The Pear Tree. A study of Greek-Australian Families 50 years after migration

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The nation's story of the migration of Greeks to Australia is immensely rich, but the everyday voices of migrant families are largely missing. Through the use of personal stories and case studies of families who originated from the region of Florina in Greece, my research examines the impacts of migration on Greek transnational families and how conflicting ideas of home and identity are mediated and transitioned over three generations. Central to my research is the idea that family is at the core of Greek life, and during the 1950s–1970s, when Australia experienced an immense wave of post-war migration from Greece, the tapestry of Greek family units and traditional way of life was profoundly changed. This paper forms part of a wider oral history research project examining intergenerational changes within Greek-Australian migrant families from the region of Florina, and how families narrate and mediate the complexities of identity.

Introduction

As a second generation migrant daughter, when I imagine my parent's homeland of Greece, I see in my mind my father's pear tree. My father told me the tree was planted by my great-grandfather 120 years ago and he still remembers climbing the tree as a young child to be the first to pick the ripe pears. The old pear tree that he speaks of still grows in the courtyard of our ancestral home in Itea, a small village located in Florina, northern Greece near the borders of Albania to the west, and the Republic of Macedonia to the north. Although the pear tree is now old and gnarled, it still bears fruit. Planted when the house was built, it has witnessed children born and die, the occupation of the village by German and English soldiers during World War Two, the fighting of the Greek Civil War, and many of its villagers leaving to find a better life in countries far away.

I too had my own "memory" of the pear tree, even before I had seen it. The pear tree evoked for me a feeling of permanence and belonging, of "Greece" as my home, that had always existed and would always exist. However, when I did eventually see

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the pear tree with my father on my first visit to Greece in 2005 (and his first visit "home" since 1960), we both saw the same tree but it had now changed for both of us, as had the village and the idea of home and identity. I questioned whether I was now more Australian than Greek or more Greek than Australian? And within that context, where did a regional identity as a villager or Greek-Macedonian now fit? In this context, the pear tree came to signify not one home but many homes, real and imagined and different notions of what (and where) it means to be "Greek". It also came to stand as a potent symbol of how the idea and meaning of home and identity are interconnected but never static.

This paper forms part of a wider oral history research project examining inter-generational changes within Greek-Australian migrant families from the region of Florina, and how families narrate and mediate the complexities of identity. Whilst there is emerging research on how geographic and emotional mobilities have shaped migrant lives and identities (Christou, 2011:249), this remains an area that has been little explored and there is much to be gained by closer examination of Greek-Australian migrant families through regional and intergenerational perspectives. Preliminary themes in this study also reveal a more complicated narrative of how Greek identity has been mediated over the generations by families who grapple with negotiating a potential third identity of "Greek-Macedonian-Australian" that extends beyond the traditional home and host cultures. Central to the research is the idea of family at the core of Greek life, and during the 1950s–1970s, when Australia experienced an immense wave of post-war migration from Greece, the tapestry of Greek family units and traditional way of life was profoundly changed. Between 1947 and 1983, almost a quarter of a million Greeks came to Australia as permanent and long-term arrivals (Jupp, 2001:387–419) and while Greeks still comprise one of the largest non-English speaking communities in Australia, this profile is rapidly changing, particularly with the ageing of first generation migrants. It is within the necessary and understandable rush and desire to explain migrant adaptation and integration, that important elements of the Greek migration story have been missed, including more personal and intimate accounts of what it meant to uproot and transport a family and sense of home. My use of oral history and family narrative fills the gap in existing research to document the longer term implications of migration on the production and articulation of Greek identity in second and third generation transnational families, particularly changing notions of family, home and culture.

Whilst my family story is unique, it also reveals universal themes about migration. The element of personal experience, memory and family storytelling therefore is crucial to this research project and it is my own collective family story that has been the catalyst to examine more closely intergenerational change in experiences of Greek migrant families who migrated from the region of Florina in northern Greece to Australia during the post-Second World War period. Attention to regional identities alerts us also to the importance of understanding the broader complexities of "Greekness" within transnational Greek migrant family formation. The anthropological

study by Danforth (1995) in the 1990s began to explore Macedonian identity and how it applied to the diaspora in Australia. It explored conflicting claims to Macedonian identity in Australia and how that relates to the construction of national identity in northern Greece. Danforth's research on the construction of identity from a regional perspective underlines the need to be attentive to such matters in the examination of families from Florina as they exist today, particularly as to how this concept of identity has been complicated for second and third generation migrants.

