

The life journey of Greeks in Ingeniero White, Argentina* Paula Michalijos & Hugo Capellà i Miternique

1. The *Chora*: between diaspora and thalassocracy

The study of Greek migration, unlike others, requires a review of established concepts that help us rethink the vision of migration in the contemporary context. This case study not only contributes to the understanding of migrations with respect to the subject of references (territorial/ethnic) but also to the concept of migration, if we consider that the Greek community is one of the few global communities (*Global tribe*). From this perspective, Greeks around the world are migrants or, rather, members of a large global community whose meeting point focuses on their maritime connection, establishing themselves as a thalassocracy. Greek migrants or, rather, in a broader sense, Hellenism is more similar to being part of or, on the contrary, not being part of. As we will see below, the limits of the relationship with the other and the definition of oneself in the case of the Greek community contribute some nuances of complexity that enrich the debate on migration and in turn provide us with answers in the postmodern world of contemporary multiculturalism. These nomads of the sea have always known that the best way to survive is by adapting, without losing sight of their references. The life of a migrant like Ulysses, in his journey throughout the world, always with the idea of a return, becomes, in the case of the Greeks, a journey of life, understood as a way of life based on learning and on adoption and adaptation, as exhibited by Alexander the Great. The concept of migration in Hellenism is supported by historical moments, with Alexander reflecting the curious adventurer of a fisherman, a sailor or a shepherd or hunter. The nomadic vision of Hellenism makes it an appropriate approach to the issue of migration and open and plural identity, very relevant to the current world. Perhaps our principles should be redefined to understand that itinerant ways of life are as valid a way of life as sedentary forms that, to date, have been the model on which norms have been established.

The strength of Hellenism encompasses not only those currently born and residing in Greece but also heirs of Magna Graecia and, by extension, all descendants around the world from these territories (Androussou, 1990). In addition, Hellenism also covers all those who share its principles throughout the world, based at first on the very foundations of the current Western world (democracy, freedom, etc.) and secondarily as guarantors of Christianity (Byzantine orthodoxy). Hellenic identity is complex and plural and encompasses an ethnic component, a territorial component and a religious component, not to mention a cultural component (Fig. 1). In this sense, Hellenic identity has a richness that is the result of its varied and long history and is only comparable to a few such complex identities worldwide, such as Chinese, Indian and perhaps Jewish. Hellenic identity has flowed in space and time as a nomad through the seas, understood as communication. Its identity is based on spreading and sharing a word and a message.

* English version of the previous article (“El viaje de vida griego en Ingeniero White”) by its authors.

1.1 Hellenisms

From the phenomenological point of view, the construction of the Hellenic referent must be understood as a process that provides an identity based on varied identifiers that have been interrelated over time, unlike other national identities focused only on one or two aspects that, many times, are exclusionary. Thus, Hellenism can be defined as a territorial identity (based on *topos*), as an ethnic identity (based on *genos*) and as a religious identity (*orthodox*), in addition to a linguistic-cultural identity (*paideia*). Each of these branches of Hellenism has allowed, at different historical moments, a series of debates when defining the nation, for example, the consideration of the Greeks of the Turkish Empire and other territories at the end of the 19th century, within the Greek State, as Greeks or migrants, or the linguistic debate when establishing the language of the Modern Greek State, between the popular language (*Dimotiki*) finally imposed or a purist redefinition (*Koini*) toward the reunion of archaic classical Greek (*Kazarévusa*), without forgetting the influence of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the Greek Orthodox Church and others.

<i>Ethniki synidisis</i>	Τόπος (Space)	Ορθόδοξος (Religion)	Γένος (Group)	Παιδεία [Αρχαία] Έλληνική (Language)
Elladisms (Greek nation)	Χώρα	Έκκλησία της Ελλάδος	Έλληνες Γραικοί	Ελληνική γλώσσα (Δημοτική) Κοινή γλώσσα (καθαρεύουσα)
<i>Alytrotos Ellinismos (Unredeemed nation)</i>	Αποικία وقف; Vakif	Βασιλεία Ρωμαίων Οικουμενικό Πατριαρχείο Κωνσταντινουπόλεως	روم Rûm	Μεσαιωνική ελληνική
<i>Apodimos Ellinisms (Diaspora)</i>	Οἶκος	The Orthodox Church	Έθνος Ομογένεια	All

Figure 1. Richness and variety of Hellenic identity.

Source: Own elaboration based on Prévélakis, 2006, and Bruneau, 2002
 (central boxes in gray to denote the most relevant aspect in each facet of Hellenism)¹

¹ Thus, territorial identity is expressed in space, not only with the Chora but also in the *apoikiai* (colony) and in the *oikoi* (house). Not only is there a change of scale depending on the weight of the Hellenic community in the location, but the space is understood in a different way. In addition, these nuances of territorial identity are not fixed and have also varied over time. For example, in the case of *Alytrotos Ellinismos*, the *apoikiai* (colony) was reconverted in the Chora but was no longer understood as a nation-territory but, rather, a nation-place, in, for example, the identification of many Greek-Turks with Istanbul as *ή Πόλις*, that is, the City. In addition, in this case, the forms of religious organisation (donations to religious institutions, the *vakif*) acquired an almost territorial dimension, shaped around the Churches, understood almost as the Chora (Minoglou, 2002). The latter concept is very malleable because it means interval and intermediate, and therefore, it must be assimilated more like a spatial vacuum where the lived space will be forged and therefore can take the most diverse forms despite corresponding to the same name (Berque, 2014). The success of territorial identity in Hellenism, in general, is due in part precisely to the very flexibility of the definition of the Chora that turned it into an embodiment of nomadism in a sedentary fixed space, only understandable from the time and space of the movement.

