

The Reterritorialisation of Pontic Greeks in Germany and the Modernisation of Tradition

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Greeks have a long diasporic history that demonstrates significant examples of all major diaspora classifications. Pontic Greeks of the Black Sea in particular, represent an excellent example of non-static diasporic typology. Starting as an imperial diaspora they were transformed to a victim diaspora, when forcefully expelled from their native lands in north-eastern Anatolia, seeking refuge in Greece and in areas of central Asia that were later annexed by the Soviet Union. Greece's socioeconomic environment, during the better part of the twentieth century, was proven insufficient to support the full integration of refugees, while those Pontic Greeks who found themselves behind the Iron Curtain, were subjected to further victimization. In 1960 Greece signed a bilateral agreement with West Germany, allowing its citizens to seek Gastarbeiter employment, resulting in the formation of a Greek labour diaspora in the country, of which an estimated one third self-identifies as culturally Pontic. After Greece's induction in the European Communities, but especially in the post-Maastricht era, the migratory regime for Greeks in Germany changed to that of European-expatriation, therefore progressively transforming their labour diaspora to a cultural one. From imperial, to victim, to labour, to cultural, Pontic Diaspora underwent a long process of reterritorialisation, in their journey from Anatolia to Germany.

Introduction

This paper examines Pontic Greek migration in Germany, by focusing on the background of Pontic Greeks in the mountainous areas of Anatolia and the Black Sea. The reasons that lead to their original uprooting from their ancestral lands, but also the socioeconomic conditions that brought them to Germany, as well as their integration and establishment in the German society and the adaptation of their traditions, towards a Western European cultural paradigm. Further, this paper examines how their experience, shaped their diasporic typology, arguing that Pontic Greeks represent a rare, if not unique, case in migration studies, or a community that entails all five types of Diaspora.

Methodology

The interview segments featured in this article, as well as the narratives analysed here, come from thirty-one semi-structured interviews, with outstanding individuals of the Greek communities in Germany; such as academics, diplomats

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and leading figures, persons in pastoral and parental roles. In all cases, it was made certain that each of the interviewees combine as many of the attributes, of a good informant, as possible and all interviewees were selected due to their significant experience on issues of the Greek Diaspora in Germany. The total of interviewees was carefully selected from fourteen locations in Germany, in particular Berlin, Bielefeld, Bonn, Cologne, Darmstadt, Dortmund, Düsseldorf, Erfurt, Jena, Munich, Rüsselsheim, Siegen, Stuttgart and Weimar. The selection of places was not random, as locations were chosen for the size of their communities and their importance in the history of Greek migration and establishment in Germany.

Interviews were conducted between December 2012 and May 2013, as part of a larger qualitative research project that examines the sociopolitical integration of Greeks in Germany before and after the Maastricht Treaty, based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The research, titled "From Gastarbeiter to European Expatriates" was conducted under the auspices of Staffordshire University and the bulk of its findings were released in a monograph in December 2019, under the same title. The book is an in-depth study of Greek emigration in Germany and offers insights on the process of European Integration from the sociopolitical perspective of intra-European migration before and after the Maastricht Treaty, highlighting the transformation that migratory and diasporic typologies have undergone between 1960 and 2016 (Tseligka 2019).

Greek Diasporas

People are mobile and so is culture; thus, facilitating the formation of a sense of coherence that is independent from spatial demarcation *per se*. That is obvious in Diasporas where the reference to space has been distorted by geographical distance, resulting in the deterritorialisation of culture (Papastergiadis 2000, p. 115-116) and creating the need for new spatial references and narratives, hence the need for cultural reterritorialisation.

