Parochialism in Perth: Aspects of regionalism amongst Western Australia’s Castellorizian community

(Final)

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Founded in 1912, the Castellorizian Association of Western Australia was the first Greek regional fraternity established anywhere in Australia. In the celebratory atmosphere of its centenary year, Perth’s Castellorizian population had the opportunity for a more critical and introspective examination of its community role. This paper seeks to outline aspects of that role and contribution to the Western Australian Greek community, past and present, while noting that in undertaking that role, Castellorizians were often dismissive of other Greeks and have sometimes excluded them from the local community’s mythology. This attitude has impacted on community politics, relationships and development. While such parochialism is not unique to Castellorizians or Western Australia, did Perth’s isolation, Castellorizian numerical dominance and assimilation accentuate this trend and to what effect?

The town-site of Castellorizo and its harbour, May 2011 (Courtesy: J. Yiannakis)
My intention in this paper is to outline aspects of the Castellorizian role and contribution to Perth's Greek community, noting that in undertaking that role Castellorizians have been somewhat dismissive of other Greeks and often excluded them from the local community’s mythology. As a result, regional distinctiveness (some might say elitism) has impacted at various levels on the unity of Western Australia’s Greek fraternity. This indifferent attitude to others is not unique to Castellorizians or Western Australia but, in this instance, is a consequence of having had numerical and political primacy for many decades. Such parochialism has caused annoyance, and in some cases resentment, towards Castellorizians from other Greeks in Western Australia. Castellorizo is Greece's eastern-most possession. It is a small hilly and rock covered island some six kilometres long and three kilometres wide, being 125 kilometres from the next major island, Rhodes, but only two kilometres from the Turkish coast. The island is favoured with a small port around which the bulk of its population live(d). By the late nineteenth century, while still under Ottoman occupation, the population was somewhere between 9,000 and 14,000, almost entirely Greek.

Many of the Greeks attracted to Western Australia (WA) came directly from their homeland or via the Eastern States, lured, during the 1890s, by the gold discoveries on the Yilgarn. A significant proportion of them were Ithacans, though local folklore does not readily acknowledge this presence. Many of them went East or returned to Greece after the 1916 Anti-Greek Race Riots (see R. Appleyard and J. N. Yiannakis, Greek Pioneers in WA, 2002).

It was, however, the early Castellorizian settlers and those who immediately followed who would shape and dominate Greek Community politics, patronage and

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1 Two recent examples of such attitudes are: a) On the same day as the OXI celebrations for 2012, the Castellorizian Association, to the dismay of many Greeks, including some Castellorizians, held its AGM. b) When in December 2012, the peak Greek association in Western Australia, the Hellenic Community of WA, called a special meeting inviting association presidents and representatives to a meet to discuss saving the Greek consulate in Perth eighteen people attended, but there was no Castellorizian representative.
power-broking. Such large numbers of them began arriving in WA between 1917 and 1919 that the Federal Cabinet of Prime Minister William Morris Hughes called a halt in Greek migration to Australia, unless the intending migrant had a close relative residing here. However, since “chain migration” relies on a network of friends and relatives, the impact of Hughes’ policy on Castellorizian migration to Western Australia was insignificant.

The stranglehold Castellorizians came to have over the Greek community of Perth manifested itself in a variety of ways; one of which was their manipulation of community folklore and history. It is typical that, until recently, many of Perth’s Greek population assumed that nearly all of the Greeks in Western Australia (particularly those within the metropolitan area), prior to World War II were Castellorizians. The presence of non-Castellorizians in Perth before the 1920s was almost unthinkable. Evidence clearly proves this assumption wrong.

