

# Shop Full of Dreams: Ethnic Small Business in Australia

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## Chapter 1 It's so multicultural around here

Get off the bus on the city side of Taverners Hill on Parramatta Road and you find yourself on the northern border of Sydney's most 'multicultural' municipality. In the area from Parramatta Road south to the Cook's River stretches Marrickville, an area where in 1991 over half of the resident population were born overseas and well over a third in non-English-speaking (NES) countries. To the urban explorer this social reality is reflected in the diversity of ethnic shops and products available, the building and renovation styles of the housing and the people seen on the streets throughout the area.

On Parramatta Road the atmosphere is distinctly Italian. Here we find businesses such as that of Rossi Brothers, a shoe shop that sells factory-made and made-to-measure shoes and does shoe repairs. Giovanni Rossi migrated to Australia from Italy as a boy in 1936 and bought the shoe shop from an Anglo-Australian in 1949. Since then the business has carried on the skilled craft of custom shoemaking, employing family workers and some part-time employees, and has sold shoes to a mixed market, with at least half of the customers Italian or Italian-speaking.

Intermingled with the majority of Italian businesses in this area we find those of other nationalities, particularly the more recent migrants from South America and South-East Asia. Further along this busy road is Star

Newsagency which was bought from a Chilean in 1984 by an Ecuadorean who migrated to Australia in 1974. The owner, Mr Rodriguez works a 65-hour week selling newspapers and stationery to a mixed market, most of whom are not South Americans. His wife only helps out if he is sick; both he and his wife came from shopkeeping families in Ecuador.

Back towards town we find a number of Asian restaurants serving the growing inner-city clientele. Thai restaurants are popping up all over the place. One successful venture was established in 1985 by a Thai businessman who came to Australia as a student. He first started his own jewellery wholesale and retail business in 1977 and then later opened his restaurant with some partners, partly to entertain his business customers, partly for fun as a meeting place and also because he could see that Thai food was becoming very popular. The restaurant now serves 100 to 150 people per day, only 10 per cent of whom are fellow Thais. The business employs up to 30 workers, mostly Asian students working part time. The establishment acts as a kind of welfare agency, helping family members and friends to study, to work and to settle.

As we walk south, away from Parramatta Road, we enter the recently gentrified neighbourhoods of Stanmore and Petersham. The streets are lined with Federation semis and single-fronted houses, interspersed with grand Victorian mansions on the high points from where glimpses of the Harbour Bridge and Centrepoint Tower can be seen.

Here the ethnic mix of the residential area is more 'Anglo' than anywhere in the municipality, and the small village-like cluster of shops near Stanmore Station is dominated by businesses owned by English-speaking shopkeepers, including Jock's Butchery. In Petersham we find a cluster of Portuguese

businesses catering to the local Portuguese residents, most of whom migrated from the island of Madeira, and shops such as the classic mixed business corner shop-cum-deli run by a Greek man and his wife who migrated to Australia in 1956. Mr Kalantzar spent his first three years in this country grape picking, working on the railways and on a manufacturing production line before mustering his savings, and taking out a small bank loan (which was very hard to come by in those days) and a hefty loan from a (Jewish) moneylender to set up his first mixed business in Stanmore. Some 28 years and two different shops later he is now settled in Petersham, and he and his wife are still working seven days a week, 14 hours a day selling groceries and deli foods to a mixed group of inner-city customers.

Heading further south along the residential streets into Marrickville proper we see old Greek ladies making lace and doing fine embroidery, sitting on the doorsteps of pale blue houses. We hear the whir of sewing machines and observe the busy antics of vans stacked full of half-made clothing darting from house to house delivering cloth and picking up garments from tired-looking Asian and Mediterranean women. Along Addison Road abandoned shops now house clothing sweatshops and pressing services. Near the door of one of these sits the Greek owner and inside are Asian and Pacific Island women furiously working to keep up their pace.

