

Article

Creating Transformation: South African Jews in Australia

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Abstract: Since the 1960s Australian Jewry has doubled in size to 117,000. This increase has been due to migration rather than natural increase with the main migration groups being South Africans, Russians, and Israelis. Of the three, the South Africans have had the most significant impact on Australian Jewry—one could argue that this has been transformative in Sydney and Perth. They have contributed to the religious and educational life of the communities as well as assuming significant community leadership roles in all the major Jewish Centres where they settled. This results from their strong Jewish identity. A comparative study undertaken by Rutland and Gariano in 2004–2005 demonstrated that each specific migrant group came from a different past with a different Jewish form of identification, the diachronic axis, which impacted on their integration into Jewish life in Australia, the synchronic axis as proposed by Sagi in 2016. The South Africans identified Jewishly in a traditional religious manner. This article will argue that this was an outcome of the South African context during the apartheid period, and that, with their stronger Jewish identity and support for the Jewish-day-school movement, they not only integrated into the new Australian-Jewish context; they also changed that context.

Keywords: South African Jews; Australia; migration; Jewish identity; Jewish education; diaspora



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1. Introduction

Australian Jewry is one of the few Diaspora communities that is increasing in size. This growth, however, is due to immigration rather than natural increase. Since the 1960s, there have been three main Jewish ethnic groups immigrating to Australia: South Africans, Russians, and Israelis. South African-Jewish migration has continued consistently throughout the period into the present, with several peaks as will be discussed, compared with the Russian migration, which occurred in the 1970s and again between 1991–1997, after which their special refugee status was withdrawn. South African Jews arrive with a strong Jewish identity connected to Jewish traditions and religious beliefs and have reinforced every aspect of Jewish life in Australia (Sagi 2016). This migration is part of a broader pattern which has created a significant South African-Jewish diaspora. The most recent study of South African Jewry, notes that it is difficult to ascertain exact numbers, but that 15,635 South African-born Jews in Australia were listed in the 2016 census, with this number adjusted for under-numeration; 6671 based on the 2011 census for England and Wales; around 13,800 in Israel until mid-2018; some 8000 in Canada; and approximately 56,000 in the USA (Graham 2020, pp. 26–27). Graham (2020) stresses that if these figures are correct, “the expatriate population may now be larger than the Jewish population in South Africa” (p. 27).

2. Literature Review

There has been little written about the South African-Jewish migration to Australia, which is one of the key English-speaking reception countries, particularly Sydney, together with Toronto and London. In their broader study, Louw and Mersham (2001) argue that this lack of research is because “South African immigrants prefer to become invisible and simply assimilate into societies like Australia” (p. 306). Regarding Jewish South Africans,

Australian immigration expert, Dr James Jupp, posits that this is because they are seen as “uncontroversial and unproblematic” (Jupp 2007, p. 10).

There have been several important in-depth studies of South African Jewry published over the years. Gideon Shimoni (2003), of the Hebrew University, is one of the key scholars. His book, *Community and Conscience*, is a key study of the community surviving as a minority within the racist structure of apartheid South Africa. Milton Shain, of the University of Cape Town, is South Africa’s leading scholar in modern Jewish history and is a prolific writer who has covered South African-Jewish history, and politics, including his book on antisemitism, *A Perfect Storm* (Shain 2015).

At its peak, South African Jewry numbered close to 120,000; today, the population is estimated to be around 50,000, so that this exodus is an important area of research. In their book, *Worlds Apart*, Colin Tatz, Peter Arnold, and Gillian Heller have explored the historical background with most South African Jewish originating from Lithuania and Latvia, and then many migrating to Australia and New Zealand, but only one chapter specifically focuses on Australia. Their study is based on an email survey, for which they had 608 responses, with their questionnaire exploring the respondent’s life in South Africa and any Litvak (Lithuanian, Latvian, and Courland) stories of their family before they migrated to South Africa, in addition to questions relating to their migration to Australasia. Their methodology is “a mix of contemporary sociology and socio-political history”. They comment that these “do not make for a ready or easy combination”, but they contend it is important to understand “the history and context of this migration and re-migration” (p. 49). It is important to note that today, 89% of Jews in South Africa were born there, and that a high percentage of their parents were also born in South Africa (68% and 74% depending on gender). However, the country that “respondents’ grandparents are most likely to come hail from is Lithuania” (Graham 2020, p. 19). Given that most of the South African Jews arrived in Australia before 2000, this explains the impact of their Litvak heritage on their contributions to Australian Jewry, with those who were part of the earlier migration waves clearly more connected to the Litvak heritage.

Apart from this book-length study, little has been published on the topic. Three journal articles (Rule 1994; Louw and Mersham 2001; Forrest et al. 2013) have dealt with South African migration to Australia in general. According to Louw and Mersham (2001), Jews constituted 13.5% of South African Australians. Given this statistic, there is almost nothing on the specific Jewish migration story in these articles.

Julie Kalman (2014) deals specifically with the topic of South African Jews in Australia. Her article is based on a qualitative study of South Africans who migrated to Australia since 2000; they live in Maroubra and Coogee, Sydney’s beach-side suburbs in the south-east, and send their children to the Coogee synagogue’s preschool. In her 2010 study, she interviewed both partners of six couples and just the wives of three other couples. She argued that “Jewish South Africans have quietly moved in to Maroubra and are moulding the suburb to make themselves at home” (p. 180). In her article, she described how her interviewees transplant the South African way of life, especially food, to their new homeland; their demography in Australia; reasons for leaving; the homogeneous nature of South African Jewry due to the Litvak chain migration between 1880–1920 when around 40,000 arrived; the fact that from 1936 onwards, the government closed the door to further migration; support networks; and a sense of Jewish identity.

