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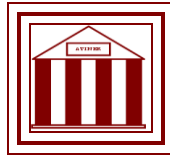# ATINER

ATINER's Conference Paper Series
SOC2013-0508

Towards a multi-layered construct of identity by the Greek Diaspora, an examination of the films of Nia Vardalos, including My Big Fat Greek Wedding (2002) and My Life in Ruins (2009).
Part 2

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Dr. Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute for Education and Research

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Abstract

The analysis of the two Vardalos films involves a multi-disciplinary approach through the social sciences. The analysis considers the themes explored through dialogue, such as the use of stereotypes, humour, role of the family as seen through the main character and narrator in these films. This is a window into seeing contemporary Greek diasporic culture as told through the migration experience, and its resonance with the second generation Greek diaspora. The impact of globalisation presents a modern force which conflicts with the struggle of the self and or of the group that pertains to a particular cultural membership that creates multiple-layered identities.

Keywords:

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Introduction

In the analysis of the two Vardalos films My Big Fat Greek Wedding (2002) henceforth MBFGW, and My Life in Ruins (2009) henceforth MLIR. We see the themes of minority culture/beauty/cultural resistance being re-asserted. This opens a window into multiple-layered constructions of identity. That are continually being re-defined through the irrepressible challenges of globalisation. Whether a minority Greek diaspora in Chicago (the formerly noted film) or as tourists visiting Greece (the latter), the interplay of stereotypical characters, the use of humour, 'kitsch' interwoven through the story-lines and plot reveal much of the daily struggle of migrants as minorities within the backdrop of a very different majority culture. This allows a portal into the construction of identity through a 'minorities' perspective using a multi-disciplinary approach through the social sciences.

Deconstructing Globalization

Within Social Identity theory (from Social Psychology through the research of theorists Tajfel and Turner,) a large influence on people's behaviour is attributed to the value in having an identity and having a sense of being in a group, which is distinct from other groups (positive group distinctiveness). The theory suggests that people distinguishing between 'in-group' and 'out-group' allows people to discover the value of their own group. This allows group members to gain positive value from membership of their group. Although this can provide a boost in positive esteem if we can make positive comparisons to other groups, this distinct identity we get from being in a group which is in contrast to other groups is valuable, in itself.

Social identity theory is thus concerned both with the psychological and sociological aspects of group behaviour.[1]

Put simply 'self-categorization' theory grew from Tajfel and Turner's work on social identity. The theory describes how people define themselves at a group level but also at an individual level through the use of 'in groups' and 'out groups'.[2]

It considers group and individual identities to be at different levels of self-categorization, and more distinct from each other than social identity theory does. For instance, individuals can have several different group identities (e.g. gender, occupation, or nationality) and also several different individual identities depending on context (e.g.issues of gender, work-culture). The concept here supports the self-identification with 'multiple-layered' identities

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[1]TAJFEL, H. E. (ed.) 1978. *Differentiation between social groups. ,* London:: Academic, TAJFEL, H. 1979. Individuals and groups in social psychology*. *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology,* 18**,** 183-190.

[2] TAJFEL, H., & TURNER, J. C. 1986. The social identity theory of intergroup behaviour. *In:* AUSTIN, S. W. W. G. (ed.) *Psychology of intergroup relations.* Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall.

and allows for 'wiggle-room'(my term) for the development of individual/collective identity, in and through such mechanisms. [1]

The salient point here is that identity whether individual or group is a dynamic process, it is more than the paradigm of a 'palimpsest' where one re-writes one's life over what has been written prior. Social Identity theory explains through comparison or possibly in opposition to forces that prefer conformity. Social identity theory supports the film MBFGW using the Portokalos family as representing an ethnic minority in Chicago, juxtaposing it as the 'in-group' by which the 'outsiders' are judged even if this means relegating the dominant culture represented by the Millers as the 'out-group'.

Toula (Φωτούλα) the main character and narrator from MBFGW chooses ultimately as an adult to define herself through this 'ethnic' Greek minority, in desperately wanting her family's approval regarding her marriage. Difference, now in the adult (from the former child of migrant background) is understood as positive-even exotic, not mainstream, not 'just like everybody else'.

It is the following definitive quote from Nia, that actually describes the processes of Identity, as having 'multiple layers' that also delineate the dual processes inherent in defining one's own place in the world (internally/self), whilst being defined (externally/group). What R. Braidotti calls 'being 'and 'becoming' using feminist theory.[2]

In the following quote the adult 'Toula' is able to now negotiate and choose her adult identity.

"My big fat Greek Wedding is every immigrant's story, . .αs an immigrant you first try to escape from your ethnicity to assimilate into Canadian culture and then you end up embracing it so hard because it is what defines you as a person." [3]

The filmic representation of 'ethnic minorities',
'Authentic' or 'Cultural-cringe' factor

It is this 'cultural-cringe factor', which is what I define as a non-authenticating factor (ie representing your subject through a protagonist who is not authentic, not believable in regards to the character one is trying to portray, especially in terms of the filmically-constructed 'ethnic' stereotype). Here no less, the portrayal of Greek/American migrant culture through the 'genre' of romantic comedy. In MBFGW we have a cultural grouping represented on film, through the use of their own authentically created, 'ethnically' modern Greek diasporic stereotypes. It often has the effect of this cultural-cringe/non-authenticating factor for ethnic minorities, who are sui generis the litmus test for authentication as an audience. There is some recognition, even from within a

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[1] R.SPEARS 2001. The interaction between the individual and the collective self: Self-categorization in context. *In:* M.B.BREWER, C. S. (ed.) *Individual self, relational self, and collective self: Partners, opponents or strangers?* Philadelphia, PA The Psychology Press.

