

The “invisible” immigrants: Greek immigrant women in Australia (1952–1972)

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1952–1972 is considered as the twenty-year period of mass or chain migration, during which the greatest number of Greek immigrants arrived in Australia. Just under half of these immigrants were women, who arrived mainly as dependent siblings, daughters, wives or brides of male immigrants. In addition, approximately 9,000 women migrated independently as factory or domestic workers. Though Greek women immigrants are an integral part of the overall Greek migration to Australia, their history still remains marginal and has not been thoroughly investigated and reported on. Greek women are regarded as the “invisible” immigrants, whose individual migration experience is encompassed within the male-dominated migration discourse. In this article we examine aspects of the migration of Greeks to Australia during the period of mass or chain migration, with a special focus on the marginal representation of women immigrants within the migration discourse.

Introduction

During the twenty-year period 1952–1972, with the signing of a Migration Agreement between Greece, Australia and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration — ICEM¹ (1952), and the subsequent mass or chain migration, many Greek women migrated to Australia mainly as dependent siblings, daughters, wives or brides. In addition, 8,763 women immigrated independently as factory workers and domestic servants for the ever growing wants and needs of the Australian society (Λαφιατόγλου, 2009:71).

Women immigrants comprise nearly half of the overall Greek migration to Australia; despite that, their history still remains marginal and has not been thoroughly investigated and reported on (Gavaki, 2003:56). Greek women are considered the “invisible” immigrants, whose individual migration experience is included in the

¹ Throughout this paper we will refer to the “Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration” as ICEM.

male-dominated migration discourse. The literature review on Greek women's migration indicates that their marginality within the migration discourse is attributed mainly to gender and social issues as well as aspects of the Australian migration and settlement policies.

In this article, we explore the migration of Greek women to Australia during the crucial twenty-year period 1952–1972, which is regarded as the time of mass or chain migration of Greeks to the country. At first we overview the migration Agreement (1952) between ICEM, Greece and Australia and the subsequent arrival of Greek immigrants to the country; we then examine Greek women immigrants who arrived either on assisted or paid passage during the 1950s and 1960s with a special focus on the brides and the female workers (mainly domestic servants), and briefly discuss the reasons behind their decision to migrate. We conclude with an overall evaluation of literature on the immigration of Greek women to Australia and assess the female status within the migration discourse. Our research is based on primary sources, namely information drawn from the National Archives of Australia and newspapers and magazines, while secondary sources (articles and books) are also used throughout. This article stems from research regarding two projects on Greek immigration of women to Australia, which are based on participatory research and some information is drawn from interviews we have conducted.²

As Greek female migration is still a partially explored research field, we believe that a systematic study of women's immigration to Australia will add significantly to and enhance the Greek-Australian migration discourse.

Post-World War II immigration of Greeks to Australia

The year 1952 heralds the beginning of mass or chain assisted and unassisted migration of Greeks to Australia. The migration Agreement signed between Greece, Australia and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) set in motion the immigration of predominantly male workers to Australia, who in turn nominated family members, spouses and brides to the country.

The establishment of ICEM dates back to late 1951. After the International Refugee Programme ceased to exist (1951),³ the issue of excess population (refugees, displaced or unemployed people) in many European countries had not been solved. With the

² The two projects, interconnected to this article, are: 1. A project on the objects Greek and Italians immigrants brought to Australia, which is undertaken at the Department of Language Studies, Flinders University. 2. A project on the Greek women who migrated to Australia as Domestic servants (1956–1970), undertaken by myself.

³ The International Refugee Organisation ceased to exist in late 1951. It is interesting to note that Australia had made an agreement with the International Refugee Organisation on 21 July 1947, according to which refugees or displaced people from Europe were to enter the country as assisted migrants (Palaktsoglou, 2011:715–6). The agreement, under which 156,491 immigrants arrived in Australia can be found in the following link: <http://www.info.dfat.gov.au/info/historical/HistDocs.nsf/d30d79e4ab5621f9ca256c8600163c0d/34de11e5815c539dca256b7e00810cb6?OpenDocument>.

encouragement of the United States, a Provisional Committee was formed which was to manage the excess European population and direct it to countries who needed migrants. In early December 1951, in a conference held in Brussels, an agreement was reached for the establishment of ICEM, which was to be based in Geneva (NAA, 1962298:13) and to create centres within the territories of its member countries. ICEM was funded mainly by the financial contributions of the United States of America and other Member States⁴ depending on their financial status.

