

Re-turning to Greece: Nostalgias of Loss and Absence

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This paper concerns short-term visits that Pontic Greeks make to Greece and the reactions that three different generations have to their former homeland. Once over, these visits do not overcome the separation brought about through the rupture of migration but continue to produce the nostalgic desire to return again, a nostalgia generated through emotions stimulated by the sensory experience of being in Greece. This nostalgia takes two different forms: a nostalgia of loss and a nostalgia of absence. The return visits of the first-generation migrants produce a yearning to return to the lost time and place of their youth. On the other hand, the journeys of the second-generation migrants produce a yearning to return to re-experience the lifestyle of Greece, which they perceive as absent in the diaspora. The nostalgias for those of the 1.5-generation encompass both these forms of nostalgia.

INTRODUCTION

It was early morning in Athens with another clear, blue sky and the temperature already hovering around the 30° Celsius mark. I was with the dancing group of the South Australian Pontian Brotherhood on their two-week tour of Greece as part of my 12 months of fieldwork focusing on Pontian Greeks in Adelaide. We assembled in the foyer of the hotel waiting for the bus to take us to the ancient fortress city of Nafplio, a former capital of Greece on the eastern coast of the Peloponnese peninsula. Once on the bus the older members of the tour spread out in the front seats of the bus and the young people sat in pairs at the back recovering from visiting clubs

the night before. At Nafplio, most people chose to spend the hot day at the beach or in the cafes, but a few wanted to engage with the history of the place in a physical way by climbing the 1,000 steps to the first level of the citadel, the place where Kolokotronis, one of the heroes in the nineteenth-century Greek War of Independence, had been imprisoned.

Pontians are descended from Greek traders, who from the eighth century BCE began to set up colonies along the Black Sea coast of northern Turkey. This area, known as Pontos, is named after the Greek term for the Black Sea, *Euxenos Pontos* (the hospitable sea). It stretched for almost 600 kilometres from Sinope in the west to the border of present-day Georgia in the east and was bounded in the south by the Pontic Alps.¹ The people in the region of Pontos were evangelised by Christian missionaries in the first century CE and with the split between Eastern and Western Christianity in the eleventh century CE, Pontic Greeks retained their allegiance to Greek Orthodoxy. At the turn of the twentieth century, a political group, the Committee of Union and Progress (commonly known as the ‘Young Turks’), came to power within the Ottoman Empire. They sought to overthrow the rule of the Ottoman sultans and to establish a Turkey solely for the Muslim Turkish people, thus threatening all Christian minority groups. As a result, it is estimated that 353,000 Pontians out of a total population of 700,000, died or were massacred between 1917 and 1922.² Those who survived were forced to settle in Greece, mainly in the north, under the Convention of the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations of 1923.³ Some of these people migrated to Australia in the mid-twentieth century.⁴ In 1958

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- 1 Michel Bruneau, ‘The Pontic Greeks, from Pontus to the Caucasus, Greece and the Diaspora’ *Journal of Alpine Research* 101, no. 2 (2013): 5.
 - 2 Tessa Hofmann, Matthias Bjørnlund and Vasileios Meichanetsidis (eds), *The Genocide of the Ottoman Greeks: Studies on the State-Sponsored Campaign of Extermination of Christians of Asia Minor (1912–1922) and its Aftermath: History, Law, Memory* (New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 2011), 105; Constantinos Fotiadis, *The Genocide of the Pontus Greeks by the Turks*, vol. 13 (Thessaloniki: Herodotus, 2004); Harry Tsirkinidis, *At Last We Uprooted Them... the Genocide of Greeks of Pontos, Thrace and Asia Minor, Through the French Archives*, trans. S Mavrantonis (Thessaloniki: Kyriakidis Brothers, 1991).
 - 3 Conference of Lausanne, ‘Convention concerning the exchange of Greek and Turkish populations, and protocol’, in *League of Nations – Treaty Source*, 807 (1923), 77–87.
 - 4 Makis Kasipidis, Director of the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research, estimated that there were, at that time, about 65,000 people of Pontian descent in Australia, that is, people who have one or more parents/grandparents from the Pontos region. He estimated that there were 45,000 in Melbourne,

the Pontian Brotherhood of South Australia was formed for the mutual support for the fledging Pontian diaspora and to pass on some of the Pontic traditions to the younger generation, in particular their distinctive Pontian dance.⁵ The movements of Pontian dance are different from that of Greek mainland or island dancing. Pontian dances range ‘from the most languid, slow, relaxed, effortless, shuffling steps to the most frenetic, tense, physically demanding and almost violent movement’ with the dancers’ feet covering a small space on the ground.⁶ In addition to foot movements, there is ‘flexing and rotation of the torso’, referred to as shimmying, which is characteristic of Pontian dance.⁷ Almost all dances are performed in a closed circle, with dancers holding hands in particular ways. All dances have a set number of steps that are repeated over and over again, with the movements of the arms and hands keeping in time to a rhythm that is unique to Pontian dance.

In 2006, the Pontian Brotherhood of South Australia organised a dancing tour of Greece. To the casual observer it would look as if the members of this tour were divided into two groups – the dancers and the parents and grandparents of the dancers. But the composition of the tour group was more nuanced than that. One group of 12 were first-generation Greek migrants to Australia. They had been born in Greece and migrated to Australia as young people in the 1960s. They were parents, grandparents and family friends of the dancers. Apart from one couple, all of them had returned to Greece before. While it is accepted that the term first-generation applies to those who made the original decision to migrate, what constitutes other generations of migrants is problematic. There was certainly a group that could be categorised as second-generation migrants. They were those who were aged in their mid-teens to mid-twenties and comprised 10 dancers, three siblings and a friend.

