

Transatlantic Repatriation: Stigma Management of Second-Generation Italian- and Greek-American Women “Returning Home”

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Post print version.

Paper published in the European Journal of Cultural Studies, first published online on 6 February 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1367549418823058>

Abstract

Based on 30 narrative-biographic interviews with second-generation Greek and Italian women who have migrated from the USA to their ancestral homelands of Greece and Italy, our paper explores nuances of their stigma management by focusing on the interaction between their pre-repatriation past and post-repatriation present and the spaces of inclusion and exclusion. We investigate from the insider perspective the interplay between returnee-women’s rejection and acceptance of stigma and, particularly, their use of body politics in negotiating their new living spaces. Adopting the method of narrative biographic analysis, we present three detailed case studies of repatriate women – organized as composite biographies - to illuminate from different angles the process of stigma management and body politics. Our findings contribute to the elaboration of concepts ‘diasporic duress’ (‘transnational/diasporic patriarchy’) and ‘nativity voucher’; while also highlighting the dynamics in the reproduction of the diasporic patriarchy through repatriation to the ancestral homeland.

Keywords:

diaspora, ethnic stigma, gender, narrative biography, patriarchy, return migration, second generation, Southern Europe, stigma management, US expatriates

1. Introduction

Migration and migrant integration studies in Europe concentrate for their most part on flows from poorer to wealthier countries and the related socio-economic and cultural dynamics involved. Special attention is paid in migration and gender studies in how women from Asia or Latin America may experience de-skilling and double stigma (as women and as migrants) in their migration trajectories in Europe (or North America). This paper takes up a somewhat unusual and less studied migration flows: that of US-

national women, usually with University education, who ‘return’ (although they have never actually lived there) to their ancestral homelands, Italy and Greece. This article focuses on their process of social integration in the place of origin of their parents and more specifically on how they manage the double stigma of being a ‘foreigner’ even if co-ethnic, and a woman that does not fully fit with the local gender roles and family/work models.

Relevant studies have shown that diasporic women and returning female migrants are frequently subjected to gender-ethnic stigmatization within their families and/or local/ethnic communities (Christou & King 2011; Romyantzev 2012). However, very little is known about the dynamics of this process, including migrants’ capacity to manage their stigma especially when within the transnational context of two countries, that of birth and the other of origin and return. Scholars who work in stigma- and repatriation studies look for new – under-studied – cases to illuminate this process. One such is American women “returning” to Italy and Greece.

There are around 100,000 US-national women living in Italy and Greece as second-generation repatriates (Mills 1993; Wennersten 2008). It is also a well-known fact that Italians and Greeks are visible diasporas in the USA noted for their strong in-group solidarity, devotion to ethnic cultural traditions, and - especially in relation to second-generation women – gender-biased ideology of “home-return” (Callinicos 1991; Christou & King 2011; Trundle 2014). At the same time, the ancestral home countries of Italy and Greece have unchallenged structures of patriarchy, especially in rural areas with clear cases of gender-based stigmatization of immigrant women as ‘immoral’ or too ‘emancipated’ (ibid; Christou & King 2011; Isaakyan & Triandafyllidou 2014). Apart from the pioneering studies conducted by King and Christou, there has been by now no in-depth research on second-generation repatriate women in these two countries, who choose to live in a homeland they never knew other than from family narratives. There is insufficient knowledge about how they can be stereotyped in ethnic and gendered terms by local society and especially on how they themselves engage with such dynamics and approach their stigma (Christou 2006a; Christou & King 2011).

