Ergastirio: Writing Greek America
Placing Greek Diaspora Studies in North America Curricula
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From Migrant Heritage to Community Practice: The Greek Canadian Archives and the Emerging Global "Classroom"

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Toronto is one of the world's most diverse cities. It is in this city that a small team of Greek and Greek Canadian researchers have taken on the task of making the history of Greeks in Canada as mainstream as possible. Making history *mainstream* does not mean sanitizing or beautifying it but practicing history with a critical view of the past that is attuned to the questions and the challenges of the present. The group of researchers in Toronto clusters around the activities of the Hellenic Heritage Foundation (HHF) Chair in Modern Greek History at York University, a vantage point that I will take up in this essay to reflect on the significance of Greek Canadian texts, historical events, and cultural situations for expanding the understanding of Greek and Canadian history through the generation of public resources.

In this context one can identify three main approaches to strengthen the transnational and comparative curriculum at the undergraduate and graduate level, while at the same time engaging through different ways with broader audiences that appreciate the educational aspect of the knowledge that is being produced. The classroom, the digital, and the experiential modes are therefore the three approaches that are self-reinforcing and complementary. As our classrooms and audiences change and as we must navigate between the physical and the digital worlds, it is the right time to think about what we offer to whom and to what end as researchers—in our case—of Greeks in Canada.

Since 2021 the project to expand the physical archive and create a digital one for the history of Greeks in Canada has started a new journey with the major funding that our team secured from the HHF and York University. The publications and research which will be produced and disseminated, the digital component of the

Greek Canadian Archives, the collections of oral history interviews and public history projects—especially podcast episodes—will all create a major new resource, making oral history and other digitized sources easily accessible and searchable for academic and non-academic users. Scholarly findings will stimulate new research on ethnic groups in Canada, generating new ways to approach and disseminate their histories through digital means. Hopefully, they will contribute to the obvious need to establish a framework for the study of Greek communities around the world focusing on the creation of archives with a digital public history agenda. Working directly on a large quantity of data (interviews and other digitized/digital sources) will lead to enhanced professional practices, and methodological advances on how best to analyze, display and disseminate oral history sources and historical data on ethnic groups for a range of historical inquiries, including the creation of public history exhibits. The goal is to address academic audiences by disseminating findings through workshops, conference papers and publications. This cannot happen independently from the university's institutional support, and we are fortunate that York is the right place to realize this project. With a multitude of scholarly agendas on documenting Caribbean Canadian, Jewish Canadian, Italian Canadian, Egyptian Canadian, Irish Canadian, and Portuguese Canadian histories, there are institutional arrangements for enabling the academics to underwrite the research activities that approach Greek Canada, not as a distinct field from all of the above ethnic histories, but as a pattern of relations that migrants build and diaspora communities in the broadest sense engage with regardless of the place of origins.

The research conducted, collected, and displayed in digital form on the Greeks of Canada has undergraduate students as the main target audience. Students will be able to engage with the results of the project, in mainly upper-level courses on the history of migration and diasporas, and in secondary education courses on the histories of migration in Canada. This is where collaboration with colleagues primarily at York and beyond becomes crucial, to make the findings of individual research projects much more than a one-week module in a multicultural course. This approach of integrating research findings on Greeks in Canada with courses on diaspora, migration, and identities will signal the multiplicity and universality of the migrant experiences in search for a better life or as refuges searching for a safe haven following displacement. At the graduate level, dissertations will be one

academic product of graduate students through their engagement with the HHF Greek Canadian Archives project, that will result to their formation as historians, researchers, and knowledge mobilizers for various audiences.

By definition, a public digital project reaches many audiences. And it is now common understanding that the classroom as well as the student population have changed. If we are already encouraged to develop continuous education courses—whether online or in the classroom—and create modules for those interested, then who is the intended audience around the world? Projects such as the Greek Canadian Archives can forge connections between researchers, communities, and institutional partners. These synergies will mediate community engagement and offer resources for fulfilling the goals and research objectives both locally and internationally. There are untapped resources for digital public history that can result from community engagement and with the support of organizations and non-profit foundations. This network of connections will promote the study and collaboration of many universities for the study of Greek diaspora in Australia, the United States, South America, Africa and Europe at least for the post-1945 era. At the same time, it is imperative to think along the lines of comparisons that are transcontinental, as Greeks in Canadian cities may have had more in common with Greeks in Australian cities than previously considered.

Non-academic audiences also stand to gain historical awareness through the digital and other media activities, including podcast episode series; history podcasts have for almost twenty years now expanded interest in the past and show no signs of tuning out. So the first approach to expanding the classroom and the "student" audience is sustainability: investing time, resources, networking and collaboration in long-term projects that make research proposals more convincing and reflect institutional realities as well as community expectations while also meeting scholarly and ethical standards. Teaching for an undergraduate and graduate audience takes time, involves a long-term commitment, and requires several stages. Sometimes is most rewarding when audiences with a background or relation to immigrant stories and narratives get involved.

