Cultural Geographies of Counter-Diasporic Migration: The Second Generation Returns 'Home'

Sussex Migration Working Paper No 45

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January 2008

Abstract

This paper introduces the notion of 'counter-diasporic migration' as the process whereby the second generation relocates to the ancestral homeland – the birthplace of their parents. We review and critically analyse the three key literatures that frame this process – on the second generation, on diasporas and on return migration – and find that all of them say very little about the transnational links and return movements of this migrant generation. In the final part of the paper we examine issues of home, identity, place and belonging as constitutive elements of the cultural geography of second-generation return. Although the paper is essentially a review and (re)conceptualisation, throughout the account we weave an empirical thread relating to recent research carried out by the authors on the return of second-generation Greek-Americans and Greek-Germans to their ancestral home in Greece.

Introduction

> Feeling Greek is to feel emotionally and physically connected to the land. My home is my homeland. Once I got here for good I felt immediately united with the land, at one with the soil… It was a mythic return… I went to the cemetery and touched the earth near my grandfather's grave. As it ran though my fingers I felt it run through my veins… No more a stranger in a strange land, this is where I belong (journal entry, second-generation Greek-American returnee to Greece, from Christou and King 2006: 823–4).

This paper is about a particular migrant group – the second generation, and its 'return' 'home'. Straightaway it must be acknowledged that these terms are problematic. First, the term 'second-generation migrant' is an oxymoron: they are not migrants, but born in a host society of migrant parents. Hence they are not 'return migrants' in the strict sense, but first-time emigrants to their

Counter-diasporic movements

In its original meaning 'diaspora' connotes the scattering of a population, caused by some forced or traumatic historical event (Cohen 1995). However, the semantics and etymology of the term are unclear about return to the diasporic origin. Evidence of return is fairly abundantly scattered in the literature on diasporas, but is not

possible permanence of exile and the broad spread and stability of the distribution of populations within the diaspora. In other words, 'time has to pass' before a migration becomes a diaspora (Cohen 1997: 185). This formulation, too, enables us to distinguish between straightforward return migration (of first-generation migrants) and counter-diasporic return, which only applies to second- or subsequent-generation migrants. Hence only a 'child of diaspora' can engage in the chronotope of counter-diasporic migration. The return, either as an individual event or as a sponsored movement, resolves the contradiction between the current situation in the diaspora and its imagined home and past (Cohen 1997: 185).

Debates on diasporas have taken on new vigour in recent years, building in particular on the important critique of Floya Anthias (1998), and on new ways of theorising the concept. Anthias argues that there are two dominant approaches to diaspora: a 'traditional' approach which considers diaspora as a *descriptive-analytical* category and which is mainly concerned with specifying criteria for inclusion (cf. Cohen 1997; Safran 1991); and a more 'post-modern' use of the term as a *socio-cultural condition*, associated with writers such as Brah (1996) and Hall (1990). To a large extent this distinction corresponds to the division proposed by Mavroudi (2007) into theorisations of diaspora as 'bounded' *homeland-oriented* ethnic groups and identities; or as 'unbound' *fluid*, *non-essentialised*, *nomadic* identities. Whilst there is undoubted heuristic value in the 'typologies of diaspora' approach (as we have already affirmed above), our approach in this paper and in our ongoing research in Greece and Cyprus is more in tune with the post-modern and post-structuralist reconceptualisations of diaspora. In particular we wish to guard against the danger of 'ethnic essentialism' in diaspora studies (one of Anthias's key criticisms), or its 'fetishisation' (cf. Samers 2003); we prefer to explore, instead, the notion of diaspora as exemplifying 'mutiple allegiances and belongings, a recognition of hybridity, and the potential for creativity' (Ní Laoire 2003: 276). By focusing explicitly on the second-generation members of diaspora we can draw attention to the complex

Britain, uses ‘the second generation’ to include those who arrived in Britain up to the age of 15. Meanwhile, in her study of African-Italians in Italy, Andall (2002) defines the second generation as those born in Italy or who arrived before the age

acknowledged. Following again Kertzer (1983), we identify the following problems:

- People sharing the same genealogical and generational position may belong to different historical periods, coming from an origin society and arriving in a destination society which will have both changed over time.
- Parents often migrate with their children, and in some cases even three generations move together. Are both parents and children to be considered first-generation? The concept of 'fractional' generations (1.5 generation etc.) resolves this question to some extent, but we are still left with an anomaly of how to 'define' the grandparents, who may either migrate with their first-generation children or join them at a later date.

focusing on foreign-born children and their experiences, especially in school. Employing a mixed methodology of surveys and ethnography, the research focuses especially on psycho-social and identity issues. The children are from Mexico, Central America, Dominican Republic, Haiti and China (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 2001) and the research carried out in schools in Boston and San Francisco.

