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Mothers, memories and cultural imaginings

Georgina Tsolidis

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*Georgina Tsolidis**

MOTHERS, MEMORIES AND CULTURAL IMAGININGS

ABSTRACT

This paper is an exploration of the role of the maternal in the creation of diasporic Greekness. It is argued that women's labour is pivotal in the transferral and reconfiguration of culural identity, particularly as it is lived between generations and between nations. The paper is based on a study conducted with the daughters of Greek post-war immigrants to Australia and Canada. Women born in these countries and now living in Greece are also included in an effort to understand diaspora as transnational and constituted through two-way flows between countries of origin and destination. Interviews were conducted as a means of exploring how these women constituted «Greek». They were asked to explore their mothers' role in the constitution of their Greekness and how, in turn, their own mothering constituted Greekness for their children. A central problematic is the possibility of understanding diasporic maternity as potentially transformative. This is explored in relation to Greekness in Australia and Canada and its association with tradition. It is also explored in relation to «Englishness» in Greece and its progressive associations. The argument is made that the «new ethnicities» which are emblematic of the «new times» (Hall, 1996) are a product of women's labour in the private sphere. It is here that children are reared in ways which maintain difference which is a signpost for the cultural fluidity so necessary for successful citizenship in the era of globalization..

1. THE BACKGROUND

This paper is part of a larger project the aim of which is to identify and understand the role of the maternal in imagining and transmitting notions of Greekness within diasporic communities. Initially this involved explorations

* Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Monash University, Victoria, Australia.

with women living in Australia and Canada. However the project was also concerned with disrupting the traditional conceptualization of diasporic communities as «national outposts». Instead the intention was to consider diasporic identifications, and the role of the maternal in their creation, in relation to two-way transnational flows between countries such as Greece, Australia and Canada. In order to achieve this, overseas born Greek residents were also involved in the project.

This project centred on in-depth interviews with 30 women living in Melbourne, Toronto and Athens. These women's ages ranged between 25 and 45. A snowball technique was used to identify interviewees. In Melbourne and Toronto the interviewees were professionals, mostly born in these countries. A minority of these women were born in Greece and had migrated with their parents at a young age. The women interviewed in Athens had more diverse backgrounds. Many had experienced multiple migrations and the range of vocations with which they were involved was also more varied. Some of these women were professionals, some were not in paid employment at the time of the interview, some were in sales and service industry employment and some were involved in various types of business ventures. Most of all the women interviewed had children. These children varied in ages, the youngest a newborn and the eldest child in her early twenties. The group of interviewees also included women who were childless by choice or because of infertility. Most of the interviewees were married although some were single, engaged to be married, divorced or had been married more than once. Many were or had been married to Greeks, both Greece-born and born outside Greece. Others were in so-called mixed marriages, most commonly with English-speaking background Canadians or Australians.

The aim was to explore the role of the maternal in diasporic identification and this was done with reference to how these women were mothered as well as how they in turn were mothering their own children. For this reason, women were not precluded from involvement if they were not mothers themselves. In such instances they were asked to imagine their child-rearing priorities as well as to reflect on the role of their own mothers on their sense of self. The interviews were conducted in English although in many instances women used Greek words when they felt this was the easiest option. These were open-ended interviews that lasted between one and two hours in response to several very simple trigger questions including; how do you identify culturally? And what role did your mother play in this? A primary aim was to explore with these women, their definitions of Greek-

ness; the origins of their understandings about these; the link between such understandings and their mothers' role in their upbringing, with particular reference to migration experiences; and how these women imagined their children's identities in relation to their own sense of Greekness. For many women these interviews triggered great emotion as they recalled both negative and positive life experiences. Many commented that the interviews challenged them to consider in more depth taken for granted assumptions about issues including their ethnic identifications, relations with their mothers and aspirations for their children. Many of these women commented that this had been a challenge they had found productive.

THE MEANINGS WE CAN GIVE THE WORDS OF OTHERS

There is a major factor which has remained, up until now, unstated. I am, myself, a mother who is part of the Greek diaspora. In this context, not only do I need to pick my way through the murky epistemological terrain associated with the traditional location of the sociologist as interviewer, but also the implications of an assumed shared location with the interviewees. Debates about how we construct meaning from research have been complicated by the so-called postmodern turn (Smith, 1999). Within feminism these debates have been pronounced, particularly in relation to identity, experience and the researcher's authority to speak on behalf of others.

The authority to speak established through the epistemological relevance of experience has been challenged, including within feminism. Assumptions of a universalizing experience have made way for an emphasis on difference, to a great extent precipitated by the critique of such assumptions offered by minority women on the basis of their experiences of racism. This has been one prompt (prompting factor) for the problematic related to identity and difference. Within research concerned with social change, including feminist research, this plays out as a tension created by the seemingly contradictory aims of dismantling homogenized identities, rejecting positivist understandings of experience and the desire to maintain an understanding of experience given its relevance to praxis. For many feminists this impasse has been overcome through the theorization of experience as a collective enterprise which allows us to retell stories towards producing new meanings, a process mediated by struggle which challenges various forms of domination. As Stone-Mediatore comments;

> Such experiences are not transparent prior to language, for they contain contradictions and take shape in reaction to culturally given images and stories. Therefore, the narration of such experience is no mere reporting of spontaneous consciousness. On the contrary, it involves rethinking and rearticulating obscured, often painful memories, and forging connections between those memories and collective struggle (Stone-Mediatore, 2000: 119).