Apart from these specific studies dealing with South African-Jewish migration, there is information about this migration in studies undertaken within the Jewish community, particularly the GEN17 in-depth survey and analysis conducted by Graham and Markus (2018). As well, Rutland has covered the topic in her general histories of Australian Jewry (Rutland 2001, 2005) and has also conducted a historical and sociological quantitative and qualitative study in 2004–2005 of this population group with Dr Antonio Gariano.

This article draws on these various sources to provide an overall picture of South African migration and integration. It provides an in-depth study of the contribution of

South African Jews to the evolution of Jewish life in Australia, a topic largely neglected by the other studies related to South African Jews in Australia.

3. Methodology

This article is based on a study undertaken by [Rutland and Gariano \(2005\)](#) from 2004–2005 at the request of the Jewish Agency of Israel. The study set out to profile and determine the needs of Australian Jewry's three largest groups of recent immigrants to Australia—former South Africans, Jews from the Former Soviet Union (FSU), and ex-Israelis. The objective of the study was to determine the extent to which these groups were involved in Australian-Jewish life given their different backgrounds, histories, and experiences. The study also set out to better understand how the different groups identify as Jews based on religion, ethnicity, culture, or otherwise. Since this study, the additional research of Australian Jewry for GEN17 undertaken by [Graham and Markus \(2018\)](#) provides further data about South African Jews which has been extrapolated for this study.

The methodology used was triangulation, which included analysis of census data; a quantitative survey; and qualitative research, including oral history and traditional methods of historical inquiry. The use of methodological triangulation is increasingly common within the social sciences because it enhances the confidence in research findings. By using more than one method of investigation, it is possible to approach the research task from different viewpoints to address issues and validate assumptions.

3.1. Census Data

The 1991, 1996, and 2001 Australian census data were analysed, drawing on customised matrixes purchased for this study. The census data collect information on a person's religion, which is the only indicator of Jewishness within the census. Persons are asked to identify their religion but may choose not to respond. Researchers in the field argue that the use of the census data without adjustment leads to under-enumeration of the Jewish population in Australia by up to 25% ([Rutland and Gariano 2005](#), p. 2). Nonetheless, the census data are the only valid and reliable source which collects religious self-identification on a population-wide basis.

3.2. Quantitative Survey

The quantitative survey instrument consisted of 63 generic questions which were applicable to all Jews with respondents being asked to respond to a series of questions about themselves as well as describing various aspects of their household. As well, there were an additional 14 questions for those born in the FSU, nine for those born in South Africa, and six for those born in Israel.

The survey instrument was disseminated by email, on-line with a web-based survey, and a paper-based survey administered via post, with face-to-face structured interviews and telephone surveys. A total of 602 responses were elicited, of which 187 responses were from South Africans, representing 665 members in the households. This constituted 6.35% of the 10,473 South Africans in Australia, according to the 2001 census.

3.3. Qualitative Research

The qualitative research combined oral-history methodology with more traditional forms of historical data. A list of key community leaders, professionals, as well as people most directly involved in creating community institutions catering for the needs of the three target migration groups was drawn up for the three largest centres of Jewish settlement: Melbourne, Sydney, and Perth. The questions focused on the interviewee's background; perceptions about reception, integration, and contribution; the relevant history of the institution with which the interviewee was associated with; and any problems the interviewee experience.

These interviews have enabled a picture to emerge of the issues of reception, integration, and contribution of each of the groups. They have provided pen sketches of the

work of each migrant-centred institution in terms of religious, educational, welfare, and cultural activities.

3.4. Analysis of the Survey Data

The questions from the survey resulted in 245 variables for analysis. The analysis of the data was limited to descriptive statistics as the sample size and response rate was considered too small and low to apply inferential analysis, especially when considering the length of the survey, the number of variables involved, and the survey limitations.

3.5. Limitations

There were several limitations with this survey. The major issues were the short time frame for the survey; a limited budget for its promotion; and sample bias common for all opt-in surveys, where it is normally the more committed who respond.

4. Findings

4.1. The Waves and Reasons for Immigration

There have been four main waves of Jewish migration from South Africa to Australia: (1) after the Sharpeville riots of 1960; (2) after the 1976 Soweto riots; (3) 1984–1989, because of the civil war; and (4) post-Mandela period between 1994–2004 (Rutland and Gariano 2005, p. 15). The tide has stemmed since then due to more stringent Australian requirements. While each wave was a response to a specific episode in South African history with a “cumulative” effect (Tatz et al. 2007, p. 164), each wave was a migration of choice with pragmatic reasons largely influencing the decision of choosing Australia as their new homeland (Kalman 2014, p. 186).

The first wave migration is seen as more ideological/liberal. Many who left, particularly during the first wave, opposed apartheid and wanted to live in an equal society, so they either had to join the African National Congress (ANC) and become activists or leave. As one respondent to the 2005 survey said of South Africa, it was “a fascist country with the trappings of democracy”. He also commented that he and his wife decided that they did not want to have children in South Africa because “it was a racist society, and we thought the government was entrenched (like the USSR)”.¹

The post-Apartheid immigrants leave South Africa for different reasons. They are disturbed by the high level of crime and feel insecure. They are also concerned about their children’s education because of present government policy of affirmative action. Thus, as one of the interviewees expressed, the most recent migration is more “‘what is good and comfortable for me’ . . . If this one has a four-wheel drive and a two-storey house, then the other wants a two-storey house with a swimming pool”.² Similarly, Tatz et al. (2007), found that when they analysed the reasons according to time, “‘ideological’ dwindles to almost nothing after 1990” (p. 192). These reasons correspond with the factors leading to the migration of South African non-Jews (Forrest et al. 2013, pp. 51–52).

The survey (Rutland and Gariano 2005) found that the political situation in South Africa was a major factor in the decision to immigrate to Australia, with 81% reporting that it was very important/important. A total of 64% responded that a major factor for immigrating was that they “did not feel safe/secure”. Of these respondents, 66% reported that the Apartheid regime was in place when they migrated to Australia. Australia was seen as a desirable place to migrate to, with 65% of the 187 South African-born respondents indicating that the major factor for choosing Australia was “better future for the family”.

