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'Jewish Culture is Inseparable From the Struggle Against Reaction': Forging an Australian Jewish Antifascist Culture in the 1940s

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Abstract

In the immediate postwar period Jewish communities worldwide sought to draw political lessons from the events of the Holocaust, the rise of fascism and the Second World War. A distinctive popular Jewish left antifascist politics developed as a way of memorialising the Holocaust, struggling against antisemitism and developing anti-racist and anti-assimilationist Jewish cultures. This article looks at the trilingual magazine *Jewish Youth*, published in Melbourne in the 1940s in English, Yiddish and Hebrew, as a prism through which to examine Jewish antifascist culture in Australia. *Jewish Youth* featured an oppositional political stance against antisemitism and fascism, tied often to Holocaust memorialisation; a conscious political and cultural minoritarianism and resistance to assimilation; and a certain fluctuating multilingualism, tied to its transnational situatedness and plurality of audiences.

Keywords

Australia – antifascism – antisemitism – Jews – minor culture – *Jewish Youth* (1946–1947)

Shortly after the death of Pinchas Goldhar in January 1947, there was an outpouring of editorials published in his honour in the Melbourne magazine *Jewish*

Youth. At this time Goldhar was the most famous and influential Yiddish writer in Australia. Attributing the formation of the magazine to Goldhar's inspiration,¹ these editorials emphasised Goldhar's cultural-political significance, describing him as someone who: 'well understood that the further development of Jewish culture is inseparable from the struggle against reaction, which has again begun to rear its head against our people in this country ... His life and death will be an inspiration to the increasing number of Jewish young people who wish to play their part in defence of their culture, and who realise that this is an inseparable part of the struggle against those who seek to undermine our very existence.'²

This is a neat summation of the project of *Jewish Youth* itself; a trilingual magazine published in Melbourne in English, Yiddish, and Hebrew from 1946 to 1947.³ This quote illustrates the ideology of Jewish antifascism that was popular within Australian Jewish communities through the 1940s and found organisational expression through groups such as the Kadimah Youth Organisation (KYO) that published *Jewish Youth*. Jewish Australian antifascists saw culture, especially in the forms of painting and writing, as vital in forging a proud Jewish consciousness that could fight against the threats of fascism and antisemitism. As the editorial indicates, this was a serious issue in Australia where in the three or four year period following the war, there were regular antisemitic attacks on Jewish immigrants by the popular press and powerful lobby groups such as the Returned and Services League (RSL) – a conservative social and political organisation representing Australian returned soldiers.⁴ In this period, antisemitism was, as put by W.D. Rubinstein, 'arguably the most

1 'In Memory of Pinchas Goldhar,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 7–8 (1947).

2 'Comment: Pinchas Goldhar,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 9 (1947). As noted by Pam Maclean, Goldhar was closely associated with the left. Pam Maclean, 'The Convergence of Cultural Worlds—Pinchas Goldhar,' in *Jews in the Sixth Continent*, ed. W.D. Rubinstein (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 133.

3 According to Lou Jedwab, the magazine folded after its ninth issue due to a lack of funds. Lou Jedwab, 'The Kadimah Youth Organisation in Melbourne: Reminiscences 1942–53,' *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 12, no. 1 (1993): 182.

4 Suzanne Rutland, 'Postwar Anti-Jewish Refugee Hysteria: A Case of Racial or Religious Bigotry?' *Journal of Australian Studies* 27, no. 77 (2003): 69–79; Klaus Neumann, *Across the Seas: Australia's Response to Refugees: A History* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2015), 86–96. Jewish antifascist activist, Walter Lippmann, writing in the *Sydney Jewish News* suggested that the Immigration Minister's 1947 cessation of the family reunion scheme (which had been bringing Jewish refugees to Australia) demonstrated 'the extent to which racial and religious prejudices have survived the military defeat of fascism.' Cited in Suzanne Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia* (Rose Bay: Brandl & Schlesinger 1997), 236.

extreme and far-reaching in Australian history'.⁵ In this article, I highlight how *Jewish Youth* expressed Jewish antifascist cultural politics as a response to both Australian and international circumstances.

Building on scholarship that has focused on other aspects of Jewish anti-fascism in Australia, particularly the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, this article argues that the KYO and *Jewish Youth* are central to understanding the intellectual and cultural history of Jewish antifascism in Australia.⁶ This article focuses on the intersection between transnational and local cultural politics within *Jewish Youth*.⁷ Its central argument is that Australian Jewish antifascist cultural practice, as exemplified in *Jewish Youth*, was envisioned as challenging and remaking both Australian and international cultures through an ambitious program of antifascist social critique and cultural production. This program was a crucial extension of transnational Jewish antifascist political movements that analysed antisemitism and fascism as emanating from international structures of oppression and domination.

In order to understand Australian Jewish antifascist culture in this period, we must first understand the context for the emergence of *Jewish Youth* in Australia as well as the cultural-political significance of the multilingualism, and multiple audiences, of the magazine. This overall context enables a discussion of how *Jewish Youth's* analysis of the Jewish plight as intimately connected to wider social issues, situating it in a left-wing milieu that took a radical stance on both national and international cultural and political questions. This textual

5 William D. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia: A Thematic History: Volume 2, 1945 to the Present* (Port Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia, 1991), 388.

6 While the KYO has been neglected in the existing historiography David Rechter's 1986 master's thesis is a notable exception, see David Rechter, 'Beyond the Pale: Jewish Communism in Melbourne' (University of Melbourne, 1986). Lou Jedwab has also written a very useful participants account, see Jedwab, 'The Kadimah Youth Organisation in Melbourne.' Other scholarship includes work by Phillip Mendes including inter alia, 'Jews, Nazis and Communists Down Under,' *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 119 (2002): 73–92; 'The Cold War, McCarthyism, the Melbourne Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, and Australian Jewry 1948–1953,' *Journal of Australian Studies* 24 (2000): 196–206; 'Constructions of Judeo-Communism and the Unravelling of the Melbourne Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, 1949–1950,' *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 20, no. 1 (2010): 110–122; 'The "Declining" Years of the Melbourne Jewish Council,' *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 17, no. 3 (2004): 375–388; 'The Enemy Is on the Right: Re-Evaluating the Formative Ideology and Political Strategy of the Melbourne Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, 1942–1947,' *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 14, no. 2 (2008): 285–292; 'Jewish Communism in Australia,' in *A Vanished Ideology*, ed. Matthew B. Hoffman and Henry F. Srebnik (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2016).

7 For a discussion of the transnational emergence of a Jewish antifascist cultural politics, across the Soviet Union, the US, the UK and Australia see Max Kaiser, "A New and Modern

analysis is then linked to a visual analysis of painter Yosl Bergner's work, whose paintings illustrate the anti-racist internationalist and particularly Australian character of Australian Jewish antifascist culture. These historical, textual, and visual analyses are all tied to an analysis of the Australian Jewish antifascist cultural project as a 'minor culture', which exceeds a Jewish or Australian national framing.

