Geoforum 41 (2010) 638–646

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Geoforum

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/geoforum

Imagining 'home': Diasporic landscapes of the Greek-German second generation

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 4 November 2008
Received in revised form 26 February 2010

Keywords:
Diaspora
Landscape
Greek migration
Home
Belonging
Identity

ABSTRACT

This article presents research on second-generation Greek-Germans, both those living in diaspora, and those who have 'returned' to Greece. The research is multi-sited, with fieldwork in Berlin, Athens, central and northern Greece. After defining and problematising the notions of 'second generation' and 'return' – especially complex in this context – we focus on the second generation's diasporic imaginings of 'home', particularly their experiences and narrative framings of landscape, space and place. In their narratives, participants 'remember' their parents' narratives about the homeland, and narrate their own experiences of returning to the diasporic hearth. Contrasts are drawn across diverse diasporic landscape imaginings and experiences: between received diasporic memories and 'pragmatic' experiences; holiday visits and long-term return; urban, rural and other spaces; and different sites in the diaspora, such as the place of upbringing and the ancestral home.

1. Introduction

This article focuses on geographies of place and mobility in order to understand how diasporic landscapes are experienced, imagined, mediated and negotiated by second-generation Greek-Germans living in Germany or who have relocated to the ancestral homeland. We explore the varied meanings of 'landscape', from territorial, place-based 'reality' to the psychological, imaginative-based context. In using the trope of landscape to enter the field of diasporic identities and mobilities, we appreciate that, for people on the move and in diaspora, landscapes are a constant source of both joy and pain, never to be taken for granted (Bender and Winer, 2001, p. i).

Epistemologically this paper is set within a now-strong conceptual trend towards drawing out the spatialities and temporalities of transnational and diasporic experience (Blunt, 2007; Featherstone et al., 2007; Mitchell, 1997; Ní Laoire, 2003). Without wishing to become immediately embroiled in the debate about precise distinctions between the overlapping concepts of diaspora and transnationalism, we see the former as less about the transnational circulation of people, economic activities and social relations, and more about the links between diaspora members, their identity and their homeland over the longer term – sometimes across generations. As Blunt and Dowling (2006, p. 199) cogently point out, the lived experiences and spatial imaginaries of people living in diaspora revolve around specific places and landscapes; the relationship between home and homeland; and the intersections of home, migration, memory, identity and belonging.

Our approach is partly inspired by Basu's research on Scottish diasporic 'clanscapes' and their role in the 'roots tourism' of the Scottish diaspora in North America (Basu, 2005, 2007). For the Greek diaspora such 'emotional landscapes' involve the location of kin, family land, villages and islands of ancestral origin, and a broader but often idealised and mythologised connection to Greece and its way of life. In Christou and King (2006, p. 823) we described the reaction of a second-generation Greek-American 'returnee' who went to visit the village cemetery where his grandfather was buried: as he scooped up the soil surrounding the grave and let it run through his fingers it was as if his grandfather's blood was running through his veins. As an evocation of the diaspora's connections to the ancestral landscape, this could hardly be more powerful.

Our empirical data for this article come from ongoing research on the 'return' of second-generation Greeks to their parents' homeland. Earlier phases have concentrated on the Greek-American case (Christou, 2006; Christou and King, 2006); here we present our first analysis devoted purely to the Greek-German material. The thematic foci are cultural geographies of home, belonging and identity; the notion of diasporic landscapes figures prominently in these themes and is central to our analysis. The evidence base is composed of more than fifty 'voices', collected in single-participant semi-structured interviews during 2007 and 2008 in Berlin, Athens and central/northern Greece. The narrative extracts below – quotes which are the most 'typical' and informative – are but a small sample of our full database.

While memory figures prominently in our participants' narratives, action and conscious decision-making are also at the centre

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doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2010.03.001

of their everyday lives in both the host society and the ancestral homeland, creating cultural geographies of diaspora which unfold in space and time (Christou, 2006). These cultural geographies are expressions of the second generation's multiple identification processes, also reflected in different forms of narrativity (Goodson, 2006). 'Essentialist' narratives are externally scripted, largely inculcated by their Greek parents for whom a return to Greece is a mythical aspiration. At the other end of the spectrum are 'flexible' and individualist narrative forms, where identity is provisional and contingent, and 'belonging' no longer an overarching aspiration. We also encounter 'hybrid' forms of narrativity that selectively produce a packaging of a personal vision within the 'essentialised' script of Greekness. As our evidence unfolds, we draw attention to these narrative types and their connection to different readings of home, identity and belonging.

We first define and problematise the notions of 'second generation' and 'return', particularly multifaceted in the context of this research on second-generation Greek-Germans. Some background is next given on Greek migration to Germany. We then explore the notion of diasporic landscapes, followed by a brief yet self-reflexive account of methodology. In the main body of the paper we order our participants' experiences of diasporic landscapes into three dimensions: roots and routes, landscapes of memory, and landscapes of (dis)placement. Participants recount notions of 'home', place and space in diverse locations, both in the 'homeland' (urban, rural and island spaces) and in the 'hostland' (Berlin and Germany); these diasporic experiences and imaginaries consist of mnemonic articulations, narrations of 'homecoming' visits, and stories of definitive return. Finally, we assess our contribution to the literature on diasporic identities and homelands.