Tatz et al. (2007) also found that the most important factors leading to re-migration were ideological, fear for the future, crime, and family. There was very little emphasis on army service or economic factors in the decision (pp. 16–17), although the economic factors have become more important in the twenty-first century, especially with affirmative action (Tatz et al. 2007, pp. 190–92). Tatz et al. argue that this is what makes South African re-immigration unique, since economic factors are normally a major motivating reason for migration (p. 184). The more recent GEN17 survey found similar factors, with family

reunion being very important, but also “a safe environment” and “better future for my children” (Graham and Markus 2018, p. 56).

Kalman (2014) captures the way the combination of these factors led to the migration decision with this quote from one of her interviewees:

I remember quite distinctly the one, you know just looking out at the back garden and thinking it's so perfect and then you look up and there is this big wall that contains you. It just felt like it wasn't real. I mean, for me the main thing was the limbo. I didn't want to keep asking the question 'should we shouldn't we'. (p. 192)

Thus, this interviewee and his family decided to leave, despite having their dream home and comfortable lifestyle, and this experience was common among their friends.

4.2. Demographic Profile

There is a debate about the exact number of Jewish South Africans who have settled in Australia. Based on the 2001 census, Tatz et al. (2007) estimated the numbers to be between 12,000 and 15,000 in 2007 (p. 54). In terms of settlement patterns, Sydney has been by far the most popular destination, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1. “JA Survey”, Rutland and Gariano (2005).

NSW	6078	58.10%
VICTORIA	2688	25.70%
WA	1334	12.70%
Queensland	243	2.30%
Other	126	1.20%
TOTAL	10469	100.00%

According to the GEN17 survey, South Africans constitute 14% of the Australian Jewish population, numbering 16,520, although Graham (2020) lists a lower figure of 15,635 (p. 26). Their distribution and percentage of the Jewish population reflect the pattern above, but their impact varies depending on the size of the local Jewish community. South Africans constitute 19% of NSW Jewry, which is the second largest Jewish community, 8% of Victorian Jewry, the largest Jewish community, and 28% of Perth Jewry, a much smaller Jewish community (Graham and Markus 2018, p. 11). Both Melbourne and Sydney are on the east coast of Australia and constitute 90% of Australian Jewry, but Sydney has attracted more South Africans than Melbourne due to the similarity of its climate and topography. Perth is located in the west coast of Australia, is a small but compact and strong community, and is considerably closer to South Africa. This explains why they constitute a higher percentage of the Jewish community, even though, numerically, there are fewer South African-born Jews in Perth.

The special geography of South African Jews in Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth is distinct, with concentration in specific suburbs, unlike the non-Jewish settlement patterns which are more dispersed. Tatz et al. describe these concentrations as “Jewish belts”, creating “their own versions of their former lives” (p. 228). This is in direct contrast with the non-Jewish South African migrants to Australia. Forrest et al. (2013) state that “On the other hand, Afrikaans speakers are as dispersed as Jewish community members are concentrated, principally in outer parts of the city” (p. 66). The non-Jewish South African migrants also have different settlement patterns based on their socio-economic status, with the better off South Africans settling in middle-class suburbs, while the poorer, largely Black South Africans settle in working-class suburbs. These groups have not created ethnic suburbs and, with their greater dispersion, have assimilated more easily into the broader Australian society (Forrest et al. 2013, p. 66).

In Sydney, many South African Jews initially settled in St Ives in the north, but overtime, as indicated in the 1986 and 1991 census, just as many moved to the Eastern Suburbs, many of the most recent migrants having opted to settle in Sydney's East rather than St Ives. According to Tatz et al.'s 2007 study, 64.5% live in the Eastern Suburbs with 30.6% in the North Shore (p. 229).

In Melbourne, from 1987 to 1997, there was an initially rapid growth of the Jewish population in the Doncaster/Templestow areas. Since 1997, the first area of settlement for South Africans has moved from Doncaster to South Caulfield, described as the 'South African ghetto'. As a result of their sense of insecurity and networking, many have tended to seek out other South African newcomers.³

Their greatest impact of the South Africans has been on Perth where the size of the community doubled between 1981 (when it was c3000) to 1991 (when it was c6000) with the main group arriving after 1987. One Perth communal worker said: "Thank God for the South Africans. I grew up in a small community. They've enriched it . . . They've given us a whole community. They work very well and very productively. We need volunteers and they volunteer year after year".⁴ They have also had a demographic impact. Until the 1980s, the Jewish community was largely concentrated around Mount Lawley. Since then, they have moved into northern suburbs, including Dianella, Coolbinia, Noranda, and Yokine, because of cheaper land, although these are still high-status suburbs. Forrest et al. (2013) found that, according to the 2006 census, 74% of the 1418 South African Jews in Perth lived in three adjacent suburbs in the northeast (p. 64).

All the research highlights that the South African Jews are highly educated. The 2005 JA survey found that 72% of the interviewees had tertiary qualifications. These figures confirm anecdotal evidence, with one respondent from the qualitative interviews arguing that 70–80% of South Africans are professionals which enables them to settle more quickly, as they are not going to a completely foreign environment. These findings are confirmed by the Tatz et al.'s 2007 survey, but they found that, while 84% of doctors continued to work in their profession, 48% of lawyers retired on arriving in Australia (p. 61).

4.3. Integration of South Africans

As with all immigration, there is a difficult phase of transition initially when South African immigrants feel quite unsettled, often having left family and friends behind. One defence mechanism is to harp back to what was and to seek fellow newcomers who are going through the same experience. Several respondents commented that they can identify the newest South African arrivals, not from their accent but from their attitude. One respondent summed this up: "they tend to stick together. They have remained in their own socio-economic group and have simply transferred themselves from one city to another". (See Note 3).