It is not until we walk on to the centre of the Marrickville municipality, closer to the old red brick Marrickville Town Hall on Marrickville Road near the corner of Illawarra Road, that we find ourselves truly in the midst of a multicultural melange of small businesses. And in this vicinity it is hard to tell whether it is Athens or Saigon that we have come across. Certainly on Marrickville Road the prevalence - but now past dominance - of Greek businesses is still evident. Here we find Greek travel agencies catering to a predominantly Greek-speaking clientele; there are also Greek doctors, Greek real estate agents and, of course, Greek delicatessens. In many cases these businesses were set up in premises previously owned by

Anglo-Australian shopkeepers. One delicatessen was set up in 1962; it had previously been a food shop run by New Zealanders. Nearby a Greek real estate agency took over in 1971 from an Australian florist, and further along a Greek travel agency from an Australian haberdashery in 1988. These businesses now serve a Greek population who are spread much further afield than Marrickville itself but who are willing to travel to obtain particular cheeses or olives or real estate advice in the mother tongue.

Around the corner on Illawarra Road we find the hustle and bustle of Sydney's inner-city 'little Vietnam'. One of the fastest growing groups of small businesses is that group owned and run by migrants arriving from Vietnam since 1978. On this street the majority of businesses were bought in the 1980s from Greek migrants departing to the adjoining suburbs and other areas further out. We find Vietnamese pharmacies, butchers, fruit shops, bread and cake shops, fabric shops, Asian groceries and herbalists, book shops and the increasingly ubiquitous Vietnamese restaurant. In some shops the clientele is dominantly Asian; in others, especially the cake and hot bread shops, the customers are mixed or predominantly non-Asian. This shopping area provides for a vital local market of Vietnamese residents in the Marrickville area, but also supplies a wider inner-city market. Many of the Asian restaurants in the inner west buy their meat and vegetables from the shopkeepers in Marrickville where prices are highly competitive with Sydney's Chinatown. Amidst the expanse of Marrickville, the chain of shops extending along Illawarra Road from Marrickville Road to the railway station provides an exotic sequence of looks, smells and sounds which are distinctively Asian.

Further to the west of this interesting intersection of roads and cultures we find the smaller shopping areas of Dulwich Hill and New Canterbury Road, bordering the municipality of Canterbury, and here the presence of older Greek businesses is still evident, mixed with newer Lebanese and Vietnamese businesses.

Out on the eastern boundary of the municipality is the Princes Highway, a major traffic thoroughfare which winds south away from the city. The layout of this busy road remains concrete testimony to the engineering of a bygone tram route along a solid rock ridge flanked on the east by the sandy, swampy industrial expanses of Alexandria and Botany. From Sydney University to the brick pits of St Peters the highway becomes King Street, Newtown - an almost continuous line of shops, many of which lie within the boundaries of the Marrickville municipality. Along this route an amazing transformation has occurred over the past decade. Once a mixed area of Greek and Lebanese shops, secondhand clothing and furniture outlets and dilapidated or empty premises, this street is now undergoing rapid gentrification.

The ethnic presence is still very evident, but now up-market ethnic food outlets, restaurants and gay bars also contribute to the diversity of products and cultural flavours so attractive to yuppie urbanites. We find an ice-cream parlour, set up in 1985 by a South American engineer which serves fresh fruit ice-cream made on the premises; a speciality Lebanese cake shop run by Lebanese brothers who sell wholesale to other Lebanese restaurants as well as retail to a non-ethnic clientele in their well frequented coffee shop; a coffee roasting and distribution business, set up in 1968 by a Greek family, which sells ground coffee and beans to an increasingly mixed market; a fruit shop bought in 1978 from Italians by a Lebanese migrant and his wife; a mixed grocery business, bought in 1973 by a Greek family, which stocks Greek products but serves only a few Greek-speaking customers and a Fijian market selling food to Pacific Islanders. Interspersed with such businesses are trendy coffee shops, antique shops, restaurants, gay bars, hotels and the usual constellation of chain supermarkets, variety and hardware stores. Ethnic small businesses along this shopping thoroughfare have played an important part in the story of reinvestment and revitalisation that has transformed parts of the inner city over the past decade.

Multicultural Marrickville certainly is. This area has been an important site of settlement for many groups of newly-arrived immigrants in the postwar period. But what is the connection between the migration of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB) and the small businesses that line the busy streets of this municipality, making a walk through the area such an exciting and exotic urban experience? What sorts of stories lie behind the street facades we have figuratively walked past?