[2] BRAIDOTTI, R. 2002. *Metamorphoses : towards a materialist theory of becoming,* Malden, Blackwell Publishers.

[3] HAMPSON, S. 2000. Nia's Big Fat Lucky Break When Tom Hanks called, Vardalos thought it was a friend's prank and told him to shut up. But he persisted, bought her autobiographical screenplay and cast her as leading lady in My Big Fat Greek Wedding. *The Globe and Mail*, 7 September.

comedy as authentically ie parading 'ethnic stereotypes', even if it's 'warts and all'.

It is therefore unthinkable to conceive that the protagonist of "Never on a Sunday" (1960 dir. Jules Dassin) to have been acted by a non-Greek female, let alone not, the late, mercourial actress/PASOK politician, Melina Mercouri or Sophia Loren's, Oscar award-winning performance in "Two Women". (1960 dir.Vittorio de Sica) Both representations are authentically portrayed, showing an intimate understanding of the subject matter by the actor.

Yet, we find in the film "Captain Corelli's Mandolin" set on the Greek island of Kefallonia (2001 dir. John Madden), Penelope Cruz as the lead-actress playing Pelagia, or the title role of "Eleni" (1985 dir. Peter Yates) played by Kate Nelligan, exemplifying this non-authenticating, 'cultural-cringe factor' operating in regard to these lead females performances, missing such authenticity of character for the audience. These latter mentioned actors seem to portray their characters from a distance, not performing from the inside-out and therefore not releasing in the Greek Diaspora, (and therefore other 'ethnic-minorities' who also wish to see representation) the authentic 'catharsis' that is craved in the Aristotelian sense. The ethnic minorities themselves are the adjudicators on this form of authenticity. Tzanelli supports the view that there is a dearth of representation, for actors portraying Greeks in the globalized First World, as compared for example to the Italian 'mafia genre'.[1]

It is not simply, only about an authentic portrayal of 'ethnicity' ie, a Greek background actor, playing a Greek. In many ways, Lainie Kazan, actor (unrelated to the Greek/American film director, Elias Kazan) steals the show in MBFGW, as the matriarchal Maria Portokalos, the ultimate example of 'soft-power'. Holding forbearance and the 'emotional glue'(my term) that connects the family together. Here, not being 'ethnically' Greek in reality, is not the issue. Convincingly, becoming the archetypical 'Greek Mama' ethnic stereotype is authentically conveyed through the disarming use of humorous one-liners:

> Maria: Toula, on my wedding night, my mother, she said to me,
> "Greek women, we may be lambs in the kitchen, but we are tigers
> in the bedroom!"

What the French describe as 'savoir faire', or as the globalised media now calls it, "the X-factor" is evident here. That certain yet elusive 'something', that authenticating element of excellence is missing or on another level or perhaps 'the cringe-factor', their accents don't quite 'cut it'. It may look and sound 'ethnic' to some populations, however again 'not the real deal' to the attuned eyes and ears. There is an inherent recognition of culture by minorities in seeing themselves being parodied, which actually touches a raw nerve of

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[1] TZANELLI, R. 2004. 'Europe'within and without Narratives of American cultural belonging in and through My Big Fat Greek Wedding (2002). *Comparative American Studies,* 2**,** 39-59. See p. 40.

authenticity in MBFGW. This also accounts for the universal popularity of this film.

The Role of Stereotypes in film

Challenging 'cultural hegemony' a la Gramsci

Stereotype can be a "dirty" word, however, W. Lippman's (1922) phrase, stereotypes create 'pictures in our heads' allows the characters in the films to freely say and do the 'politically-incorrect' and 'get away with it'. From MLIR:

Georgia (Nia Vardalos), the American Tour Guide, now working in Greece, asking if she can select a particular tour-group:

" Look, there they are the 'tipsy Australians', (whilst they drink beer from aluminium cans), the 'obnoxious' Americans, whilst the American tourist starts complaining : "It's called rip-off". . .'Miserable' marriages, 'the disgusted-with–men, but still-looking divorcees', stop. . . (an old couple almost being run over, in order to cross the road). . . and of course 'the o-l-d people', I don't see Mr. Funny, just always one annoying guy, who thinks he's the life of the party. . . Canadians, o-o-h polite Canadians."

However, we also recognise that in order to process information, we do categorise information, constantly. Whereas the cautionary saying 'you can't judge a book by its cover' may well be correct. However, in marketing terms it is the all important 'front-cover' that sells magazines and newspapers.

