Chapter 10: Dynamics of the Integration/Multicultural Connection

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The demographic objective of Australia’s post war immigration policy – to achieve numbers equal to one per cent of the population each year – initially gave top priority to persons from the United Kingdom. This was supplemented by immigrants, mainly northern Europeans, under specific programs with countries such as the Netherlands, and also under the IRO (International Refugee Organization). When the pool of so-called displaced persons dried up, the government turned to countries in southern Europe to achieve its policy target. Initial reluctance to give southern Europeans a central place in the immigration program had been based mainly on the view that they would neither ‘assimilate’ nor learn English as readily as northern Europeans. However, by the early 1950s, the government saw value in bringing single male workers from southern Europe to help resolve the high, unfilled demand for unskilled labour in Australia’s manufacturing, extractive and transport industries. The program included Greek males who worked as labourers in those industries and other Greeks nominated by relatives who had settled in Australia prior to World War II.

The personally nominated males generally came from the same villages/towns as their nominators; those sponsored by the government came from many parts of Greece. Their prospects for marriage in Australia were not good: not only was there a dearth of single Greek females of marriageable ages, but, the newcomers were unable to communicate easily with Australian females. Some sponsored fiancées in Greece; others married by proxy girls unknown and unseen, a practice neither readily accepted nor understood by the Australian community. Newspaper images of Greek girls peering over a ship’s rail, photograph in hand

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1 Based on results from a longitudinal study of female Greek emigrants interviewed in Greece prior to their departure for Australia in 1964, and in Australia (and in Greece with those who returned) in 1965, 1976, 1990/91 and 2007/8. Co-researchers for the project were Anna Amera (Athens) and Elsa Demetriou (Melbourne).
of the proxy groom on the Melbourne wharf below, holding a bunch of flowers, were accompanied by editorials criticising the proxy practice as unfair to women and un-Australian.

The government’s response was to introduce a new program under which single Greek females would arrive in Australia unattached and, in due course, hopefully meet and marry a Greek with whom they had fallen in love, not a proxy who they had never met. As in the male worker program, single females aged 17 to 23 years could either be sponsored by the Australian government or nominated by relatives in Australia. The former, living mainly in rural towns and villages, were interviewed on behalf of the Australian government by officials from the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM, now IOM). Pre-selected applicants were then taken to training schools at Kiffisia (Athens) or Thessaloniki where they enrolled in a ten-week course. Although titled ‘Language Training’, the course essentially introduced the women to aspects of modern urban domestic life and provided information on economic and social conditions in Australia. On completing the course, the women were flown to Sydney or Melbourne. Personally nominated applicants were not required to enrol at the training schools. Once their applications had been approved they too were flown to Sydney or Melbourne.

The survey of single Greek female emigrants

In 1964, two years after the program began, the author was on study leave in Geneva, working on a research project with ICEM. His suggestion to ICEM officials that they support a sample survey of workers under both the government-sponsored and personally nominated programs was accepted. Interviews conducted with the women prior to their departure for Australia, and then again up to one year later, were directed not only to establishing whether or not policy objectives had been achieved, but also to obtaining information on the respondents’ socio-economic backgrounds, decision-making processes and expectations of Australia.

Interviews were conducted in Greek by co-researcher Anna Amera with fifty-one government-sponsored women at the Kiffisia and Thessaloniki schools. She also interviewed twenty-eight nominated dependents in their villages/towns prior to their departure for Australia where they were met by their nominators and drawn into a protective family circle where only Greek was spoken, introduced to Greeks known by their nominators and found employment generally in nearby factories.