During the first years of its establishment, ICEM organised a migration programme which aimed at resolving issues of excess population in Europe, and at the same time addressing the individual needs of the host countries. The countries which agreed to accept immigrants were: United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela, while those from which people emigrated from, were predominantly: West Germany, Italy, Austria, Greece and the Netherlands. In 1952 alone, the movement of 115,000 Europeans was arranged, of whom Australia agreed to accept 25,000 immigrants (NAA, 1962298:30). In Australia, new immigrants were mainly destined for the construction of infrastructure projects, such as the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Project, the construction of housing and expansion of the railway network as well as agricultural works (NAA, 1962298:39).

For Greece, its membership to ICEM and the consequent Migration Agreement signed with many countries appeared as a solution to its Post Second World War socio-political and economic problems: high unemployment, poverty and political instability (Dimitreas, 1995:166). After the Second World War and the Civil War, Greece went through a difficult political, social and economic phase. The high rate of unemployment and the economic crisis plagued the country and led large numbers of the population to seek an outlet in emigration.

In January 1952, official talks were held between Greece and ICEM, while on 17 April of the same year, a Migration Agreement was signed in Athens.⁵ The Agreement marked the beginning of assisted emigration of Greeks to countries such as Australia,

⁴ Australia and Greece were amongst the founding members of ICEM.

⁵ It is interesting to note that apart from the agreement through ICEM, Greece had no bilateral agreement with Australia as other countries had. Documents found in the National Archives of Australia show that there was a draft agreement but was never approved by the Greek government and never materialised (Palaktsoglou, 2011:722–3). At the National Archives is the following information (“Note on a discussion with the Greek Minister, Mr Dimitri Lambros”): “In answer from a question from Mr. Tange as to whether Greece had a migration Agreement with Australia, Mr. Lambros said it had not, although an Agreement had been proposed by the Department of Immigration and submitted to the Greek Government. He went to say that his Government had shown some reluctance to conclude an agreement on the terms offered by the Department of Immigration. In some respects it was less advantageous than the agreement signed with Germany. In view of the sensitivity of Greek public opinion as regards to Germany, the government was anxious not to lay itself open to criticism when the agreements were compared. Under the circumstances, and as Greek migration was proceeding smoothly without an agreement, it was not disposed to rush matters. Mr. Lambros emphasised, however, that the matter was one of detail and he was concerned too much might be of it. He had not raised this aspect with the Department of Immigration, who, he observed, were always most cooperative” (NAA, 591218:257).

Canada, the United States and Latin America. In 1952 alone 20,000 Greeks, planned to emigrate mostly to the United States, Canada and Australia (*Ελευθερία*, 25/4/1952), though this plan never fully eventuated and many Greeks were left disappointed and in financial turmoil.⁶

For the needs of Greeks immigrating to Australia under the new Migration Agreement, an Australian Immigration office was established in Athens (1952) (NAA, 3345837:205).⁷ The urgent need for the Australian office in Greece was proven by the first days of its operation, when officers sent the following request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Australia:

Our office opened March 17th but closed to public at 11.30 to quell disturbance when premises stormed. 300 forms issued, 500 persons turned away. Another 500 issued March 18th, 600 turned away. 2,000 letters, 160 landing permits on hand. Approval is requested by telegraph to engage additional 2 translators, 2 clerk-typists, 1 doorman-messenger. Suggest additional interviewing officer be sent immediately. (NAA, 3318907:469)

From 1952, all Greek immigrants to Australia were processed through the ICEM office and/or the Australian Immigration office in Athens. In June 1953, the Australian Immigration Minister, Harold Holt, visited Greece and further talks on Greek immigration to Australia were held (Palaktsoglou, 2011:726–7). The Minister defined the profile of the workers, who were needed in Australia (mainly rural and factory workers), and agreed in a future increase of the immigrant intake (*Καθημερινή*, 28/6/1953). However, the increase in the Greek immigration quota depended in Australia's capacity to absorb large numbers of immigrants, as this newspaper report shows:

