

Diaspora, Migration and the Greeks of Canada

The Greek migration to Canada started in the beginning of the 19th century. In 1871, only 39 Greeks were in Canada, by 2011 this number had grown to 252,960. Socio-political-economic factors determine reasons for migrating and thus the way that we conceptualize diaspora. Each ethnic group is case specific. This paper focuses specifically on an analysis of one ethnic group, the Greeks of Canada. The purpose of this paper is to examine diaspora, migration, and the case of the Greeks of Canada. Specifically, this paper examines the migration history of the Greeks in Canada, and the conceptualization features of diaspora that describe Greeks of Canada. This paper reveals that for the Greeks migration is not simply geographical but also entails embracing and adapting to the host society. The Greek group is recognized in the diaspora as one that is cohesive and contributes to the fabric and ideals of Canadian society.

Keywords: Diaspora, Migration, Greeks in Canada.

Introduction

The Greek migration to Canada started at the start of the 19th century. Many Greeks from the Greek islands such as Syros, Crete, Skopelos and villages from the Peloponnese migrated to Montreal in 1843 (Chimbos, 2008). In 1871, only 39 Greeks were in Canada. More recently, the 2011 Census indicated that 252,960 Canadians claimed to be of Greek ancestry (Chimbos 2008).

In the early to mid 1900's, more Greeks decided to leave their country and establish their homes in different parts of the world. Following World War I and World War II, the poor economic situation led many to leave Greece in hopes of building a better life and future. The decision as to where to migrate was largely determined by the host society in which a relative or friend from Greece had already migrated to. This is indicative of the desire of migrants to feel close to their country of origin with compatriots who share the same culture.

There are three domineering values that characterize the Greeks. These are: (1) "*thriskia*" which means religion, (2) "*patris*" which means motherland and, (3) "*oikogeneia*", which means family. These values are engraved in the hearts of Greeks who try to protect themselves regardless where they are in the world. It is these core values that act as pillars of Greek ethnic community organizations through all phases of migration and diaspora identification.

Many Greek Orthodox communities have been established around the Greek Orthodox Church. Thus, religion is a very important element that facilitates the preservation of Greek identity and nationality (Karlis, 1993). Greek Orthodox Church's in urban centres were first build for religious purposes and were also used for recreation purposes, included wedding and baptism receptions in Church basements. Greek Orthodox Church's initially housed another important variable for ethnic cultural maintenance of Greek

migrants – Greek language schools. In many Greek communities across Canada, the first Greek language schools were held in Church basements.

When you think of the concept “diaspora” you think about migrants, and groups of migrants, been housed or living outside of their ethnic homelands. Yet, the meaning of diaspora extends beyond this simple conceptualization to a deeper sociological analysis regarding multiple factors including those that precipitated individuals to leave their ethnic homelands. As period (years) of migration vary for many different immigrants, so do the social and economic situations that they encountered. Underlying factors such as these shape the reasons for migrating and thus the way that we conceptualize diaspora. Each ethnic group is case specific with not only different time lines, but also, different socio-cultural and economic factors precipitating migration and the conceptualization of diaspora. This paper focuses specifically on an analysis of the Greeks of Canada.

The purpose of this paper is to examine diaspora, migration, and the case of the Greeks of Canada. Specifically, this paper examines the migration history of the Greeks in Canada, and the conceptualization features of diaspora that describe Greeks of Canada. To fulfill this purpose, this paper is divided into three parts: (1) conceptualization of diaspora, (2) the migration of Greeks to Canada, and (3) migration, diaspora, and the Greeks of Canada.

Conceptualizing Diaspora

Definitions of diaspora vary yet emphasis tends to be placed on nostalgia and a collective identity of homeland (Sim and Leith, 2014). Thus, diaspora refers to not only leaving one’s ethnic homeland, but the inner feelings of nostalgia that come with it. Diaspora refers to an inner emotion or feeling of reminiscing, an intrinsic connection built through an imagination formed in the past.

A review of literature reveals that diaspora is a concept that varies in meaning. Etymologically, the word has its roots in ancient Greek and means the scattering of seeds. Beine et al (2011) have constructed their conceptualization of diaspora around the ancient Greek perspective claiming that diaspora reflects the dispersion of people or an ethnic population from their homeland culture, voluntarily or involuntarily to go to a foreign country. (Beine, Doccquier, and Ozden, 2011).

Elizer’s (2013) analysis of diaspora presents an institutional perspective. That is, Elizers’(2013) perspective of diaspora is on institutions and cultural symbols that are used as a way to alleviate the difficulties of leaving the ethnic homeland. By establishing ethnic community groups and participating in ethno-cultural specific activities, adaptation to mainstream society is made more easier.