On the other hand, religious identity, although it is the foundation of unredeemed Hellenism, is also relevant in the formation of some of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches of present-day Greece and continues to be an

This phenomenological complexity of Hellenic identity is further diversified by ontological differentiation. The mythological origin that links the collective referent to a hero such as Hellen, as an eponymous, precisely emphasises the nomadic character of the initial referent, linked to sailors and transhumant shepherds. The great success and, at the same time, mystery is having known how to build a reference, based on the culture itself, as a cohesive people from the most varied origins and beliefs, from its origin. This particularity of Hellenism in its origin marks both its apparent weakness in the face of great empires and its real strength because it is a reference based on the same transformation and with a great capacity for adaptation and survival that starts with the collective because of a decision of wanting to be part of or share that reference.

From this ontological perspective, Hellenism, unlike other identities, is not divided into a duality of being part (nation) or not being part of the referent (foreigner); rather, it also includes a third intermediate option (μεταξύ/*metaxy*), with the union of the three being the defining set of that identity (Hellenism).

Hellenism is expressed in multiple ways in each of these three options, starting first with the *Elladism* of the modern Greek nation, as opposed to the *Apodimos Ellinismos* de la Diaspora (Garland, 2014), to compare terms related with other national identities (Tziouvas, 2016). However, this duality in the case of Hellenism is more complex. The first appearances can mislead us because on the one hand, Elladism, far from being the causal matrix on which identity is established, is on the contrary the receptacle built recently, on the modern Greek nation, in the XIX-XX century. In this sense, *Elladism* is a syncretism fruit of the ideological debates regarding Greek nationalism that emanate from Hellenism. On the other hand, the diaspora, far from being understood in this case as a split from a central nation, represents itself a part of Hellenism itself. That is, the diaspora is a translation of Hellenism that in many ways resembles more archaic or pure Hellenism than Elladism itself (of modern Greece). This

element of cohesion for the Greek communities in the diaspora, with churches belonging to it, directly to Constantinople or new Orthodox Churches of their own (such as the Orthodox Church of North America; in the specific case of Argentina, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Buenos Aires and South America, also called Santa Metropolis of Buenos Aires and South America (in Greek: *Ιερά Μητρόπολις Μπουένος Άϊρες και Νοτίου Αμερικής*), is an Orthodox jurisdiction with headquarters located in the city of Buenos Aires, under the canonical jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople).

Finally, regarding the issue of ethnic identity, the denominations of the group (*genos*) in the case of Hellenism continue to be important, alluding to *Hellenes* or *Graikos*, and has led even today to certain difficulties regarding the acceptance of migrants who have recently arrived to Greece as well as to unredeemed Hellenism, which is defined ethnically, in this case, externally by the Arabs and Ottomans as “*rûms*,” as a religious-ethnic concept. However, as has already been said previously, it is in unredeemed Hellenism where religious identity acquires more relevance, becoming the axis of identity for a long time and making a Greek nation coexist in a non-Greek territory, without issues (Minoglou, 2002).

The linguistic-cultural aspect that is manifest by the link between the language and concepts expressed and shared in all forms of Hellenism, from the most archaic and purist vision to the most popular and even in the face of accepting the loss of language itself (on the part of the Diaspora), although never the associated thought forms, should be mentioned. The described diversity of the Hellenic identity, through its elements and forms, gives it a very flexible and adaptable character to any situation, without ever losing the referent.

complexity can be understood only if we consider a third intermediate element between Elladism and *Apodimos Ellinismos*, i.e., *Alytrotos Ellinismos*, or unredeemed or unsaved Hellenism. It is perhaps in this initially secondary and peripheral Hellenism where the key elements to understand the identity of the diaspora are found (because a good number of migrants came not from present-day Greece but from territories of ancient Magna Graecia and the Eastern Roman Empire), as well as the elements for the reconstruction of the modern Greek nation (with the reincorporation of migrants from Magna Graecia to Greece and the reincorporation of lost territories such as the Dodecanese) (Anastassiadou, 2012).

The union of these three forms of nationalism configure Hellenic identity as a whole, although they are never fully expressed. In turn, each of these nationalisms has been expressed in different ways with respect to identify elements. Thus, for Elladism, the strength lies in territorial identity (understood as *Chora*); for the diaspora of *Apodimos Ellinismos*, the strength is based more on ethnic identity (in the strength of the group, *Omogeneia*); and finally, the persistence of *Alytrotos Ellinismos* (unredeemed Hellenism) lies above all in the religious identity of the Orthodox Church, represented by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. We have highlighted each of the elements in each of the forms of nationalism; however, as seen in Figure 1, other aspects are mentioned in a secondary way.