In fact, the term Diaspora is a Greek one, it derives from the verb *σπείρω* (*speiro*, to sow) and the preposition *δια* (*dia*, over), and it originally referred to colonization through migration. However, the word also means 'to scatter', implying a forceful dispersal of people away from their homelands; it was that second meaning of the word that linked it to the Jewish experience. There are five distinct types of Diasporas: Victim, also referred to as Refugee, Diasporas are created by involuntary migration, from people fleeing persecution, ethnic cleansing, genocide, etc., as was the case with the Armenians, Jews, Pontic and Minor Asia Greeks. Imperial, also referred to as Colonial, Diasporas are formed during a process of colonisation, as in the case of Ancient Greeks, British, Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese. Labour, also referred to as Service, Diasporas are created by voluntary migration of workers, as for example in the case of Indians in the UK or Italians and Greeks in the US. Trade, or Business and Professional, Diasporas refer to communities of merchants or businesspeople who live away from their homeland in associated networks, as for example contemporary Indians and Chinese, but also in the past the Venetians or the Greeks in cities like Odessa,

Vienna and Leipzig. Finally, there are the Cultural, also referred to as Hybrid or Postmodern, Diasporas, which result as a fusion of two or more of the above; a term that describes most current Diasporas, such as the Caribbean, Chinese, Indian and of course Greek. It must be emphasised however that the nature of each Diaspora depends on circumstances and as circumstances change, so do the Diasporas. Thus, the taxonomy of Diasporas is not an exact science; as the case of the Jewish Diaspora indicates, it has been regarded as victim, labour, trade and cultural (Cohen 2002, ix p. 177-179).

What makes the Greek Diaspora such an interesting case study is the fact that its history clearly entails all five typologies. It has been Imperial, for example during the Hellenistic era, but also in medieval Byzantine times. During the Ottoman period the Greek communities in Europe were almost exclusively structured around trade. In fact, it can be argued that the case of the Greek Diaspora is the only one in European history which so clearly involves all five typologies. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Pontic genocide and the Greek Catastrophe created a massive wave of refugees, while after the Second World War many of them, along with mainland Greeks, became labour migrants in various European states and the US, to eventually become part of the Cultural Greek Diaspora. It is also notable how the change of circumstances can entirely transform the nature, and the self-perception, of one diasporic community. A significant portion of Greek migrants in Germany originally descended from refugees of the Greek Catastrophe; they come therefore from the initial imperial Greek Diaspora, which only recently in history became associated with modern immigration. For example, the Pontic Greeks were originally an Imperial Diaspora, which later became a Victim Diaspora and through their mass migration to Germany a Labour Diaspora, and finally through the social mobility of modern Europe they integrated into a Cultural Diaspora.

The Modern Greek state is a construction that could not have existed in the past, as the Greek world was not territorially confined. The spread of Greeks in the world and subsequently of their culture, reached a peak very early in history; during a period that was consequently recorded as the Hellenistic era. Stretching throughout most of the known world, from Sicily and Southern Italy to Persia and parts of India, and from southern Gaul to North Africa and throughout the Black Sea, the Greek ways lost their original association with citizenship and ancestry (Makrides 2009, p. 10). Under that very premature version of globalisation, Hellenism was transformed and from being exclusive was rendered an inclusive culture. That view of Greekness as a culture by default deterritorialised and global, led during the Byzantine era to the concept of a religion that transcends national boundaries and is universal, or as the Greeks would say it, it is *ecumenical*. The concept of internationalised Greekness is so old that it has become almost endemic to Greeks, especially given that the present Greek State and subsequently the concept of a territorially focused national body, is less than two hundred years old. Hellenism has been by default Diasporic and for such a long period in history that it can be expected of contemporary Greek Diasporas to reproduce the same patterns of cultural inclusion, traditionally found in classic Greek Diasporic communities.

Greeks of the Black Sea

The Greek presence in the region of Pontos can be traced as far back as the eighth century BCE, with the establishment of the city of Sinope on the Black Sea. Their distance from the Greek mainland and their isolation in the mountainous regions of Anatolia, resulted in the development of their distinct traditions, culture and dialect, which is a variation of the Greek language (Bouteneff 2003, p. 292). According to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, before the outbreak of the First World War, there were around 700,000 Greeks receding in the Pontic lands. More than half of them did not survive the period from 1914 to 1924; during which the *Pontic Genocide*, commonly known as the Greek Genocide, and the Greek Catastrophe took place. Those who survived followed the road to exile, with their majority fleeing mainly to Greece and the Soviet Union (Vergeti 1991, p. 382).