12,000 in Sydney, 7,000 in Adelaide. There were 25 families in Darwin and 20 families in Hobart and 21 in Perth. Makis Kaspidids, interviewed by author, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria, 1 May 2006, transcript held by author.

- 5 Diasporas are ‘dispersed networks of peoples who share common historical experiences of dispossession, displacement, adaptation’. James Clifford, ‘Diasporas’, *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 309; Bruneau, ‘The Pontic Greeks, from Pontus’, 4–5.
- 6 David B. Kilpatrick, *Function and Style in Pontic Dance Music* (Los Angeles: University of California, 1975), 104.
- 7 Kilpatrick, *Function and Style in Pontic Dance Music*, 105–06.

They were the children born of those first-generation migrants who had become established in Adelaide for a number of years. There were, however, five members of the tour party who did not fit into either the first- or second-generation category. These could be those described by scholars as ‘1.5-generation’ migrants.⁸ Sharaby defines these migrants as ‘youth who immigrated with their parents and comprised an intermediary generation, between the parents’ generation and the second and third generation’.⁹ But as Li states ‘there is no consensus [among scholars] about the age range of 1.5’ers’.¹⁰ It can range from those as young as six years of age up to those as old as 18 years of age, but it includes those who have had some of their education in the land of origin.¹¹ For this article, I define ‘1.5-generation’ as those who came as babies or were born soon after their parents migrated. They grew up, and were educated and socialised in Australia, at the same time as their parents were still negotiating the transition to living in a new land. Such was the case with these five members of the tour – four were parents of the dancers and the other, one of the dancers. As parents and at least 20 years older than the second-generation group, those of the 1.5-generation mixed more freely with the first-generation group. My husband and I, who both have an Anglo-Saxon background and were born in Australia, completed the tour party. This article explores how these different generations responded to this visit to Greece.

The main reason for the tour was to give Pontian Greek dancers from Adelaide an opportunity to dance at a number of Pontian venues in northern Greece, the most important of these being at the monastery of Panagia Soumela.¹² This monastery

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- 8 Allen Bartley and Paul Spoonley, ‘Intergenerational Transnationalism: 1.5-generation Asian Migrants in New Zealand’, *International Migration* 46, no. 4 (2008); Russell King, “Mediterranean Home-lands”: Transnational Perspectives on Continuing the Migratory Tradition Across Generations’, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 20, no. 2 (2011): 192; Yao-Tai Li, ‘One Person, Three Identities? Examining Re-Politicization of Ethnic, National, and Australian Identities Among 1.5-Generation Taiwanese Immigrants in Australia’, *Journal of Sociology* 5, no. 5 (2021): 541; Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second-generation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
- 9 Rachel Sharaby, ‘Between Cultures and Generations: Ethnic Activism of 1.5-Generation Immigrant Leaders’, *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 8, no. 1 (2021): 270.
- 10 Li, ‘One Person, Three Identities?’, 543.
- 11 Li, ‘One Person, Three Identities?’, 543–44.
- 12 Panagia (*Panayia* in Greek) refers to Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ as the all-holy one and the foremost among the saints. Soumela is a contraction of $\sigma\sigma\omicron\upsilon$ (‘s sou’) in the Pontian dialect meaning ‘of

replicates the ancient monastery of Panagia Soumela in Pontos, now in ruins, as the religious, educational and cultural gathering place for present-day Pontic Greeks.¹³ The dancers, along with many other dance groups from Greece and overseas, were invited to perform there on the feast of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary.¹⁴ This feast on the 15th August is a national and religious holiday in Greece, and one of the most important dates in Orthodoxy commemorated across the country. It attracts Pontians from all over Greece as well as from overseas. In 2006, people were camped on either side of the road for up to one kilometre leading to the monastery. The secretary of the monastery later told me that there would have been between 30,000 and 40,000 people at the site. On the evening of 14th August, a church liturgy, in the presence of the Archbishop of Athens and Primate of Greece, Christodoulos, was attended by high-ranking military personnel, members of the clergy, political leaders, security guards, members of the press, photographers and television crews. The church liturgy was followed by a long procession of an icon through the monastery grounds and after this, the entertainment for the rest of the evening took the form of Pontic dance and music.¹⁵ As well as taking their children to a site of Pontian and religious significance, the first-generation had a subsidiary aim, that of showing that they have been able to retain their culture in the diaspora and pass it on as ‘a symbol of a successful migration’.¹⁶ The performance of Pontian dance was one way to show this. It was the first time that a dancing group from the Pontian Brotherhood of South Australia had been invited to dance at Panagia Soumela and it had formed the focus for all their prior practice sessions. Before the tour, parents had stressed to the dancers how it was such a privilege for them to dance there and they expected them to practise hard to attain a high degree of dancing expertise.

the’ and Μελά ‘Black Mountain’, so the title means the Virgin Mary of the Black Mountain.

13 Bruneau, ‘The Pontic Greeks, from Pontus’, 6.

14 Otherwise known as the Dormition of the Theotokos, literally translated as ‘the falling asleep of the God-bearer’, this feast day celebrates the death of the Virgin Mary and the belief in her bodily resurrection and assumption into heaven.

15 The icon of the Panagia is believed by Pontians to be one of four painted by the first century CE Christian Apostle Luke. This was the focus of devotion at the original monastery in Pontos and is now housed at this monastery in Northern Greece.

16 Loretta Baldassar, *Visits Home: Migration Experiences Between Italy and Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), 288.