Oikogeneia in an Australian context: scattered seeds of the Greek diaspora

My *oikogeneia* (the Greek term for family) provides, of course, only one set of stories within the wider Greek "diaspora" — a diaspora which today continues to grow and change and connect in many different ways, particularly the ability to now easily communicate. As in my own family's experience, the imagined connection with the homeland in Greece has rarely been severed by Greek migrants, and this has given rise to multiple Greek diasporic communities across the world (Tastsoglou, 2009:4). With the "scattered seeds" of my transnational family tree growing and taking root in other countries, I have come to ask other members of my family whether they have heard about the pear tree and thus to probe other stories about ideas of family, home and identity. In the process, I have come to understand that tales of the meaning of the pear tree — and other key signifiers of identity — change in the telling and the reception of these stories across generations. These meanings are distinct, but exist as linked narratives. As many scholars have noted, an important mechanism in the creation and maintenance of separate identities is the transmission through narrative accounts of a body of folklore, its traditions and myths. Collective narratives that gather together accounts of a group's origins, its qualities and characteristics, and its distinguishing features as they are internally perceived are a central aspect of ethnic identity (Hirschon, 1999:166). They are also an element present in the creation and maintenance of diasporic identity. Such collective narratives are a central focus of this research, which examines in particular changing constructions of "home" and its impact on identity across migrant generations, including "in-between" spaces. Ien Ang's (2001:44) deconstruction of the Chinese diaspora to both describe the Chinese diaspora and to relate how cultural China grapples with its "obsession with Chinese-ness" describes the process of diaspora as an organic "living tree":

> A living tree grows and changes over time; it constantly develops new branches and stems that shoot outward, in different directions, from the solid core of the tree trunk, which in turn feeds itself on an invisible but life-sustaining set of roots. Without roots, there would be no life, no new leaves. The metaphor of the living tree dramatically imparts the ultimate existential dependence of the periphery on the centre, the diaspora on the homeland. Furthermore, what this metaphor emphasizes is continuity over discontinuity: in the end, it all flows back to the roots.

Exploring the narratives of Greek migrant families in depth, provides the opportunity to examine in a contemporary context, how Greek-Australian families construct and navigate the connections between its "roots" and new "routes", as well as the "diaspora space" — known as the "in-between" or hybridised space where translation and negotiation of culture and identity occurs (Bhabha, 1996; Rutherford, 1990 as cited in Tastsoglou, 2009:4–5). Traditionally, the Greek family is described as collectivist rather than orientated towards individualism (Tsolidis, 1995:121–122). Professor Georgina Tsolidis writes that:

> Through the family, each generation negotiates old and new understandings of work, success, education, gender roles and 'family' itself. For Greeks in Australia, this process takes part in the context of experiences of migration. As a result, definitions of what it means to be Greek in Australia are becoming increasing varied... and no longer can we measure levels of assimilation by an understanding of the traditional Greek family as disrupted. (Tsolidis, 1995:121)

My story of the pear tree provides a metaphor to examine wider themes of change and growth of the identity of the traditional Greek migrant family as it has been dislocated from the homeland and taken root in Australia as well as other global destinations such as Canada, United States and Germany. Today, "there is no essentialised Hellenism" (Tastsoglou, 2009:5) and the concept of "Greekness" can change within the consciousness of a family dynamic to develop a more complex idea of intergenerational identity. The stories that are remembered and experienced by subsequent generations can create multiple ideas of home; and subsequent generations often negotiate concepts of home and identity that may never have existed for migrant parents.

A brief history of Greek migration to Australia

With more than 40 per cent of Greeks residing at any given time outside the national borders of Greece, the movement of Greek people can be traced from classical antiquity with trading and colonising activities spreading Greek culture, language and religion around the Mediterranean and Baltic Seas (Tamis, 2005:2). With successive and long periods of foreign domination, patterns of migration developed from Ottoman rule in the late 1700s to large-scale outward migration after the Second World War. This "last exodus" commencing from the 1890s saw massive numbers of Greeks migrating to almost 150 countries around the world until 1974 with the restoration of democracy to Greece. *Xeniteia*, or sojourning in foreign parts, has been central to the historical experience of the Greeks in modern terms and thus as a consequence the relationship of the communities overseas with the homeland has been of critical importance (Clogg, 1999; Doumanis, 2010; Tamis, 2005; Tastsoglou, 2009). Yet in historical and political terms it was only in 1830 that Greece was established as an independent state and only in recent times that Greece's current borders have been established (Tamis, 2005:1). Today, the economic crisis in Greece has again opened up the cycle of migration with the educated young leaving for new opportunities.