The history of their downfall begins with the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the antipathy of the Muslim masses towards the Christian subjects of the Empire that was aggravated by a series of reforms advocated by the Great Powers, which took place between 1839 and 1876, known as the *Tanzimat*. As parts of a broader attempt towards the westernisation of the Empire, the reforms aimed, among other things, to the protection of Christian populations against systemic maladministration and injustice, including over-taxation; however, part of the Muslim populations perceived the reforms as the end of their own privileges and the destruction of the traditional economic ethos. In their eyes, the changing attitude of the Sultan towards minorities did not signify progress, but failure to use the 'legendary Turkish scimitar'. The novelist Ahmed Midhat, who represented the class of the *esnaf* (craftsmen), wrote about the reforms: "*the real community is made up of those pure Turks whose hands in peacetime are still on their scimitars*" (Cicek 2010, p. 20-21).

During a period of eleven years, which started in September 1911 with the Italian invasion of Ottoman Libya, commonly known as the Italo-Turkish war, Anatolia lost most of its Christian inhabitants. The First Balkan War in 1912 brought ethnic Greek populations in the epicentre of animosity from the Ottoman Empire and signified the beginning of a period of mass migration of Anatolian Greeks, which was caused by the anti-Greek sentiment and the violence against Christian hellenophones that resulted from it. In 1914 the Ottoman-Russian war was followed by the Armenian revolt, supported by other minorities in the region, like the Nestorian Christians in the city of Van (DiCarlo 2008, p. 46). The above event signified the orchestrated extermination of the majority of Christian populations of the Ottoman Empire, which often is mistakenly viewed as a series of individual incidents, such as the Armenian Genocide, the Pontic Genocide (also known as the Greek Genocide), the Assyrian Genocide and the Greek Catastrophe (DiCarlo 2008, p. 53).

Christians and Muslims had coexisted for centuries as subjects of the Ottoman Empire and even though they always had separate roles in the life of the Empire, they were all Ottoman subjects nonetheless; however from September 1911 onwards, Christians were treated by Turks as a separatist threat and became

the object of hostility, of both the authorities of the state and their Muslim neighbours.; at the same time religion and ethnicity became more important than the shared Ottoman citizenship (Akçam 2012, p. 111-113).

The aftermath of the defeat of the Greek forces in Asia Minor, often mentioned in the relevant bibliography as the *Greek Catastrophe*, brought the forced migration of more than a million civilian refugees from Turkey. Their exact number is difficult to estimate; their hasty displacement did not allow them to be registered upon arrival, however according to the general population census, in 5 May 1928 the total number of refugees in Greece was 1,221,849 persons, in a total population of approximately five million. According to the League of Nations the number of refugees who entered Greece at the time was much higher, but between 1922 and 1928, seventy-five thousand had died due to impoverishment and a further sixty-six thousand managed to emigrate to Egypt, parts of Western Europe and the United States (Kontogiorgi 2006, p. 73-74).

Despite the fact that the majority of refugees nourished a keen desire for full social and economic integration, their expectations were shattered by the harsh socioeconomic reality of life in Greece. The scarcity of land for agricultural purposes, paired with the industrial underdevelopment of the country, inhibited their financial independence. To access the limited state funds, the newcomers had to go through rigorous bureaucratic procedures, which often resulted in exclusion from even the essential means required for their survival (Dragostinova 2011, p. 162).

The inefficiency of agriculture had been a constant problem in Greece, since the founding of the Modern State, and hindered economic development. Despite the main land reform legislation of 1917, mostly designed to relieve the refugee problem by bringing a significant expansion of the total cultivatable area through policies of land reclamation and state funded irrigation projects, the cropland median per person remained very low and the average production of grain per acre, varied between half and one third of that of Western Europe. Regardless of the predominantly agrarian nature of the Greek economy, many essential foods had to be imported. In fact one third of all imports in the 1930s were edibles, demonstrating further the inefficiency of Greek agriculture. Under those harsh financial circumstances, the majority of refugees remained destitute, sheltered in slums which soon increased in numbers and created whole shanty towns on the outskirts of cities (Aldcroft 2006, p. 148-149).