This is a process of remembering, reinterpreting and rearticulating experiences, not in the belief that these then become new truths but instead it is a means of bringing into scrutiny perspectives that are often obscured by the dominant perspective. In relation to diasporic maternity, the dominant perspective is multifaceted referring to patriarchy as it operates within, as well as outside families. The dominant perspective is also linked to those processes whereby cultures are essentialized and presented as:

> natural givens, entities that existed neatly distinct and separate in the world, entirely independent of our projects of distinguishing between them. This picture tends to erase the reality that the Aboundaries between Acultures are human constructs, underdetermined by existing variations in worldviews and ways of life; representations that are embedded in and deployed for a variety of political ends. (Narayan, 2000: 86).

The aim here is to open up for consideration some aspects of the collective experience of being part of the Greek diaspora through the insights of women who experience the materiality of this location regardless of the society in which they live. Here I argue that the everyday labour of women reiterates Greekness and that this effort is most commonly overlooked. Moreover I argue that in the context of a politics which attempts erasure of cultural difference this labour by women is particularly profound.

REITERATING DIASPORIC GREEKNESS

In his exploration of globalization in the context of postmodernism, Cohen (1997) provides a guarded attempt at a taxonomy of diasporas. He identifies a range of characteristics common to diasporas, not claiming that all of these features are shared by all diasporas. There are nine features as follows:

> dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically; (2) alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; (3) a collective memory and

> myth about the homeland; (4) an idealization of the supposed ancestral home; (5) a return movement; (6) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time; (7) a troubled relationship with host societies; (8) a sense of solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries; and (9) the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in tolerant host countries (Cohen, 1997: 180)

With reference to the Greek experience in Australia and Canada, many of these features have relevance. The notion of diaspora is dear to the Greek identity. The word itself has Greek origins derived from the verb *speiro* (to sow) and *dia* (over) (Cohen 1997). However, unlike the Jewish, Armenian or Palestinian diasporas, the Greeks are not associated with dispersal due to oppression. The diaspora is engrained in the Greek psyche to the extent that for some, it makes sense to talk of the number of Greeks living outside its shores almost as though these communities are outposts of Greece. Authors describe Greeks from Cyprus living in London, or the Greeks who left Egypt in 1952 to settle in Melbourne, or the Greeks who left Kastellorizo, went to Port Said and ended up in Sydney. The Greek presence within Australia has been particularly well documented. Greek men accused of piracy arriving on the First Fleet, Greek women who arrived on brideships after the second world war, Greeks who were born here to parents who fled the junta, or parents who left a remote village to make a better life for their children. The first demographically significant community was established during the Australian Gold Rushes and now people identifying as Greek live in all parts of Australia. They may work in factories or on the land, run successful law firms, represent constituencies in parliaments or represent Australia in overseas tennis tournaments. They may have established business empires through oyster or pearl farming, run restaurants, experienced little or great social mobility. Many have intermarried; with indigenous Australians, with those who have ancestral links with Ireland, England or Italy (Anthias, 1992; Gilchrist, 1993; Murphy, 1993; Hawthorne, 1988; Price, 1975; Alexakis and Janiszewski, 1989; Kapardis and Tamis, 1988).

Despite the fact that diasporic Greekness fractures into a myriad of experiences and interpretations there persists an understanding within diasporic Greek communities that this difference is bound by similarity. This is an assumed Greekness in places far from Greece which relies on a common identification with the Greek nation, its language, religion and heritage (Papageorgopoulos, 1981; Hellenic Forum Inc., 1993). This representation is strengthened by figures which indicate relatively slow rates

of out-marriage and language loss (Clyne, 1991). The dynamics which reinforce this sense of Greekness are complex and interactive. The common and persistent representation of Greeks as perpetually Other in countries such as Australia and Canada regardless of length of residency, needs to be considered also.

Ethnicity, particularly as it is linked to nationalism, is suspect and in this context, all manner of illusion can be brought to a notion such as Greekness. Yet many in the diaspora who identify with Greekness resist the idea that the object of their identification is indeed chimera. The family is deeply implicated in processes whereby the illusion of Greekness is provided with materiality. In turn it is women who undertake great responsibility for family. The argument being made is that women's work in this context has both conservative and progressive possibilities. The progressive potential is linked to rearticulating this work as a transnational and collective experience which creates new forms of Greekness.

