

FILM AUSTRALIA'S IMMIGRATION DVD

Interview with Ann-Mari Jordens

Questions by Paul Byrnes and Penelope McDonald

Q: What do you think inspired the government to embark on its post-war program of mass migration?

AMJ: When the Curtin government was elected in 1943 it was a very exciting time. It looked to the future and had a new vision of what post-war Australia should look like. This was a generation that had just gone through the Depression, and they were very aware of enormous fluctuations in the Australian economy. When people overseas didn't want our primary products — wool, wheat and coal — there'd be recession and a lot of unemployment. They had this vision — Ben Chifley was Minister for Post-War Reconstruction and Nugget Coombs was his chief bureaucrat and they constructed this idea of what Australia should be like after WWII, an Australia with no unemployment. During the war we had been cut off from supplies of manufactured goods from Britain and we developed our own small industries, mostly to do with the production of war-related materials. The Curtin government saw that this could be the basis for industrial development. If you developed secondary industry in Australia, then the Australian worker would be protected in times when there was less demand for our primary products overseas.

In 1945, they produced a White Paper called 'Full Employment in Australia' that was a Keynesian vision for the future and of the role of the government. The Commonwealth government would control employment for the first time: it had always been a state responsibility. They would invest massively in public works, build schools and hospitals and control prices, so people couldn't profiteer because of the shortage of materials. Particularly, they would also provide social welfare services to protect or to enable the domestic economy to flourish.

Internationally, they pushed the idea of full employment as a goal for other countries — because it's not much good if Australia had a goal of full employment and other countries didn't — and they were successful in pushing that in the international forum. They also had a vision of exporting to Asia and Africa.

Q: What products?

AMJ: Australian-manufactured goods. But the key thing was that we only had 7.5 million people. We needed a much larger and more skilled workforce to make this vision come true. We couldn't supply it from our existing population so we had to have very large-scale migration, and that was the origin of the post-war migration. Also, there were defence concerns; Australia had just almost been invaded by Japan. We'd always had this fear of the 'yellow peril', a fear of living isolated from Europe, our imagined homeland, and being separated from it by vast yellow hordes of people with large populations who would envy our prosperity. So for defence reasons too we thought we needed a much larger population.

Q: Arthur Calwell, who became the first Minister for Immigration, was talking about this increase in population as early as 1942 and I know there were people before him who were thinking that Australia needed to increase population. Do you think his ideas about population were radically different to what had been said before and how was he different? How did he differ from other Labor politicians on this matter?

AMJ: I think it was largely academic in the 1930s. There was no possibility of getting any migrant population because of the worldwide depression. All our later attempts had relied very much on assisted immigration from Britain, with money provided by Britain. Every time we tried to get assisted population in the past, there would be a disaster. We tried before WWI and war broke out. Then we tried more successfully in the 1920s, but the Depression interrupted the effort. This was a time when it looked like there were a lot of people who might want to come from Britain; we didn't really want them from Europe initially.

Q: The policy of migration to Australia was always based, to some extent, on exclusion — who was not considered desirable — from the White Australia Policy and before that. Do you think the mass migration policy was framed as a departure from that or as an extension of it?

AMJ: Even in the past there were two streams of migration. There was keeping people out or exclusion, and trying to attract them and get funding to bring them in. There have always been these two faces of immigration policy. Before, the settlement of migrants was left largely to the states, and the very big change to immigration settlement — getting people and keeping them here — was now seen as a function of the Commonwealth government. Also it was much more planned, being set in a context for population policy. Calwell wanted two percent growth in Australian population (one percent by immigration and one percent by natural increase) so immigration matched natural increase. More or less that's what happened over the whole post-war period — it was achieved.

Q: It seems astonishing that it was achieved, in light of Australia's history and in light of Labor politics. Can you talk a bit about how it was achieved?

AMJ: Selling the idea of mass migration was not without difficulty, of course, particularly non-British migration. All previous attempts to attract migrants had been targeted at British migrants. But after the war it was very difficult to bring British migrants to Australia because of the lack of shipping and also the lack of funds; you need a lot of money to bring people here. It wasn't until after Calwell toured the refugee camps in 1947, quite a long time after the war, that he realised what an important source this would be for migrants, particularly after negotiating with the International Refugee Organisation [IRO] in July 1947. The IRO provided migrants at a cost of ten dollars a head to the Australian Government and the Australian government made a very small contribution to the administrative costs. The main thing is that the IRO had ships provided by the American government. They were former troop carriers, most of them named after American generals, like the *General Heintzelmann* which brought the first group of carefully selected 'beautiful Balts' to Australia in November 1947. It all happened very quickly.

Q: Let's talk specifically about that shipment, the 'beautiful Balts'. What was the idea behind that and how did they do it?

AMJ: Australians were very insular people; most never travelled much and never met foreigners. All previous migrants had been British and there was a conception — held even in high positions in the public service — that foreigners [Europeans] probably wouldn't assimilate into Australian society. We had this very strong feeling that we were a British nation, both ethnically and culturally, and we didn't want to lose this. This was our national identity — British, white, largely Protestant country — and it was scary. Also, we traditionally thought of migrants as poor people who didn't speak English, weren't very well educated and, most of all, who would be out to get our jobs. They would undermine the hard-won working conditions and rates of pay that the union movement had been struggling for since the 1890s.