The Adelaide dancers gave two performances. At the first, I was sitting with the grandparents and older members of the tour watching as the dancers came onto the open-air stage. They danced a routine of dances, which I had seen many times before at practice sessions and at many performances at Pontian events in Adelaide. But this time it was different, and I could feel the tension coming from those with whom I was sitting. I knew it was the culmination of their planning and fundraising activities to enable them to make this trip possible and, as the highlight of the tour, the most important reason why the dancers had come to Greece. But not only that, the parents and grandparents of the dancers were anxious that the dancers would perform well and so show that they, as first-generation migrants, had retained Pontic culture in the diaspora and had successfully passed it on to the next generation. Afterwards, one of the grandparents told me that she had started to cry when she heard the people sitting behind her saying how surprised they were to see the Adelaide group dancing so well. They said that even though they were second-generation children in Australia, yet they ‘keep everything’.¹⁷ She told me that overhearing mainland Greeks complimenting their dancers on their dancing had made her feel very proud that she and her husband had been successful in passing on Pontic culture to her children and grandchildren. They had demonstrated this in the most significant of places – at Panagia Soumela, a focal point of Pontic culture in Greece.

Apart from these performances at the monastery, the dancers were to perform at other venues in northern Greece: the village of Agios Bartholomaeus, a festival at Kria Vrissi and at the village of Langada. There were other areas included in the itinerary, such as a visit to Nafplio (mentioned earlier), the Monastery of St Irini of the Golden Apple on its annual open day and an all-day excursion to the Prespa Lakes in the far north-west of Greece, bordering Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. This was the region where Greek resistance fighters played a crucial role in securing the independence of Greece in 1914 and in defending it in World War Two. This trip had a particular relevance for first-generation Pontic Greek migrants. As young people growing up in northern Greece, those of the first-generation were very aware of the importance of securing independence from

17 ‘Despina’, interviewed by author, at her home, 29 November 2006, tape and transcript held by author.

the Ottoman Empire, and often had first-hand experience of the effects of World War Two and the Greek Civil War (1946–49). These times of conflict brought great suffering, and, as Damousi describes, the memories of them remain and are passed down to subsequent generations of Greek migrants.¹⁸ Yet after a time span of 50 to 60 years, the visit to these sites aroused a patriotic pride for both those of the first- and 1.5-generation members of the tour. But, for second-generation migrants, it could not produce the same sentiments.

So, if the focus of the tour was to perform at Pontian events and to connect with Pontian culture in Greece, why were these other places of broader Greek historical and religious significance included in the itinerary? ‘Dimitris’, who was 17 years of age when he migrated in 1970, explained it like this:

We went there for a mission. We went for a reason...That’s why I was hounding them, ‘You get up. You do this, you do that’. I did not want them to sleep and so the trip to Nafplio was to give them more information. The visit to St Irini’s was to absorb the culture. They [would] never have gone there by themselves. These kids would never go and see these things. We are coming back to culture things, to the basics. I believe these kids, it doesn’t matter what age they are, they will still remember [this trip]. It was ‘one-off’. It was an experience.

He went on to say:

You have to give them something, not written. It’s why we keep telling them stories. We keep telling them how beautiful Greece is and I thought [that] if they don’t actually live it, they will never feel it...What can I do for my daughter. I can tell her how beautiful my village is, I can tell her all these things but it’s only a story...The minute you go there and you live it yourself and you come back, it’s actually like a stamp, a seal, stamp...it’s stamped, it’s there.¹⁹

18 Joy Damousi, *Memory and Migration in the Shadow of War: Australia’s Greek Immigrants after World War II and the Greek Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 83–108.

19 ‘Dimitris’, interviewed by author, Collinswood, 6 May 2007, tapes and transcript held by author.

He was hoping that the ‘stamp’ or the transformation would occur in his daughter when on returning to Australia, the same yearning to return would be ‘sealed’ in her. By taking their children to significant historical, religious and political sites, he and the other parents were hoping that this visit would impart something of the same sense of nostalgic loss of Greece that they, as first-generation migrants, feel. But it is not as simple as that. It is impossible for the second-generation to return to the same time, even in their imagination, or to feel the same sense of nostalgic loss of Greece that first-generation migrants feel. His daughter may come to love Greece and long to make return short-term visits, but her nostalgia will be not of loss but one of absence.

In this article, I analyse how different kinds of nostalgias are formed for the different generations and argue that these nostalgias, one of loss and one of absence are produced through emotions that are aroused by a sensual engagement with Greece.

DIFFERING NOSTALGIAS

The word ‘nostalgia’ has taken on different meanings over time. The word was first coined by Johannes Hofer in 1688 when he combined two Greek words ‘nostos, to return home and algia, a painful condition – thus meaning a painful yearning to return home’.²⁰ Initially, it described a phenomenon where ‘once away from their native land, some people languished, wasted away, and even perished’.²¹ Thus, nostalgia began to be viewed as homesickness, a physical disease, which doctors thought could be fatal.²² By the beginning of the twentieth century, nostalgia was thought of as melancholia. It was perceived to be a mental illness and so moved into the realm of psychiatry. By the late twentieth century, the word has ‘a pejorative connotation: the word implies the useless yearning for a world or for a way of life from which one has been irrevocably severed’.²³ It has often become ‘the universal catchword for looking back’.²⁴ Theoretical

20 Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (London: The Free Press, 1979), 1.

