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Generations: *ΓΕΝΙΕΣ*

Abstract

For generations now Greeks have been migrating to Australia – from at least the 1820s if not earlier. Many have settled, some have returned permanently to Greece, while others have lived a twilight existence vacillating between the two countries.

This article presents a number of Greek-Australians, or those of Greek descent, reflecting upon their forebears, and/or their succeeding generations, as well as upon themselves. Their stories provide personal, diverse, and often powerfully moving insights into their families' generational development – the opportunities, the hopes, the challenges, the changes, the inspiration, the courage, the failures, the regrets, the sorrows, and the achievements. Collectively, their stories also provide personal perspectives into generational notions of diasporic Hellenic identity, trans-culturality, inter-culturality and hybridity in a world that, over the last 200 years, has progressively embraced ever increasing global connectivity and interdependence.

Ti na kanoume

Ti na kanoume

What can we do?

What can we do?

Ola ine tikhe

Ola ine tikhe

All is luck

All is fate

All I can do is tell the tale

Sea of Many Returns, Arnold Zable, 2008

Introduction

This article reflects upon interviews of Greek-Australians, or those of Greek descent, conducted by the authors in both Australia and Greece between 1985 and 2000¹. In 2001 a selection of these interviews were utilized, together with photographic portraits of the interviewees (accompanied when possible, by historical portraits of their forebears), as the basis of an exhibition that initially opened at the Migration Museum in Adelaide, South Australia, in March of that year. The exhibition, curated by the authors, was titled, as is this article, 'Generations: ΓΕΝΙΕΣ'².

Like the exhibition, this article recognizes that Greeks have been migrating to Australia since at least the 1820s – and probably earlier (Gilchrist 1992: 20-24; Appleyard and Yiannakis 2002: 7; Janiszewski and Alexakis 1995: 15-16; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1998: 10). Many decided to settle, some returned to Greece, while others lived itinerant lives vacillating between the two nations. The stories of each individual interviewee within the exhibition provided poignant insights into their family's generational development – the opportunities, the hopes, the challenges, the changes, the inspiration, the courage, the failures, the regrets, and the achievements. Some interviewees were first generation migrant-settlers,³ while others were second, third, fourth and even of fifth generational descent from their initial Greek forebears. Collectively, the stories of these interviewees also offered personal perspectives into generational notions of Australian identity and diasporic Hellenic identity, trans-culturality, inter-culturality and hybridity in a world that, over the last 200 years, has progressively embraced an ever-increasing circulation of people, ideas, technologies and commodities.

Within the article, cultural identity is viewed as the way in which an individual defines themselves in terms of their cultural background and heritage, and shown that it is malleable. Given the unavoidable restriction on word length however, discussion will be limited to a brief selection of interviewees who permanently resided in Australia.

The interviews

Doreen McTaggart (nee Field) was born in Yass, New South Wales, in 1932 (see Figure 1). She was interviewed on her rural property at Bees Creek in the Northern Territory in 1996. Doreen is a great-granddaughter of



Figure 1: Doreen McTaggart (nee Field) on her rural property, Bees Creek, Northern Territory, 1996.
Photo by Effy Alexakis, from the *In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians National Project Archives*.

Ghikas Boulgaris – Boulgaris and Andonis Manolis are currently recognized as Australia's earliest confirmed Greek settlers, having arrived as convicts in 1829.

Doreen stated:

Ghikas Boulgaris is my great-grandfather [...] I've always been really proud of it [...] recently at a speech night I was asked to speak about myself [...] I like to think of myself as an ordinary Australian [...] So I spoke about great-grandfather [Ghikas Boulgaris] and the Irish part of our family [...] and how pleased I was that they, no matter what they had to suffer, had settled in Australia [...] I think the diversity of our multicultural society is what is making Australia such a great country [...] I think that what has come through from both sides of the family