"The lack of regard for differences within a stereotyped group makes stereotypes into "over-generalizations," and as such they are always at least somewhat distorted. However, many stereotypes may have valid grounds and a "kernel of truth" to them." [1]

It is also noteworthy, that the use of 'kitsch' imagery, as in the ethnically Greek symbols used to demarcate the Portokalos household, MBFGW is significant. So that immediately, one is forced to make comparison, between their world and the 'outside'. The 'kitsch' imagery of the film helps place the Portokalos household in the 2 worlds in which they live, Greek world at home where "more is more" and contemporary American society for the remainder. Whether it is the Greek statues in the front yard, the Greek flag painted on the entire size of the garage-door or Aunt Voula's shell lamps. Here the stereotyped "Greek diaspora" finds its phenotypical symbolism through the visual accompaniment of "kitsch' that not only demarcates class and a representation of one's ethnicity, rather "as a general existential corrective, shoring up a sense of ontological insecurity in a world of myriad choices and high risks." [2]

"See, this is from Mykonos, (proudly showing-off her shell lamp shades), beautiful island. . .see that, where we from. . .you like'm I make'm."

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[1] SEITER, E. 1986. Stereotypes and the Media: A Re-evaluation. *Journal of Communication* [Online], 36. Available: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1986.tb01420.x/pdf. See p. 75

2 BINKLEY, S. 2000. Kitsch as a repetitive system. Journal of Material Culture, 5, 131-152. See p. 136.

The use of 'kitsch' provides an ever-present nostalgia. A yearning for the Greek homeland that was left behind, in order to reside in the New World, a reminder of things past, memories from another world. What I describe as a dialectical (in the classic philosophical sense) duality, people with a history left behind but ever present in memory and traditions. This is a crucial ingredient for the construction and maintenance of identity by the new-comers.

Yet in the Miller household, representing the white, Anglo-Saxon protestant (WASP) culture, the restrained 'less is more' dominates, along with the absence of kitsch/clutter.

Hence the use of stereotypical characters through-out the synchronous narrative, is an extraordinarily clever device, and is testimony to the fine crafting, in particular MBFGW. It allows the characters to freely speak in their colloquial (going between Greek and English) that frees them further from any perceived 'political correctness'. This also allows for honest expression when facing another culture-notably ethnocentrism. Gus (Kostas) Portokalos (played by actor Michael Constantine), as Toula's father analyses the Millers and the culture they represent after their first meeting at the Portokalos home:

"I try, you try, we all nice to them. You see it. . .and they look at us like we from the zoo. . . this no work, this no work Maria. They different people, so d-r-y, that family is like a piece of toast, no honey, no jam, just d-r-y. My daughter. . . my daughter is going to marry   I-a-n Miller, a «ξένo» (modern Greek : foreigner), a «ξένo» with a toast family."

These characterizations are allowed to express freely how they see life, ie. from a minority-group's perspective. The Portokalos family have attempted to welcome an era of inclusion-that both families can share regarding the pending marriage of their children and they have been disappointed. This has important consequences not only for authenticity and realism, also for canvassing a number of concepts. eg challenging English-speaking, cultural hegemony as seen through the Miller family and all that this American world represents when compared to the Greek-speaking minority population's perspective.

Both Toula and Ian navigate their way through such differing cultures. I disagree with Tzanelli. [1] Ian Miller is not 'the cinematic norm of the everyman' in MBFGW, he is the only son of lawyer, Rodney Miller, solidly middle-class and willingly submits in preparation for his full-immersion, adult baptism into the Greek Orthodox church. Prior to being married also in the same church in order to marry Toula:

" I'll do anything, whatever it takes, to get them (Toula's family) to accept me."

Whilst the stereotypes represented through both the Portokalos and the Miller families are free to debate political correctness, seeing each other through the lenses of each other's culture is enigmatic. The Greek diaspora in the US are appropriately seen as 'internal aliens' [2] by the dominant White, Anglo-Saxon

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[1] TZANELLI, R. 2004. 'Europe'within and without Narratives of American cultural belonging in and through My Big Fat Greek Wedding (2002). *Comparative American Studies,* 2**,** 39-59. See p.53

[2] Ibid. p. 39

Protestant (WASP) culture that originally colonized North America. So through assimilation attempted to incorporate the 'poor, . . . tired, huddled masses'. In the early twentieth century, given Greek migration to America, these migrants were historically categorised as 'dirty Greeks' and considered 'black' by the Ku Klux Klan, as portrayed in the documentary directed by Σ. Κούλογλου , «Βρωμοέλληνες». [1]

Yet with the Greek diaspora, even among these generations of migrants, here stereotyped as an example, through the Portokalos family - the question of who is assimilating with whom, crosses one's mind.

Or which culture would one prefer: the Millers or Portokalos?

In MBFGW we see the Greek diaspora minority re-claiming power and ascendancy from the hegemonic WASP culture, (that is embodied through the example of the Miller family and even now is being embodied in the relatively new political movement of the 'tea-party' political association in the U.S. It is envisioned by the adherents, that the 'white' population 'will not be the majority grouping . . . just another minority in America'. [2]

The use of stereotype here intentionally subverts such 'hegemony' and we see 'the under-dog ie. the Greek Diaspora as seen through the Portokalos family given a 'go'. The use of poignantly crafted, dialogue self-stereotype minorities in their own way. Here, we see the use of 'soft-power' as exemplified through Maria Portokalos when speaking with Toula as she devises a plan to persuade her husband to let their daughter attend College:

"Toula, I know what you want, how you say, have a spirit. . .you want to learn. . I know, you're from my side aaaagh,. . Let me tell you something Toula, the man is the head, but the woman is the neck. She turn the head, any way she wants."