21 David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 10.

22 Jean Starobinski and William S. Kemp, ‘The Idea of Nostalgia’, *Diogenes* 14, no. 54 (1966): 95.

23 Starobinski and Kemp, ‘The Idea of Nostalgia’, 101.

24 David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 4.

approaches to the concept of nostalgia range from the historical,²⁵ sociological,²⁶ psychological,²⁷ postmodernist²⁸ and anthropological.²⁹ Most of these approaches refer to memory as the trigger for a range of nostalgic emotions but few describe how these emotions are aroused. Through the etymology of the Greek, Seremetakis shows the Greek word, *nostalghia*, is closely linked with the senses particularly that of taste and smell.³⁰ Sutton also describes how the emotions of nostalgia are associated with the tastes, smells and textures of food and so are evocative of a past time.³¹ In this article, I contend that nostalgia is activated through a wider range of sensory experiences. For example, when Pontians return to Greece for short-term visits, their emotions are stirred by being in their former homeland: the all-encompassing experience of travelling through the countryside; sensing the heat, sights, smells and sounds of Greece as well as the taste of its food; meeting family and friends; and experiencing the religious milieu. For the first-generation, through the sensory engagement of the body emplaced in a physical and social world, nostalgic emotions are aroused by remembering what it was like to be there in the past. However, because of the rupture of migration, they cannot make up for the lost time spent in the diaspora, and so their nostalgia becomes one of loss. The diasporic experience of the second-generation is different from that of their parents and so the reactions they have to visiting Greece are different. They become aware of elements of Greek culture that are not available to them in Australia, such as, for instance, the experience of engaging with the religious lifestyle of Greece. So, this arouses a different form of nostalgia, an awareness of the absence of Greece in their daily lives in the diaspora and, hence, theirs is a nostalgia of absence.

25 Starobinski and Kemp, 'The Idea of Nostalgia'.

26 Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*.

27 Tim Wildschut, Constantine Sedikides, Jamie Arndt and Clay Routledge, 'Nostalgia: Content, Triggers, Functions', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91, no. 5 (2006).

28 Kathleen Stewart, 'Nostalgia – A Polemic', *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 3 (1988).

29 C. Nadia Seremetakis, 'The Memory of the Senses, Part I: Marks of the Transitory', in C. Nadia Seremetakis (ed.), *The Senses Still: Perception and Memory as Material Culture in Modernity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1–18; David Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory* (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Klaus Neumann, 'Nostalgia for Rabaul', *Oceania* 67, no. 3 (1997).

30 Seremetakis, 'The Memory of the Senses', 4.

31 Sutton, *Remembrance of Repasts*.

METHODOLOGY

This article has been written from an anthropological perspective. Such an approach has correlations with that of oral history. Both disciplines seek to capture the perspective of those who are engaged in the research and the immediacy of their voice. Interviewing then forms a major part of both disciplines, with the researcher placing emphasis on reflecting ‘on interview relationships and ways of interpreting and using oral testimony’.³² For oral history as well as anthropology, interpreting ‘oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did’³³ to produce what Geertz refers to as ‘thick description’.³⁴

The interview process formed a significant element of my research into the Pontian Brotherhood of South Australia. In Adelaide, 38 formal interviews with their members, people ranging from 18 to 102 years of age, were conducted. Ten of these informants were interviewed more than once. Interviews were between half an hour to three hours and were undertaken either at the Pontian Brotherhood’s clubrooms or at private homes. All the interviews were taped and later transcribed. Twenty members of the tour party were interviewed. As well, I had many informal conversations with Pontians and as soon as possible the relevant comments were noted and included in written fieldnotes. Written approval for each formal interview was obtained and to protect the anonymity of the informants, pseudonyms have been used throughout this paper and indicated by inverted commas at their first mention.

Grele claims that the methodology of oral history distinguishes it from other disciplines because historians ‘are trained to understand and analyze the variety of historical thought and their cultural context, and thus oral history interviewing is simply an extension of that training into the field’.³⁵ In anthropology, also, the

32 Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge 1998), 5.

33 Alessandro Portelli, ‘What Makes Oral History Different’, in Perks and Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader*, 67.

34 Clifford Geertz, ‘Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture’, in Clifford Geertz (ed.), *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books 1973).

35 Robert Grele, ‘Movement Without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History’, in Perks and Thomson (eds), 48.

researcher is trained to understand and analyse the available material, but they also use participation and observation. In this methodology the researcher themselves becomes immersed in the research through prolonged fieldwork in order to analyse what informants are saying and doing. For both oral history and anthropology 'the final result of the interview is the product of both the narrator and the researcher'.³⁶

The extended nature of my fieldwork enabled me to observe and participate in the community's various activities such as at festivals, commemorations, dinner dances, parties, weddings, exhibitions and funerals. It included nine weeks in Greece, first accompanying the dancers from the Adelaide Pontian Brotherhood for two weeks as they performed at a number of venues in northern Greece. I then remained in Greece for further fieldwork. In both Adelaide and Greece, I travelled with Pontians, ate and danced with them, observed the performances of their dance groups, walked in religious processions and took part in village festivals and commemorations. Through this participant observation, I gained an insight into how Pontian Greeks in the Australian diaspora have a strong attachment to Greece that makes them want to make return visits and engage with the cultural milieu of that country.

NOSTALGIA OF LOSS FOR FIRST-GENERATION MIGRANTS

In the first years after their migration to Australia, first-generation migrants mostly were not able to make frequent return visits, often because of the need to put limited financial resources into establishing themselves in Australia. However, because air travel was relatively quick and affordable and, because many first-generation migrants were retired from full-time employment, many had been able to make short-term return visits. The families of most of those I travelled with came from villages in the north of Greece and so, because the tour was predominantly in this region, almost everyone had a chance to meet with extended family members and to visit their former villages, either during or after the official tour was over. This aspect of the tour was happily anticipated, their memories stirred through recalling past sensual pleasures. During the flight to Greece, 'Anastasia' who migrated to Australia

36 Portelli, 'What Makes Oral History Different', 67.

in 1960 when she was 18 years old, told me that she was looking forward to meeting her sisters and returning to her village. She said that she liked to stay there because it was quiet, and the air was fresh.³⁷ ‘When you wake up you can hear the fowls in the morning’, she said. ‘Iosif’ was returning after leaving Greece when he was fifteen and a half years of age in 1962.³⁸ At the time he was working in Thessaloniki, and although he does not remember much about his village, he could remember ‘the smell of the delicious apples when you drive along the road’.