Greek migrants in Australia began to arrive in small numbers in the nineteenth century, first as convicts and later as gold-seekers and waterfront workers. By the late nineteenth century, many had become owners or lessees of small businesses or employees in them, with around 1000 Greek-born recorded in the earliest census. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Greek migrants began to arrive in Australia in greater numbers, but there was no substantial increase until the inter-war period (Jupp, 2001:387–419). The Balkan Wars during 1912–1913 and the Asia Minor Disaster in 1922 brought 42 per cent of Greeks in Australia from the islands of Kythera, Ithaca or Castellorizo (Tastsoglou, 2009:11). Between 1912 and 1947 chain migration, where family members would sponsor other members of the family, was largely responsible for the rise in the Greek migrant population to Australia. In the 1920s a quota system limited the number of non-British immigrants to Australia, including Greeks, which meant that between 1925 and 1929 only 100 Greeks were allowed to immigrate each month (Museum Victoria). Whilst there were discussions about the suitability of Greeks as citizens in Parliament as part of the White Australia policy, the development of a post-war immigration program meant that agreements were signed between Australia and several European countries including Greece to facilitate migration (Tamis, 2005:41–42). The Greek owned passenger ship *Kyrenia* began regular passages to Australia in 1949, although numbers did not become substantial until the early 1950s (Gilchrist, 2004:292).

By 1951 there was a massive influx of Greeks migrating to Australia, many government assisted. While there were some families, most arrivals were men, with single women beginning to arrive in the late 1950s and early 1960s due to a change in government policy that aimed to redress the gender imbalance and encourage the setting up of family households (Jupp, 1998:387–419). These migrants in the post-war period made the journey from Greece on migrant ships such as the *Patris* which made her first immigrant voyage to Australia on 14 December 1959, reaching Fremantle on 2 January 1960 and Melbourne on 7 January 1960. ("My uncle Lazaros was on this maiden voyage and recalls the infamous story of the ship running aground in the Suez Canal during the journey.")[1] During the 1950s and 1960s over 160,000 Greeks came to Australia, mostly to Victoria. Post-Second World War migrants were drawn from a wide geographic area although most were from small villages and towns, with similar socio-economic backgrounds, and few had tertiary education. Most Greek migrants found work in factories or farms as unskilled or semi-skilled labour. Community groups, churches, welfare agencies, newspapers and schools gradually developed, and eventually, the population of Melbourne constituted one of the largest Greek settlements in the world outside of Greece. During the 1970s, the Greek population was mainly concentrated in inner-city neighbourhoods that were closer to factories, such as Northcote, South Melbourne and Richmond. By the late 1980s, many Greeks had moved to middle-distance and outer metropolitan suburbs such

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[1]   Lazaros, interviewed July 2010.

as Preston, Thomastown and Lalor as they began to have families. Whilst general employment was centred on low-skilled jobs in manufacturing and retail trades for first generation migrants, in contrast many second generation migrants subsequently have experienced a significant degree of upward social mobility (Danforth, 2000:91). Some estimates suggest the Greek community in Australia could be as large as 600,000 with estimates of the Greek diaspora today vary widely between three to seven million people globally, with Australia, Canada and the US accounting for roughly half of the diaspora communities (Tastsoglou, 2009:8).

The size and nature of migration of Greek-Macedonians was in many ways similar to other regions of Greece, with village and district chains being the main source of immigration to Australia during 1924–1974. With regional restrictions imposed by the Greek government between 1955 and 1959, the largest intake of Greek Macedonians was from the districts of Kozani, Kastoria and Florina (Jupp, 2001:417–418). Rough estimates in 2000 suggest there may be about 27,000 people from the district of Florina who now live in Australia and it is possible there are as many as 15,000 people from the Florina area who live in Melbourne (Danforth, 2000:94). By 2020, it is estimated that Greek migrants will comprise of less than 5 per cent of the total Greek Australian community.