Equally harsh with the housing conditions, were the social conditions those refugees had to face and despite their often shared ethnicity with the locals, they were perceived as competition in the struggle for scarce resources. Stereotypes for Pontic Greeks were created, perceived as a distinct kind of Greek, one rather unpolished compared to mainland Greeks (DiCarlo 2008, p. 116). The initial hospitality with which the authorities and the locals welcomed the refugees, was soon withdrawn and replaced with worries about hygiene, adequacy of provisions and fears of potential rise in crime rates (Kontogiorgi 2006, p. 75). Despite the shared ethnic, religious and linguistic background between the vast majority of the refugees and the locals, the historical development of Hellenic communities in Asia Minor was different than that of mainland Greeks, and had been shaped

under fundamentally different social conditions; therefore, each group had evolved to an individual cultural body within the broader Hellenic world and had a distinct way of life and sense of aesthetics. Regardless of the fact that the refugees were perceived by the state authorities and local population, not as outlanders on foreign shores, but as Greeks exercising their birthright to return to their historic homeland, the minor differences in customs, dress and speech were enough to cultivate prejudice and facilitate conflict especially in the form of competition for state resources, like land and livelihood. The social integration of the newcomers was inhibited by the above matters, and it is now commonly accepted, that the actual and social surroundings were generally sorrowful and inhospitable (Kontogiorgi 2006, p. 166).

Pontic Greeks faced additional obstructions to integration; their dialect was incomprehensible for mainland Greeks, while their customs seemed alien and their native dress outlandish. Most importantly Greece's nation building policies of the time, focused on homogenisation, promoting an assimilationist agenda, under which all Greeks of refugee background were discouraged from publicly discussing their particular roots, but instead they were urged to assimilate fully in the Greek mainstream culture (Bouteneff 2003, p. 293).

Things were far worse for those Greeks who searched for refuge in the Soviet Union, in some cases joining the former Trade Greek Diaspora in those regions, which already included many Pontic Greeks. In October 1937 the Stalinist regime started persecuting ethnic Greeks, with arrests, executions and pogroms, from which not even party members were excluded. Labelled as '*enemies of the people*', an estimated of 50,000 Pontic Greeks were executed or sent to concentration camps in Siberia. During and after the Second World War, the Greeks of Crimea were deported to Northern Kazakhstan and Siberia, while the Pontic Greeks in the Caucasus were deported to Central Asia (Agtzidis 1991, p. 374, 377).

Greek Emigration to Germany

After the end of the Second World War, Germany stood in rubbles and was divided into two separate states. The regime in the East took every measure possible to prevent immigration to the West. The *Wirtschaftswunder*, West Germany's economic miracle of the 1950s, solidified the country's position among the world's richest states, but that unprecedented economic development risked coming to a halt due to a decline in the flexibility of labour supply. By the late 1950s, the flow of workers from East to West Germany saw a dramatic decrease, until the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 ceased it altogether. To overcome the problem of a rising labour deficiency, the West German government signed bilateral agreements allowing foreign individuals to join its labour force. The newcomers were identified as guest-workers, *Gastarbeiter*, a term describing their ephemeral and temporary position in the German society (Braun 1990, p. 165–169).

On the other hand, the 1950s was a gruesome period for Greece, following two successive wars that took place the previous decade. The defeat of the

communists in the summer of 1949 brought the Civil War to an end and solidified Greece's place in the Western bloc, while at the same time it signified the beginning of the postwar period for the country (Koliopoulos and Veremis 2009, p. 127). The devastating effect of the two wars extended far beyond the thousands of civilian casualties, as, in a total population of 7.5 million, one million were left with no shelter and nearly ten percent of the population became internally displaced. One quarter of all buildings in Greece had been partly damaged or completely destroyed, and the available farming land has been reduced by a quarter. In addition to the above, transportation and communication was left shuttered and so was the country's economy. Compared to pre-war levels exports have halved while imports have almost ceased (Shrader 1999, p. 252–253).