The second approach is institutional collaboration and experiential education. The scope of research on "Greeks in Canada" for example is clearly too large to achieve

even by one team of researchers and this is where the Immigrec Virtual museum research project—a collaboration between the University of Patras, McGill University, Simon Fraser University and York University—offered valuable lessons and a training ground, helping us to find out what works best. In this capacity it became a catalyst for many ongoing initiatives. Developing teaching resources for instance is a task that seems much more manageable now to all those who were involved in the Immigrec project than before. The experiential education that this project involved and its function as a public history initiative is a related aspect.

The anti-Greek riots of 1918, a very public and urban event, offers such an entry point. On its centennial anniversary, a group of researchers and amateur history enthusiasts called the HHF "History Committee" took on the task of inviting and offering engagement with large groups, to understand the city's history and self-image. The centennial commemoration saw the mayor representing a narrative for the city and reflecting whether the events of the past could happen again in a city like Toronto. The answer was a vigilant yes, a positive message of non-complacency. The question and answer, of course, do not concern only Toronto and local relevance, but claim importance for many other places where such events have shaken local societies. In addition, another form of dissemination that continues to attract students and broader audiences alike is the urban historical walk. The York University team and the History Committee have created two of those walks, one in the footsteps of rioters of the 1918 anti-Greek riot in downtown Toronto and a second walk on the making of Greektown in the Danforth area of the city.

The third approach and the most important one—a precondition for the previous two—is critical reflection. Various research projects currently underway avoid the often politically-driven tendency to sideline any unpleasant or even traumatic experiences and thus silence or sanitize the memory of Greeks in Canada. It is also the case that the term "Greek Canadian" is way too broad and needs to be explored and taught in relation to histories of whiteness, ethnicity, and transnational migration, not least in relation of Greeks to other settler migrants and the indigenous communities Greeks interacted with.

Teaching and approaching the communities we engage with as a dynamic presence and not as an entity we are often asked to "preserve" because it will otherwise disappear and is already in danger of extinction is an obligation. While we preserve historical material and create digital files consisting of interviews, stories, and video recordings, which we are storing for future teaching, research, and public history projects, we cannot claim and pretend to preserve a culture, a heritage, not even memory itself, as those are constantly negotiated. Memory is individual as well as collective, and each generation will inevitably revisit its history and groups within the same generation will offer different histories of their communities' past. We can aspire and have the obligation to be knowledge keepers though, and this is what the Greek Canadian Archives will seek to do with a critical reflection upon the material they will hold. It will be up to historians, the academic and the broader public to interact with this knowledge and attach their meaning to it.

A transnational and comparative angle is therefore also engrained in this Archives project. One historical approach that is often missing is the interpretative oscillation between developments in Greece and the broader region—Ottoman Empire for instance—and the cities in Canada where Greeks settled. The study of Greeks in Canadian cities is more fruitful than pan-Canadian approaches to the history of Greeks in the country. After all, some of the most interesting recent works in the history of European or Asian groups in Canada and the United States tend to focus comparatively on cities, such as studies on the Irish in Toronto, Detroit, or Chicago. The comparative study, in other words, of the immigrant experience within one or between two cities will probably make more sense, as the urban environment can be seen as even more influential than the country at large. The issue of scale of analysis therefore is crucial here as well.

At a university such as York the pool of students from Humanities and Social Sciences is large. York is called the community university and the engaged university for a reason; with a particular agenda for social equity and diversity it is in this social academic context and constellation that the teaching of Greeks in Canada and more broadly the teaching of Greece and Greeks in the modern and contemporary period takes place, studying Greeks in Canada as part of the history of Greece as well as the history of Canada and finding where and how the two intersect. Public history is one of the fastest growing fields in terms of student

interest for the Heritage "industry" or what is sometimes called the "GLAM" (Galleries, Libraries, Arts, Museums) sector. It is clearly a sector that history graduates and those we train to specialize in Greek Canada in cities such as Toronto may find appealing. When it comes to educational material, the centennial of the 1918 anti-Greek riot provided the opportunity to generate educational material to be used by Toronto District School Board teachers as part of the Hellenic Heritage Month activities (celebrated in March), the Greek schools in the greater Toronto Area and elsewhere in Canada as well as by academic communities around the world.

The study of Greek migration is still a long way from becoming mainstream, although some work has been done toward this goal in the last few years. The digital public history that initiatives such as the HHF Greek Canadian Archives promotes can enrich our understanding of Greece and Greek communities around the world in their diversity. National contexts matter enormously of course but Greek migrants, Greek communities, and Greeks—hyphenated or not—are still situated within debates about national belonging, identities, and face daily challenges and opportunities generated by the transnational circulations of cultural and financial capital. It is not clear how this development shapes transnational diasporic Greek identities, and it is the obligation of public history projects to engage with such undeniably important initiatives. Regardless, the stories and narratives of the Greek Canadian past are discovered, produced, may even be contested, and will hopefully be reproduced through the Archives and other digital forms.

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