Jewish Youth in the Australian Context

Jewish Youth was a product of, what Suzanne Rutland and W.D. Rubinstein term, a 'revolution' in Jewish communal affairs in the early 1940s, precipitated by a sharp increase in Jewish immigration to Australia. According to census figures, the Jewish population in Australia more than doubled in the years between 1933 and 1961; rising from 23,553, with a majority being Anglo-Jews, to 59,343. This was largely the result of German and Austrian refugees arriving in the late 1930s and Holocaust survivors arriving from Eastern Europe in the late 1940s and the 1950s.⁸ The Holocaust, and the challenges thought to be facing Jews as a whole from an intensified international antisemitism, sparked the rapid emergence of intra-Jewish political solidarity, and the widespread acceptance of Jewish identity as transcending religion.⁹

Driven largely by the Jewish left and related progressive forces, Jewish communal and representative institutions expanded and flourished in the 1940s.¹⁰ Hence Suzanne Rutland's assertion that the influx of newcomers 'radically transformed every aspect of Jewish life in Australia.'¹¹ Along with the revolution in communal institutions went a change in the way the Jewish press operated. The 1940s saw a flowering of dozens of periodicals and magazines in English and Yiddish, including *Jewish Youth*, that engaged in a common conversation about the politics and plight of Jewish people in Australia and internationally.¹²

Golden Age of Jewish Culture": Shaping the Cultural Politics of Transnational Jewish Antifascism,' *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 17, no. 3 (2018): 287–303.

8 P.Y. Medding, *From Assimilation to Group Survival: A Political and Sociological Study of an Australian Jewish Community* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1968), 18–19; Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, 256. It is notable that census questionnaires in Australia have only ever defined Jewishness as a matter of religious identification.

9 Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, 324–327; W.D. Rubinstein, 'The Revolution of 1942–1944,' *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 11, no. 1 (1990): 142–153.

10 Rubinstein, 'The Revolution of 1942–1944,' 151.

11 Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, 256.

12 Ibid., 212. Marianne Dacy, *Periodical Publications from the Australian Jewish Community: A Union List*, fifth ed. (Sydney: University of Sydney, Archive of Australian Judaica, 2007).

Jewish Youth, which underrepresented women writers compared to other contemporary left-wing cultural institutions, involved key male Jewish left cultural figures.¹³ Judah Waten and Yossel Birstein were on the editorial board as well as writing for the publication, whilst items were regularly published by Walter Kaufmann, Herz Bergner, Pinchas Goldhar, and Yosl Bergner. Waten was soon to become a very famous author in Australia through the publication of his collection of short stories, *Alien Son* (1952).¹⁴ Birstein was a prominent Yiddish poet in Australia, who would go on to be a famous short story writer in Israel.¹⁵ Kaufmann's *Voices in the Storm* (1953) – a partly autobiographical, social historical novel chronicling the Nazis rise to power in Germany – was one of the first books published by the Australasian Book Society.¹⁶ Herz Bergner's 1946 novel *Between Sky and Sea*, translated from the Yiddish by Waten, won the Australian Society of Literature's Gold Medal for Book of the Year in 1948.¹⁷ Pinchas Goldhar's works of this period, many published posthumously, were also central to a new Australian Jewish cultural expression.¹⁸ The painter Yosl Bergner brought a notable visual element to *Jewish Youth*, and it is in his paintings and drawings – both in his wider oeuvre and in those reproduced in the magazine – that we can see most vividly the development of the anti-colonial, anti-racist threads of Jewish antifascist culture. To best understand how these images would have resonated with *Jewish Youth's* readers, we must first understand the cultural milieu and conditions in which these writers and artists were brought together in *Jewish Youth*.

- 13 This reflected the structural sexism of organisations such as the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism and the KYO. Though the KYO was relatively more egalitarian, with the leadership group consisting of 'six men and four women'. Rechter, 'Beyond the Pale,' 90.
- 14 David Carter, *A Career in Writing: Judah Waten and the Cultural Politics of a Literary Career* (Toowoomba: Association for the Study of Australian Literature, 1997).
- 15 Boris Sandler, 'Yiddish Writers Monologues: Yosl Birshteyn,' (Forverts, 2017), available at Youtube.com, August 24, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSPbGC8xhs>, accessed October 28, 2020; Shachar Pinsker, "'That Yiddish Has Spoken to Me": Yiddish in Israeli Literature,' *Poetics Today* 35, no. 3 (2014): 325–356.
- 16 Kaufmann moved back to East Germany where he had a successful writing career. See, Alexandra Ludewig, 'Walter Kaufmann: Walking the Tightrope,' in *Australian Literature in the German Democratic Republic: Reading through the Iron Curtain*, ed. Nicole Moore and Christina Spittel (Anthem Press: London, 2016).
- 17 It was produced via a collective translation process, involving Herz Bergner, his nephew Yosl Bergner, Goldhar and Waten, see Yvonne Fein, '1: A Retrospective: A Morning with Judah Waten,' *Melbourne Chronicle* 57, no. 1 (1988). Herz Bergner was the brother of Melekh Ravitch, a key figure in the world of Warsaw Yiddish literature, while Yosl Bergner was Ravitch's son, see Rebecca Margolis, 'Remaining Alive in Silence? Melekh Ravitch as Yiddish Catalyst: Montreal, 1941–1954,' *East European Jewish Affairs* 46, no. 2 (2016): 192–209; Clive Sinclair, 'The Kimberley Fantasy,' *Wasafiri* 24, no. 1 (2009): 33–43.
- 18 Maclean, 'The Convergence of Cultural Worlds.'

Lou Jedwab, a former leader of the group, outlines that the KYO in the mid to late 1940s was a relatively large organisation of hundreds of Jewish youth ranging from ten to thirty years old. Only a minority of the group were actively committed to only one particular Jewish political ideology. In general, KYO members were interested in Zionism, Yiddishism and Jewish antifascism as proud Jewish movements that answered urgent political and existential questions for the Jewish people. The KYO was the centre of a vibrant social and cultural world involving theatre, social events, classes, talks and debates. They regularly had hundreds of people attending events.¹⁹ As Jedwab notes, the most prominent faction within the KYO, which was consistently elected as its leadership, were the Jewish antifascists who aligned themselves with the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) and saw the Soviet Union as a progressive beacon.²⁰ Although the KYO was a distinct group with a different focus, its membership had a large overlap with the youth section of the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism, an organisation with similar Jewish antifascist, pro-Soviet Union politics.²¹ This was reflected in the editorial positions taken by *Jewish Youth*, however, this did not mean the enforcement of one dogmatic perspective.