So there was a big psychological barrier to non-British migration. Also, of course, we had based all our trades and professions on British standards. So if we wanted a skilled workforce, we automatically recognised and understood the qualifications of British tradesmen and professional people. It was easy, as we didn't have to worry about how to employ people.

Q: The *Heintzelmann* was almost a show ship, wasn't it?

AMJ: Yes. Because we thought foreigners were sort of ugly, threatening people, the immigration officers were instructed to select very nice looking, blonde or blond-ish, good-looking young people — the sort of people that wouldn't frighten the horses when they arrived in Australia.

They were all Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians, and they were all selected from refugee camps in various parts of allied occupied Europe, largely Germany.

Q: One of the hallmarks of the early days of the policy seems to be a careful stage management of image, what we would now call 'spin'. Where do you think that came from, and was it common in the Australian government at the time to manage public relations so carefully?

AMJ: About two days after WWII was declared, Arthur Calwell was made Minister for Information. Information actually meant control of the press, so, as you do in wartime, all the news that was coming into Australia about the war overseas was carefully filtered by the government and the media was told what they could and couldn't report and how they should report it. By the time he became Minister for Immigration in 1946, Calwell had a very strong feeling for what Australians thought and he developed a lot of skills about how to manage or control their perception of things.

Q: How did the government organise its mass migration program?

AMJ: First of all, on 13 July 1946, it set up a Department of Immigration. It wasn't considered a very important department and wasn't high in the pecking order. The important departments were located in the parliamentary triangle, in Canberra. The Department of Immigration was first housed in the nurses' quarters in Canberra Hospital, and then, I think, it was moved to weatherboard houses on what is now the ANU campus. It was staffed mainly by ex-servicemen. The first permanent head of the Department of Immigration was Tasman Heyes who'd been an ex-serviceman and fought in WWI. He'd been looking for staff and most of the men available had had a military background. He also had a strong appreciation of the maturity that war service had given these young men, and some of them had been in Europe after the war and seen the devastation of the population. There were 13 million people who were displaced: people who had been in concentration camps, people who had been brought to Germany from other countries to work as forced labourers, and others. There were another 10 million Volksdeutsch people, Germans who maybe generations ago had gone to other parts of Europe, mainly Eastern Europe and had been expelled and fled to Germany when the Soviets took over. The IRO wasn't responsible for the Volksdeutsch, only for the displaced people. Some servicemen had seen this and their heart went out to people who looked as though they were rotting away in refugee camps with nowhere to go.

Q: What sort of migrants were the Australians looking for?

AMJ: Well, this was very interesting. People often complain about important professors coming here and being made to work on the Snowy Mountains and surgeons ruining their hands by being labourers. There were very few criteria that the Australian government had. They would look at anyone who passed a health test and a security test — that hadn't been hard-core Nazis — and who was prepared to work for two years anywhere they were directed to, no matter what their

qualifications were. Now, this sounds awfully harsh, and people have criticised it in retrospect, but when you look at it in the context of the time, the Americans would only accept people who had family in America; the Canadians picked the eyes out of them and selected people with skills they wanted, but they wouldn't let them bring their family with them; the Belgians would only accept people prepared to work in the mines. Countries like Turkey would only accept people with appropriate language, religious and cultural background. There were a lot of people who wouldn't have had a choice to go anywhere else but we accepted them as long as they were prepared to work anywhere.

You've got to remember that even today, skills recognition is one of the most difficult things [to assess]. The Australian government just didn't have the capacity to assess the skills of the people it brought in. The main reason for the fulfilment of the economic dream of the wartime planners' vision of the new Australia was really based on the conscripted labour of migrants. Those two years were vital in overcoming shortages of all sorts of things, particularly housing.

Q: In some ways it's always seemed to me that what happened at that point was a shift from, if you like, riding on the sheep's back to riding on the migrant's back — a move from agrarian wealth to industrial wealth. Is that a fair assessment?

AMJ: I think it's a bit one-sided because you've got to look at it from the migrants' point of view. Europe was economically devastated. There were enormous levels of unemployment, not only in Germany — which I think bore the brunt of the refugee problem — but also places like Italy and Greece, countries that had traditionally sent migrants away to enable their families to hold onto their land. In Italy, there'd been a long tradition of guest workers in South America for example. Australia provided the opportunity for migrants to come here and support their families who were often in desperate situations. Young men, particularly the Italians, often didn't want to stay here. They wanted to come as guest workers, whereas the Australian government was really interested in having people stay permanently and put a lot of effort into ensuring that the migrant was integrated into the workforce and into society.

Q: In a sense, we had been selecting ourselves before in our own image, and there was a crucial change at this point. Can you talk about that change?