Mr. Holt Tells Greeks of Migrant Problems ATHENS, Sun. — The Australian Minister for Immigration (Mr Holt) was asked on arrival in Greece yesterday if Australia would raise the quota of Greek immigrants to Australia to 4,000 a year. The request was made at a meeting of Greek officials with Mr. Holt who was in Athens as the guest of the Greek Government. Mr. Holt said later that he explained to Greek Ministers the two factors which limited Australia's capacity to absorb new settlers — the capital cost of hospitals, schools and services for the new settlers and the need to find immigrants with skills to fit into the specialised jobs open. [...] (*The West Australian*, 29/6/1953)

Under the ICEM Migration Agreement, the Greeks who qualified for emigration were mainly: young healthy men, preferably single who had agreed and signed a two year employment contract and were obliged to work in a placement (mainly in rural

⁶ In the newspaper *Εμπρός* the predicament of many Greeks — potential migrants — was reported on in a negative tone in an article entitled: “Διατί απέτυχεν η δωρεάν μετανάστευσις; (Why has free Migration failed)” (*Εμπρός*, 6/7/1952). The article claims that many Greeks had invested in the idea of migrating to Australia and had sold their properties in order to have enough money to arrange for their applications.

⁷ Prior to the Migration Agreement all applications for immigration to Australia were handled by the Australian legation in Rome (NAA, 585332:2).

areas) chosen by the Australian authorities. Some married men and their families were also chosen and were given assistance for their passage.⁸

In January of 1953, the first ICEM Greeks emigrants, embarked on their long sea-journey to Australia; they were 86 people, destined for employment in the agricultural sector. According to the Greek newspaper *Εμπρός*, 10 women and 7 children under the age of 15 were included in the first group of assisted migrants (*Εμπρός*, 30/1/1953). In this particular newspaper article, details of the first assisted passage of Greeks to Australia are given as follows:

Την δην μ.μ. χθες ανεχώρησεν εκ Πειραιώς εις Αυστραλίαν δια ατμοπλοίου “Νέλλη” το πρώτον τμήμα εξ 86 Ελλήνων μεταναστών, φροντίδι της Διακυβερνητικής Επιτροπής Ευρωπαϊκής Μεταναστεύσεως. Εις την εν λόγω Επιτροπήν μετέχουν ως γνωστόν 21 κράτη, μεταξύ των οποίων και η Ελλάς, κατόπιν της υπογραφείσας συμφωνίας του περασμένου Απρίλιου. [...] Τους Έλληνας μετανάστας συνώδευσε μέχρι της αποβάθρας ο Επιτετραμμένος της Αυστραλίας εν Ελλάδι κ. Μακένες, ο οποίος τους αποχαίρησεν ομιλήσας δι’ ολίγων δια την εκεί διαμονήν και εργασίαν των. Ο κ. Μακένες ετόνισε ιδιαιτέρως ότι οι Έλληνες αγρόται θα τύχουν της ίδιας ακριβώς μεταχειρίσεως που τυγχάνουν και οι Αυστραλοί συνάδελφοί των. Θα λαμβάνουν τα αυτά ημερομίσθια και θα έχουν τα ίδια δικαιώματα και υποχρεώσεις έναντι των Αυστραλιανών νόμων. (*Εμπρός*, 30/1/1953)

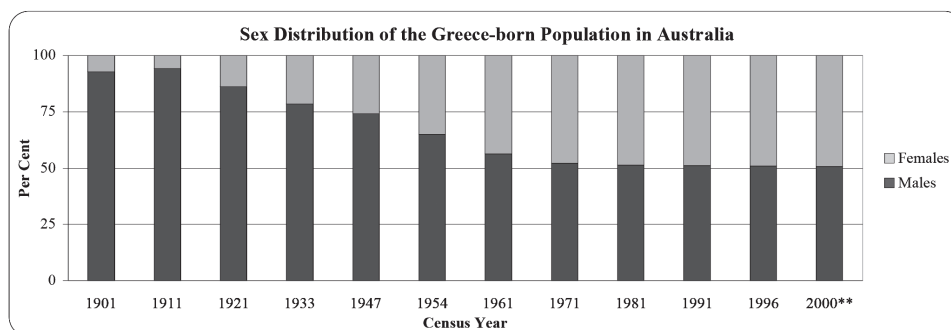
During the same year, 500 Greeks — mostly males — migrated to Australia with assisted passage, destined for employment in rural areas. At the same time the overall number of Greek immigrants who arrived under the ICEM migration agreement was 1,486 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1955:343). During the twenty-year period 1952–1972, the number of Greek immigrants who arrived in Australia with assisted passage was 71,221 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1973:156) while the overall number of Greek immigrants (assisted and self-funded) was around 180,000 (Λαφιατόγλου, 2009:99).⁹ Greek immigration to Australia waned after 1972 and, by the late seventies, with the economic and political circumstances in Greece improving, came to a standstill.