1.2 The nation of nations

Hellenic identity, as we have seen, is complex, but it can be synthesised in three major concepts (Figure 2): *metaxy* (intermediate), *anamorphosis* (transformation) and *epiphany* (representation). These are the three aspects of Hellenism in its primal sense (archaic) and are then converted into a collective form to persist as a reference in time (*συννοικισμός*). Identity is not so much the fruit of a binary duality of being or not being but rather a trinity, where the third element becomes the determinant (unredeemed Hellenism).



These three nations of Hellenism conceptually constitute the three stages of the same process or *synoecism*, where the anamorphosis of the environment becomes a worldview for the group. The

medium (natural) is the intermediary (*metaxy*) on which to build and reflect an identity; however, in the Hellenic case, we have seen that because it is not a sedentary tradition, such a medium is not as relevant as for other cases. In fact, even the concept of *Chora* is much broader than that of territory and is more like an *Epiphany* (representation) closely linked to the group that represents it (Reyser, 2011). This *Chora* is then established as a representation of a group but in a territory shared with other populations that do not share the representation. It is a symbolic territorial construction that sustains a nation but without the need for territorial exclusivity. This situation, which may seem unusual from the modern traditional visions established for the nation-state and a more sedentary tradition, is based on an imposition and exclusion of all that is foreign, but from the perspective of Hellenism, the opposite and open vision adapts to the time and places, in a much more current way in the face of contemporary diversity, within a global world, where limits can be very relative.

Hellenism is an identity that is dispersed with the journey, like seeds by the wind, and that can be developed and represented in the most varied ways based on the circumstances and the moment by focusing on the conceptual security of the referent, taking the form or background desired. That is, Hellenism is defined as a function of everything that its members decide at each moment, without limiting itself to any imperative. This is precisely the unstoppable strength of this nation, based on the simple message of freedom and democracy.

2. Methodology

The research herein is carried out using ethnographic methods that assess the cultural dimensions of the social reality under analysis, describe and analyze the ideas, beliefs, meanings, knowledge and practices of groups, cultures and communities, and characteristics of the phenomena and reveal associations among them (Vieytes, 2004). The objective is to reconstruct the categories that the participants use to conceptualise their experiences and their worldview. Ethnography involves the description and deep interpretation of a group, social or cultural system, generally applied to studies of immigrant groups, neighborhoods, and urban tribes, as a path towards communication, to understand the other, and as a component of the new configuration of the coexistence of the multiple and the plural.

Ethnography requires immersing oneself in everyday life; for this, it is necessary for the researcher to be immersed in that reality, utilizing the basic tools of qualitative research: participant observation and interviews (Hernández Sampieri *et al.*, 2010). Following this premise, five in-depth interviews were conducted with second and third generation Greek descendants, given that Hellenic immigration in Ingeniero White dates back to the end of the XIX century; additionally, a specific meeting (with *focus group* technique) was held with the Greek community in Bahía Blanca. The interviews were carried out in the homes of the interviewees in such a way that the researcher could actively observe the situations analyzed, discovering things that are made intelligible through the

immersion of the researcher in the culture. The interviews did not comprise a list of strictly formulated questions but, rather, topics that guided the conversation. The interviews were flexible and dynamic, allowing a narrative between the researcher and the interviewee to capture the way in which the interviewee sees, classifies and experiences the world and, thus, allowing us to obtain contextualised and holistic information on the object of study. The interviews were conducted by Paula Michalijos (for 2 months in 2019), who is part of the same Greek community; therefore, the interviewer was not an outside element that interfered with the responses but, rather, allowed for much more refinement in the interviews, comments and responses. The study is complemented with supplementary materials, such as a small ethnographic study carried out by the authors in 2003, of a testimony that is no longer present, allowing us to establish nuances and see the evolution of certain concepts across more than a decade. In this article, the notes are not provided, and the interviewees remain anonymous. Rather, this article focuses on the results of the interviews, which were analyzed and discussed by both authors, and summarises the theoretical concepts provided.

3. A Migration?

Greek migrants around the world are far from being the first diaspora and representatives and worthy descendants of archaic travelers. The presence of Greek communities around the world is nothing more than the projection of the Hellenic reference in the current global village. Its identity has been adapted to current needs, and its virtue has been that of incredible flexibility, where the limits of what is considered part of the referent are mobile and are set by the community itself. Therefore, the factors of Hellenism may differ based on place and time. Language, ethnic origin and religion are not exclusive elements but complement the central element that is based on “*omogeneia*” (collectivity).

This group of *Hellenes* represents one-third (approximately 5 million) of the total community (approximately 11 million in present-day Greece), and we must even consider that some Greeks living in Greece are migrants (returning emigrants, individuals reincorporated in territories of origin after war, or individuals incorporated from territories that were not part of modern Greece). If to this perspective we add the Greek foreigners who live in Greece, we see, first, that the Hellenic community does not correspond to the Greek community and, second, that paradoxically the latter is derived from the former (construction of the recent modern Greek State) (Nazloglou, K. 2014).