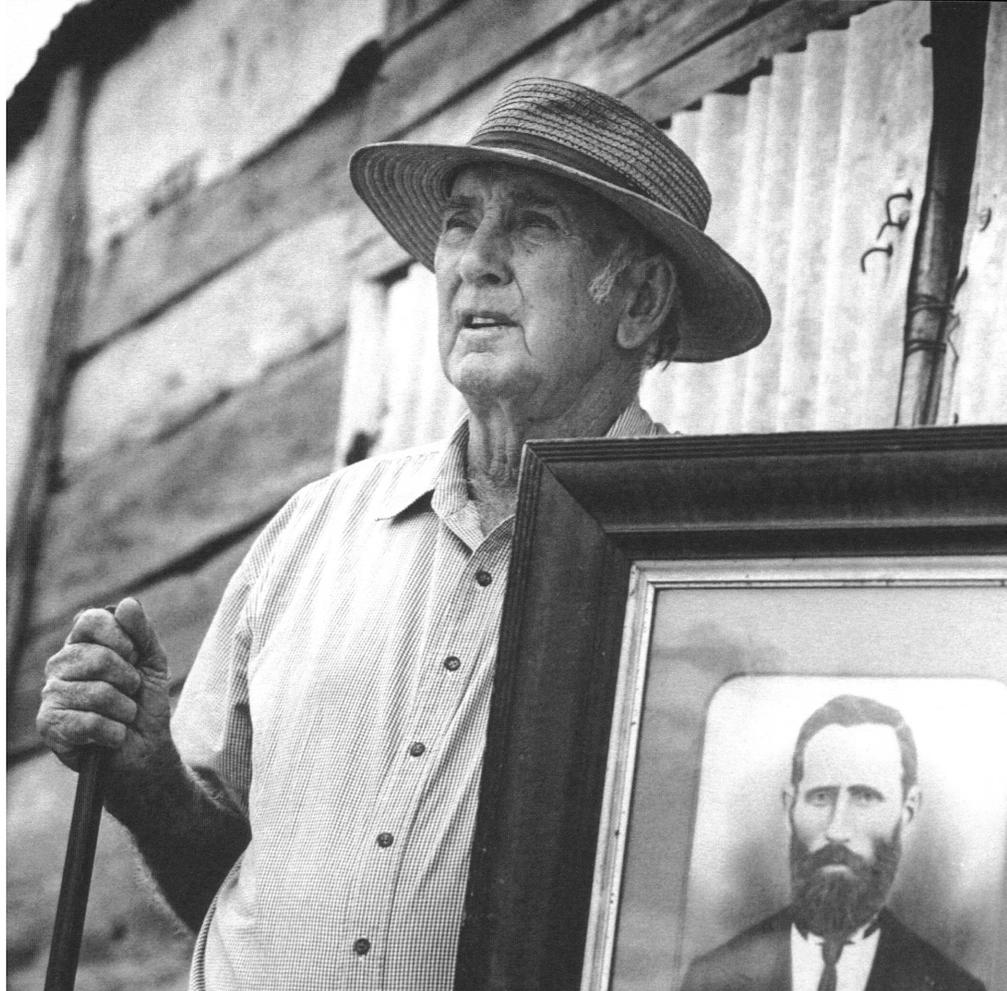


Figure 2: Laurence George Williams holding his paternal grandfather's portrait and hunting rifle. Hillside Station, Dunedoo, New South Wales, 1997.

Photo by Effy Alexakis, from the *In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians National Project Archives*

to which I was born to – my mother's side and my father's side – was one of hard work, family, the right to express your views and the right to express your religious views. (McTaggart 8 June 1996 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1998: 22-23)

Similarly, Robyn Margaret Johnson (nee Lowry), whose great-great-great grandmother Aikaterini Plessos arrived in Sydney in 1835, stated:

It's [having a Greek forebear] broadened my outlook [in regard to my Australian identity] because I always thought I was just English, Irish, Welsh [...] I think what you are [in terms of cultural identity], is [collectively] what your parents and grandparents [your forebears] have been. (Johnson 10 July 1994 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1995: 58-59)



Figure 3: Mavis Deards. Newcastle, New South Wales, 1986.

Photo by Effy Alexakis, from the *In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians National Project Archives*.

Robyn was interviewed in Canberra, Australian Capital Territory, in 1994. Plessos is acknowledged as the earliest known Greek woman to permanently settle in Australia.⁴

Another descendant of an early Greek arrival, Laurence George Williams (see Figure 2), shares Doreen and Robyn's inclusive, liberal views. Interviewed at Hillside Station near Dunedoo, New South Wales, in 1997, Laurence is a grandson of Gerasimos Vasilakis who arrived in Australia in 1863 and married Elizabeth Carty two years later; Elizabeth was of British background. Laurence pointed out: 'I'm just an ordinary [...] Australian [...] everyone [excluding indigenous Australians] had to come [migrate] from somewhere' (Williams 19 January 1997 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1998: 46-47).