THE DIASPORIC FAMILY

Bottomley (1992) cautions us against interpreting the Greek family through a perspective which accepts the nuclear family as the norm. She argues the inappropriateness of models in which neat divisions can be made between the public and private spheres in relation to the family, which in Greece functions as a cornerstone within both business and politics. Bottomley argues that in Greece the family «...is a kind of corporate enterprise for which everyone, even a small child, bears some responsibility...» (p. 114). Such understandings of the family, founded on the way it functions in Greece, provide a backdrop for how it functions within the diaspora. In the age of globalization, family, like most other things, is lived at a transnational level. We now need to consider the family as it is lived between nations, cultures and generations and in this way recognize the dynamism and fluidity which exists within and between cultures and generations and how these inform each other through the family.

Brah distinguishes between diaspora as a theoretical tool and as a referent to the historical experiences of diasporic communities. In relation to its analytical capabilities she draws on the Foucauldian notion of genealogy to argue that diaspora captures a range of power relations within and between communities embedded within discourses, institutions and practices that are historically contingent. She argues that journeying is critical to diasporas but that the end point of this journeying, paradoxically,

is settling somewhere else. Diaspora for Brah captures the various narratives of journeying and the link between these produced by economic, political and cultural specificities. Such diverse narratives are transformed into one by individual and collective memory and re-memory. In this way, Brah argues that:

> Y. the identity of the diasporic imagined community is far from fixed or pre-given. It is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively (Brah, 1996: 183).

Brah stresses that these stories of journeying are told through modalities such as race, gender, generation and class. Because of this she cautions us to consider the power relations that shape the narratives which shape diasporic «we-s». These power relations, she argues, are more complex than the simple binaries which assume a single, overarching Other.

Brah also suggests that while there is a longing for home implicit in diaspora this is distinct from a desire for a homeland. In this context, home is an imagined, desired place even if it may be possible to return to it as a geographic location. Home is also the place of residence. In this way Brah argues for diaspora as «*Ymulti-locationality* within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries» (Brah, 1996: 197, original emphasis) rather than rootlessness or exiled communities longing for a homeland.

With most relevance to the issues under consideration here, Brah distinguishes between diaspora and diaspora space. The latter is the place where the genealogies of journeying combine with those of staying and where the boundaries between the diasporean and native become intertwined and blurred. Brah distinguishes this position from undifferentiated relativism because it takes account of:

> The similarities and differences across the different axes of differentiation B class, racism, gender, sexuality, and so on B articulate and disarticulate in the diaspora space, marking as well as being marked by the complex web of power (Brah, 1996: 209).

Brah uses the terms «diasporean» and «native» to differentiate between assumed inclusion and exclusion. However, she stresses that nativist discourses can be used to denote both inferiority and superiority. She exemplifies this by describing the use of «native» in the colonies relative to its use in the UK. In the former it illustrated inferiority, whilst in the latter it denotes the superiority of British natives relative to colonial natives who may be «in» Britain but not «of» Britain. Brah is careful also to distinguish

these notions of «native» from understandings of indigeneity utilised by subaltern groups such as First Nation Canadians or indigenous Australians.

Following Brah, I would like to construct the Greek family as a diaspora space. Within the family, differences between the native and the diasporean become blurred and intertwined. In the case of the Greek family, this is the case whether its members are living in Greece, Canada or Australia. In each of these contexts diasporeans and natives are brought together because of migration, re-migration, inter/marriage, place of birth, processes of assimilation or resistances to these processes. Definitions of diasporean and native are mediated through power relations responsive to factors such as gender, class, generation and sexuality. Most importantly within the Greek family as diaspora space, various narratives of journeying as well as real and metaphoric notions of home produce inclusion and exclusion constructed in relation to authenticity.

For the women interviewed for this project, residing in Canada, Australia and Greece, their journeying, both real and metaphoric, produced narratives of Greekness which assumed the existence of an authentic, almost essential version of its form. Their explorations of this essential Greekness and their assessment of how they measured up to it, is critical to this project. So too, is the role of the maternal as they experienced it and as they produce it with their own children.

NAMING IDENTITIES

All but one of the women interviewed incorporated «Greek» in their self-attributions. Commonly, interviewees referred to themselves in hyphenated terms such as Greek-Australian or Canadian-Greek. Some of these women chose to identify as Canadian of Greek background or Greek living in Australia. This was also the case for the women who lived in Greece. The term Greek-Greek was used to identify those who had lived all their life in Greece. The order of the words took on great significance as did their choice to foreground one label over another. These choices were made in response to context and circumstance.

> Maria: If somebody asked me, what are you , I'd say Greek-American. I won't say Greek because I don't feel I'm totally Greek. And I don't say American because I don't feel I'm really American-American, you know, and I say Greek-American, and the reaction is, this is what irritates me, people say, no, you're Greek. Why am I Greek? I am Greek. My background is Greek but my country is

> America. I love America. This is my country, I was brought up there. You know, I came here (Greece) twenty-two years old... I think what plays a major role, is where you grew up, I don't know.

Maria provides a typical example of the ambivalence behind the construction of these labels. As well she illustrates that these are labels responsive to context. This is also illustrated by the comments of Kathy who described how she used different labels in different places.