AMJ: We didn't actually want to achieve the changes that we did. There were unintended consequences of all this. What we originally wanted to do was to have largely British migrants who wouldn't change our national identity at all. Then, because of the shipping problem, we couldn't get them and we discovered that we could get non-British migrants cheaply and easily, so we got them. We expected them to assimilate into our Anglo-Celtic society. By 1962, it was evident to people in the Immigration Department that assimilation just didn't work and they changed the word they used to 'integration'. People couldn't and didn't want to become British. We'd also introduced an enormous amount of ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity into a country where most of the laws and the regulations were based on the premise that we were all British and that we all understood what the laws were and we would obey them.

In order to integrate this vastly diverse migrant population into our Anglo-Celtic community, we had to change a lot of our laws and regulations to acknowledge the fact that people were not all Anglo-Celtic, Christian, and spoke English. In the process of changing these laws, we actually changed ourselves. So within 30 years, which is an extraordinarily short time for such a massive shift, we officially in 1973 defined ourselves as a multicultural society. Until the election of the Labor government in 1972, the Coalition government always referred to Australia officially as a homogeneous [British] society. It was quite obvious by the 60s that we weren't a homogeneous

society at all. We were a very diverse society. Introducing the term 'multiculturalism' was sort of acknowledging, after the fact, the enormous changes that had happened to our society and culture over a very short period of thirty years.

Q: Are there other countries where you would see a comparable modern history?

AMJ: The one I have the most connection with is Belgium. My husband's Belgian and we regularly went to Belgium after our marriage in 1962, so I actually saw changes happening in Belgium. Now Belgium and a lot of other European countries had the same level of immigration as we did in the same period but they didn't redefine themselves as a multicultural society. Belgium is a country I associate with chocolates and high living ... I remember in the 1970s, standing in one of the main streets of Brussels and looking across the street at a very ugly vehicle which looked like a tank but wasn't. It had absolutely no markings on it. I asked my brother-in-law what it was. He said, 'Oh, that's a riot control vehicle. And over there is the migrant area of Brussels. The police won't even go into that area physically unless they're in one of the riot control vehicles, with water cannons and gas'. And this was, I thought, the product of having a very large migrant intake but not wanting them to become absorbed into the economy and culture of the community.

I think that's the first time I got a wonderful revelation of what multiculturalism meant to Australia. Multiculturalism is the product, I think, of all the carefully constructed settlement services that were available to migrants, and also the propaganda to encourage Australians to accept them. I found there, in Belgium, the word immigrant meant drugs, crime — all the negative things — whereas in Australia, migrant just meant that you actually came from another country. It's a very neutral term. It's an informative term, not a pejorative term in Australia, and I think this is the result of thirty years of very carefully constructed settlement services and government-led opinion formation.

Q: What were the problems that Arthur Calwell encountered when getting aliens accepted in Australia and what did he do about those problems?

AMJ: There was a very strangeness of non-British people to most Australians. I remember my mother saying that if she heard a person speaking in a foreign language in the train she'd turn around and feel very hostile. There was this feeling of hostility that sprang from an unfamiliarity with strangers. There was the fear that they would take our jobs and undermine our working conditions. And then, the very practical objection to large-scale migration was the housing problem. After the Depression and the war, there was a backlog of about 400,000 houses. So it was very hard to buy a house and almost impossible to build a house because the materials weren't available, and rented accommodation was like hens' teeth. This was a very practical reason why people would resent foreigners coming in and taking the scarce accommodation. What Calwell did to try to manage this from a practical point of view was that he directed conscriptable migrants into the housing industry to produce materials. By about 1954, the housing backlog was overcome in most states. What he did about the fear of migrants taking our jobs was, very cleverly, to get the unions and also employer organisations like the Australian Council of Manufactures inside in the migration planning process, particularly in the question of skills recognition. It was mostly migrant tradesmen that we wanted and migrants in industry. The unions were not hostile any more because they were involved in looking at the accreditation of the people who were brought in and they could control the numbers. The government was much less successful with the professional organisations, but that's another story.

Then there was the matter of public attitudes, the irrational and instinctive things, the fear of foreigners. Calwell knew a social worker called Hazel Dobson and he employed her, in 1948, to look at the settlement problems of migrants and refugees in the Sydney area. She came up with

two brilliant ideas. One was that the department should employ a largish number of professionally qualified social workers to help migrants deal with their personal problems. Calwell appointed her as head of the unit. Her other brilliant idea, which was also accepted by the government, was to create a network of community organisations. She suggested amalgamating churches, the RSL, the Country Women's Association, Rotary, Apex and every organisation with membership in small towns around Australia into a network called the Good Neighbour Movement to be regulated by a government-funded Good Neighbour Council.

In 1950, at the first citizenship convention, about 300 representatives from organisations all around Australia got together and formed the Good Neighbour Movement. Every year until the end of the 1970s, there was an annual citizenship convention, held in Canberra, funded by the Department of Immigration, where largely Anglo-Celtic people from all around Australia would give their perceptions of what the migrants' problems were in their particular area. These would be directed to officers in the Department of Immigration, as would their suggested solutions. The Department of Immigration directed these to the relevant government or non-government agency to look at and the following year they would report back on what action had been taken. The Good Neighbour Movement was a very grass roots organisation — it just had a life of its own. The government couldn't control it and it never actually found out quite what it was doing. That was why it was abolished in the late seventies and replaced by ethnic organisations.

