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A Home Away From Home: The Greek-Cypriot Migrants/Refugees in South Australia

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Migration waves have occurred over many centuries due to the historical events of countries experiencing turmoil and people wanting to have a better future elsewhere. Australia was and still is today known as the "land of opportunities". It was a likely destination for many Greek-Cypriots at a time of crisis, in the period leading up to the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 and afterwards. This paper intends to explain the experiences of people — ranging from political migrants to refugees — settling into a predominantly Australian society or predominantly British origins. The foundation for this study was oral history interviews conducted with members of the Greek Cypriot community in South Australia. This research will provide an understanding of "belonging" as experienced from previous decades till the present time.

Introduction

In 1950 the Australian Department of Information produced a film called "No Strangers Here" to "encourage immigration" (Department of Information: 1950). The film actively promoted the idea that migrants to Australia would want to "belong", and it further aimed to recognise diversity and friendly attitudes towards ethnic migrant populations and New Australians. In short, this film was designed to make them feel welcome and reciprocate a sense of equality. The black and white film encapsulates the then developing and expanding range of political opinions towards migration and migrants. The intriguing theme of the storyline in this film, in the sense of what was meant by "home" and "belonging", was certainly applicable to the Greek-Cypriot refugees and political migrants who came to South Australia from 1965 and throughout the 1970s. This paper explores and describes the experiences and attitudes of refugees settling into a traditionally and outwardly "British" society, with the sense of "belonging" being the key focus.

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Traditionally, institutions such as churches and already established community and minority groups had made Greek-Cypriot settlement in Australia possible. While interpreting the experience as one of "home away from home", this paper will address the following main points: firstly, the transition made in building a home; secondly, integrating into Australian society; and thirdly, the return journey to Cyprus in the context of "belonging".

The term "belonging" has been defined in the literature in various ways over the decades. In this paper, it is used loosely as referring to the feelings of "the orientation to a real or imagined 'homeland' as an authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty" (Brubaker, 2005:5). Rogers Brubaker, a renowned academic in diaspora studies, refers to William Safran's journal article titled "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return", highlighting the concept of orientation to the homeland. One can utilise four of the six guidelines Safran developed to create an understanding of the context:

> firstly, maintaining a collective memory or myth about the homeland; second, regarding the ancestral homeland as the true, ideal home and as the place to which one would (or should) eventually return; third, being collectively committed to the maintenance or restoration of the homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and fourth, continuing to relate, personally or vicariously, to the homeland, in a way that significantly shapes one's identity and solidarity. (Brubaker, 2005:5; Safran, 1991:83–84)

Brubaker and Safran's theory of belonging can be applied to various culturally diverse groups, specifically minority groups residing in societies dominated by one ethnic group. The Greek-Cypriots are closely related to the southern Europeans in that they share similar cultural values and ethnic characteristics. For this reason it is appropriate to consider them in relation to a study conducted on post-war Italian migrants in Australia which shows that "the characterised identity of migrants from Italy was often reinforced by the experience of migration" (Ricatti, 2011:17). Francesco Ricatti explains that "a relevant side effect of migration, as a cultural shock determined by the impossibility of applying old cultural means to the new reality, in which migrants are under the continuous and contradictory gaze of the host society and their own micro-ethnic community" (Ricatti, 2011:49). Similarly, amongst Greek-born migrants to Australia, specifically "the Greek communities of South Australia, Hellenic ethnicity [was] largely a process of identification with Greece and Cyprus, ... which means the survival and propagation of certain values and characteristics that are definably Greek" (Ganzis, 1999:77). These examples of Australian minority group case studies indicate that "belonging" is an elastic concept, where migrants have the ability to overcome political, social and cultural constraints emanating from the surrounding environment.

Methodology

The research was conducted using an oral history methodology because it provided study participants with an opportunity to express themselves more openly about

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such an important turning point in their lives. The data was derived from five Greek-Cypriots who arrived in Australia between 1965 until the 1970s. The information collected from interviews was reinforced by secondary sources to provide a much more rigorous analytical framework.