These studies – and many others, mostly smaller-scale but also including large number-crunching census analyses (eg. Rumbaut 2004) – form the raw material for a lively debate about assimilation across generations of migrants to the US. Three main comparative axes frame this debate: the historical comparison between old (European) and new (non-European) immigrants; the comparison across biological generations (first, second, third, and fractions in-between); and the variable assimilation trajectories among the different nationality groups of the recent immigrants. The details and nuances of these debates lie outwith the scope of this review, but some key elements can be mentioned as they are relevant to our discussion in this paper.

Classical or straight-line assimilation (eg. Gordon 1964), which assumed a steady assimilation into the American mainstream by the third generation, was stood on its head by Gans (1992) who presented the notion of 'second-generation decline', namely that the 'new' second generation would fall short of the achievements of their immigrant parents. Segmented assimilation (Portes and Zhou 1993; Rumbaut and Portes 2001) was a further revisionist challenge to classical assimilation theory. Theories of second-generation decline and segmentne ande third geor862.7(e)0.]TJ0 -ht8-1.2093 (assu)-r 0.5TJ0 -1.2093 -n( )6.3(iy)3.2(.e5

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- The TIES project, on 'The Integration of the European Second Generation', examines, more systematically than EFFNATIS, the 'integration performance' (mainly education and employment outcomes) of the Turkish, Moroccan and former Yugoslav second generation in eight countries – Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Sweden and Spain – based on a common set of questionnaires. Allied ethnographic research extends the geographical scope of the TIES network (see Crul 2007; Crul and Vermeulen 2003b)

  Nevertheless, like their US counterparts, these projects are still based on an uncompromisingly one-track orientation to the host society and therefore to a hegemonic understanding of 'integration' into the structures, values and

Later on in the life-course, first-generation retirement back to the home country may also reinforce the second generation's ties: the (by

Basu, typical roots visitors are senior citizens aged

frameworks and empirical generalisations from the study of first-generation return can be fruitfully applied to the ‘return’ of the subsequent generation?

The first question is easy to answer: very little. The return literature concentrates almost exclusively on the first generation. This is as true of the early classic studies (e.g. Hernández Alvarez 1967; Saloutos 1956) as it is of the research on labour-migrant returns during the 1970s and 1980s (see, *inter alia* Bau i 1972; Bovenkerk 1974; Cerase 1974; Gmelch 1980; Kayser 1972; King 1979; 1986; 1988; Kubat 1984; Rhoades 1999) and of ongoing collections published in more recent years (Ghosh 2000; Harper 2005; Long and Oxfeld 2004; Markowitz and Stefansson 2004). It is true that, in these latest publications, one finds an emerging interest in ancestral return and other diaspora-homecomings (Basu 2005; Tsuda 2004), but almost none of this focuses on the specific experiences of the second genn3ta420 -20.dcen13.3((n3ta42(e)1wri)8-0.90(e)19.6l)17.3.(n13.3(())9(s)7.4( )]TJ0 -1.2029 *0.0

Whether changes *are* stimulated by these returnees is open to question. What often happens is a battle of wills between the innovation-minded returnees and the conservative power-brokers who still prevail in the host society – the old landowners, entrenched elites, etc. Undoubtedly there are instances where returnees are agents of change and development; but equally there are cases where their efforts are frustrated by vested interests.