I read a lot of social workers' reports and they would be reporting on the problems of migrants in their particular state. Sometimes their reports would comment on the activities of the Good Neighbour Movement and in some cases it worked brilliantly. In other cases it was quite hopeless. It was a very patchy organisation but when it worked it was wonderful. When migrants were going to leave assisted accommodation, holding centres or work camps, their names and addresses would be given to people in the area where they were going. Somebody from the Good Neighbour Movement would go along to their home, introduce themselves and introduce them to, say, the headmaster of the school or the bank manager, and involve them in the social activities of the community. In many cases it worked very well and a lot of migrants themselves became involved in the movement to help other migrants.

Q: I suppose we could call the other part of this a propaganda campaign to do with filmmaking. Can we talk about that as part of this whole attitude of trying to change people's minds?

AMJ: The Department of Information produced films during the war with people like Maslyn Williams and Damien Parer. [The propaganda campaign] grew out of the war documentaries that were shown in the cinema. People would go along because they didn't have television. I'd go with my mother sometimes to a cinema in the middle of the day and they'd have these newsreels. I think it was based on that. The film *Mike and Stefani* was aimed at making Australians realise the terrible experiences that a lot of refugees had gone through by focussing on one particular couple. It personalised the thirteen million displaced people. You could hardly think about thirteen million people but when you look at this young, beautiful couple, the woman struggling to keep her baby alive and her delight when she was reunited with her husband in the camp; this made it a very personal experience.

It got Australians feeling sympathetic towards migrants but also the interview scene in that film informed us that Australia wasn't accepting any riff-raff. They just didn't let anyone in. They went through a very rigorous process of selection and we only accepted really good people. That was the message of that film. Other films were made to attract migrants or to inform them about what sort of life that they were to experience in Australia, showing how wonderful the climate was and how nice and relaxed and welcoming we were. They didn't give an absolutely accurate description,

I think, of all the rules and regulations they would have to obey and the difficulties they would encounter.

Q: We've heard anecdotal evidence that in fact some of these films created ill-feeling in the migrants when they did get here and find that it wasn't like the films. Have you heard of that sort of reaction to the country not being the paradise that they thought it was going to be?

AMJ: Not personally, no.

Q: A few people have told us that they were disappointed.

AMJ: Some were. To select photographs for my two books, I was looking through the enormous collection of photographs that the Department of Immigration had, which came from the Department of Information. I found a lot of them very unacceptable because they were always full of happy, smiling migrants in their brand new kitchens with their Holden outside and their Hills Hoist in the garden. It was all propaganda, they were not realistic at all. I was looking for a picture of the sort of house or garage that I knew about having grown up in Lakemba in Sydney. At Bankstown a lot of migrants were living in the unsewered area of Sydney, building a little shack or a garage in the backyard if they managed to get a block of land and then eventually building their house. That was the reality. What you saw in the Department of Information's photographs of all these happy little Vegemites [laughs] was not the reality at all. So I'm not surprised that they were disappointed and felt cheated.

Q: What do you know of the official reaction to *Mike and Stefani*?

AMJ: The interviewer in *Mike and Stefani*, Harold Grant, was instructed by his superiors in the Department of Immigration to look tough in the interview. He was told not to make much eye contact and not to smile because the aim was to reassure Australians that Mike and Stefani themselves were going through a very rigorous selection procedure. Then, when the film was put together, the Department was pretty aghast because he seemed too tough, cold and hostile. The film was a magically emotive film, you really felt for that couple, and then suddenly they're confronted with this scary, unfriendly immigration officer. That was a negative aspect of that film. The film was intended for showing in mainstream theatre but, by the time the film was fully processed, the government was negotiating a migration agreement with Germany. Suddenly the government realised that this film could incite anti-German feeling, or actually inflame it, because most people were anti-German anyway.

They decided not to release it for public showing and it was only shown in a film festival in Melbourne and in an art film theatre in Sydney. But it was used a lot in the context of the Good Neighbour Movement and also by social workers. Until 1955 when the department got a public relations section itself, all this public relations work was just another of the myriad tasks that the professional social workers employed by the Department of Immigration had to do. When they went to a place, they would often screen *Mike and Stefani* and the film *No Strangers Here*. After that it was distributed through the Good Neighbour Movement network for showing but it was really, in a way, only being shown to the converted, people who were already interested in promoting migrants' settlement in Australia. It didn't have the propaganda effect that it would have had if it had been released in the mainstream cinema, and I think it was really good enough for that.

Q: How did the Department get these films to where they wanted them to go?

AMJ: From 1954, the Department of Immigration employed professional journalists to produce a newspaper called *The Good Neighbour* and they pushed a lot of their articles into other mainstream newspapers and journals when they could. The Department of Immigration had a train, which travelled around Victoria and South Australia and would distribute Immigration Department propaganda — a leaflet called *Why Migration is Good for Australia* — and enabled these films to be shown in the places where the train stopped. Particularly they showed *Mike and Stefani* and *No Strangers Here*.

Q: When the Labor Party lost power in 1949 and the Menzies government came in, what were the changes in terms of policy in the Immigration Department?

