Conflicted identity across the generations of the Greek Diaspora in Melbourne, Australia

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and
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The Greek Diaspora of Melbourne, Australia

- Migration to Australia by Greek people dates from 1827, however the peak occurred during 1945-1982.

- The move only being intended to be short term with the plan and aspiration to return to Greece, this was a dream only realized by a few.

- Melbourne has a well-established Greek community with the church often being the heart.

- Religion was and still is of great significance to the diaspora on a number of levels, and one of these is health.

- For the Greek community, religion and the institution of the church provides membership and a sense of belonging that is directly linked to wellbeing and identity.
Moreland Council fears cost of installing statue of Greek god

JOHN MAŠANAUSKAS  HERALD SUN  MAY 24, 2014 8:30PM

A GREEK community in Melbourne’s north wants to donate a giant statue of the Hellenic god Poseidon to the local council.

But the City of Moreland is worried about extra costs and claims Melbourne Water doesn’t want the 2.5m sculpture erected in Coburg Lake.

However, the community is pushing ahead with the idea and is getting overseas quotes for construction of a bronze or copper statue that would be lit with solar power.

Australian Greek Orthodox Community of Moreland president Savvas Athanasiadis said Poseidon would be a gift from his members to celebrate their life in the area.

“It’s a cultural thing, it’s very important for the Greek community but also for the whole Moreland area,” he said.

“Something like this I haven’t heard of before in Australia.”

Mr Athanasiadis’s son Tasos said it would appeal to all generations. “It’s a good symbol of the past and where we’ve come from, to where we are today,” he said.
Background

- Qualitative study undertaken in Melbourne, Australia – health beliefs and practices across three generations of the Greek Diaspora of Melbourne.

- 48 female participants (immigrant generation, 1st generation and 2nd generation Greek Australian) took part in the study. Echoed by the participants were both challenges and strengths connected with their conflicted Greek Australian identity.

- This study investigated transmission of health information among three generations of Greek-Australian women in Melbourne, Australia. This included, first, an examination of the way these three generations understood health and disease as an aspect of cultural maintenance within the larger Australian society, and second, religious practice in the context of health and wellbeing.
1. To what extent have culturally specific ideas from the immigrant generation affected the views of health of members of the first and second Australian generations of people of Greek background?

2. What kinds of cultural information seem to be transmitted and how does this differ between the first and second Australian generations?

3. Does the transmission of health culture occur in the reverse direction, i.e. from grandchildren to parents, grandchildren to grandparents and children to parents?

4. To what extent has the Greek Orthodox religion affected views of health and wellbeing across the generations of the Greek diaspora in Melbourne, Australia?

5. To what extent has the Greek language been maintained across the generations of the Greek diaspora in Melbourne, Australia and how is this visible in each generation's conceptualization of health?

6. Does the experience of health transmission in this community fit with established models?
# Participant demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Immigrant generation</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; generation</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age [at the time of interview]</td>
<td>58 - 78</td>
<td>37-50</td>
<td>16 -18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Australia</td>
<td>39 - 56</td>
<td>Australian born</td>
<td>Australian born</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Examples of interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General questions (all participants)</th>
<th>Questions specific to the immigrant generation</th>
<th>Questions specific to the 1(^{st}) and 2(^{nd}) generation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“What does it mean to be healthy?”</td>
<td>“How was illness treated in Greece when you were a child?”</td>
<td>“What has your mother and/or grandmother told you about how illness was treated in Greece”?</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Can we improve/protect our health by what we eat?”</td>
<td>“Was illness treated differently in Greece than in Australia?”</td>
<td>“Have you been to Greece? If so, how old were you and with whom did you go? If not, why?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Can we improve/protect our health by what we eat?”</td>
<td>“What have you tried to maintain and hand down to the younger generations about the Greek way of life?”</td>
<td>“What has your experience been as a 1(^{st}) or 2(^{nd}) generation Australia?”</td>
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# Themes and Experimental Domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Experiential Domains of Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Greek culture and health, food and health, formal health knowledge, folk health beliefs</td>
<td>1. Health knowledge and conceptualization of health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Greek Orthodox religion, religious practices, religious folk ideas</td>
<td>2. Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Greek culture, Greek language, culture-specific practices, the idea of being Greek</td>
<td>3. Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Trust, reliance on family, in-group/out-group perceptions</td>
<td>4. Transmission of knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings and Discussion