Cerase's typology taps into the 'success or failure' binary which is surely a too-simple question to pose about returning migrants, or about second-generation resettlers. But there are aspects of the typology that can be extended to the next generation – although, once again, the various scenarios are speculative and need empirical testing. The relationship between 'integration' or 'identification' with the host society (in the case of the second generation, this is the society where they have spent all, or nearly all of their lives), and the propensity to migrate to the 'homeland', is one such dialectic. As noted above, second-generation individuals who do not feel fully integrated, for whatever reason (this could be a sense of marginalisation born of exclusion or discrimination, or produced by living in a strong ethnic community), are probably more likely to consider a homeland relocation. But this may reflect a too-simplistic reasoning: it may also be the case that successful integration and material comfort in the host society give the second-generationer the luxury to think about expressing or discovering their identity in a different place: linkages and identifications with 'host' and 'homeland' societies are not positioned in a zero-sum game (Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2005). In other respects, the relationships between 'home' and 'host' countries can be reversed for second-generation 'returnees'. The 'return' itself may be a failure, so that the 'returnee' then 'returns' to the country of birth and original residence. In this instance, the failure of the 'return to the homeland' project may well be due to some of the reasons mentioned above for Cerase's 'return of failure' – failure to get satisfactory work, learn thsng7p5p0e6.8(5p90TJT)6.4(()-9.11T*0.00rre far2k0.3943 T.7(er T.7(en)4.97catin Tw.3(fa)4a)

sustained contacts over time across national borders'. Viewed through the transnational lens, return migration is part and parcel of a system of ties and forms of mobility, but seen as an ongoing circuit rather than a definitive act of resettlement (Cassarino 2004: 7). On the other hand it can also

new East European shuttle migrants move to and fro to richer West European countries, gathering work opportunities on short-term contracts, precisely because they want to conserve their Polish, Slovakian or Ukrainian roots and *not* migrate for good. Second-generation returnees may do the opposite, seeking a final resting-place against their existential anxiety about their in-betweenness and where they belong. As several of our interviewees would relate, 'I am finally home, where I belong... the cycle is closed'. In other words, the exile's return is fuelled by nostalgia for the imagined stability and coherence of past times and places: the plan is to relocate the dislocated self somehow in an earlier, more authentic, time and place.

Demetra had recently bought a little house by the sea outside Athens: her description of it, right at the end of the interview, reflected on her life as a journey which – possibly – might be coming to a settled end, or might equally continue on to new places. Interestingly, she projects her own uncertainty about her migratory trajectory onto her boxes of clothes.

> It's just weird to see my boxes here... you know, boxes full of clothes that, you know, keep getting packed and unpacked... I wonder if the boxes are ever going to have a home. I wonder if these clothes are ever going to have a home... This place, I'll never sell this place. Because it's by the beach... I'll never sell it... it's a great investment, right? If I ever have kids, or now that

economic security (usually a job) and a circle of friends become paramount. If these necessities are not achieved, or realised only with great difficulty, the homecoming dream becomes a nightmare (Christou 2006a). Experiences of return may be marked by confrontations with the social and cultural institutions in the place of origin; these institutions, together with wider behavioural norms and practices of the home society (which for the second-generation resettler becomes a host society), obstruct the social project of homecoming, to the frustration and annoyance of the returnee. Some examples from our interview data: first from Demetra who (like so many of our participants) was appalled at the corruption and lack of honesty in professional life, and struggled to find the right words to describe how she felt.

> I've met a lot of people, I made a lot of connections, but I did not respect the level of... I didn't respect... what's the word? I could not stand the way they tried to get me into positions with just saying... 'We can do this for you... you can do this for us'... Like I've met people, politicians, you know on high-end posts, even academics, that are tellinhitI.001(w)5.4(o)ot ityt2(h)-4(-end pob1)-6.9( )12.7(eoe)-3tp.u-end pob1 eoeppatp25Thu is.4(t)I.00ph9pI2

‘true postcolonials’; they are ‘a population that arrived in a decolonizing metropole during an era of shifting understandings of their nation’s relationships to Europe while the colony and the colonial era were quickly fading in significance’. They tend to suffer a common ‘internal strangerhood’ that results from their unwanted return – a displacement that is not only

> and that people make me feel I belong... It's a part of my life I haven't discovered yet and I think I need to in order to become a whole.

But other evidence, such as that presented in the section immediately above, contradicts this image of finding home and true identity in the homeland: disillusionment and even alienation set in as a result of experiences which pile up. In her narrative Demetra described losing her teaching post in Athens and having to fight for the redundancy pay she was legally entitled to; getting robbed (twice) in the city; the corruption

> German, you're not whatever the hell you are. This is yourself and that's what it is'... Meanwhile I don't feel split any more, I do just fine.

