

# ASSIMILATION OR INTEGRATION IN AUSTRALIA OF MANY COLOURS

## I still call Australia Home



**Coming to terms with Assimilation or Integration in Australia of many colours – A point of view.** I have written this article as a result of speaking with Australians whose origins were from another country and had lived most if not all of their lives in *Australia*. Many expressed to me that they still felt some emotional ties to the “old country” and at times were drawn back to their place of origin. Many resolved this matter by forgetting altogether their heritage only to find that it came back to haunt them later in life, and others suffered from an identity crisis even after their long sojourn in Australia and worse still, some fell into depression amongst other related illnesses.

This little article by no means explains how an Australian born overseas from a different culture, colour and religious beliefs feels, even now after all this time; but it does go to ease some of the unresolved questions and feelings one has about their origins. I can say without a doubt that I am an Australian of Hellenic background without having the fear of being ridiculed. As such, I have always maintained that the word integrate is a far better word than assimilate.

Australia has become a nation of many cultures and as a result has been able to weave their threads of cultural diversity into the loom of Australian society. This is a good thing for Australia and for Australians as a whole for we need new blood to revitalise and our nation in becoming a future world power in our neck of the woods without other nations feeling threatened by our existence. The nation in the past 60 years post WW2 has gone from strength to strength and has met every challenge and overcome many barriers with courage, integrity and the resilience of its people. It has fought a number of battles to ensure the freedom of its people and its very existence as fledging nation during its early years.

Australia to achieve its goals needed new blood and manpower to build the nation to where it is today. In addition, Australia opened its doors and welcomed many from diverse and colourful cultural backgrounds and integrated them into jobs crucial to Australia’s well being. In doing so, the new settlers had to overcome their own fears and obstacles and learn the hard way of integrating into a society that was completely alien to them. It was a difficult and emotional time for many of the new comers who had to balance the paradigms of their cultural past with their new environment and try where possible find solutions without losing one’s identity in the new world.

Language was a problem, education, food another, hygiene for some it was something new and for many being accepted in their new environment was sought after. While it was not uncommon to hear of stories where the youth suffered from physical and psychological abuse, the parents also suffered the same during their working life and in later life suffered further when depression set in. During the early years, many new settlers were called derogatory names and ridiculed with the aim of lowering their self esteem and made to feel insecure and second class citizens by those who should have known better.

However, over time the new settlers became entrenched into the Australia society and through sheer hard work, made Australia their new homes, raised their standard of living, enhanced their education, purchased property and were influential in reshaping the Australian landscape. In many cases this was achieved by the melding and welding of two cultures into one without losing one's identity at the expense of one or the other.

Selling the new settlers to the Australian people was no easy task as Arthur Calwell found out when he was bringing in southern Mediterranean Europeans and only won the day by the publicity of blonde, blue eyed, tall of stature and Anglo looking Balts from the Baltic countries? This well coordinated publicity stunt swayed the Australian people and nothing more was said on a great scale. Soon after the Italians, Hellenes (Greeks), Egyptians, Germans, Dutch and Russians arrived on the Shores of Australia by the boatload or later by air.

As the new settlers began to grow and integrate within the Australian society, they soon found that they faced resistance from their Australian hosts whether it was at an institutional level or in their daily lives. To overcome this frenzy of negativity to the new arrivals the word multiculturalism was born to navigate through the muddy waters of political opinion and political aspirations.

Whether it's due to the word "multiculturalism" or not is one of conjecture and the subject of much debate amongst all Australians. From the author's point of view, the word multiculturalism is merely a vehicle upon which it supports new arrivals to this great nation of ours to integrate into its society without the need of fearing abuse and ill treatment like their predecessors post WW 2.

The internet and the introduction of social media have entered all of our lives and as such are here to stay, whether we as individuals like or not. It's a phenomenon that has been sweeping the world crossing many barriers whether they are of a physical, religious, psychological or cultural nature, its overcoming all resistance.

One only has to look at the Middle East and what has happened during the well known "Arab Spring". People are becoming aware of their rights and that life can be better as a result of having access to a store of knowledge that was otherwise hidden from them by their nation's political and religious leaders.

Multiculturalism has had a poor start in Australia as it was not portrayed to the Australian people as a vehicle to becoming Australian, but it was hijacked by those intent on retaining the past without moving forward and developing as a nation. Multiculturalism will soon be overtaken by Australianism or another word that describes an Australian whose origins and culture were external to Australian shores.

Take for example the Hellenes or as the Romans called them the "Greeks". They have integrated well within the Australian society without losing entirely their Hellenic heritage. Although a new Hellenic consciousness is slowly rising amongst the second and third generation of Australians of Hellenic origins, it is no way detrimental to their loyalty or status to the Australian nation or its institutions. The Australian Hellene of today is no different to an Australian who is of a Gaelic, Kelt, (Celtic), and Germanic, Islamic, Baltic, Asian, Oceanic or African background.

They all have the same needs, wants and status as their next door neighbour. The fear of ethnic enclaves is a thing of the past, although it is true that ethnic communities will tend to stick together in suburbs that are considerably more aligned with their cultural origins. However Australia is a vast country and its people are as tolerant as they are resilient in their attitude to new settlers. The average Australian in the street does not care where the new settler comes from as long as they contribute to the well being of Australia and adhere to its institutions and rule of law. There are no longer any barriers for the new settlers, no more doors closed and certainly no closed shops so to speak where an individual feels unwelcome.

The author would like to conclude with the words of a famous Australian whose far sighted words of wisdom still ring true today as they did back then in 1890 prior to Australian becoming a nation. One must keep in mind that at the time of making this speech, Briton was master of the oceans seas so to speak, hence the saying "Britannia rules the waves"

*"Why should not the name of an Australian be equal to that of a Briton? Why should not the name of an Australian sailor be equal to that of a British sailor? Why should not the name of an Australian citizen, be equal to that of the citizen of the proudest country under the sun? All those grand objects would be promoted by a national organisation. But there is something more. Make yourselves a united people; appear before the world as one, and the dream of going "home" would die away. We should create an Australian home. Henry Parkes, Federation Conference, Melbourne, 11 February 1890."*

As an Australian whose origins began some 63 years ago in a little village called Pellana, in Lakonia Greece (Helen of Troy and her husband King Menelaus fame), I have travelled across this vast and beautiful country of ours, have worn the uniform of Australia for some 30 odd years, fortunate to have met so many wonderful people from all walks of life and shaped me into who I am today.

This country of ours that we call Australia is where my four sons (whose parents are of Anglo and Hellenic heritage) will live on, long after I have gone, content in the knowledge that it is their home. I as an Australian of Hellenic background can be forgiven like my predecessors whose origins were of Anglo Saxon background may have emotional and cultural ties to our place of birth but I still call Australia home. **Peter Adamis**