There is a difference between remembering the past and nostalgia. The nostalgic person not only remembers but ‘conjures up images of a previous time when life was “good”’.³⁹

Nostalgic remembrance, particularly when connected to the home place of their youth, is often linked to positive sensations such as ‘pleasure, joy, satisfaction, goodness, happiness, love’ and not to such negative emotions as ‘unhappiness, frustration, despair, hate, shame [and] abuse’.⁴⁰ While visits might allow a return to the physical place of one’s home, they do not take one back to a past time of one’s youth or even to the past time of a good holiday. It is only possible to remember the time when it was good to be at that place, and when the visits are over, there is the sad realisation that a loss has occurred over time, a loss that cannot be recovered.

‘Nina’, unlike the other older members of the group, had not returned to Greece since she migrated to Australia in 1965 when she was 11 years of age and was eagerly looking forward to going to her village.⁴¹ She and her husband had saved and planned to return to Greece for a long time, but every year there was some excuse not to go, so to go with the dancing group was an opportunity that they did not want to miss. Nina and her family stayed in her village for eight days and on her return to Australia, she told

37 Conversation with ‘Anastasia’ on the plane travelling to Greece, 8 August 2006, recorded in fieldnotes held by author.

38 Conversation with ‘Iosif’ on the plane travelling to Greece, 8 August 2006, recorded in fieldnotes held by author.

39 Janelle L. Wilson, *Nostalgia: Sanctuary of Meaning* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), 21.

40 Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 14.

41 ‘Nina’, interviewed by author, at Nina’s home, 6 May 2007, tapes and transcript held by author.

me that early every morning she would enjoy leaving the house where she was staying and wander about the village. People would speak to her and ask her if she was new. When she told them who she was they would remember her parents, but they could not recognise her. Even though she was very young when she migrated to Australia, Nina remembered where her home had been and recognised many of her neighbours.

Nina said that her village had changed a lot and while she vaguely remembered some of the places from her childhood it was 'like a dream'. Her parents' house had belonged to her uncle and after they left, it fell into disrepair and has since been demolished. So, there was no building for Nina to return to, but there was a big tree that she could remember from 40 years ago, still growing on the property. Nina showed me a copy of an old photograph given to her in Greece that shows the tree as it was in 1964. The photograph showed Nina with her two sisters and her mother stringing tobacco leaves together to be dried, with the tree and the house where they lived in the background. She said that she can remember that the tree used to have a hole in it – and indicated that place on the photograph – where she and her brother used to hide things. The hole has now gone as the tree has grown. 'Now it is different', she said. When she saw the tree, she cried. 'Next to the tree I was so emotional', she said and added that it was more distressing for her than she expected. In seeing how the tree had grown, Nina became aware particularly of the effects of change over time. Thus, in becoming aware of her loss over time and place, Nina's journey brought home to her the realisation that while she could return to the village of her birthplace, she could not go back to how her village was when she left it.

The passing of time often brings the death of family members. Several older people on the tour had migrated as single people leaving behind their parents and some of their siblings; for two of the members of the group, returning meant visiting the graves of family members. Anastasia, for instance, showed me a photograph of her mother that she was taking to go inside the receptacle on her mother's grave to replace the photograph that had deteriorated over the years.⁴² 'Despina' also was going back to visit her

42 'Anastasia', 8 August 2006.

parents' graves.⁴³ She had migrated to Australia in 1963 from the north of Greece as a single person when she was sixteen and a half years of age leaving behind her parents and some of her siblings. Despina's mother had come from Trapezounda in northern Turkey as a baby with her mother and sister. There was another sister, but she was lost during the upheaval of leaving Pontos at the time of the Exchange of Populations. Her aunt was only found through the agency of the Red Cross in 1996. Despina's grandmother remarried and went to live in the Prespa Lakes area.

Despina's father's family came from an area near Constantinople. They had been wealthy but lost everything when they had to move to Greece. They lived in the next village to her mother who became engaged to her father through proxy when she was 14 years of age. Despina was born in 1947, the fifth child of her family; she has an older brother and two older sisters (one brother died of starvation). During the Civil War in Greece their village was burnt, and the family had to flee to Florina where their father, who was in the army, was stationed. After the Civil War, the family was given a small allotment of land (about an acre, Despina thought) and a two-bedroom house in which her parents, nine children, a grandmother, an aunt and an uncle all lived. There was a baby every year. She said that they were hard times and that she was often hungry. To ease the burden on her parents, Despina sometimes would do odd jobs for other people in the village in return for items such as shoes that were very much needed to walk to school across the frozen lake in winter. She said that she often went fishing with her father but when they caught anything, rather than the fish going to feed the family, it had to be sold for money so the family could survive. Her village offered little prospects for her future. By the 1960s her older brother was already in Australia, and he paid for a deposit for her passage on the ship. She was not given any extra money to spend. Despina thinks that this was not because her family was unaware of this, but because there was no spare money. This meant that as a young person she was always hungry and would wait impatiently for each meal. She left Greece on 14 September 1963 and arrived in Adelaide on 28 October 1963 and went straight to live with her brother and sister-in-law. When she started

43 Conversation with 'Despina' on the plane travelling to Greece, 8 August 2006, recorded in fieldnotes held by author.

work at a glass factory the following Monday morning, she said that she did not even know how to say 'good morning' in English.

On the occasions when she spoke to me about her impending visit back to her village, her eyes would fill with tears. Although she was keenly looking forward to visiting the village of her youth, two changes had occurred that made the thought of returning distressing for her. First, she was unable to be in Greece at the time of her father's death. With both her parents now deceased, when she visited the village she visited graves. Second, her sister had demolished the family home in the hope of building a new modern home for herself. She said that it is hard going back when there are no parents to go to. Going to the village of her childhood was important but the place of home, perceived as being with her parents, was no longer there. She said that she felt that the only home she has in Greece is the grave site of her parents. Hence, returning for these older Pontic Greeks was tinged with a keen sense of the loss of time over the years, time that they had been unable to spend with their parents and other family members. As with Nina, the visit could not compensate for all the time they had been away from their villages.