Early reflections: exploring intergenerational change through oral history and family narrative

Most previous migration histories have focused on migration policies and Australian attitudes to migration, and documented from the "outside" (Thomson, 1999:26). However, oral history offers a rich resource to explore the intergenerational dynamics of migration. My own family experience is one example of many families from the region of Florina and is the starting basis for this study on family migration narratives. Like many others, my parents migrated to Australia in 1960 on the *Patris* and although from villages very close together, they met for the first time while making the journey from the Port of Piraeus and later married and settled down in Melbourne, Australia. The region of Florina where my family originates is rich in agriculture and is made up of many villages. It suffered immensely during the Balkan Wars, both World Wars and the Greek Civil war. My father was one of eight children of whom five of the brothers migrated to Melbourne from the village of Itea. The first brother to migrate to Australia, Pandos, arrived in 1954 with his wife Olga and his two young children and he worked the cane fields in Cairns. He found the work back-breaking and he was separated from his young family who stayed in Melbourne. The family worked hard and were soon able to buy a house in Richmond, Melbourne and Pandos was subsequently able to sponsor the migration of four of his brothers to Australia during 1959–1960. The cost of my mother's migration was sponsored by the Greek Orthodox Church. During the civil war in Greece fought between 1946 and 1949, many of the children in her village in Flampouro, including my mother, were placed in the safety

of children's homes in Florina and Thessaloniki. With poor economic conditions in Greece, three of the four children in her family later migrated to Australia. Since my parent's journey to Australia over fifty years ago, my paternal and maternal family has since established roots in Melbourne, Adelaide, Toronto, Rochester and Hagen, representing the truly global impacts of migration for Greek families.

Aside from my own immediate family, participants in the research study are drawn from other family groups who migrated to Australia during the 1950s and 1960s from the region of Florina, including members of the first, second and third generation of migrants. As a proportion of the research participants are my own family members, it is important to note both the benefits and limitations with using my own family history as a starting point of the study. However, my personal interest and cultural background allows me to be an "insider" at the interviews. Intergenerational change within Greek family groups is an area that has not been widely researched to date and preliminary research has shown that there are rich narratives to explore how members of the family view their identity, and also how this identity changes over time and place. The first generation participants appear to be able to integrate and choose identities. However, second generation participants seem often confused as to how to reconcile their identity and may feel that they are "in-between" cultures. The narratives also provide a rich tapestry of what life was like in Australia for Greek families over the decades from the 1960s, and the challenges of growing up in a hybridised family setting.

For the first generation themes of journey, of success and family are central to the family narrative, and, in particular, of building a life in Australia, getting married and having a home. These themes are often present in Greek migrant "contribution" literature of the 1980s which began to construct the stereotype of the Greeks in Australia as "model migrants" and examples of the success that could be gained through hard work and focus on social-economic integration. But for the women, there is also a sense of loss for a life in Greece before the war, and of community and village and knowing one's place that has been little explored in the context of an intergenerational family setting. In contrast to life in a rural village, in Australia, many women worked in factories and lived the "Australian dream" of a suburban house on a quarter acre block.

Zoi,[2] a first generation migrant, speaks of her experience of work, and of a life that was profoundly changed from her traditional village route:

> We no have much life here. But the children can have life here. That's what they tell us when we become Australian citizen.
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> They said, for you, Australia will not be very nice. But for your children it is going to be very nice. That is true.
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> I have to work, not because I like it, I have to work. Yes it was hard with three children. First two children, after three children it was very hard. We [my husband and I] do two

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shifts, no give the children somebody else to look after. I come in one o'clock in the night home. I was not scared at the time. Now you can't go in the backyard. Train and bus from Richmond. Train and bus.

First no buses, after we have a bus. Sometimes I used to cry when I walk home. I say what life is this? But still I walk in the night. It was too much work. It was too much work.

No English when I come. Work, just slowly, slowly. They ask what to do in work and I done. I start to learn more Italian than English.

In contrast, life at home in Greece, with all the challenges of war and hunger, was remembered as a happy time:

It was nice childhood. Life was beautiful. We played. We have a river there and a beautiful school and it was good. It was very nice. We have beautiful water in the village. It come from the mountain. We have lot of apple trees, farm with apple trees and beautiful vegetable garden. Plenty wood for winter, plenty snow in winter. Every night you have to sit down all with the grandmothers and old people and talk stories, you know? Like Snow White and Cinderella and just a lot of stories like that.

