

Researcher:	Athina Tsoulis
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Executive Summary

The research aim of this research project was to explore the migratory experiences of a distinct group of single women who left Greece en masse to undertake domestic work in New Zealand in the early 1960's. This was an unprecedented occurrence for traditional Greek culture, which, at the time, was essentially patriarchal and women did not travel, far less live away from home without the supervision of a male or older member of the family.

Who were these women, why and how did they persuade their families to allow them to leave, what impact did the freedom and difference of western culture have upon these unchaperoned women and how did it change their lives were some of the questions we sought to discover.

The documentary form was chosen to complement the fifteen interviews of representatives of this group we undertook as part of the Ministry of Culture and Heritage's oral history grant and which will be shortly lodged in the Alexander Turnbull Library for the benefit of future researchers.

What became very evident was the devastating impact that World War II had upon the Cretan population, particularly in the west coast in the mountainous regions behind Hania. This was largely due to the punishment meted out by the Germans retaliating against the support the local Cretan population gave to the British and New Zealand forces engaged in the struggle.

The Cretans paid dearly for their support and fathers and adult brothers were rounded up systematically and shot or imprisoned in unbearable conditions for long periods, and dwellings and personal possessions were destroyed leaving women and children scabbling for food and basic necessities.

The grind of daily life which had little relief for many of these women who did not know much childhood pleasure, constantly helping the family in daily survival led to many of the women who decided to emigrate long for a better way of life. Many of them resented never enjoying the fruits of their labour or control on how it was spent as money went to male members of the family to dispense with. Many were influenced by the stories coming from the Greek diaspora and their adventurous spirit was aroused as they rejected the lives proscribed for female womanhood in their local environments.

The abruptness of the migration experience, severing with all that is familiar and going into the unknown was a traumatic experience no matter how much the women desired to leave. And things were never the same. Community was disrupted and attempts to reclaim this were successful as the new immigrants clung together and recreated familiar Greek rituals and

celebrations but again were disrupted as the unsettled immigrants decided to move to Australia to be part of a greater Greek community or returned back home. Visits home highlighted the disruption for these women as villages were emptied, loved ones dead or gone, villages becoming ghost towns.

We found that the Greek women we interviewed were reluctant to criticise their new host country and many spoke well of how they were treated by New Zealanders. Yet the toll the Migration experience had upon them and their children is quite profound.

Background

A large number of Greeks left their country after the WW2 for economic reasons resulting in large waves of migration to the US, Canada, Australia, several northern European countries, amongst others. New Zealand attracted a much smaller number of them in comparison to Australia which has one of the biggest Greek Diasporas. A large influx of Greek migration to NZ took place in the 1950s and 1960s. A New Zealand government scheme to provide domestic staff for hotels and hospitals, as well as potential brides for the many single Greek men who were earlier arrivals, brought 267 young Greek women, mostly from the island of Crete, to New Zealand between 1962 and 1964.

Almost all were single women in the age group 16-35, especially 16-24. The influx of single women changed radically the sex ratio of the NZ Greek population which was predominantly male, although, this changed with the arrival of fiancés and close relatives, as well as intermarriage (higher ratio amongst these female assisted immigrants). These women received basic instruction in special training centres in Greece prior to their departure including basic language and domestic skills. Most of them arrived in groups but dispersed upon their arrival to different work placements and often experienced isolation because of their poor language skills.

These young women were taking a big risk, moving to a country they knew very little about with very small Greek communities to provide them with support. This was in contrast to many post-war Greek Australian migrant women who often migrated with their families to a country with well-established Greek communities, which helped to lessen the social and cultural dislocation experienced through the process of migration and settlement.

The Greek female workers who came to New Zealand were employed on a contract basis for two years, in different parts of the country. On completion of their contract, some moved to small established Greek communities, especially in Wellington and Auckland. This scheme resulted in a significant period of 'chain' migration consisting of fiancés, close relatives, often assisted by these young women. Some of these women chose later to migrate for the second time to Australia to join other relatives, for better prospects or to be part of the much larger Greek communities there. By the 80s, a large number of these women returned to Greece and Crete as a result of changes in the immigration policies of both countries. This seems also to be a trend amongst Greek Australians who have an exceptionally high rate of return migration to Greece.

New Zealand has a special relationship with Greece, especially with the Island of Crete, stemming from World War II. Wellington has a sister city relationship with Hania on Crete. The street in Wellington on which the Greek Orthodox Cathedral sits is named Hania in recognition of this special bond between the two cities. As most of these assisted female immigrants came from Crete, and more specifically from the Hania province, one can see a special connection and a contributing factor for this migration.

The largest concentration of Greek New Zealanders resides in Wellington. Smaller communities exist in Auckland, Christchurch and Napier/Hastings. Greek Orthodox churches exist in all these centres. The largest and most active organisation is the Greek Orthodox Community of Wellington which manages the Greek Community Centre. This consists of The Greek Orthodox Cathedral - The Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, the Parthenon Building, classrooms and meeting rooms. Other cities and regions have active community associations as well, namely, Auckland, the Hutt Valley, Palmerston North and the South Island.

