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# Greek-Cypriot settlement in South Australia during the 1950s

## Abstract

The article investigates the settlement of Greek-Cypriot migrants in South Australia during the 1950s. The aim is to examine the experiences of Greek-Cypriot migrants, and look at established groups in the Greek-Cypriot community, to have understanding of the social structure and the mechanisms that helped migrants settle into an Anglo-Celtic Australian society. This article will utilize first hand experiences, and document individual and group accounts, which otherwise would have been lost. By documenting these accounts, the paper will be a useful resource for future research done on this minority group, but will also fill in gaps in our history.

## Introduction

This article intends to examine the experiences of Greek-Cypriot migrants, in order to have an understanding of the social structure and the mechanisms that helped migrants settle into an Anglo-Celtic Australian society. Oral history was utilised as the method of research because it provided a suitable means to capture the unique experiences. The data is derived from interviews conducted on a pool of ten people. The interview pool was gathered on the grounds of those who were Greek-Cypriot and migrated to South Australia in the 1950s. It must be taken into consideration that the study does not intend to discriminate between age, gender or background of candidates. Furthermore, it does not propose to speak for the whole Greek-

Cypriot population in South Australia as a whole. It does, however, intend to identify some of the experiences faced in their settlement, through the lens of oral history. The topics discussed with interviewees were on experienced cultural differences, family establishment, identity matters, governmental or non-governmental assistance they received, assimilation and integration into the Anglo-Celtic Australian community. The experiences of migrants who settled in South Australia will be aligned with secondary resources to combine an analytical framework.

## Theory

The research conducted on the Greek-Cypriot population is not focused on the reasons for their arrival in Australia as such, but essentially it is directed towards their establishment and permanency of settlement. The reasons for migration can be narrowed down to essentially three aspects, which are 'social aspects' (i.e. family and friends), 'economic aspects' (i.e. financial and work opportunities), and 'environmental' (i.e. weather and living standards); as shown in Figure 1.

All of the above contribute to migration; however the research findings showed there was a shift in attitudes towards the reason for settlement. The three aspects of migration had diminished into two distinctive groups, social and economic, as shown in Figure 2. Furthermore, there was an emphasis on social rather than economic aspects, hence categorizing social as a major influence and economic as a minor influence for settlement.

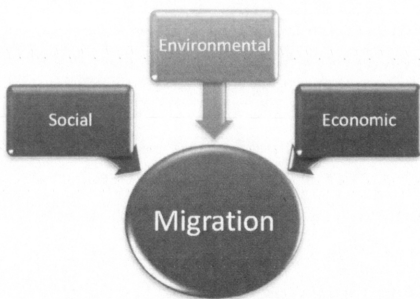


Figure 1: Three aspects of the reasons for migration.

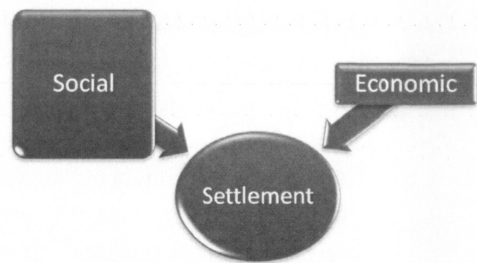


Figure 2: Two aspects contributing to settlement.

This was apparent from the interviews, when candidates were asked the reason for staying in Australia; they ranked family and friends (social) higher than economic aspects. The reasons for arrival and the reasons for settling show a transformation of attitudes, which makes an interesting disparity of situations. This is evident from the following patterns. For example, a migrant who arrived in 1950 stated,

*I came because there was not much work opportunities for me in the village, so my relative in South Australia sponsored me to come and work ... I settled in South Australia because I met my wife, who is Australian, and we had four children. They grew up, and had children of their own.*

He also affirmed that he returned to Cyprus numerous times for holidays years later, but there was not much to go back to because he now considered his family to be in Australia. Whilst, another migrant who arrived in 1959, stated 'I came to South Australia because of the weather ... we settled here because it was an ideal place to raise our family and we made a lot of friends.'

This may also be interpreted by a 'push pull model, [where] less developed state economies push people out, [whilst] those with higher wages and standards of living pull them in' (Harzig & Hoerder 2009: 62). In relation to this theory, one should not generalize social aspects as a common denominator for settlement. However, one may say that economic aspects are an underlying influence to social aspects. For example, if people migrated in search of a better life for family and friends, this was done with the opportunities and living standards that are in effect financial aspects. Ultimately, to some extent financial aspects are an underling influence to social aspects.