The Greek fish shop, Italian greengrocer, Chinese restaurant and Vietnamese hot bread shop have become such institutions in the cities and country towns of Australia that everyone has stories about ethnic small business to tell. But these are the stories of consumers - tales of appreciation or dismay when confronted with new tastes, of misunderstanding or racism when communication is difficult, of acceptance and enrichment when new cultural practices are added to the Australian experience. What this book aims to do is to tell a different set of stories -- those of the NESB migrants who run small businesses in a foreign country and culture. Stories about why they do it; how they do it; what they get out of it; their dreams; their hardships; their futures. At one level this book is about family histories, such as those we next tell of the Karanges and the Chin families. At another level it is a story about the political-economic context of migration and ethnic small business in Australia. We revisit multicultural Marrickville - a window into cosmopolitan Sydney - in Chapter 6.

### ***Milk bar dreaming: The Karanges family and the Niagara Cafe***

In May 1989 the family of Con Karanges met for their annual picnic at Terrigal on the central coast of New South Wales, Australia. Not all of the 113 family members could make it, but most did, as four generations of Greek-Australians gathered to show off the new babies and catch up on the latest family, business and political news. This was part of their milk bar dreaming: all of the first generation of the

Karanges family were small business owners of cafes, fish shops and milk bars in Australia. Their life in Australia has been tied to the Niagara Cafe, Newcastle, which has been owned by the family for nearly a century.

The story of the Niagara Cafe is a story of chain migration of peasant farmers from the small Greek village of Vlahokerasia on the Peloponnese to Newcastle and the Niagara, before eventual ownership of their own cafes and milk bars. As news of Australia filtered back to Greece by word and letter, the Niagara Cafe entered the dreams of many Vlahokerasia villagers: dreams of emigration to a new country many thousands of miles away; dreams of working in uncle's cafe, of even eventually saving enough to buy a small business of their own; dreams of marriage and raising a family in a new country where the children could prosper and get a good education. For the members of the Karanges and Velissaris families, these dreams became a reality, spanning over nine decades, many thousands of kilometres and five generations.

The story of the Karanges family in Australia began with Angelo Burgess who left Vlahokerasia for the USA before the turn of the century. From the USA he travelled to Australia, eventually settling in Newcastle and opening the Niagara Cafe in Newcastle's main street, Hunter Street. Burgess (his Anglicised name) wrote to his Greek village about his success in distant Australia and requested workers from the village to help in the cafe. Brothers Michael and Theo Karanges (who was Burgess's godson), arrived in 1912 to work there. Theo stayed on to take over the business when Burgess died, while Michael opened up his own Niagara Cafe a few miles away in the Newcastle suburb of Hamilton.

In time, more men left Vlahokerasia with dreams of a new country and the Niagara Cafe. Con Karanges arrived in November 1936. For six years he worked for his uncle Michael and gradually learnt the skills required to run a small business. By 1942, after repaying his fare and working long and hard, Con Karanges had managed to save enough money to buy the

Embassy Cafe, also in Hunter Street, Newcastle, where he stayed until retirement in 1976. He married Lela in 1952, and they had three children, all of whom are now teachers.

George and Nick Velissaris, also from Vlahokerasia, and Steve Gounis - who married Alexandra Velissaris - followed the same path of chain migration. George arrived in 1938 to work for his uncle, Michael Karanges, in the Niagara Cafe, Hamilton, before buying his uncle out in 1946 and running the business himself. In 1954 George married Argyro and a year later bought the Station Cafe in the Sydney suburb of Campsie with his brothers Nick and Michael. George and his family ran the Station Cafe until 1983, when he retired. Steve Gounis arrived in 1940 to work in the Hunter Street Niagara Cafe. He later worked at the Murwillumbah Restaurant on the far north coast of NSW from 1947 to 1949. Like the others, he learnt the trade, saved up capital and eventually branched out into his own business, buying the Newcastle Fish Shop in 1950.

John Scoufis, from the same village, also came to Australia to work in a cafe, but unlike the others he settled in Sydney. Scoufis bought and ran the Central Inn Cafe in Railway Square, Sydney, from 1933 to 1948 and the Circular Quay Cafe on the No 5 (Zoo) jetty from 1958 to 1975. He married Gorgea Karanges in 1937, and had three children, of whom one bought a dry cleaning business, one became an architect and the other a masseur. Another relative, Nick Bouris, arrived in Australia in 1938 and sought work in the central west area of rural NSW, working first in the Wellington Cafe and later in the Orange Cafe. Like the others, he moved on, working at the Railway Square Cafe in George Street, Sydney, from 1940 to 1944 before buying his own business, the Jubilee Cafe, in 1945. He married Athena in 1947 and moved to a new business, the Sandwich Shop in Erksine Street, Sydney, in 1965, before retiring in 1974.