It was also accepted that the first Greek in the state was a Castellorizian — Arthur Auguste or Athanasios Augoustis. Auguste stepped ashore at Broome sometime in 1890 or 1891 from Egypt. He spent a short while there before moving onto South Australia and then returned to the West in 1896. He soon sponsored his two cousins, the Manolas brothers, who followed him half way around the globe. This action began a classic process of chain migration from Castellorizo to Western Australia. Other Castellorizians soon ventured from Europe and North Africa to Australia: brothers, cousins, wives, friends and eventually entire families made the journey across the

Arthur Auguste and his family in their “Sunday best” outside his Barrack Street oyster saloon (Courtesy: Eve Mirmikidis)

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2 NAA, Greeks from Castellorizo; Admission to Commonwealth 1917–1919, Acc No A1/1File No19/5153, Memo 8/2969, 28 May 1918.

3 Ibid., Letters 16 July 1918 to 24 February 1919 (inclusive), providing reports of Castellorizian numbers arriving. Though numbers fluctuated, arrivals continued to be significant.

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world. The process which Auguste had initiated continued until well after World War II, by which time the island of Castellorizo had been depopulated.4

The claim that Auguste was an important individual is seconded by the account just given. However, the reality is that this is the story of the arrival of the first Castellorizian, not the first Greek. Greek sailors aboard British or French vessels visiting Australia possibly remained behind quite early in the colonial period. But evidence of this has been obscured as Castellorizians have been able to gain much out of “having been here first”. When Auguste died in 1932, a newspaper obituary made reference to his early arrival in this state. Hence this element of community folklore goes back in origin at least eight decades. So great has Castellorizian dominance and the mystique of their achievements been that, until recently, their claim to have arrived first has never seriously been questioned. Yet, the archives show that there may have been a Greek family in the Swan River Colony as early as 1830, and that at least three Greeks did “jump ship” at Albany as early as 1870. A group of sailors from the vessel Callixene failed to return to the ship in April of that year. Three of these men were Greeks. Antonio Fossilo (Phasoulas) is the only one whose life can be traced and documented with certainty after this incident.5

By claiming to have been the “pioneer” Greek settlers of this state, Castellorizians have been able to perpetuate myths about their achievements, particularly about

4 Castellorizians did not just leave for Western Australia. They migrated in large numbers to other parts of Greece, to the United States and Brazil. Castellorizians also settled in other Australian towns and cities, but Perth had the largest Australian concentration of Castellorizians until the 1940s.

5 For further information regarding early arrivals to WA see R. T. Appleyard and J. N. Yiannakis, Greek Pioneers in Western Australia, Nedlands, 2002.
how they single-handedly created the infrastructure of Perth’s Greek community. Justification of their actions is also possible because they were the “first” and had no examples to follow. In part, this is a valid claim and they certainly did transplant a fragment of their society to Western Australia (WA) from which they proceeded to construct a new life, but to overlook the presence and contributions of other Greeks in WA is negligence.\(^6\)

It was in the 1980s when research into migrant communities around Australia intensified that deeper academic exploration into WA’s Greek community began to question local mythologies and deconstruct the community’s past. Nation-wide work by Alexakis and Janiszewski, Jupp, Tsounis, Appleyard and even Tamis sought to better understand the migrant experience and the evolution of Greek communities. In the process, complex internal divisions and rivalries based on time of departure, place of origin, livelihood, class and political experience were realised. Even within a single regional fraternity there existed tensions. Castellorizian pre-eminence and parochialism had, however, remained strong. Publicly at least a united front was regularly portrayed, making it easier for Castellorizians to be dismissive of other Greeks.

The large number of Castellorizians in this state does not alone explain their dominance. Even after the 1960s when they were no longer the undisputed largest numerical regional group, their political and financial influence remained considerable. Decisions made, organisations established and networks formed particularly during the second and third decades of the twentieth century, laid the basis for Castellorizian control of community affairs. Subsequent generations of Castellorizians would build upon these foundations so as to develop community networks and organisations requiring Castellorizian support or sponsorship. Inter-marriage between individuals from families that wielded power and had position within the Greek community was evident from before the 1930s. Such marriages were a means by which community networks, influence and power base could be expanded and reinforced.