Multiple Languages, Multiple Audiences

The most obvious sign of *Jewish Youth's* cultural and political pluralism was in the trilingual form of the magazine itself. The importance of this trilingualism was spelled out in the first issue: 'we will present without prejudice the work of all Jewish writers and thinkers in whatever country they live and whatever their language.'²² However, this multilingualism was to an extent in tension with a strong Yiddishist cultural emphasis in the magazine. The magazine featured numerous exhortations to read the Yiddish sections and the KYO formed Yiddish reading groups to encourage the learning of Yiddish. In the opening editorial Yiddish was deemed to be necessary to Jewish culture in Australia:

The Australian Jewish boy or girl who lacks a knowledge of Yiddish, the living language of millions of Jews throughout the world, the language of

19 Jedwab, 'The Kadimah Youth Organisation in Melbourne.'

20 Ibid.

21 Rechter, 'Beyond the Pale,' 95–97.

22 'Comment by the Editors,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 1 (1946). For a discussion of Jewish antifascist multilingualism internationally see Kaiser, "A New and Modern Golden Age of Jewish Culture".

the Polish Jewish people who were massacred by Hitler, and the language of the Soviet and American Jewry, is to an extent barred from full access to the soul and life of his people. And in general, a lack of knowledge of Hebrew cuts one off from a fuller view of the life of the Jewish people in Palestine. But the Australian Jewish youth who speak neither of these languages must not be lost to our people. The literatures of both of these languages are so rich and extensive that many examples are to be found in English translations. A great deal is always lost in translation, but these examples of our heritage provide a starting point for our English-speaking young people. It is only through a knowledge of our culture that we can learn seriously what it means to be a Jew.²³

Despite this stated Yiddishism, the magazine functioned to promote a new multilingual Jewish culture in Australia as part of a transnational cultural project.

My analysis here focuses on the English language section due to the vast majority of *Jewish Youth's* original content being published in English.²⁴ While the Hebrew section certainly should not be entirely discounted from an analysis of *Jewish Youth*, it was the smallest, and likely least read section of the magazine.²⁵ The only significant original pieces written for the section was an article praising *Jewish Youth's* trilingual nature by Semitic studies professor at the University of Melbourne, Morris David Goldman and later a short tribute to Pinchas Goldhar by H. Rubinstein.²⁶ The Yiddish section was more vibrant, larger, and contained original pieces by Yossel Birstein and Pinchas Goldhar, as well as poetry and prose from contemporary overseas Yiddish writers such as Der Nister and David Bergelson, both members of the Soviet Union's Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAFK), as well as older canonical writers such as Sholem Aleichem (Sholem Rabinovich).

The English section was privileged despite the trilingual nature of the publication. It contained the editorials, political articles, and letters. It featured

23 'Comment by the Editors,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 1 (1946).

24 Articles were normally published in only one of the three languages rather than appearing in multiple languages.

25 Modern Hebrew was not widely learned or understood in Australian Jewish communities before 1948, see Pinchas Goldhar, 'Jewish Antisemitism,' *Unity: A Magazine of Jewish Affairs* 1, no. 2 (1948). The Yiddish readership was much larger, see Margaret Taft and Andrew Markus, *A Second Chance: The Making of Yiddish Melbourne* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2018).

26 Morris David Goldman, 'Our Future is in Our Hands,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 1 (1946); H. Rubinstein, 'My Debt to Pinchas Goldhar,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 7–8 (1947).

multiple translations from Yiddish and Hebrew writers such as I.L. Peretz, and Sholem Aleichem as well as contemporary Yiddish writers such as David Bergelson and Sholem Asch. Whereas within a Yiddishist imagination Yiddish was a Jewish lingua franca, the situation of Jews in postwar Australia meant in practice this role was increasingly assigned to English, not least because of the interest in Jewish culture and politics from Jews who did not come from Yiddish-speaking backgrounds.

One indication of this was the KYO's approach to new arrivals. *Jewish Youth* urged their readers to help settle new Jewish migrants and teach them English.²⁷ There was an acceptance of the idea of a majority English-speaking Jewish community in Australia. This was reflected in the KYO's cultural activities. The enthusiasm for Yiddish culture encouraged by *Jewish Youth*, rather than competing in a zero-sum game with other languages, produced a flow of enthusiasm for Jewish cultural expression in English. A *Jewish Youth* editorial noted, for example, that the success of the KYO Yiddish dramatic group at a 1946 concert led to 'people . . . clamouring for an English group', a wish which was shortly fulfilled.²⁸ *Jewish Youth* considered English an additional and co-existing means of Australian and transnational cultural dialogue with Jews as well as non-Jews. For instance, multiple poems were published by the Canadian Jewish poet Abraham M. Klein. His poetry on themes of the horrors of war and fascism were introduced in issue two with a quote declaring that 'the Jewries of English speech have at last found . . . a poet of their own'.²⁹

Jewish Youth played a role as a self-conscious cultural arbiter, featuring in the English section articles which made clear its multilingual and transnational cultural project. 'Jewish contributions to art in Australia', for example, published in the first issue of *Jewish Youth*, outlined the multiple audiences of 'those who are writing in Yiddish on specifically Jewish themes, and others who write in the English language on themes Jewish and otherwise', and

27 'In the News,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 5–6 (1946). Another reason for the prominence of the English section is one that draws our attention to the power relations inherent in language use. Issues three and four of the magazine were issued only in English. Although the government's assimilationist rhetoric was largely bluster, they did enforce a prohibition on the publication of foreign language magazines or newspapers without express permission. This led to a temporary period of forced monolingualism for *Jewish Youth*. Notably Vic O'Connor acted as the legal representative of Jewish Youth in this matter, see National Archives of Australia: A6122, 153 REFERENCE COPY, 'Kadimah (Jewish Youth Organisation in Victoria),' (1946–1953). On the government's assimilationist program see Andrew Markus and Margaret Taft, 'Postwar Immigration and Assimilation: A Reconceptualisation,' *Australian Historical Studies* 46, no. 2 (2015): 234–251.

28 Alex Rosenberg, 'From the President of the KYO,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 5–6 (1946).

29 Abraham M. Klein, 'Ballad of the Days of the Messiah,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 2 (1946).

noted that the case was similar for Jewish painters who 'are making a definite contribution to Jewish and Australian culture'.³⁰ The article made specific mention of Goldhar and Herz Bergner, suggesting that their 'fame has spread far beyond Australia, and their stories have won acclaim in the Jewish press throughout the world'.³¹ The article went on to detail the successes of Goldhar, Herz Bergner, and Birstein (all writers for *Jewish Youth*), publishing to acclaim in English translation in Australia as well as in the international Yiddish press.