> Kathy: As a Greek-Canadian Well, it's hard to know what that means except that my Greek roots show through very often. I feel in many ways that I'm sort of totally assimilated I guess you would, you know, I mean, my education has been here and certainly all of my work experience. But certainly some core values and some ways of thinking and doing are very much flavoured by my Greek heritage and, of course, my parents are a certain embodiment of those values. So I guess if someone were to ask me, now if I'm abroad, and somebody says, what are you, I would say Canadian, but within Canada, I would say Greek-Canadian.

The one interviewee who did not use Greek in her self-attribution was also responding to context. At the time of the interview this woman was in her mid -forties. She was born in the USA and had undertaken university study in Greece where she met her Australian husband. They married and she migrated to Australia. Elizabeth visited Greece regularly as her parents had returned to live there after retiring in the USA. She was fluent in Greek and was undertaking research on Greeks. She had reared her three children bilingually and maintained some Greek customs and religious observances. Nonetheless she identified as simply American. She described her reluctance to take on «Greek» as part of her self-attribution, partly in relation to the significance of American citizenship. She argued that in America people were raised as Americans and she felt that this was more inclusive than the Australian experience where migrants were rarely considered as fully Australian. Additionally she argued that in Australia, it was her Americanness which was emphasised not her Greekness. She argued that Australians, including Greek-Australians, focused on her American accent and attributes they associated with Americans, often in disparaging ways. She illustrated this with reference to her so-called loudness. By her own estimation this prompted an almost defensive response which emphasised the American above the Greek. Noteworthy was the absence of any reference to Australia in her self-identification, this despite having lived in the country for almost twenty years at the time of the interview.

Many of these women described metaphorical or actual journeying, when prompted to explain the reasoning behind the label they had created for their cultural identification. For many, these journeys included periods of recognition of their difference from mainstream Australian and Canadian society, rebellion against the Greek aspects of their backgrounds and then some form of resolution. These processes of recognition, rebellion and resolution were complex. Moreover, each woman's biography with its attendant specificities, prompted different issues and different responses along the way. In some cases, vivid experiences of racism framed this journey; in others, the journey was framed by the definitions of Greekness within which the family functioned; in yet others, the journey was framed by the experiences of living between two countries. Many of the women identified their teenage years with the rebellious stage in their journeying. Being a teenager and rebelling against parents is not unusual, however in the diaspora this rebellion implicates cultural identity. The following interview excerpt illustrates this and the belief many interviewees shared, that in Canada and Australia, an «anti-Greek stage» is something akin to a right of passage.

> Betty: When I was 12 or 13 and you're in the mall and your mum's yacking away in Greek and you're going, mum say it in English, say it in English. I remember doing that with her, mum say it in English and she'd go no I won't say it in English B but that was a phase that I was going through. I think every kid goes through that phase I think you'd be really, you'd be fooling yourself if you didn't say you went through that phase.

Here Betty identifies language as a symbolic cross-cultural issue. The use of Greek by her mother takes on huge significance because of place and age. Betty and her mother are in a public space and further to this, the mall is a space of significance to her teenage peers. Her discomfort with the use of Greek illustrates the ambivalence many ethnic minority young people feel about displaying their private selves in public, particularly with reference to ethnic minority status and their mainstream peers. The mother's insistence on the use of Greek, on the other hand, arguably illustrates a constitution of identity as a form of defiance in a situation where her daughter constructs her Greekness as a potential embarrassment. Betty describes her actions as a phase and does not reflect on the social practices which constructed such seemingly irreconcilable tensions between her public and private selves.

This sense of inevitable rebellion is also described in the following quotation. In this instance the issue relates to self-attribution. Irene recalls a conversation with her father thus:

> Irene: Well my father always used to say I was Greek Canadian. I always used to rebel and say no, I'm Canadian Greek because I was born in Canada Dad - my birth certificate says Canadian, my heritage is Greek. But I think, regardless of which one you put first, you're always both. So we'd joke around about it, he'd say you're Greek Canadian, I'd say I'm Canadian Greek. This was when I was 12 and rebellious. He'd go, the only people here Canadian, are the natives.

Irene is older than Betty and she migrated to Toronto from Greece the year before she entered secondary schooling. She identifies rebellion with a similar age to Betty and like her, associates it with an estrangement from her parents' conception of Greekness. In the following extract, Stella who was less than one year old when her parents migrated to Australia from Egypt describes similar feelings. She married a Greek visitor to Australia and accompanied him on his return to Greece. At the time of the interview she had been living in Greece for eighteen years.

> Stella: I was one of the first migrant children in school and I was the only dark haired olive skinned child in the school... And I was the «wog» and I was outcast.... As I grew up, I didn't want to look Greek. I didn't want to sound Greek. I didn't want to speak Greek. And I didn't. I didn't want to go to Greek school and I didn't. I wanted to be Australian. All my friends were Australians.

