 that number was 48,436, and finally in 1961 the total of Australian Jewry numbered 59,343. This rate of increase corresponds to a proportion of the population in 1933 at a low mark of .36% to a high in 1961 of .56% of the total population of Australia.[28] This proportion has remained fairly steady to the present. For comparison's sake, Jews in the United Kingdom represent also .5% of the total population, while in the United States the percentage is approximately 2.2%.[29]

V. 'MIR ZAYNEN DO'

Among the refugees who were allowed to settle in Australia were writers, artists, and musicians whose work allows us another window on to their experience and by which we can in some ways measure their influence. Like Goldhar, Herz Bergner (1907-1970), and Yossel Birstein (1920-2003), the immigrant generation faced difficult adjustments in their new land. For children of immigrants, the strangeness of the new land seems less jarring, never having lived in the old world. However a sense of alienation from mainstream Australian culture was not an uncommon experience especially for children of Holocaust survivors. The Australian documentary film *Angst*[30] presents the lives of three comedians who are children of survivors (Of relevance to this discussion are Australian Sandy Gutman, and New Zealander Deb Filler). These performers give expression to their experience of otherness through their craft, highlighting and ironizing the challenges that children of this generation encountered as they strove to feel at home in Australia, making fun of themselves and their sensitivities as well as others' obliviousness to these. Deb Filler narrates several scenes from her childhood in which the painful difference of her experience is made plain. She tells of visiting the library as a child, and while her friends were reading *Cat in the Hat* she was reading the *Diary of Anne Frank.* She imagines her child self asking the librarian 'Do you have anything with a good 1930s setting, anything more about girls trapped in attics?'[31]

Sandy Gutman, whose stage persona Austen Tayshus displays an aggressive, ascerbic wit, talks about bridging the gap between his father's world and his own. It is difficult to gauge the seriousness of this effort through the film, but he addresses it plainly,

Your world is lost unfortunately. It can only live through survivors, and the children of survivors who are interested enough and can utilize it and distill it and make it relevant to this generation and the following generation. That's what I'm trying to do.[32]

This claim, that the Yiddish world is lost, is one which recurs and one which I deny. The diasporic Jewish world has always been one of shifting centers and peripheries. And while the destruction which took place in Europe in the 1940's was enormous, it was not complete. Pieces of that world were recovered, reconfigured, and brought together in different parts of the world. In Australia in particular, some of those vestiges included the Yiddish language, Jewish secular culture, and they were planted in an entirely different soil, where they produced fruits of a new variety. The vitality of this cultivar is sometimes surprising.

Arnold Zable is today one of Australia's most widely known authors of Jewish - Australian literature. Some of his works of fiction, though in English, try to capture the Yiddish speaking world of Jewish immigrants to Australia. His novel, *Scraps of Heaven* is set in Carlton in the late 1950s, and peopled by immigrants from many lands. He describes the freedom experienced by children of immigrants, to wander the streets of Melbourne, while parents were busy trying to make a living. *Cafe Scheherazade* tells the stories of a few of these immigrants, from Yiddish-speaking lands, in the voices of the cafe's proprietors and patrons over endless cups of coffee and plates of cake. Though fictional, the experiences described by characters mirror very real war-time experiences and reveal the persisting scars created by those events. Zable's storytelling is narrated with tremendous warmth and a sense of gratitude for the refuge found in Australia. He incisively captures the strong human need to communicate – the absolute necessity of making oneself heard and understood. In *Cafe Sheherazade*, this idea is embedded in the work's title, as the eponymous Princess Sheherazade was compelled to tell stories in order to save her own life.

Zable also begins to address themes of the persistence of trauma among families of survivors.

With Australia's large proportion of survivors from Europe, this comes as no surprise. In addition to the fiction we have mentioned, there is a large and growing body of memoir writing which comes out of the community of survivors in Australia. This aging population has taken up pen to commit its memories to paper. Some of these have been published by popular presses, others are self-published. Many emerge from a community program specifically designed to give survivors the skills needed to write their life stories.[33] This body of literature, while rich and important in its own right, lies beyond the scope of the current project. Its importance here rests in the extent to which it demonstrates ongoing engagement with Jewish past and present, as well as communal cohesion, and finally governmental support for and interest in the experiences of immigrants as a part of an Australian heritage.

Finally, Zable represents another important link in our understanding of the lasting impact made on Australian society by Ashkenazi immigrants. Arnold Zable has made broad connections between the struggle of Jewish refugees to find home and acceptance in Australia and that of refugees from other nations. He has also been active on behalf of Australia's aboriginal population, promoting recognition of and respect for their cultural heritage as an essential piece of Australian culture.