⁸ The preference for single men migrants while evident in practice is sometimes debated on some official documents. One such example was found in the following Cablegram sent to the Australian Legation in Rome (13 February 1953): “I.C.E.M Australia has requested revision of marital status 500 Greek selectees suggesting single men increased to 300. Increase of single men is said to be necessary as result our original request that ‘accent should be on single men’ and your interpretation of that instruction as being 80% single men initial selection having been undertaken by I.C.E.M, on that basis. At this stage am not favourably disposed to increasing number of workers at expense of dependants but would appreciate your comments as to position reached in selection” (NAA, 341432:269). The reply to this cablegram shows that even though single men should be sought, married men or families are difficult to find: “[...] Pre-selection [...] has proven that married rural workers difficult to obtain and I.C.E.M has accepted application for single workers far in excess quota. [...] I.C.E.M’s contention that my 80 per cent single interpretation has caused their latest/revision is not entirely correct. The fact remains that married couples difficult to obtain” (NAA, 341432:268).

⁹ According to Λαφιατόγλου the numbers of assisted and unassisted immigrants to Australia are as follows: Unassisted — 69,356 and Assisted through ICEM — 109,775 (Λαφιατόγλου, 2009:99).

Greek women immigrants

During the early fifties, the majority of Greek immigrants arriving to Australia were young single males. As women’s number intake was considerably smaller, the numerical bias towards maleness¹⁰ of the Greek immigrant population was evident and in need of an urgent solution. The gender imbalance was improved gradually with the increase of the female immigrant intake either through nominations and family reunion schemes or through immigration programmes for female workers.



According to ICEM’s Migration Agreement and the Australian Migration Policy, Greek immigrants were allowed to nominate and sponsor other Greeks as migrants, “wives, fiancées, sisters, brothers, nieces, female and male cousins and single unrelated females” (Pennay, 2011:13). Unmarried sisters, fiancées, children and wives, who were deemed as “dependants”, were preferred. Nomination and sponsorship numbers were reduced after 1956 and then increased again during the sixties, when more female immigrants were needed.

Amongst the nominated female Greek immigrants the “brides”¹¹ held a special place, as they were considered an immediate solution to the gender imbalance of the Greek population (Λαφιατόγλου, 2009:66). Throughout the time of mass or chain migration period, “brides” migrated to Australia after a nomination and their fare was either assisted or privately paid.¹² Upon their arrival to Australia, they were married and started a family.

The majority of the “brides” had never met their prospective husband in real life; their introduction was through relatives, who were Australian residents, or common

¹⁰ The gender balance of the Greek population during the twentieth century: <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/statistics/federation/body2.pdf> (p. 47).

¹¹ The migration of Greek “brides” to Australia is an interesting part of the migration history yet very few scholars have researched this area. Some of the researchers are: Srebrenka Kunek, who has investigated the area using the feminist theory and Panagiota Nazou, who approaches the topic through the Oral History theory.

