Australians take pride in the welcome they gave to refugee masses after World War II and our post-war immigration policy of "populate or perish" that brought hundreds of thousands of European migrants here.

Yet the story of Harry Triguboff's unsuccessful struggle for his parents to receive permission to migrate to Australia revealed in the Summer 2017 AFR Magazine is a disturbing reminder that racism and bigotry were just as much a part of the migration debate after the Holocaust as they are today in relation to Muslim refugees.

Both before and after the war, strong anti-Jewish hysteria prevented many family members from the chance of a new life in Australia. And, for those who wished to come to Australia before the war, that refusal could mean a death sentence.

Australia's refugee quota for German Jews, announced at the Evian Conference in France in July 1938, was 5000 per year over a three-year period, based on family and economic sponsorship. Indeed, Australia's delegate, Colonel Thomas White, said at Evian: "Australia does not have a racial problem and is not desirous of importing one."

Given that Australia House received 50,000 applications from people wanting to escape from Europe in 1938, there was only a one in 10 chance of success. My parents and older brother won that lottery and arrived in Sydney in January 1939. Other members of my family who were not so lucky perished in the Holocaust.

The anti-Jewish hysteria about Jewish migration from China that limited Jewish migration - as seen in Harry Triguboff's story - also applied to migration from Europe. In the media, the halls of parliament, the RSL and other organisations the same negative messages were conveyed about Jews. They would lower living standards in Australia by introducing sweat labour and cut-price competition, they would charge extortionate prices for "key money" for apartments, they would cluster together, they only cared about themselves, and they were terrorists or criminals.

A cartoon from The Bulletin published in December 1946 showed Minister for Immigration Arthur Calwell as the "Pied Piper" playing the Jews' harp to entice in the rat-like stereotypical Jew - fat, bearded, hook nosed and foreign - as the "imports", whilst the locals, the white Australians, were being forced out as "exports". This was just one of many anti-Jewish cartoons published in The Bulletin, Smith's Weekly and Truth. Extreme feelings were also expressed in daubing and damage to property, particularly in areas of Jewish concentrations in Melbourne and Sydney.

In 1946, Liberal Henry ("Jo") Gullett, stated in federal parliament: "We are not compelled to accept the unwanted of the world at the dictate of the United Nations or anyone else. Neither should Australia be a dumping ground for people whom Europe itself, in the course of 2000 years, has not been able to absorb."

With the strength of this anti-Jewish hysteria, it is very understandable that Harry Triguboff's parents were excluded - and they were not the only ones. The Department of Immigration always consulted the Department of Internal Security - from 1949 ASIO - and the slightest possibility of a black stain was enough to keep a would-be migrant out.

In my own family, when Max Freilich, at the time a leading paper manufacturer, applied for the survivors of his wife Sasha's family to migrate to Australia, they were also excluded - ASIO sent a negative report about Freilich, a well-known Zionist leader. As far as ASIO was concerned, all Zionists were Communists and so suspect.

The rejection of the Triguboffs' request, as detailed in the AFR Magazine is not surprising given that Tasman (later Sir) Heyes was secretary of the Immigration Department for much of that time. Heyes was a member of the Melbourne Club - an Australian establishment club that excluded Jews - the "gentleman's antisemitism". He naturally provided full support to Otto Carl Wilhelm Fuhrman, the Consul-General in Shanghai, known for his negative attitudes to Jewish refugee migration who warned that Triguboff's father was a collaborator.

Indeed, Heyes went further than that. After the Jewish migration quota was reduced from 5000 to 3000. A specific ques-
tation "Is/Is not Jewish" was added to the sponsorship form. Australian migration officials tried to catch out anyone who lied about being Jewish, based on family surnames and circumcision (only Jewish men were circumcised at the time). A total of 17,000 Jewish survivors arrived under this sponsored quotas scheme between 1945-1954 – a further 10,000 had arrived from Hungary and Poland by 1961.