Cohen’s (2008) conceptualization of diaspora focuses on the “we-ness” provided by the attributes of ethnic culture that provide collective identity. In conceptualizing diaspora, Cohen argues that nine features of diaspora exist: (1)

1 dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more
 2 foreign regions; (2) the dispersion from a homeland in search of work, in
 3 pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; (3) a collective memory and
 4 myth about the homeland including its location, history and achievements; (4)
 5 an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to
 6 its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation; (5) the
 7 development of a return movement which gains collective approbation; (6) a
 8 strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a
 9 sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;
 10 (7) a troubled relationship with host societies suggesting a lack of acceptance at
 11 the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group; (8) a
 12 sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of
 13 settlement; and (9) the possibility of a distinctive yet creative and enriching
 14 life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism (Cohen, 1997 cited in
 15 Laako and Hautaniemi, 2014). Cohen's nine features of diaspora indicate that
 16 the way that diaspora is defined is largely determined by reasons for migrating.
 17 That is, the reason for leaving one's ethnic homeland may have been
 18 determined by one or more of Cohen's feature of diaspora, thus indicating that
 19 the conceptualization of diaspora extends beyond migration to an
 20 understanding as to why one migrated.

21
 22

23 **The Migration of Greeks to Canada**

24

25 Different time periods and political environments have also played a role
 26 in shaping Greek migration in countries across the world. There are three
 27 essential political crises that shaped the formation of Greek migration. First the
 28 period from 1453-1821 when Greece was under the rule of the Ottoman Turks.
 29 During this period, there were two types of migration: internal and external.
 30 Internal migration refers to the movement of people within the Greek borders.
 31 On the contrary, external migration refers to the peoples' movement outside the
 32 Greek borders; more particularly to countries such of Western Europe.

33 Greeks started moving to Canada following the "Greek War of
 34 Independence" (1821-1832) and many of these migrants, at that time, were
 35 young sailors. Perhaps the most recognized of Greek migrant sailors was
 36 Apostolos Valerianos, also known as Ioannis Phokas. Valerianos was a Greek
 37 maritime pilot, he was also an explorer who originated from Kefalonia. In
 38 1705, one of his most famous discoveries, was the discovery of the strait that
 39 separates Vancouver from Washington, DC, and connects the Pacific Ocean to
 40 the bay of Georgia. The strait is known by the name "Juan de Fouka", a name
 41 given to Valieranos in 1725 by the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences (No
 42 author, 2012). Apostolos Valerianos is today recognized the First Greek to
 43 come to Canada.

44 The second crisis influenced Greek migration, especially to Northern
 45 Europe, is the period from the end of the Greek War of Independence to World
 46 War II (1832- 1945). As for the third crucial period, it began with the end of

World War II until the end of the 20th century. Prior to the 1950s, Greek migration was slow and steady. The oil crisis in 1970 stimulated migration waves to European, American and Canadian cities. Approximately one million Greeks migrated in this second wave, from 1950 to 1974 to Western Europe, the USA, Canada, and Australia (Kasimis and Kassimi, 2017). The motivation behind this migration period was both political and economic and more specifically, resulting from the Greek civil war (1946-1974) and the military junta rule. Statistics indicate that from 1955-1973 603,300 Greek migrants went to Germany, 170,700 to Australia, 124,000 to the USA, and 80,200 to Canada (Kasimis and Kassimi, 2017).

During the 1900s, public opinion and the press in Canada implied that immigrants from southern Europe were not intellectual and physically prepared for Canada's climate and culture (Woodsworth, 1909). In response to this statement, the Greek population not only proved being suitable for Canada's climate, but also, that that Greeks of Canada have significantly contributed and enriched multicultural Canada. After World War II, the Greeks in Canada, had developed a reputation of being hard-working, lawful, honest and respectable citizens while also contributing to Canada and its evolving culture (Tastsoglou, 2009). Thus, it can be supported that although most Greeks were uneducated and poor, they work hard, struggled, and sacrificed for a respectful life.

Following the 1967 Canadian Immigration Act, it became more difficult for foreigners to migrate to Canada. Canada became more selective of the migrants it would accept and therefore, Greeks who migrated to Canada after 1970 were more educated, more skilled and more literate thus abiding to the parameters of the Canadian Immigration Act (Tastsoglou, 2009).

As for the Greeks maintaining their national and religious identity, research has shown that gender is a determining factor in ethno-cultural maintenance and transmission as women encourage the preservation of ethnic culture and ethnic identity (Alba, 1990). It has also been suggested that the family -especially the women in family - are the vital determinants in the maintenance and transmission of ethnic identity (Alba 1990; Gavaki and Stalikas 1997).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Greeks worked hard and preserved to maintain Greek traditions and identities. Greek migrants were able to speak and read the Greek language and most importantly they strove to teach their children not only their mother language but also, the Greek values. The Greeks of the diaspora have built strong ties with their compatriots, not only to overcome adjustment of a foreign country, but also to fulfill the need to maintain ties with their home country and subsequently to protect their ethnic identity, their culture and language- not only as Greeks but also as Greek Orthodox Christians.