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Seventy per cent of the government-sponsored women were aged under 20, all were unmarried, 54 per cent had left school before age 12, and 43 per cent were not gainfully employed. About one-half had been born in villages or small towns that they had never left, and a further one-third had grown up in villages but later moved to towns in Greece. Hardship of village life, inadequate spending money, and especially their parents’ inability to provide a dowry large enough to attract a suitable groom, were their main reasons for deciding to emigrate. Many had thought about emigrating since childhood, but until the Australian government’s offer, never had the opportunity to do so. Even so, their decisions to accept the offer took a great deal of courage. Few had ever ventured outside their village hinterland, and since leaving school their time had been divided between shepherding goats and digging in the fields in summer, and helping their mothers with domestic and cottage-industry chores during the winter. As first links in migration chains, they carried a heavy responsibility to succeed. Parents clearly saw the opportunities that their presence in Australia would create for other siblings, especially a brother who would be nominated by the respondent as soon as possible. Many girls realised that the prospects for marriage in Australia were excellent; others had fiancés in the village who they intended to nominate. During their time at the Kifissia/Thessaloniki schools, government-sponsored women formed social sub-groups which were retained in Australia and had a significant influence on their adaptation.

Because hardship of village life, and in particular dearth of income, was the government-sponsored worker’s main reason for emigrating, they were delighted to learn before they left Greece that employment had already been arranged in Australia at a fruit-canning factory at Berri, South Australia. However, their employment, despite ‘unbelievably high wages’, was not a pleasant experience. Itinerant male workers (many were Greek) in the same town harassed them in ways they had never experienced. In their villages, and in the mountains where they shepherded goats, they had been well protected from male harassment by an unwritten code that meted severe punishment on transgressors. Furthermore, at Berri they found it difficult to cope with the pace set by machinery in the canning factory. Most of them left Berri within two weeks to seek the ‘relative protection’ they anticipated would be provided by Greek communities in Melbourne and Sydney.

Retaining the village/community groupings they had established at Kifissia and Thessaloniki, the government-sponsored workers either boarded in inner-city hostels or rented dwellings occupied by other Greeks. When re-interviewed in 1965, all of the thirty respondents were sharing bedrooms, and had saved the equivalent of ‘thirteen weeks pay’. All but three had already sent remittances to Greece; but purchase of consumer durables and vehicles had been negligible. Twenty-three had obtained repetitive-type factory jobs found for them by Greek
neighbours, many of whom worked in the same factories. Employers resolved the workers’ inability to speak English by grouping them into units where only Greek was spoken. However, in many respects they were left to fend for themselves, official services being insufficiently flexible to cope with the unusual group. For example, if a worker sought information from the employment office on an available job, the name and address of a potential employer would be written in English on a piece of paper and so the worker had no idea where to go when she left the office.

Only eighteen of the thirty government-sponsored respondents had enrolled in official evening classes in English language and three of these had withdrawn after four weeks and a further four after two months. Only one stayed the full one-year course. Workers seldom found it necessary to use more than a few words in English. They worked in factories with other Greeks, lived in houses inhabited only by Greeks and socialised almost exclusively with other Greeks who, like themselves, had been in Australia for only a year or two.

The groupings of kinfolk/friends from similar villages and communities in Greece that had been formed at the Kifissia/Thessaloniki schools soon became formalised as associations that provided opportunities to meet single Greek males. While those who had fiancés in their villages saved hard to cover the cost of his airline ticket to Australia, others readily saw that the good prospects for marriage suggested prior to their departure proved to be accurate. Eight of the 30 respondents were already married and a further seven were engaged, including those who had fiancés in Greece. Others found it difficult to deviate from village precepts regarding courtship. Their responses to the attentions of Greek men (not all of whom were interested in marriage) was to move from mixed to solely female companionship. Many respondents told us that their greatest need during the first year in Australia was the companionship of a brother or other close relative who could guide, advise and protect them.

While they anticipated that the established Greek communities in Melbourne and Sydney, organised and led by Greeks who had emigrated to Australia during the inter-war years, would embrace and protect them, this did not occur. Indeed, the only contact many had made with Greeks outside their own associations was during attendance at Orthodox Church services and celebrations. Their associations were, in many respects, minority groups within the wider Greek communities in Melbourne and Sydney.

