



**Title: *Hellenes in Western Australia:
A century of changing relations,
responses and contribution.***

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Australia was a society that dreaded the “mixing of races” and was obsessed with protecting racial purity. Such sentiments were well expressed by Western Australia’s Premier John Forrest who, in 1897, concluded debate about his state’s Immigration Restriction Bill by saying “we desire to restrict this country, so that it shall not be over-run with races whose sympathies, and manners and customs, are not as ours.”¹ Forrest, like other colonial leaders forging the new Commonwealth of Australia, wanted the nation, and his state, to remain British, Protestant and white; a desire enshrined in the legislation that became known as the White Australia Policy. While this policy was aimed primarily at prohibiting the entry of Asians and non-Europeans to Australia, it also made it difficult for non-British Europeans to enter.

For early 20th century Australia an “olive peril” was almost as threatening as the yellow one. In the coming years, government policy towards Hellenic (Greek) arrivals would fluctuate. Restrictions and quotas would be imposed, only to be disregarded, and then observed stringently.

The fear and contempt held by Anglo-Australians for most Greeks and other southern Europeans intensified as their numbers increased. Verbal and physical abuses were common forms of antagonism. Overseas and Australian born Greeks, pre and post 1945, had to endure a seemingly endless list of derogatory names. Anti-foreign sentiment was prevalent throughout society. Even the local schoolyard could be a place perpetuating bigotry and division.

¹ J. Rickard, *Australia: A Cultural History*, London, 1988, p. 116.

Greeks also found it necessary to change their names to suit Anglo Saxon “ears and tongues.” In pre-multicultural Western Australia, a strange name was as much a stigma as was a darker complexion. Mispronunciation of a name was often and regularly deliberate. To save face and avoid ridicule many Greeks changed their names. Formal applications made by numerous Greek immigrants requesting name changes are held in the Australian Archives. Imposed name changes were not uncommon in assimilationist Australia. Incidents such as the 1916 and 1934 Race Riots – where Anglo-Australians in Perth and Kalgoorlie resorted to mob violence targeting Greeks and their properties in 1916 and then primarily Italians in 1934 - are the most virulent examples of local xenophobia. These incidents blemished Western Australia’s wholesome image as a friendly, warm and welcoming abode, destroying the consensus notions of WA society, but remaining unknown to many local residents.²

Despite widespread antagonism towards Greeks in the first half of the twentieth century, a significant number volunteered for military service during the two World Wars. At least six overseas born Greeks joined the AIF during World War One and saw active duty. An Australian born Greek from Western Australia, Robert Crocos, fought at Gallipoli. These are noteworthy contributions from new arrivals to their adopted homeland. During the Second World War the number of Greeks eligible for military service was much greater than in World War One. Many would again volunteer to fight for Australia; others would be conscripted. At least six Greece born and second generation Greeks from Western Australia were killed or died from wounds or diseases contracted during World War Two.³

Post-war attitudes towards migrants from the Mediterranean and their descendants have gradually mellowed. International and local pressures combined with government policies, tourism and assimilation to modify behaviour and opinion. Yet, Greeks still felt the brunt of discrimination well

² See R. Appleyard and J. Yiannakis, *Greek Pioneers in Western Australia*, Nedlands, 2002.

³ For further detail about Greek participation in both World Wars see Appleyard and Yiannakis, *ibid.*, Chapter 7. Greek-Australians also participated in later conflicts such as the Vietnam War.

into the 1970s. Some elderly Greeks interviewed cynically remarked that this change was because “Anglos had found somebody else to pick on, [that is] Asians.” At school, in the workplace, in the media and on the streets Greeks were likely to be the victims of prejudice. Speaking Greek in public was asking for trouble. Talking Greek on public transport was met with the bellow, “Speak English you bastard!” Australian born Greek children would often cower from their strangely attired parents or grandparents, particularly **yiayia** (grandmother) dressed in black, in case association brought ridicule.

Radio posed another aural danger for those opposed to the manifestations of alien cultures. In the days before ethnic radio, Arthur Athans developed and hosted a popular Greek radio programme on what was then 6PM, known as the “*Campana Parade*”. The show remained on Perth airwaves from 1963 until 1969 when the radio station changed its format. The programme was monitored carefully by Australian officialdom, with the script translated word for word and submitted to management before the show went to air.