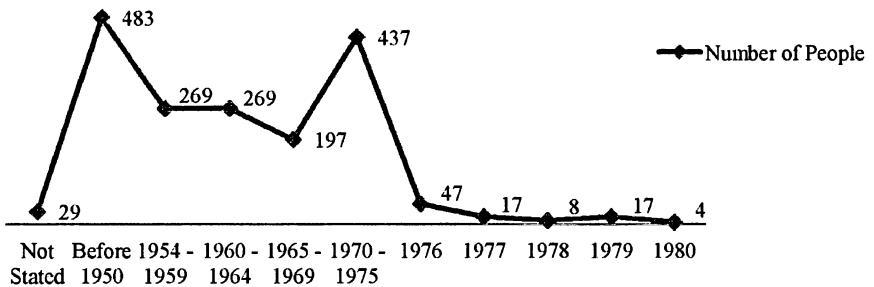


Figure 3: Greek-Cypriot born population in South Australia between 1950–1980

To contribute one’s own understanding of this transition, the following phase of the article will analyse why this transition happened.

### Statistics

The majority of Greek-Cypriot migrants went to British colonised countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia and South Africa. According to Solsten (1991) ‘Between 1955 and 1959, the period of anti-colonial struggle, 29,000 Cypriots left the island.’ The 1981 Cyprus Profile Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, as referred to in Figure 3, shows the Greek-Cypriot mass migration arrivals to South Australia were at a peak ‘between 1945-1950 and 1970-1975’ (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1981).

On the contrary, one cannot go past the initial mass migration wave of Greeks to Australia after 1945, which was due to the end of the Second World War and the demand of workers. The continual influx of migrants was apparent from an *Advertiser* newspaper article (‘Migrants Now 1 in 15 of S.A. Population’, *The Advertiser*, South Australia) on p.1 on 15 March 1952 stating ‘the rise of migrants in South Australia was 1 in 15 people’. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2008), as referred to in Figure 4, in 1947 South Australia had an estimated 105 Greek-Cypriots compared to 1,024 Greeks. In 1954 there were 665 Greek-Cypriots and 2,809 Greeks. Then, the

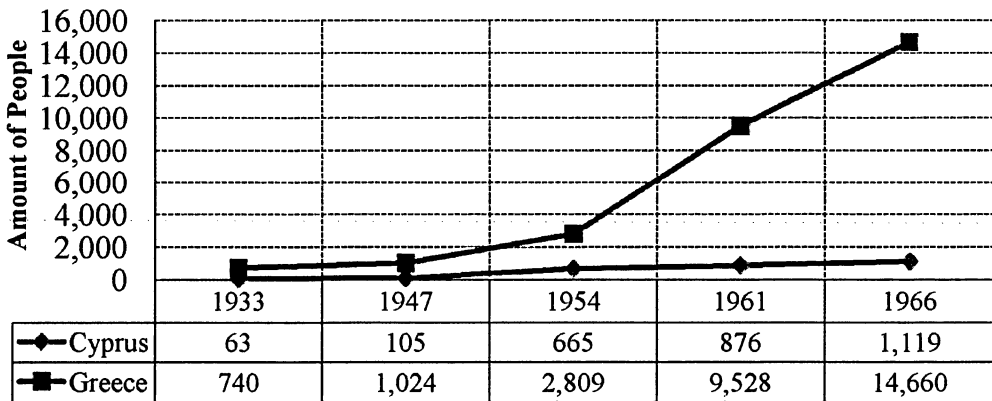


Figure 4: Population Census of Cypriots and Greeks in South Australia: 1933-1966

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008

1961 Census revealed there were 876 Greek-Cypriots and 9,528 Greeks. As we can see there is a significant difference in numbers between Greeks and Greek-Cypriots.

It must be noted there are limitations to the statistics presented in Figure 4, on various levels. Firstly, the Census was only compulsory to fill out from 1961, so one may interpret the data from 1961 onwards to have somewhat more validity. Therefore, the numbers are more estimates rather than approximates. Furthermore, actual numbers maybe more or less, as Greek-Cypriot information may be intertwined with that of Greeks. Also, it may not distinguish whether Cypriots are either Greek or Turkish. They are two different minority groups.