3.1 Greeks in Argentina

While the main Hellenic communities around the world are concentrated in neighboring regions of present-day Greece (Turkey, Balkans, and the Mediterranean) and North America (Constantinou, 1985), these communities can also be found in Australia or in Bahía Blanca in south central Argentina (Torrecilla, 2014).

	Argentina	World
Greeks	231	5 Million
Bahía Blanca (1914 census)	33,012	

Figure 3: Greek migration to Argentina
 (Source: Own elaboration based on statistical data from the census).

In the case of Argentina, although migrations were a transcendental element in forming the modern population in the country (at the beginning of the 20th century), Greeks were a minority with respect to individuals of other origins such as Spaniards, Italians, Russians, French, Germans, and Austro-Hungarians. In the Bahía Blanca census of 1914, there were 231 Greek migrants among the approximately 33,000 migrants of a population that did not reach 70,000. Although migrants in Bahía Blanca represented approximately half of the population, the Greek community was a minority; however, from the logic of Hellenism, that was not seen as a problem because of the global perspective of these Greeks.

The characteristic of this reduced community was the cohesion and link with the referent that united them from the sea. The majority of migrants worldwide –and Bahía Blanca is no exception– concentrate in port areas (Ingeniero White), not only because of functional reasons, to perform tasks related to the sea, but also because of symbolic reasons. The vicinity of the sea should be interpreted as an umbilical cord that unites everyone and from which they are not separated. That liquid element, far from separating, as in other identities, should be understood almost as a common uterus. The proximity to the sea makes migrants not only conceptually close to their place of origin but also equally part of the same marine reference. The community must then be understood as a marine nucleus within whose margins its community lives. The union is reflected both in a shared space (the sea) and, at the same time, in the form of an organise (decisions are made by each group autonomously). Based on these principles, it is not difficult to understand the great diversity of forms that Hellenism may take depending on the place and time.

In the case of Bahía Blanca, as it is also a very small community, the ability to adapt was considered a basic element for its survival. The majority of the migrants were men in search of work, but in some cases, women migrated (wives were fed up with waiting and worried that their husbands had rebuilt their lives and abandoned their commitments to their family of origin). Many other cases, single men were forced to marry Argentine women of other origins, without this posing any problem for the survival of the community. This same flexibility or conceptual permissiveness of identity is found in other aspects, such as those linked to language or religion, where there was no problem adapting to Spanish as a vehicular language or even to other religions (to be able to marry nonorthodox individuals).

3.2 A *thalassocracy*

The Hellenic world is defined as a *thalassocracy* and has forged a very rare reference of *thalassocentric* trajectory. Therefore, it is necessary to better define and explain these concepts for a population that

mostly takes the land as a reference for its sedentary life. The Hellenic case is precisely the opposite, and in the world, we find very few people who have established their reference as the sea.

The thalassocentric view differs from the continental view by a basic element. Just as the sea is unitary and unites peoples, continents separate and compartmentalise people. In this sense, since modern times, when terrestrial communication became predominant and a continental vision was imposed, we have lived in an increasingly globalised world that resembles a global village, much more so than the archaic thalassocentric concept of the Hellenic world. The maritime vision of the world is an open, multicultural view and, above all, dynamic and in constant movement, as occurs in our contemporary world. The political forms adapted to this fragile context gave rise to thalassocracies based on small administrative units with a great margin of autonomy that together exercised great strength, understood as a network. The Hellenic Thalassocracy implies a unitary view (the sea as a common element of reference) and diverse view (based on the autonomous units that compose it). Let us recall that from classical cosmology, the center of the Cyclades revolves around Delos, in a certain way, as if of a navel.

The cosmological vision of a people based on a dynamic and unitary referent such as the sea leads to a great capacity for temporal and spatial adaptation regarding the ability to understand change as part of the referent, unlike cosmologies based on terrestrial referents, which are understood from the perspective of stability. In this sense, the translation of this marine perspective on a contemporary global scale allows us to understand that the *Hellenes* can be defined independently of the time and place they are and, consequently, that a *Hellene* from Bahía Blanca has the same referent as one from Chios, Athens or Constantinople.

The important factor regarding this reference point is the distance to the sea. In fact, many of the *Hellenes* who live around the world continue to be physically linked to the sea, living or working in activities linked to the sea, even if only symbolically (shipping or trade) or representative of the sea (for example, painting marine murals in restaurants). The proximity of meters to a few kilometers from the sea is one of the common elements of many *Hellenes* around the world. Where there is sea, there will always be *Hellenes*. Greeks in Argentina are no exception, mainly concentrating in port cities such as Buenos Aires, Berisso, Rosario, and Mar del Plata; in the case of Bahía Blanca, Greeks settled mainly in the port area of the city of Ingeniero White, where they both live and participate in activities (Ritacco, 1992). The proximity to the sea is, for many migrants, like being at home. From this perspective, *Hellenes* around the world cannot be considered a diaspora or migration but as part of Hellenism in the global village (Bustos & Tonello, 1997).

