In this paper notions such as identity, migrant culture and conflicts of diversity will be explored and will be presented as described in plays of first and second generation Greek Australian women playwrights. Their plays are about Greek and Australian contemporary issues and their “in-between” experiences. Women playwrights as torch-bearers, challenge authority, patriarchal power, discrimination and exploitation. They introduce characters, relationships, and situations as they understand and interpret them. Furthermore they utter their truth in their own “voice”. Similarities and differences between playwrights of two generations will arise and conflicts will be revealed. The traditional and contemporary lifestyles will be exposed. The eternal dialogue between mother and daughter will be distinguished.

**Introduction**

The aim of this paper is to explore the notions of identity, migrant culture and the conflicts of diversity as presented in plays written by first and second generations of Greek-Australian women. Playwrights as ethnographers participate in speech events through their characters. They use their experience to develop their own communicative competence. The playwright through his/her story transmits knowledge, experiences, language, music and songs.


They will be presented comparatively and contrastively. The findings will attempt to bring to the surface:
a) A set of conceptual tools, which decode the migrant culture as a process of traveling between two cultures and a process of the “changing” of core values from one generation to the other.

b) The complexities of migrant cultures and identities as processed and diffused from first to second generations.

First Generation Playwrights

The first generation women playwrights introduce their work into the Greek Community theatre. They mainly use the Greek language in their plays, independently from the themes they introduce, as they address an audience that is basically Greek-speaking with common cultural background, ethnic and religious traditions, beliefs and practices. Post war playwrights want to explore their past, their roots, their history, look into their identity. They reassemble the elements of reality into new arrangements that urge their audience to consider or to reconsider the dominant symbols and the received meaning of culture. In this sense “playfulness” introduces a form of social interaction and interpretation. Theatre is an important tool for the first generation Greek migrants assisting them in identifying themselves, firstly within the Greek Community, secondly within the wider immigrant community, and finally within the boundaries of the Australian society, independently from their place of origin. This postwar immigrant generation of writers (1950s and 1960s), is characterised as either the generation of “Catharsis and Self-Awareness” or the “Lost Generation”.

Vasso Kalamaras was born in Athens and migrated to Australia in 1950. She writes both in Greek and English. Her inspiration comes from many sources, but mostly from the universal themes of love, humanity, freedom and peace. The exploration of human relations, especially woman's destiny in the world, has directly influenced her work. Her first play The Bread Trap (1986), a drama in three acts, portrays the Greek Community of Munjimup, Western Australia and focuses on the clash between the traditions of the original Greek community who arrived in the 1920s and their children, the second wave of migrants who arrived after WWII. It comments on the ways migrant communities were formed and the difficulties of resisting assimilation into the newly established migrant culture. The pain, the suffering and the nostalgia are common feelings of all newcomers to a foreign land.

The characters of this play are tobacco farmers employed in an industry with no steady income, always at the mercy of international tobacco companies. As revealed from the title of the play, these people are in despair when the industry collapses and they cannot control their own fate. They feel trapped with no chance to escape. It is

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1 Sophia Rally–Catharios introduces the notion of “Catharsis” in her play Crossroads (2008) and Dimitris Katsavos, playwright, defines his generation as such in his play entitled Lost Generation (1992), Unpublished material.
a real-life story that relates to thousands of immigrants, including the playwright. It brings into scene the insights of Greek culture, yet it allows people of other ethnic backgrounds to relate and see the human story. It is a play that operates on many levels and allows one to experience the sense of being torn between two countries, especially through the character of Chrysa, the daughter, who tries to resist being assimilated into the economic logic of the new world. She is an educated free-spirited young woman who feels suffocated in the unfriendly manners and practices of the community. In despair she says:

... all the roads are closed. The sun has been quenched and the stars hidden. The earth sank and swallowed all my efforts, all my expectations, all the things I have loved...

and

My body has become a machine that works and eats and sleeps. Forever breathless from rushing about, without respect for my existence... Do I exist? (Vassiliki, 1986:42).

Her feelings of despair are justified when one considers the mentality at the time. As described in the words of the character of Vassiliki (1986:52).