At the 1989 Terrigal family reunion, some of the Karanges families still ran milk bars, while others had moved into a retirement that freed them from the shop counter for the first time

since the early 1950s. Months after this family gathering, the Niagara Cafe was partially destroyed by the 1989 Newcastle earthquake, which succeeded where financial crisis, prejudice and family problems had failed: the doors of the Niagara Cafe were closed for the last time. The demise of the Niagara Cafe marks the end of one chapter of the remarkable story of Greek chain migration to Australia and of the emergence of an Australian institution. The Greek cafes or milk bars became commonplace in the suburbs and country towns of Australia, oddities in an otherwise British Australia where the Aboriginal people were marginalised to the fringes and where racism and prejudice were unchallenged. They fed the Anglo-Australians hamburgers and steak, chips and eggs, milk shakes and lollies. Only in the last 20 years did Greek foods - souvlaki and yeros - emerge on the Greek cafe menu.

Today one in three milk bars, cafes and take-away food shops in Australia are owned and operated by Greek-born Australians, a remarkable fact given that the Greek-born comprise only 2.5 per cent of the Australian population (Collins 1989).

### ***Business dreaming: the Chin family and the Singapore Gourmet***

Jenny and Henry Chin emigrated from South-East Asia in the 1960s. Henry, a Malaysian, and Jenny, from Singapore, both came from business families. They arrived in Australia in the early 1960s on temporary entrant visas to study accountancy in Perth, Western Australia. After graduating, they worked for accounting firms in Melbourne and then in Sydney. They returned to Singapore in 1967 due to illness in the family. Jenny's family had commercial and mining business interests in Singapore, where they had experienced the highs and lows on the roller-coaster of business life: 'five times a millionaire, six times bankrupt', as Jenny put it. The Chins returned to Australia in 1973, encouraged by the changing political climate that accompanied the election of the Whitlam Labor Government. Having initially crept in

under the White Australia Policy as students, they could return to Australia in 1973, because they 'were now seen as the cream to be milked from Singapore'. However, as was the case with many immigrants, chance influenced their lives in Australia. Darwin, far to the north, was their intended destination, but Cyclone Tracy intervened, so that Sydney became their unintended place of resettlement in Australia.

In Sydney, Jenny worked as a chief accountant at Express Freight, helping to set up their first computing system using punch cards. Pregnancy interrupted her career, but two months after the birth of her first child Jenny returned to work as an accountant, hiring a full-time nanny to look after her son. After the birth of a second child, Jenny and Henry moved into their first small business, a fish and chip shop, previously owned by Turkish migrants, in Hay Street near Sydney's Chinatown. It was a risky move, but they wanted to make more money quickly since childminding fees were eroding their income. Friends in Perth had become very rich through business. When a fortune-teller predicted a similar outcome for Jenny and Henry, they decided to turn their dreams into reality. In the fish and chip shop they continued the existing menu of fish and chips, lambs fry and sausages. They began to introduce Singaporean food gradually after passers-by commented favourably on the display of food that Jenny had prepared for a party to celebrate the birth of a daughter. Business doubled as the fish and chip shop was transformed into a Singaporean restaurant. 'Australian cuisine' was undergoing a gradual ethnic revolution.

Fortunes for Jenny and Henry Chin took a rosy turn as business prospered, but their ambitions were not fulfilled. They decided to use business profits to expand, opening a tea house across the road and another restaurant, the Bottomless Pit, in nearby George Street, where they employed eight people. Only then did Jenny give up her other job and manage the business full-time. Expansion continued as they opened restaurants on Pier 1 and Pier 2 in the Rocks area under the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and a restaurant in the western suburb of Bankstown. By 1981-82 the

Chin restaurant empire was worth millions of dollars a year. However like Jenny's family in Singapore, the Chins experienced the fickle fortunes of business as a combination of factors destroyed their burgeoning restaurant empire. Henry, who had been ill for some time, was hospitalised. In 1983 the newly elected Hawke Government introduced a 'fringe benefits' tax which curbed the 'business lunch'. The 1982-83 economic recession led to soaring interest rates and reduced spending, further undermining restaurant business. In addition, the introduction of random breath testing in NSW and a staff problem - described by Jenny as the 'leaky till and walking crabs' - all combined to reduce business turnover as costs escalated. Impatient creditors and landlords, who would wait for her outside the George Street restaurant, finally resorted to cutting off the electricity just before big functions. Jenny Chin was forced to sell everything.