AMJ: One of the main things is that the Labor Party could never encourage the migration of the ten million people of German origin in the camps in Europe. They were a very good source of skilled migrants but the Returned Services League [RSL] was incredibly powerful at that time in influencing the government's views on a lot of things. The RSL, very sensibly I think, wanted to be sure that none of these Germans were hard-core Nazis. From 1948, the American government suspected that there were communists in our Department of External Affairs and so cut off the Labor government's access to the allied intelligence collecting services in Europe. So the Labor government was never able to reassure the RSL that the Germans who would be selected for migration were not hard-core Nazis. Immediately the coalition was elected in late 1949, the Americans restored intelligence to the Liberal coalition government. I saw one of the first documents that was sent, which was an assessment, a very detailed, very long assessment of the sorts of people who comprised this ten million Volksdeutsch, as they were called. They were people who had migrated from Germany to various countries in Eastern Europe, often generations before WWII, but were regarded during the war as fifth columnists by the locals. Some may have helped the Germans and some were just ordinary migrants in those areas. When the Soviets took over that part of Europe, they were expelled and sent back to Germany. It showed very strongly the misery these people were enduring in Germany because they weren't accepted. Germany just didn't have any accommodation for them, the food was short, and there was no work for them.

So after about 1950, the government started to negotiate to bring German migrants to Australia. The Allies feared that they would actually create a revolution in Germany because they were a very large and disaffected group. They were very anxious to get rid of them and resettle them in other countries but until the RSL could be assured that they weren't hard-core Nazis, nothing could happen. Immediately, the Liberal government sent the leaders of the RSL on a trip to Germany and they toured all the security bases in Germany and were absolutely satisfied that not a single hard-core Nazi could pass through the system. They came back and the RSL passed a resolution at its annual conference that they were in favour of German migration. The cabinet passed it and started negotiating for a treaty to bring them out.

Q: You mentioned the kind of Germans the government was appealing to and you mentioned that they saw an appeal in these right-wing, anti-communist migrants from the Volksdeutsch?

AMJ: Yes, they were anti-communists and all the refugees that we accepted until fairly recently, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, were anti-communist. Our refugee policy has never been politically neutral. We've had Hungarians, Czechoslovaks, even the Vietnamese were escaping from communism. Until the fall of the Berlin Wall, we only accepted refugees who were fleeing from communist countries. So it's never been neutral.

Q: Was that something that dates from the election of the Menzies government or did it predate it?

AMJ: It's from the sort of division of Europe, between the Allies and the Soviets. The politics goes back to before WWII. The very useful thing about the dictation test, which was introduced in 1901 largely to exclude people who were the wrong colour, non-Europeans, was that it could also be used to exclude people on political grounds. The most famous case of this was in the late 1930s, when an anti-Nazi advocate from Eastern Europe (Hungary, I think) came to Australia to warn us against the dangers of Nazism. First of all he wasn't allowed to land. He then jumped off the ship, broke his leg and had to be admitted to hospital, so they had to screen him. They gave him the dictation test but unfortunately he was a European who spoke just about every European language there was. Finally they failed him on Gaelic and sent him back. We have been able to exclude people who were regarded as communists and all refugees until fairly recently when we got a quota for refugees and used the United Nations High Commission for Refugees as the screening process. Before that we had intakes of refugees at various emergencies which were always created by communist countries invading other countries, like Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Vietnam, or people fleeing from communism anyway.

Q: Would you go so far as to say that we were active in seeking anti-communist, right-wing migrants? Or at least that was part of the attraction of Volksdeutsch?

AMJ: We could at least be sure that they weren't communists, which was the main thing. This is in the context of the Cold War and the 'big bogey-man' was communism. It has been alleged that we did select people who could be used to spy on communists in Australia but I think the main thing was their negative virtues, that we could be sure they weren't communists. We hated communism and feared it very much. I don't think communists were ever much of a threat in Australia but we did try to use big guns to suppress them.

Q: Can you give a short history of the treatment of Jews as migrants, from the 30s through to the early 50s. How it was achieved and what wasn't achieved?

AMJ: We had agreed, at the Evian Conference in 1939, to accept about fifteen thousand Jews but we only managed to bring in about half that number before Europe was closed and the Jews couldn't get out. It wasn't entirely the Australian government's fault. I think the Jewish communities in Australia, largely British Jews and those who had assimilated very much into our society, didn't realise the urgency of the situation. They wanted to make sure, for example, that there were places ready to receive the unaccompanied Jewish children that were to be brought in. They weren't built in time and the children never arrived.

Calwell was aware that there was anti-Semitism in Australia but it wasn't a virulent sort of anti-Semitism. We did have Sir Isaac Isaacs as our first Jewish Governor General from 1931 to 1936, and we had Sir John Monash and Major General Paul Cullen, great Jewish military leaders who were very highly respected. We had highly respected business people. Calwell has been accused of being anti-Semitic, which is entirely wrong. He realised, as did the Jewish community, that there was anti-Semitism in Australia. We'd been quite happy with Anglo Jews but we were pretty worried about all these strange Europeans, probably more because they were Europeans and didn't speak English and had funny, foreign ways, than because they were Jewish. So Calwell and the Jewish community leaders cooked up this arrangement, so that no more than fifteen percent of any boatload of refugees would be Jews.