...Schooling is wasted on a girl. It robs her of her chances.

Men are frightened of the brainy ones. They want the empty-headed girls who can work... and won't moan around the place.

**Sophia Ralli-Catharios** was born in Patras, Greece and migrated to Australia in 1968. She writes both in Greek and English. She is inspired by themes such as loneliness, the effects of technology in daily life, migration and the cultural dislocation and discontinuity that follows those who are uprooted from their native land and transplanted into the host country. In her plays, Sophia Ralli-Catharios introduces “Meteorism” (dangling in the air) as the ultimate experience of those who live “in between” two cultures. The characters are described as people who see the world from a distance, fragmented, contradictory and conflicted. Women’s rights and the role of the power of domineering groups, the marginalisation of immigrant women, the racial and class discrimination and the inter-generational conflict are themes that prevail in her plays. Ralli-Catharios’ work is defined by her belief that humans are related to a common fate which is characterised by the principle of equality of cultures.

Her first play, *Preferably Gardenias* (1989), is set in Australia and is about a Greek family, its intergenerational conflicts and its difficulty with disembarking from the “time-capsule” they placed themselves in when leaving their homeland. In the play, she introduces the traditional Greek customs that define what should be the roles of men and women within a family and how they, as parents, relate to their children who were born in Australia and vice versa. Men, even if they are unemployed and stay at home all day and/or their spouse is working all day long, are not willing to help with the housework. Respect means fear and obedience. Democracy excludes women. Mothers must serve the needs of their children but have no right to interfere
with their upbringing. Women should hand in their wages at the end of the week for the welfare of the family. Women are always compared with their mothers-in-law by men, and it goes without saying that mothers-in-law are better.

In our story, all this is happening until a retired aunt from Greece arrives in Australia to visit her relatives and surprisingly enough, although older in age, is found to be modernised and updated with the rest of the world, not upholding the old fashioned ideas of Greece of the 1960s, which to her disappointment, her relatives in Australia still retain. She brings “resurrection” in the lifestyle of women with her “revolutionary” ideas, according to her nephew. She introduces the idea that a woman is “old” when she is not open to accepting the new. Age in women is no obstacle for wanting to live and expand their knowledge and experiences. The “unknown” and “foreign” are a challenge and not a threat. She proposes that every migrant should transplant flowers, preferably gardenias (a Mediterranean flower), in the new land, symbolically encouraging migrants to make Australia their home.

Koula Teo was born in the Western part of the Peloponnese, Greece and migrated to Australia in 1964. Koula Teo’s motivation derives from her sensitivity to modern-day problems and a willingness to confront them. She explores contemporary themes that relate to young and older generations that enrich the heart and challenge the mind. She explores the human condition under circumstances such as addictive behavior, substance abuse, domestic violence, intergenerational gaps, marriage in all forms, repatriation, and difficulties in readjustment. Her stories move between Greece and Australia. She writes in the Greek language but also introduces the English language whenever, in her dialogues, the characters are children of immigrant families and talk either among themselves or to their parents. This is a sign of the different attitude and mentality that the next generation develops. Humorous and quick-witted dialogue provides comic relief amidst the seriousness of the main themes. The audience forgets the drama and sees the humour.

Her first play, A Pair of Socks [Ena zevgari kaltses] (1992) — The Greek word “Kaltses” in the title was inspired by the English word “cultures” — mirrors the everyday life of two related families who migrated to Australia in the 1960s. It is a play that describes the difficulties the characters experience living between two cultures. The parents who migrated from Greece retain the values and traditions with which they grew up and forget that their children are educated in a different cultural environment. In the play, the past seems better, safer and works as a self-defense mechanism. Every element that doesn’t belong to what is considered “Greek” is a threat. The playwright through her characters examines the particularities and the differences of the two generations and explores ways to resolve their conflicts caused by their difficulties with communicating and interrelating in their new multi-cultural environment in Australia. Food “symposiums” with relatives and friends, continuous work, saving money and sacrifice reflect the “material culture” that characterises the migrant identity. Parents do not accept disobedience from their children because they themselves as
children were taught to yield to their parents. On the other hand, the new generation has learned to live in freedom. Mixed marriages are a threat to the continuity of the cultural identity. The playwright stands on the other side of the dispute and, through one of her heroines, who is the mother of the son who has fallen in love with an Australian girl, gives the message that people coming from different cultures should build bridges and not walls that divide them.