In this same broad period, Commonwealth government assistance to Greek migrants was small compared with that given to migrants of British and “Nordic stock”.⁴ Of the 152,074 Greece born arrivals in Australia between 1945 and 1966, only 28% (42,486) received government assistance. Yet, of the 107,176 German born arrivals during the same period 73% (78,192) received “assisted passage”.⁵ There was a clear preference for Caucasians who were ethnically similar to the Anglo-Australian, as it was believed they would assimilate more readily and were considered a better “type” of migrant.

Persons of Greek background began arriving, living and working in Western Australia well over 130 years ago and constitute one of the State's most important ethnic groups. While the 2001 census identified 3,180 Greece born persons living in the state, a total that has been in decline since 1976 when it was 6,239, this recent figure did not include Greeks born outside Greece, second, third and later generations of Greeks, and others who identify

⁴ J. Wilton and R. Bosworth, *Old Worlds and New Australia*, Ringwood, 1986.

⁵ M. Tsounis, *Greek Communities in Australia (Ph D Thesis)*, Adelaide, 1971, p. 344.

themselves as Greek. However, the 2001 Census did include an ancestry question which encompassed some of these latter categories. If these numbers are taken into account, 14,320 persons gave their ancestry as being Greek, it can be estimated that the state's "Greek community" is between 15,000 and 20,000 people. (i.e. about 1% of Western Australia's population of 1.8 million.)

Until recently it was accepted that the first Greek to arrive in WA was a Castellorizian - Arthur Auguste or Athanasios Augoustis. Auguste stepped ashore at Broome sometime in 1890 or 1891 from Egypt.⁶ He spent a short time there before moving on to South Australia, then returning to the West in 1896. Soon after his cousins, the Manolas brothers, joined him, beginning a classic process of chain migration from Castellorizo to Western Australia.

The reality is that while Auguste was the first Castellorizian arrival, he was not the first Greek, to Western Australia. Greek sailors aboard British or French vessels visiting Western Australia possibly remained behind quite early in the colonial period. The archives show that there may have been a Greek family (known as Barvides) in the Swan River Colony as early as 1830,⁷ and that at least three other Greeks 'jumped ship' at Albany as early as April 1870.⁸

It would, however, be the early Castellorizian settlers and those who immediately followed who would soon dominate Greek community politics, patronage and power broking. Even after the 1960s when they were no longer the undisputed largest regional group, their political and financial influence remained considerable.

As Greek arrivals to Western Australia increased in number early in the century, and with linguistic and cultural problems not being solved, the desire

⁶ Interview, Mrs E Mirmikidis, June 1987.

⁷ The Barvides family arrived at the Swan River Colony in March 1830, but left in July 1831. For further information regarding these early arrivals to WA, see R.T. Appleyard and J.N. Yiannakis, *Greek Pioneers in Western Australia, Nedlands, 2002*.

⁸ They were crew from the vessel Callixene and included Antoni Fossilo (Phasoulas), whose later experiences have been traced and documented. *ibid*.

to formalise an ethnic organisation was enhanced. So, in 1911 there was an effort to institute a Greek Orthodox Community in Perth. The initial attempt failed. The following year some of the same individuals decided to establish a fraternity. A pan-Hellenic body was not yet possible, so a regional association whose members shared greater 'common ground' was the next best thing.

The Castellorizian Brotherhood, established during 1912, was the first Greek regional association formed in Australia. The next regional fraternity to be instituted in WA was the Greek-Macedonian 'Alexander the Great' Association in 1930.⁹

A comprehensive, but not complete, census list was compiled by the Federal Police in June 1916, recording the name, age, address and occupation of 267 "Greece born" adult males in WA. This census provides insight into the nature of the Greek presence at the time. For instance, most of those listed worked as general labourers and in fruit shops and restaurants. A number were also employed in the timber industry, a popular occupation for newly arrived Greeks during the 1920s and 1930s. Though the work was difficult and dangerous, it offered hefty financial reward in the short term. The newcomer then had the financial ability to return to an urban centre and establish himself as a shopkeeper. Even though this enterprise may have been a gamble, it was believed to be more profitable than being an employee since it was perceived that wages paid to foreign workers were low and the treatment of migrants was poor.¹⁰ Many Greek immigrants to Western Australia therefore, established themselves in the catering trades.