1. Religion
2. Culture
3. Food
4. Language
Education level across the generations – Immigrant gen

- Primary School (Greece) 75%
- High School (Greece)
- High School (Australia)
- University

[Diagram showing percentage distribution of education levels across generations]
Education level across the generations – 1\textsuperscript{st} gen

- Primary School (Greece)
- High School (Greece)
- High School (Australia)
- University
Education level across the generations – 2nd gen

- Primary School (Greece)
- High School (Greece)
- High School (Australia)
- University

69%
The Greek Orthodox religion

“I see religion God and religion as support. This is something I was raised with and brought from Greece”; “When the priest makes their speech when we go to church, they say for us to live the right way, for us to fast and pray. All this brings us inner peace and happiness. They tell us not to get angry, and this calms us down, and, when we are close to God, we’re healthier and happier. You feel calmer when you go to church.” – Immigrant generation

“It’s important for me, for my children, to receive Holy Communion regularly, because we live in a society that puts a lot of pressure on us, and I believe, if you have your roots in spirituality, which I believe orthodoxy really has, it grounds them. It gives them something a strength, a foundation.” – 1st generation

“Prayer offers support and having something, a prayer or a saint, that you pray to is very supportive.”; “We generally go to the doctor but I also pray for my grandmother who is unwell. I pray because I am religious and I try to connect to God. Prayer gives you comfort and I always do my cross before I go to bed. My parents taught me this and my grandmother and grandfather because I come from a religious background.” – 2nd generation
Their Culture – (Greece)

“We had our own garden in Greece and, in those years, everything was natural, and this was good for our health”; “We didn’t have much in Greece. We would always eat legumes and very rarely we would have meat, and that is the reason why were healthier. Because we ate things that were ours, homegrown.”– Immigrant generation

“Mum would tell me what’s good to eat, vegetables, beans, lentils all the things they grew up with from the land. When I was young, we ate well because mum cooked, and that’s what I tell the kids”; “Why didn’t they have asthma back then? There wasn’t depression back then. There was no anxiety, no autistic kids. I can’t understand what’s happened now; I think it’s the food we eat and our environment.” – 1st generation

“Processed food is bad for our health, all the chemicals, why are apples so big now? Apples from the tree are smaller compared to the ones from the supermarket. The growth hormones they did not have them then and that’s the reason we have more illness today that we didn’t have then in my grandmother’s time. Best example my grandmother grew up in a tobacco farm, there tobacco was all natural, it wasn’t addictive; it was still bad for your lungs, but not that bad, and there weren’t all those chemicals. It was not addictive; you only smoked it because it was a pass thing, a social thing. Now cigarettes are one of the worst things you can put in your body.” – 2nd generation
Food

“As much as I can I cook what we used to cook in Greece”; “At our age, legumes; I prefer them but unfortunately the kids don’t like them. We grew up with this type of food and I believe the fact that we have reached this age, that is significant”. - Immigrant generation

“My mother would say, eating is a sign of health, and they still say this. I was told eat more or people would think you have a bad marriage. For that generation, being thin means you’re not happy. And they don’t let any food get thrown out. Because they lived through war and famine, they see food different to us.” - 1st generation

“Γιαγια (grandmother) doesn't like it when we have fast food, she would be like why didn't you come to me and I will cook you something” – 2nd generation
Shift – perception of food

- Immigrant generation - “I try to avoid heavy foods, such as moussaka, foods that we made in the past.”

- 1st generation - “When I cook Greek food I feel better. It’s almost like I hear ‘well done’, you’re maintaining it, and you’re cooking Greek meals for your family. The migrants brought all their traditions and culture from Greece, and it’s like I’m maintaining it, keeping it for the migrants. I feel like I’m keeping the Greekness, and my children can understand the difference when they go to and Aussie house and to a Greek.” Another explained, “The kids like Greek food and when we travel and we have been away for a while they say ‘we need some of grandmother’s food’”.