Second generation playwrights

The second generation women playwrights present their stories and personal life experiences through devised theatre. Improvisation is the key that unlocks and develops production processes and dramatic structure techniques thus eliminating borders and standardising the organisation of space. The linear flow of text-based drama of the first generation gives way to an almost impressionistic succession of visual (and often verbal) symbols and captures not only one generation’s struggle and sacrifice, but also the post-war emigration as a continuous process in this country, as one ethnic group after another, one generation after another, making Australia home. As members of the transitional generation, genuinely straddling two cultures, second generation playwrights are uniquely equipped to make a comment on this process.

**Tes Lyssiotis** is Australian-born to Greek parents and was brought up in Horsham, Victoria. She writes bi/multi-lingual plays mainly featuring characters of Greek heritage. She has basically focused on the complexities of culture and identity (Coslovich, 1998). Theatre is her tool and the outcome is universal. She draws inspiration from her own and her family’s life. Her stories explore the migrants’ experiences and struggles, focusing on those who came to Australia from Europe, in the decades 1930–1950. They reflect “the hardships of emigration, migrant camps, lack of work, the demeaning nature of work when it comes, the problems faced by the new generation in Australia, and the difficulty of retaining belief and language in a prosperous, materialistic society” (Krausmann, 1985). Using the technique of collage she blends together a series of documentary items such as newspaper stories, mime, sketches, songs, dance and a short film. The structure is not linear. The thread that joins the facts in the story is a journey itself, formed as in a ritual — the arrival, the survival, the sacrifice and the endurance (Tsefala, 2006).

Her play *I’ll Go to Australia and Wear a Hat* (bilingual play, staged in 1982 at Carlton’s La Mama Theatre) was inspired by her mother’s experiences as a young woman sent to Australia as a “proxy bride”. The subject of the play is the experiences of Greek women in Australia and it addresses issues of great social, historical and political importance.

The play *A White Sports Coat* (La Mama Theatre, Melbourne, 1988) presents a nameless woman, the Daughter, alone on stage, while the characters of Mother and Father derive from her imaginative world. The whole time the heroine has a “baoulo”
[glory box] in front of her. It is where the family stories and secrets are hidden. “Opening the 'baoulo' is like opening a can of worms…” she says (Lyssiotis, 1988:24).

The mother–daughter relationship is highlighted in the play as the following: Girls are closer to their mothers, but whenever they disagree with them, it is because they resemble the stubbornness of their father. When married, the daughter should stop work, stay at home and look after her husband and children like their mother.

The “in between” experience is also very intense in the play. On the one hand, Greece is where the daughter's ancestors are buried, the land in which her parents were born. On the other, Australia is where they live and where they will be buried. Despite this, the daughter should claim the land back "home", in Greece. The confusion and conflict is profound in the following extract:

Mother: It's yours, don't let them take it...

Daughter: How many times have you been over? Three times isn't it? Still nothing has been resolved. What do you expect me to do? ... I'm sick of the whole business; leave me out of it... (Lyssiotis, 1988:44).

Angela Costi was born in Melbourne. Her play Panayiota (1998) is based on interviews with acting students of Greek, Italian and Cypriot backgrounds, in late 1993. The main character is Athena Harismiadis. In a reunion she meets with two high-school girlfriends. Both women are unaware that Athena Harismiadis is now called Lisa Harris. They’ve heard on the Greek-Cypriot grapevine that she is living in sin with an “Ozzie”. Patrick wants her to commit to her new life with him and, in doing so, deny her old life. Lisa is a painter who has powerful memories whenever she is in front of her easel. She recalls her friendships and their importance in shaping her identity. These memories consume her, forcing her to consider her lost life. She was eager to experience the world of blonde girls with blue eyes. Lisa is confused, conflicted and fears resembling her mother. The eternal argument of mother–daughter appears in the following extracts from the play by Lisa:

The deep makes me fear. When you see me do you see me? I'm a learner. I draw hippopotamuses, I'm constipated, I'm a mess, I'm a Cypriot-Greek, I'm a Mother? Mum when you see me do you see me? (Costi, 1998:105).