VI. WEIGHING THE YIDDISH INFLUENCE

W.D. Rubinstein has argued that the activist Jewish secular culture, which so many of the Eastern European Jews had imbibed in their youth and brought with them to the new land, was never genuinely influential in the formation of the Post-War Australian Jewish community.

> Post-war Australian Jewry arguably never had, and does not now have, any vision which is not, essentially, wholly Jewish, and either aimed at rebuilding the shattered remnants of European Jewry here, or at furthering Israel and Zionism, or a vision expressed in purely religious terms. Post-war Australian Jewry has never sought to change Australian society for the better through radical nostrums.[34]

While I acknowledge his extensive experience and familiarity with the community, as an active leader for decades, and as a highly respected historian, I disagree with this assertion.

Rubinstein cogently argues that the transformation which took place after the influx of immigrants was thorough, he also claims that there was little difference ideologically between the immigrants who became community leaders and those of the old Anglo-Australian tradition. His argument seeks to minimize the influence of leftist politics and universalistic political principals, such as social justice, minority civil rights, etc. Instead, he argues, the Jewish community in Australia became solely concerned with self-preservation, and with supporting the newly established State of Israel. I can only present the counter-examples, and the reader must judge their relative weight.

The presence and continuity of organizations such as Kadimah, Bund-SKIF and Sholem Aleichem College suggest a measure of continued relevance of Yiddish modernism and related universalist principals. These ideals were not only an integral part of the political consciousness of Jewish youth in Poland in the interwar period, but also have roots in the Prophetic tradition and the Jewish obligation of *tikkun olam,* repairing the world.

The Bundist principle of *doykeit*, or here-ness, expresses the desire to direct community energies and attention toward building vibrant Jewish lives where they are (as opposed to in Israel, or any promised land). According to Zable,

> The focus [of the Bund] has always been on creating a Jewish life wherever one is and also

respecting other communities right to create a life for themselves. In a sense, the Bund were multi-culturalist before the word was even dreamt of probably or invoked.[35]

In this way the institutions and political engagement of the new immigrants contributed to the development of the Australian context, and not just that of the Jewish community, but the broader society as well. We can see early points of contact in the kind of cross-cultural exchange undertaken by Goldhar and his circle. Their literary and artistic explorations suggest an interest in meaningful social engagement. According to Maclean,

> The Kadimah acted as the focal point for interaction between immigrant Jews, attempting to make sense of Australian culture, and Australian intellectuals and artists who were rebelling against the constraints of a conservative, Anglophile culture and were yearning for the insights offered by European modernity.[36]

In terms of leadership as well, Melbourne historian Andrew Markus notes that,

> If we look at the history of Victoria and we look at the history of multiculturalism Australia, what we find is that some of the individuals who were significant in that movement towards a more pluralistic, open, diverse society were people from the Jewish community.[37]

Markus goes on to mention Walter Lippmann in particular, a Jewish communal leader who served as an advisor in the development of governmental policy regarding multiculturalism, and argued for the extension of opportunity to all groups in Australian society. Multiculturalism, as a political ideology which emerged from the realities of post-war immigration programs, makes room for cultural particularism, but within a context which acknowledges no hierarchy, no privileging of any single group.

The policies which are laid out in the 1989 *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* aim to promote, 'respect for individual identity, to ensure social cohesion and to enhance social justice. It addresses not only issues of equity but also of economic efficiency.'[38]

Thus, as government policy began to embrace the diversity of cultures within its borders, these points of contact multiplied and took on greater significance. As we have noted, Arnold Zable stands at a nexus between the Jewish and Australian worlds, as his writing and activism for immigrant's rights demonstrates both close ties to the culture of Yiddish Carlton, and catholic ideals of social justice. In a interview filmed for the Multicultural Research Library Video series, Zable talks about growing up in Carlton in the 1950s among immigrants from Eastern Europe, Italy and, Greece, as well as a core of working class Anglo-Celtic residents of Carlton. He describes in particular a kind of resonance between the desire of immigrant children to make their way in Australia and a working class Australian attitude of egalitarianism, the idea that everyone deserves 'a fair go.'

While some immigrants eventually migrated onward, those that remained continued to build on the institutional foundations they had set. The constellation of Yiddish cultural organizations in Melbourne, during the period of the 1950s became embroiled in ideological wranglings over the role of leftist politics in Jewish communal life. This took place in the context of cold war hysteria aimed at a perceived communist threat.