- 1st generation – role; reinforces; integrated to the Australian mainstream

- 1st generation – “I also cook Asian dishes for my parents; Mum is interested in different foods and likes what I make.”
Fasting

• Immigrants described it as something that was good for overall health and wellbeing - “Fasting is what we do in our religion. We have religion inside us, and we are born with one homeland and one religion.” Folk sentiments were also expressed by both the immigrant and the Australian born generations. An immigrant participant explained, “If you don’t fast, you cannot understand religious events.” One of the 1st generation participants said, “Living in Australia, we only fast the week leading up to Easter. The people in Greece work shorter days, have days off, and can celebrate things better.” This participant felt that, if she was in Greece, she would fast more, because, “There you would feel it more as a festive religious event because, at religious times, they change their working times based around the celebration and attending church services.”
A shift in the symbolic meaning of fasting within the Australian context was expressed by the 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation. One of these participants said, "Obviously it’s difficult to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays but I would at least try to have vegetarian food." Another explained, "Fasting is religious mainly. It prepares you mentally, it cleans you before you go into the happy days, but it’s also really healthy. I generally fast, unless there is a special occasion and I may have dairy. and it’s a chance to be really healthy as well. I like to fast and it’s not bad."
Gardens

“I have a lovely garden with fresh vegetables. I had a garden in Greece as well, and our garden is our connection to Greece.” – Immigrant generation

“Growing up my parents always had a homegrown the veggie garden, what they had in Greece. What they could bring with them from the village they did.” – 1st generation

“My grandparents always have a massive garden with fresh fruit and vegetables. I think a garden for them is just what they had in Greece. From what I have seen a garden is a way to keep our Greek tradition alive and I want my own garden” – 2nd generation
Language

• Language plays a central role in the process of cultural maintenance and is also a marker of identity. For the participants of this study, the of the Greek language was a way they could retain a cultural identity, even when the language was not a primary means of communication.
Language – Immigrant gen

Self-reported Use of Greek by Members of the Immigrant Generation

- 50-70% (1/16)
- 70-90% (3/16)
- >90% (12/16)
Examples of English words used by the immigrant generation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>homemade</th>
<th>anyway</th>
<th>alcohol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>jeans</td>
<td>lungs</td>
<td>hamburger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chips</td>
<td>restaurant</td>
<td>stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>healthy</td>
<td>computer</td>
<td>mobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bus stop</td>
<td>drugs</td>
<td>cheese cake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ice cream</td>
<td>government</td>
<td>happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cancer</td>
<td>pollution</td>
<td>infection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no hope</td>
<td>very difficult</td>
<td>take it easy</td>
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### Language 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> gen

Use of some Greek words by 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; generation</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; generation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>μάτι (evil eye)</td>
<td>κήπος (garden)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ευκέλεο (Holy Unction)</td>
<td>Νιστια (fasting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Γιαγιά (grandmother)</td>
<td>σέλινο (celery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>χαμομήλι (chamomile tea)</td>
<td>Ευκέλεο (Holy Unction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Αγιασμός (Holy water)</td>
<td>Σταυρός (cross)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>χωρίο (village)</td>
<td>χωρίο (village)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Προσευχή (Prayer)</td>
<td>Πάτερ ημον (Lord’s Prayer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>πρόσφορο (offering bread)</td>
<td>Μοναστήρι (monastery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Παναγία (Virgin Mary)</td>
<td>Προσφορο (offering bread)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ρίγανη (Oregano)</td>
<td>χαμομήλι (chamomile tea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Μύρο (Myrrh)</td>
<td>Γιαγιά (grandmother)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Conclusion

- A conflicted sense of identity was apparent among participants of all generations, and elements of culture, religion, language and food that marked identity had a dual function in the experience of the participants across the generations.

- These elements they identified as marking their Greek identity tended to be seen as positive for health and wellbeing but also created a conflict between their participation in mainstream Australian social norms and their desire to project a Greek identity.

- The resilience of all the participants was notable, despite expected dilution with each generation. Religion was, and is anticipated to be in the future, the central feature of identity for this group.

- Their level of integrational trust extremely high and continues to contribute to the maintenance and transmission of the Hellenic culture between the generations of the Greek diaspora of Melbourne.
“I don’t want to lose any part of my Greek identity, like I said, I don’t see myself as Australian, I don’t have Australian blood, like an African elephant if it’s born in Australia, we still consider it African, so we’re just [Greeks] born somewhere else.”
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