3.3 The anamorphosis of the sea

The trajectory of the liquid matter of the sea allows, on the one hand, the settlement of a nomadic identity based on a specific physical element (the sea), unlike other nomadic identities, such as the Gypsies or non-Zionist Jews, who have terrestrial origins. The marine referent adopts concepts of Christianity, i.e., a *transubstantiation* or rather *consubstantiation* of the referent. The trajectory of the referent of origin

can maintain its form, but the meaning is changed, or on the contrary, the form changes to maintain the meaning of origin.

The projection of the representation of the referent for the individual and collective migrant, from one place of origin to another, goes through a process of translation that resembles anamorphosis because the referent of origin, when projected in the new place, recreates a reality similar to the original but projected in a different way (Capellà, 2012). This process of referential trajectory by migrants is often associated with identities closely linked to a specific territory or ethnicity on which to base their referent. The change is understood as a loss or progressive dissolution of the referent. In the Argentine case, the majority of the German communities tried to recreate their place of origin in a new territory and were limited to maintaining customs, even at the risk of falling into a progressive imbalance with their own descendants. For example, there were discussions in the Southern Hemisphere on whether to keep the *Oktoberfest* festival in October (maintain tradition) or adapt it to beer production in the Southern Hemisphere, around March.

For the Greek community, as we have seen, there is a double interpretation; on the one hand, from the Greek perspective (*Ellados*), the logic of the aforementioned communities is followed, trying to transpose Greece into Argentina; however, this comes at a price. The descendants face dilemmas regarding remaining anchored in a simulated reference of Greek origin or adapting to Argentina with the consequent feeling of a loss of their Greek reference. However, and here is where the richness of the reference of study lies, if we focus on Hellenism, the collectivity does not generate any anamorphosis because the same marine reference is maintained, and therefore, life becomes dynamic and adaptable without feelings of loss first for migrants and then for their descendants. In the case of the Greek/Hellenic community, both feelings persist, generating, in some cases, certain confrontations within the same community as well as in the same members who confuse elements of both.

In this sense, it is important to recall the interview with Ricardo. He is the grandson of Greeks; his grandfather was a native of the island of Tenedos, and like many upon his arrival in Argentina, he married an Argentine woman, and they lived in the port of Ingeniero White near the sea. He fondly remembers a tradition that was “religiously” respected; every year, the whole family gathered to celebrate San Silverio. On the third Sunday of November in the Port of Ingeniero White, the procession of the Patron Saint of Fishermen was held; although the saint belongs to Christian Apostolic and Roman religions, the sea workers adopted him as a protector. The procession consists of walking the saint through the waters of the estuary and throwing a floral offering into the sea.

In our view, the Hellenic perspective not only provides a dynamic and adaptable response to any reality but also becomes a response to the identity dilemma on a universal scale that can be used for other communities. The Hellenic identity curiously has its strength in its universal and dynamic character, although it may seem much more fragile in appearance because it is much more adapted to the surrounding realities. The character of weakness has been perhaps one of the best qualities of

Hellenism because it has allowed it to coexist and adapt to the passage of time and places and has thus become the best form of survival by passing references that appeared at the time as much more robust but in the end were stagnant. Hellenism is a polyhedral reference perfectly adapted for current times, unlike the numerous modern national references, today totally overwhelmed and in processes of existential crises in the face of the challenges of multicultural societies in a global world. Even in that sense, Greek nationalism itself today suffers from that crisis and finds in Hellenism the best ally for its postmodern reinvention.

4. The representation of *οίκος* or fire

The Hellenic referent is reflected from the shores of the sea and from the fires around which its representatives live. Its references are fragile and, at the same time, strong like fire, a symbol of life, purity and renewal. The Greek *οίκος*, despite representing the house, should be understood more as the basic unit of life (*κώμη* or people) and the autonomous space from which stems the constitution and will to agree on a common reference point. It is from Hellenism that we can translate, as it was done in the past, the number of inhabitants not so much as a function of concrete houses but of fires.

In the *οίκος*, a living, dynamic reference is developed and adapted to each moment and need. It is a reference, therefore, that is not enclosed in tradition, although it also serves as a refuge but is reflected more in vitality more than in the forms it adopts, with *omogeneia* and *synoecism* being the basic elements for power and the (re)production of the trajectory. The Hellenic referent has no limits, nor is it defined, but flows like the sea in its diversity, humble but indomitable. Hellenic fire is found anywhere and at any time, in full view of all without the need to hide, despite the various persecutions and vicissitudes of history that Hellenes have suffered. It is a heroic fire without the need for ostentation and visible from the hearts of its members. Vitality and joy are the best modes of diffusion for the Hellenic referent and have an overwhelming ability to bring everyone together. The universality of a base referent generates universality and, by default, as we will see, an a-temporal and a-spatial community.

The house represents the basic unit for the epiphany of the Hellenic referent in general; in particular, however, it is the most important territorial element for the diaspora. The house is important on the one hand for its materiality and design but on the other hand for symbolically representing the referent both internally and externally. The house from the symbolic point of view is both a refuge for the referent and a reference point for the community.