If you read Diane Armstrong's book on the *Derna* [*The Voyage of their Life*], she was on that boat as a twelve-year-old child and they were supposed to have fifteen percent Jews. When they had a religious service to commemorate a Jewish festival the Captain was quite horrified to see the number of Jews that appeared. He, very sensibly, turned a blind eye. He obviously had many more than fifteen percent of Jews. When people are desperate they'll do anything, including pretend they're not Jewish, just to get out. We did get Jews in the quota of IRO refugees but also they had very good sponsorship. There were two main American Jewish organisations that funded the emigration of Jews.

And so we got about 11,500 sponsored aliens, most of them Jews who were sponsored by the Australian Jewish Welfare Society, who had to provide them with accommodation, employment and settlement services. Jews were probably better off than a lot of non-British migrants that came at this time because there was a very well-organised, established Jewish community in Australia to help them ease themselves into Australian society.

Q: Do you think that there is any justice in the statement that we could have done more?

AMJ: I couldn't comment on that but I think one of the terribly important differences in anti-Semitism before the war and after the war was the film footage of the liberation of the concentration camps. Anti-Semitism was no longer respectable after that. I think the book that most influenced me in my entire life was a book I read when I was twelve or thirteen years old, called the *Scourge of the Swastika* by Lord Russell, an account of the Nuremberg Trials. I remember I'd take it to school in a brown paper wrapper and read it on the bus going to school so that nobody would know I was reading this book that introduced me to the fullness of human evil. I never appreciated evil before and the practical effect that casual anti-Semitism or racism can have on a people, and I think that book influenced my attitude towards refugees and towards racism for the rest of my life. I also read the *Diary of Anne Frank*, which was very widely read in Australia, and I think that made anti-Semitism pretty unacceptable. There were upper class clubs like the Melbourne Club, which would exclude them, but on the whole, I think, there was a change after WWII as a result of finding out about concentration camps.

Q: That change didn't extend to some newspapers or journals in the country that were still publishing anti-Semitic cartoons after the war. Weren't they hurling accusations at Calwell about letting 'all the scum of Europe', as they called them, into Australia and clearly depicting anti-Semitic clichéd characters?

AMJ: Soon after, in 1950 when the Liberals took over and [Calwell] was no longer Minister for Immigration so he was no longer such a focus. Yes, the mud did stick. People said he was racist. He actually spoke Chinese and had a lot of Chinese friends. I'm not saying that anti-Semitism vanished entirely but it was not as acceptable as before [WWII].

Q: Do you think that Calwell is remembered fairly in our history yet?

AMJ: I think Calwell hasn't been appreciated for the full stature that he deserves. He's been smeared as a racist, as an anti-Semite. I think the best speech or summing up of attitudes about the Vietnam War was his speech made in the 60s. He was overthrown by Whitlam and, no, I think he hasn't been well depicted.

Q: Do you think that his vision of an Australia full of migrants, and his parenthood of that idea, has been recognised?

AMJ: Oh no, but that's the political process. Whoever is in power gets to rewrite the history, you claim credit. I recently went to a speech by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, who said that 'multiculturalism' was introduced by the Liberal Government in 1978, even though Al Grassby was present and he had introduced multiculturalism as official policy in 1973.

Q: What do you think Calwell's legacy is?

AMJ: I think Calwell shaped the post-war migration policy and, even after he was no longer minister, his tradition was carried on. Particularly valuable was the emphasis he placed on the importance of successfully settling migrants in Australia and the importance of preparing Australians to accept migrants. He didn't do anything that would threaten the migration program, even if it might have been something he didn't personally agree with, like sending the Asian refugees back to Asia after the war. I don't know, he might have personally wanted them to stay but the very thought that post-war migration would include Asians, he knew, would be politically unacceptable.

Q: Let's go back to the ideas of selection and talk about White Australia Policy and Asians.

AMJ: We've always had non-Europeans in Australia, I think, even on the First Fleet. Then entrepreneurs like Towns and Ben Boyd introduced South Sea Islanders to work. In the 1850s, we had very large numbers of Chinese gold miners, and, in the 1870s, we started to import people from the Solomon Islands and other parts of the South Pacific to work in the cane fields, as indentured labourers. The burgeoning labour movement in Australia saw this as slave labour, a threat to their own wages and conditions. There was a state conference in 1896 where all the states, except South Australia and Queensland, decided to exclude 'coloured labour'. Also in the 1870s, the Victorian and New South Wales governments passed very draconian anti-Chinese legislation preventing ships from bringing more than a very small quota of Chinese into the country — that was the background.

In 1901, the Immigration Restriction Act introduced the dictation test. We couldn't actually say we don't want any coloured people in Australia because we were a British colony, and other British colonies like India and South Africa had coloured people in them. So we very cleverly adopted the dictation test from South Africa that enabled officials to give a reading test in any language that they chose, and if people failed it they could be sent home.