First-generation migrants become aware of how time brings about perceived changes in the way people behave compared with how they remember their behaviour from their youth. In Adelaide, 'Evangelos' told me that he had spent 18 months renovating his father's house in Greece, making it like an 'Australian house, with a separate bathroom'.⁴⁴ On a later occasion, he said that he had put this Greek home on the market. When I asked Evangelos why he did that and whether he would consider living permanently in Greece, he told me that he could not live there anymore because the Greek people there are different from the Greeks in Australia. When pushed further on this, he told me that the Greeks in Greece have lost 'respect'. Evangelos explained that when he was growing up there, people would help each other. For instance, if a bus came with a woman on board, she would hardly have to ask for someone to go to her family to bring the donkey. He said, 'He would have already gone and done it. But nowadays, people say, "Do it yourself!"' Evangelos

44 Conversation with 'Evangelos' at the Pontian Brotherhood's clubroom, 5 June 2006, and on the bus to Nafplio, 12 August 2006, recorded in fieldnotes held by author.

then said that the trip that they were making with the Pontian dancers would be his last one back to Greece. He said, 'When I leave, I hurt. All my time in Australia which I love, but I can't forget...I can't forget the way my father brought me [up]'. He was quite definite about not returning and became quite emotional, wiping away his tears. In renovating his father's house, Evangelos attempted to hold on to Greece even though the renovations were reminiscent of an Australia he knew. Once back in Australia he remembered how he lived in Greece as a young man. When returning to Greece, however, he found that he could no longer live there permanently because the changes in the society have become too great for him to accept. He realised that the Greece of his youth that he attempted to hold on to is no longer there and despite his efforts, he is unable to return to it. The ties to the place of his origin remained as do the ties to the country where he settled. Visiting the former was an attempt in some way to overcome the loss that is inherent in the rupture of migration, but through the experience of renovating his house, the reality of what he had lost became apparent.

Sometimes these visits are not just to the place of their youth, but an attempt to experience again the good times of youth. Dimitris, who has achieved a higher socio-economic status than the other first-generation members on the tour, has had the opportunity to return to Greece about twice every year for the past 15 years. When I asked him why he wants to return so often, he said:

I ask myself that. We all love Australia but I reckon when you grow somewhere and you actually enjoyed yourself where you [were], you can never forget your memories, isn't it. I could go around the world...There is no country around the world I haven't been [to]...Why [do] I go back to Greece? I think Greece is still my home. I wouldn't live in Greece, put it that way...I don't know. Maybe because I still haven't broke away. You know. Is it because I have good memories? Is it because I love Greece? Is it because I'm Greek? I don't know. What makes me go back there? I haven't got anyone there. Ah, when I say I haven't got anyone, I have [my wife's] parents but in any other way, people wouldn't see that as a reason to go back twice or three times a

year...Why do I keep going back to Greece? Something keeps pulling me there. I go there and stay three or four weeks, and I have had enough.⁴⁵

Although Dimitris has his own family, his parents and all his siblings living nearby in Adelaide, he, nevertheless, feels an urge to return to Greece and particularly to his village. Dimitris goes back to what he calls home but in fact his return visits are nostalgic ones where he goes back to the place of his youth in an attempt to recapture his good memories of growing up there. But he finds that he is unable to do this and leaves after three or four weeks only to be pulled back to that place at a later date to seek again that elusive time.

Even though these first-generation migrants appreciate living in Australia, the return visits arouse a nostalgia of loss that is tinged with pain and sometimes regret as they realise what has been lost to them through the migration experience. If they had remained in Greece, they would not have been so aware of the changes that have occurred over time. In the second half of the twentieth century, internal migration of young people in their late teens to early thirties to larger urban areas has brought about underdevelopment for rural Greek villages, but also changes in social customs and patterns of behaviour.⁴⁶ Not only are the villages changed from the places they remembered as young people but they find that they are unable to recapture the time of their youth. So, the emotions of nostalgia are not only tied to place but more importantly to time. They are aroused when first-generation migrants realise that when returning to the place of their youth, they are unable to sense in the body that elusive time when things were good. This is even though Nina can touch the remembered tree, Evangelos can live in his renovated house in his village or Dimitris can drink coffee with his acquaintances. The emotions that come through such sensual engagement can be disappointment that the remembered place has changed; realisation that people's behaviour has changed; grief for those who have died; doubts

45 'Dimitris', 6 May 2007.

46 Vasilikie Demos, 'Rapid Urbanization, Internal Migration, and Rural Underdevelopment in Greece: A Case Study', *Journal of Hellenic Diaspora*, (1988) 87–99 and Anna Collard, 'Les inegalities du changement dans un village montagnard Grec: (Sterea Hellas: Evritanie)', *Επιθεώρηση Κοινωνικών Ερευνών* (1981): 208–20, <http://dx.doi.org/10.12681/grsr.577>.

about whether the choices that were made at a previous time were the right ones; or regret that they did not remain in the place of one's birth. These are the bittersweet emotions of loss, aroused during visiting their birth country, all the while belonging in another country where they have established their own families. The children of these families might experience much the same sensual experiences as their parents during the short-term visits. However, they were not born nor grew up in Greece, and so different nostalgic emotions are produced.