These occupations became the mainstay of many Greeks. Greek shopkeepers could be found across Western Australia, in very remote localities as well as the metropolitan area. By operating cafes, oyster saloons, milk bars, greengrocer stores and the fish and chip shop, for which Greeks became stereotyped, they provided an important service to the

⁹ For further information about such regional groups see, Appleyard and Yiannakis, *ibid.*

¹⁰ CA Price, *Southern Europeans in Australia*, Melbourne, 1963, p. 21.

broader community.¹¹ Over time, they would influence the cuisine of locals as tastes in food (and its preparation) moved away from the somewhat “stodgy” British fare to more diverse victuals such as olives, fetta cheese, kalamari and olive oil.

Migrants who lived in the timber towns and camps, cutting down trees, clearing land, laying railway tracks and opening up the state also made an important contribution to the State’s development. Others, male and female, worked in the wheat belt regions of the State, or were involved with the fishing, mining, pearling, tobacco and market gardening industries. “The pre-1952 Greek migrant, even though he [usually] arrived here poor, uneducated, single or without his wife, could hope that if he was willing to move about, turn his hand to whatever work presented itself, he would eventually be able to enter the world of small business.”¹² Work was often difficult, arduous and dangerous. From Cue to Collie, Wyndham to Wanneroo, a Greek presence could be found after the 1890s. It is often easy for those who evaluate the contributions of Greeks since 1829, the year the Swan River Colony was founded, to overlook the efforts and importance of individuals who laboured on the land, at sea or behind the shop counter (and many still continue to do so) while glorifying successes in business and academe.

Nevertheless, by the 1940s there was a Greek teaching at the University of WA in Engineering, and in the previous decade the first Greek graduated from the University. At about the same time, a number of Greeks were emerging as owners of significant property portfolios around the state.

Hence, Greeks could claim that their contributions to Western Australia, by the late 1990s, in the economic, business, educational, public service, cultural and other sectors, had “been largely impressive.”¹³ There were six Greek professors in the state’s universities, the State President of the Australian

¹¹ A range of links between food catering in Greece and Australia did and still does exist but, ironically, such specific food outlets are unheard of in Greece. These stores offered high returns if the owner was prepared to work long hours in a rather unpleasant environment.

¹² C. Castan, *Conflict of Love*, Brisbane, 1986, p. 53.

¹³ *Hellenic Community News*, Part 1, Issue 1, 1995, p. 11.

Dental Association was a Greek, at least fifteen members of the Greek community had received national honours since 1970; while many notable Greek-Australian sportsmen had represented their state (for example, in lacrosse, Australian Rules Football, and cricket) or the nation (in soccer and wrestling). A Greek had been Lord Mayor of Perth, another Greek was Mayor of Bunbury and, in 2003-2004, so is the Mayor of Canning. The out-going Crown Solicitor is of Greek descent, as is the current Chancellor of the University of Western Australia. One of the state's leading paediatric surgeons is also a third generation Greek. A Greek-Australian medical researcher has recently been listed as one of the State's "living treasures". There are also notable artists and writers of Greek descent. The first female branch manager for the Commonwealth Bank in Western Australian was a woman of Greek descent, as was the chief advisor to Premier Carmen Lawrence in the early 1990s. Prominent Greek business families and entrepreneurs, such as Michelides in earlier times, Litis or Kailis nowadays, are synonymous with their particular industry. Census data for 1996 and 2001 also show that there is very little difference between the education and occupation characteristics of Greek Orthodox persons and the Western Australian population as a whole. There are many Greek lawyers, architects, accountants, dentists, doctors and teachers in WA. These impressive achievements reflect not only personal success, but also a considerable return to the Western Australian community by Greek migrants and their offspring.

What has also emerged over the last decade or two is that overseas born Greeks in Western Australia are under-represented in professional and clerical occupations compared to their Australian born counterparts. The discussion paper that accompanied the 1986 Census made the observation that the number of Greeks in the professions (5.1%), was lower than expected, while 30% of Greek males and 41.9% of Greek females in the workforce were labourers - a category which includes factory workers, cleaners and construction workers.¹⁴ To some extent, this fact reflects the nature and impact of post 1952 Greek migration to Australia.

¹⁴ *Appendices to 1986 Census*, Perth, 1986.