Greece was yet again unable to feed its population, relying almost entirely on international help and emigration. It must not come as a surprise that it was among the first to sign the guest-worker agreement with Germany, on the 30th of March 1960. The German Committee in Greece opened two recruitment offices, the first in Athens, at Viktoros Ougko Street, near Omonoia Square, and the second in Thessaloniki at Dodekanisou Street (Rimpa 2010, p. 4), creating a very efficient system to link employers to foreign employees. First, the employers had to apply to their local employment office, declaring how many workers were needed and the skills those individuals should have. Then the employment office would search for workers that were already registered with them in the country, and if they could not find any, they would contact German officials in one of the cosignatory countries. Until 1973, the recruitment of foreign workers bore no restrictions, except for the 1967–1968 period, marked by a recession, during which the German government refused to extend work permits (Meyers 2004, p. 127). While the agreement was active, Greece encouraged its workforce to leave and advertised immigration as the solution to individual poverty. In what was probably the biggest wave of emigration Greece has ever seen, more than two million, or approximately one fifth of the country's 1974 population left (Charalambis et al. 2004, p. 165, 174), with three quarters of them moving to Germany and of those, the majority, namely fifty-eight per cent, were women (Detsch 2012).

In 2008, according to the *Ausländerzentralregister* (AZR), the German Central Register of Foreigners, the number of Greek nationals living in Germany was 287,187, while the total number of ethnic Greeks, regardless of their nationality, was approximately 384,000 based on data from the German Microcensus of 2007 (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2016); and according to the *Verbund Griechischer Gemeinden* (Association of Greek Communities in Germany, OEK 2014) more than one quarter of them are of Pontic descent.

From *Gastarbeiter* to European Expatriates

On the 1st of January 1981 Greece became a full member of the European Communities (ECs), including the European Economic Community (EEC), the predecessor of the 1993 formation of the European Union. The changes brought forth by that agreement would progressively bring into legislation the free

movement of goods and the free movement of persons, services and capital, but also the common customs tariff between Member States. In addition, that agreement introduced Greece to free movement of workers by the 1st of January 1988, the liberalisation of direct investments from 31st of December 1985 onwards, and from the 1st of January 1981 the unblocking of funds and the increase of tourist allowance, to no less than 400 European Units (European Union. Publications Office. Official Journal 1979).

The common European market placed a lot of focus on entrepreneurship, which in the case of the Greeks was greatly enhanced by the liberalisation of investments in 1985; but even before that, the 1981 unblocking of funds, gave them the opportunity to transfer savings they previously kept in Greek banks and invest them into the German economy. Quite often those funds were remittances previously sent home, due to feelings of uncertainty brought forth by German immigration laws, or funds invested in the Greek banking system. I. P. in Düsseldorf, a senior cleric of the Greek Orthodox Church, mentioned that *“those who wanted to break free from work in the factories were helped (by the ECs legislations), as they made use of the new conditions in creating their own businesses”* (I.P. Cleric, 2013). The above development also promoted social mobility, as people gave up their old jobs in factories to start their own businesses. That increased social mobility, cleared the air from the negative stereotypes of the past such as that of the poor Greek *Gastarbeiter* who is a manual labourer, allowing the Greek community to be seen under new light by the German public, enhancing thus the concept of European identity.

Such developments led the Greeks in Germany to feel closer to the society of the receiving state and facilitated their social integration. Indicative example is the segment from the interview of A.G., headmaster in one of the many Greek schools of North Rhine-Westphalia, pointed out the role of European multiculturalism in the integration of Greeks and commented that *“many Greeks were integrated here (in Germany) because they found high ranking jobs and were well accepted (by the German society) [...], showing that (joining the European Communities) was a positive development”* (A.G. Teacher, 2013). The EU created a legal frame that empowers European minorities living in Germany, some of which felt previously ignored. *“The federal state of Germany in the mid or late 1990s – that is after the Treaty of Maastricht –, came to the sudden realisation that it had foreign European nationals living in Germany since 1960; they have been here for more than thirty years and they are not going anywhere, therefore something has to be done [...]. The European Union gave us a voice, it helped us gain political rights since we could vote in the local elections. That was as important as the free movement of people and it helped tremendously in the establishment of Greeks in Germany”* (M. F1. Unionist 2013).