Very few South Africans have sought assistance from Jewish Care. One Melbourne respondent, an ex-South African, who played a very active role in Melbourne Jewish Care in the 1990s as Appeal Chairperson, commented: "South Africans do not apply for loans from the community. They have a different culture—they do not ask for handouts".⁵ In Perth, the main role of Jewish Care in the early 1980s was to lend household goods to the South Africans until their "lift" arrived, but they also purchased a property to provide newcomers with short-term accommodation until they found work and a home. However, most South Africans do not need long-term community assistance. In general, South Africans cannot obtain an Australian immigration visa without a job and, by and large, they have employment before they arrive. They are more likely to work on a voluntary basis for Jewish Care, or in the larger centres to be employed by Jewish Care, than need welfare assistance.

However, the GEN17 survey found that 25% of South African immigrants complained about inadequate income, with 22% complaining about housing costs, 21% about making friends, and 35% about finding suitable employment (pp. 56–57). At the same time, this

survey found that 80% of South Africans were either “much more satisfied” or “more satisfied” than they were in South Africa (p. 59).

In general, migration of Jews from South Africa and their integration is easier than for non-Jews because the latter “have to join the club—tennis club, bowling club . . . ”.⁶ Jewish South Africans just join the *Shule* and the school. They have Friday nights, *Yom Tov*, and other social functions (Rutland and Gariano 2005, pp. 17–19). Thus, Jewish networking with family and friends played a key role in their successful integration.

4.4. Religious Life

In general, South Africans are a much more homogeneous group than Australian Jewry because of their largely Litvak background. As discussed earlier, even though most of the current and previous generations in South Africa were born there, the grandparents’ generation largely come from Lithuania and the cultural traditions from there have been maintained across the generations. All make their *kneidlech* (*matza* balls) in their own ways, their Yiddish is different in nuance and flavour, and their Yiddish dialects used in Melbourne are different.

Moreover, there are also small nuances in ritual and practice. For example, during a funeral, South Africans will change pall bearers several times, unlike Australian custom, and have a wedding choir in attendance. Further, there is a different approach to synagogue services and management. Rabbi Philip Heilbrunn, who was chief minister of the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation from 1988–2013 and an ex-South African, commented: “there are great similarities, and it is easy to adapt, but one would be fooling oneself if one believed that they are the same, because there are subtle differences and expectations, and these can be quite profound”.⁷ The choir is a key feature of synagogue worship in South Africa, which has a strong musical tradition of *hazanut* (cantorial music). Many South African Jews are also very traditional in their approach to Judaism, but they lack a solid foundation of knowledge in Hebrew and cannot *daven* (pray) by themselves, so that the choir enables them to enjoy the service. South African congregations are also much more uniform with the rabbi’s authority not questioned. This is very different, particularly in Melbourne, where each congregation is a *shteibl* (little house) to itself; there are several *Betei Din* (Jewish Courts of law), and communal discipline is not as strong as in South Africa.

Since their arrival, South Africans have established their own synagogues, in some cases associated with schools. In Sydney, there are no specific South African congregations, but they have made significant contributions to established congregations, such as South Head Synagogue and Central Synagogue, and in the 1980s and 1990s, have played a role in the newly created congregations, Kehillat Masada and Chabad, St Ives. In addition, the Jewish Learning Centre, (JLC) established to strengthen traditional Judaism in Sydney, opened its own premises in 2003; it has been funded and largely supported by ex-South Africans. Its spiritual leader, Rabbi Davey Blackman, is ex-South African, closely associated with the Ohr Somayach movement.

In contrast to Sydney, several synagogues have been established to specifically serve South Africans in Melbourne as well as strengthen established synagogues, including the Northern Suburbs *Shule*, the Central *Shule*, and Blake Street Synagogue. For example, the well-established St Kilda Hebrew Congregation, one of the largest congregations in Melbourne, has also attracted South Africans. Rabbi Heilbrunn commented in 2004 that about a quarter of the congregation’s members were ex-South African. The style of service at St Kilda is very similar to Cape Town and Johannesburg with the English sermon, *hazan*, and choir.

The Northern Central *Shule* was established in the Doncaster area and is associated with the North Eastern Jewish Centre, which offers educational and social activities. It developed with the South African influx in the late 1980s, when the congregation experienced a rapid growth. By the early 1990s it had reached its zenith with around 450 families as members, of whom around 60% were ex-South African, but since its peak in the mid-1990s, its membership has declined although it continues to function.

Central *Shule* Chabad is a new congregation, which started in 1998, growing out of an association between ex-South African, Ian Harris, and Rabbi Yitzhak Riesenber, a Chabad rabbi (not an ex-South African), who served the community until 2022. From these early beginnings, the community has grown with its attendance representing the South African religious commitment. Thus, it is packed on Friday nights, but has difficulty getting a *minyan* (quorum) on Saturday mornings, since most South African Jews still drive and carry out normal activities on *Shabbat* (Sabbath). Its service is modelled on the Johannesburg synagogues with a male choir of fifteen members mainly singing the same tunes as they used in South Africa.

Established in 1996, Blake Street is another new congregation with a smaller South African population. They acquired new premises which they renovated and moved into in 2005, and are a modern Orthodox, Zionist community.

South Africans also contributed to significant synagogue expansion in Perth, as well as strengthening the Perth Hebrew Congregation and joining the synagogue board, including president, Michael Odes (1999–2003). The Northern Suburbs synagogue, also known as the Noranda *Shule*, formed around 1987, built their synagogue in 1991. Again, it is largely an ex-South African *Shule*. The Dianella *Shule* developed with a focus on Jewish education and is called 'Beth Midrash' (House of Learning). The president of the synagogue, Rabbi Marcus Solomon, has been on recruiting trips to South Africa. It holds regular classes for both children and adults, with up to three classes being held each day at the centre for different age groups, with a large proportion of the students attending these classes being ex-South Africans.

