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T&G PUBLISHING

THE NEW SETTLERS
BY LOUISE WHELAN

FOREWORD

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC, CMG

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One Time Justice of the High Court of Australia

What does Australia look like? What is the face of Australia today? Who are the people that now make up the Great South Land that fascinated explorers and attracted them, in their tiny boats, to venture forth to a new continental country?

It was easy to answer these questions when I was young. Those were the days in which we denied the rights, and even the existence, of Australia's indigenous peoples. Aboriginal rights were refused on the face of the Constitution, until the referendum in 1967. White Australia was enshrined in our laws until 1966. It was then that the Holt government began the process of legal reform. This was continued by the Whitlam government after 1972. Those reforms were endorsed and extended by the Fraser government in 1975. It was Mr Fraser who established the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, to whose Council I was appointed in 1977. His government also created the Multicultural Broadcasting Authority to help break down the uniformity of the face of Australia up to that time. And to give its people a new, positive aspiration of multiculturalism to guide our policies. We would become the first continent on earth that celebrated and protected multiculturalism. We would not insist that migrants and citizens all become Englishmen in the South Seas. They would continue to celebrate and exemplify their own cultures. They could freely practise their own religions and beliefs, customs and traditions. They would contribute to our society, economy and institutions. Ours would become a country with a positive philosophy of diversity and acceptance of difference. Its face would change.

It would be hard to imagine a bigger alterations in the belief system of a nation than that which we set out to achieve in Australia. When I look now at the photographs of my classes, at the public schools I attended in Sydney in the 1940s and 50s, I see the face of Australia as it was then. English and Celtic faces, so familiar. A good sprinkling of redheads with freckles on their noses. Pale skins and blue eyes predominated. This was Australia of the original British settlers. When my brothers (one of whom was himself a redhead) went to Ireland as young men, they

were struck at how similar the faces were to those of Australia at that time. We were substantially a community of transplanted immigrants from the British Isles. And that was what we looked like. They were our faces in the middle of the last century. In my class was but one Asian Australian face.

This book sets out to capture the change that we have embraced. We have not yet overcome all of our anxieties and prejudices about people of different cultures, who look, sound and act differently. The way that many Australians still treat refugee applicants with hostility and fear is an illustration that xenophobia is hard to eradicate, and especially in a country that started with such deep feelings embedded in its attitudes and laws. Nevertheless, we have certainly made much progress. This book shows how much.

Louise Whelan had a cultural background similar to my own. She shares with me a fascination with the intriguing changes that have come to Australia during our lifetimes. She is a gifted photographer, whose photographs have been honoured by the experts. In this work she has endeavoured to capture what the federal ministers then responsible for Australia's multicultural policy described in 2011 as “the amazing breadth and diversity of Australia's society...[reaffirming our] unwavering support for a culturally diverse and socially cohesive nation”. Here is a selection of photographs from her project to capture the images of all the nationalities that now make up the Australian community. Amazingly, there are now more than 200 different language groups in Australia. The photographic selection aims to document what Australia looks like today. From these images future historians, researchers and citizens will be able to see us as we see ourselves at this moment in our development. In a sense, these are like the school photographs of 60 years ago. But with a big difference.

Louise Whelan has captured migrants who have lived in this country 40 years or others, freshly arrived as refugees. Her photographic technique is an honest one. It is not contrived. Rather it seeks to capture the here and now. She honours the reality of her subjects as human beings who trust her to present them accurately and truthfully to those who look at their faces. Some are shown in churches, mosques, temples and at cemeteries or on spiritual occasions. Others are shown in family circumstances. Still others are revealed at work or at play. Through all the images emerges a vision of the new Australia: an example that we hope will become an inspiration and good example for other countries that still battle old racial, ethnic and cultural animosities.

In 2014, Australians will celebrate the centenary of the beginning of the Great War. A year later we will remember the heroism and sacrifice of ANZAC and Gallipoli. These were a potent symbols of a nation that viewed itself as part of a great world Empire, created with a civilising mission. Going to war to defend those values came naturally to a society that was essentially made up of Anglo Celts, with their pale skin, red hair

and freckles. Now, as we approach these centenaries, it will fall to a new generation of Australians to define the potent symbols of a new country with multicultural ideals. I see this book as making an important contribution to that realignment of our values. Anyone in doubt about the future diversity of Australia should look at Louise Whelan's photographs. And ponder upon the lives of the human beings who now make up the Australian family. What they believe in. What they cherish. And what they would defend.

I hope that amongst the highest values that will emerge from our journey over the last century will be a dedication to notions of acceptance of diversity, respect for equality and pride in our inheritance. That inheritance includes that received from the ancient indigenous people of the land. From the people who have come to Australia from the four corners of the planet. As well as the strong institutions bequeathed to us by those early settlers, with their pale faces, red hair and freckles.

I am. You are. We all are Australians! And these are the faces of our people today.

26 January 2013

Michael Kirby