In Australia the term «wog» is commonly used as a derogatory description for immigrants, usually those from southern Europe. Most recently it has been taken up by the children of such immigrants, particularly through humour, as a means of constituting an anti-racist identity. Stella arrived in Australia in the mid-1950s when xenophobia and assimilation predominated and this term took on great symbolic value in relation to being Other. Like Betty, Stella describes a history of wishing her Greekness away and in addition to Greek language and culture, she identifies her appearance as constituting a problem.

The argument has been made here that the hyphenated labels which most of the interviewees adopted to describe themselves reflected a lot of thought and were the culmination of a journey which included conflict and resolution. These labels were worn like badges with pride, as testimony to a great deal of hard work, including self-reflection. Much has been made of the

hyphenated identifications of those who inhabit the cultural borderlands (Anzaldua, 1987) and these women offered beguilingly straightforward descriptions of such identities. The following extract exemplifies this.

> Sophia: I always saw myself, even in Australia, it was doubled, you know, it was always double. In Australia, I saw myself as more Greek than Australian and here, when I came to Greece, I saw myself more Australian than Greek.

For Sophia it is not a matter of being Greek or Australian in response to context. She is always «doubled». In this way, it is the emphasis in identity which shifts in response to context, rather than the identity itself. How do we understand this feeling of always being double? There was no sense given by these women, but for this period of teenage rebellion, that this doubleness was a form of cultural substitution. Instead it was described as an accumulation of various lived experiences, which provided them with a rich cultural repertoire. The following section of the paper describes some of the reflections on the meanings behind the labels these women used and the practices they associated with these meanings.

DEFINING PRACTICES

As stated, all but one of the interviewees included «Greek» in their self-attribution when asked about their cultural identification by the interviewer. What did they mean by «Greek»? This was posed as a follow-up question. Most often this question prompted a list of cultural attributes which included Greek language, Greek Orthodox religion and Greek conceptions of family. This list also included the rituals associated with the preparation and consumption of food, feast days and traditions related to such things as the naming of children. One or two women added music to this list. This defining list was created spontaneously and with little difficulty. Moreover there was little variation between the women on this issue, regardless of place of birth and residency. In this way, what it meant to be Greek seemed a well-rehearsed conception. The most interesting discussion occurred, however, when women reflected on their own Greekness in relation to this list. These women did not live the list they identified with being Greek, yet considered themselves some form of Greek.

The only attribute on the list that all these women lived, was Greek language. It was usual for the women living in Australia and Canada to insist that their children attend after hours Greek school, as they had done when

they were children themselves. This was so despite the relatively negative feelings they associated with their own experience of this schooling. It was a case of doing something, which may not be immediately enjoyable, for the long-term good of knowing your mother tongue. And there was no questioning of the merits of mother-tongue maintenance. With regard to the other cultural attributes on the list, there was variation. Nonetheless, most of these women no longer attended church except for Easter, weddings and Christenings. Most did not visit members of their extended families. Most did not prepare Greek food or celebrate events such as name days in accordance with tradition. Most of the Canadian and Australian residents did not get involved with the organized Greek communities there. And the overseas born Greek residents stated that they socialized with families, especially women, who had lived or were born outside Greece in preference to the «Greek-Greeks».

All interviewees felt various levels of unease about their choices. Many described the pressure they had experienced to conform to a way of life they chose to reject. They nominated their mothers as the source of this pressure. For the women who lived in Greece, this pressure to conform had more diverse sources including what interviewees described as a general social pressure. More specifically their husbands and their husbands' families were described as exerting pressure on them to conform to customary practice. In this context it is noteworthy, that many of the women interviewed in Athens were married to men they described as «Greek-Greeks», that is, they had not lived elsewhere.

Some interviewees explained their decision to omit many traditions from their ever day lives as a result of their inability to fit these into busy work schedules, rather than a rejection of their worth. This was particularly true of those living in Australia and Canada. Many of these women also commented that they had grown tired of living against the grain of mainstream society.

A minority of these women chose to adopt life styles that included most of the attributes on the list referred to above. In most cases, these were women with very young children and women whose own mothers were involved in their lives. They explained how their mothers undertook many of these cultural responsibilities and did so for their daughters and grandchildren as well. For the women who had lost their mothers, their absence was often described in relation to the loss of a range of these cultural attributes as well as in relation to the loss of the person.

MATERNAL GREEKNESS

As has been described above, how these women accepted, rejected and lived the list of attributes they established as defining Greekness varied, yet they understood themselves as some form of Greek nevertheless. This contradiction prompted much reflection on the part of many interviewees. Many contemplated the difference between what establishes Greekness in the abstract, relative to what established their own sense of Greekness. Most often in this context, a «Greek mentality» was nominated as critical. Most commonly, particular understandings of the family were identified as pivotal to this mentality.