According to the classic definition by Goffman (1963: 3), stigma is ‘a deeply discrediting attribute that reduces the bearer from a usual [mainstreamed] person to a discounted one’. A stigmatized person ‘manages her spoilt identity’ by accepting or rejecting the stigma (ibid: 10). Coles (1967/1902) further notes that the choice of stigma management strategies depends on how one approaches the social construction of her image, or on her ‘looking-glass self’. Creating negative labels and responding to them, the stigmatizer and the stigmatized often manipulate femininity – or socially defined attributes associated with “good”/“bad” woman. One venue of manipulating femininity is the female-body politics (Siziba 2016). Body politics, or body-gaming, is defined by Bourdieu (1989) as the person’s ability to use her body as a resource for negotiating her identity by either activating certain physical aspects of her body or taming them, which often happens in resonance with public expectations. It is important to remember that even a democratic mainstream such as the USA remains highly gender-stigmatizing in practice (Putnam 2000; Wennersten 2008).

This paper investigates from an insider perspective the interplay between returnee-women’s rejection and acceptance of stigma and, particularly, their use of body

politics in negotiating their new living space and making sense of their lives. Based on 30 narrative-biographic interviews with second-generation Greek and Italian women who have migrated from the USA to their ancestral homelands of Greece and Italy and more specifically to the island small towns of origin of their parents, our paper explores nuances of their stigma management by focusing on the interaction between their pre-repatriation past and post-repatriation present and the spaces of inclusion and exclusion.

The paper starts with an overview of relevant concepts taken from the wider diasporic literature notably of “ancestral return” (Christou 2003a), “diasporic bubble” (Christou & King 2011), but also the wider notions of “stigma” (Goffman 1963) and “mirror-glass self” (Coles 1967/1902). Adopting the method of narrative biographic analysis (Creswell 2013; Denzin 1989), we present three generic cases of repatriate women, which are organized as their composite narratives and which illuminate from different angles the process of stigma management and body politics. Showing interaction between the women’s pre- and post-diasporic experiences, the paper highlights the dynamics in the reproduction of the diasporic patriarchy through repatriation to and settlement in the ancestral homeland. Our findings also introduce and elaborate on the concepts of ‘diasporic duress’ and ‘nativity voucher’ in relation to factors affecting repatriation experience.

2. Diasporic upbringing, repatriation and gender

In his fundamental work, Althusser (1972: 162) argues that our choices are governed by ideologies – ‘our imagined relationship to our conditions of existence’ - which are disseminated through such powerful ideological institutions as family, even in societies with quite democratic state-power apparatuses. In our families, we are taught every day to do certain things, which we continue to do (often unconsciously) long after we leave our families because we are made to be ideological subjects. These taught values can be both good and bad – but they make us ‘complicit to our own domination’ (ibid; Adorno & Horkheimer 2002; Butler 1990, 1997). One of such unwritten societal ideologies is the diaspora ideology.

Scholars of diaspora studies stress the importance of the ‘diasporic bubble’ - an interactive framework within which the second-generation migrants are brought up in diaspora (Anthias 2000; Christou 2003a, 2003; Christou & King 2011). This framework consists of rules, expectations, beliefs and established cultural norms within a diaspora to which diasporic members – particularly second-generation women – are subjected. To varying degrees of proximity and intensity, these cultural forces are witnessed, mastered and even internalized by diasporics on a regular basis – shaping their everyday behaviours and identities. This socio-cultural framework starts on the level of immigrant family and household, and often develops toward the level of the migrant/ethnic community. For Italian and especially for Greek diasporas in the USA, this interactive framework is usually sustained across patriarchal lines, with the leading role of the man of the household such as the father/husband, and associated with both positive and negative aspects of ancestral home orientation (Callinicos 1991; Fugytakis 1997; Moskos 1999; Tsemberis 1999).

The overall diasporic bubble rationale centres around the ancestral home return. The ancestral home such as Greece or Italy is constructed in family narratives as a vibrant place imbued with real life and humanistic values – in contrast with the nonchalant and alienating environment of the country of diasporics' current residence (Christou & King 2011; Sheffer 2003). On the one hand, the incorporation of some ancestral values [e.g.: healthier food, religious traditions, spirituality, historic richness and the overall idea of a faraway land magic that gives zest to life] becomes a positive, enlightening experience for diasporic children. And the second-generation migrants may live in this romantic and spiritual atmosphere from early on, having been actually brought up on and having internalized the family-advocated values of the diasporic bubble.