The Melbourne Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, an advocacy group formed in 1942, took an active role in publicizing discrimination as well as protesting the arrival of Nazi war criminals on Australian soil through the IRO program. According to W.D. Rubinstein, the Council,

represented the chief secular political expression, within the Australian Jewish community, of a universalistic social and political philosophy, reaching out from the Jewish community to other (in its view) oppressed groups...[39]

In the late 1940s and early 50s it was at the center of a dispute which divided the community. The Council represented a broad spectrum of the Jewish community, but was viewed as heavily Left-leaning. Judah Waten, its secretary, was an avowed Communist. The President of the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies, the official community umbrella organization, Maurice Ashkanasy, was stringently opposed to Waten's politics and refused to affiliate with the Council on these grounds, going so far as to resign from the Board when a resolution to exclude the Council failed in 1950.

Kadimah became another flashpoint in this ideological dispute and its Youth Organization eventually disbanded over accusations of radicalism which was out of step with the larger community. Other organizations thrived, the Yiddish afternoon and Sunday schools eventually joined the overarching system of Jewish day schools which have become highly successful and widely embraced by all segments of the community. The Sholem Aleichem Sunday school has been transformed into a day school and continues to teach Jewish secular culture. According to its website it,

aims to foster a love of Jewish culture, history, traditions and festivities in a secular educational setting. At the heart of the College is the study of Yiddish language and culture, Hebrew, Jewish history, traditions, customs and literature, together with a rich and diverse general curriculum...[40]

The Bund-SKIF continues to operate in Melbourne and offers youth activities in a context which promotes Bundist principles. At its point of origin in Poland, SKIF and Tsukunft (both youth arms of the Bund) sought to reach out to children,

By blending scout activities, sports events, and politics, Tsukunft provided its members with tools for self-expression and prepared young Jews for positions of responsibility and leadership. Above all, it left them with a feeling of belonging at a time when traditional supports were crumbling and when day-to-day living was becoming hard to bear because of economic depression and growing antisemitism.[41]

SKIF in Melbourne embraces the same values of chavershaft, doykeit and yiddishkeit, as the parent organization, the Bund, even as their meaning has changed within the Australian context. Among SKIF's goals are 'developing an awareness of the struggles faced by all the peoples of the world and expressing solidarity with oppressed people...'[42] The Bund-SKIF of Melbourne continues to embrace the ideals of social justice, strong communities, and Jewish secular culture, and though numerically small, subsequent generations of Jewish Australians continue to take part in their activities.

According to Alex Dafner, Yiddish language continues to be a primary spoken language for approximately 1800 Australians, while thousands use it as a second language. Yiddish language radio broadcasts air several times a week on 3 different stations. In addition to the Yiddish Day School, which has approximately 200 students, Yiddish language is taught in several state high schools as an elective. Kadimah continues to be a community focal point at its new premises in Elsternwick, with its lending library, reading circle, and theater group still active. In addition, Joshua Goldhar, son of Yiddish writer Pinchas Goldhar, tells me anecdotally that Judah Waten's novel *Alien Son* is compulsory reading for Australian students in grade 12.

VII. CONCLUSION

  What I have presented here is a sketch of Australian Jewish life during a period of change as an influx of immigrants transformed its culture completely. We have noted the shift away from a British cultural hegemony and toward an outlook more heavily influenced by Eastern European refugees. Some of the Jewish institutions founded in Australia were directly transplanted from Europe, even as they developed their own particular Australian Jewish flavor. We witnessed the ongoing relationship with the Yiddish language and culture which was so central to Jewish life on the continent before the war.

  The durable contribution of this community to the larger Australian context can be seen in the way in which the struggle for immigration reform and acceptance of minority groups became central political questions of the post war decades. Many of the influential voices in these debates were Jewish voices, writers, artists, activists, and community leaders. Further emblematic of this shift is the desire of certain institutions within the Jewish community to see themselves in the context of broader concerns. Bernard Korbman, Executive Director of the Holocaust museum in Melbourne, expresses the desire that his museum remain a separate entity from the Jewish museum, in order to allow the experience of the Holocaust to have a human message, not only one for Jews.[43] This speaks directly against the claim that the Australian Jewish community is solely inward looking. Korbman goes on to describe the community which started the museum,

> Our community mirrors the Polish community in pre-war Europe. We have the same fights between the same groups as happened before 1939...This unique museum that can show you this transition and a resilience of a society and how it mirrors the society it came from beforehand.

