

7th April 2011

Dear Ms Vamvakino,

Thank you for inviting comment directly from “migrant communities” with regard to the Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia that you are chairing.

As a migrant from South Africa (some twenty years ago), now a fully integrated citizen of Australia, I must say I recoil from the idea of being part of a “migrant community”. I am an Australian, and that’s the essential way I want to see myself.

When I first arrived in this country, I did have a number of opportunities to be part of a “migrant community” of South Africans living in Melbourne. One such opportunity was through a life-long friend from South Africa. What I found over time was that this group of South Africans were almost exclusively meeting with each other – they seemed to have no Aussie friends, even to the point of being quite cool towards my then Australian girl friend. I had to make a conscious decision to resist this group’s “us and them” view of society. This group of migrants was like an exclusive club, and some of its members were quite happy to perpetuate their former S. African attitudes, including those bred in the apartheid era. Racist jokes were acceptable, as were attitudes of racial superiority and intolerance. I soon decided to refrain from associating with this “migrant community”. As a consequence, I no longer have contact with my life-long friend. That’s how important I regarded the business of getting on with being an Australian.

Though I still maintain some ties with my country of birth (all my family still live there) and I still participate in some aspects of South African culture, I see myself essentially as an Australian. I have embraced Australian culture and values, which are quite distinctive and should never be blurred by so-called “multiculturalism”.

I believe we migrants should be encouraged to embrace Australia’s distinctive culture and values, and we should be discouraged from seeing ourselves as “migrant communities” with their own exclusive set of values and attitudes, including those that run counter to Australian values.

I would also like to see Aboriginal people (the "first Australians") playing some part in educating new migrants. Aborigines have an important place in Australian society, history and culture, yet they seem to be all but forgotten in the business of welcoming and educating new migrants. Perhaps they could even be part of the welcoming team at citizenship ceremonies.

Thanks for listening.

Yours sincerely,