Rebecca then related how, before she relocated to Greece, she had met a Jewish woman in Germany who

> had been living all over the world herself and has been split around with identity crisis and all that stuff, and she helped me a lot ... to get ideas about how to deal with that. Because ... I haven't really talked about this with too many people ... you're not crazy, you're not really an exception to the rule or something, it's just a normal thing to be... That is what makes you feel 'Wow! There are other people!' [just like me]. I remember I found this book, an American book about rootless children ... who are children from the American military who had lived all over the place... I could see at least ten different authors having the same ideas and facing the same issues as I was. A feeling of relief, so to say.

Finally Rebecca was asked whether she felt her identity had changed since she'd been living in Greece now for three years:

> It's difficult to say ... um ... have I changed? I have found myself, so I haven't really changed. I'm more relaxed. I haven't changed. But I probably can be more myself. If there was a change, it happened before. Because that change made me come here.

Conclusion

Return migrants are the voices we never hear in migration history (King 2000), which usually focuses on the struggles and successes of those migrants who stay on. This paper, by focusing on a particular form of return, that of the second generation, exposes an even deeper historical amnesia associated with this mobility form. Paul Basu, whose inspirational writing on 'roots return' we have quoted from extensively in this paper, regards such homecoming visits as 'heuristic journeys' to '*sites of memory, sources of identity and shrines of self*' (2001: 338, italics in original). Such journeys, as we have shown, provide an opportunity for self-discovery through a process of self-narration. Our dialogic approach has demonstrated how the second generation's 'return' and the narration of this return are performative acts during which the migrant, through the story of the self, is (re)located in the story of the familial, the ancestral, the national and ultimately within the transnational diaspora.

But there are multiple ambiguities built into both our conceptualisation of counter-diasporic migration as a neglected chronotope of mobility, and into the ambivalent experiences of Demetra and Rebecca, whose returns seem to hover uncertainly between the closure of a definitive return 'home' on the one hand, and an expression of ongoing transnational identity on the other.

Let us take the empirical dimension of this dual question first. As examples of the actors of global post-modernity, Demetra and Rebecca globalise their personal biographies beyond the borders of the nation-state; they articulate feelings of being at home (and also not-at-home) in several places – what Beck (2000) terms 'transnational spatial polygamy'. Both Rebecca and Demetra have quite complex mobility histories, the full details of which we have not revealed in our account above; their parents and grandparents, too, have multiple migration experiences which, arguably, have shaped their families' mobility narratives and identities. These cases remind us that 'being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; and being mobile is not necessarily about being detached' (Ahmed *et al.* 2003: 1). Or, to quote another well-known author who has entered the fray with some weighty arguments: 'In a globalized, diaspora-prone society, it may be that neither the place of birth, nor one's generation are of much predictive power in terms of how one sees the world' (Loizos 2007: 197).

At a micro scale, one of the most revealing objectives of diaspora research is to illuminate the complex processes by which migrants mediate and reconcile the contradictions between the diasporic condition, the notion of 'home' and the role of the homeland as an actual (or denied or destroyed) nation-state. In this context, 'home', as a context and as a symbol, should be problematised as a social and kinship space; a signifier that encapsulates actions, interrelationships and feelings and thus is a social,

part of the very essence of diaspora? The answer to this question turns around the different ways the term diaspora is itself defined and conceptualised. In its Greek origins, its meaning is to 'sow or scatter across' – thus it is fundamentally a movement of dispersal. This reflects the colonising/imperial scattering and settlement of the Ancient Greeks across the Mediterranean and beyond; an etiology which, for sure, admits a diachronic long-term relationality with the Athenian hearth but does not assume any inevitability of return. In the other, now more-commonly-used version of diaspora theory, the desirability or inevitability of return is part of the definition of a diaspora; reference to Safran's (1991) six criteria shows that return figures prominently, and so in that sense counter-diasporic migration is the quintessential concluding moment of the diaspora cycle. And yet, viewed through the more temporally restricted prism of the migration, integration and transnationalism literatures, second-generation relocation in the homeland is indeed illogical, unless it represents the deferred ambition of the first generation to return, transmitted explicitly or

generation, he is less careful about gender, committing the common sin of ascribing male gender to an unknown author (1983: 129).

[7] This is not the place for a review of this transnational migration literature which, as

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