

Introduction

Inventively exploring an English language pun, philosopher Nelson Goodman (1979) spoke of metaphors as 'old words that do new tricks'. In most Indo-European languages the meaning of 'home' has a dual reference: as a 'house' or 'shelter' and as a 'lived space' with special reference to the individuals that inhabit it and their social relations. This is evident in the poet's Boris Hristov reference, "To have a house but not a home" (*Dai imash kushta, a da njamash dom!*). The emotional identification of 'home' in this poetic rendition of the hearth is preserved in most languages that distinguish between the animate and inanimate aspects of home. In general, the concept is construed around emotional notions of familiarity, family and friends or specially sheltering, protection and provisions, as well as, collective and individual belonging (e.g. Buck 1949). An idea that Turton (2005) has expanded to refer to place-making practices among refugees who tell stories about their former places maintaining links between the imagined and actual places of belonging; thus, reconceptualising their novel places according to familiar categories.

This book is an anthropological analysis about the meanings of 'home' among a group of people that have been creating new 'homes' in every generation for more than a century. Thus, the book itself is also a metaphor in Goodman's sense, in that it may be seen as a way of describing historical processes of displacement and emplacement. Both processes constitute key dynamics in addressing relations between refugees, lived experiences and power relations established in the context of providing assisted or self-settled types of intervention.

The main heroes who enact the ethnographic narrative are the Pontic Greeks in the Former Soviet Union (FSU), a country that no

longer exists, yet it remains alive both as a legend and as a legacy for those who were part of it.

Seen over time, the Pontic Greeks are a permanently mobile people, due to choice or coercion, who can trace their origins as far back as the 7th century BC, who spoke Greek at different periods, call themselves Rhomaioi (medieval noun for 'Greek'), have been referred to as 'Greek' or 'Hellenes' by the different cultures they have lived among as well as scholars who have studied them, and who continue to distinguish themselves from their surrounding cultures—including in Greece—by calling each other 'My root' (*riza'm*) as a term of endearment. This identity is far stronger and deeper than just being Greeks from the Pontos. In this book, their identity is examined and deciphered.

The historical framework of the ethnographic narrative formally begins in the 19th century and it tells of the predicaments of survival of the Pontic Greeks as a *foreign* ethnic group in the Former Soviet Union (FSU), and the challenges of their adaptation over 100 years. My main hypothesis is that repatriation in the case of the Soviet Greeks should be construed in terms of 'affinal repatriation' meaning 'return to each other' rather than return to a specific place.

The book addresses the two complementary processes of ethnic displacement: diaspora and repatriation. It situates the particular case of migration in the context of contemporary constructions of ethnic identity, membership and belonging in the post Cold War era. It illustrates how over the course of a century, members of the Soviet Greek diaspora experienced radical transformations in their status. It traces their downward spiral from privileged farmers, rather than serfs, in the Tsarist Empire, to being forcibly collectivised as farm labourers in the 1930s, to deportees living in labour camps on the arid steppes of Central Asia in the 1950's. With perestroika, their status underwent yet another dramatic

change, from least to most favoured nationality, given that they could now go 'home' to a state that is part of the European Union. The historical reconstruction of the different regionally defined Greek groups in the FSU, shows how the knowledge of a 'motherland' in the West and the tacit assumption of a 'right of return', which could not be exercised during 70 years of state socialism, was a factor enhancing people's sense of ethnic awareness. For many their sense of 'Greekness' was sharpened as a result of their experiences of deportations to Central Asia.

The repatriation to Greece in the 1990's was planned by the Greek state as a rural settlement project in Thrace, modelled on the largely successful Asia Minor refugees of 1924 (e.g. Hirschon 2003; Kontogiorgi 2006). Instead, the returnees in the 1990's, opted for urban life and occupations other than agriculture. Today, instead of simply staying in Greece, they can be found all over Europe working as transnational labour migrants. Their relative success has been the result of the unintended consequence of their manipulation of the Greek government's original rural resettlement plan. Their current pattern of movement is 'transhumant'; moving between Europe and the FSU, all the while tracing, building, restoring and reinforcing family networks.

One of the unique characteristics of the Soviet Greek diaspora is that they remain one of the world's most resilient refugee groups of the Ottoman Empire. Unlike other Greek Asia Minor refugee groups that settled in Greece as a result of the Lausanne Treaty Exchange of Populations Agreement between Greece and Turkey (1924), many Pontic Greeks fled their Eastern Anatolian homeland to Southern Russia and the Caucasus. Their trials and tribulations during the years of state socialism, including Stalinist repression and deportations, disclose a dynamic cultural group with great powers of adaptation and survival strategies. As such, they constitute a rare precedent of cultural resilience that promotes

an image of refugees as a term of honour. At a time when refugees are seen as a burden, at the global level, this particular group of Soviet Greeks has appropriated the predicate 'refugee' as an element of national pride.

In this sense, they constitute a 'successful' example that seeks to rehabilitate the 'refugee' stereotype by providing a positive model of emulation.

The structure of the book

The challenge for any ethnography is to provide a context for understanding the individuals and their practices. The ethnographic data of this book was drawn from different places and at different times. Therefore, the challenge of contextualisation is multiplied. The two overarching themes, as stated in the title, are the 'right to return' and the 'meaning of home'. As will be shown, the 'meaning of home' is a constant theme for every generation given the predicament of forced migration faced by each and every generation of Pontic Greeks. Significantly, the 'right to return' did not become salient until the last decade of the 20th century – after the dissolution of the Soviet Empire.

The logic of presentation in this book is dictated by the concern to establish a historical narrative which illustrates the varieties of contexts within which 'exile' and 'return' are key themes confronted by every generation of Pontic Greeks in the course of a century. Subsequent chapters illustrate this pattern.

Chapter one presents the theoretical assumptions and the methodological framework adopted as well as the challenges faced during fieldwork.

Chapter two situates the Pontic Greek case in its pre-exile context during the age of proto-nationalism by articulating the 'failed Pontic Greek state' case and the impact on diaspora networks in Southern Russia.

Chapter three addresses the Interwar period by comparing Pontic Greeks in the FSU and in Greece. This uneasy comparison is meant to contextualise the predicaments faced by each group in the respective socio-political contexts.

Chapter four traces the patterns of forced migrations and exiles during and after World War II, while arguing that the experience of displacement and exile became the consolidating factor in the creation of a sense of group membership.

Chapter five focuses on the post-Perestroika period (1989-1994) and the novel challenges of emigration, repatriation and re-settlement. I argue that the 1990s were a 'revolutionary moment' which necessitated an ontological re-examination of group identities.

Chapter six addresses the paradox of ethnic 'return migration' as a European phenomenon and the patterns and choices of the Soviet Greeks in becoming Europeans.

Chapter seven reflects on the dialectics of 'home' and the right to return to alternative homelands.