In 1911 there was an attempt to institute a Greek Orthodox Community in Perth. The initial endeavour failed. So, the following year, some of the individuals present at the abortive 1911 meeting, decided to institute a regional fraternity. A pan-Hellenic body was not yet possible, so an association whose members shared greater “common ground” was the next logical step. The Castellorizian Brotherhood, as it was then called, came into being during the second half of 1912 and was the first Greek regional fraternity formed in Australia, and the second ethnic association established in WA. The Brotherhood’s original executive was comprised of nine men; significantly a number of them were related.\(^7\) In Western Australia, the next regional fraternity

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\(^6\) Notable non-Castellorizian include John Doscas, Father Germanos Heliou (Illiou), Alexander Fokas and Theo Mathewdakis, who all made major contributions to the local Greek community and the state pre-1939.

\(^7\) A separate meeting held during October 1912 was reported in The West Australian. This gathering was held at the Bohemian Hall in the city where over one hundred Greek men attended. The meeting was called in response to the first Balkan War and to protest the actions of Turkey against Greece.
to be instituted was during 1930 with the Greek-Macedonian Alexander the Great Association.

With its membership restricted to Castellorizians, the Brotherhood was certainly not a pan-Hellenic organisation. Being able to impose such restrictions reflected the numerical dominance of islanders in the state's Greek population. However, the association did strive to handle the affairs of the Greek population of Perth and Fremantle in a pan-Hellenic fashion; that is, exhibiting public and private concern for all Greeks. Assistance to newcomers was given, usually at a cost, by members of the emerging small business class like Arthur Auguste, who allowed many recently arrived migrants to remain in the basement of his new premises, an oyster saloon in Barrack Street opened in 1915, until they had established themselves. The Castellorizian Brotherhood also organised Greek educational and religious facilities, at various city locations such as the Hibernian Hall in Murray Street, or, more often, the Assembly Hall in Pier Street. In 1915, the Brotherhood helped open the first afternoon “Greek School” in Perth, which Father Germanos Illiou, the newly arrived priest, took over. It also began the task of raising money for the construction of a church.

These measures and the establishment of an organised body gave Castellorizians a distinct advantage over other Greeks in Western Australia. Particular Castellorizians now were able to offer their services and those of their fraternity to the newcomer. The power-base and patronage network which thus developed assisted some individuals financially and politically, while allowing Castellorizian dominance over community affairs to expand.

Because Castellorizians then took the initiative in organising the construction of a church, and would continue to be the chief sponsors of such a project through the Hellenic Community of Western Australia, their control over local Greek affairs was reinforced. The Greek Orthodox Church, which was such a powerful symbol of “Greekness”, especially among overseas Greeks, was linked in Perth to Castellorizian determination and efforts.

Patronage of the church of Saints Constantine and Helene would be so dominated by Castellorizians and older more established families that, until recently, non-Castellorizian Greek newcomers to the church were referred to by the Castellorizian establishment as *xenoi* (or foreigners). The fact that it was possible for the Hellenic Community of WA to name the church after the patron saints of Castellorizo is a

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A committee was formed, chaired by M. Papaganestras, calling for volunteers to fight in the war. The name Papaganestras is unknown to today’s Greek community. He arranged for a telegram to be sent to Athens informing the government of volunteers ready to leave WA to fight for Greece. This meeting may have been prompted by the formation of the Castellorizian Brotherhood or, more likely, may have helped prompt the Brotherhood's creation. Either way, the events unfolding in Europe between Greece and Turkey seem to have stimulated the formation of the Castellorizian Association. “Meeting of Perth Greeks”, *The West Australian*, 21 October 1912, p. 7.

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In January 1919, the Brotherhood was incorporated with state government authorities and was registered as the Castellorizian Association of Western Australia.
telling reflection on their political, economic and numerical supremacy in Western Australia before the Second World War. Such an arrangement had been insisted upon by the Castellorizian Association when it agreed to donate the land it had purchased in 1922 for a church to the broader pan-Hellenic, non-regional based, Hellenic Community of WA.

During the late 1920s, when the church construction project was undertaken, the Castellorizian intake to Western Australia slowed. More Greeks from Lesbos, Ithaca, Smyrna, the Peloponnesian and particularly Macedonia were venturing across the seas. These settlers were important as they further accentuated the growing diversity developing among Perth’s Greek population. However, the numerical supremacy of Castellorizians in the metropolitan area was never seriously challenged in these years.