Indeed, it is both the transition and resilience of this community which have together shaped its distinctive character.

1   Pinchas Goldhar, letter to the Aronsons, Victoria, 1946, in *Pinchas Goldhar,* by H. Brezniak (Surry Hills: Wentworth Press, 1968) p.7.
2   Pinchas Goldhar, quoted in W.D. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia: A Thematic History, Vol. II 1945-Present* (Port Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1991), p.151.
3   Suzanne Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora:Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia* (New York: Holmes & Meyer, 1997), p.112.
4   A Carlton resident, quoted in Pamela Maclean and Malcolm Turnbull, "A Vibrant, Dynamic Centre: The Jews" in *Carlton: A History*, ed. Peter Yule, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), p.60.
5   Jeffrey Shandler, *Adventures in Yiddishland: Postvernacular Language and Culture* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2006), p.9.
6   Pamela Maclean and Malcolm Turnbull, "A Vibrant, Dynamic Centre: The Jews" in *Carlton: A History*, ed. Peter Yule, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004), p.63.
7   *Hebrew Standard*, 15 August 1924, and 22 January 1926, quoted in Rubinstein, p.150.
8   Pinchas Goldhar, 'S. Stedman,' tr. From the Yiddish by Isaac Ripps, *Australian Jewish Forum*, April 1943, 25, quoted in Rubinstein, p.151.
9   Rutland op.cit. p.187.
10 Ibid. p.183.
11 *Sunday Truth*, 4 October 1938. Quoted in Rutland, 185 and H. L. Rubinstein, p.232.
12   H. L. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia: A Thematic History, Vol. I 1788-1945* (Port Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1991), p.204.
13 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 May 1939, quoted in Rutland 186, H. L. Rubinstein p.214.
14   Ibid. p.203.
15 Rutland op.cit. p.206.
16 S. Stedman, "The Yiddish School in Melbourne," *Australian Jewish Forum,* June 1946. Quoted in Rutland, p.211.
17 David Burstin, "I.L. Peretz Yiddish School 1935-1984," *AJHS Journal.* v.10 pt.1 (1986): p.21.
18 Rutland op. cit. p.212.
19 Alex Dafner, "The Kadimah at 98: Mir Zaynen Do - We are here!" http://home.iprimus.com.au/kadimah/k90eng.htm (accessed 2009-09-29 13:37:58).
20 W. D. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia: A Thematic History, Vol. II 1945-Present* (Port Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1991), p.8.
21 From an editorial in the *Australian Jewish News,* quoted in Blakeney, p.152.
22 *AJF*, Feb. 1941, 20-21, quoted in Blakeney, p.235.
23 Rutland op.cit. p. 226.
24 CPD, December 1946, as reported in the SJN, 20 December 1946, quoted in Rutland, p.230.
25 Rutland op. cit. p.231.
26 Appendix II in Rutland's book provides extracts of instructions given to Australian Selection Teams in Europe for the purpose of choosing candidates for the IRO settlement program. Also see Rutland, p.232.
27 These figures are based on Commonwealth Year Books, and cited by Rutland, p.405. See Appendix II for the complete table.
28 P. Y. Medding, *From Assimilation to Group Survival* (New York: Hart Publishing, 1969) p.18.
29 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_Jewish_population_comparisons. Accessed 4/9/10.
30   Judy Menczel. *Angst,* VHS. Australia: Generation Films, 1993.
31 Deb Filler *Angst,* VHS. Directed by Judy Menczel. Australia: Generation Films, 1993.
32 Sandy Gutman. *Angst,* VHS. Directed by Judy Menczel. Australia: Generation Films, 1993.
33 The Makor Jewish Community Library 'Write Your Story' project began in 1998, funded by a grant from the Victorian Multicultural Commission.
34 W.D.Rubinstein, op.cit. p.7.
35 Arnold Zable, http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/library/media/Video/id/1631.Arnold-Zable-on-democracy-and-Multiculturalism-in-Australia, accessed 4/7/10.
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37 Andrew Markus, http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/library/media/Video/id/1415.Andrew-Markus-on-Jewish-communities, accessed 4/5/10.
38   Australian Government, Department of Immigration and Citizenship.
http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/multicultural/agenda/agenda89/foreword.htm, accessed 4/14/10.
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42 What is SKIFhttp://www.skif.org.au/history.html

43 Bernard Korbman, http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/library/media/Video/id/1573.Bernard-Korbman-on-the-Holocaust-Museum-and-the-Jewish-Museum, , accessed 4/8/10.