The stereotypes also use what M. Billig describes through the discipline of anthropology, 'humour' to negotiate conflicts/tensions[3]. It can also have the added consequence of using 'gossip' keeping the community in check whether the Greek diaspora in Chicago in MBFGW or the Second-generation tour-guide in MLIR. Here Georgia, the former University Lecturer now turned Tour-Guide, in an outburst regarding the still broken elevator in an Athens hotel, criticizes 'the siesta' in Greece and posits this, as the reason Hellas lost its greatness over the centuries by way of a contrasting American Protestant work ethic perspective - 'the nap'.

All the while the audience sees that the construction of identity, through such characterizations is actually 'a work-in-progress' for everyone eg. including

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[1] ΚΟΎΛΟΓΛΟΥ, Σ. 2011. *Βρωμοέλληνες - Η.Π.Α. : "No rats, no Greeks, all American"* [Online]. YouTube. Available: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IE49kaB8wRQ&feature=related)accessed [Accessed 1st September 2012.
[2] ABC TV 2010. Tony Jones Interview with Christopher Hitchens screened 18/10/2011. *Lateline.* Australia: ABC TV, .
[3] BILLIG, M. 2005. *Laughter and ridicule: Towards a social critique of humour*, Sage Publications Ltd.

those of English background and how they respond to Nia Vardalos's "loud and even louder" Greeks.

'American Gothic' meets 'my Big Fat Greek' Diaspora
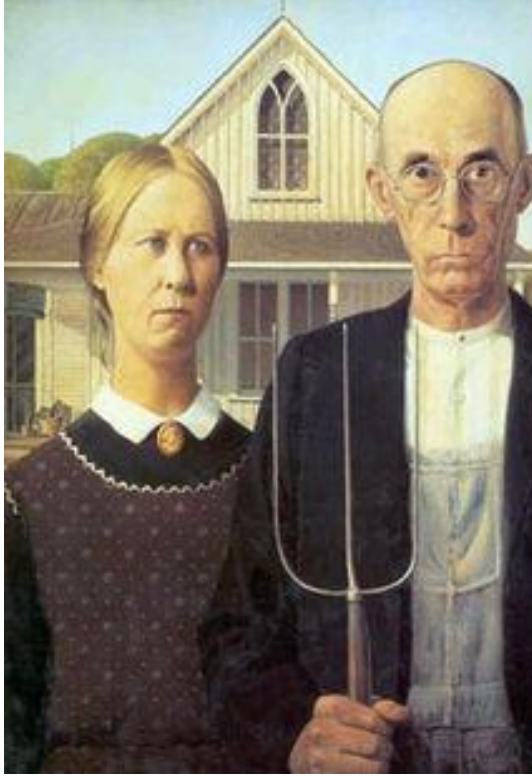
'American Gothic' painted by G. Wood, (1930)   Movie Poster (2002)

An examination of the characterization/dialogue gives valuable clues in terms of family values, hierarchy, family structure and to paraphrase Samuel P. Huntington's phrase the inevitable 'clash of civilisations' between the Miller and the Portokalos families. The painting, American Gothic, has been intentionally selected to visualise ethno-specific, cultural difference. From the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant perspective symbolizing austerity and restraint characterised by 'less is more' when compared to the 'more is more' Greeks.

The view of the 'Other' as seen by Gus, father of Toula and married to Maria harks back to the idea of 'barbaroi', that is the 'other' seen as 'barbarian' by definition those who are not Greek and do not speak Greek. This portrayal also supports much of the inter-generational conflict in Greek immigrant families. Where a 'core-value' of marrying someone from a different culture who is not Greek is frowned upon by the parental, first generation migrant, whereas more readily accepted by the offspring, the 2nd generation. [1]

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[1] VLAHOU, A. & CANADIANS, G. 1991. *Intergenerational conflict in Greek immigrant families*, McGill University.

Gus Portokalos: "Toula, there's two kinds of people: Greeks and everybody else who wish they were Greeks."

The following excerpt comes to embody this clash through the first meeting of the In-Laws, the Portokalos extended family and the visiting Miller nuclear family, namely Rodney (played by Bruce Gray) and Harriet (played by Fiona Reid), subsequently called 'Harry' by Aunt Voula, along with this newly interpreted incorrect name, printed on the Wedding invitations.

Previously Gus has gone ahead and broken the physical distance, at this first meeting of the In-Laws with a strong masculine embrace, that almost winds Rodney Miller, then enter Maria, Gus's wife:

Excerpt, MBFGW:

(Coming forward now, from behind the throng of relatives)

Maria: " Halloh, I'm Maria Portokalos and welcome, welcome to our home.

(Harriet Miller hands over her home-made cake, not saying a word, blocking any physical form of greeting by handing over her home-made cake.)

Maria :" Thank-you what is it ?"