Shattered and weary, Jenny and Henry decided to start all over again. They moved to a site about 15 kilometres from the centre of Sydney, which became their new shop and living premises in one. Henry's health recovered sufficiently to allow him to work as a 'temp' accountant's clerk. They were heavily indebted. Henry worked even when he had gallstones because, as he put it, 'the whole family and everyone depended on me'. Jenny's professional skills were by then becoming outdated, but in 1985 she was able to find a job with a car provided. With two incomes, after a while they were able to take up a lease on a shop in the inner-city suburb of St Peters for \$250 per week. This became the new Singapore Gourmet, the site of Jenny and Henry Chin's current business.

Jenny and Henry Chin still work in other jobs and run the Singapore Gourmet restaurant. After work each evening Jenny goes shopping before arriving at the restaurant between 5.30 and 6.00 p.m. to cook. She has the help of three assistants, with her son helping out - 'for tips only' - when they need him. The new Singapore Gourmet has now established a secure clientele and Jenny and Henry are planning to extend

the premises and lengthen the opening hours. Jenny is reluctant to give up her other job, but if all goes well she plans to open a lunch-time eating place somewhere else. Eventually Jenny would like to give up her other job, move into the family business full-time - because 'it keeps the family together' - and hire a chef to free her from the cooking. Jenny and Henry Chin are struggling financially and are still paying off creditors from their earlier business ventures.

## ***Dreams or nightmares?***

These two stories of ethnic small business illustrate some of the diversity of experiences in this sector of the economy. For the Karanges family, milk bars offered a relatively low-risk business serving basic fast food to working people. Upon this stable basis a chain migration stream was established and a modest family empire of networked milk bars was built. For the Chins, restaurants offered a more risky business at the luxury end of the food services market, highly prone to fluctuations in levels of disposable income in the economy. Their business adventures intersected a period of instability in the national economy. Consequently, hard work overlain by their speculative orientation was to lead them onto the roller-coaster of rapid business success and failure. Such differences are not typical of Greek versus South-East Asian stories of small business. They are more likely to be related to the economic circumstances at the time when the businesses were established and to the area of the economy in which they were set up rather than to cultural differences. What is common to these stories - as it is to most of the stories of ethnic small business - is the dreams that these enterprises encapsulate. The postwar immigration net drew in immigrants from eastern, southern and northern Europe, the Middle East, Asia and both Americas. Immigration changed the face of Australian society. In major cities, such as Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, one-half of the population are first or second generation immigrants (Collins 1991:39). The ethnic diversity of the Australian population has grown rapidly so that today Australia has more than

140 ethnic groups. Many of these ethnic groups, particularly those from non-English-speaking countries, moved into small business at a much greater rate than the Australian-born (Collins 1991:92-6).

Immigrant workers in Australia dreamed of freedom: to have no boss or foreman above them, to be able to set their own work rhythms, to have autonomy in choice of tasks, methods of work and products, and hopefully to achieve prosperity. They also dreamed of freedom from racism and prejudice in the workplace. Migrant parents dreamed of a better life for their children: to have more time for them by combining residence and place of work, and to have enough resources to give them a good education and a start in life. For NESB ethnic groups in Australia, a small business such as a corner shop, a small factory, taxi or building firm promised dreams of independence, of freedom and financial security, if not fabulous wealth.

Certainly there have been amazing rags to riches stories which have fuelled these dreams; for instance, the Queensland hairdressing tycoon Stefan Ackerie, who started off as a car washer; or Luigi Grollo, who worked as an itinerant rural labourer in Victoria, living in a tent for many years, before becoming the founder of a multimillion dollar construction enterprise (Pascoe 1988). There are multimillionaire property developers such as Greek-born Sir Arthur George, Polish-born Eddie Kornhauser, Czechoslovakian-born Frank Lowy and Floyd Podgornik, who was born in the former Yugoslavia. Other millionaires, such as Lebanese-born Joe Gazel, Polish-born Abe Goldberg and Anglo-Indian Basil Sellers, made their fortunes from the clothing, footwear and textile industries (Ostrow 1987). Still others made their fortunes in the food industry, introducing 'foreign' foods to the Australian palate. The Smorgon family, originally from Russia, founded a financial empire on new forms of processed and continental meats; the Greek Andronicus family spread the popularity of coffee in tea-dominated Australia; Lebanese-born Joe David built a huge billion dollar