Second follow-up interviews were conducted in 1976 with both the government-sponsored and personally nominated female workers in Australia, and in Greece with those who had returned. The economic achievements of the Australia-
domiciled respondents were impressive. All but one respondent had married (within two years) a Greek of similar social class and migration vintage, courtship having ‘proceeded in ways and circumstances almost unthinkable at home’\(^5\). Ninety per cent were owner-occupiers of their homes; one half had paid off their mortgages; one half owned or were buying independent businesses; 18 per cent owned second houses; 14 per cent had investments in Greece; and ownership of consumer durables was almost at ‘saturation’. High propensity to save from incomes earned by both partners was the foundation of these achievements. Sixty per cent of respondents still lived in the inner suburbs, although 25 per cent had already moved to the outer suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney\(^6\).

Their English comprehension, described as ‘uniformly poor’, had improved little during the first decade and their social contact with non-Greece-born Australians was confined mainly to workmates, tradesmen and, for those who had purchased shops, customers. There is no doubt that the village/town associations played important roles in their early adaptation. Indeed, Mistilis has observed, regarding Greeks in Sydney, that strong identification with culture, combined with fondness for organisation, enabled Greeks to develop communities no matter how little help they received either from the government of Greece or their adopted country\(^7\). However, by 1976, the importance of village associations for our groups had already declined, many having been disbanded and those still in existence being held together by recollection and sentiment.

Neither the Australian government nor existing established Greek communities had been able to provide adequate services to facilitate the adaptation of respondents in this sample. The Greek community was really too small, and too limited in resources, to meet the cost of a comprehensive adaptation service. At the end of a decade in Australia respondents still retained only desultory contact with the Greek Orthodox Church, attending celebrations such as at Easter and the christening of their children. The Church’s capacity to assist new arrivals had also been reduced by serious political divisions within the organisation\(^8\). Personally nominated respondents had access to the established community through their nominators, but government-sponsored workers’ contact was only occasional. Nor did the Good Neighbour Council, the official body established to assist newcomers ‘assimilate’, have either the resources or expertise (or perhaps the will) to resolve the issues faced by Greek migrants and thousands of others arriving in Australia during the 1970s.

The 1990/91 follow-up interviews revealed that, although respondents and their families still lived in Melbourne or Sydney, they had moved from inner to outer suburbs where they had acquired comfortable homes. As noted above, this mobility was already underway in 1976 when we discovered that one-quarter of respondents had made the move. Lack of formal skills reduced respondents’ opportunities for higher levels of employment, but almost all remained in the workforce until the 1990s, leaving it only for short periods before and after childbirth. Investment in property and in business, initiated during the first decade in Australia, increased significantly after the 1970s. Many families had also acquired properties in Greece, generally located in their home village or a nearby town. While some respondents (and their adult children) deem these properties ‘holiday houses’ which they visit frequently, others spend several years there, retaining, of course, their properties in Australia. At any one time members of the family (including their 40+ year-old children) are accommodated in both the Australian and Greece-owned properties.

For example, a respondent from a village in the Peloponnese acquired a property there after having bought a large home in Mascot, New South Wales. Her husband owns a ready-made clothing business. Plans to sell the Mascot property and return to live in the village house came to nought because their children refused to leave Australia. One son was enrolled in an electrical engineering course at the University of NSW. However, the respondent and her husband return to the village house ‘quite frequently … we take it in turns’. Another respondent and her husband returned to Greece in 1972 intending permanent stay but returned to Australia after a short time, then returned to their Greece property again in 1981. Another respondent, Anna (who lives in Malvern, Victoria and is employed as an office cleaner), and her husband, have also made many visits to Greece, mainly to keep in touch with their ageing parents. Interviews conducted with respondents in 2007/08 also show that others have returned permanently to Greece, including one who returned in 1985 when her husband acquired a machinery shop from savings they had accumulated in Australia where, she said, they had done well. These examples typify the nature and reasons for respondents’ inter-country mobility during the last decade in particular.