¹² In the article, *Brides, Wives and Single Women: Gender and Immigration* (1993), S. Kunek gives a detailed account of the circumstances under which Greek “brides” immigrated to Australia.

acquaintances. Upon introduction, photos and letters were exchanged between the bride and the groom and arrangements for a nomination were made. “Brides” went through the selection procedure for migration (health checks, interview). On many occasions prior to the “bride” leaving for Australia in order to get married, an engagement was held in Greece where a priest was performing the ceremony between the fiancée and the photo of the “absent” fiancé.¹³

During the 1950s and the early 1960s Greek “brides” were arriving in Australia in large numbers and many a time their arrival was attracting the interest of the Australian Press. One such example of “brides’ arrival” can be found in *The Australian Women’s Weekly* magazine (25/1/1956) and the *Argus* (7/1/1956).¹⁴



(*The Australian Women’s Weekly*, 25/1/1956)

In 1956, 515 women and children arrived in Melbourne by the ship “Tasmania”. Anxious Greek migrants awaited the arrival of their loved ones: wives, brides, sisters, and children. Upon disembarkation migrants dispersed to different places of Australia, including Queensland and South Australia. According to the article, grooms were the most anxious from all the people waiting in the harbour of Melbourne because they had to welcome their new “brides”, most of who had never seen before in real life. Some grooms were so anxious that they stayed in Melbourne, married their “brides” immediately and then returned to their place of living. The *Argus* article claims that due to female arrivals the Greek wedding ceremonies in Melbourne would increase to 400 (*Argus*, 7/1/1956).

Amongst the passengers of “Tasmania”, there were 30 “brides” who were destined for Adelaide. Some of the brides were greeted by their future husbands in Melbourne

¹³ In one of our interviews a photo from one such engagement was seen. A priest was blessing an engagement between a young woman and an absent man, whose photo was on a table. Also, some examples of the migration experience of “brides” have been drawn from sources such as articles (Tsiannikas, 2009; Nazou, 2009), newspapers, magazines and interviews.

¹⁴ Both articles refer to the same event.

while others travelled by train to Adelaide and were received anxiously at the train station. Upon their arrival a great street party was thrown by friends and the local press was present. The "brides" were portrayed in both articles as shy but skilful¹⁵ young women who followed the Greek tradition, which was still observed in Australia.¹⁶ Amongst other practices, the tradition of keeping the bride and the groom apart before marriage was emphasised in *The Australian Women's Weekly* article:

They arrived too late in the weekend to visit the Registrar of Marriages for the civil wedding ceremony that precedes their church wedding. Therefore the weddings were postponed and Mr Koussadias was kept busy for a few hours obtaining last minute accommodation for the girls with friends and relatives. The Greeks are proud people and are very particular about the conduct of their young people before marriage. (*The Australian Women Weekly*, 25/1/1956)

It is interesting to point out that the articles seem to highlight, intentionally or unintentionally, the dependency of the "brides" to their prospective grooms, who spoke on their behalf, as well as to the "custodians" of the Greek tradition within the Greek community, who were guarding their reputation before the marriage.¹⁷

While "brides" migrated to Australia as "dependants", after a nomination from male immigrants, another group of women immigrated as "unaccompanied" workers¹⁸ and later married and settled in the country (Kunek, 1993:100). These women were the domestic servants or the factory workers who migrated to Australia under ICEM's "Domestics and Male Workers" or "Male Workers and Women Trainees" programmes. Greek female "unaccompanied" workers were mainly from a low socio-economic rural or semi-rural environment and were prepared to work and build their personal wealth in order to better their life.

The emigration of Greek "unaccompanied" female workers was initiated in 1956. During this year, ICEM established a Migration Programme in Greece, which aimed at training and assisting women emigrants who were trained as domestic workers and sent to Canada and later Australia (Kunek, 1993:99).

In 1959, the Australian Minister for Immigration, Alexander Russell Downer, while visiting Athens formally endorsed the Programme. While in Athens he proclaimed: "Send on your girls; we'll welcome them with open arms" (*The Australian*

¹⁵ "She makes her dresses and she makes dresses for children and women too." This particular bride who was 19 at the time brought her wedding dress with her but it was still in her trunk in Melbourne.

¹⁶ According to the *Argus* article, "Archimandrite, Senesios Ktenas, the Greek Orthodox priest of St Evangelismos Church, Victoria Pde, was one of the first abroad the ship when it berthed at Station Pier yesterday. And he was immediately besieged by engaged Greek girls, clamoring for news of how soon they could be married" (*Argus*, 7/1/1956).

¹⁷ We have to note that not all "brides" went through with marrying the grooms who had nominated them. For some the grooms were not suited and they preferred either to return to Greece or find another husband (*The Central Queensland Herald*, 1/11/1956).

