

## **“Voices of Migration: Exploring Agency within Canadian Immigration Policy and Greek Emigration Framework”**

In 2019, an undergraduate international exchange program introduced me to Toronto’s diverse and vibrant migrant communities. With Greeks being part of the mosaic, Professor Sakis Gekas introduced me to the *Immigrec* oral history archive, which hosts more than 400 interviews and reapproaches Greek immigration to Canada during the 1950s and 1960s through immigrants’ voices. Since then, my research interests have developed around migrants’ agency and their diverse experiences.

Since the establishment of the modern Greek state in 1832, the country has seen two major emigration waves. The first occurred from the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, followed by a second wave that emerged after the end of the Second World War and the ferocious Greek Civil War in 1949. This emigration wave saw over one million Greeks depart from their homeland, and approximately 100,000 settle in Canada.<sup>1</sup> By examining the Canadian immigration policy and the Greek framework of emigration, this text brings migrants’ narrations and agency to the foreground of our research. On the one hand, post-war Canadian governments dealt with numerous immigrants from around the world. On the other hand, Greece had to regulate the outflow of its people. Utilizing a never-before-investigated oral history archive, this research exemplifies the ways immigrants obeyed, exploited, or disregarded the law as the sites of agency in the migration process despite the policies’ limiting nature.

Following the Second World War, Canada was among the few states able to absorb the millions of people fleeing the devastated continent. Regarding the country’s immigration policy, the 1952 Immigration Act limited admissions based on nationality, property, health, and education criteria, protecting Canada’s white European identity.<sup>2</sup> In 1956, new regulations specified the only four classes of preferred immigrants who

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Bruneau and Giorgos Prevelakis, «Η Χαρτογράφηση της Νεοελληνικής Διασποράς» [“Mapping the Modern Greek Diaspora,”] in *Οι Έλληνες στη διασπορά: 15ος-21ος αι.* [*The Greeks in the Diaspora: 15th-21st Centuries,*] ed. Ioannis Hassiotis, Olga Katsiardi-Hering, and Evridiki Abatzi (Athens:Hellenic Parliament, 2006), 322.

<sup>2</sup> Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos, “Dismantling White Canada: Race, Rights, and the Origins of the Points System,” in *Wanted and Welcome? Policies for Highly Skilled Immigrants in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos (New York: Springer, 2013), 21.

could enter Canada.<sup>3</sup> According to this classification, Greeks had two options to enter Canada: by providing guarantees about their future job or being sponsored. It was not until 1962 that the Diefenbaker government introduced more universal admission plans to lower the racial barriers. In 1967, a less exclusive point system ranking applicants based on their education and training, personal qualities, and age was adopted.<sup>4</sup>

For the most part, the central problem of the Greek emigration post-war policy was that Greece did not have one. For Greece, emigration released the pressure caused by the excess workforce and provided the benefits of remittances. Nevertheless, the country worked towards bilateral agreements with northern European countries to promote emigration.<sup>5</sup> Greece was a founding member of the International Committee for European Migration, (ICEM) which mediated between countries to alleviate Europe from its excess workforce. In 1952, it was arranged to assist 115,000 migrants to relocate, helping around 20,000 Greeks to emigrate to the U.S., Canada, and Australia.<sup>6</sup>

While the ICEM chiefly regulated Greek immigration to Canada, migration was on the agenda when officials of the two states met. The newspaper *Empros* in 1953 underlines the Canadian government's willingness to permit "unlimited Greek immigration to Canada."<sup>7</sup> Similarly, during the 1961 official visit of the Greek Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis to Canada, immigration was celebrated as a link of friendship between the two countries.<sup>8</sup> However, the Canadian Department of Citizenship and Immigration was reluctant to endorse substantial Greek immigration despite the requests made by organizations or the Greek government. In the following years, an annual influx of 4,000 to 5,000 Greeks was granted entrance, and only after

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<sup>3</sup> Ninette Kelley and Michael J. Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 328.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 360–361.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Plaktsoglou, «Η Μεταναστευτική πολιτική της Αυστραλίας προς την Ελλάδα και η Ελληνική μεταπολεμική μετανάστευση (1945–1953)», [“Australian Immigration Policy Towards Greece and Greek Post-war Immigration,”] in *Greek Research in Australia: Proceedings of the Eighth Biennial International Conference of Greek Studies, Flinders University, June 2009*, ed. Marietta Rossetto (Adelaide: Flinders University Department of Languages - Modern Greek, 2011), 720–21.