There is not a strong tradition of Reform Judaism in South Africa so that only a small proportion of South African Jews have affiliated with Progressive Judaism in Australia, although some South African Jews have had an impact on the movement. For example, Lorraine Topol arrived in Melbourne in November 1985. She was very involved with reform in Johannesburg, and within five years, she was elected president of Temple Beth Israel, serving in that position from 1990–1992. There have been other South African Jews who have played a leading role in the Progressive movement (Rutland and Gariano 2005, pp. 35–36).

4.5. Jewish Education

The strong support for Jewish day schools, particularly from South African immigrants (75% in the JA survey) has been reflected in the rapid growth of Jewish day schools in Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth.

In Sydney Masada College on the North Shore was established as a primary school by Australian parents in 1966, but with increased South African migration to the area after 1975, it became largely a South African school, with over 50% of its student body comprising South African newcomers. In 1981, its high school opened in St Ives, the first area of settlement for South African Jews, with the college reaching a peak of 800 students in the early 1990s. However, since 1995, there has been a movement to the East, so that Masada faces ongoing problems of maintaining its enrolments, while Moriah College, the largest Jewish day school in Sydney located in the East, has benefitted from the influx of South Africans.

Similarly, in 1990 in Melbourne, the first area of settlement in Doncaster was also more distant from the main area of Jewish concentration. In 1990, the Doncaster *Chabad* School was established at the North Eastern Jewish Centre and, at its peak, it had 120 students. However, with the move of many South Africans to the South Caulfield area, its enrolments decreased until the school was no longer viable. It closed in 2000, with the other Jewish day schools in the south-eastern suburbs benefitting. For many South Africans, Mount Scopus College, the largest Jewish day school in Melbourne, is the closest to what they knew in South Africa with King David in Johannesburg and Herzliya in Cape Town, and many sent their children there.

In Perth, Carmel College, the only Jewish day school, is strongly South African in terms of student numbers, particularly after 1987. One Australian parent commented:

When my son . . . started kindergarten in 1985, the children were all Australian born. In 1987 there was a huge influx of South Africans . . . In 1985 we knew everyone in the car park. Over the next couple of years, there were all these strangers. (See Note 2)

The community has always been very welcoming of South Africans because migration has meant that there are more Jewish friends for their children and there is a greater chance that they will meet a Jewish partner in Perth and not move away. They have become very involved with the school, serving on the Parents & Friends, the school board, and in executive positions. In this way, the school has become the main interface between the established Jewish community and the newcomers. Carmel College and other Jewish schools in Australia have also sent recruiting teams to South Africa to encourage migration to Australia.

South Africans have also provided Jewish Studies and Hebrew teachers and educational leadership. One respondent to the face-to-face interviews commented:

These teachers adjust quickly to the Australian classroom as they come from the same background, drive on the same side of the road, speak the same language, more or less are of Central and East European background, so that there is no cultural dissonance (See Note 5)

In the early years of South African migration, the newcomers did experience some problems in adjusting with Australian-Jewish children, especially at Masada College, where the Australian children felt they were being outnumbered. However, Australian-Jewish students have become so familiar with South Africans that most do not regard their entry into school as an issue. In this way, the South African migrants have significantly contributed to the growth of Jewish day schools in Australia.

4.6. Connection to Israel

Over 90% of all respondents (South Africans, Russians and Israelis) to the JA Survey agreed that it was “important/very important” that:

1. The state of Israel is very important to Jews.
2. Jews should support Israel.
3. They should keep informed on the situation in Israel.
4. Israel will always be a home to Jews, and
5. Israel is a home for all Jews, regardless of affiliation (Rutland and Gariano 2005, p. 61).

With the South Africans, their connection to Israel seemed to be based on emotional factors; they were not committed to living in Israel. This was confirmed by cross tabulating responses to “Israel is the place where I belong” to the question of whether respondents feel emotionally attached to Israel. Most South Africans who said that they did feel emotionally attached to Israel strongly agreed/agreed that “Israel was the place where they belonged” (Rutland and Gariano 2005, pp. 59–61). They engaged in business with Israel and/or donated to charities that directly benefit Israel, such as the United Israel Appeal (UIA), the Jewish National Fund (JNF), and Women’s International Zionist Organisation (WIZO).

In Sydney and Melbourne, South Africans first became involved in local community leadership as they integrated into the community but were slower to become involved in the Zionist movement, unlike Perth, where the more established South African Jews were seen as vital to Zionist activities. The UIA executive director in Perth, who was there since 1987, asked in 2003: ‘Is anybody not South African’? She noted that when the South African influx started, they changed the whole infrastructure of UIA and JNF. (See Note 2).

4.7. Jewish Identity

South African Jews arrive in Australia with a strong Jewish identity. The 2005 JA Survey found that only 5% of South African Jews were intermarried and that they strongly

opposed intermarriage, with 78% of those with children attending Jewish schools and 72% of non-day school parents, “strongly agreeing/agreeing” that “Jews should not intermarry” (Rutland and Gariano 2005, p. 31). This strong identification has continued. The GEN17 study found that only 11% of the 18–39 age group and 12% of the 40–69 age group stated that they attach limited, little or no importance to being Jewish. These figures can be compared with the findings of a recent study on South African Jewry, with 86% of children having two Jewish parents and only 10% having one. Indeed, this study found that “compared with Jews in Australia and the UK, South African Jews are more likely to select ‘very important’ to a standard set of thirteen Jewish identity markers. Overall, Jewish identity in South Africa appears to be stronger, and more religious, than in either Australia or the UK” (Graham 2020, p. 6 and Figure 29, p. 37).