Migration, Diaspora and the Greeks of Canada

1 When examining migration, it is relevant to note that its process consists
 2 of three phases. The first, the *initial* phase, takes place through the first contact
 3 of people(s) from a foreign land. This contact is one in which no or very little
 4 services of the ethnic homeland exist, as the migrants are the first to arrive. The
 5 second phase, the *formative* phase, occurs when a significant amount of people
 6 have arrived from the same ethnic homeland and have had time to gather
 7 resources and come together to form an organized structural organization
 8 offering services (i.e., religious, linguistic, recreational, etc.) representative of
 9 the ethnic homeland culture. The final phase, the third phase, the *advancement*
 10 phase, is the one in which new migrants settle into a mainstream society and
 11 find already prepared organized structured ethnic cultural organizations and
 12 services. Migrants here ultimately contribute to the further development of
 13 these well-established services to address the changing current social-ethno-
 14 cultural needs.

15 For the case of the Greeks in Canada, although Greek migration to Canada
 16 took place in the late 1800s and early to mid 1900s, it was quite slow.
 17 However, Greek communities across urban centers in Canada started to be
 18 formed, such as the Hellenic Community of Ottawa that was established in
 19 1929. Up until 1950 many Greek communities in Canada were being formed,
 20 thus the Greek group in Canada was in the *initial* phase of migration.

21 It was not until the European migration thrust years from 1950 to 1974
 22 when the large influx of Greek migration to Canada took place. This increase
 23 in number of people meant more human and material resources for Greek
 24 communities that helped them make the jump from the *initial* migration phase
 25 to the *formative* migration phase. Communities such as the Hellenic
 26 Community of Ottawa grew from 80 individuals to over 1000 individuals.
 27 Existing community structures purchased in the *initial* migration phase were
 28 sold, such as the Church on Albert Street, as financial resources increased.
 29 Larger pieces of land were purchased, and the community expanded by
 30 developing Church and Community Centres in suburban districts. The
 31 *formative* migration phase was thus a period of growth and establishment for
 32 many Greek communities in Canada. The Greek group in Canada, during the
 33 *formative* migration phase is best described as a diaspora according to the
 34 following three features of diaspora put forth by Cohen (1996): (1) strong
 35 ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of
 36 distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate, (2) a sense
 37 of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of
 38 settlement; and (3) the possibility of a distinctive yet creative and enriching
 39 life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism. Indeed, most Greek
 40 communities in Canada have been established around the distinguished
 41 features of Greek Orthodoxy and the Greek language. Further, most Greek
 42 communities in Canada have in their mandates an emphasis on contributing to
 43 the multicultural, diverse and pluralistic nature of Canadian society.

44 Post 1974 is classified as the *advancement* migration phase for many
 45 Greek communities in Canada as it is the period in which emphasis on ethno
 46 specific services and enhanced contribution to mainstream society. For

1 example, the Hellenic Community of Ottawa has expanded its ethno-culturally
 2 specific services to include dance groups and recreation programs for
 3 descendants of immigrants and their children as well as provide fundraising
 4 activities for local hospitals. The *advancement* phase of migration is one that is
 5 reached through time and, of course, through development and advancement of
 6 ethno-culturally specific services. In the case of many Greek communities in
 7 Canada, reaching the *advancement* migration stage takes 2-3 generations to be
 8 achieved. Similarly, to the *formative* phase of migration, the *advancement*
 9 phase of migration for the Greek group of Canada also emphasizes the three
 10 distinctive features of diaspora as presented by Cohen (1996). These are: (1)
 11 strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a
 12 sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate, (2)
 13 a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of
 14 settlement; and (3) the possibility of a distinctive yet creative and enriching
 15 life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism (Cohen, 1996). As time
 16 changes, and as generations change, Greek communities and their members
 17 become more assimilated into mainstream Canadian society. Distinctiveness
 18 becomes reflective of where one's roots are from with a greater emphasis being
 19 placed on contributing to one's place as a diaspora group to the common good
 20 and advancement of mainstream society.

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23 Conclusion

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25 This paper has presented an analysis of diaspora, migration, and the case
 26 of the Greeks of Canada. Specifically, this paper has depicted the migration
 27 history of the Greeks in Canada, and the conceptualization features of diaspora
 28 that describe Greeks of Canada. That is, an overview of the migration history
 29 of Greeks to Canada has been identified while emphasizing how this group is
 30 identified through the multiple features that are used to conceptualize diaspora.

31 This paper reveals that the migration of Greeks is not simply geographical
 32 but also entails embracing and adapting to the host society. As posited by
 33 Tastsoglou (2009), migration extends beyond geographical borders to
 34 obtaining citizenship and becoming a part of the host culture. Indeed, through
 35 its history in Canada the Greek group has embraced its cultural identity while
 36 also making significant contributions to multicultural Canada.

37 The Greek group is recognized in the diaspora as one that is cohesive and
 38 contributes to the fabric and ideals of Canadian society. Most of the Greeks
 39 who migrated to Canada did not speak English, had very little, if any money,
 40 and little or no education. However, through hard work and deep faith, Greek
 41 communities were built around the establishment of Greek Orthodox Churches
 42 in Canada. It was these migrants that established the Greek group as a diaspora.
 43 It is these migrants that felt that it was their responsibility to build Greek
 44 communities to help sustain Greekness in the diaspora.

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