Harriet :"It's a bundt"

Maria attempts to pronounce this new term "a b-u-n-d-t"

Harriet: Bundt

Maria: " Bonk " Bonk " Bonk

Harriet: Bundt

Maria: Bo-n-n-t

Harriet: "Bundt,(louder) bundt, ,(louder,)

She is cautioned by her husband Rodney Miller, with a "tch-tching" sound to stop her disapproval.

Then a relative from behind the Greek extended family throng, says in Greek to Maria:

«είναι κέκι μορή»,meaning "it is a cake, silly" (my translation)

Maria answers with relief :

Ooh, it's a cake (breathes hard).

I know. (Then giggles nervously.)

Maria: Thank-you, thank you, very, very much.

She later says to the relatives inside, not in front of the Millers:

"There's a hole in this cake" (noting her dissatisfaction with the gift.)

Later in the evening brings it out on to the main table with a flower in the middle of it, obviously dealing with the perplexing empty space, with a comment from one of the relatives:

"Yeah, Maria you fixed it".

This is an example of a gift exchange that is seen as somewhat perplexing by Maria Portokalos, here at the first meeting, a cross-cultural miscommunication is expressed through this example of good-will.

"Caplow argued, the majority of
gifts are given in order to ascertain and fortify relationships that are
deemed important but have not yet been stabilized." [1]

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[1] KOMTER, A. 2007. Gifts and social relations. *International Sociology,* 22**,** 93.See p. 99

Maria Portokalos diminishes esteem from Harriet's gift, because a 'hole in the middle' is literally seen as a missing part of the cake. Anyone who has tried to bake a 'bundt' knows the skill in being able to take it out of the oven without first burning the cake [the hole in the middle allows for even temperature baking], then there is an even higher level of difficulty in removing the round metal form from the cake, whilst allowing the cake to come out in one piece.

Through such a gift exchange, Komter's research from an anthropology /psychology perspective explains :

" Gift exchange is based on the mutual recognition by givers and recipients of each others' identity. . . for gifts reveal both the identity of the giver and his perception of the recipient's identity." [1]

Here then we see the thoughtfulness of making something by hand by Harriet Miller, in order to present to the wife/mother of the household, Maria Portokalos at their first meeting, yet it is considered somewhat deficient. Harriet Miller's particular gift is not well received by Maria. Here this Greek migrant identity, reveals itself as – 'more' is in fact 'more'. Therefore the anticipated emotional reaction, to overwhelm and impress the dominant female in the Portokalos household has spectacularly backfired with the 'bundt'. The identity of the giver of this gift (bundt), is therefore characterized by the Greeks here as being too restrained, miserly, as culturally represented in the painting American Gothic . Certainly not enough to impress this minority. This rejection by Maria, has the effect of asserting her dominance over Harriet Miller, in reaction to this gift. This is further supported by Maria having to "fix" the cake with a flower coming out of the middle of the cake in order to impress the assembled throng.

 Sociologically, what is certain, is that both women here represent the vehicle as "kinkeepers".[2] Part of their regular duties in the noting of dates eg. Saints name-days (Greek Orthodox calendar), or birthdays, anniversaries and therefore they have the social status of procuring appropriate gifts for such occasions. However, this has one added responsibility, it allows for the "social capital" and its investment to continue, with the bi-product of 'reciprocity' as described by Komter. It allows for this particular form of reciprocity, to be continued even when the gift-giving maybe asymetrical in the interpreted value or the scheme of things.

In the transactions of everyday life, it is the women, as represented through these two Vardalos films that lay the foundation for the transmission of such culture across the generations by giving it such due recognition. It is through such transactions and their inherent interpreted value that cultural meanings are conveyed. Whether they are reciprocated in the way each party would like it or not.

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[1] KOMTER, A. E. 2005. *Social solidarity and the gift*, Cambridge Univ Pr. See p. 70. See also KOMTER, A. 2007. Gifts and social relations. *International Sociology,* 22**,** 93. See p. 87.
[2] KOMTER, A. E. 2005. *Social solidarity and the gift*, Cambridge Univ Pr.p. 87. Quoting Rosenthal (1985).

"Finally, one can wonder why the informal contract generated by reciprocity is so effective in creating the social cement of society. The answer lies in the sublime reconciliation of individual and social interests resulting from it. Reciprocity represents the elegant combination of self-interested concerns with the requirements of social life." [1]

We see through the 'bundt' exchange, the Portokalos family reaching out, wanting to embrace the new in-Laws as a form of inclusion into the world of their migrant culture, of course on their own cultural terms. The Millers in coming to the Portokalos family home were shocked at seeing the welcoming party, in the front–yard for all to see. The party in the front yard is meant to produce what the Italians call: 'bella figura' or the 'good impression'. Not to be outdone, another matriarch Aunt Voula (played by Andrea Martin) wants to create her own good impression with the Millers challenging the 'social distance' of the Miller family by literally 'being in their face', symbolically, subverting the normative, socially appropriate WASP hegemony by declaring the Millers are part of their family now. This form of recognition by Aunt Voula is not reciprocated, not recognised[2] in quite the same manner by the Millers. Such feelings of recognition, now being included as family are thus not 'symmetrically reciprocated'. Using Komter's terminology as illustrated through the following excerpt.