wholesale grocery business; while Peter Manettas and Theo Kailis, both from the Greek island of Kastellorizon, made separate fortunes selling seafoods. In the fast-growing services sector of the economy, immigrants such as Polish-born Leon Fink built an entertainment empire, the Belgium-born Isi Leibler made his fortune out of tourism, while stockbroker Rene Rivkin, who was born in China of Russian parents, turned to finance, as did Hungarian-born Larry Adler, who set up a large insurance business. Some immigrants, such as Italian-born Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, Estonian-born Sir Arvi Parbo or Hungarian-born Sir Peter Abeles have become captains of industry.

Success stories such as these provide a basis for almost unquestioned support within the community for the ideology of small business. Such tales fuel the Smithian dreams of liberal economists for the resurrection of the free market: a galaxy of small enterprises, where nobody has enough economic power to set prices; a society of free producers, where there is no need for unions. Governments grasp at the dream of a solution to the human problems of restructuring and unemployment: if they lack the fiscal resources and political will to establish retraining and relocation programs for immigrant workers, they hope that a spontaneous move into small business will save the day. The small business sector also holds the best hope of creating new jobs in Australia in the 1990s.

How realistic are the dreams of migrants, economists or governments? Do these dreams sometimes turn into nightmares? The migrant entrepreneur's freedom may be no more than the freedom to work at night to finish rush orders. The better opportunities for the children may become the compulsion to work in the family business after school every day, to help make ends meet. The free market may be just a veil for control and exploitation by powerful suppliers or customers. The solution to unemployment may be a costly and temporary one, as ill-prepared and under-capitalised entrepreneurs go bankrupt and lose everything - even the family home. After all, an estimated 80 per cent of small businesses in Australia fail

within their first five years (Neals 1989)

Perhaps both the dreams and the nightmares are realities: some small businesses prosper and grow, while others collapse. The list of millionaires is short and the tally of failures is long but there are also many modest success stories. This book presents the experiences of immigrant small business people in a number of different sectors of the economy: retailing, manufacturing, construction and services. The aim is to situate these individual histories within the context of Australia's changing political economy in the postwar period, and specifically during the economic recessions of the 1980s. The book explores the links between individual immigrants' dreams of freedom and the more deep-seated structural requirements and effects of economic change: the backdrop is the end of the 1980s boom and the onset of the 1990s recession.

Until recently, very little research on ethnic small business had been conducted in Australia. In this book we present the findings of a survey of 280 immigrant and non-immigrant small businesses in Sydney as well as recent data on the characteristics of small business in Australia. This information is placed in relation to other historical and contemporary studies that have been undertaken on immigrant or ethnic small business in Australia and internationally. In this literature, reference is generally made to ethnic or immigrant businesses or ethnic or immigrant entrepreneurs. These descriptions can be confusing. All Australians, other than our indigenous peoples, were immigrants at some time over the past 200 years. Moreover, all peoples can be considered to be part of an ethnic group. Both the terms ethnic and immigrant are therefore confusing when comparing small businesses in Australia owned by ethnic or immigrant minorities with other businesses owned by people who are third or later generation immigrants. In this book we refer to immigrant or ethnic businesses when our focus is on those run by people from a non-English-speaking background, and we use the terms ethnic and immigrant interchangeably. When we refer to other businesses, we use the

term 'non-immigrant businesses' rather than 'Australian businesses' or 'non-ethnic businesses', since all businesses we study in this book are run by Australians, be they first, second or later generation immigrants, and all Australians are 'ethnics'.

Another clarification of terminology is required before we outline the contents of the book. Strictly speaking, the members of the petite bourgeoisie are people who own their own means of production and work on their own account, without employing labour. However the division between own-account workers and people who themselves work, but also employ a few people, is fluid and arbitrary. When we use terms like petite bourgeoisie, small entrepreneur or small business in this book, we generally mean both own-account workers and small employers. We also use the terms immigrant and migrant interchangeably, since in Australia - unlike in Canada (Collins 1993) - there is no official status difference between the terms.