In the article 'Bergner, Jewish Painter: An Appreciation', which was featured in the same issue and reflected a similar orientation, artist Vic O'Connor discussed Yosl Bergner's work within the context of the fight against fascism.³² O'Connor framed Bergner as an important Jewish antifascist artist responding to the Holocaust. He underlined the link between the production of a new Jewish culture in Australia and the international nature of the Jewish struggle against fascism, noting that: 'as cultural magazines begin to arrive from overseas, particularly from the Soviet Union, and from America, it can be seen that artists all over the world have been moved by the same idea . . . This is very good, for it shows that there is a growing group of artists who will add another chapter to Jewish culture, and will help to ensure that the suffering of the last decade shall never again come to their people or any other people.'³³

Jewish Youth's Yiddish to English translations also reflected this multilingual Jewish internationalism that validated Jewish culture practiced in 'whatever country they live and whatever their language'. The opening editorial suggested that English translations were merely an ersatz stand in for a full appreciation of Jewish culture. In practice, however, the original translations published by *Jewish Youth* were clearly impressive cultural works in themselves, functioning to bring famous Yiddish works to an English-speaking audience, both Jewish and non-Jewish, but also to contribute to the world of Jewish literature as a whole, which was characterised by translations between multiple languages.³⁴

30 M.R., 'Jewish Contributions to Art in Australia,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 1 (1946).

31 Ibid.

32 V.G. O'Connor, 'Bergner, Jewish Painter: An Appreciation,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 1 (1946). O'Connor was a non-Jewish artist. As the section below outlines, the KYO and Jewish Youth had a number of non-Jewish connections, however the vast majority of *Jewish Youth's* writers were Jewish.

33 Ibid.

34 For an historical overview of Jewish literature as world literature, see Lital Levy and Allison Schachter, 'Jewish Literature/World Literature: Between the Local and the Transnational,' *PMLA* 130, no. 1 (2015): 92–109. For an overview of the postwar Yiddish literary world, see Jan Schwarz, *Survivors and Exiles: Yiddish Culture after the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015).

One of the most striking examples of the artful nature of these translations are Margaret Birstein's translations of two short stories by the famous Soviet Yiddish writer and JAFC figure David Bergelson.³⁵ The major translation work produced by *Jewish Youth* was a heart stopping story of two young Jewish children during the Holocaust, written by Sholem Asch. The story 'It is Commanded We Live' was 'translated for the first time into English from the "Morning Freiheit" by Margaret Birstein and H. Ross' and took up most of the English section of issues seven and eight. The translation was obviously a major undertaking, of which the editors of *Jewish Youth* were very proud, touting its forthcoming publication in prior issues, indicating that it was an important cultural achievement in itself rather than merely an inferior substitute for the real thing.³⁶

While *Jewish Youth* certainly had an international outlook, it also focused on Australia and was sometimes hyperlocal, containing Melbourne Jewish news and sometimes gossip or in-jokes related to the KYO.³⁷ In this sense it functioned as a method of community-making on multiple levels. In issue number four, for instance, the editorial expressed a wish to feature more content on 'day to day issues that confront our youth in Australia . . . we believe that a cultural magazine cannot be a living force unless it is able to link the fruits of culture with everyday matters – matters that concern us, right here in Melbourne, in Australia.'³⁸ In other words the magazine was not envisioned as a vehicle of transmission of 'Jewish culture' in Yiddish, Hebrew and in translation, to young people who lacked it. The aim was for the magazine to act as a forum for the ideas and creative expression of Jewish young people in Australia to be publicised, encouraged and debated, and for this to be in dialogue with the ideas and culture of past and present Jews internationally. Rather than simply re-publishing Jewish literature from overseas, the magazine itself became a central organ for the creation of a new Jewish culture in Australia, formed in dialogue with the international Jewish world. Jewish culture was not an imposition from elsewhere but something to be generated in local contexts as part of a transnational, multilingual cultural-political project.

35 Margaret Birstein was born Margaret Waisberg. She left Frankfurt after Kristallnacht and learnt Yiddish with Yosl Birstein who she married when she was 18 in Melbourne; '[s]he was with him for the rest of his life, and translated almost all of his work into English'; see Andrew Firestone, 'Yossel Birstein's Melbourne Years,' *The Burnstein Project*, 2008, http://www.yosselbirstein.org/pdf/about/YBs_Melbourne_Years.pdf, accessed October 28, 2020.

36 'Comment by the Editors,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 4 (1946).

37 For example, see Ida Ginter, 'K.Y.O. News,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 2 (1946); 'In the News,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 3 (1946).

38 'Comment by the Editors,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 4 (1946).

Left and International(ist) Connections

The issues referred to as ‘confront[ing] our youth in Australia’ were above all political, connected to the need to fight war, fascism and antisemitism. These political concerns were mediated through strong associations with the non-Jewish Australian left. An article on ‘Anti-Semitism in the Australian Press’, for example, decried the daily antisemitic press attacks on Jewish refugees that blamed them for housing shortages and high prices.³⁹ The author, ‘M.R.’ suggested that antisemitism was taking hold ‘throughout the whole Empire’ as Jews in DP camps and in Palestine, were being continually maligned. ‘M.R.’ suggested that ‘reaction’ – ‘news-papers and the interests they represent’ – aimed to repress progressive working class movements and believed that ‘if they can divert attention to the Jews, their plans will succeed.’ The only answer to this was for, ‘Jewish youth’ to ‘play an important part in the struggle against anti-Semitism’ by forming ‘stronger bonds with the progressive youth and their organisations in Australia.’⁴⁰

The KYO was keyed into discussions of colonialism and racism on an international and national level. For instance, an editorial in issue 4 suggested that ‘[o]ne [talk] which will be remembered for a long time was Alan Marshall’s informal talk on his sojourn in the north of Australia.’ This trip was the basis for his 1948 book *Ourselves Writ Strange*, an account of Marshall’s encounters with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and Queensland.⁴¹ While the book was certainly flawed, it did represent a rare attempt by a non-anthropologist to write an anti-racist account of Aboriginal communities that was critical of government policy and written for a general audience.⁴² We can postulate that Marshall’s talk to the KYO ran along similar lines. While the KYO and *Jewish Youth* did not, at this stage, have a fully developed analysis of colonialism in Australia, in the years to come connections with people such as Marshall would serve as an important link between Jewish antifascists and Aboriginal activists.⁴³

As well as politics and international affairs, the KYO was involved in discussions around Australian arts and literature. One of the numerous talks given by Australian left-wing writers to the KYO was a talk by Alan Marshall and Frank Dalby Davison on the new publication *Twenty Great Australian Stories*

39 See Rutland, ‘Postwar Anti-Jewish Refugee Hysteria.’

40 M.R., ‘Anti-Semitism in the Australian Press,’ *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 3 (1946). See also ‘Gullett and Antisemitism,’ *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 9 (1947).

41 Alan Marshall, *Ourselves Writ Strange* (Melbourne: FW Cheshire, 1948).

42 For a fairly scathing contemporary review, see Ronald M. Berndt, ‘Review of Ourselves Writ Strange by Alan Marshall,’ *Oceania* 19, no. 3 (1949): 302–304.