4.1 The House

The importance of the house for the Greek community is such that it was the trigger for this article. In 2003, after months traveling through Argentina and being far from home, I was lucky enough to be invited to the home of a Greek migrant woman, unfortunately now deceased, originally from Kastoriá and living in Ingeniero White. In addition to her testimony and life story, which have been reflected in

numerous places in this article, such as the importance of the sea as a link to being at home, it is worth mentioning her home.

From the outside, the façade resembled the rest of the houses in this port area that were built at the beginning of the twentieth century and somewhat ramshackle, but when crossing the threshold, I was in the heart of the Mediterranean in an area of oceanic Argentina. Each piece of furniture and corner of the house was of her island of origin. We began a long conversation after she gave me coffee and a glass of homemade ouzo, in the tradition of hospitality. His life story was immediately intense and emotional, with a diaphanous sincerity that seemed more as if she were telling her life to her own family, despite knowing me for only a few moments. The testimony explained her arrival alone in Argentina in search of her husband, who had left years before and of whom she knew nothing (with a certain joke about the fear that he had already rebuilt his life with another woman), her first difficulties in communication, for example, going to shops, where she communicated with signs. Even in a neighborhood with many migrants from other origins, mainly from Eastern Europe, she mentioned that over time, among the women, they spoke a language that was a mixture of all their languages, incomprehensible to any Argentine but that served them wonderfully. The story reaffirmed the great capacity for adaptation and survival in the first years after migration, always positively and without any desire for a return the land they had left behind, even under very hard economic conditions.

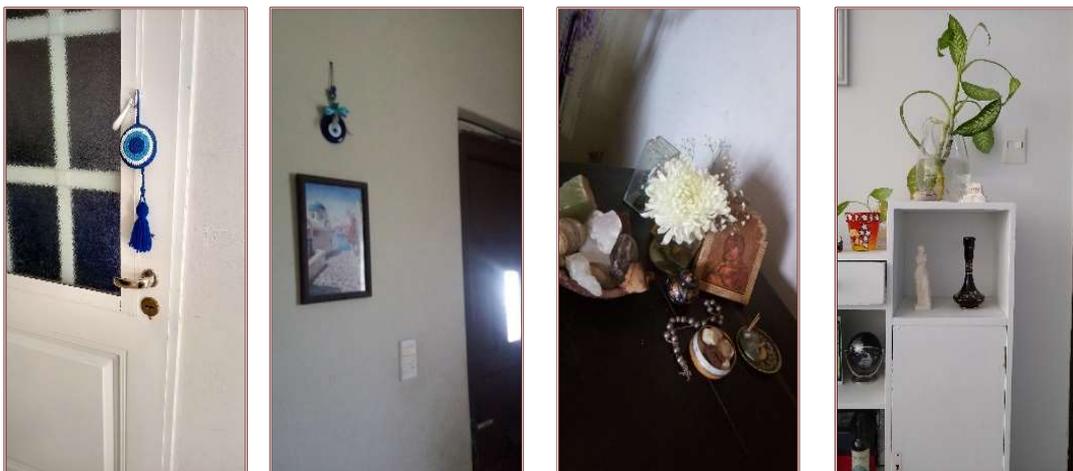


Figure 4: Interior of the Greek house in Bahía Blanca
(Source: Paula Michalijos in the home of an interviewee)

She showed old photos hanging on the walls of her family, especially the photos of her descendants in Argentina, with pride and without any hesitation when defining them as both Greek and Argentine, without any contradiction. The conversation continued, focusing on the weight of the Greek community in Bahía Blanca, recognizing that the community was younger than previous years due to descendants and commenting on the projects related to the establishment of an Orthodox Church (which years later would not be completed) with great enthusiasm.

Another example of the importance of the house for Greeks was provided by another interviewee, a young woman (43 years) who was a third-generation Argentine. When seeing her, it is very apparent that she is Greek based on her attire; there is no lack of Hellenic accessories, bracelets, pendants, and rings. Despite not having met her great-grandparents from *Kalimasia* (Chios), she has paintings with Greek landscapes and a small “altar” with stones and travel keepsakes, and the entrance of her house is framed with the traditional Santa Rita. Sometimes when she is alone, she takes the opportunity to dance, and she also gets together with her parents for Greek coffee (*ελληνικός καφές*) (every time an acquaintance travels to Greece, it is mandatory to offer them the coveted coffee), prepared in *briki* (*μπρίκι*: coffee pot) with Greek sweets. The language was lost over time; however, currently, this interviewee is taking classes in modern Greek at the university. Thus far, she is the only one in her family who was able to return to Greece, and even without finding her Greek relatives, she feels a very strong connection with that country.

4.2 The garden

As if we were transported, after this conversation and interaction inside the house, the owner took us to the back of the house, and to my amazement, the garden was a vision of Greece. Olive trees, rosemary, bougainvillea and a host of Mediterranean aromatic herbs were the highlights of this wonder. She then began the story of the origin of each of these plants and trees, brought from their home, reflecting their life story. Thus, for example, the vineyard was a gift from her grandparents when leaving, and the rosemary was from a neighbor. The garden was not only a recreation of a Hellenic landscape in the Pampas but also a garden of life based on the memories associated with each plant.