As in other urban centres, Greek settlers tended to conglomerate in particular suburbs close to relevant recreational and cultural venues and places of employment. In Perth, this was in the inner city precinct now known as Northbridge. The area offered relatively cheap accommodation. **Kafenias** (coffee-houses) and the premises of Greek associations were nearby and, with the establishment of a Hall and Greek Orthodox Church in Northbridge, this residential pattern would be reinforced. The Castellorizian Brotherhood also began organising Greek educational and religious facilities at various locations such as the Hibernian Hall in Murray Street or, more often, the Assembly Hall in Pier Street, all close to Northbridge.¹⁵ In 1915, the Castellorizian Brotherhood opened the first afternoon 'Greek School' in Perth which Germanos Iliou, the newly arrived priest, took over. The Brotherhood also took the initiative in purchasing land and then raising funds for the construction of a Greek Orthodox Church.¹⁶ Small rural communities were also established in places such as Cue, Day Dawn, Bunbury, Geraldton, Northam, Kalgoorlie, Broome, Greenbushes and Collie.

In an alien and often hostile environment, the natural response was to live near fellow Greeks who could make life more bearable, while allowing for language and cultural maintenance. This conglomeration, however, made them a conspicuous social group, often increasing local dislike for the Greek newcomer. Yet, the suburb(s) did not coalesce into a distinct Greek ghetto. Not being a totally homogeneous population helped prevent such a development. As well as Greeks there were Slavs, Italians and Anglo-Australians living in the area. Furthermore, the Australian economy offered some degree of social mobility, and government policies did not encourage the formation of ethnic enclaves. Over time, as socio-economic advances took place, Greek settlers began to move away from Northbridge and adjoining suburbs to more affluent outer suburbs. Occupation, income and

¹⁵ Various oral sources. (Between 1987 and 2000 over 120 taped interviews were conducted. The tapes are with Professor Reg Appleyard and the author.)

¹⁶ These measures and the establishment of an organised body gave Castellorizians a distinct advantage over other Greeks in Western Australia. Particular Castellorizians now were able to offer their services and those of their fraternity to the newcomer. The new settlers in turn were indebted, both formally and informally, to their hosts.

age impacted on this residential trend, but much of the flavour of Northbridge as a cosmopolitan locale with its many eateries, usually offering al-fresco dining, can be partly attributed to the long Greek presence in the area.

Because Castellorizians took the initiative in organising the construction of a church, and would continue to be the chief sponsors of such a project through the Hellenic Community of Western Australia, which was formed in 1923, their control over local Greek affairs was reinforced. Castellorizians dominated the executive and membership of the Hellenic Community for many years ensuring that, on the surface at least, Perth's Greek community was united in its objectives.¹⁷

It was also during the 1920s that larger numbers of Greek women began to settle in Western Australia. The increase in female numbers is reflected in census statistics showing that in 1911 3.5% (12) of the State's Greece born population was women; by 1921 the figure had risen to 25.7%(148). It was not surprising then that the first of many Greek women's sororities, the Hellenic Women's Association, was founded in the mid 1920s. This organisation became crucial to the local Greek community's philanthropic activities, including fund raising for the church of Saints Constantine and Helene, which was finally built in late 1936.¹⁸

Domestic and/or paid work dominated life for most migrant women. Women of non-English speaking background historically have been a cheap, flexible and dispensable source of labour in Australia. Apart from working on the factory floor – notably in the post-war period – Greek women would often render assistance to their husbands in shops and restaurants. Daughters and granddaughters may have benefited from the educational, economic and social opportunities in Australia since the 1960s, but the initial female immigrants were not always so fortunate. Females, much more than males,

¹⁷ Between 1923 and 2004, the Hellenic Community of WA has had twelve Presidents, six of whom have been Castellorizian.

¹⁸ In more recent times such associations have become more politically active, no longer content to play a secondary role in community affairs

stressed the importance of religious and cultural maintenance. They transmitted the patterns of behaviour, crafts, foods, cultural mores and expectations to children, while asserting economic influence within the home. Such public and private behaviours are immeasurable contributions by Greek women to life in Western Australia.

The large number of Greek arrivals in the post 1945 period did not see a corresponding increase in Castellorizian migration to Western Australia. Census data reveal that, between 1947 and 1961, the number of 'persons born in Greece' in WA rose from 1,933 to 4,088,¹⁹ a relatively small number given Australian totals, 12,292 in 1947 and 77,333 in 1961; reflecting that most Greek migrants went to the east coast. Between 1955 and 1981, 85% of Greek arrivals settled initially in Victoria. These Greek immigrants came not only from many different regions of Greece, but with diverse political and socio-economic backgrounds. Regional fraternities proliferated to cater for the diverse origins of Perth's Greeks.