From MBFGW:

(Aunt Voula instructs the Millers to sit down, whilst telling other relatives to go).

Aunt Voula: "Now you are family,

OK, all my life, I had a lump at the back of my neck right here always a lump. I start the menopause, the lump got bigger, from the hormone-e-s. . started to grow. So I go to the doctor, and he did the biop, bop, the bios, the. . . the bo-bopsy. Inside the lump he found teeth and the spinal column, yes. . .inside the lump, was my twin."

(To which the Millers recoil in horror, utterly speechless,) Aunt Voula sensing something is wrong, then resounds and changes the topic of conversation with" Spanakopita !"

«Τα Στέφανα» The Wedding Crowns

Along with the notion of identity being under construction, it is noted in this paper that identity is also bequeathed, bestowed by a significant 'other'. This concept has its roots in genealogy, which undergirds 'multiple- layers of identity'. Concluding with, a positively accepted concept of conferred identity handed down from generation to generation.

It is significant that Alisa Perren, regards the multi-generational appeal of this film as the reason for its unprecedented popularity.

"My Big Fat Greek Wedding appealed to multiple groups. It was truly a rare film, one to which grandmothers, mothers, and grand-

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[1] KOMTER, A. 2007. Gifts and social relations. *International Sociology,* 22**,** 93. See p. 103

[2] HONNETH, A. 1996. *The struggle for recognition : the moral grammar of social conflicts,* Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.

daughters, could (and did) go together." [1]

Excerpt: MBFGW
The crowning of Toula, by her Mother and Grandmother
(Soothing music playing in the background. Maria Portokalos is having a quiet moment with Toula, the night before the wedding:)

" Listen, to me Toula, my village saw many wars, Turkish, German. They all made a mess, and my Mother, my Mother, she said, "we're lucky, 'we're lucky to be alive', and I thought;' we're not lucky to be alive'. We're not lucky when they're telling us, where we should live, what we should eat, nobody has that right. Then I see you, and I see Athena, Niko. We came here for you. . . so you could. . . so you could live. I give you life . . . so that, in that you could live."

Symbolically, Toula's Grandmother, [who up until now has been chasing imaginary Turks around the Chicago neighbourhood, being brought back home by the complaining, neighbour] now, with a remarkable clarity of purpose, comes into the room and brings out the treasure handed down from generations passed. The Grandmother, the keeper of the treasure has waited for the appropriate time to reveal the contents of the old box to Toula. The box is opened revealing old photos and two wedding crowns (modern Greek: Τα στέφανα), tied together with a ribbon symbolising the unbrokenness of marriage, from the rites of the Orthodox wedding ceremony. [2]
Τα στέφανα, (modern Greek: the wedding crowns) are then placed on Toula's head, as an act of acceptance and inclusion symbolized by the 3 generations of women visually present, daughter, mother and grandmother.
Thus identity through belonging is bequeathed in the crowning of Toula, for her empowerment both now and in the future. The three generational roles of the Portokalos women and their transgenerational values are both dramatically symbolized and cinematically depicted in this moment. This scene offers a time for reflection as the women serenely pour through the contents of the old box, depicted with little dialogue between them. This scene is at a much slower pace, in stark contrast to some of the frenetic scenes in this film. By crowning their daughter, through the placing of the wedding crowns on her head, it is implicitly understood, that they-the women, the significant bearers and transmitters of identity/culture, accept Toula's choice of marriage partner. The wedding crowns as handed down from the previous generations will be part of her journey now. The scene resolves with the audience viewing the faces of the three women, in a remarkable tableau, harmoniously positioned together and viewed through the mirror.
'To be or not to be' – Globalisation and Identity

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[1] PERREN, A. 2004. A Big Fat Indie Success Story? Press Discourses Surrounding the Making and Marketing of a "Hollywood" Movie. *Journal of Film and Video,* 56**,** 18-31. See p.29
[2] GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA. *Wedding Service Booklet* [Online]. Available: http://www.greekorthodox.org.au/general/resources/servicebooklets/wedding [Accessed 1/12/11

Braidotti, urges us for 'innovative' and 'creative energy', when considering the "structures of subjectivity at a time in history when social, economic, cultural and symbolic regimes of representation" are swiftly moving" in response to globalisation. [1]

T.Fotopoulos provides the following, helpful definitions:

"'Globalisation' refers to the case of a borderless global economy in which economic nationalism has been eradicated and production itself has been internationalised in the sense that the big corporations have become stateless bodies involved in an integrated internal division of labour which spans many countries." [2]

Further defined :

"Cultural globalisation, refers to the present homogenisation of culture, as expressed for instance by the fact that almost everybody in today's 'global village' watches more or less the same television serials and videos, consumes—or aspires to consume—the same products and so on. Finally, social globalisation refers to the homogenisation of today's mode of life that is based on an individualist and consumerist culture." [3]

Globalization on one level is seen as a barrage of information and images. It has been well understood in first world societies characterised through the importance of persuasion via different forms of social media than at the actual point of a gun, as in military dictatorships. [4] Caution has been voiced regarding the amount of American television, Australian society is now digesting, particularly through the 2004, Free Trade Agreement (US & Australia) [5]

When considering a minority non-English speaking background (NESB) cultural perspective attempting to keep its cultural traditions within a majority Western culture, Castells makes the following relevant argument:

"Identity is people's source of meaning and experience'. . . 'Our world and our lives are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalization and identity." [6]

The 'push factor' thus being globalisation, propelling us into the new world and the 'pull' factor being negotiated by our sense of belonging through the values of individual/collective identity.