¹⁸ The term "unaccompanied" refers to women who arrived as workers, either domestic servants or factory workers as opposing to the term "dependants".

Women's Weekly, 21/10/1959). In an article which appeared in late 1959 the ICEM Programme called "Operation Domestic" was described as a means to assist the Australian housewives and the wider community by importing Greek women to work as domestic servants, hospital helpers, hotel workers etc. According to the article the ICEM Programme had dual purpose:

'Operation Domestic', the latest large-scale undertaking by Australian immigration authorities, will make marriage and happiness possible for hundreds of Greek girls as well as relieving the domestic-help problem in their new land. (*The Australian Women Weekly*, 21/10/1959)

Greek women who were from families with no economic means to provide them with a dowry were given the opportunity to migrate to Australia, work for a period of time as domestics and provide dowries for themselves. Greek women wanting to migrate to Australia as domestics had to apply to ICEM and upon selection had to undergo a vigorous four month/twelve hours per day training in Athens on cooking, hygiene, and language. Their training was complete with an examination and the award of a certificate.¹⁹

Greek women trained as domestic workers migrated to Australia where there were assigned to different households. Their duties were: household chores, looking after the children of the family and shopping. Domestic workers were obliged to stay in Australia for a minimum of two years, though they were not forced to stay in the same field of work. Our research, thus far, has indicated that the majority of the women who arrived as domestic workers, 8,763 in number, never worked in that field; instead they found employment in factories and the majority married within the first two years of their arrival (Kunek, 1993:99).²⁰

The ever-growing²¹ arrival of Greek women either as nominated immigrants or "unaccompanied" workers seemed to counterbalance the issue of the preponderance of males in the Greek immigrant communities in Australia. As statistics point out by 1972 the number of female immigrants was smaller by approximately 7,000:

¹⁹ An example of the whole migration procedure of Greek women destined for the domestic service can be found in the National Archives of Australia (NAA, 1450336).

²⁰ In the interviews we have conducted, women have stressed the fact that the majority of the Greek female immigrants were employed in factories as workers. A number of them were sent to the Riverland where they worked in the canneries and later left as conditions were quite harsh. In the National Archives of Australia there are many photos of Greek immigrants working at the Riverland's canneries.

²¹ As a Greek newspaper reported in 1960 women emigrants' numbers were on the increase and in some instances was at least equivalent to the number of men: "Το νέο στοιχείο που προσετέθη κατά τα τελευταία χρόνια στο μεταναστευτικό πρόβλημα είναι η συμμετοχή των γυναικών στην φυγή προς το εξωτερικό. Κατά το 1957 οι γυναίκες εκάλυπτον το ένα τρίτο του αριθμού των Ελλήνων μεταναστών. Το 1959 έφτασαν στο ίδιο περίπου ύψος που βρίσκεται ο αριθμός των ανδρών και τείνουν ήδη να τους προσπεράσουν" (*Ελευθερία*, 10/4/1960).

POPULATION: COUNTRY OF BIRTH, BY SEX, AUSTRALIA, CENSUSES, 1966 AND 1971

Country of birth	Census, 30 June 1966			Census, 30 June 1971			Increase 1966–1971
	Males	Females	Persons	Males	Females	Persons	
Australia	4,688,441	4,780,137	9,468,578	5,037,098	5,139,222	10,176,320	707,742
New Zealand.	26,174	26,311	52,485	41,350	39,116	80,466	27,981
Europe—							
United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland ^(a)	474,427	434,237	908,664	562,869	525,341	1,088,210	179,546
Germany	55,799	52,910	108,709	56,196	54,615	110,811	2,102
Greece	73,936	66,153	140,089	83,483	76,717	160,200	20,111
Italy	150,138	117,187	267,325	159,492	129,984	289,476	22,151
Malta	31,028	24,076	55,104	29,546	24,135	53,681	—1,423
Netherlands	35,189	44,360	99,549	54,846	44,449	99,295	—254
Poland	36,496	25,145	61,641	34,753	24,947	59,700	—1,941
Other	147,921	104,509	252,430	189,836	145,269	335,105	82,675
Total Europe	1,024,934	868,577	1,893,511	1,171,021	1,025,457	2,196,478	302,967
Other countries	102,039	82,885	184,924	163,242	139,132	302,374	117,450
Total born outside Australia	1,153,147	977,773	2,130,920	1,375,613	1,203,705	2,579,318	448,398
Grand total	5,841,588	5,757,910	11,599,498	6,412,711	6,342,927	12,755,638	1,156,140

(a) Includes Ireland (undefined).
Minus sign (–) denotes decrease.