One woman, who described herself as a Greek living in Australia, explored the significance of her Greek sense of family. She described how little emphasis was given to family life in mainstream Australian society by comparison, particularly through work-based institutional practice. She indicated that in this context, the priority she gave to the family sharing a meal together every day had become a burden. She was commonly asked to stay back at work for meetings or her colleagues would conduct informal gatherings related to work, over drinks after hours. She described how the assumption her colleagues shared that family members were individuals with separate timetables, who ate at different times from each other, created a personal dilemma for her. She felt that the only way she could be thoroughly integrated at her work place, particularly in relation to the micro-politics, was at the expense of her family life. Her decision to prioritize her family, she argued, left her with little chance of promotion, despite undertaking duties in a responsible and competent manner. While this is a common dilemma for women, this interviewee suggested that being Greek in Australia added a cultural component to this dilemma. According to her, not only was the Greek interpretation of family different to that of the mainstream, she argued that her priorities were often represented in contrast to those of other women, as illustrative of a backwardness within the Greek community, particularly with regard to female emancipation.

It was in relation to family life, that many women began to compare their mothers' role within the family and their own. They described their mothers' role in making Greek culture a lived experience through the teaching of language and religious observance. They also described the role of their mothers in maintaining family ties through visiting relatives, organizing family celebrations and maintaining contact in other ways. Their mothers' labour was also critical in maintaining and transferring these

understandings between generations. Many of these women's mothers were active carergivers, taking great responsibility within extended families for grandchildren, repeating their own experiences of childrearing.

By describing the impact of their mothers' role on their own processes of identification, these women were struggling to evaluate the worth of what their mothers had bequeathed them in relation to the contexts in which they now functioned. This included the most obvious cultural components such as language, religion and customs. However, their mothers' role extended beyond these factors to the «Greek mentality» which they elaborated as a way of understanding and feeling. This sense of feeling comfortable, natural and normal happened through the family and home, and most obviously through women's labour there. This sense of naturalness and femaleness is conveyed by Terry when she describes the «stuff» of her Greekness. She states:

> Terry: This is stuff that has been passed down from my mother, my grandmother, my great-grandmother, it's just part of me, I pass it on to my children.

This is a feeling of Greekness as naturalized, as women's work and as passed down by women through the generations as their contribution to the constitution of ethnic identity. This is the everyday of women's work in the home and in the family. Within feminism the everyday is an important means of establishing a set of understandings which are situated within the private realm, constructed, as it is, in contradistinction to the public realm, which is established as masculine. This ambivalence in relation to the public sphere makes women's perspective particularly poignant (Lewis, 1993). The significance of this public/private division on how we understand patriarchy has occupied much feminist thought (Pateman, 1992). In this project, I have been particularly interested to consider this dichotomy as it is interrupted by complex relations brought about by transnational cultural fluidity. I have argued elsewhere (Tsolidis, 2002) that relations between minorities and majorities are complicated by, and in turn complicate, relations between the private and public spheres as these are gendered and that this is particularly so for women from minorities living in countries such as Canada and Australia. If we understand the Greek family as a diaspora space inhabited by strangers and natives the micro-dynamics that operate within families reflect and respond to a complex set of uneven power relations related to gender, generation and ethnicity. These are played out internal to the family but in response to the context which is influenced by new cultural understandings produced through globalization.

The work with these women indicated that taken for granted assumptions about mother/daughter or father/daughter relations were disrupted within the family understood as diaspora space. For example, many of the women interviewed, expounded an ambivalence in relation to their mothers= role in their cultural upbringing. Often it was the father who was identified as open-minded, optimistic, educated and more enlightened. In some ways this contradicts the representation of Greek men, often expressed in countries such as Australia, as particularly patriarchal (Tsolidis, 2001). Mothers were often described in their policing role within the family and the community, sometimes with empathy, sometimes not. The following interview extracts illustrate this point of view.

> Well, my mother who's very, yes I would say she was obsessed with what I would consider surface things.... So she spent a lot of her time worrying about these things, you know, how people saw her and how people, I guess you would call it public opinion but, you know, I mean, she was such a good person herself.... she didn't want to give anyone the opportunity to bad mouth any of us, so you had to sort of beY. beyond reproach, I guess that's the word....But, you know, like, she just worried about a lot of little things and that's why she's gone, I think, just an awful lot of little inconsequential things ate her up.

This comment was made by Kathy, who is referred to earlier in the paper. She described her own mother with sympathy and great affection. Yet she was critical of the policing role her mother played in her own life. In one instance, she described how her mother had been profoundly embarrassed when the groceries were delivered in the late morning and Kathy was still in her sleepwear. Her mother felt that this would be taken as illustrative of her daughter's indolence and that this would lower the regard with which Kathy and the family was be held within the wider community. Kathy described this incident in a light-hearted manner. This was not always the case with many interviewees describing their mothers as cautious and over-protective and in many cases as a benchmark for the type of mother these women did not want to become with their own children. Sophia is illustrative of this attitude. She was born in Australia and had been educated there before migrating to Greece. She was a psychologist with a practice in Athens where she lived with her «Greek-Greek» husband. She was in her early forties at the time of the interview. She was nursing her first child, a two month old baby boy after years of rejecting the idea of being a mother. She describes her mother in the following extract:

Sophia: Like she had two different selves - one would be the compliant daughter/sister/and whatever, and with my father she would be more herself and more demanding, and sort of, she wouldn't sit back as much. It's as if she had two different roles. And she was also compliant with my grandparents. My father's, her in-laws. So, basically, it was the family that she, she probably learnt from her mother that, you know, you don't talk back to your in-laws, then you, sort of, become a good daughter-in-law, things like that, so that would be her main characteristic, I would describe my mum.