43 In 1951, the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism became affiliated to the Council for Aboriginal Rights and sent a delegate to meetings regularly. The Council for

(1946), a collection edited by Waten and O'Connor.⁴⁴ As Lou Jedwab outlines, this was just one of the many talks given to the KYO in the period 1945–1948. His list includes a wide variety of Jewish speakers – from Norman Rothfield of the Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism to Bundist Sender Burstin to Zionist Aaron Patkin – and also features non-Jewish cultural luminaries such as Nina Christesen who addressed the KYO on ‘Russian and Soviet Literature’, Noel Counihan who spoke on ‘Realism in Art’, and other well-known figures associated with the CPA such as Kath Bacon who spoke on ‘Conditions in S.E. Asia’.⁴⁵

The breadth of topics attended to by the KYO and *Jewish Youth* provoked criticism from conservative Jewish quarters who preferred that they kept to strictly ‘Jewish topics’.⁴⁶ In reply *Jewish Youth* decried elements of the current leadership of the Jewish community as ‘smitten by the bug of complacency’ and suggested that ‘there is more than a suspicion that they belong to that strata of society which possesses more than its fair share of worldly goods’.⁴⁷ In the ninth issue of *Jewish Youth*, Margaret Birstein offered a passionate defence of the KYO’s approach, suggesting that keeping only to ‘Jewish topics’: ‘betrays a lack of understanding of even the Jewish question. If we were to foster this attitude amongst our members, we would soon degenerate into a chauvinistic

Aboriginal Rights was formed following a major public protest meeting co-sponsored by Canon Farnham Maynard, Doug Nicholls and Alan Marshall. See Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (Crowns Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 132–136; ‘Jewish Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism Executive Committee Minutes, 14th March 1951, 25th July 1951,’ University of Melbourne Archives, Norman Rothfield Collection, 2002.0014, Box 1. This was one site of many where Jewish antifascists had the opportunity to become acquainted with Aboriginal activists through left connections. The large civil society peace congresses and campaigns around peace, and civil and human rights including the fight against the Communist Party Dissolution Bill were also occasions of participation from both the Jewish Council and Aboriginal activist groups. E.g. ‘19 Illawarra Delegates Attend Peace Congress,’ *South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus*, May 4 1950.

44 ‘From the President of KYO,’ *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 2 (1946).

45 Jedwab, ‘Kadimah Youth Organisation in Melbourne,’ 183.

46 For a description of the different factions of Australian Jewish politics at this time see Kaiser, Max. ‘Zionism, Assimilationism and Antifascism: Divergent International Jewish Pathways in Three Post-War Australian Jewish Magazines,’ in *The Transnational Voices of Australia’s Migrant and Minority Press in a Global Context*, ed. Catherine Dewhirst and Richard Scully (Palgrave, forthcoming 2020). It is possible that Birstein was also referring to the Jewish Labour Bund in Melbourne who in the years following, allied with the right-wing revisionist Zionists to attack the KYO for activity they considered too political such as ‘a symposium on conscription and a talk on aborigines’. ‘Kadimah Meeting Votes in Turbulent Atmosphere,’ *Australian Jewish News*, 31 August 1951.

47 ‘Comment by the Editors,’ *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 1 (1946).

sect and end up in a dead end. We Jews can least afford to shut ourselves in water-tight compartments, ignoring the outside world, for, to-day, more than at any other time in our history, we are so much dependent upon the general flow of world events.'⁴⁸

Thus, political and cultural questions for Jews were understood as necessarily imbricated with wider social and political questions, particularly as they pertained to racial oppression, nationalism, war and colonialism. This comes further into focus when we look at the KYO's association with other left-wing groups. The KYO had a close relationship with the Eureka Youth League, a youth organisation affiliated with the CPA. Harry Stein, reporting back from the Eureka Youth League conference for *Jewish Youth*, in a typical left formulation of the time, suggested that youth needed to struggle for world peace and against nuclear bombs, and to 'battle hard against the remnants of fascism and those forces who would once again plunge the world into war'. He argued that 'to work for peace, it is necessary to eradicate fascism in such countries as Spain and Greece and help to develop democratic regimes there. Also to withdraw foreign troops now preventing the people of Palestine, Indonesia, Iceland, Egypt, India and many other countries from running their own affairs.'⁴⁹ The threats of fascism and the struggles for postwar decolonisation were often drawn together as such in Jewish antifascist discourse.⁵⁰

African American struggles also influenced the Australian Jewish left's attitudes towards issues of racial oppression in this period.⁵¹ One of the more remarkable reviews in *Jewish Youth* was a feature book review by Yossel Birstein of *Lay My Burden Down* (1945), a recently published collection of oral histories of slavery in the US, 'told by thousands of ex-slaves themselves'.⁵² This review was followed by the reprinting of selected excerpts from the book.

48 Margaret Birstein, 'The K.Y.O. Open Forum,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 9 (1947).

49 Harry Stein, 'A Youth Conference,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 5–6 (1946).

50 For one example see 'Maccabeus, Despair and Hope,' *Unity: A Magazine of Jewish Affairs* 3, no. 4 (1951).

51 See for instance Ruth Faerber, 'Move up Can'tyer,' *Unity: A Magazine of Jewish Affairs* 1, no. 2 (1948); Paul Robeson, 'Robeson,' *Unity: A Magazine of Jewish Affairs* 2, no. 4 (1949); George Berger, 'Books in the Fighting Line against Discrimination,' *Unity: A Magazine of Jewish Affairs* 1, no. 2 (1948). This was in line with the enormous impact of African American struggles on both the Jewish left in the US but also on communist approaches to racial oppression and imperialism internationally. For example, see Carl Vedro, 'The Menace of White Chauvinism,' *Jewish Life* 4, no. 8 (1950). See also Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (Columbia University Press, 2002), 19–44; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 103–121.

52 Jossel Birstein, 'Our Book Review "Lay My Burden Down"', *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 4 (1946).

Lay My Burden Down resonated with the shared necessity for Black Americans and Jews to collect, record and invent new ways of representing and invoking their experiences of suffering and oppression. Birstein's review here was contemporaneous with the transnational circulation of Holocaust survivor writing.⁵³ Botkin, the editor of the collection, was an American folklorist from a Jewish background, and the volume of testimonies published represented only a small portion of the 'tens of thousands of reminiscences and stories' that were collected by 'hundreds of writers and journalists' as part of the New Deal Federal Writers Project in the 1930s.⁵⁴ Birstein's review thus serves as a link between the African American anti-racist threads of US Popular Front culture and postwar Australian Jewish antifascism.⁵⁵

While there was no explicit comparison drawn between Jewish experience and Black American experience in the review article, solidarity was certainly invoked. As Birstein noted: 'Although the coloured people of America are still struggling for freedom and equality, the abolition of slavery represented a great step forward in the history of mankind, an important step towards a more humane world.' The black struggle was thus one of universal importance, part of a global fight for 'freedom and equality' for all oppressed people. As we will see, the idea that separate struggles against racial oppression were in fact profoundly connected, was also key to Yosl Bergner's Jewish antifascist cultural practice.