Castellorizians therefore retained their influence and control over community affairs. An example of this sway is Castellorizian dominance of the Hellenic Community of Western Australia. When this organisation was established in 1923, elections were held for an executive to administer its functioning. Seven of the twelve members chosen, including the President, Secretary and Treasurer, were Castellorizians. Castellorizians dominated the executive and membership of the Hellenic Community for many years ensuring that, on the surface at least, Perth’s Greek community was united in its objectives.

By the time the Peloponnesian Angelo Ayeropoulos (known as Silverton) became President of the Hellenic Community in 1941, the basis for community development
and division had been laid. Even though Silverton was not a Castellorizian, he needed islander support to gain office. His committee was dominated by Castellorizians who continued to maintain the status quo, despite the new arrivals of the mid to late 1930s.

Following the Second World War and the Labor government’s scheme to entice more migrants to Australia, the established Castellorizian vanguard believed itself to be under threat. The early-mid 1950s saw the arrival of many Greek immigrants to Western Australia. Census data reveal that, between 1947 and 1961, the number of “persons born in Greece” rose in WA from 1,933 to 4,088. These newcomers, who were to include the last significant intake from Castellorizo, soon realised that they were not necessarily welcome in community affairs. Their experiences and attitudes were different from those of the Castellorizians who had been here for years. Shelling of the island in 1943 had resulted in the entire population being evacuated. On their return to Castellorizo, possessions and property had been destroyed. Eventually a significant percentage of them made their way to Australia. Here many of them were quick to realise that their compatriots, though sympathetic, had life experiences and expectations different from their own.

The government assistance that some of the new arrivals received, little as it was, was also resented by the “pioneers” who had to deal on their own with the intense
xenophobia of the local Anglo-Australian population. Furthermore, the young migrants found it difficult, for a while at least, to be accepted by Australia-born youth. Assimilation had created different behaviour patterns and interests among the locally born Greeks, and communication problems existed. These differences divided the local Greek community and for a time weakened Castellorizian solidarity.9

The large number of Greek arrivals throughout the 1950s and 1960s also reduced Castellorizian numerical dominance. Greek-Macedonians, Mytilinians, Greek-Egyptians, Greeks from the Peloponnese and from numerous islands were now in a position to begin organising themselves on a larger scale. Regional fraternities proliferated to cater for the diverse origins of Perth's Greeks. This in turn lessened the need for the Hellenic Community and hence an avenue of Castellorizian control.

During 1951 some of the more recently arrived migrant joined with those who came to Western Australia in the very late 1930s, to establish the Hellenic Progressive Association of Athena. This organisation especially aimed to attract Greek migrant (male) youth. Newsletters, dances, plays and finally sporting teams were to be the means by which this association would help Greek youth to mix and socialise. Some of the persons instrumental in founding this association were Castellorizians.

Over time their influence would dwindle and other Greeks would come to control the destiny of this organisation. But, prior to 1989, the most serious breach and challenge to community harmony would occur not with this Association, but over the problem of whether or not to open a second Greek Orthodox church.

By the mid-1950s Perth's Greek community had grown to such an extent that a number of individuals believed that another church was warranted. Such a move was not welcomed by the leadership of the Hellenic Community of Western Australia, despite the individuals pushing for a second Orthodox Church having expressed the view that the new church would also “belong” to the Hellenic Community. Fearing the growth of a powerful rival, leaders of the Hellenic Community, predominantly Castellorizians, refused to budge. This caused growing resentment towards the old guard and personality clashes developed between various Castellorizian figures. As a result, those wishing for a second church acted on their own initiative and took with them some members of the parish of Saints Constantine and Helene and the former local priest.

