

The South African Oral History Project

December 2017

The **South African Oral History Project** is a private project which was initiated by Dr Rose Lerer-Cohen in 2002. It is a private project and it has not been sponsored. She carried out the interviews over a period of time. In 2015 she was assisted by a Telfed PRAS student (Karen Jacobson) who carried out interviews for the project. Additional interviews were done by volunteers Hertzal Katz and Bennie Penzik.

The aim of the Southern African Oral History Project, is to document the testimonies/life stories of South African Jews who have immigrated to Israel.

Rationale:

This project is of genealogical importance, as part of the questionnaire relates to names of the parents, grandparents, great grandparents, siblings and extended family of the interviewee. It also includes the migration patterns of entire families. In addition it is a survey which can reveal how immigrants have acclimatized and adjusted to life in their new country.

This multifaceted project aims to document:

- Immigration to South Africa/ Africa
- Life in South Africa relating to social, political, religious and Zionist aspects
- Motives, influences, experiences and other factors that explain the choice to live in Israel
- Integration into Israeli Society
- Involvement in Israeli Society

Methodology:

The questionnaire was drawn up with the assistance of the staff of the Oral History Department of the Hebrew University.

At the outset of the project Rose carried out the interviews on her own and later was assisted by two volunteers. For a number of years the project was put on hold. During the 2015, academic year, Karen Jacobson a student who

received a bursary from PRAS - TELFED, carried out approximately 35 interviews as part the bursary program.

Each volunteer compiled their own list of interviewees, thus choosing who they wish to interview.

The interviews focused on older immigrants, "famous/well known" SA immigrants and Rose began interviewing the Garin of immigrants who came to Kibbutz Ramat Rachel in Jerusalem. The two volunteers live in the area of Hod Hasharon, also interviewed mainly elderly immigrants in the Tel Aviv Hod Hasharon area, while the student, as a resident of Raanana, has interviewed in the Raanana area

Over the decades South African Jews have come on Aliya for a varying number of reasons ranging from Zionist and religious ideology, opposition to the apartheid regime, incidents in history : Sharpeville, the Soweto riots in 1976, before and after the 1994 elections or crime or a feeling of insecurity in the new South Africa. Since the establishment of the State, South Africans have been instrumental in establishing a number of agricultural and urban settlements. They have been active in the Arts, Government, the Foreign Service, Medicine, Science and Sports. South Africans have contributed to every aspect of Israeli life and community, from volunteerism to entrepreneurship. Immigrants of Southern Africa origin have fallen in both active service and terror attacks.

South African immigration to Israel makes for a unique study:

There are immigrants whose grandparents and parents were born in South Africa. A large number of immigrants were not born in South Africa and immigrated there from Eastern or Western Europe. There are immigrants who immigrated from the Congo or Zimbabwe to South Africa and from there to Israel. A number of immigrants have migrated twice, and sometimes three times in their life time. There are immigrants who are first generation South Africans, born in South Africa, grew up there and then immigrated to Israel.

An additional group of immigrants have also immigrated twice. This immigration results from the mass immigration that left South Africa with the beginning of the riots in South Africa and the fall of apartheid in the 1970's. Many South Africans immigrated to Australia, the US and Europe. The children of these immigrants are now leaving their new adopted land and immigrating to Israel. The majority of immigrants to South Africa are of Lithuanian descent, and there are very few Holocaust survivors.

Regarding the use of the interviews and publishing them. Each interviewee has signed a form agreeing that the interview may be published.

This material can certainly be used by researchers. Use of the material can only be made with the permission of Dr Rose Lerer-Cohen.

(Editor: Telfed is grateful to Dr Rose Lerer-Cohen for making these important oral histories available and an important part of the Telfed History Project).

(Editor : an extensive study of South African immigration to Israel was carried out by Prof. Rivka Raijman of the Ruppin Academy. Between 2008 and 2010 Telfed, the South African Zionist Federation (Israel) assisted the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town and the Ruppin Academic Center's Institute of Immigration and Social Integration, to conduct an in-depth study about the South African community in Israel. The research project explored the various social, economic and cultural aspects of South African Jewish immigration in Israel. It resulted in an extensive book written and edited by Dr Raijman called South African Jews in Israel.)

The book "South African Jews in Israel" can be purchased through Amazon (Click [Here](#)).

To listen to a very interesting interview of Prof. Rebeca Raijman on her book, Click [Here](#).