It wasn't that we were discriminating against their colour, we were discriminating against them because they couldn't read whatever language we decided to give them. If we knew they wouldn't speak or be able to read Gaelic, we could exclude them on those grounds. It was used to exclude people on the grounds of colour and undesirable politics. We never actually had a purely White Australia Policy because there was always the room for ministerial discretion. We could always let in people with the skills we wanted, like Japanese pearl divers or Asian chefs. Even in the mid 1960s, we had about thirty thousand non-Europeans in Australia. We could pick and choose and we could use that device to exclude them.

After WWII, there was gentle erosion over time as little bits got bitten out of the White Australia Policy, starting in 1947 under Calwell actually. Non-Europeans who had come into the country as businessmen and had been in the country 15 years wouldn't have to apply regularly for renewal of their temporary visas or permits to stay. Then Harold Holt allowed Japanese war brides to stay. In

1958, the dictation test was dropped because you now had an Immigration Department with officers who would select. They were instructed to accept only people who were 75 percent European in appearance and considered able to integrate into our society. They used to joke they had a sort of colour chart under the desk. How on earth they ever made the decision that someone was 75 percent European in appearance is beyond me and probably beyond most of them. There was a lot of discretion given in those days to immigration selection officers in choosing migrants. If there was any uncertain case, like in the case of Southern Europeans, the immigration officer would refer the man to a medical officer who would examine him without his trousers on. If he had a white bottom and the rest of him was suntanned, he was obviously just a Southern European labourer, but if he was dark all over he wasn't accepted 'for his own good', because he wouldn't enjoy being in Australia where he'd be discriminated against because of his colour.

Q: Would it have been the case then that before that they basically had to be 100 percent European in the immigration officers' eyes to be selected? Does it imply that 75 percent is actually a dilution of the previous policy in that sense?

AMJ: Yes. I think often they would try and rely on documentation to see what the birthplace of [the migrant's] parents were, but they realised they couldn't rely on documentation. These sort of racial attitudes actually flowed over to Southern Europeans. Immigration selection officers were part of the Australian community and we were a pretty racist sort of society then. The most desirable migrant was the British migrant and if we couldn't have a British migrant, we went to Northern Europe. We really liked Dutch people and we really liked Germans, despite the fact that they were on the wrong side in the war, because they were white. As you got further down Europe, they became less and less desirable. This dates from the 1920s. Before 1921, the American government would accept anyone from the huddled masses but they became very alarmed at the number of Jews and Southern Europeans who were coming into America. They decided that they didn't want these people. So then the Australian government got pretty alarmed because they thought if the American government wasn't going to accept Jews and Southern Europeans, they would all flood into Australia. Progressively, we introduced something called a landing permit, which until 1930 only applied to selected people — Jews, Italians, Greeks. In 1930, they decided to require a landing permit for all aliens [non-British people]. It was actually quite racist too, because it applied to Maltese and Cypriots who were British subjects also but just a bit darker in colour.

Landing permits were an early version of our visas. British people could come into Australia until 1973 without a visa at all, whereas from 1930, all aliens had to have a visa. That was used to limit the number of Southern Europeans arriving. In 1952, the Department of Immigration started to get a bit alarmed at the proportion of Southern European [migrants]. These were Catholics, not English speaking, not very well educated and often from a pretty poor background. The Secretary of the Department of Immigration issued an edict to its officers to restrict the sort of people who could sponsor Southern Europeans. A lot of Southern Europeans came in as sponsored migrants.

From that time, Southern Europeans could only be sponsored by immediate relatives. But we didn't want to appear to be discriminating against Southern Europeans, so immigration officials were given a message to allow a larger group of sponsors for Northern Europeans but to be stricter with the Southern Europeans. That was a way of cutting down on the numbers of Southern Europeans. Assisted migration treaties, with various countries, also affected the balance. Only about seventeen percent of Italians and thirty-three percent of Greeks came as assisted migrants whereas something like eighty-six percent of British and seventy-six percent of Germans came as assisted migrants. They got their passages paid; they could access assisted accommodation and advice on how to get a job. There were a lot of perks in being an assisted migrant that migrants

who payed their own way didn't have. They didn't know about the English language services that were available to them. That was subtle racism, even after the war, in our selection policies.

Q: The British migrant was never treated the same as the non-British migrant in terms of our selection processes and in terms of the requirements we made of them. Can you talk a bit about the differences between the British and the non-British migrant in terms of the responsibilities that they were given?

AMJ: In 1949, we got Australian citizenship, which implies a special status: you can come and go in the country, you can vote in elections. British migrants who came into Australia after 1944 were British subjects but they had the status of Australian citizens. Until the 80s, British migrants could automatically vote and had all the rights and responsibilities of Australian citizens. This was withdrawn from migrants who entered after 1983, as late as that. They could be conscripted, they could access all our social welfare benefits, including age, invalid and widowed pensions, without time qualifications, and they were eligible for public housing. They didn't have any obligation to work. They paid ten pounds for adults and five pounds for children of fourteen to eighteen years, and the only requirement was they should stay in Australia for two years. If they left before that time, they would have to pay the full cost of the immigration. They had a very privileged position.