The new group set about establishing their own community and organising their own church. The new committee purchased an Anglican church, Saint Paul’s, on the corner of Carr and Charles Street (less than 4 km from the already existing church), and by 1958 had established the Greek Orthodox Community (Evangelismos) of Western Australia. The original Evangelismos committee was dominated by Castellorizians. However, the bulk of the executive has for many years been made up of non-Castellorizians. The church became associated more with post-war migrants,
especially non-Castellorizians, and migrants still in the process of securing an economic base. At the same time the church of Saints Constantine and Helene was identified with the older, more established Greek migrants, predominantly Castellorizians and their descendants.

The challenge from this second Greek Orthodox church, the existence of many regional fraternities and the re-location of Greek families away from Northbridge to the newer, outer suburbs of Perth took its toll on the Hellenic Community of Western Australia. Membership fell away and its leadership in Greek community affairs and politics faltered. Whether this was also due to dwindling Castellorizian interest and involvement in the affairs of the community, or a result of the newer Greek arrivals not willing or able to participate because of perceived obstacles and prejudices they encountered from Castellorizians upon their arrival is difficult to tell. Certainly many of the more recent Greek arrivals (Castellorizian or otherwise) were involved with Evangelismos and as the older Castellorizians withdrew from Hellenic Community activity or died, the gap became hard to breach.

The growing importance of non-Castellorizians within the community was made evident in 1962 when a Castellorizian stalwart, John Aris, was defeated for Presidency of the Hellenic Community by an Epirot Greek, Arthur Litis. This election result reflected the changing composition and mood of Perth's Greek community. During the mid to late 1960s the executive of the Evangelismos also illustrated the more diverse nature of Perth's Greek population. A Greek-Macedonian became President of this organisation from 1967–70.

At the Hellenic (Club) Association, a similar shift in power and personnel took place. A Mytilinian had gained control of the organisation in the late 1960s, changing its direction and operations. Political and personal animosities intensified during the 1970s and eventually the Club and the Castellorizian Association severed their long standing ties. The outcome of this split was the Castellorizian Association purchasing its own premises here in Mount Hawthorn, “Cazzie House”, and thereby securing its future (see Yiannakis, 2012).

In 1978, Australia-born Greeks, predominantly Castellorizians, entered the political fray, and catching the incumbent executive off guard, promised to save the Hellenic Community from financial and administrative peril. They were able to rekindle Castellorizian interest and voting power. Castellorizians, including those who were locally born, could still muster the numbers that would make or break community developments. Though their involvement appeared to be waning, many had remained financial members of the Hellenic Community, ensuring some control over community matters.

The emergence from the mid-1980s of newer associations, such as the Greek Parents and Citizens Association, and personalities, did alter the local Greek political

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10 However, since 2006, the priest of this church has been a Castellorizian. He is the second Castellorizian to serve as its rector.
and social landscape. The growth of the Floreat Athena Soccer Club had the same impact for a time. Success on the soccer field during the 1970s and 1980s resulted in an upsurge in membership for this club, which had developed from the Athena Association that was founded in 1951. With growing support, particularly from post-World War II Greek immigrants; the club became a stronger social fraternity and a vehicle for nationalist fervour.

As noted, Castellorizian numerical supremacy in Perth’s Greek community gradually diminished. Combined with this factor was the impact of assimilation which lessened the interest and commitment of third and fourth generation Australian-Castellorizians in former avenues of Castellorizian community dominance, for example the Castellorizian Association and the Hellenic Community. Indicative of this period of reduced Castellorizian participation and interest was the inability of the Castellorizian Association during 1993–2003 to easily find members prepared to serve on its committee.

The 1987 Castellorizian Association (75th Anniversary) Committee: Standing (left to right) A. Samiotis, M. Paul, P. Kontoolas, L. Tsolakis and P. Kanganas. Seated (Left to right) D. Kalaf, A. Lucas, N. Nicholas, A. Mistilis and K. Kikiros (Courtesy: N. Nicholas)

The September 1989 elections held for the Hellenic Community were a further sign of the times. The mainly Castellorizian committee, including the President and Vice-President, who had served on the executive for close to ten years decided not to stand for re-election. Those who nominated for their (and other) executive positions were nearly all non-Castellorizians. Furthermore, some of them were individuals who had been “thorns in the side” of the previous few committees of the Hellenic
Community, especially given their participation in the Greek Parents and Citizens Association. This body was made up of predominantly newer, non-Castellorizian settlers who had clashed with the executive of the Hellenic Community a number of times over such matters as the teaching of Greek. Additionally, some of these people found Castellorizians arrogant and assimilated, and openly said so. They tapped into an anti-Castellorizian sentiment that existed in Perth's Greek community.