Limitations

Whilst undertaking this research, I had to confront numerous limitations. Firstly, published research on the Greek-Cypriot population in South Australia is severely lacking. Secondly, it must be taken into consideration that only a handful of political/forced migrants and refugees were interviewed, and findings cannot be generalised to the whole migrant and refugee population. Thirdly, a variable factor is reflected in the findings because candidates are of different age, sex and background. This will be addressed accordingly through the analysis.

Building the home

From a psychological point of view, building a "new" home in an unknown country represents numerous challenges. I would like to address three aspects in this paper: firstly, housing upon arrival; secondly, property ownership; and thirdly, the land's impact on the migrants' social structure.

Examining the respondents' comments on housing upon their arrival, they all said one thing in common. This was having "their own place" which can be explained as a sense of ownership and belonging. Owning property was of great significance culturally. A 63-year-old male political migrant, who brought his siblings from Cyprus years later after his arrival, commented:

> I lived with my uncle who had six children. There were four of us. In addition to my uncle and his wife, this makes twelve of us living in one house. We stayed with them for one year before we, the four siblings, rented a house of our own because there was too many of us in the house.

A 55-year-old female refugee stated, "We stayed with my uncle, who had a fish and chip shop. Two months later when the rest of my family came to Australia we decided that we should find a place of our own because there were too many of us in one house". Even today, we know many migrants tend to share accommodation with others up until they are able to take care of the financial burdens by themselves. In the first few decades after the Second World War it was very common for many migrants to share the rent with other people because they could not afford to stay as a family by themselves. This was the experience of another Greek-Cypriot couple who arrived in 1966 with four young children. The mother told of the struggle she had caring for her children. They could not cope with the costs of living by themselves and therefore they decided to offer one room for rent. She asserted, "What else were we meant to do? I had no one to help me. I would wash nappies by hand, walk long distances,

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if we could we would catch the bus with four children... we struggled. Now, it is so much easier". Briefly, she looked down at her hands. This is symbolic because when someone talks about their hard work, their hands become the focal point, literally that of rolling the bread and feeding the family.

The property situation in Cyprus has resulted in many unresolved issues concerning housing titles due to the illegal occupation of property which has left thousands of people with nothing to claim as their own. An insightful 2009 study conducted in Cyprus on the issues faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) by Savvas Georgiades notes that "as a result of their displacement, they lost not only their homes and land but also 'key structures of meaning in their life'"[1] (Loizos, 1980:130; Georgiades, 2009:38). Furthermore, Roger Zetter has over the years conducted extensive research on Greek-Cypriot refugees, arguing that those "residing in governmental housing had an outlook that they did not want to fully settle into the house because they viewed it not their own and were waiting for the day they will return home" (Zetter, 1994:312). There is a sense of "imagery, [and] idealising the past, [which] parallels findings of resistance to adaptation elsewhere"[2] (Zetter, 1994:312; Hirschon, 1989; Colson, 1971). It has now been 39 years since the invasion of Cyprus, indicating a long time not to feel at home!

However, the Greek-Cypriot refugee population in South Australia embodies a transition of attitudes, which indicates they have moved on with their lives. With reference to the theme of property ownership, a 72-year-old female refugee commented:

> It was a friend who brought us here. We stayed with him for two weeks before we needed to find a job and a place of our own. We moved further down to our own place at Melrose Park. Years later we slowly slowly saved money and took out a mortgage to buy a house in Cumberland Park, which we still live in today.

A 77-year-old male refugee stated, "When we first came we were renting a house. A few years later, I bought our own house at Croydon Park from a friend for $25,000, and we still live in it today". While we cannot generalise about the whole Greek-Cypriot population, we can make certain assumptions. It is intriguing that migrants/refugees still live in the house that they first bought in Australia. The contributing factors to this are two factors. Firstly, it signifies the struggle behind building a new life which shares the good with the bad and what they know as having a safe home. Secondly, they bought their own house around the time they became citizens in 1978–1979. This connection reflects the correlation between the pledge of allegiance and settling permanently into a new country.

On the topic of property and land, the memories start to flow, triggered off by particular words. Something that stayed with one refugee, whose family consisted of tobacco farmers at the time of the invasion, concerned the Turkish officials who

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[1] S. Georgiades (2009:38) also referenced P. Loizos (1980:130).

[2] R. Zetter (1994:312) quoted R. Hirschon (1989) also E. Colson (1971).