Very few British migrants actually took out Australian citizenship because they didn't need to. British migrants didn't need visas. Accommodation provided for non-British migrants after the war, in old army camps like Bonegilla, was considered not suitable for British migrants. One of the reasons why British migrants were outnumbered by alien migrants until about 1951 was that the Commonwealth decided that they couldn't put British migrants in the awful old Nissen huts available, they had to build special accommodation for them. For a while in the 50s, the British migrants resisted having any alien families coming into their specially built Commonwealth accommodation, which was managed by a special non-government body called the Migrant Hostels Association.

Q: The idea of citizenship became focused in the 40s but before that various ideas of citizenship excluded and included people. Can you talk a little bit about those?

AMJ: We were always regarded as British subjects, and in 1949, all British subjects that had been in Australia since 1944 automatically became Australian citizens. Aboriginal people had been determined to be British subjects in 1923 and they automatically became Australian citizens in 1949 like everybody else. All other British subjects in Australia became Australian citizens. The position of Aboriginal Australian citizens is a very interesting one because it shows that citizenship is not just a stamp on your passport. It's not just saying that you're Australian, as opposed to German or British, French or whatever, it involves a status, a collection of rights and responsibilities awarded to citizens and not to non-citizens.

British non-citizens had all the rights and responsibilities of Australian citizens, without actually being Australian citizens. Aborigines were Australian citizens with none of the rights and responsibilities that went with it. They were denied the social welfare benefits that came with citizenship. Their right to vote in the Commonwealth was tied to their right to vote in the states, and most states, until 1964, didn't grant Aborigines a right to vote in state elections. Hence, they were automatically excluded from the right to vote in the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth was given the responsibility for the welfare of all Australians, except those of the Aboriginal race.

This phrase — ‘except those of the Aboriginal race’ — was removed as a result of a referendum in 1967. That’s a very key thing, for the first time Aborigines were the responsibility of the Commonwealth, not just the responsibility of the state. State legislation in relation to Aborigines was uniformly dreary and disgraceful and denied them any rights as citizens. They didn’t even have human rights like the right to movement — they couldn’t move from one place to another without permission. As we’ve seen from the *Bringing Them Home* report, they didn’t have the right to care for and take responsibility for their own children. I think the history of Aboriginal people shows the importance of looking at citizenship as rights — full participation in the Australian community — and not just as a status.

Q: What do you think is the legacy on Australia of the migration program and what impact did it have?

AMJ: People often think of migration as changing migrants, but I could see very clearly that it radically changed Australia in ways that we didn’t anticipate. I think the most important thing is that it changed us, within 30 years, from a country that saw itself as culturally and ethnically British to one which was beginning in 1973 to define itself as a multicultural society. In coping with the cultural diversity of migrants — the linguistic, ethnic and racial diversity — we were confronted with the actual diversity of our own society that we had successfully ignored. The ideal Australian was a man, an ex-serviceman: the ANZAC soldier was the image of our national identity. Women were marginalised. We couldn’t exclude Aborigines through the dictation test because they were already here, but they were not white, so we excluded them through our legislation and our constitution. People with a disability were just not seen.

We wanted migrants to settle in Australia and become part of our economy and society, and this confronted us with the fact that a lot of our laws and regulations were based on the assumption that we were white, Anglo-Celtic and, preferably, males. There was an immense series of legislative and administrative changes over 30 years because we were forced to confront the diversity of migrants, and we realised that we had a diverse society that had to be encompassed and recognised in this multicultural society. Post-war migration was not only an economic miracle, it was a miracle in transforming our imagined community of Australians. We now conceive ourselves in a very different way and recognise the true diversity of our society. We weren’t expecting that.

Q: There were a number of mechanisms that were used to inculcate and encourage the idea of tolerance in Australia, and we talked about the Good Neighbour Movement, but film was another one of those. Can you describe the way tolerance was encouraged by official propaganda?

AMJ: The Immigration Department recognised that it was terribly important to have the host community accept migrants into their everyday life. By setting up the Good Neighbour Movement they provided a venue through which communities, not only in cities but also in country towns, could be educated to see the value of migrants to the community and to accept them into their society and the economy of their town. The department, through producing pamphlets and literature, stressed the idea that migrants are good for Australia and you must be nice to migrants, a fairly simple message. It also did this through producing films like *Mike and Stefani*. Most Australians had no conception of the sort of life that Europeans, particularly refugees, had experienced. To give them some insight into the individual’s experience, they showed these films. Through the structure set up by the Good Neighbour Movement and using the settlement section of the Department of Immigration, they got an opportunity to do this. It was probably unique in migrant-receiving countries to place such an emphasis on facilitating the settlement of migrants and educating the population to accept them.

Q: Were they propaganda films?

AMJ: Yes, but propaganda in a good sense. Propaganda can be used to poison peoples' minds and to narrow their vision but I think this sort of propaganda was valuable propaganda, helping Australians appreciate the background of people that they knew very little or nothing about. It encouraged them to be welcoming, friendly, and to get over initial problems caused particularly by language. The English language training that was provided free and unrestricted to all non-English migrants was particularly valuable and the Good Neighbour Movement helped Australians to help migrants to speak English too.