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1973:140)

The “marginalisation” of Greek women immigrants

Greek women constitute nearly half of the overall Greek immigrants to Australia; despite that, the historical and social immigration enquiry on Greek women is limited and marginal²² and mostly intermixed or included in the male-dominated migration discourse. Scholars who have focused on Greek female immigration (mainly to Canada and to a lesser extent Australia), while acknowledging the progress which has been made in this field since the 1980s, attribute the lack of plurality in research to a perceived “marginalisation” of women due to gender as well as social, economic and political factors. Efrosini Gavaki, attributes female “marginalisation” within the Greek migration discourse primarily to the “gender factor” and the subsequent lack in its consideration by researchers (Gavaki, 2003:56). Generalisation prevails in the migration narrative and there is little mention of female diversity. Women and men experience migration in different ways and, in most instances, issues associated with the change of living are more dramatic to women than men (Tastsoglou, 2009:2). Srebrenka Kunek attributes the “marginalisation” not only to gender but to ethnicity factors as well; she further claims that, during the 1950s and the 1960s, Greek immigrant women, were considered by Australian migration policy makers

²² Efrosini Gavaki, in an article which explores the “portraits” of Greek immigrant women to Canada claims: “There are major differences in the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of immigrant women, differences in work, education, social class and achievements. However, these differences and experiences of immigrant women have not yet found a strong voice in the scientific literature, and like their position in the receiving society, talking about them is still marginal. Their lifestyles — before and after immigration — have ranged from the most traditional to the most unconventional. Yet most works on immigrants tend to marginalise them, ignore them, or simply include them in the discussion of male immigrants” (Gavaki, 2003:56).

and government officials as “dependants” and as such they were treated as a “special needs group” (Kunek, 1989:36 and Kunek, 1993:105) and thus “subordinate” to men. Under these circumstances “marginalisation” was not only inevitable but expected.

The issue of the “marginalisation” of women within the migration discourse is certainly a complex matter which demands an in-depth and thorough approach. Of special interest are the factors which contribute to it: gender, ethnicity, social attitudes, and political decisions. Due to the limitations of this publication we will focus only on social attitudes and beliefs, relating to gender which have contributed to the “marginalisation” of Greek female immigrants.

Within the Greek patriarchal society of the greatest part of the twentieth century, gender differences arose from the subordinate status of women, which was enforced by the Greek Constitution,²³ certain customary beliefs and social attitudes. Within the Greek society women were regarded as “dependants” to male family members, who were responsible for their honour and their welfare. Dowry giving²⁴ especially was regarded an important and essential part of a successful marriage, which had to be provided by the father or the brothers. Families with limited or no economic resources were facing problems in finding a suitable husband for their daughters and had little or no alternative other than to turn to migration either national or international.

For Greece as for other Southern European countries, male migration was a usual phenomenon which was triggered by many factors.²⁵ For Greeks, one of these migration factors was the accumulation of wealth in order to provide dowries for the dependant female family members (Dimitreas, 1995:174). Women’s emigration, on the other hand, was infrequent and occurred only under extreme financial or social strain associated with the family and/or the local community. Women were more likely to emigrate if the local community and its economy were shattered and the male members of the family could not sustain a basic way of living. Under these circumstances, young women, found themselves trapped in poor or destitute conditions. With their marriage prospects diminishing dramatically, and without any support from male family members, they were usually coerced to seek employment outside the family home and create their own modest dowry.

Up to the late 1970s working class female migration/movement from rural to urban areas within Greece was accepted only under difficult financial conditions and with permission from the family. The reasons for migration were mainly for employment.

²³ Up to the early 1980s the subordination of women was endorsed by the Family Law and the Greek Constitution according to which men and women were not equal. In the late 1970s a series of discussions were held for the review of the Greek Constitution which questioned the status of women within the home and the society in general resulting in the change of particular articles (Σκουτέρη-Διδασκάλου, 1991:78).