The out-workings of these values can be seen as the formation of cultural systems of knowledge handed down through time with the anthropological function of protecting the collective/individual as a means of aposteriori knowledge, faithfully given over from generation to generation.

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[1] BRAIDOTTI, R. 2002. *Metamorphoses : towards a materialist theory of becoming,* Malden, Blackwell Publishers.See p.73

[2] FOTOPOULOS, T. 2001. Globalisation, the reformist Left and the Anti-Globalisation'Movement'. *Democracy & Nature,* 7**,** 233-280.See p.2

[3] Ibid. p.2

[4] CAREY, A., LOHREY, A. & CHOMSKY, N. 1997. *Taking the Risk out of Democracy, corporate Propaganda versus Freedom and Liberty*, University of Illinois Press Urbana, IL. See Preface.

[5] GLOBAL TRADE WATCH. 2005. Australian Culture / Audio-Visual Content Available: http://www.tradewatch.org.au/AUSFTA/Index.html [Accessed 25/11/10].

[6] CASTELLS, M. B. 1997. *The Power of Identity, vol. II of The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. ,* Oxford, Blackwell. .See p.6

However, with the advent of the relentless, unstoppable forces of technology fuelling capitalism through globalization, is the casualty going to be 'social capital'? (Based on Coleman's definition: "social capital is anything that facilitates individual or collective action, generated by networks of relationships, reciprocity, trust and social norms"). [1]
That has hitherto historically, been the 'social glue' holding people- groups together ?
Will the pursuit of rampant individualism as exemplified through the Lone-Ranger tropes in cinema from the West destroy the collective wisdom practised by such communities?
Will the tribal cultures be seen as 'fossilized' in a vacuum for anthropologists, or plainly seen as 'old fashioned'.
However, Tomlinson goes further and attempts to bring a positive message to the debate:
"To put the matter simply: globalization is really the globalization of modernity, and modernity is the harbinger of identity." [2]
Whilst this may well be correct his argument does not take into account the concept of positive role of 'ethnic identity' regarding the role of ethnicity in the construction of Identity [whether individual or collective] that is affected by such change and again the inherent problematic processes of re-constructing Identity(ies) in the face of globalization. Will the outcome be a marginalised concept of individual/collective 'ethnic'-identity or will such re-definition contribute to a positive sense of Identity including a positive sense of individual self-esteem?
How will such re-calibration affect minority, non-English speaking background youth in a majority western culture? Or will the 'generation gap' between minority diasporic youth and their parents, already problematic and tenuous as examined in MBFGW, widen even more in the face of such' social' and 'cultural' globalisation?
Ethnic minorities are caught in this struggle of attempting to reclaim their cultural identity through the processes of re-definition in opposition to the 'homogenising' or 'conforming' forces of globalization-namely the migration experience. It is a basic contention of this paper that globalization has both a 'homogenising' and fragmenting (modern Greek: διαιρέσεις) processes. Creating a divisive effect eroding collectivist cultural-transmission in favour of the mono-individualist paradigm. This further propels inadequacy in the individual and thus transforms the fragile world of identity and therefore self-esteem into an entity that is even more subject to 'cultural hegemony'. According to Gramsci and Carey et al, this manufactured culture of consensus facilitates the status quo rather than revolution. In advanced capitalist societies, we can see the use of mass media and popular culture indoctrinating

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[1] M. W. FOLEY & B. EDWARDS 1997. Escape from politics? Social theory and the social capital debate. *American Behavioral Scientist,* 40**,** 549-560.
[2] TOMLINSON, J. 2003. *Globalization and Cultural Identity* [Online]. Available: http://www.polity.co.uk/global/pdf/gtreader2etomlinson.pdf [Accessed 2011. See p.271

people with the opinions maintained by the powerful. According to C.Waterstreet,

"Capitalism with its emphasis on brand names, mass-market commercialism, advertising and relentless product placement is the expression of what people want by the people and institutions who make it. Capitalism is not real choice, but the illusion of it. Children love KFC because they are trained from birth via television to demand it." [1]

Cultural Resistance and Hybridity

In this way Vardalos's films especially, MBFGW attempts to usurp the hegemony of the dominant WASP culture, through 'cultural resistance' of the Portokalos family, allowing the stereotypical Portokalos family characters, through humour, gossip, insistence on their cultural ties, live-up to the phrase "if you can't beat them join them.". Because such symbiotic cultural ties can be a form of strength for the individual and community- a form of 'social capital' that binds. It is not insignificant that Harriet Miller becomes "Harry", much like the ending of the Oscar award winning film " Zorba the Greek" (dir. M. Cacoyiannis, 1964) where Basil (the Englishman) asks Zorba to teach him how to dance. In MLIR, the character Georgia decides to remain in Greece and not go back to America. All being absorbed and enfolded into this modern evolving, all-encompassing "Greekness". In this way we see 'cultural resistance' at odds with 'cultural globalisation'. The following is an interesting conception of 'cultural resistance':