**Second generation**

Our second follow-up interviews in 1976 revealed that of the 122 children born to respondents, 72 were already in primary schools. Because they had grown up in homes where only Greek was spoken, and played mainly with other Greek children in the neighbourhood, the eldest child entered primary school knowing little or no English. Eva Isaacs’ study of Greek children in Sydney, conducted about the same time as our second follow-up interviews, concluded that,
The Greek child grows up in Australia in a home environment where parents and relatives are determined to hand on units of traditional behaviour without modification. The world they wish to preserve is the one they knew in Greece. Their social norms developed out of constant interaction between family and community where there were few strangers and everybody knew everybody else.

Inner-city schools in Melbourne and Sydney had been criticised in a government report published in 1975 for not resolving difficulties associated with trying to teach English to classes of high migrant density. The respondents’ first child experienced these difficulties when he/she entered primary classes unable to speak or understand English. Their placement in withdrawal classes where they received special instruction in English eventually facilitated progress in general classes, although parents argued that the withdrawal classes did not entirely overcome their handicap. By the time the second child began primary school he/she had been exposed at home to English spoken by the first child. And many respondents noted that the third child often spoke in English to the older children. The more proficient in English the children became, the further they slipped from parental influence and control. Indeed, parents relied increasingly upon their children to ‘explain’ in situations where only English was spoken.

While it is not surprising that all respondents insisted that their children ‘learn to read and write Greek and speak it properly’, the only medium for achieving this objective was a Greek ethnic school. In 1974 there were 350 Greek ethnic schools in Australia, over 300 of which were associated with the Greek Orthodox Church. Others were run by independent Greek communities and by persons offering private services. Respondents were uniformly critical of the quality of language teaching provided by all these schools. Many argued that Greek should be offered as a second language at primary and secondary levels in government schools. Nor did many of the respondents’ children enjoy ethnic school classes, partly because they encroached on their leisure time and partly because class discipline was severe, corporal punishment being not uncommon.

Our third follow-up interviews conducted in 1990/91 focused on the adaptation and achievements of the respondents’ children. Interviews conducted with 64 children living in Australia (many others had returned to Greece with their parents) showed that 79 per cent of those aged 17 to 24 years had remained at school to Year 12/HSC or its equivalent. Twenty-eight per cent had then

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proceeded to further training through TAFE/Technical School/Apprenticeship, and a surprising 42 per cent went on to universities and Colleges of Advanced Education.

By 1991, 93 per cent of the children had attended ethnic schools, entering at primary school ages. Parental determination that they learn ‘proper Greek’ had not waned over the years, although the children were not so positive about the experience; 43 per cent claiming it was ‘not worth much’. One daughter of a respondent said that she had wanted to learn Greek at an early age, went on to complete HSC level and expressed pride in having done so. ‘It’s my heritage,’ she said, and was critical of the ‘kitchen Greek’ spoken by children in many Greek homes. At the 1990/91 interviews, 48 per cent of children said they still communicated in Greek with their parents. A further 38 per cent communicated in either English or Greek.

Most of the respondents who had lived in the inner suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney during their first decade in Australia had, by 1990/91, moved to the outer suburbs of those cities. This had provided opportunities for the second generation to make new social contacts in schools populated by a higher proportion of Anglo-Australian children than in inner-city schools. However, if their secondary school classes included other Greeks (and the outer suburbs had seen significant ‘new Greek’ populations after the 1980s) there was a ‘natural tendency’, as one child put it, for friendships to be formed between them. One second-generation respondent said that she preferred Greek friends because she could ‘relate to them more … tell them her secrets. We had more in common. We all had strict parents you see, and we operated on the same wave length’.

Regarding their social networks in general (not simply school contacts), almost one-half of those aged 17 to 24 years comprised ‘mostly Greeks’, compared with 33 per cent for those aged 10 to 16 years. This may be partly explained by the latter group beginning schools in the outer suburbs where the proportion of Greek children in schools and in the community was much lower than in the inner suburban schools attended by their older brothers and sisters.