### Migrant establishment

The Greek migrants established a Hellenic community upon their settlement in South Australia, which in return coincided with the successful establishment of the Greek-Cypriot community in later years. It is known that Greek-Cypriots settled in more concentrated Greek populated areas in Adelaide, of surrounding city suburbs like Mile End, Torrensville and Henley Beach. As Greeks and Greek-Cypriots share the same language, and religion, Cypriots were able to benefit from already constructed establishments, such as churches, Sunday schools, halls, and social groups. In July 1955 *The Advertiser* reported, one of the Greek community's centres in Adelaide was in the process of completion, costing 'between £25,000 and £30,000' ('For Our New Citizens', *The Advertiser*, South Australia, July 28, p.4). Interestingly, in 1948 the Greek-Cypriot Community of South Australia was founded, and its hall located in the CBD at 117 Carrington Street was bought through community fundraising. As one migrant reflected on the first time he went to the Cypriot community, he commented,

*After a year or so [of being in Perth], I came to South Australia. I didn't know anybody when I reached Adelaide. I had heard that there was a Cypriot Brotherhood Club on Hindley Street, so I decided I would go there first. However, I didn't know where it was, or where I was going, but once I came out of the railway station I saw a compatriot I used to know. I was so surprised, I couldn't believe it. I felt delighted to know somebody. I asked him where the brotherhood was and he walked me there.*

Now in recent times, elderly pensioned migrants look forward to attending fortnightly social gathering at the new Cypriot Community Hall in Welland, where they can converse with friends in their own language.

### Social networking system/work

Migrants were able to find work in labouring, factories, shops or in the Port Pirie BHP smelters. Work was readily available, especially in production lines of automobiles; hence many Greek-Cypriots men found worked at Holden, Chrysler or Mitsubishi. Many of them found work through a 'friend of a friend' or a 'friend's cousin's relative's friend'. People became walking directories. One male migrant stated,

*I got a job at Holden when I first came ... it paid well. We were very hard working. Then I had a few friends and acquaintances, some of whom I may have met once or twice, that were interested in working for Holden. They didn't know any English and I went and spoke to the boss with the friend, and he got the job. It was really nice ... we made company with our compatriots and helped one another.*

This form of networking was not only a common way for migrants to find assistance in any matter they needed, but it also emerged into the formation of social groups.

### Language

Through interviews with numerous migrants, those of a more mature age upon arrival expressed that it was difficult for them to learn English. Many were only able to pick up a few words here and there through work, media or from other people. One migrant stated,

*I didn't know any English ... [Back in Cyprus,] I worked on the farm from a young boy, and was not able to attend a proper school. ... You had to pay extra money to learn English. If you didn't pay, you didn't learn. To go to the academy, you had to pay. ... This meant that I didn't get to learn English.*

Whilst another stated, 'I didn't have the time to attend language classes here in Australia, whilst working long hours to support my family, to have what we do today.' Understandably, this was a common factor as to why migrants did not find it important to learn English, especially for females who were housewives. This was common because Greek-Cypriot migrants began to establish their own community within the Anglo-Celtic Australian community.

Migrants would also in effect, condition their children to speak the Greek language as a mother tongue. Furthermore, there was a demand for the Greek language to be introduced into the school curriculum because of the strong flow of migrants.

## Media

During the 1950s media did not play a significant active role for migrants upon arrival because it was seen as leisure. Attitudes have changed because migrants have gotten older and their English language skills are limited. One migrant reflects back to early 1950s stating, 'one Greek record would be played once a week on the radio, and it was not something I would necessarily tune[d] into.' Now this is where globalisation has left its footprint, especially, in the last 20 years. Consequently, it has reversed the pattern of integration into the Anglo-Celtic Australian society, as Greek media is now more accessible than 50–60 years ago. One migrant claimed that in now in his senior years, having such things as Greek radio and cable TV with Greek channels is definitely a form of media he likes to tune into and pass his time. With the gradual isolation from the wider Anglo-Celtic society, and by only associating with Greek-Cypriot/Greek populations and media, this has in effect made migrants feel as if they exist in Cypriot/Greek States of Australia. The result of this will be described further on.

## Discrimination

In the 1950s discrimination and hostility was not avoided. All interviewees admitted that they were discriminated against at some stage or another. This was either directly or indirectly. For example, one migrant, who was living in a communal house in 1952, was abused by another resident. This male migrant detailed the event, shaking his head,

*I lived in a room with an Australian ... one night he came back to the house drunk, swearing and abusing me ... he wouldn't let me go into the room to sleep ... he then started arguing with a German engineer [who lived there too] ... So, they took him into the office, where they paid him and they all kicked him out of the house. They told him never to return!*

In addition, another migrant was dismissed from his job at the factory because there was a miscommunication. Although through the findings, depending on the situation there was a sense of tolerance, but only to some

extent. In another situation, one migrant who was a shoemaker, threw away some of his items, mostly his shoes because he felt Australians were not socially accepting due to his clothing. He went out and bought new clothes just to fit in. Interestingly, nowadays everyone wants European made/styled shoes and clothes because they think them to be more classy. Although, the 1950s was during the time of the 'White Australia Policy', one can speculate that South Australia may have experienced discrimination on a lower scale rather than to any extreme extent, while both sides of the spectrum tried to mend ends.