When asked about the basis of Jewish identity, “Jewish by birth” was the most frequent response and this applied to the Russians and Israelis, followed by “tradition” for South Africans (80%), “nationality” for those born in the FSU, and “connection to Israel” for Israelis (75%). South Africans also listed “religion” as a Jewish identifier, which was higher than 49% for Israelis and 29% for Jews born in the FSU (Rutland and Gariano 2005, p. 33). They also included “Jewishness by religion” as their most common pattern of identification, with 77% affiliated with Orthodox synagogues and schools (Gariano, Rutland, pp. 34–35). There are contradictions in the South African’s religiosity. When asked about belief—as measured by asking respondents about the level of importance to each of the 13 basic principles of Judaism—most responses were “not so important” and the same applied to “cultural connectedness”. Yet, they averaged a score of “important” for knowledge and for attitudes.⁸

South Africans have also brought their own food traditions and have opened their own shops. In Sydney, until recently, they have enriched kosher-food outlets with shops, such as Katzkies, while South Africans have recently taken over the management of well-established kosher shops. In Melbourne, there are several South African shops in Chapel Street, Pahrn, Templestow, and South Caulfield, which all sell traditional South African fare, such as *biltong* (Kalman 2014, p. 55).

5. Discussion

5.1. South African Waves of Migration and Demography

Louw and Mersham (2001) have argued that there were five main waves of migration for non-Jewish South Africans to Australia. The Jewish profile is similar but there are a few differences. Jewish migration began in the early 1960s following the Sharpeville riots. As the findings revealed, a number of these early migrants came for ideological reasons due to their dislike of apartheid, rather than the Anglo-concerns about the Afrikanerisation of South Africa. The second wave started after the Soweto riots in 1976, with a significant proportion being Jews who, as discussed, had a significant demographic impact on the local Australian community (Louw and Mersham 2001, p. 311). There was an increase in non-Jewish migration in the early 1980s, largely Rhodesians (Zimbabweans), which constituted a third wave, but for Jews, this was still part of the second wave. Thus, the fourth wave for the non-Jews, the pre-Mandela period 1985–1990, was only the third wave for Jewish South Africans, with their fourth wave occurred in the post-Mandela, 1990–1995/6.⁹

As with the Jewish findings from the surveys, the major reasons that are mentioned in surveys of non-Jewish South Africans for the post-apartheid period were “crime and the politics of racial re-ranking”, with the latter being due to the African National Council’s “policies of ‘black empowerment’ and ‘corrective action’”, as the new government sought to reverse the Anglo-perception that they were superior, and therefore, were at the top of the status ladder” (Louw and Mersham 2001, pp. 316–17).

In the Tatz et al. (2007) survey, “fear of the future” was the main factor leading to emigration, although, since 1990, they argue crime and family unification have increased in importance. They speculate that the fear of the future was because “White South Africans, and Jews in this instance, had a reflex (or even a neurotic) adverse reaction to the very

idea of Black government” (p. 196). They also point out that more recently, government corruption, including the police and judiciary, has emerged as an important factor (p. 196). They argue that crime, always endemic in South Africa, has only emerged as a key reason since 1990, so that crime could mask deeper reasons, such as “fear of living under Black rule or, having lived under it for a few years, not liking it” (p. 197). Their discussion of the crime factor again reinforces the findings of the 2004–2005 study, because our interviewees left not “necessarily because of attacks on them, but because of attacks on people in their social milieux, network or family”, which Tatz et al. describe as “another remarkable émigré population” (p. 199).

Tatz et al. (2007) also note that, while family reunification is a reason for South African migration to Australia, families are often scattered, while aged parents often remain in South Africa. They argue that this indicates that family ties are not as strong with the South African re-migration, especially in contrast to the Litvak emigration. There are also practical reasons for current migration choices. Some elderly Jewish South Africans feel that they are too old to restart life in a new country, and they are sufficiently comfortable to remain, happy in the knowledge that their children and grandchildren have found a safer home. For others, especially the less wealthy, emigration choices are more limited, and others fear leaving means loss of their wealth and facing the challenge of restarting their lives (pp. 199–201). Yet, their research has demonstrated that since 1990, the number of people over 90 has grown exponentially (pp. 202–4). In the Australian case, family reunification is one of the factors giving permission to immigrate. Tatz et al. also demonstrate that a significant percentage of their respondents came on an exploratory trip first, again presenting a different profile from refugees who are forced to flee or expelled.

Over time, the number of non-Jewish migrants from South Africa to Australia has significantly eclipsed the Jewish numbers, but due to their more dispersed settlement patterns and their efforts to assimilate quickly, their presence has tended to be less noticeable. Non-Jewish ex-South Africans are well-educated, have tended to settle in the more affluent suburbs on Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth, and have integrated very easily into Australian society, with many having highly paid jobs (Louw and Mersham 2001, p. 323). This is largely due to the Australian skilled migration programme which operated in the 1990s to the 2000s. It is much more difficult for South Africans from the less affluent groups to migrate to Australia. As Louw and Mersham (2001) stress “self-selection and Australian immigration policy have skewed the profile of South African migrants in favor of those most likely join the upper-middle classes or the affluent in Australia” (p. 329).

Similarly, most South African Jews also arrive as professional or business migrants to Australia and constitute part of the well-off middle class who come from a culturally similar background to their new host country (Tatz et al. 2007, p. 42). The high proportion of professionals who have left South Africa, both Jewish and non-Jewish, have created a “brain drain” there (Tatz et al. 2007, p. 43). They constitute part of what Forrest et al. describe as “internationalists”, having the ability to readjust quickly to their new country as part of the process of economic globalisation where “those with sought-after skills and who are highly qualified are increasingly in demand among immigrant-receiving countries in the developed world” (Tatz et al. 2007, p. 64).