2. Problematising 'second generation' and 'return'

The term 'second generation' poses challenges both as a descriptive notion and as an analytic category. Through a rather too-flexible use of the term, definitions appear blurred and hence imprecise. The most common usage alludes to the offspring of the first generation, the initial migrants to the host country. Complications arise when children have one immigrant parent – through 'mixed marriages' – or when children's early lives are divided between two countries, by, for instance, being sent to Greece for part of their childhood. Our research revealed many such cases. We nevertheless persist in using 'second generation' as an appropriate term, not least because our participants 'identify' with it to describe their background.

Another terminological issue requiring clarification is the 'return project' of second generationers who consciously decide, often independently of their parents who remain abroad, to relocate to the 'homeland'. In the statistical measurement of migration, this is not true return because our participants were born in Germany, but personal circumstances, including a quest for 'home' and 'identity', have brought them 'back' to Greece. Scholars of return migration often ignore or dismiss this 'return that is not return' (Bovenkerk, 1974, p. 19). Others have surveyed 'ancestral return' (King et al., 1983, pp. 10–12) or 'counter-diasporic migration' (King and Christou, 2008) more systematically, revealing it as a widespread, growing phenomenon (Levitt, 2009). Growing up 'abroad' but within a family socialisation which emphasised ethnic cultural capital and a strong ideology of return, our participants' desire to relocate to a country to which they have always felt bonded by family ties and ethnic ancestry can be seen as a project of existential return to the ancestral homeland. Because of this emic reading of return, we deploy the term in defiance of the statistical meaning.

Anther important issue is the remarkable silence on second-generation return in the now-burgeoning literature on migrant transnationalism. Of course, there are exceptions – Smith's exemplary *Mexican New York* (2006) for example, which, within its broad 'transnational lives' approach, follows some of the second generation back to their Oaxacan hometown. Whilst this is a rich and finely-written ethnography, with extensive fieldwork in New York and southern Mexico, most of the returns are regular visits rather than long-term resettlement. Likewise, Cressey's *Diaspora Youth and Ancestral Homeland* (2006), a study of British Pakistani youth visiting their parental birth-place, does not tackle the question of 'real' settlement, despite the anecdotal evidence of such moves taking place (Wajid, 2006). A third exception is the US-based collection edited by Levitt and Waters (2002), with case-study chapters on Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese and West Indian second-generation links to parental homelands. Yet again, none of these case-studies looks at definitive 'return', reflecting the hubris of American immigration scholarship where there is a kind of 'myth of non-return' (King, 2000, p. 28) and an assumption of eventual assimilation. Closer to our interest in longer-term return is a recent strand of European literature on second-generation 'roots' migration from Switzerland to southern Italy (Wessendorf, 2007) and on British-born Caribbean-heritage young adults relocating to Barbados and Jamaica (Phillips and Potter, 2005, 2009; Potter and Phillips, 2006, 2008; Reynolds, 2008). Meanwhile, parallel research on second-generation returns from the extensive Greek diaspora is also emerging – Panagakos (2003) on returning Greek-Canadians, Tsolidis (2009) on the return of the daughters of Greek emigrants in North America and Australia, and Unger (1986) on the return of German-born children to Greece when their parents repatriated in the wake of the 1970s oil crisis.

3. Greek migration to Germany

The part of the Greek diaspora that has taken root in Germany can be seen in a dual context: as the last phase of the historically deep and geographically wide process of 'scattering' of the Greek diaspora; and as part of the recruitment of 'guestworkers' into Germany in the 1960s and early 1970s, characterised by Cohen (1997) as a *labour diaspora*, rather than one created by forced exile, imperial colonisation or trade.

Estimates of the total Greek diaspora today range between 3 and 7 million, the discrepancy largely due to whether the figure is limited to the so-called 'migratory diasporas' since the late-nineteenth century to the USA, Canada, Australia and Western Europe, or includes the 'historical diasporas' resulting from much earlier colonisations of territories not subsequently incorporated into the modern Greek state (Tatsoglou, 2009, p. 8). More relevant to this paper are the scale and direction of postwar migration. Between 1945 and 1973 one in six of the Greek population emigrated. In the early postwar years most went to North America and Australia. From 1960, West Germany became the dominant destination, accounting for almost 60% of the 1 million emigrants who left before the end of 1973 (Fakiolas and King, 1996, pp. 172–174), when Germany halted migrant labour recruitment. Considerable return migration took place, but the Greek diaspora in Germany was sustained by ongoing family reunification and the birth of the second generation. Labour migration resumed, albeit on a smaller scale, after Greece joined the European Community in 1981.

Greek emigration to Germany was classic labour migration structured by international wage and labour-market imbalances. In Greece high unemployment, bare subsistence incomes and the quest for political freedom (especially during the military junta's rule, 1967–1974) were the main driving factors. Greece was one of a group of Southern European countries that supplied manual labour, via intergovernmental recruitment agreements, to key