G: And has that been influential on you?

Sophia: Yeah. I like to think we are totally different. Totally opposite. I'm very, very absolute, like I'm, I'm things that I want, whether it's with my parents or my in-laws or my husband... You know, my mum did this so I'm going to do the direct opposite... Church, no. I don't go, like, as often as mum. I do Easter and things like that. What else? The relatives thing, going to relatives and things, I don't do that, either. I just pick the people I want to, I like or friends or that, and yeah, basically, I, I consciously I do the opposite that my mum would say to these things. I hate anything that I have to be compliant or I have to do.

However, many of these women provided a context for their mother's attitudes. This was a supplementary understanding that the hardships of migration were somehow implicated in their mothers' attitudes and actions. In the following extract Jenny describes her mother. Jenny lived in Athens at the time of the interview and was in her late thirties. She was born in Greece and had migrated to Australia with her parents as a very young child. The family returned to Greece when Jenny was a teenager and she attended an English language school to complete her education. Her parents arranged her marriage to a seaman and after the birth of her second child the marriage broke down. Jenny described how her mother had counselled her against leaving her husband despite extreme circumstances which included violence against her and him bringing lovers back to the family home. Jenny described, with bitterness, a range of experiences she linked with her mother including her arranged marriage and the lack of support she was given to divorce and begin a new life. Despite this, her description of her mother is sensitive to the circumstances that made her the woman she was. Her mother had been widowed at a relatively young age and had taken sole responsibility for rearing her children through a number of migrations.

According to Jenny, her own mother was bitter about her life and how this had been over-determined by narrow understandings of what was appropriate for women. Jenny describes this in the following extract thus:

> Jenny: My mother's role? My mother was born in Ithaca. She was very good at school. She got into some teaching school here [Athens] at the time but it was, what, pre-war. She wasn't able to finish. She could have, you know, she was, she's a very intelligent, very domineering woman. She could have done wonders. If she was man, she could have been prime minister of Greece. She's that type of person. But somewhere she's bitter, that we, you know, things had, didn't turn out the way she had wanted. Things didn't turn out so well in Australia. She was disappointed in the end.

In the following extract, Helen provides an example of another mother/daughter relationship. Helen had lived in Canada and her father had been a priest. After his death at an early age, her mother migrated to Greece with Helen and her brother. Subsequently Helen married in Greece where her mother supported her enormously in the rearing of her two children. Her brother returned to Canada where he married and remained. Helen described the fact that the family lived apart in this way with great sorrow. She describes her mother as a woman who was strong and soft and who provided her with enormous support. It is noteworthy that Helen contrasts her own mother to «Greek mothers» in Athens who she describes as meddling. In this way she represents her mother is as not authentically Greek.

> Helen: My mother, I you know, she passed away a few years ago and I miss her and her role was to, she was a very devoted, loving, affectionate, very strong personality, even though she was very, let's say, she was very soft, you know. She was not, my father was the dominant person in the family. He died very young, of course, and my mother, she was, I don't know, she was always there for us. She was a wonderful person. She would never get involved, you know, like when I met my husband. You know, do you think you love him, you know? As long as you're sure and he's the person you want to be with you know, how here [Athens] like the Greek mothers are, they get very involved with in your personal life. Whether you get married or you want a divorce, the whole family gets involved, yeah. She was always there for me I miss her. I never, every second of the day I think of her. I cook something, I remember, you know. I make

coffee, I remember her because we used to have coffee together. I go somewhere, I remember her. Ah mum and I used to come here, you know.

Most of the women interviewed were themselves mothers. However, the ages of their children and the ages of the women when they had become mothers varied enormously, as did the circumstances surrounding the decision. For some, motherhood had never been contested, for others it was a decision taken after considerable ambivalence and relatively late in life. Some women were still making the decision and one of the women was coming to terms with her inability to have children. Between them, these women were raising their children in extended families, nuclear families and as single parents. Through their descriptions of their desires and enactments in relation to the maternal, these women provided insights into a range of issues associated with cultural reproduction, particularly given the centrality of family in their conceptions of Greekness. Noteworthy in this context was the link these women developed, or did not develop, between their children and their own mothers.

All of the interviewees aspired to raising their children as «doubled» in the sense used by Sophia, quoted above. For most of the women who lived in Melbourne and Toronto this involved speaking Greek and enrolling their children in Greek after hour schools to learn language and culture. All women presented this as a minimum requirement. In addition to this, some interviewees described taking their children to church, Greek community events such as dances, and involving them with traditions, particularly those involving extended family as important. Some of these women were able to take trips to Greece, which was also seen as a priority. The women who lived in Athens raised their children as «doubled» by assisting with their acquisition of English through speaking this at home, in addition to enrolling them in English language courses, which is common for most children there. Additionally these women set as a priority, taking their children on trips to Canada or Australia.