Reterritorialising Culture and Modernising Tradition

The free movement of people and the political empowerment of European nationals contributed to a general feeling of safety. The unprecedented example of

the European Communities, which linked different states under the same laws and policies, but without the hegemonic presence of an empirical power, provided an excellent opportunity for Greeks to reterritorialise their culture in their newly established communities in Germany.

The monastery of *Panagia Soumela*, the Virgin Mary of Soumela in English, or *Sümela Manastırı* as it is called by the Turks, hangs on the rock of the Pontic Mountains chain in the region of Trebizond in the Black Sea, once home to Pontic Greeks (Kévorkian 2011, p. 467). Bielefeld is a city in North-Rhine Westphalia in Germany, home to a sizeable Greek community, mostly consisting of former *Gastarbeiter* settling there after 1960, and their descendants. The epicentre of the community's social life, can be found at the local parish of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Germany and Exarchate of Central Europe, the church of Apostle Paul; an impressive building within walking distance from the local stadium. Inside the church, on display in a prominent position, is an icon of *Panagia Soumela* adorned with a collection of donated jewellery which appears old enough to be heirlooms. The local priest, who was my guide during my visit, explained to me that the icon was donated by a local Greek family which descends from survivors of the Pontic Genocide. It took a very long, cross-generational journey, but finally the owners of that icon were feeling safe enough, to be able to donate their heirloom to their local parish, maintaining the tradition of votives.

The word tradition comes from the Latin *traditio*, which indicates something that is transferred hand-to-hand, passed from one generation to the next for safekeeping. Etymologically it is suggested that any alterations to the transferred object should be avoided, as that would be an act of tradition-breaking. Therefore, in that sense, tradition is something, which, by nature abhors change and resists modernity. Tradition is a process of doing things in a certain way and at the same time it is the knowledge resource of how to do things in that certain way, therefore tradition is both a process and a resource (Cashman et al. 2011, p. 3). It is the processes and means by which humans form and replicate their social bonds and cultural identities. Therefore, the concept of tradition can also be defined as an intergenerational process of transmission of social institutions, which regulate behaviour. Tradition is a message from the past generation to the present, instructions from the dead to the living; however, as the dead do not actually speak, the importance of their message is restricted by its interpretation by the living (Despland 2012, p. 19). The Greek word for tradition is *paradosis* (παράδοσις), which can be defined as *traditio*, but most commonly it refers to the act of surrendering, perhaps suggesting the limited control the previous generations have over the present.

During the eighteen months of field research in the Greek communities in Germany, I witness time and again the interruption of old deep-rooted customs, not for the sake of abandoning tradition, but in an attempt to maintain it. In Darmstadt I witnessed a group of female dancers performing the Greek Pontic *Pyrrhichios* (Πυρρίχιος, Pyrrhic dance), a traditionally male dance associated with battle and warfare. In other words, a custom was interrupted, since in contemporary society rigid gender roles have become irrelevant, and that minor change allowed for a very old tradition to be preserved. Being able to distinguish

between those elements of tradition that should carry on, and the ones that should be left in the past, has created space for the modernisation of tradition. Instead of denying modernity, they incorporated tradition in the modern concept. Therefore, diasporic Greeks have the ability to maintain their cultural particularities without turning their backs to mainstream society. Tradition is something they do in their social gatherings, it is part of their Greekness and allows them to connect and belong in the group, but it is not something that segregates them from the host society. Serving like practices of cultural cohesion, the particularities of Greek tradition adapted to the modern socio-political environment of Germany. Therefore, Greekness does not act as an inherent hindrance that prevents them from integrating, but as an excuse for further social mingling. Within the above-stated context, Greek communities have the autonomy to follow modernity in their own way and at the same time express their cultural traits freely, and in their own individualistic way (Tseligka and Trantas 2013).

