

Eryastirio: Writing Greek America
Placing Greek Diaspora Studies in North America Curricula
Spring 2022

Introduction: Transnational Greek Worlds in the Classroom

We will begin with an obvious observation. It is impossible to understand modern Greece independently from the movement of ideas, people, and institutions crossing its borders. From the Greek War of Independence to today's refugee phenomenon, from literary modernism to Greek immigrant remittances, from tourism to Greek rock music, Greece has been entangled with human mobilities and cultural crossings. A history of Greece is a history of transnational relations and cross-cultural encounters.

The crossings, of course, are multidirectional. Modern Greece is also produced outside its borders, from Greek festivals to translations of Greek literature; from scholarship to the Giannis Antetokounmpo phenomenon; from Greek food culture on American television to modern Greek academic programs; from Greek film festivals in North America to Hollywood constructions of Greece. They all involve the production of tangible cultural products and social imaginaries about "Greece" at the intersection of at least two cultures.

This making of Greece within and outside its borders in connection to cultural mobilities and intersections shifts our analytical attention toward two interrelated directions: one is the move from the study of Greek national culture to the transnational making of Greece; the other is from the study of Greece to the making of Greek worlds internationally.

This double shift has been well underway in Modern Greek studies. Books and articles have shown the impossibility of comprehending phenomena such as the post-World War II illegal adoption of Greek children abroad, the modern revival of the Delphic festivals, or the film *My Life in Ruins* outside a transnational framework.

This Eryastirio speaks to this historical moment. Our guiding question is this: how does the placement of Greek America and Greek Canada in College curricula contribute to the understanding of Greek worlds as a transnational and transcultural phenomenon?

It is of value to inquire how this placement matters and what kind of cultural work it delivers. We ask, what are the prospects, challenges, and limits in making the Greek diaspora a feature in the pedagogies and politics of our teaching? Given that there is a variety of academic classrooms in which Greek subjects are taught and substantial differences across our institutions, the exploration requires a broad range of perspectives and a great deal of collective thinking across our similarities and differences.

In all this we must not lose sight, we believe, that those of us who work in Modern Greek programs do so in a transnational educational space. Modern Greek programs in North America have been enabled by a network of cultural and political forces both at home and abroad: they involve cultural politics around multiculturalism; the cultural activism and financial support of diaspora communities; the production of translations; the interests of Greek national and private institutions for Greek education abroad; the mobility of scholars from Greece to North America and scholars connected with histories of immigration. The making and continuous operation of the programs takes place within a complex and ever-changing landscape which is shaped by national ideologies of multiculturalism, the internationalization of education, the discourse of heritage preservation in the diaspora, and, in the age of webinars, virtual cultural exchanges across continents.

Modern Greek programs in North America are then transnational spaces par excellence, engaging with a subject whose scope extends beyond Greece as a nation state. It would be ironic not to make diaspora histories and cultures an integral component of our inquiries.

Today's speakers will help us navigate this terrain from several institutional and disciplinary perspectives. We thank them very much for accepting our invitation.

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