All three interviewees acknowledged the positive diversity of Australian society. All three are speaking at a time after 'multicultural Australia' had been long introduced by the Whitlam government of the early 1970s, and despite the concept's severe criticism by conservative governments and social critics, the cultural identity of the interviewees as 'Australians' is unquestionably linked to an acceptance of the idea that Australia is a multicultural country – that Australian society is culturally and ethnically diverse.

Mavis Deards (see Figure 3), whose great-grandfather Dionysios Corkuchakeys (Korkoutsakis) arrived in Australia from Corfu at some time before 1857 (when he married Annie Stubbs at Tarnagulla in Victoria) has taken her Hellenic connection even further. At the time of her interview in Newcastle, New South Wales, during 1986, Mavis was attempting to inject herself into the local Greek community in an effort to regain her lost ancestral cultural legacy. Apparently, her efforts were being well nourished and rewarded. Mavis had been previously denied acceptance of a hybrid identity, or the choice of a positive inter-cultural engagement with those of non-English speaking background: 'My father was a bigoted Anglican [...] if you had anything to do with those "greasy dagos", or anything to do with Greeks, it was clammed up fast' (Deards 20 September 1986 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1995: 70-71).

Ellen Rose Purcell (nee North), whose great-grandfather Georgios Tramountanas arrived in Port Adelaide in 1842, also recalled racist attitudes within her family: 'Beautiful children, but pity they're Greeks' (Purcell 20 March 1989 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1998: 27). Ellen (see Figure 4), who was interviewed in Adelaide, South Australia, in 1989, proudly reclaimed her Greek forebear as an integral part of how she sees herself as an Australian. The severe xenophobic, racial outlook of 'white Australia' was well established within Australian society even before its official formalization by the federal government's *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901. Indeed, Ghikas Boulgaris became Jigger Bulgary, Georgios Tramountanas became George North, Dionysios Corkuchakeys became Denis Keys, Gerasimos Vasilakis became Jeremiah Williams and after marriage, Aikaterini Plessos became Katherine Crummer.

The generational journeys of the families of the interviewees mentioned, indicates that changes in government policy during the second-half of the



Figure 4: Ellen Rose Purcell (nee North) with her daughter Wendy. Adelaide, South Australia, 1989. Photo by Effy Alexakis, from the *In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians National Project Archives*.

twentieth century permitted a personal acceptance of the diversity of their racial and cultural origins, and the possibilities of future cross-cultural interaction. The notion of an Australian identity founded upon inclusiveness (of indigenous people and those of non-English speaking background), rather than British-settler exclusivity, had been officially permitted to evolve within the nation's collective, socio-cultural consciousness. Len Ross Jannese's, paternal great-great-grandfather, Ioakeim (James) Zannis, arrived in Victoria before 1858. Interviewed in Bunbury, Western Australia in 1987, Len emphatically confirmed the change of outlook: 'My Greek background is [now] part of my heritage' (Jannese 24 October 1987 interview).

All these interviewees clearly articulated, in terms of their cultural identity, a process of unification and differentiation – the core characteristic of trans-culturality.

Whilst those whose Greek forebears had arrived three or four generations ago were, during the late twentieth century in Australia, in a position of embracing their Greek heritage and open to choices of positively engaging inter-culturally with established Greek communities around the country, what do the experiences of later arrivals and their descendants reveal.