Many Greek New Zealanders have been able to maintain Greek cultural customs whilst integrating into the NZ way of life. It has been estimated that that about 50 percent of marriages of Greek persons are now mixed. It is common for the wedding to take place in the Greek Orthodox Church with the non-Greek partner becoming baptised before the marriage.

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Researchers Background

Evangelia Papoutsaki and Athina Tsoulis independently developed an interest in the influx of single, Greek women in the 60's. Papoutsaki has an oral history research background which relates to the project's main focus on immigrant identities in a new cultural environment (one of the principal researchers for a NZ Dutch immigrants oral history project commissioned by Dutch Museum Trust Board in 2008 and recipient of funds from the Jack Ilott Fund for the same project and the chief researcher for a Pacific Islands diaspora project) and extensive research experience.

Athina Tsoulis a Greek Australian, an established writer/director of drama and documentary and an academic who has dramatised the lives of Greek families in 1950's and 1960's New Zealand. Athina have also worked on projects with members of various immigrant communities – Samoan and Indian – empowering them to tell their stories.

Due to our common interest and different skill sets we decided to embark upon this project. We were delighted that the NZ Oral History Fund saw value in our project and funded the audio recording of 15 of these women by giving us a grant of \$30,000. The documentary component has been funded by the URC.

The collaborative aspect of our project is one that fits in with Unitec's push towards collaborative research amongst researchers across departments. Our skill sets combine to achieve the kind of research and outputs that would be difficult for either of us alone to achieve.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this project was to create a documentary with the following objectives:

- a. Explore multiple migration experiences of Greek women who came to New Zealand between 1962-64 to work as domestics.
- b. Compare migration experience between those women who chose to stay and those who either returned back to Greece/Crete or chose to migrate for the second time to Australia within the context of the Greek Diaspora.

The documentary format enhances the ability of the research to provide new insights into the lives of Greek female migrants by recording their personal perceptions of life in their home countries before departure and in their chosen new country – what it was actually like and how they felt.

The need for this research is particularly pertinent in an environment where New Zealand's multi-cultural dimension has been largely neglected and women's history in particular easily lost. Visual and sound recordings not only provide raw data for future analysis but the finished documentary will present this research to the wider community who have a strong connection with the Cretan people.

Methodology

We have worked closely with the Greek Communities of Auckland and Wellington to identify women who first came to NZ, stayed, or moved on to Australia and/or back to Greece as suitable candidates to record for the first stage of our project. The documentary component was always part of the project as we wanted to add another platform for the research to exist which would make our research accessible to a wider audience, not just in NZ, but internationally particularly amongst the Greek diaspora.

The aim of researchers is to present a dispassionate account of the research they undertake and its findings. However, the limitations of this is that it fails to truly capture the impact such experiences as migration have upon the emotional landscape of the individuals caused by the rupture of parting. The visual element of this research in the form of the documentary gives voice to this and is more adept at presenting the ambivalence and complexity of such experiences as it communicates to more senses than the written word. Furthermore, the documentary form is a rigorous research process because it requires a deep analysis and synthesis of the material during the editing process to provide a coherent summary of the research findings.

Outcomes/findings

It became evident that the task we have undertaken is bigger than anticipated and the more we researched the more we realized that this documentary will not be completed in a short space of time. In terms of PBRF a publication of this creative type is more synonymous in terms of the time it takes to write an original book publication, which takes a number of years to complete.

Whilst we have continued to film and interview the women, our immediate aim is to create a short promotional piece to attract more funding. We continue to work on this, however, the more funding we attract the faster we can complete the work, as we will be able to hire researchers and other creative collaborators.

Implications

The research will have the benefits of:

- a. Contributing to the international discussion around Diaspora in general;
- b. Contributing to the understanding of the specific NZ and Australian multicultural experience and impact of different cultural contexts on the migration experience;
- c. Expand community engagement in our understanding of the multicultural experience;
- d. Provide a historical record for the Greek communities in NZ thereby validating their experiences;
- e. Contributing to the National History Archives and future researchers.

In terms of the wider context, the project will be the foundational project of a proposed Unitec research centre around Digital Arts and the impact of digital technology on storytelling, which embraces digital memory (oral history).

Recommendations

Digital communities has been identified as a research cluster that the FCIB has highlighted as a theme that can bring collaborators from many environments together – a desire which is part of the drive towards creating a Unitec which is future focussed. Digital storytelling gives us the tools to engage with community that does have the capacity for social change.

Publications and dissemination

Presentations given at:

1. The New Zealand Oral History Assoc Conference – Rotorua, April 2011
2. Biennial Conference of the Oral History Association of Australia 2011 - COMMUNITIES OF MEMORY, Melbourne, 2 October 2011
3. Unitec Research Symposium, Oct 2011.