5.2. Networking and Success in Australian Society

In discussing the high socio-economic status of South African Jews in Australia, Kalman (2014) argues that their success is because “they come from a position of resourcefulness and confidence” (p. 1970). These are not the only factors, as the findings of the 2004 study and her own micro-study demonstrate. Networking plays a key role in the successful integration of South African Jews in Australia due to chain migration through family sponsorship. The new arrivals also have a whole support network in terms of finding a job, a place to live, and advice relating to adjusting to Australian life. This help comes not only from family but also from friends and the broader Jewish community, ensuring that the South Africans enjoy a soft landing in their new homeland.

Jewish networking is not specific to the South African migrant experience but is part of broader Jewish migration patterns to the new world. Research has shown that social networks played a key role in the successful integration of Jewish refugees from Nazism before the war and the arrival of Jewish survivors after the war in Australia and elsewhere (Strobl 2019; Fuhse 2009).

5.3. *An Easy Integration?*

Compared with other waves of Jewish immigrants, the integration of South Africans has been comparatively easy, given their knowledge of English and the cultural similarities. Yet, there are differences and tensions with the local Jewish community. Language differences can lead to misunderstandings. Kalman (2014) notes that “At pick-up times cries of ‘How’s it? And ‘You must come to me’ ring out; in voices high and clear and markedly South African”. She comments that the food traditions which they brought from South Africa pervade their lifestyle and are:

... evocative of a fondly remembered life. These new immigrants wear their difference proudly. They did not try to round their vowels. They imported their strange and different foods. They established shops so that these could be easily accessed, or they insinuated them onto the shelves of local supermarkets. (p. 181)

However, this tendency to stick together, establish their own institutions or take control of already established institutions has led to tensions. Local Australian Jews often view the South Africans as pushy, arrogant, and loud, and thus, resent their presence (Rutland 2001, pp. 368–69; Rutland 2005, p. 140). As immigrants, South African Jews expected to be accepted unequivocally and totally by the Australian Jewish community, and when this did not occur, they tended to retreat to their familiar South African circle. This contributed to increased tensions between the established Australian-Jewish community and the newcomers, with the former seeing the latter as “cliquish”. There has also been some dissonance between the older and newer South African Jewish immigrants, because the new group is seen as a threat to their full acceptance by the more established South African Jews, who have also expressed concern over the newcomers’ more vocal characteristics. These tensions decrease as the second generation of South African Jews become more assimilated into the general Jewish community.

5.4. *Jewish Community Involvement*

The South Africans have integrated most successfully into the broader Jewish community, but as discussed above, they have also developed their own structures both for geographical reasons as well as different cultural patterns, in addition to synagogues and day schools. Particularly in Sydney, South African Jews lead the full range of Jewish organisations and institutions, including The New South Wales (NSW) Jewish Communal Appeal, the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, the National Council of Jewish Women in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, and many other institutions. The peak organisation, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, has had two Australian presidents. More recently South Africans had taken on key leadership positions in the Zionist movement in Sydney and Melbourne, particularly with UIA. As South Africans have become more integrated into Jewish life in Australia in the two major cities, they have become more involved in Zionism. They have been involved and have reinforced the Communal Security Groups (SCGs).

One interesting development is their strong involvement in Holocaust teaching and remembrance, particularly at the Sydney Jewish Museum. In her doctoral thesis, “The missing paradigm”, Holocaust descendant Sophie Gelski (2010) was initially skeptical of South Africans being able to teach about the Holocaust. As a result of her research, she came to the realisation that with their Litvak background, they felt deeply affected by the Holocaust and were effective in teaching and remembering. As they commented to her, “it could have been us” (p. 135).

5.5. Jewish Identity

The apartheid system was based on ethnic divisions, so that even though there was antisemitism, “Jewish particularism could find a legitimate place” (Kalman 2014, p. 187). She argues that “South African Jews were able to establish a strong sense of community, and to flourish, as all whites did, in a society that did not allow them to slip into the underclass: this was exclusively occupied by blacks” (p. 188).

South African Jews arrived in Australia with a strong sense of and pride in their Jewish identity. Even though they were identified with the Anglos as “white” (Louw and Mersham 2001), there was still an undercurrent of antisemitism among the Anglos. The Afrikaner relationship with the South African Jewish community was complex, initially due to the role of General Jan Christaan Smuts, Boer leader, and Prime Minister from 1919–1924 and 1939–1948. He was a Zionist and played a role in the framing of the Balfour Declaration. After 1948, Dr Daniel Malan assumed the leadership. He was known as a racist and an anti-Semite, causing the Jewish community concerns. However, he visited Israel shortly after his election in 1948, and later, ties developed between South African and Israel, with both countries experiencing a pariah status internationally. This complexity has been subject to significant historical debate but discussing it in detail is outside the scope of this article.

This complex situation, where Jews are seen as being both white and non-white, has led to a contradiction in their status, as Tatz et al. (2007) describe it: “of belonging but not quite belonging, of Jews hoping, even preaching, that they were mainstream South Africans but somehow sensing that they had no place in this white South Africanism” (p. 68). This marginalised status led them to focus on their Jewish identity, and this has intensified more recently within the contemporary South African Jewish community, even as it decreases in size (Graham 2020). Tatz et al. (2007) describe this as “the spiritual security and comfort in the return to devout Judaism, to ultra-Orthodox ritual practice” (p. 196). In contrast, South African Jews in Australia have tended to become more assimilated, as the 2005 study has demonstrated, and this contrasts with the Russian and Israeli waves, where Jewish practice has strengthened.

The 2005 study found that most South African Jews identify through tradition, affiliate Orthodox, and send their children to Jewish day schools. It confirms one respondent’s summation of the South African group:

The South African Jew comes here with a very strong sense of Jewish identity, a willingness to commit to involvement in Jewish communal life, a Litvish mentality, which eschews the fundamentalism for the most part. (Rutland and Gariano 2005, p. 65)

As a result, they have reinvigorated and enriched the local Australian Jewish community with the establishment of new synagogues and strengthening the day schools. This is a result of the fact that in South Africa, Louw and Mersham (2001) comment, “religion is such a strong marker of ethnic identity” (p. 327).