The Pontic Greeks of the Soviet Union

The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 signified a period of international socio-political transformations. For Greece, as well as the Greek Diaspora, among other things, it signified the arrival of thousands of repatriates from former communist states. In the era following *Perestroika*, as well as after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the rise of nationalism and the revival of the pan-Turkish movement in parts of central Asia, created yet another wave of Pontic refugees and yet another refugee problem for Greece (Agtzidis 1991, p. 380). Namely, over 160,000 Pontic Greeks from the former Soviet Union, descendants of the original survivors of the Pontic genocide, entered Greece in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse. To exempt the diasporic repatriates from the restrictions on work and residency, imposed by law to immigrants of foreign descent, they were acknowledged with the term *omogeneis* and thus differentiated by the *allogeneis*, under a law passed in 1991 (Venturas 2009, p. 129). The term *omogeneis* in Greek means people of the same lineage and is also the root word for the English word 'homogenous', while *allogeneis* means people of different lineage. The distinction between the two had to be made because after the fall of communism Greece had also become a country of immigration rather than emigration. The 1991 law therefore was also necessary in order to regulate the influx of foreign migrants coming into Greece (Official Government Gazette 1991).

As was the case with Pontic Greeks entering Greece in the beginning of the twentieth century, flying from the former Ottoman Empire, Pontic Greeks of the former Soviet Union were not particularly welcomed by the local population. Quickly branded as outsiders, they were referred to as Russian-Pontics (*Ρωσοπόντιοι* in Greek), a derogatory and pejorative term, coined by popular media in an effort to separate the newcomers from their counterparts repatriated in Greece around the time of the Greek Catastrophe, but resulting in questioning their ancestry and Greek lineage. The old and forgotten stereotypes that tormented Pontic refugees in the first half of the twentieth century were resurfaced in the

Greek public sphere after the Soviet Union dissolved and reinforced by xenophobic attitudes towards migrants from former communist states.

Roughly a decade from the fall of communism and less than a decade from the Maastricht Treaty and the formation of the European Union, the Euro currency was launched in circulation. Following the collapse of the Lehman Brothers in 2008 and the Dubai sovereign debt crisis near the end of 2009, Greece that has been previously instructed to reduce its budget deficit, came to acknowledge a national debt almost double to the Eurozone's limit, a proclamation which brought forth a series of downgrades of the state's credit rating and a further increase on its national debt and budget deficit (*BBC News*, June 13, 2012).

In collaboration with the European Union, strict fiscal measures were introduced in an effort to rectify the issue, deeply impacting the living conditions in Greece for the worse. The loss of income to salary cuts, the rising cost of living as well as the increase of unemployment, which by the end of 2013 had reached 27 percent (Sotiropoulos and Bourikos 2014), had a profound socioeconomic impact on the emigration rate, analogous to that experienced in Greece in the 1960s. In reference to the new wave of Greek emigration, the Greek press colloquially used the term *neo-migrants* to describe post 2010 crisis-driven emigrants. However, despite its colloquial origin, the term is useful to distinguish crisis-driven emigrants from the established Greek Diaspora, as well as from Greek European expatriates in a temporal manner, but also in terms of motives, relocation patterns and integration opportunities (Tseligka 2022, p. 55).

Being amongst the most financially vulnerable, many Pontic Greeks of the Soviet Union took the same decision with their counterparts in the 1960s and relocated to Germany. Of course, under the auspices of the European Union their relocation took place within a more permissive migratory regime than that of guest-workers, however during the field research I conducted for my 2019 book, mentioned earlier in the article, I encountered many testimonies of Pontic Greeks of the Soviet Union, having recently relocated in Germany, often supported by immigrant associations of the established Pontic Greek Diaspora in the country. Indicative is the following interview extract from the headmaster of one of the Greek lyceums in Bavaria: "*I am aware of families offering accommodation to fellow Pontics (of the former Soviet Union). Generally speaking, I do not think they have acquired average living standards yet and I am aware that they live in poor conditions and crowded accommodations; however they really support each other*" (Dr T.K. Teacher 2013).