NOSTALGIA OF ABSENCE FOR THE SECOND-GENERATION

Those of the second-generation do not have the same sense of loss as their parents but through short-term visits they become aware of a sense of absence of a broader Greek way of life missing in the diaspora. The second-generation looked forward to the tour with just as much eager anticipation as the first-generation. The dancers diligently practised their dance routines in preparation for their performances and talked excitedly about the things they would do in Greece. Once in Greece, they accompanied their parents or grandparents to their former villages and met extended family members. However, it was not only important to the second-generation that they connect with family members but, as Baldassar observed regarding the visits of second-generation Italian migrants, that they sought to increase their knowledge of popular culture in Greece through these visits.⁴⁷ Hence, for second-generation Australian Pontian Greeks, the nightlife of Greece attracted the younger members of the tour. For them, it was important to see live performances by artists in the ambience of the night clubs of Athens, performances that could not be replicated in Adelaide. Seeing these artists perform in Greece was 'important to their ethnic identification', particularly by being able to refer to them once they were back home.⁴⁸

Highlighting the absence of such popular Greek culture, one young dancer, 'Sofia', felt that 'there is nothing in Adelaide that makes up for what is in Greece'.⁴⁹ She has

47 Baldassar, *Visits Home*, 331.

48 Baldassar, *Visits Home*, 331.

49 'Sofia', interviewed by author, Pontian Brotherhood's clubrooms, 20 November 2006, tapes and transcript held by author.

been to Greece three times. The first time was in 1995, when she was about seven or eight years of age, then again in January 2006 when she stayed in her family's village for five days and then in August with the dance tour. Sofia said that she remembered only a little from her first trip but that the visits in 2006 were 'fantastic'.

That was a big eye-opener...It was a bit of shock, actually. It was like, where am I? How come, I am here now? Why didn't I come earlier? Or like...why did it take me 10 years to come back to Greece? Now it's like, I want to go every year...I think it is because to keep in touch with the culture, the Greekness.

She went on to say,

Like Greece, is get away and enjoy yourself and don't have any other worries...Winter was very cosy and local, and a bit more traditional, the style of Greek living. In summer it's more like, the tourist atmosphere – the clubs, the beaches. You know, that sort of going out, partying and that sort of thing...more like, I don't know, wild fun.

Another dancer, Irini expressed a similar reaction to her first visit to Greece as well as the strong desire to return. At a Pontian Brotherhood function she said:

I have been part of the Pontian Brotherhood dance group for a number of years. It has been my dream and that of others to dance at Panagia Soumela. This dream came true when we visited Greece in August of this year. It was my first time to go to Greece and a big opportunity for me and for my parents to go back to Greece. I cannot explain fully the feelings I had, knowing that I was in Greece with my family and friends. I learnt so much about their life there by staying with my family. I have become more proud of being Greek. I want to return. I will definitely be going back.⁵⁰

Growing up in Australia, second-generation Pontic Greeks do not have the first-hand experience of Greece until they visit. In visiting the nightclubs and historical

50 Speech given by Irini Kosmedis at a Pontian Dinner Christmas Dance, 26 December 2006, recorded in fieldnotes held by author.

and religious places of significance, second-generation Pontic Greeks experience a way of Greek life that is absent in Adelaide. As Davis states, 'the material of nostalgic experience is the past', so now the nostalgia acquired after these visits is a yearning to return to the past that they have now experienced, which is the time of a good holiday in Greece, often in holiday mode in summer.⁵¹ The past is perceived positively as a time when life was good. This nostalgia, then, is without the aching longing that the first-generation holds. Rather than tied to a place and time of the past, the nostalgia of the second-generation is tied to a place associated with a certain Greek lifestyle which is far from the reality of living in Greece on a permanent basis. It is a nostalgia of absence rather than of loss.

NOSTALGIA OF THE 1.5-GENERATION

The nostalgia of the 1.5-generation is hard to categorise. Like the second-generation they experience a nostalgia of absence, but they grew up witnessing the nostalgia of loss that their newly arrived migrant parents felt. Also, they

differ from the first- and second-generation immigrants because they are generally better immersed in the culture of the host society than the first-generation; yet, compared to the second-generation, they often have to renegotiate their identities in relation to parents, colleagues at work, and people in the host society.⁵²

While those of the 1.5-generation might identify more with the Greek culture of the first-generation than do the second-generation, they know they are not Greek in the way their parents are but then they are not Australian Greeks as their children might describe themselves. This feeling of 'in-betweenness' of the 1.5-generation, Li argues, results from being 'in-between origin and destination societies', which I propose leads to a sense of not knowing where they belong.⁵³ Commenting on this, a Greek friend

51 Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday*, 8.

52 Li, 'One Person, Three Identities?', 541.

53 Li, 'One Person, Three Identities?', 545.

of mine who had come to Australia as a child in the 1960s with her first-generation migrant parents, said that people in her generation do not know where they belong.

Our parents know where they have come from, and they know they are Greek. But for us, we have been brought up in a Greek milieu, but we have been educated and have worked and mixed in the wider Australian society. The problem for us is that we do not know (or can remember) where we were born. My parents have shown me pictures of the place but when I went back it was completely different.⁵⁴

For her, belonging is associated with the place of her birth, which she cannot relate to as it is in an unfamiliar place. She ranges from feeling closely tied to Greece to not feeling connected to it.

'Manolis' has lived in Australia all his life. He was educated and socialised in Australia, is married with three children and was a parent of one of the dancers.⁵⁵ Even so, he identified strongly with his Greek heritage. When his parents decided to migrate to Australia in 1965, his mother was already three months pregnant with him, and gave birth to him in Australia in 1966. His strong attachment to the Greek way of life began with his first visit to Greece at 14 years of age when he visited his father's village in the north-west of Greece. At that time, it was still very rural. They had their own cows and from the milk they made their own dairy products, such as yoghurts, butter and cheese. While he was there, also, he was caught up in the Easter celebrations in a small village setting and so for Manolis, it was an experience of a rural as well as a religious lifestyle that was new to him. However, what was overwhelming for him was the warmth he felt from his extended family members. It gave him a sense of belonging that he had not experienced before. He said, 'It was though I had been away and had come home'. On the last day of his trip, he can remember that he locked himself in his bedroom and would not come out. He told his parents that

54 Conversation at Biennial National Conference Dinner of OEEGA (Organisation of Hellene and Hellene-Cypriot Women of Australia (SA) Inc.), Morphettville, 11 October 2008, recorded in fieldnotes held by author.