By the mid 1950s, Perth's Greek community had grown to such an extent that a number of individuals believed that another church was warranted. Meeting resistance from the Northbridge establishment, this new group set about establishing their own community and organising their own church. The new committee purchased an Anglican church, Saint Paul's - less than 3km from the already existing church, and by 1959 had established the Greek Orthodox Community of WA (Evangelismos)²⁰. This church has become associated more with postwar migrants, especially non-Castellorizians, and migrants still in the process of securing an economic base. At the same time, the church of Saints Constantine and Helene is identified with the older, more established Greek migrants, predominantly Castellorizians and their descendants.

The increase in non-Castellorizian Greek settlers slowly changed the complexion and politics of the local community. Castellorizian hegemony was

¹⁹ The peak year for permanent new arrivals from Greece to Australia was 1964, when 18,006 Greeks settled in Australia.

²⁰ J. Wilton and R. Bosworth, *Old Worlds and New Australia*, Ringwood, 1986.

not at first seriously threatened but, by the late 1960s, challenges to their pre-eminence were taking place. By the 1980s, the numerical balance was also shifting, while assimilation and “out-marriage” (exogamy) continued to take their toll on the primacy of older Greek groups further fragmenting Perth’s Greek community.²¹ Into the 1990s there was another ingredient changing the composition and complexion of Perth’s Greek community, the arrival of an increasing number of Greeks from South Africa following the demise of Apartheid.²²

Tensions within the state’s Greek population continued to be exacerbated by the impact of assimilation, particularly on the Australian born youth. Inter-generational conflict intensified as children often found themselves living ‘dual lives’. The life at home, and the one that they lived in public beyond the front fence, was different to that at school or university or in the workplace. Behaviours, expectations and morals matched even less than the typical generational divide. Family conflict over dress codes, friendships, “going out” and even use of the language, though not new, became more common in Greek households by the late 1960s. Soon exogamy, socio-economic mobility and residential changes were also impacting on Hellenism in this state. With the passing away of the overseas born Greek settlers, folklore, customs and language are proving to be harder to maintain. Fewer and fewer Greeks speak Greek and the participation in community affairs and religious practise by Greek Australians is dwindling.

One of the reasons for the construction of a Greek day school in 1991 – Saint Andrew’s Grammar, Dianella – was to help preserve the Greek language. The School is also meant to be a promotional vehicle of Hellenism for the entire WA community. The School’s existence finally seems to be having a positive effect. So too has tourism, which has helped stimulate interest in Greece from local Greeks and non-Greeks alike. The broader community is more interested in Greece nowadays as a holiday destination because of the

²¹ Castellorizian numerical supremacy continues to diminish. Yet, close to 35% of WA’s Greek population - of whom the majority are Australian born - are of Castellorizian descent.

²² This phenomenon, and other recent developments, needs investigating. The author hopes to research some of these more contemporary trends and their impact.

lifestyle and the history. In recent times, Australian born Greeks have also shown considerable interest in their Greek heritage. Performances, programmes and personalities with a Greek flair, for example, “Acropolis Now”, or “Surprise Chef” Aristos, also promote Greece and all things Greek. Those migration officials from the past who advocated a British monoculture in Australia would be disappointed with such developments. Nor would they be happy that bonds with Greece remain, and not just for the original migrants. There is even a small number of locally born Greek youth who have completed national service for the Hellenic Republic.

For over 130 years, Greeks have been settling in Western Australia. During this time they have not only established associations and venues to allow for the maintenance of their Hellenism, but have made invaluable contributions to the state. In business, education, the arts, the trades and professions, and sport, Greeks have been prominent. Currently, the profile of Greeks in Western Australian society has never been stronger. These facts are well understood by the State’s political leaders who willingly attend Greek functions. A case in point is the Premier’s annual attendance at the HACCI February Dinner meeting.²³ The achievements of Greeks are lauded at this occasion with the Premier bestowing most of the accolades. Such recognition was not always forthcoming: It is difficult to imagine Premier John Forrest being so complimentary a hundred years ago, and it may indicate that finally the Greek presence and contribution to this state is valued.

²³ HACCI is the Hellenic Australia Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

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