In most of the interviews were Pontic Greeks of the Soviet Union have been brought up, a narrative describing extreme poverty and poor living conditions have also been reported. Not in few occasions, second generation members of the Greek Diaspora in Germany, mentioned how the living conditions of the former Soviet Pontic Greeks, reminded them of their childhood, as children of guest-workers in the 1960s or the stories they heard from their parents about their living conditions when they first moved to Germany as *Gastarbeiter*.

Finally, there was yet a third theme in the narratives about former Soviet Pontic Greeks in Germany that reflected the distrust and intolerance by which they have been first met during their repatriation in Greece in the 1990s. Indicative of

those hostile narratives is the 2013 interview extract below, by a Greek European expatriate, which I have chosen to completely anonymise, therefore I will not disclose any other information, such as the location where the interview was taken or the exact date when it was conducted: *“We have too many Russian-Pontics, who based on my own experience [...], I would say that they are opportunistic. What I mean by that is that they took advantage of all the good things offered to them by the Greek state (referring to Greek nationality), but (instead of staying in Greece) they seized the opportunity to migrate in Germany. They do that because they have nothing to lose; they are allowed to take their Greek passports with them and as Greek citizens, through the European Union, they relocate to Germany”* (Anonymous 2013).

The above extract and others similar analysed for the sake of this article, focus on Greek and by extension European citizenship, as a privilege rather than a right. This brings to mind the narratives of social hierarchy and exclusion by which Pontic Greeks and other refugees of the Greek Catastrophe were faced, by the Greek mainland population in the beginning of the twentieth century. As previously discussed in this article, the original survivors of the 1915 Pontic genocide, who entered Greece as refugees, had recently undergone the transformation of an Imperial Diaspora to a Victim Diaspora. The current wave of Greek emigration, including that of Pontic Greeks of the Soviet Union, to Germany is ongoing and therefore it cannot be fully studied, let alone permit any conclusions to be reached regarding its results and outcomes. However, the historic example of Pontic Greek residence and ultimately integration, in Germany and elsewhere, allows space for optimism.

Conclusion

Starting their journey in space and time as an Imperial Diaspora in the mountainous areas of Anatolia, Pontic Greeks have a long history that dates back to the millennia. Due to their geographic isolation, their language and culture, though both undoubtedly Greek, developed differently from the common paradigm of mainland Greeks. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the socio-political tensions within the declining Ottoman Empire, brought them, as well as the other Christian minorities within the Empire, in the epicentre of animosity, hostility and ultimately persecution. Subjected to ethnic cleansing and genocide, Pontic Greeks were violently expelled from their ancestral lands and fleeing for their lives, started their journey as refugees. During that journey, their population was divided into two main bodies. The first was comprised of those who managed to flee towards the west and entered the newly founded Modern Greek state. The second body of Pontic Greek refugees, cut off from the rest by the Turkish army, continued their perilous journey towards the east and found refuge in parts of the Soviet Union, in some cases merging with the existing Greek Trade Diaspora in those regions, which already included many Pontic Greek families. However, instead of safety, they were faced with further persecution by the communist

regime. Regardless though of their geographic location, both bodies of the Pontic Greek population became established as a Victim (Refugee) Diaspora.

The harsh economic conditions in Greece, as well as the further decline of the Greek economy due to the Second World War and the subsequent Civil War, left little space for the integration of refugees. Therefore, a significant part of the Pontic Greeks, descendants of the original refugees, immigrated to Germany as *Gastarbeiter* in the 1960s, becoming a Labour Diaspora. After Greece's full induction to the European Communities in 1981 and the founding of the European Union in the decade that followed, Greeks in Germany found the space to fully integrate and departing from their guest-worker past, they evolved to a Cultural Diaspora, with modernised traditions. At the same time, their counterparts from the former Soviet Union, could also join them in Germany, following their footsteps from the 1960s, but as European Expatriates, rather than *Gastarbeiter*, joining the Pontic Greek Diaspora in Germany.

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