55 'Manolis', interviewed by author, Pontian Brotherhood's clubrooms, 22 June 2006, tapes and transcript held by author.

they could go back to Australia but that he wanted to remain in Greece. This was not possible for him at that stage of his life, but this initial visit produced a nostalgia of absence that has since motivated him to return to Greece on four separate occasions all the while knowing that his life is in Australia.

However, not all places associated with this trip to Greece produced a nostalgic desire to return. As Hodgkin and Radstone observe:

Images of the lost homeland...can be passed down generations, summoning up loyalties and nostalgia. In some cases this may produce a powerful identification with the parents' lost physical environment, as nostalgia, or as charge: to go back, to reclaim what was lost. In others it is a more reluctant and ambivalent bond: the children who have come to belong somewhere else will not readily be summoned back. In either instance, what is returned to will not be the same.⁵⁶

While Manolis identified strongly with the Greek way of life, 'Marianna' was more ambivalent about her Greek heritage.⁵⁷ Marianna was born in Australia to Despina and her husband soon after they married in 1966. She has lived all her life in Australia and she is married with two daughters, one of whom was a dancer on the tour. She visited Greece as a child, as a teenager and then 10 years before this visit. After the tour, Despina was eager to take Marianna and her granddaughters back to her former village in the north of Greece on the shores of Lake Prespa. While it was a sad time for Despina to be visiting the graves of her parents, on the occasions when she spoke of her family and childhood, there was no indication that it was an unhappy time. My impression was that, even though her family was very poor, living in her village was a good time in her life. She later told me that

At night-time, to amuse ourselves my father would sing (we could not afford to have a lyra) and our whole family would dance. We danced the usual

56 Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, 'Introduction: Contested Pasts', in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds), *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory* (London: Routledge, 2003), 12.

57 'Marianna', interviewed by author, Pontian Brotherhood's clubrooms, 13 November 2006, tapes and transcript held by author.

dances – Tík, Omál, Dipát, Kótsari and Karsilamá. The neighbours would often say to us how they were happy to see us all dancing. Always during the summer there would be festivals where there would be dancing. We would go to different villages or people would come to ours. I can remember my mother and grandmother dancing on occasions such as weddings. These days are gone and will not come back again.⁵⁸

Marianna had a different experience of her mother's village. She said that she was appalled at the current state of the village and did not know how the people could continue to live there in their wooden houses with ill-fitting shutters. Marianna went on to say that there were a number of snakes in the area that could come inside people's homes and that she, herself, had to use sticks to chase the snakes away from her grandparents' graves in order to keep her own children safe. She said that there were only a few old people living in the village now and, apart from their own gardens, there did not seem to be any other source of income. There were no shops: one man had to travel to a nearby town once a fortnight to buy groceries for the whole village. Overall, she said she thought that these villagers had a terrible existence. While it was important for Despina to return to her former village and particularly to visit the site of her former home and the graves of her parents, it was not a good experience for Marianna. Although they both went to the same physical place, the 'imaginary landscape' of that place was different and evoked a different response from each of them.⁵⁹ As a first-generation migrant, Despina went back to the place where she grew up, and through the sensory experience of being there, can remember when it was good to be there with her parents and brothers and sisters. Her nostalgia of loss cannot be experienced by her daughter because Marianna was not going back to the place of her birth. Her unpleasant experience in the village did not produce a nostalgia of absence. In contrast, Marianna, before the tour began, had had an enjoyable time visiting her father's relatives in Greece and renewing the ties she had made with them on three previous occasions. It was these holiday experiences that produced a nostalgic desire to return for Marianna rather than her mother's village.

58 'Despina', 29 November 2006.

59 Hodgkin and Radstone, 'Introduction: Contested Pasts', 12.

This feeling of not belonging in either place can result in nostalgia of both absence and loss. However, those of the 1.5-generation have been able to develop their own strategies for asserting their unique identity. This, Dellios argues, is because they have acquired language fluency, have developed competencies within significant cultural spaces, all the while being immersed in their Greek community networks.⁶⁰

CONCLUSION

The short-term visits to Greece produced different nostalgias for the different generations of Pontian Greeks. For the first-generation it was a nostalgia of loss as they remembered the time of their youth and tried to assuage the loss that the rupture of migration has caused over time and space. In accompanying their children to Greece, parents hoped to instil in them the same feelings for Greece that they have. But this was impossible. Although the first-generation were returning to the place of their birth and upbringing this was not so for the second-generation. For them, the visit provided an experience of Greek culture absent in the diaspora. On returning to Australia, these short-term visits created a desire to return to the lifestyle of Greece. This nostalgia of absence was without the painful longing to return as for the first-generation. As young children, those of the 1.5-generation absorbed a sense of loss from their migrant parents as well as experiencing a nostalgia of absence after they visited Greece. In both nostalgias, the emotions of loss and absence were stimulated by the sensory experiences of these short-term visits to Greece. Ultimately, however, these visits did not alleviate the separation inherent in the migration experience, but for the three generations of Pontic Greeks acted to continually produce the yearning to make further nostalgic return visits.

60 Alexandra Dellios, 'A Cultural Conflict?: Belonging for Greek Child Migrants in 1960s and 1970s Melbourne', *Victorian Historical Journal* 84, no. 2 (2013): 303–25.