For many Castellorizians the victory of the Greek Parents and Citizens Association faction signalled disaster and brought home the realisation of the dwindling Castellorizian role in Western Australia. The passing of older Castellorizians, exogamy and assimilation were taking their toll on Castellorizian participation in institutions they had helped to establish. No-one could be found to run for President in 1989 to challenge the "xenoi"; hence they “walked in and took over”. An obvious shift in where community power resided had taken place, even though the new President and some members of his committee belonged to the business world.11

While the new management committees of the Hellenic Community established support bases large enough to survive without Castellorizian support, Castellorizians could still muster political and numerical clout. Many of them championed a non-Castellorizian to tackle those who gained ascendancy in 1989 and he did so successfully for ten years, from 1995–2005.12

By 2005, a Castellorizian was back in charge of a Castellorizian dominated committee at the Hellenic Community of WA, but not at the Evangelismos Community. Here for approximately twelve years a Greek-Macedonian has been at the helm. Since 1923, however, of the fourteen Hellenic Community presidents, eight have been Castellorizian. More recently the Castellorizian Association experienced a rejuvenation of sorts and this renewal intensified as its hundredth anniversary approached.13

In 2012 the public face of Perth's Castellorizian fraternity, the Castellorizian Association of Western Australia, celebrated its centenary; a most significant achievement. During the course of a week in mid-May various events, including a two day conference, were held as part of these celebrations. I presented a paper not dissimilar to this one to which, understandably, some took exception. In a plenary session a comment

11 One thing, however, remained evident throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the twentieth century, Castellorizian financial support and blessing remained important for the success of many of the projects underway in Perth's broader Greek community.

12 There followed a period of bitter disputation in Perth's Greek community about the ownership of 10.6 hectares of land in the suburb of Dianella; and the establishment and control of a Greek day school on that property. The contest ended up in the Supreme Court and caused deep divisions within the local Greek community. These divisions ran across many non-mutually inclusive lines; including differences related to age and generation, birth place, "old guard" versus newcomer, party political affiliations, and Castellorizian versus non-Castellorizian (for further discussion about the dispute see John N. Yiannakis, Odysseus in the Golden West, Nedlands, 2009).

13 The public profile of Castellorizians was further enhanced by the significant and landmark appointment of Dr Ken Michael as Governor of Western Australia in 2005: The first non-Anglo-Celt to hold this post in this state.
was made about pioneering Castellorizians having come from a remote part of the
Greek world and then living in the most isolated capital city in the country and one
of the most isolated cities in the world possibly having accentuated their insularity
and regionalism, with the view that they didn't need other Greeks to maintain their
Hellenism. Additionally, the judgement was made that if “Cazzies” had been running
Greece in the 1980s and 1990s, the country wouldn’t be in the economic mire it cur-
rently finds itself. It seemed to be lost on the person making these remarks that they
reflected Castellorizian parochialism.

A predominantly Castellorizian population had toiled to create the necessary eth-
nic infrastructure to ensure that Greeks retained aspects of their cultural heritage in
Western Australia. However, their own pre-occupation with these past achievements,
their parochialism and subsequent alienation of other Greeks, along with the assimili-
lation process, took its toll, for a time, on Castellorizian involvement in community
affairs. While many key individuals in the Greek community remain Castellorizian,
the dependence of other Greeks on them has dwindled. New networks have been cre-
ated, new facilities and venues now exist, many without Castellorizian patronage. A
growing numbers of “other” Greeks question the Hellenism of locally born Castellori-
zians, even suggesting that they are becoming the xenoï in Perth’s Greek community.
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