Yosl Bergner, Aboriginal Resistance and Australian Jewish Antifascism

Jewish Youth published many works by writers and artists associated with the Jewish antifascist cultural movement. However, notwithstanding Judah

53 David Cesarani, 'Challenging the "Myth of Silence": Postwar Responses to the Destruction of European Jewry,' in *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence*, ed. David Cesarani and Eric J Sundquist (London and New York: Routledge, 2012). For an Australian example see *Bleter Fun Pain Un Umkum* (Document on the History of Jewish Extermination) published by the YIVO Committee, Melbourne, 1949.

54 Birstein, 'Our Book Review "Lay My Burden Down"'. According to Jerrold Hirsch '[a]s a Popular Front intellectual, Botkin made it clear that he found repulsive the connection between the search for folk purity, the hatred of the allegedly impure, and the growth of fascism.' Jerrold Hirsch, 'Rediscovering America: The FWP Legacy and Challenge,' *Community Literacy Journal* 77, no. 1 (2012): 21.

55 See Bill V. Mullen, *Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics, 1935–46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

Waten, the most well-known figure to emerge from this Melbourne Jewish left milieu was Yosl Bergner. In addition to his notoriety, his paintings also serve as a clear demonstration of the particularly Australian nature of Australian Jewish antifascist cultural politics. After Bergner's arrival in Melbourne from Warsaw in 1937 he became involved in the Kadimah Younger Set (the precursor to the KYO) and became close with Pinchas Goldhar and Judah Waten.⁵⁶ Waten introduced Bergner to his close friend and comrade Noel Counihan and into a wider left wing social circle.⁵⁷ Bergner had a Bundist and Yiddishist schooling but was most politically active as an antifascist during the war and in the immediate postwar years in Australia.⁵⁸

He joined the CPA in the early forties and was actively engaged, along with Vic O'Connor and Noel Counihan, in trying to take the Contemporary Art Society (CAS), a large, recently formed organisation of dozens of artists, in a more radical direction.⁵⁹ O'Connor, Counihan and Bergner positioned themselves as the social realist faction, dedicated to an art which would in Counihan's terms, 'give an objective picture of contemporary Australian society in its movement and development' by revealing 'the social relations involved in our most intimate experience'.⁶⁰ In other words, the technique they developed was to take their own experiences and paint scenes of great meaning and emotion but to relate these images to an objective social world; rather than mythic or psychological symbols or other types of 'subjectivism' that were then popular in the modernist art produced by others in the CAS. Perhaps the first manifestation of this new movement was an exhibition held as a fundraiser for the Australian and Soviet Red Cross at the Melbourne Jewish cultural centre, the Kadimah, in 1941. Bergner, Counihan and O'Connor featured along with others such as

56 Yosl Bergner, *What I Meant to Say: Stories and Travels as Told to Ruth Bondy*, trans. Valerie Arnon (Tel Aviv: Hed Arzi Book Pub, 1997), 93–95; Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* (Melbourne: Allen Lane 1981), 80.

57 Bergner was instrumental in inspiring Counihan to begin painting. Bernard Smith, *Noel Counihan: Artist and Revolutionary* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1993), 163–164. For the close relationship between Counihan and Waten see *ibid.*, 97. For descriptions of their left-wing social milieu see Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 27; Smith, *Noel Counihan*, 104–106; Yosl Bergner, *What I Meant to Say*, 96.

58 Bergner, *What I Meant to Say*, 34; Frank Klepner, *Yosl Bergner: Art as a Meeting of Cultures* (Macmillan Education AU, 2004), 52.

59 For an account of the creative and political partnership between O'Connor, Bergner and Counihan see Smith, *Noel Counihan*, 162–200.

60 *Ibid.*, 189–190. For a wider discussion of the relationship between Counihan, Bergner and O'Connor's project, with Soviet socialist realism and CPA cultural policy see Smith, *Noel Counihan*, 186–197.

James Wigley and Nutter Buzzacott.⁶¹ This was followed by the CAS's famous 'Anti-Fascist Exhibition', driven by the social realist faction, in 1942.⁶²

Bergner started painting Aboriginal people as early as 1937, and after the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939 he began painting increasingly anguished and upsetting images depicting the plight of Polish Jews.⁶³ Aboriginal people became more of a focus after his joining of the Army Labour Company in late 1941 and being sent to the small town of Tocumwal to load and unload trains on the Victoria, New South Wales border.⁶⁴ Richard Haese notes that in the CAS's 'Anti-Fascist Exhibition' in 1942, Bergner featured two paintings each from his concurrent two series on persecution of Polish Jewry and Aboriginal people. The vast majority of Bergner's paintings between 1942–1946 were concerned with painting Jews in Poland and Aboriginal people in Australia.⁶⁵

These paintings did not emerge in a political vacuum, the background was the substantial changes in the situation of Aboriginal people during the war and in the immediate postwar years. As discussed by Deborah Wilson, Australia's war efforts meant large numbers of Aboriginal workers were employed in the north-west of Australia, receiving proper wages for the first time, while a similar situation occurred in the Northern Territory for Aboriginal people employed by the military. This experience of relative equality with white workers was a major spur for a wave of organising across pastoral stations.⁶⁶ One of the main conduits for the national publicisation and support of these campaigns were activists involved in the CPA, and associated triade unions and civil society groups.⁶⁷

The War also occasioned a rapid increase in Melbourne's Aboriginal population, as people came to take up employment in munitions factories and other war industries.⁶⁸ As highlighted by Richard Broome, the war years saw

61 Haese calls this 'the first indication of a coherent left-wing movement'. Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 148; Smith, *Noel Counihan*, 171.

62 Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 126–129. This was a large exhibition including art from the entire CAS rather than a particularly social realist exhibition.

63 Bergner, *What I Meant to Say*, 112–113.

64 Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 84.

65 Ibid., 150.

66 Deborah Wilson, *Different White People: Radical Activism for Aboriginal Rights 1946–1972* (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia Publishing, 2015), 39–42.

67 Douglas Jordan, 'Conflict in the Unions: The Communist Party of Australia, Politics and the Trade Union Movement, 1945–1960' (PhD diss., Victoria University, 2011), 246–306; Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 132–136.

68 Richard Broome, *Fighting Hard: The Victorian Aborigines Advancement League* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2015), 13.

the emergence of a new pan-Aboriginal movement in Melbourne, led by Doug and Gladys Nicholls.⁶⁹ Bergner would have had occasion to encounter this movement through his membership of the CPA and involvement with associated left cultural organisations.⁷⁰ The plight of Aboriginal people resonated with Bergner and he became the first Australian settler painter to paint urban Aboriginal people.