## **Outline of the book**

**Chapter 2** presents a review of the international and Australian literature on ethnic entrepreneurs and ethnic business. This provides a theoretical framework against which the Australian findings can be analysed and compared. In turn the Australian experience of ethnic or immigrant business suggests that the international 'models' of ethnic small business fail the test of universality. We argue that the theory of ethnic business requires substantial revision in light of the Australian experience.

In **Chapter 3** we briefly review the long-standing relationship in Australia between immigrants and small businesses prior to the postwar Australian immigration program. We discuss ethnic entrepreneurship within the small NES immigrant community, especially in retailing. During this early period small business played a key role in the chain migration strategies of NES immigrants. Moreover, the relative success of immigrants in small business in these early years established a model for postwar immigrant aspirations in this distant



and foreign country.

Since 1945, more than five million immigrants have been absorbed into the Australian economy and society. In **Chapter 4** we explore what happened to them in the labour market and society, and investigate why a disproportionately large number of NES immigrants moved into small business. Despite the buoyant job market up until the 1970s, there were many reasons for NES immigrants to be reluctant proletarians, with their employment mobility blocked by individual and institutional barriers of racial discrimination. Since the 1970s, economic recessions and changes to Australian immigration policy have meant that many NESB immigrants arrived as highly qualified professionals, technicians and managers, unlike their counterparts in earlier postwar decades. We investigate why some NESB immigrant groups are over-represented in small business activities while others are under-represented.

In **Chapter 5** we turn to the more recent period of global economic restructuring to identify changing trends in international capital and labour flows and in the changing nature of capitalist production processes from Fordism to post-Fordism. We are interested in the links between this global restructuring and the Australian economy, including the impacts it has had upon patterns of investment and immigration, small business growth and migrant employment. There is increasing international evidence that the growth of small businesses is a key strategy in the restructuring and revitalisation of older capitalist economies currently underway. In this chapter we suggest that the patterns of immigrant small business in Australia in the 1990s are related to these international trends.

One way to study the links between economic restructuring and immigrant small businesses in Sydney is through the window of Marrickville, Sydney's most multicultural municipality. **Chapter 6** looks at the changing demographic and economic structures of Marrickville to show the interrelationship between shifts in the economic base and the entry of new ethnic

groups, as well as the departure of older ones. The 'ecological' or 'ethnic succession' in which Anglo-Australian working-class people were replaced first by Greeks and other southern Europeans - who in turn are now making way for Vietnamese and other Asians - is closely linked with a new spatial division of labour within Sydney.

**Chapters 7 and 8** report the findings of a Sydney survey of 280 small businesses. The survey covered immigrant and non-immigrant businesses. Chapter 7 attempts to identify the similarities and differences between immigrant and non-immigrant small businesses. A key question is whether there is a distinctive ethnic business strategy, or whether small businesses irrespective of ethnicity, face the same problems in the same ways. In Chapter 8 we consider in more detail the relationship between gender and ethnicity in Sydney small businesses. In particular, we investigate the similarities and differences between businesses owned and managed by women compared to those owned by men. We also take a close look at the different dynamics of immigrant businesses run by people from different birthplace groups. These chapters contrast the dreams of independence and security that attract people into small business with the realities which they encounter: long working hours, few holidays, low profits, the risk of bankruptcy, the constant pressure of competition, and the lack of security against accident or illness.

**Chapter 9** will examine gender roles in ethnic family businesses. Drawing on the international feminist and small business literature, the chapter looks at the importance of family labour and resources in the success of small businesses, including the domestic division of labour within ethnic family businesses, and links this to the varying family structures and values of different ethnic groups. We investigate whether the ethnic family business is a realm of freedom or exploitation for women.

Finally, **Chapter 10** draws together the themes and findings of the book. We revisit some of the central issues and questions that motivated our

study. These include: Does the experience of ethnic business in Australia fit with the findings of the international literature that there is a remarkable similarity in the nature of immigrant business, irregardless of the country of origin? Is there a distinctive 'ethnic business strategy' evident in Australian small business? How important are gender and the family in small business dynamics in Australia? We draw on the lessons of our study to suggest that a revision to the theory of ethnic business is required to fully encompass the complexity and flux within the Australian small business sector.