CULTURAL FLUIDITY

This interest in Greekness is premised on the understanding that cultural forms are responsive to circumstance and that at this particular moment communities like the Greeks, which have strong historic experiences of the diaspora, are relatively well placed to take advantage of the intersections between the local and the global. The assumption is that this process will

have significant cultural outcomes; new and creative understandings of Greekness which challenge static understandings of what it means to be Greek, Australian and Canadian. By interviewing Greek-identified women living in Australia and Canada, and some born in these countries now living in Greece, the intention has been to explore the role of the maternal in the production of diasporic identities as «irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures» (Hall, 1996). The aim is to go some way towards recognizing the private labour of women in processes of diasporisation. This is not intended as a celebration of women's work in and of itself. Instead it is an attempt to make the private public in the feminist sense of disrupting this dichotomy and also in the sense that collective experience spoken in this way, has political potential towards transforming oppressive practices. In this context, can we frame the maternal as cultural work at the cutting edge of the «new times» whereby the «new ethnicities» (Hall 1996) are being forged? And can we argue that because it is most often women's work it is at once pivotal and under-valued, situated as it is between the private and public spheres?

In describing their mothers, these women were also describing the contradiction which exists between the importance of the private sphere and the work entailed here for women, and the public sphere where this work receives little recognition and value. These women can be described as cultural workers who produce new cultural manifestations. The product of their work is not a replication of the old nor is it mimicry of the new. Instead, their work is responsible for the inextricably linked identities which define diasporas and which Sophia, quoted above, described as doubled. The argument here is that this work is positioned between spaces; between the private and the public, between the mainstream and the marginal and between the traditional and the transformative. These are all spaces which are oppressive but also empowering because they are «in-between» and because of this they create a cultural dynamic that is dialectical.

Inhabiting «in-between» spaces is more than ambivalence and non-belonging. It is also a space where inhabitants develop a particular type of power which grows out of having expertise with multiple ways of being. These multiple ways of being are not mutually exclusive but instead are articulated in response to particular place and time. It is in this sense that they can be constructed as transformative. In the context of globalization such fluid cultural identifications have great potential, particularly when recognized as functioning at a transnational level. This potential is intimated through the voices of the diasporic women who live in Greece. Unlike the

Greek-Australian and Greek-Canadian women these women are associated in Greece with English language and the ways of modern, industrialized nations. They are understood as sophisticated and as having facility with the culture many Greeks aspire to and associate with progress. Their children's biculturalism is encouraged and envied. For them there is no ambivalence regarding whether or not they are doing what is best for their children. This contrasts with the Greek-Australian and Greek-Canadian women whose attempts at bicultural child-rearing are associated with a harking back to the old and an anti-progressive tendency which has the potential to disadvantage their children. This construction of biculturalism in Canada and Australia is not surprising. These mothers are the daughters of post-war immigrants and their representations have been shaped by migration and the centre/periphery relations it involves. The public faces of post-war Australia and Canada are not readily associated with postmodern pastiche. Instead, the desired end point of immigration was assimilation and the imagined possibility of cultural sameness. In this way, this project which seeks to examine the role of the maternal in diasporic cultural identifications, is tied up with centre/periphery relations. Whilst the act of mothering is examined as contingent and responsive to time and place, I nonetheless construct these marginal women as powerful because in the context of postmodernism, diasporic cultures which assume the significance of difference and fluidity, are powerful cultures.

CONCLUSION

In this study women's collective experience of mothering in the diaspora indicates that they maintain cultural difference. This difference needs to be considered in the context of the family which is constructed here as diaspora space in the terms used by Brah. In such a space the distinction between the so-called native and diasporean becomes blurred. Here it has been argued that the family in Greece as much as in Canada and Australia exists as diaspora space and that it is critical to the establishment of «*...multi-locationality* within and across territorial, cultural and psychic boundaries...» (Brah, 1996:197, original emphasis). Bauman (2000) argues that in the postmodern era cultural fluidity is at a high premium. Here I have argued that it is the everyday labour of women which creates this cultural fluidity. I have also argued that because this labour is commonly considered women's work undertaken in the private sphere, it is rarely thought of as having transformative potential. This is particularly the case in countries such as

Australia and Canada, where this labour is further demeaned because it is seen as maintaining minority cultures commonly characterized as backward, particularly with reference to female emancipation. Instead the aim here has been to open up for consideration some aspects of the collective experience of being part of the Greek diaspora through the insights of women who experience the materiality of this location. It is an argument that their everyday experiences in kitchens, nurseries, schools and family homes defines cultural fluidity. This work, given its ambivalent location between the public and private realms, is most often ignored and yet remains a powerful way of interrogating global cultural imaginings through local cultural enactments. In this way it has the potential, also, to teach us about culture more generally.

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