Up until Bergner the dominant modes of portraying Aboriginal people in Australian settler art were variously, according to Frank Klepner (following Bernard Smith): as assimilated with nature; as 'noble savages'; as the 'treacherous brute'; and as a 'doomed race'.⁷¹ Although many of the Aboriginal people that Bergner painted were based on people living at the edge of the small country town of Tocumwal, all his paintings in this series, bar one, are of urban Aboriginal people.⁷² Bergner was rejecting the depiction of Aboriginal people as a 'dying race' incompatible with modernity, imagery typical of settler colonialism.⁷³ Bergner's Aboriginal people are complex modern subjects, displaced and dispossessed in a world of urban poverty inseparable from the wider social relations of Australia. Unlike earlier depictions of Aboriginal people as

69 Ibid., 15–18. Doug Nicholls and Eric and Bill Onus revived the Australian Aborigines' League (AAL) shortly after the War. Nicholls, the Onus brothers and the AAL cooperated with CPA activists and unions on a number of projects and campaigns in this era. See Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 194; Broome, *Fighting Hard*, 29–31; Jordan, 'Conflict in the Unions,' 125–134; Angela O'Brien, 'The Road Not Taken: Political and Performance Ideologies at Melbourne New Theatre 1935–1960' (PhD diss., Monash University, 1989), 142.

70 See Albert Tucker, 'Backdrop Designed by Bert and Yossell [Yosl] Bergner, 1939, for Melb New Theater Where's That Bomb?' [photograph], Collection of Contact Prints, Depicting Aspects of the Artist's Life and the Artistic Community in Melbourne, 1930–1945, State Library of Victoria, available at <http://handle.slv.vic.gov.au/10381/140148>, accessed October 28, 2020.

71 Klepner, *Yosl Bergner*, 95–96; Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific: A Study in the History of Art and Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960).

72 Aboriginal people were barred from Tocumwal and lived in humpies at the edge of the town. Klepner, *Yosl Bergner*, 93. The exceptional painting was 'Aborigines Chained to a Tree' (1946). As Klepner reports this image was based on a response to newspaper reports from Western Australia from earlier that year and was exhibited in the 'Three Realist Artists' exhibition at the Myer art gallery in Melbourne in July 1946 along with photographs of Aboriginal prisoners. Ibid., 100. Yosl Birstein, Bergner's close friend, also modeled for many of Bergner's paintings of Aboriginal people while they shared a tent for four years in Tocumwal. See, Nissim Aloni and Rodi Bineth-Perry, *Yosl Bergner: Paintings 1938–1980* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1981), 206.

73 See Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1997); Liz Conor, *Skin Deep: Settler Impressions of Aboriginal Women* (Crawley, WA.: University of Western Australia Publishing, 2016).

somehow outside of, or counterposed to Australian society, in Bergner's paintings their situation was featured as Australian society's hidden and central truth. There was a continuity in these paintings with Bergner's earliest work featuring street sweepers and rat catchers in Melbourne. These paintings and drawings aimed to unveil the reality of capitalism and urban poverty.⁷⁴ Bergner's achievement here was to realise a portrayal of Aboriginal people cast within a wider social critique. His understanding of the racist character of the oppression of Aboriginal people is highlighted by the dual nature of his painting project, being also focused on the plight of Polish Jewry. It is perhaps best summarised by Counihan in a 1943 letter to Bernard Smith: '[f]or the first time these abused people are being painted by a painter with an understanding of their sufferings and exploitation. It has taken a Polish Jew to interpret the aborigine [sic] realistically without patronage or sentimentality.'⁷⁵

The aforementioned piece on Yosl Bergner by Vic O'Connor in *Jewish Youth* was a review of a solo exhibition of Bergner's in 1946 at the Kadimah. We can surmise that this was something of a retrospective covering the past five years or so of Bergner's paintings. O'Connor made clear that not only did Bergner's paintings express empathy and admiration for those suffering under fascism in Poland they also served as a riposte to the scepticism of those in the West who questioned the extent of Nazi atrocities.⁷⁶ O'Connor noted that the order in which the paintings were exhibited did not reflect the order in which they were painted, instead they reflected the chronology of reality, progressing from paintings of old Warsaw to the Nazi occupation, to the 'terrible pictures of the final days'.⁷⁷

O'Connor suggested that the story is 'not complete yet' because the story of resistance still needed to be portrayed, in particular the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Although not included in this exhibition Bergner did complete two paintings along these lines, in 'The Dead Nazi' and 'Ghetto Uprising'. Haese suggests that these paintings 'add little to what Bergner had already said' but O'Connor's review gives us pause to assess the importance of these paintings for Bergner in terms of the larger project of *Jewish Youth* and Jewish antifascism.⁷⁸ O'Connor also notes that the exhibition included his 'aboriginal paintings', where Bergner had 'painted their story with the same sympathy which he

74 Smith, *Noel Counihan*, 168. See reproductions in Aloni and Bineth-Perry, *Yosl Bergner*, 28 and 208.

75 Quoted in Smith, *Noel Counihan*, 182.

76 See Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination* (Oxford UK & Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1994).

77 O'Connor, 'Bergner, Jewish Painter.'

78 Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 170.

painted that of his own people'. The frequency with which Bergner exhibited these two sets of paintings together indicates the strong connections Bergner sought to indicate between the plight of the two people and how his Jewish antifascism as situated in Australia was inextricably bound up in a politics of solidarity with Aboriginal people.⁷⁹

Bergner's work featured in a number of issues of *Jewish Youth*. One is a whimsical sketch concerning the fictional town of Chelm.⁸⁰ The others are illustration to stories by I.L. Peretz.⁸¹ These sorts of folksy illustrations caused Bergner to fall afoul of the CPA in the years following World War II, because of his move away from social realism.⁸² The Peretz illustrations, along with the illustrations Bergner developed for other famous Yiddish stories gave expression to the frustrated writer in Bergner, who given his immersion in Yiddish culture had a strongly literary imagination.⁸³ Given Bergner's brief to paint and draw for a Jewish culture magazine with a strong emphasis on Yiddish culture, it is not surprising that he produced these sorts of images.

These deviations from social realism seem not to have been an issue for the leftist editors of *Jewish Youth*. We can surmise that they did not see such a stark contradiction between the ideology informing the Peretz illustrations, and Bergner's social realist works. Neither was Bergner's work in this context read as necessarily proto-Zionist or proto-Nationalist. As outlined above, the Jewish left cultural project, often with a strong Yiddish component, saw the development of proud Jewish cultural projects as part and parcel of a progressive anti-fascist politics.⁸⁴ Bergner always emphasised his strong Jewish identity in his dealings with Australia's creative world. George Luke, a fellow artist and close

79 William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines League famously expressed their solidarity with the Jews of Germany through a protest to the German consul in Melbourne following Kristallnacht in November 1938. Hilary L. Rubinstein provides a good historical contextualisation of this protest, even if her political motivations are somewhat dubious. Hilary L. Rubinstein, 'William Cooper and Kristallnacht: Setting the Record Straight,' *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 24, no. 1 (2018).

80 J. Bergner, 'Beginning of Chelm,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 3 (1946).

81 See J. Bergner, 'The Bass Viol,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 5–6 (1946); J. Bergner, 'The Magician,' *Jewish Youth* 1, no. 4 (1946).