²⁴ Dowry giving was abolished in the early 1980s (Dimitreas, 1995:175).

²⁵ As Alessandra Venturini points out in her book *Postwar Migration in Southern Europe, 1950–2000 An Economic Analysis*, migration is a social phenomenon and can be interpreted through different theoretical approaches.

Hionidou, for example, argues that during the first decades of the 20th century it was accustomed to many rural and poor households to send their young women to work as domestic servants in wealthy households in the big cities within Greece or in diaspora centres, such as Alexandria or Istanbul, in order to earn enough money to acquire a dowry (Hionidou, 2005). In the 1950s, also, with the economy of Greece in turmoil and most areas devastated by the aftermaths of the Second World War and the Civil War, many young women were forced to work in seasonal rural works, factories or cottage industries, as a means of escaping poverty or destitution and at the same time creating a modest dowry. One such example is given by Σκουτέρη-Διδασκάλου:

Τα περισσότερα κορίτσια είναι κόρες ακτημόνων εργατών, μέλη οικογενειών με πολλές κόρες ή ορφανά [...] Τα κορίτσια εργάζονται για να συσσωρεύσουν μια προίκα. Αυτά τα κορίτσια παλιότερα δεν θα έπαιρναν καθόλου προίκα ή θα έπαιρναν κάτι λίγα από τους γονείς τους. Η προίκα που φτιάχνουν τα κορίτσια μόνα τους — με την εργασία τους δηλαδή — τους προσφέρει τη δυνατότητα ενός καλύτερου γάμου με την υπεργαμία. (Σκουτέρη-Διδασκάλου, 1981:180–1)

During the same period (1950s and 1960s), many young women were coerced into emigrating and joining male relatives or prospective husbands who were already in foreign countries such as Australia. These women migrated to Australia as “dependants” under the Nomination Programmes which were established either by ICEM or by the Australian Government. In interviews and personal narratives, Greek immigrant women, attribute their decision to leave Greece, amongst other reasons, to the economic hardship their families had encountered and the subsequent lack of a dowry they were confronted with:

There were seven girls and one boy in my family. I had to leave because of the dowry. [...] It was because of my children’s future. I had four girls and a deep anxiety about dowries for them. (Kunek, 1989:41)

Thus, the majority of Greek women immigrated to Australia as “dependants” to male relatives, being their brothers, fathers or husbands. As “dependants” they remained in the “shadow” of the male immigrants and their subordinate status continued unaltered. Women’s “dependency” was accentuated even further by the Australian migration and settlement policies, which made a clear distinction between men and women. Therefore, women’s original customary and social status was transplanted to their country of immigration and consequently replicated within the migration discourse.

Conclusion

During the period of mass or chain Greek migration (1952–1972), Greek women migrated to Australia in large numbers mainly as wives, brides, young unmarried sisters and daughters of male immigrants as well as “unaccompanied” workers. For these immigrant women, Australia represented a place of plenty, though distant and

“foreign” to their country of origin, which offered them many opportunities to improve their social status and acquire financial stability for themselves and their families. Moreover, Australia offered poor or destitute single women the opportunity to marry and have a family without the social and economic constraints (dowries), which were imposed to their families by contemporary Greek customs and traditions.

While in Australia, Greek women endured many challenges, due to their gender and ethnic background, yet few of their stories were recorded or recognised. Greek immigrant women remained marginalised within the migration discourse; they were the “invisible” immigrants whose history seemed to take second place to men’s or “blindly” included in the collective history of Greek Migration.

Though some studies have been conducted on Greek immigrant women in Australia, explicit research into this field has not been carried out. Areas of female Greek migration to Australia such as the “brides” or female “unaccompanied” domestic and factory workers are under-researched and in need of further investigation. Moreover the interrelation of gender, ethnicity and migration policies needs to be considered in order to throw light on certain aspects of Greek migration and put into perspective the status of Greek women as immigrants within the Australian society. As Gavaki claims: [...] men and women play different roles in society at large, [...] their emotional make-up, their goals, expectations and experiences are different and should not be lumped in the immigrant total (Gavaki, 2003:56).

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