

## Transnationalism, being and belonging under seven empires: Polish Jewish refugees and the negotiation of survival in World War 2

Professor Andrew Jakubowicz  
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Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October 5 to 6.30 pm,  
Robert Webster Building 327

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While transnational theory has been one of the key tropes in migration studies over the past generation, transnational dynamics are of course much older. Thus it is important to problematise the concepts of nation (the imagining of community) that are too often assumed to be givens in the application of theory. Theories of empire may contribute usefully to unpacking assumptions about nation, and moreover provide a sharpened analytical frame for engaging with traumatic movements of populations. With stark relevance for contemporary challenges to nations that underpin the major movements of populations in the middle east, the process through which a small number of Polish Jews survived the Holocaust reveals why grasping inter-imperial as much as the transnational characteristics of forced global population movements can be theoretical enriching. Inter-imperial conflicts, provocations and collaborations among seven empires (with their aspirations and resources) triggered, accelerated and sustained the movement of about 1000 Polish Jewish escapees from the Nazi and Soviet invasions of Poland in 1939, to their ultimate settlement in Australia and elsewhere in the late 1940s. In the period four of the seven empires essentially disintegrated, while the other three became more powerful. Each of these outcomes was a necessary component in the chain that permitted survival.

Drawing on original research, and refreshed with new material from the Shanghai Municipal Archives, the paper reports work in progress by the author as Japan and China once more in 2015 use the “rescue of the Jews” as part of their contemporary soft power struggle for legitimacy. It links analysis of the global with the local and the personal, attempting to bind together humanities and social sciences modes of explanation, to delineate structural and accidental dimensions of social change, identity and nationality.

All are very welcome to the workshop.

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