For the children of migrants, themes of cultural struggle, alienation, in-betweenness, confusion, conflicting concepts of home and of course the longing for beautifully wrapped Aussie sandwiches cut into beautiful quarters in the school lunch box (rather than thick Vienna loaves with feta and salami) were key themes. Paul[3] described the differences he experienced in Australia after having moved from Greece at the age of four:

Obviously my home life compared to school life was a total split living environment. It was like living in two worlds, yes. We didn't talk about that as migrants but it was a very different culture in that the language was the overt [difference] … that what we ate… we'd have bloody thick sandwiches with salami in it, not you know vegemite sandwiches with white sliced bread. It was just some of the obvious manifestations but there were lots of things that were different. The way we dressed, what we ate, the fact that we spoke a different language. You learnt to cope with it and live with it. You learnt to realise that there were two separate segments of your life and you dealt with that. It was interesting, as more and more migrants kept coming out and there were kids that were a lot older coming into school having trouble with language, so we used to help teach them. It was really tough on the kids of 12 and 13 who had not a word of English, that were brought into primary school, and they were older than what we were, and they found it really tough.

The themes that these stories reveal and the developing — and changing — sense of Greek Australian identity has been one focus of studies emerging since the 1990s, often in their investigation of aspects of cultural history, representation, language and literature. The exploration of hyphenated and hybridised Greek identities has begun to complicate the picture of migration and sense of home and belonging in the Greek-Australian context and while much of the earlier Australian literature reveals a preoccupation with a rather narrowly conceived sense of "Greekness" and home —largely

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3   Paul, interviewed November 2010.

within the context of understanding the development of a particular ethnic or national consciousness among migrants — works in the 1990s began to complicate the picture as subsequent generations began to question this narrow sense of home, identity and belonging. Another development in Australian migration studies in the 1990s moved to examine questions of second and third generation identity within the migrant experience, outlining the yearning to return "home" and also consider hybridised and "in-between" Australian identities (Baldassar, 2001; Butcher & Thomas, 2006). This is a preliminary finding from the research which requires further exploration as existing literature is limited on Greek–Macedonian–Australian post-war migrant families, and, in particular how the different generations view their cultural identity. From this study within the same family groups, brothers, fathers and daughters, uncles and nephews see their cultural and ethnic identity very differently. The following quotes provide some examples.

First generation voices of cultural identity

"I feel Macedonian more and Australian."[4]

"I am Australian with origins in the Macedonian part of Greece."[5]

"I am Greek. I am Australian. My kids are Australian."[6]

"I am Greek. I am Greek-Australian. I am more Australian now. I have been here for fifty years. I am Australian. I see my children as Australians. The grandchildren are more Greek, they like to talk Greek and they have Greek friends."[7]

Second generation voices of cultural identity

"I struggle with it constantly and it's more so not knowing what to call myself, whether I call myself a Greek or a Macedonian or a Greek-Macedonian. It's just a constant struggle with me. Particularly with the Greek community because you're xenos to them and you're xenos to Australians and you're xenos to the Macedonians, so you sort of don't fit anywhere really."[8]

"I don't know what my identity is. I have got a Greek passport. It doesn't look like me, and it says I am a Greek citizen. I look like an angry brunette. In my Australian passport I have blonde hair and I am smiling. It is like two different people."[9]

Such statements reflect the complex stories of home, family identity and belonging that emerge when personal narratives are explored. Cultural geographer Jane Jacobs

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[4] Lazaros, interviewed July 2010.

[5] Paul, interviewed November 2010.

[6] Theodoros, interviewed February 2011.

[7] Zoi, interviewed February 2011.

[8] Helen, interviewed September 2010.

[9] Sarah, interviewed October 2010.

(2004:167–168) has argued that for many migrants, home as a sense of dwelling-in-place is no longer bound to one single place but is linked to a range of locations and identities. Today the *oikogeneia* must translate and negotiate the complexity brought about by transnational family migration; multiple and hybrid identities; and changing ideas of home. Whilst there is no essential "Greekness" in describing the "Greek family", a certain degree of sameness is assumed and is marked by a tension between differences and sameness (Tsolidis, 1995:121). This sameness can be seen through the preservation of the traditions and patterns of village life still being kept by first generation Greek-Australian migrants — of vegetable gardens and the planting of fruit trees — but different in the adaption and choices that subsequent migrant generations make in mediating what it is means to be "Greek" and where home may be.

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