Mum used to say, “Athena I look at you but I don't see my daughter's face, I see a stranger”...
It works both ways, I look at my Mum's face, waiting for something in me to twig and tell me, she's your mum. Nothing happens (Costi, 1998:108).

The sea is a fundamental element in the play as an archetypal symbol of the unknown, the unconscious, a force of nature, a representation of freedom, the vastness of mind and spirit and life. The play begins at sea and is centered in Lisa and Patrick's living room which is close to the beach. The actors engage themselves in choric sound effects over the sound of the sea. The continuous voice of the sea is inviting the soul to wander into the abyss of solitude, to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation.
Lisa is on a journey of self-awareness and self-discovery. She awakens to the fact that her own personal happiness can be gained if she begins anew and breaks away from the conventions and the restrictions that have caged her inner soul. She wants to draw the way she sees the world.

**Suzan Alexopoulos** was born in Melbourne. As an actor and playwright she produces her first play *By Night We Tremble* (2005) at La Mama theatre. It is an autobiographical play about alienation, heartbreak and despair, a bitter-sweet physicalised comedy, inspired by a personal experience. The story is a nightmare experienced by her character Simply Blue, who nurtures a broken heart. The play starts with a man and a woman creating pictures and abstract images with their shadows. Over time they merge into each other and “with this unity comes another entity” (Alexopoulos, 2005:1), a naked-body in a bubble, trying to give birth to itself. Simply Blue bursts out. Caught within the loop of her past, her present and her future, she stages a battle with the monsters born from her grief. In the fight the heroine battles the regressive forces of the unconscious which threaten to swallow her. The forces are personified in the figures of Mother and Father. Through the characters, violence and feelings such as fear, lust, aggression and selfishness prevail on stage. She fears turning out to be like her parents and replicating their relationship. The mother figure is she, herself, in all aspects, and the father figure is all the men in her life. She is caught in a maze from which she wants to escape. Lost and alone, she realises that she is exhausted running on the same spot while seeking to know what love is and how she can become a lover. She goes back to her bubble and starts to crawl back in, where it is safe. The sphere symbolises the embryonic state as the wholeness, the perfection and the beatific containment of the self.

**Conclusion**

The playwrights express a philosophical and political thought in their dramatic art. They use theatre to regain values such as justice, freedom and equality. They illuminate a set of conceptual tools, which decode the migrant culture as a process of travelling between two cultures and as a process of the “changing” of core values from one generation to the other. Their plays are not only an artistic representation of human behaviour and attitudes, but the most concrete form of expression from which one can reflect and examine the human condition. It is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another. Therefore the value of the play as a piece of art should not be critiqued solely through idealistic-metaphysical parameters, but also through objective-socio-cultural criteria. The latter give different meanings to similar events and practices. Common characteristics and ideas may be clear markers of a shared cultural identity, but essentially this identity is determined by difference. Each generation feels it belongs to a group, and this group defines itself by noticing and highlighting differences between the previous
and next generations, and other cultures. Thus the dynamics of cultural self-definition imply a continuous contact and struggle between generations and cultures. Political, economic, scientific, and cultural webs of relationships create the unequal character of intercultural and intracultural relations. The fact that the construction of identity is linked to unequal power relations implies that identity construction can be seen as ideological and cultural practice constructs. If identity is constructed in opposition to the alien, intrusions from other cultures imply loss of autonomy and pose a threat to cultural identity. Therefore, every culture is continually striving toward preservation of this identity. Awareness and redefinition of this identity provide ways to retain it. Acknowledging the otherness of intruding elements—codes from other cultures on one hand and recognising their transformation when reflected on the other, in the so called “hybrid” culture, provides the alternative way. Hybridity disturbs traditions and replaces them with novel solutions. The solution is one that fits the locale. The concept of “Modernisation”, the remolding of a cultural system into a new mode is profound in the plays of all the playwrights here presented, each in their own distinct manner.

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