82 Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 170. Yosl Bergner's account of him being told off by Jack Blake of the CPA is in Smith, *Noel Counihan*, 523–524.

83 Klepner, *Yosl Bergner*, 119–120.

84 Neither was this sort of non-social realist work deemed heretical by the wider Jewish antifascist left. Klepner notes the influence on Bergner of Marc Chagall in the postwar more whimsical work and the large influence of Chaim Soutine on his more painterly expressionist work. Soutine and Chagall both featured in another prominent Australian Jewish antifascist magazine, *Unity*. Klepner, *Yosl Bergner*, 41, 120; George Berger, 'Soutine: Painter of Suffering,'

friend at the time, reminisced that one of Bergner's first statements upon their meeting and indeed a very frequent one was 'I am a Jew'.⁸⁵

Bergner's work in this period should thus be situated in a Jewish antifascist framing which encompassed an emphasis on the development of a new proud Jewish culture, a celebration of the greatness and continuing relevance of the classics of Yiddish culture, an antifascist understanding of and memorialisation of the Holocaust, and a wider critical anti-racist consciousness that connected antisemitism to broader, and international social forces. As discussed above with reference to African American struggles, Bergner's work is evidence of the impact of Aboriginal activism and mobilisation on the way the Australian left envisioned the key social struggles of the period. Bergner's work was not strictly Jewish nor strictly Australian, it formed part of an antifascist, anti-racist struggle imagined on a transnational scale. His paintings developed from both a proud Jewish consciousness and a collective social realist project of radical social critique.

A Jewish Antifascist Minor Culture

I suggest we can understand both Bergner's paintings and *Jewish Youth* with reference to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's famous definition of a 'minor literature', which they argue has three characteristics: the 'deterritorialization of the language, the connection of the individual and the political', and 'the collective arrangement of utterance'.⁸⁶ Deterritorialisation is achieved through linguistic experimentation in accentuating the characteristics of the minor (ethnic, subcultural or otherwise) usage of a majority language.⁸⁷ The connection of the individual to the political is a product of the fact that a minor

Unity: A Magazine of Jewish Affairs 1, no. 3 (1948); H. Brezniak, 'Marc Chagall: The Painter of "Casrilivke"', *Unity: A Magazine of Jewish Affairs* 1, no. 2 (1949). For more on *Unity* see Kaiser, "A New and Modern Golden Age of Jewish Culture"; Suzanne Rutland, 'Creating Intellectual and Cultural Challenges: The Bridge,' in *Feast and Fasts: Festschrift in Honour of Alan David Crown*, ed. Marianne Dacy, Jennifer Dowling, and Suzanne Faigan (Sydney: Mandelbaum, 2005). See also Nate Zusman, "'Unity" a Magazine of Jewish Affairs,' *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* 9, no. 5 (1983): 341–355.

85 Klepner, *Yosl Bergner*, 51.

86 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 'What is a Minor Literature?' *Mississippi Review* 11, no. 3 (1983): 18.

87 See Chana Kronfeld's critique of Deleuze and Guattari's definition of a minor literature as necessarily utilising a major language. Chana Kronfeld, 'Beyond Deleuze and Guattari: Hebrew and Yiddish Modernism in the Age of Privileged Difference,' in *Jews and Other*

literature, unlike a major literature, is not concerned with producing psychological portraits of the plight of individuals while pretending to universality. Instead in a minor literature each individual character portrayed cannot be separated from their social milieu, meaning their plight is always a venue for the discussion of wider social and communal problems and politics.

The 'collective arrangement of utterance' similarly refers to the fact that given the paucity of great talents or major figures, works are produced in a self-consciously collective process. Unlike the writer in a major literature, who can pretend to the individualised figure of the great artist, the minor writer is intimately aware of their own social and political production. Seeking to consciously engage this 'collective arrangement of utterance', the minor writer often appeals to a collectivity not yet properly invented and in doing so helps to produce that collectivity: 'to force the means for another consciousness and another sensibility'.⁸⁸ David Carter notes that although in Waten's work there is some sense of linguistic experimentation in how he renders Yiddish dialogue in English, it is certainly subtle.⁸⁹ For the most part this is common across all of the literature surveyed in this article, which in hewing towards realism was not particularly concerned with linguistic experimentation.⁹⁰ Despite this I suggest that there are strong reasons to consider *Jewish Youth* and its milieu in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's formulation.

My own version of this formulation suggests that there are three related factors that make the antifascist Jewish literature and painting moulded in *Jewish Youth* a minor literature, or better, a minor culture. It was a self-consciously collective project with an oppositional political stance, most obviously against antisemitism, racism and fascism; a political and cultural minoritarianism and resistance to assimilation via a proud Jewish consciousness; and a multilingualism, tied to the transnational nature of its project and plurality of audiences. These three factors mean that this culture cannot be read simply as ethnic culture, giving voice to and representing a particular set of 'Jewish experiences' in Australia. Instead, following Deleuze and Guattari, I suggest this literature and painting had a disassembling effect on what was taken to be majority or hegemonic culture; it was aimed not at simply diversifying the status quo or carving out a place within it, but at challenging and remaking Australian and

Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies, ed. Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

88 Deleuze and Guattari, 'What is a Minor Literature?' 17.

89 Carter, *A Career in Writing*, 67–71.

90 Though as Carter suggests Australian social realism was in fact highly formally inventive and innovative. David Carter, *Always Almost Modern: Australian Print Cultures and Modernity* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2013), 169–208.

international cultures through an ambitious program of antifascist social critique and cultural production allied with political movements.

It cannot be viewed simply as a contribution to Australian culture, it was not aimed at a purely Australian audience nor was it only expressed in English. Neither did it aim to contribute to the development of a strictly Jewish national culture, it did not have a set language in which to do this and it did not aim at only a Jewish audience. Jewish antifascist cultural expression cannot be understood without reference to the antifascist political project of constructing a Jewish political subjectivity in alliance with non-Jewish progressive forces to combat fascism and racial oppression more broadly. *Jewish Youth*, in this rendering, should be seen as the venue for the development of a type of minor culture.

Conclusion

When looked at through the prism of *Jewish Youth* the work of artists like Yosl Bergner and writers like Waten, Birstein, Goldhar and Herz Bergner, comes into focus not simply as 'Jewish Australian', but as forming part of a 'minor' cultural project that acted as an imaginative support to movements counterposed to the status quo. This minor culture involved a particular mode of Holocaust memorialisation that critically assessed antisemitism and fascism as emerging from international issues of racial oppression, war and colonialism. As such, *Jewish Youth* was influenced by a number of contemporaneous progressive cultural and ideological forces. In an Australian context this meant an engagement with the wider world of the Australian left cultural and political sphere. It also meant that Australian Jewish antifascism more often than not reflected an anti-racist internationalist imagination. This imagination was open to being pushed and pulled by anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles; as evidenced by Yosl Bergner's paintings, this included Aboriginal resistance movements.

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