"Culture can be used as a means of social control. More effective than any army is a shared conception that the way things are is the way things should be. The powers-that-be don't remain in power by convincing us that they are the answer, but rather that there is no other solution. But culture can be, and is used as a means of resistance, a place to formulate other solutions. In order to strive for change you have first to imagine it and culture is the repository of the imagination. " [2]

Given globalization's unprecedented pace of change; in a sense we are all products or 'hybrids' of what has gone before. We can call this the 'hybridity of globalization' (my term). Through the literature of anthropology, the hybrid construct has been characterised with miscegenation in terms of racial categories and connotes a derogatory terminology. Eg. wog, 'mulatto', 'mestizo', 'meti'. Yet it was the colonisers that determined miscegenation. [3]

This term actually connotes an idea of a fantasised racial purity that is set-up for hierarchically, self-defining purposes and categories. For humans the 'hybrid' has been at the bottom of the pecking-order. Yet for the purposes of this paper the majority culture circumscribes and defines the boundaries of such minorities, even if we are to apply a Gramscian analysis, ie. the role of

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[1] WATERSTREET, C. 25/07/2010. *Sydney Herald Sunday*, p.20.

[2] DUNCOMBE, S. 2002. *Cultural resistance reader*, Verso books. See p. 35

[3] TAUSSIG, M. T. 1993. *Mimesis and alterity :a particular history of the senses* New York Routledge.

'cultural hegemony'[1], to the problems related to evolution of culture within the processes inherent to globalization. Hence the necessary layer of politics over the 'hybrid' label and the ensuing wars of 'identity politics' as minorities jostle for influence in a majority culture. The processes inherent to globalization, and its ravenous appetite for 'unbridled capitalism' determines such pecking orders by their hegemonic influence. Such a Gramscian analysis is able to deconstruct the reach of globalization. Yet, whilst the term 'hybrid' is demarcating change it also reveals sui generis a form of syncretism.

J. Hutnyk in his well argued paper, links the contemporary understanding of hybridity with political overtones:

"Maybe it is the mongrel, interfering mix that undermines racialist absolutism. . . by right. But is it also perhaps the message of hybridity that re-assigns <u>fixed identity</u> (my underlined italics) into what becomes the jamboree of pluralism and multiplicity?" [2]

Could we then be applying such terms as 'hybrid' to circumscribe political power already labelled and categorised by the status quo as a "dirty word"? Who then by their very influence determine or even manufacture, what is 'normative'? If difference then, is subsumed or "equalized" by just being 'hybrid' R. Chow offers the following warning and supports the Gramscian analysis I've presented:

"The enormous seductiveness of the post-modern hybridite's discourse lies. . .in its invitation to join the power of global capitalism by flattening out past injustices in a way that accepts the extant relations of power and where " the recitation of past injustices seems tedious and unnecessary." [3]

If as we have seen, the concept of Identity is bequeathed by the significant 'other' be it reference group, family or some form of 'in-group' to the individual. We then see the enormous influence wielded by the construction of consent through globalized forces. So the question remains: Who is doing the defining here that bequeaths and possibly determines such identity?

There is power in being the 'definer', the 'labeler' the one that imputes status and position in the constructed hierarchy. Who by virtue of their superior status, position the goal-posts, then move them accordingly, in order to perpetuate their inherent privileged position.

Epilogue

In the present age with the advent of globalization the concept of Identity appears to us like an ever-present mirage. In that just as we appear to glean a glimpse of this concept and attempt to draw near to it . . . we find it has moved on, transformed itself, and has been subsumed into the sands of time. What

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[1] For more information see Part 1, TONYS-SOULOS, M. 2012. Towards a multi-layered construct of identity by the Greek diaspora: an examination of the films of Nia Vardalos, including *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and *My Life in Ruins*. *A Journal for Greek Letters,* Special edition**,** 195-207.

[2] HUTNYK, J. 2005. Hybridity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* 28**,** 79-102. See p. 99

[3] CHOW, R. 1998. *Ethics after Idealism:Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading,,* Bloomington, Indiana University Press.See p.156

was, now has metamorphosed into unceasing undulating, unstoppable images and waves. A form that has rendered the original entity, as becoming part synthesis, part syncretism into a form of energy, or 'ontological being' that once had a beginning and now has no end. That ultimately is imperilled in and through the waves of 'being' and 'becoming'. The sojourner whilst constructing their own identity, continues this mystery through an amazing parallel. Whilst attempting to define their world and one's place in the world, is as much being defined by it. Then at the cross-roads, with astonishing temerity, the subjects submit themselves in ritual as a 'rite of passage', allowing Identity (herself) to be bequeathed upon them, like the crowns, garlands of old. Unashamedly, accepting, being welcomed into the embrace of belonging and inclusion.

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Dedication:

The one and only Uncle Nick, Παναγιώτα (Paloma), Δ.Κ. and C.P. never forget you have the capacity to inspire.