Certainly, arrivals during the early twentieth century such as Anthony Flaskas (see Figure 5), who migrated from the island of Kythera as a young boy in 1913, recognized Australia as a land of opportunity – ‘the time I come to Australia, I reckon it was the golden age of Australia’ (Flaskas 4 April 1989 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1995: 90-91) – but also that the nation wasn’t afraid of expressing its xenophobic temperament:

You see, it was very, very strict White Australia [...] the White Australia Policy [...] You see, we were fighting in those days. Really, we were fighting for our existence [...] we were fighting for our life. That’s how hard it was [...] Third class citizens was us really – third class, not second class, third class! (Flaskas 4 April 1989 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1995: 90-91)

Anthony, who was interviewed in Temora, New South Wales, in 1989, was naturalized in 1920, but his cultural identity remained Greek. Jerry Comino, who arrived in Australia from the Ionian island of Ithaca in 1924, also experienced racial and cultural intolerance, and considered his cultural identity to be unquestionably Greek: ‘Australia [...] it’s my home [where I live], but I’m still Greek’ (Comino 9 June 1986; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1995: 80). Jerry was interviewed in Newcastle, New South Wales, in 1986. Greg Loupos, who arrived in Australia in 1952 and was interviewed in Sydney in 1990 stated: “Wogs” and “dagos” they called us [...] They punched us for nothing [...] If I knew, I wouldn’t come [to Australia] [...] I [was] born Greek, I like to die Greek’ (Loupos 6 January 1990 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1995: 111). The prevailing racist and assimilationist attitudes of Australian society encountered by these interviewees arguably resulted in a strong, life-long maintenance of their Hellenic identity. All were ‘in’ Australia, but not ‘of’ Australia. George Gabriel, who arrived from Kythera in 1924, possibly best exemplifies the depth of the personal scarring that could arise out racial and cultural tensions between ‘dagos and kangaroos’ (Gabriel 24 January

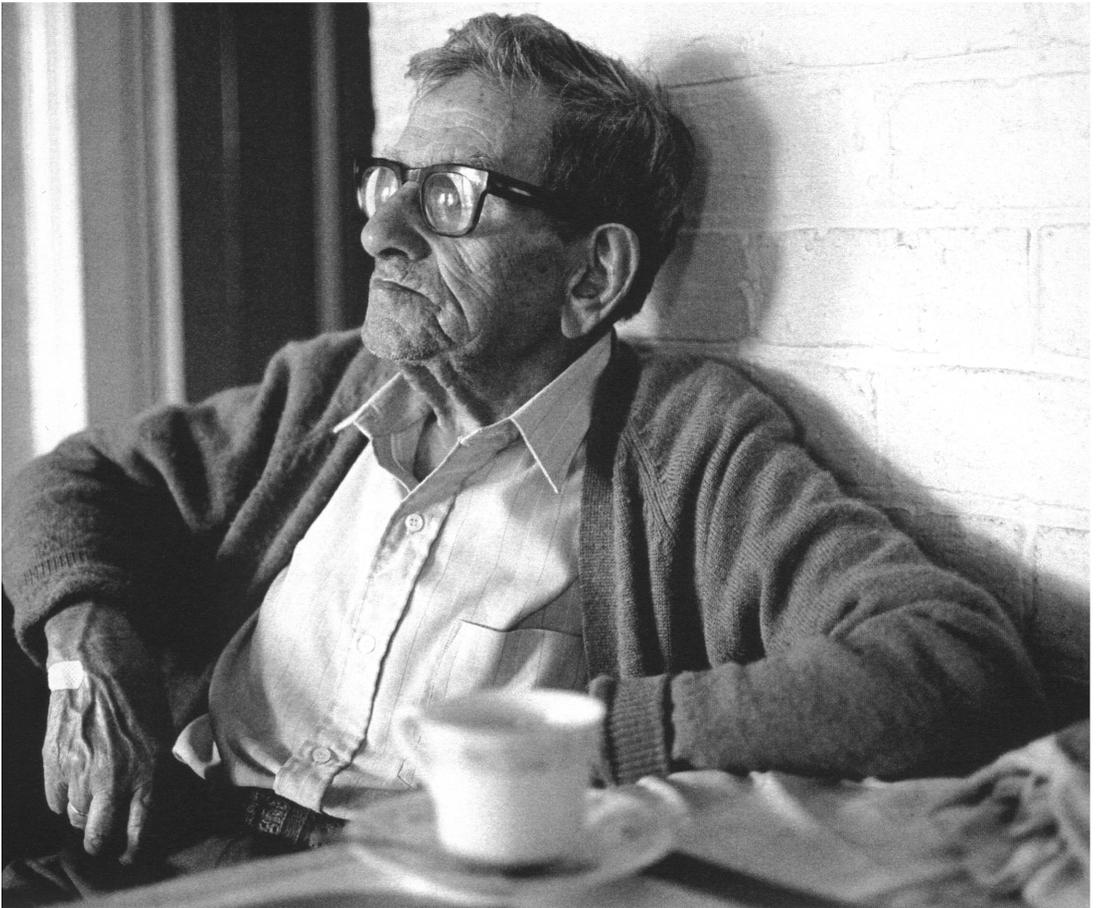


Figure 5: Anthony Flaskas. Temora, New South Wales, 1989.