Essentially, the 1950s was at a stage of transition, where cultural needs needed to be met, rather than denied. Thus, a decade more onwards, the 'multiculturalism' policy was introduced, which consisted the acceptance and tolerance of other cultures. For example, food in a sense is a global language, it speaks for itself. Everyone can enjoy it, and it brings people together. Migrants would exchange recipes and educate each other on types of cuisine. This also acted as a mechanism for migrants to integrate into the wider community. According to the Adelaide *Advertiser* 28 July 1955 an article titled 'Migrant's Impact on our Eating,' commented, 'what a wonderful opportunity we have to improve our menus!' Australians became enlightened by new versions of food, and vice versa. Therefore, multiculturalism over time evolved, and it established an appreciation for the finer aspects of culture, diversity and traditions.

### Integration/assimilation

When looking at assimilation, the question is, to what extent if any did Greek-Cypriots integrate into the Anglo-Celtic Australian society? Ultimately it was not until their children or they themselves went to work, that they integrated outside their social circles. Otherwise, through interviews, it is quite evident that Greek-Cypriots formed their own identity and were happy in their own community groupings. One female migrant stated,

*I had worked in customer service position in a Bank, and a lot of Greek and Greek-Cypriot people would come in and see me. Eventually, it got to the point where I would translate for people I barely knew. They would come into my work and ask me to fill out their personal forms, like medical or government forms. I guess you would do it because you understood their situation.*



Some migrants commented that it was not 'distrust' of the wider Anglo-Celtic Australian population, but more a case of not being able to communicate with them.

## Government

So what was the government's plan for the migrant population? One of the initiatives put into action was the South Australia Good Neighbour Council, which was a volunteer organisation, formally launched by the Federal Government in January 1950. Its aim was to help immigrants to assimilate into society by adopting Australian traits. One of their programs, in 1958 was that 'new migrants' would have the opportunity to learn English through an initiative from the Good Neighbour Council. The program according to *The Advertiser* ('S.A. Language Plan for Migrants,' *The Advertiser*, South Australia, December 29, p.6) was intended 'to give simple training in technical phrases used in workshops and trades with minimum of basic grammar taught with a "sugar coating"'. Even though, the migrants who arrived prior to 1958 did not benefit from this initiative, the migrants who arrived after then may have. As one migrant mentioned,

*I eventually learnt a bit of English at work because we were all mixed there.*

*Otherwise I don't think I would have learnt. I didn't know English when I came to Australia, but slowly slowly I picked up words ... Thinking about it, we didn't consider going to English classes either, at that time.*

Likewise, the magnitude of this initiative was not as successful in the Greek-Cypriot migrant population, because they did not turn to the government for assistance because it was more in their nature to request help from family members, friends or people within their community. This was evident when one migrant reminisced about the time he came to Australia and he needed to buy a car because his wife was soon to give birth. He was not able to gain a loan from the bank. A very close friend at the time came forward and bought him a car. He was very grateful and eventually after obtaining a job at Holden he was able to pay him back. From the examples throughout this article, Greek-Cypriot migrants were helped by those around them.

## Conclusion/further comments

In conclusion, this article highlights the significance of social aspects, which have influenced Greek-Cypriots in their settlement. From the foundations of the Greek population, the Greek-Cypriots were able to build upon this. Social networking was a key mechanism for migrants to find work, socialise and receive assistance in any matter they needed. Although, integration was difficult, this has become even more evident nowadays with the force of globalisation.

So what is set for the future? With no incentive for a Greek or Greek-Cypriot mass migration wave set to hit South Australia in the near future, the strong sense of identity will eventually be demised. This is evident, as second and more so third generations, confront the issue of having multiple identities, and the pattern of allegiance to the country of origin. Potentially, this will influence the future of the Greek-Cypriot community. In 2010 one of the most exclusive Greek festivals in Adelaide, the Glendi, for the first time in 32 years, sadly enough, was not held due to lack of financial commitment and community support. At this festival, the Cypriot community would have their own tent, supplying the best of Cypriot cuisine and hospitality, whilst during the day the Cypriot Dance Group showcased authentic styles of dance. Undoubtedly, this was a favourite for the crowd. Furthermore, closer to the subject, we also find the Cypriot Dance Group discontinuing from a formed identity group and only coming together for special occasions because of time constraints. The question is, whether this is the onset of the Greek and Greek-Cypriot communities' demise in South Australia, and what it will take to keep this culture alive.

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