The same is observed in the garden of the Hellenic Association of Ingeniero White, where the descendants recreate a little piece of Greece through plants: Santa Rita, malvones and olive trees occupy a preferential place, with limestone in open areas, where dancing and musical performances occur on holidays.



Figure 5: Hellenic settings in Argentina

Source: http://www.hydrahomes.com/hydra_island_villa_rentals.aspx (Left) and Paula Michalijo, garden of the Hellenic Association of Ingeniero White (Right).

The house and its garden created a space and time outside of logic and rationality and allowed the construction of a reference based on emotion and sensations. The Hellenic referent was present in that

house on the edge of the sea, as though it was on any Greek island or another part of the world. Proof of a-temporality and a-spatiality is the impossibility of knowing, by looking at photos, whether the scene is Argentina or Greece. Interestingly, it does not matter why both recreate the same representation, where the symbol (icon) becomes more relevant than reality. In this simulation of typical postmodern times, time and space are blurred, and the geographical location becomes secondary. In addition, in the case of the Hellenic referent, unlike other collectives where the place of origin is the reference of the derived image in the place where they migrated, both are understood as equal referents of the same sea. In this sense, the house that we saw was as relevant to the Hellenic identity as the house of origin in Kastoriá. Kastoriá was in Ingeniero White, in the same way that Ingeniero White was in Kastoriá, and what is truly relevant from that perspective of the Hellenic reference is precisely the dynamism of sea voyages. Here, it is not about “Ulysses”, who travels to return home, but about “Alexander the Great”, who travels to broaden his horizon and define himself as a person and reference. This view was corroborated with the other interviews conducted.

This testimony reflects the thought implicit in the legend recalled by another of the participants interviewed about the transcendence of the sea for the Greek reference:

“Legend has it that at the time when people rode in sulki, in front of the Sea of Marmara, there was a mermaid who had a red handkerchief and said that the day she gave it to a human, she would become a human. A Greek fisherman was madly in love with her. He cheated on her and took the red scarf from her. The mermaid became a woman and married the fisherman; they lived for years on land and had three children, but over time, she began to miss the sea. One day, when the husband went fishing, she very sadly looked everywhere for the red scarf until she found it and was able to return to her beloved sea. After that, they met every day at sea” (according to one of the testimonies interviewed).

Another descendant, a second-generation Argentine, said that her grandfather arrived in Argentina in 1911 and that her grandmother arrived in 1913. They came only for a few years, but when the World War broke out, they decided to stay. After visiting several ports, they settled in Ingeniero White. There they met, married and created family; the children were baptised into the Orthodox religion because a priest from Buenos Aires regularly visited the “Hellenic.” Stella recalls that her grandfather was a great swimmer and said that under the sea, there was another world; on weekends, they went to the port to watch him swim, like a “boat.” Pilaf was never lacking in his father’s house, and Greek was spoken.

Within that logic, what is relevant for the referents themselves is not so much to surround themselves only with their own (who can also be bad people) but to know others who contribute to and enrich their lives, as Alexander did. Thus, it is not surprising that a woman interviewed was proud of her children in Argentina for adapting and for their Argentinianess, in the same way that she was also happy with how Hellenism contributed to their lives. The referent is based on interaction, understood as dynamism, light and fire.

From this testimony, we can empirically demonstrate the richness of the Hellenic referent as well as its universal character that is reaffirmed with a variety of testimonies from other parts of the world, such as the family of the first author. For example, a half great-aunt, of a common great-grandmother but of a different great-grandfather of *Houanzis* Greek origin in Marseille, made me part of her own family, despite not having a blood bond nor sharing customs, language, or religion. For them, we were and will always be part of their Hellenic family from Marseille, forgetting even their origin because the very origin of the city is as Hellenic as being from Kalymnos; they are always at home (Calapodis, 2014). This was perhaps one of the events that jointly inspired the idea for this article with Paula Michalijos.

5. Nomads of the Sea

The nomadic vision of the Hellenic referent, largely marginalised from the supposed solidarity of modern nation-state referents, which forced the very invention of the Greek national referent, becomes, on the contrary, in the current postmodern world, an example almost to be followed, owing to its global and universal character (Sarlo, 1994).

Hellenism, despite its little relevance in the current international political scene, is one of the few current global tribes (Bruneau, 2001), only comparable to referents of enormous demographic and/or political dimensions, such as the Chinese (Han), Indians, and in certain aspects Jews. All these referents have a great internal complexity: first, because of the diversity of identity references, i.e., ethnic, territorial, religious and linguistic; second, because of its dimension and millennial historical evolution; and third, because of having established a differentiation with respect to not only a dual referent (being or not being part of) but also with nuances among citizens (for example, between the Chinese of the National Republic of China and the Chinese from abroad - with nuances for those who return and for those who are descendants of Chinese - and even within China, e.g. distinctions between the Han with respect to other peoples in the country).

Those who are considered global tribes (Bruneau, 2001) are better adapted in a contemporary global world, as evidenced by the dynamism of their diasporas around the world. Hellenism is the most flexible and plural because it is not limited to a specific element (territory, ethnicity or religion), nor does it adhere to a sedentary vision because its reference is based on the sea.