Photo by Effy Alexakis, from the *In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians* National Project Archives.

1986 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1998: 203), and its consequent re-enforcement of Greek identity: 'Naturalization [...] I wouldn't naturalize a dog!' (Gabriel 24 January 1986 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1998: 203). George was interviewed in 1986 at Murrurundi in New South Wales.

The negative inter-cultural experiences of these first generation migrant-settlers assisted in denying them the ability to develop a hybrid, trans-cultural identity. However, this was not the case for all.

Professor Mary Kalantzis (see Figure 6), who arrived in Australia from the Greece in 1953 as part of the government orchestrated post-war migrant intake, argued that a culturally and racially exclusive Australia still exists – at

least in the 'public imagining' (Kalantzis 20 January 1997 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1998: 158-159) – but she declared that: 'Against the public imagining, I demand to be recognized as an Australian' (Kalantzis 20 January 1997 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1998: 158-159).

Mary argued that:

The image of what it is to be a 'true blue' Australian is linked to an Anglo image of being Australian [...] [and that] we need to expand on this [...] What it is to be an Australian is something we've all contributed to – indigenous people, and people of different migrant backgrounds. It needs another set of symbols and histories to recognize and reflect this [...] I like to say, 'I am an Australian in my difference'. (Kalantzis 20 January 1997 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1998: 158-159)

Mary's position claims a superficiality to the current notion of 'inclusiveness' within Australian society. Yet, her view also presents a trans-cultural perspective, where difference is the commonality for inclusiveness – where a hybrid diasporic identity (in this case Greek-Australian) and active inter-culturality, are accepted as being elements of what it is to be an Australian. Interviewed in Sydney in 1997, Mary's cultural identity echoes that expressed by those interviewees whose Greek forebears arrived three or four generations ago.

But what of the children of such first generation migrant-settlers in regard to their cultural identity?

Dr Paul Elias Boyatzis' father migrated from the Dodecanese island of Kastellorizo to Australia around 1912. Paul described his cultural identity as a hybrid Greek and Australian: a hyphenated Greek-Australian existence where aspects of his Greek family background are married with that of his Australian socio-cultural environment and education. He stated: 'I have a dual identity [...] part Greek, part Australian [...] both cultures [...] [I'm] able to move from one to the other' (Boyatzis 1 March 1996 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1998: 157). Paul was interviewed in 1996 in Perth, Western Australia. Nina Black, whose father, Dennis Black (Dionysios Mavrokefalos), arrived in Melbourne from Ithaca in 1892, stated:

I never felt that I was a stranger with Australians. I never felt that I was a stranger with Greeks [...] I could easily move from one sphere to the other [...] I don't specifically think of myself as being Greek, but then I don't specifically think of myself as being Australian either [...] it's what the situation [at any one time] demands of



Figure 6: Professor Mary Kalantzis. Sydney, New South Wales, 1997.

Photo by Effy Alexakis, from the *In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians* National Project Archives.

me. (Black 20 May 1993 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1995: 42-43)

Nina, who was interviewed in Melbourne in 1993, appears to share Paul's, hyphenated, inter-cultural existence. Dr Con Caston, whose parents separately arrived in Australia before 1914, also navigated a hyphenated existence: 'I'm very much at home in a totally non-Greek environment, and I'm equally at home in a Greek environment [...] a Jekyll-and-Hyde kind of existence [...] It's a creative tension, not a destructive one [...]' (Caston 24 November 1987 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1998: 166). Con was interviewed in 1987 in Brisbane. Dr Vasili Berdoukas, whose father arrived in Australia in 1923, provided a similar attitude: 'Culturally [...] I'm just quite