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were in his village of Rizokarpaso. He recalled, “There were these red flowers [poppy flowers] all over the village. No one would take any care of them. They would just grow anywhere. Anyway when the Turkish officials were in the village, they gave residents hassles. They caused such a big fuss over these flowers”. Today we know that the poppy flower contains opium, which is a base for cocaine and other drugs. The land in Rizokarpaso was rich and fertile soil. Generally, locals lived off the land. It was a vital means for survival.

A recent study conducted in 2011 on Greeks and Greek-Cypriot migrants, who arrived in Melbourne and Brisbane during the 1960s and 1970s, reported the experience of a Greek-Cypriot migrant who was a “retired self-employed handyman, age 75, [commenting] ‘the City Council’s trees in my street are no good. In my country people plant beautiful olive trees in front of their house, so I pulled up Council trees and I planted olives, like in Cyprus’” (Brockhall and Liu, 2011:20). Similarly, through my findings when visiting each interviewee at their home, I found that they all had something in common that would have been overlooked if one did not understand their culture. Each and every one of these Greek-Cypriots had a vegetable garden. One may say “so what?”....well, analysing the passion and pride behind the land is important because it signifies four factors. Firstly, they were able to create a home, one that was similar to that in Cyprus. Secondly, it was an interactive mechanism that brought people together. They would swap produce, especially those vegetables not normally found in the shops. Thirdly, Greek-Cypriots were accustomed to growing their own produce, thus creating a social order that could be adapted to life in Australia. And finally, it “was a means of communication and negotiating relationships with others, but in doing so they also reinforced and contributed to new knowledge about what was Cypriot and Cypriot relations” (Kalivas, 2009:212). Therefore all four factors helped create a psychological structure for the maintenance of normality.

Integration into Australian society

When discussing integration into Australian society, we must consider that “forced migrations either made trans-cultural connections seemingly impossible or rigorously constrained them” (Harzig and Hoerder, 2009:111). We can analyse this as an underlying factor that is important to this minority group integrating into the wider society. For example, a 77-year-old male refugee stated:

> The people here were friendly and nice to us. Sometimes they used to get upset at us not knowing the English language. They couldn’t communicate properly with us. They were glad that they got us. We were a hard working people and that’s all they wanted in those days.

A female refugee commented on her experience:

> We would go to friend’s places, who were also Greek or Cypriot. We didn’t have much interaction with Australians. Whatever English I knew I forgot because I was at home with the children and all we spoke was Greek. Once my children started to go to school, I then started to learn to talk English a bit more.

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The common contributing factor here was the language barrier and it evidently imposed difficulties. Understandably, "bilingualism on both sides could defuse such conflict-prone non-understanding. Knowledge of the receiving society's language is a distinct advantage" (Harzig and Hoerder, 2009:105). Knowing two languages prevented migrants from becoming isolated, and aided them in making connections outside their own circle when trying to find information or assistance. For example, one political migrant stated, "We found Australian people very good, we also met a lot of Greek-Cypriots and Greeks in Australia ... in the Australian community we were not involved a lot. We made a lot of Australian friends because of our business and we still keep in touch with them". Whilst on the other hand, a 63-year-old political migrant claimed:

> With the Australians it was a bit difficult at the beginning. If you did not know English and you would only talk Greek they didn't like it. Even at work when they would talk to you, you would say 'yes' but you wouldn't know what they were telling you. It was difficult. But slowly slowly we learnt a bit of English and it became a bit better.

Another female refugee recalled:

> My sister and I got a job in a factory. They were difficult years because we didn't know the language well, even though we learnt English at school it was different to the English that was spoken here. Life was different here from what we knew it. In Cyprus we didn't mix with many people because we were all girls and we stayed in the house. But here were had to catch the bus to go to the factory, and there was many people. People would talk to us and we couldn't understand.