As well, when Calwell went to Europe in 1947 to negotiate with the International Refugee Organisation for displaced persons to migrate to Australia, Jews were secretly excluded. Heyes made sure this policy was enforced. In all, 170,000 displaced persons migrated to Australia between 1947 and 1950, with the quota being 100,000 in 1950. This was not a direct migration program, but more a foreign workers' program, based on a two-year work contract, after which the participants could apply to remain in Australia, as almost all did.

But Jews also had to agree to work in remote areas of Australia, and only single Jews were admitted from the DP camps, while by 1949 families were accepted from all the other nationalities. Thus, Jews were asked about their religion and then treated as a separate race.

One Jew who did manage to come out on this program was Nick Gardos, who was single at the time and prepared to work outback – all he wanted was to get as far away from Europe as he could. When I interviewed him in the 1980s, he explained how he managed to get in. He told the Australian selection officer interviewing him that he was a farmer. The officer looked at him in disbelief, because he knew Gardos was Jewish and Jews were not perceived as farmers.

Gardos told me that he had been milking cows and "you know when you milk a cow you get big bunions from the fork and your hands get very, very rough – you could practically grate cheese on them". So, when the officer asked him "Are you a farmer? Show me your hands", he did and quickly got the okay. "It took about five minutes, the whole thing. Five minutes at the most."

Gardos travelled to Australia on the General Taylor, with 1260 displaced persons, of whom only 12 were Jews. This is an example of how Australian migration officers were reluctant to take Jews without a special reason, reflected in the tiny proportion of

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The migration charade

Jews on the ship.

Ironically, given the allegations against Harry Triguboff's father of collaboration with the Japanese, Australia accepted hundreds if not thousands of non-Jewish Nazi collaborators from Eastern Europe with no vetting at all. Indeed, with the start of the Cold War, the Australian selection officials were much more worried about Communists than Nazi collaborators.

Some of the DPs on Gardos ship from the Baltic countries, Yugoslavia and Ukraine had tattoos under their left arms. This was a tell-tale sign that they had been in the Waffen SS, the armed wing of the SS.

Indeed, a Jewish official, Lewis Neikrug, who was working with one of the American Jewish welfare organisations in Paris, helping survivors to leave Europe, claimed that there were more Nazi war criminals and collaborators on the IRO ships to Australia than Jews.

Today we know some of those stories, such as Konrads Kalejs, who was part of the Latvian Arajs Commando, led by Viktors Arajs. This was one of the most notorious killing squads, estimated to have murdered 26,000 Jews, as well as Roma and the mentally ill.

And Kalejs was not the only member of this infamous unit to find a new life in Australia. The same applied to Karlis Ozols, a well-known chess player, who did not change his identity and migrated with the IBO.

Those lucky enough to come to Australia both before and after the war worked hard and built new lives. They contributed to post-war Australia, in terms of business, the arts and the sciences.

There are so many other names – such as Holocaust survivor Frank Lowy. Lowy's father, Hugo, perished in the Holocaust. His mother and other family members migrated to Australia before him, and he joined them in 1952, migrating from Israel.

Or Sir Peter Abeles, another Holocaust survivor who migrated from Hungary. He was knighted in 1991 for his contributions to the Australian transport industry, but also Australian opera because of his love of music.

The question that needs to be asked is, how many more Jewish refugees and survivors could have contributed to Australia if they had not faced the bigotry that Harry
Holocaust survivor Sir Peter Abeles, right, with Bob Hawke in 1972.

Real estate mogul Harry Triguboff’s parents were refused entry into Australia. Left: cartoon from 1946; Sydney Morning Herald, 1946. PHOTOS: FAIRFAX MEDIA

Holocaust survivor Sir Peter Abeles, right, with Bob Hawke in 1972.
Above, Jewish immigrants arrive in Sydney in 1946. Below, author Suzanne D Rutland.

Top: 'Light in the Dark: Melbourne says Welcome' protest this year. Above: Holocaust survivor Frank Lowy.