On no issue was discussion more profound than on aspects of ethnic identity. The large majority of second-generation respondents argued that Greek values, ideals and family unity outweighed such Australian inputs as workforce and location. Australia, they argued, did not exert a strong influence as a cultural base. The most satisfying aspect of living in Australia was the ability to still have a Greek way of life and close family relationships.

Ability to communicate in Greek was related closely to their preferences concerning the ethnicity of marriage partners. Forty-eight per cent indicated
that they would definitely prefer to marry a Greek; a further 6 per cent had already done so. There was also consensus that the older they became the more they began to ‘appreciate Greek culture’, whereas when younger they had rejected quite strongly what they described as their parents’ ‘old fashioned views’. Forty-seven per cent of second-generation respondents had already visited Greece, either with their parents when younger or alone or with friends when older. A further 48 per cent were interested in visiting or planning to visit Greece. But while these figures clearly convey an increasing interest in Greek culture, only four respondents said that they may one day settle there.

Although data obtained from interviews with respondents and their children at the fourth follow-up survey in 2007/8 have not yet been analysed and integrated into the longitudinal network, we can report that the majority of second-generation respondents have married persons of Greek ancestry and most of those who were still unmarried expressed the intention of marrying a Greek. The son of a government-sponsored worker spoke for many when he said that his marriage to a Greek woman would facilitate his strongly held intention to pass on Greek language and traditions to his children. And the daughter of another respondent told us that she will ‘insist that their children attend a Greek language school’.

There was also general consensus that it had been their parents’ insistence that they remain at high school that had provided the foundation for their achievements. The son of another government-sponsored respondent, and his brother, had attained university degrees. ‘Our parents,’ he said, ‘had high expectations, especially our getting to university. We know that education was important for them.’

**Integration/multiculturalism**

Integration is an ongoing experience for the migrant. Our research confirms that critical issues were different at each stage of the resettlement process. Socio-cultural adaptation occurs within the changing political and socio-economic background of the receiving country. Although migrants are eligible, indeed encouraged, to become naturalised many have neither done so, nor thereafter participated in political processes. Sestito argued in 1982 that it was political parties that initiated the migrants’ interest in politics rather than the migrants themselves demanding greater participation and benefits. Greeks, however, have tended to become involved in internal (at the expense of Australian) politics, a

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13 The 28 per cent who gave no response were aged 10 to 16 years.
situation which, Sestito claims, changed after the mid-1970s, partly because the non-British communities in Australia were more aware and confident of their political power, and partly because of the encouragement provided by changing government policies concerning adaptation/integration. Jayasuriya\textsuperscript{16} concluded that after the mid-1960s governments supported a milder form of adaptation which signalled greater tolerance of cultural differences and diversity of lifestyles. Then with the election of a Labor government in the early 1970s, migrants were encouraged to cultivate their cultural differences in order to restore their self-esteem. This led quickly to the adoption of the new policy of multiculturalism. It was the sheer magnitude of votes at stake, argues Sestito, that led both parties to bargain with the promise of special benefits. Multiculturalism, he concludes, was the creation of political parties.

Changing government policies regarding integration reflect not only changing attitudes, but also recognition that the nation’s ethnic mix, and the stage reached by each constituent group in the adaptation process, requires new and different approaches. It is well to be reminded of Charles Price’s view that in the long term Australia will be less a multicultural and more a mixed cultural society, one in which people inherit many different cultures. This process will be facilitated by second-generation migrants marrying outside their communities, although such a process had not been adopted by the second-generation Greeks in our study.

Jayasuriya also argues that in its normative-prescriptive usage, multiculturalism is predicated on the existence (or desired existence) of mutual tolerance and respect for cultural differences. Distinction between life-style and life-chances is central to an understanding of the meaning and significance of multiculturalism as a philosophy of migrant resettlement. Life-chances, he declares, revolve around the question of overcoming structural inequalities, and have to do with competition, power and conflict rather than consensus.