<sup>7</sup> «Τι επέτυχε ο κ. Μαρκεζίνης εις τον Καναδά» [“What Mr. Markezinis achieved in Canada,”] *Empros*, May 15, 1953, 1,3.

<sup>8</sup> «Το Πρωθυπουργικόν ταξίδιον εις τας Ηνωμ. Πολιτείας», [“The Prime Minister's trip to the United States,”] *Makedonia*, April 15, 1961, 1.

1964, their numbers increased, with a peak of 11,000 in 1967. This shift corresponded to the more receptive Canadian immigration policy.<sup>9</sup>

Being invited by a Canadian resident seemed to be the most secure way to enter Canada for Greek immigrants. With chain migration being a recurrent theme in the interviewee's narrations, it is essential to stress the cases of women who became the pivot for relocating their relatives. Considering the demand for domestic servants and nurses, Greek women consciously followed the ICEM training as a gateway to Canada. After working the required period, having acquired basic English, and being deemed Canadian residents, they would change their jobs and invite other family members to the country.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, families resorted to arranged marriages, allowing other family members to migrate through kinship. Hence, young women became part of the family's economic strategy to expand its networks and obtain social mobility. Furthermore, Greek women played the role of migration initiators, typically attributed to men. This role was a source of pride for many, as conveyed during their interviews.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the legal framework enacted was not enough to discourage illegal migration. As Canada's policy excluded Greeks who did not meet the respective criteria, some reached Canada as sailors and extended their stay the longest possible. The story of an interviewee from Crete, who, when he reached Canada in 1964, left his ship and did not reembarc, was not uncommon as there were a few hundred similar cases over the examined period.<sup>12</sup> In 1962, James Dimitrios and Anthony Gaitanis surrendered to the police because "they were tired of being exploited by employers," knowing that in 1959, they had jumped off their ship. They reported at least 1,000 similar cases of ship-jumpers in the greater Montreal area alone.<sup>13</sup> The phenomenon was not limited to Canada since deserters from Greek ships frequently featured in the American press, nor appeared for the first time after the war.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Chimbos, "The Greeks in Canada. An Historical and Sociological Perspective," in *The Greek Diaspora in the 20th Century*, ed. Richard Clogg (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 92.

<sup>10</sup> Agape Gournis, 737, June 5, 2018, Immigrec.

<sup>11</sup> Noula Mina, "Taming and Training Greek 'Peasant Girls' and the Gendered Politics of Whiteness in Postwar Canada: Canadian Bureaucrats and Immigrant Domestic, 1950s–1960s," *The Canadian Historical Review* 94, no. 4 (2013): 532.

<sup>12</sup> G.A., Landed immigrant, Immigrec, <https://virtual.immigrec.com/en#/r1/room-1-map>.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Geiger, "1,000 Ship-Jumpers in Montreal, Officials Told by 2 Greek Sailors," *The Globe and Mail*, January 27, 1962, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander Kitroeff, "Ship Jumpers: An Unspoken Chapter of Greek Immigration to the United States," *The Pappas Post*, April 16, 2020, <https://pappaspost.com/ship-jumpers-an-unspoken-chapter-of-greek-immigration-to-the-united-states/>.

The cases of Greeks arriving legally as tourists in Canada but extending their stay were similar to that of ship-jumpers. After issuing a visitor visa, immigrants had to provide the border service officer a roundtrip ticket and 250 dollars cash to fund their trip. An anonymous interviewee explains that after arriving in Montreal as a tourist, he settled there while evading the police. He believed the Canadian authorities were not actively searching for individuals staying longer than their permitted duration as long as they were “hardworking” and had a “normal life,” like himself.<sup>15</sup> Despite the potential consequences, interviews and articles about ship-jumpers and tourists suggest it was easy to avoid detection because Canada was rewarding diligent immigrants.

Migration policies establish the legal framework for people planning their relocation, which can significantly impact their migration decisions and trajectories. The way immigrants understood the legal framework, placed themselves within it and navigated through it could not be shaped by any government or law. Examples of exploiting the sponsored system or extending the legal stay in Canada beyond the permitted duration demonstrate that the comprehension and interpretation of the law are as crucial as its conception. Immigrants, rather than being victims, could make strategic decisions to navigate through legal restrictions and find alternative means of achieving their migration goals.

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<sup>15</sup> Anonymous, Round trip ticket, Immigrec, <https://virtual.immigrec.com/en#/r1/room-1-map>.