Kalman (2014) explains:

“South African Jews travel within this South African Jewishness. This is their home: the presence of networks of family, friends, and coreligionists allows them to place roots in Australian soil, while maintaining the sense that their South African past is somehow integral to who they are” (pp. 196–97).

In a recent article after a visit to Australia, Judy Maltz (2022), *Haaretz* journalist, quoting a leading South African Jewish businessman, David Gonski, who arrived with his parents in 1961 at the age of seven: “All immigration is difficult, and these people found solace with family and friends who were already established in Sydney . . . They moved near them, set up schools with them and, eventually would all become a tribe within a tribe”.

5.6. Diaspora/Centre or Post-Diasporic?

Citing data from the study by Horowitz and Kaplan, Tatz et al. demonstrate that during the first two waves of re-emigration, Israel was the preferred destination (37.5%) followed by the United States (23.7%). During the third wave, the percentage of people going to Israel declined (22.6%), with the United States becoming the preferred destination (26.9%); nevertheless, by the fourth wave from 1990–2000, Australasia has become by far the most popular destination (40%), compared with the United States (20%) and Israel (15%) (pp. 210–11).

These statistics have led to a debate about Israel's role in the twenty-first century for South African Jewry. In their book, *New Jews*, Aviv and Shneer (2005) reject the concept of Israel as the centre of Jewish life. Their thesis is that, in a globalised Jewish world, Jews can be in the "centre" regardless of where they live. Kalman (2014) supports this thesis, arguing that South African Jews in Australia are "better conceptualised as 'new' or 'global Jews'" (p. 198). She stresses that South African Jews enjoy the freedom offered in Australia and, at the same time, they see themselves as citizens of the world and argues that "South African Jews . . . are global. They make a home for themselves in both Australia and the worlds in ways that cannot be conceptualised as diaspora" (p. 199).

Yet, this debate ignores the pragmatics. South African Jews choose to immigrate to Australia, thereby forming part of the global South African Jewish diaspora, but this does not mean that Israel is not still important for them. One interviewee in the Tatz et al. survey, who arrived in Sydney in 1981, wrote that even though they had chosen to migrate to Australia, as Jews, "our 'centre' is our spiritual connection with our people and with Israel" (p. 212). Israel still plays a central role within the Australian-Jewish psyche, as indicated with the GEN 17 survey. Even though they have not chosen to settle in Israel, South African Jews recognise the centrality of Israel for Jewish identity.

Eisenstadt (2000) has argued that in the modern world, people have multiple identities and this certainly applies to the complexity of Jewish identity. Thus, within the Jewish world, there are efforts to maintain the particularism of Jewish identity and connection to Israel. At the same time, Jews also focus on universal values and aim to be global citizens. This effort to remain within the tribe, while at the same time being part of the globalised world, is complex and challenging, with some focusing more on the former and others more on the latter. However, with almost half of the Jewish world living in Israel, where the Jewish population is constantly expanding both due to natural increase and migration, this challenges the "new Jews" concept. Hence, the concept of multiple identities seems more relevant than denying the centrality of Israel.

6. Conclusions

For their book, Tatz et al. chose the title, *Worlds Apart*. This title relates to the first Litvak migration but not to their re-migration. Australia and South Africa may be separated geographically, but from the religious and cultural perspectives, the Jewish communities in these two centres are not worlds apart. This cultural affinity has meant that South African Jews have seen Australia as a desirable immigration location. As well, for most their integration has been relatively easy, despite initial challenges and a high percentage indicate satisfaction with their new life in Australia.

Those who have arrived have significantly reinforced every aspect of Jewish communal life, including the growth of synagogues and development of the day-school movement. However, unlike those who have remained in South Africa, they have tended to become less religious and communally involved than they were there, because of the greater freedom they enjoy in Australia.

One limitation of this study is that the qualitative research from the findings was conducted in 2004. While GEN17 has provided more recent information based on the quantitative survey, more qualitative research could be undertaken in the future. This could include issues, such as whether the South African Jewish sector in Australian Jewry has been characterized by demographic growth (or stability) or aging, in comparison with

the already-establish Australian-Jewish groups. Yet, the 2017 quantitative research has reinforced the findings of the earlier research drawn on in this article, indicating that the “re-immigration” of South African Jews, many of whom were originally Litvak, to Australia has been very successful from every perspective.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Jewish Agency of Israel, which approved the survey instrument. This included a statement at the start of the questionnaire, which stressed that all the information provided was completely anonymous. All participation was fully voluntary, as it was an opt-in survey.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data is available via the unpublished JA Study. The report was not made publicly available, but a copy of the report can be obtained from the author. The analysis was undertaken by Dr Antonio Gariano, but since this study was undertaken almost 20 years ago, he has not retained the original data.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Interview, 7 December 2003, Perth; see also the reasons for Taft and Arnold leaving in the 1960s, Tatz et al. (2007, pp. 184–209).
- ² Interview, 8 December 2003, Perth. Rutland and Gariano (2005). “JA Survey”.
- ³ Interview, 18 February 2004, Melbourne. Rutland and Gariano (2005) “JA Survey”.
- ⁴ Interview with Perth respondent, 8 December 2003. Rutland and Gariano (2005). “JA Survey”.
- ⁵ Interview, 17 February 2004, Melbourne. Rutland and Gariano (2005) “JA Survey”.
- ⁶ Interview, 7 December 2003, Perth. Rutland and Gariano (2005). “JA Survey”.
- ⁷ Telephone interview, 18 February 2004, Melbourne. Rutland and Gariano (2005). “JA Survey”.
- ⁸ The relevant questions can be found in the survey instrument in Rutland and Gariano (2005, Appendix C, pp. 74–112).
- ⁹ According to Tatz et al., there were five waves—they add one from 1986–1990, before the end of apartheid and its immediate aftermath, pp. 160–83.

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