happy that I belong to both cultures [Greek and Australian]. I don't agonise over it [...] I'm Greek and I'm Australian' (Berdoukas 29 May 2000 interview). Vasili was interviewed in 2000 in Sydney. Fotini Epanomitis, whose parents arrived in Australia in 1969, concurred with Vasilis's outlook: 'I'm Australian, but I'm also Greek [...] So I feel that I'm actually quite lucky' (Epanomitis 3 February 1997 interview; Alexakis and Janiszewski 1998: 152-153). Fotini was interviewed in 1997 in Sydney. These interviewees considered their inter-cultural identity as comfortable, but for other second generation migrant-settlers like Andreas Litras (see Figure 7), the hyphen in Greek-Australian can be dangerous. Andreas, who was interviewed in Melbourne in 2000, stated:

I call myself an Australian [...] I think there is a danger in hyphenating our identity as 'Greek-Australian'. This hyphenization suggests we are something other than Australian [...] I think that the key is to develop a definition of Australian which is so broad that it resonates with difference, so that all people will feel the word, 'Australian', includes and defines them. (Litras 1 April 2000 interview)

Although second generation, Andreas' cultural identity reflects that of first generation migrant-settler, Mary Kalantzis. Also like Mary, Andreas' statement relates to those expressions of cultural identity offered by descendants of very early Greek arrivals following the 'multicultural revolution' of the 1970s. A trans-cultural Australian identity intertwining difference, rather than delineating it, is therefore evidenced, at least in part, across generations.

Conclusion

In today's globalized world, it is assumed that cultures are becoming, like commercial products, homogenized – that the interconnectedness and entanglement of cultures is leading to international cultural uniformity. However, emerging trans-cultural identities, as suggested by interviewees in this paper, can concomitantly accommodate universality and difference – that which is common is interpenetrated by that which is distinct. Trans-culturality does not promote separation and isolation, but exchange, interaction and intermixing with commonness.

The racist attitudes of white Australia forced many Greek migrant-settlers to assimilate or find solace in fiercely maintaining their Hellenic cultural identity. The descendants of first generation migrant-settlers appear to have been generally more effective in pursuing positive inter-culturality



Figure 7: Andreas Litras. Melbourne, Victoria, 2000.

Photo by Effy Alexakis, from the *In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians* National Project Archives.

and hybridity. Across generations, some individuals of Greek background have recognized the need for a trans-cultural Australian identity – where a hybrid diasporic Hellenic identity and active inter-culturality, are accepted as being elements of what it is to be Australian. This, without doubt, is the way forward for succeeding generations of Greek-Australians.

I have now told the tales, but all is not just luck or fate, as there is something that can be done. We can recognize, like the Ithacan character Andreas, in Arnold Zable's *Sea of Many Returns*, that 'to know one place is to know all places' (Zable 2008: 290), that the reverse is also true, and that by continuing to tell the tales, our cultural identity continues to breath, live and transform.

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Notes

¹ The authors conducted all oral history interviews cited in this paper. The audio recordings, and/or transcriptions of the interviews are part of the In Their Own Image: Greek-Australians National Project Archives, Macquarie University, Sydney.

² The 'Generations: GENIES exhibition was officially launched by Senator Nick Bolkus at Adelaides Migration Museum on 16 March 2001. It remained on display at the museum until 30 April. The exhibition was also displayed at Macquarie University Library, Sydney, between 25 March and 28 April 2002.

³ The authors utilize the term 'first generation migrant-settlers' to mean those who initially migrated and decided to settle permanently. In Australia's historical narratives, the words 'migrant' and 'settler' are generally applied separately, which in effect, marginalizes the former as an entity not sharing elements of the dominant latter. However, the significance of migration to Australia (particularly in regard to the post World War II period) was certainly generated by the rate and impact of permanent settlement – migrants transforming into settlers.

⁴ John N. Yiannakis has identified a probable Greek female presence in Australia prior to Plessos' arrival – that of Maria Barvides (Bartides) who arrived in the Swan River settlement (Western Australia) in March 1830 with her husband, John, and son, Petro. However, Maria and her family seem to have departed in July the following year (Yiannakis 1996: 68-69; Appleyard and Yiannakis: 2002: 7; Janiszewski and Alexakis 2006: 154-155).