In contrast to what has been explained in the previous paragraphs, a study conducted by Ferdinand J. Brockhall and Shuang Liu claim that migrants' lives are made up of private and public facets. They observed, for example, that Greeks and Cypriots have a "strong affinity and affection for their homeland, they made distinctions between two selves, the public and the private. In other words, they performed Australian in public while being Greek or Cypriot in private" (Brockhall and Liu, 2011:19). They further commented that "new settlers were often expected to perform to others' expectations of New Australian... [However] many would still not want to abandon the traditions of the old country" (Brockhall and Liu, 2011:20). Cypriot cuisine in Australia demonstrates this pattern. Tina Kalivas in 2009 wrote that "many learned to cook in Italian, Asian and Australian cooking styles that were part of the gourmet boom of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s in Melbourne, including spaghetti Bolognese, pizza, stir-fries, fried rice and other previously unfamiliar dishes" (Kalivas, 2009:210). Through her study she found "informants still used [Cypriot recipe] books either as a means to learn the recipes they recalled from Cyprus, or as a means to learn and maintain their Cypriot or Greek cooking traditions" (Kalivas, 2009:211). Similarly, through the observations I made, my participant pool had a close connection with their own Cypriot cuisine. It is also evident that they too expanded their recipe repertoire but more so for their children.

Overall, integration in the predominantly Anglo-Celtic society has revealed to be minimal, if any, and language skills have been a key restriction. It seems that the

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issues faced by participants in my study have been more complex than in the general community because the study participant cohort consisted of forced migrants and refugees. We could interpret their experiences on the one hand, as a cultural shock and trauma whilst on the other hand, as a case of not having time to adjust psychologically and/or mentally because individuals were dealing ultimately with the necessity of economic survival. They were essentially unprepared and they had to quickly adjust to circumstances in the new country.

Return journey

The concept of permanent repatriation to the homeland has evidently been considered at one stage or another by the participants in my study. However, many have come to accept they have two homelands to call upon as their own. It is understandable that "occasional visits to Greece and Cyprus often invoke a reverse experience of 'us' versus 'them,' whereby they could become 'foreigner' in their home country. Such return visits reinforce their hybridised identity" (Brockhall and Liu, 2011:22). Those who were interviewed for this study said that they had all returned to Cyprus for a holiday. They all keep closely updated on significant issues in Cyprus, such as current affairs or what was happening with family and friends. One Cypriot during his interview stated that he had returned to Cyprus, but there was not much to go back to. He reflected on his current situation commenting, "I've settled here in my address in Woodcroft. I have my little paradise here". A 72-year old female refugee declared, "We have returned to Cyprus on several occasions. My parents have passed away. I only have one sister there by herself. Eeeee... But we only go there for holidays now". The tone conveyed by this statement is that Cyprus is a distant memory but still deep in their hearts.

As the decades have passed since the invasion of Cyprus, which forced Greek-Cypriots to become migrants and refugees, second and third generations are now coming to the fore. A 55-year-old refugee lady asserted, "We went many times to Cyprus for holidays. Even our children now go there for holidays. They feel that they couldn't live there but they love going there for holidays". Similarly, regarding the view of Greek-Cypriots residing in southern Cyprus, Zetter explains:

> Effectively full employment, relatively high wages, considerable economic mobility, a second generation that has no conception of life in an agrarian economy, and the enormous disparity in living standards between the north and the south serve to emphasise that, all things being equal, there will not be a powerful economic incentive to return [to the north], at least in the short term. (Zetter, 1994:314)

This same observation can be applied to those in Australia and especially South Australia. By contrast, repatriation of the first generation is different from uprooting the second generation. In essence, circumstances have evolved, making future decisions of repatriation complex in the later years of settlement. Overall, the participants

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in this study have all built a future for themselves and their children here. We can analyse this as being connected to Cyprus, but more so Australia. The first and second generations of Greek-Cypriot forced migrants and refugees, have resided in this country with multiple/ambiguous identities, not only that of a Greek-Cypriot or a migrant or a refugee, but also that of an Australian. Thus, in this instance, identity and "belonging" appear to go hand-in-hand.

Conclusion

The findings make it evident that Greek-Cypriot refugees and political migrants have experienced several aspects of hardship when they settled in South Australia. They have been able to build a "new" home, similar to that in Cyprus, providing them with a sense of belonging and identity. Property ownership is of great significance in rebuilding their lives and it has enabled them to cope with having to change their attitudes and adjust to the social structure. Even though there have been difficulties for them with integrating into the wider community, they have done so in their own way. Whilst limitations of language have constrained them at times, they call Australia their new home with Cyprus in their blood. They have made a new way of life for themselves in South Australia, woven stitch by stitch, and this has helped them create a home away from home.

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