In this sense, Hellenic referents share with the Chinese and Indians the plurality of referential identifiers, but they are differentiated by their nomadic character. The comparison with Jewish referents is similar in many aspects, both by the plurality of identifiers and by a nomadic origin, although it differs by its disconnection from the ethnic referent, which is very relevant for the Jewish case. In that case, the religious and linguistic identifiers and, to a lesser extent, territory are more difficult to dissociate from each other, especially ethnic identifiers.

In summary, the Hellenic reference is the most functional and practical in a global, open and dynamic world, with great capacity for survival owing to adaptability. Its marine origin, however, allows us to liken it to other cases, for example the Polynesians and Vikings, for whom the ethnic aspect remained very relevant; however, for Hellenism, this aspect could not be prioritised because diversity guaranteed the survival of their referent. This explains in a way the success and diffusion of the latter and the stagnation of the former, despite using the sea as a common element of diffusion. In summary, the Hellenic referent is a compendium of the best logical combination of elements to build an effective and far-reaching identity, regardless of time and space.

5.1 The polyhedral referent

The referent of Hellenism is multifaceted because of its territorial, ethnic, religious and cultural base, without being limited to any one in particular; rather, it has been the fruit of adaptation and survival to the vicissitudes of the history of the Greek people. Its nomadic origin centered on the sea, without forgetting pastoral aspects, making it an excellent reference for its dissemination.

The Hellenic referent is unifying because of its polyhedral characteristics. Its universal character, centered on the sea, and its varied identifications make it a referent that is difficult to abandon because there will always be an identifier with which to link and evolve throughout life, expanding different facets of the same referent, from its most territorial aspect to linguistic and religious aspects. The sense of community makes it an attractive and friendly reference, with great potential to influence individuals with other references. The coexistence of diverse referents is allowed, as long as no attempt is made to interfere with the Hellenic referent. In this way, a common result is becoming part of the community, not so much by one's own decision but by the decision of others in the Hellenic group (corroborated from interviewees in Bahía Blanca). Newcomers will experience the maelstrom of the Hellenic referent but will be able to adopt without problems. Interactions can also occur from within the open reference to the outside, not the other way around. Thus, interference from other references that affect the identity of Hellenism (ethnic, territorial, religious, and cultural) will be understood as an attack and excluded. This provides context for the current reaction of the Greek population regarding the recent migrations labeled as xenophobic.

These situations are framed more in the context of modern Greek nationalism (Elladism) and not so much from the perspective of Hellenism, although the role of Hellenism has also been commented on. The efficiency of the referent is guaranteed because Hellenism averts being consumed by other external referents. This particularity, in our opinion, is due to history and the numerous situations in which the Hellenic referent had to survive under the imposition of other political referents (Egyptian, Assyrian, Persian, Roman, Ottoman, Turkish, Russian., Italian, German and British empires, for example). The forms of rejection are consequently not so much toward the other but rather understood as rejection of non-self-recognition, from other references.

5.2 Global Hellenism?

Currently, the role of Hellenism is, in a certain way, at a crossroads. While on the one hand we have said that it is one of the most solid references, due to its dynamic and polyhedral roots very suitable for contemporary postmodern society, the construction of modern Greek nationalism (Elladism) represents, on the other hand, its greatest danger. It is interesting to see how the modern fruit of Hellenism has become a form of reductionism or homogenise of its rich referents, thus exacerbating the greatest defects of the modern model of collective referencing.

In our view, it is necessary to reopen a process of re-identification of the Hellenic referent, as was done in the past to build modern Greek nationalism, to rediscover its more universal and plural character. This effort is requested of the Greek people, although the benefit would be for all and particularly for Europe and the West in a broader sense. The revitalise of the Hellenic referent based on the freedom of the universal marine referent (territorial or marine), the plurality of referential identifiers (ethnic, religious, and cultural) and above all constructed from the axis of a democratic commitment to decision-making make it a necessity in the shadow of other identities that are much more exclusive. In that sense, the value of Hellenism is brought closer to the values defended in the Enlightenment by the universal French culture, although with an even greater margin, by not adhering to a specific language or territory. In addition, in the Hellenic case, the long tradition and history throughout the centuries provide valuable experience regarding the ability to face any circumstances, not only favorable but, especially, adverse.

Hellenism is a key reference not only for the future of Europe and the West but also at the universal level; it is invisible everywhere and is manifested nowhere. The referent of Hellenism is almost an anti-referent, given that it can manifest itself in the most diverse ways and because it is not defined, it circulates through time and space like a journey. The referent of Hellenism is well defined in the metaphor of Ulysses and Alexander the Great, whose life reference was his journey. The reference of Hellenism is providing freedom to an individual to create a life journey without imposition by anyone. The strength of this reference and its acceptance in the community has survived the passage of time because it is easy to carry and because it is the best ally in times of misfortune. For example, Ulysses himself could, when facing the Cyclops Polyphemus, define himself as “nobody” because he had clear certainty of who he was and thus was able to save himself and not be devoured, thanks to his ingenuity. Hellenism in this sense, far from being outdated, is presented as a solid response to the great contemporary challenges and as the best argument against all forms of imposition and denial of itself and of the other.

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