The double disadvantage of ethnicity and class deprivation was clearly manifested in the early adaptation of the Greek migrants discussed in this chapter. Even so, the study has revealed that language, community structure and the determination of the migrants themselves, were significant variables in the process of socio-cultural adaptation.

Implication of survey findings for the integration/multicultural process

Selected findings relating to a longitudinal-type survey of Greek women migrants (and their Australia-born children), interviewed on five occasions over a 45 year period, have confirmed and explained the dynamic nature of their integration. The single Greek women were participants in a program adopted by the Australian government to resolve difficulties associated with the gender differential of Greece-born persons in Australia. Many of the government-sponsored women, while attending language-training classes in Greece prior to their departure, formed social groups comprising fellow students from the same village or region. These groups were retained during their early years in the inner suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney. Identified informally as ‘associations’, they were essentially minority groups operating within the wider Greek communities. Their role and influence in the integration process was central during the first decade, but, as the women married and became increasingly involved in activities associated with the wider Greek communities, their role and influence declined.

During June 2008, Michael Clyne suggested to the authors of chapters in this volume that they give consideration to specific aspects of the integration/multicultural process, which, he argued, would not only give some ‘unity’ to the chapters but also provide ‘collective impetus’. The aspects that he suggested be addressed include the extent of marriage within two generations, linguistic indicators of integration and socio-economic mobility. He also encouraged authors to cover, as far as available data made possible, the contribution of second-generation migrants in the integration and multicultural process.

As noted above, a primary objective of the government’s single Greek female program was to balance the gender differential of single adult Greeks in Australia. Within one year of their arrival, eight of the 30 government-sponsored respondents had married an Australia-domiciled Greek or a fiancé from Greece. And within two years all but one respondent had married a Greek of social class and migration vintage similar to themselves.

Inability to communicate in English had greatly restricted their contact with non-Greek Australians, which, of course, largely explains their marriage to Greek men. The 1965 interviews showed that only 18 of the 30 government-sponsored respondents had enrolled in English language classes and all but one had withdrawn from the one-year course within a few months. Their English comprehension remained ‘uniformly poor’ over the survey period and outside their homes they struggled to communicate with Australian workmates, tradesmen and customers.
Regarding their mobility, both socio-economic and geographical: by 1976 they had accumulated substantial assets, mainly because both partners were employed full time and exercised a high propensity to save. By 1991 most of the couples had moved from inner to outer suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney where they acquired comfortable homes. The 2007/2008 interviews also showed that many families had acquired properties in Greece, generally in their home villages or nearby towns. While some of these properties were used as ‘holiday houses’, more typical was their use as ‘second properties’ where they (now aged in their sixties) and their Australia-born children (many in their forties) spent periods of up to two years.

Interviews conducted with the respondents’ children in 1990/91 and 2007/8 indicated that although the first child entered inner-city primary school knowing little or no English, and was placed in a ‘withdrawal class’ where he/she received special instruction in English, younger brothers and sisters entered the same schools with ‘limited English’. Parental insistence that their children ‘learn Greek properly’ led to almost all being enrolled in Greek language schools. Parents also placed strong emphasis on the importance of education despite, but perhaps because of, their own limited education. Almost 80 per cent of the children remained at school to Year 12/HSC. A surprising, but nonetheless encouraging, finding was that 42 per cent of the children aged 17 to 24 years at the 1990/91 interviews, had completed degrees at universities and Colleges of Advanced Education.

A large majority of the children indicated that, for them, Greek ideals, values and family unity outweighed such Australian inputs as workforce and location. The most satisfactory aspect of living in Australia was, in addition to a high living standard, the ability to still have a Greek way of life and close family relationships. When seen in 1990/91, 47 per cent had already visited Greece, and 48 per cent said they would definitely marry a Greek, 6 per cent having already done so. The 2007/8 interviews, yet to be analysed, indicate that a large majority had already married or intend marrying a person of Greek ancestry.\footnote{Appleyard, Amera and Demetriou are presently writing an overview volume on the project’s findings.}