On the other hand, some diasporic bubbles may be sustained through strong patriarchal norms, advocating the ultimate and undisputable decision-making power of the father and the subordination by him of females in the family including his daughters. Scholars thus recognize the highly controversial nature of diasporic bubbles, ranging from 'the idealization of the diasporic family to the abuse of the patriarchal power' (Christou & King 2011; Luconi 2000; Moskos 1999). Moskos (1999) shows that the second-generation women may not be only abused by their fathers but also made to believe in the morality of this abuse. The so-called 'conscious decision to return in order to fulfil the dream of the parents' is, in fact, a forced decision because, from the very beginning, the person was not given any choice for an alternative route (Christou 2006b: 88).

This situation resonates with what Bourdieu (1989) defines as 'symbolic power' - the process of making other people unconditionally accept certain ways of behaviour, thought and perception - often without any reflexivity. According to Bourdieu (1989), symbolic power often makes a much stronger effect than any other type of power because it penetrates people's minds from childhood and shapes their 'tastes' (or internalized choices), which are extremely difficult to amend with time. Such 'cultural tastes' (what to eat, where to live, whom to marry, etc.) may disrupt social mobility of undermined people by forcing them to make choices that they might not have made under other circumstances. The dominated person [diasporic woman] finds it difficult to object because of the fear to appear tasteless, or inappropriate, to the social circle in which she becomes imprisoned by the symbolic power [of her father or husband].

The motivation for the ancestral return among second-generation migrants in general and second-generation women in particular can often be contradictory. There are diasporic women who believe that they engage in self-invigorating journeys of self-discovery, which are translated into "searching for roots" or returning to one's cultural and historic base, and marked by 'an emotional connection to the ancestral homeland' (King & Christou 2014: 89). At the same time, its negative side forces second-generation women to engage in repatriation as the only option available in order to escape from the diasporic patriarchy (Callinicos 1991; Christou & King 2011; Moskos 1999; Tsemberis 1999).

Whatever motivation may stand behind the repatriation of second-generation woman, it is always grounded in a rather strong 'ideology of return', cultivated in the diasporic family from her childhood (Christou 2004, 2003b, 2006a). Whether it is envisioned as a highly desired destination or the only available escape outlet, the ancestral home is

always implanted in the brains of second-generation as the only worthy place to go and the only legitimate diasporic cultural taste.

Studies on return migration confirm that female returnees are often subjected to stigmatization in their ancestral homes (Isaakyan & Triandafyllidou 2014; Kubal 2012; Kupets 2012; Pozniak 2013; Rummyantsev 2012). In a broader sociological interpretation offered by Jones (1984) and widely used by sociologists, stigma is ‘a mark that links a person to undesired characteristics’. Research on migration also acknowledges that such stigmatisation oftentimes has a strong bodily connotation. Siziba (2016: 125) notes that for whatever reasons, migrants are often represented in scholarship as ‘disembodied subjects’, and literatures on migration ignore the body of the migrants as ‘a resource and avenue for resisting, reconstructing and negotiating otherness’. His work stresses the importance of looking at the migrant (returnee) as the ‘embodied self’ – that is, as an actor who may strategically use her body in rather complex identity games, especially through an intimate intercourse’. In situations when other identity tools are unavailable, migrants often use – as Siziba’s (2016: 137) work illustrates - ‘bodily innovations’. They make a ‘strategic use of their bodies’ for the purposes of stigma management (Siziba 2016: 137). Reissman (2000: 120) notes that women’s responses to sexual stigmas are very ‘complex and contradictory’: while disrupting the patriarchy, the woman may also ‘collaborate’ in its reproduction because she often ‘rethinks [rather than rejects] stigmatizing interactions to give past incidents new meanings,’ because she is subjected to the phallogentric (male-dominated) ideology.

3. Methodology

It is in the light of these analytical reflections that we approach our 30 narrative, in-depth interviews conducted with second-generation Greek and Italian women who have migrated from the USA to their ancestral Greek and Italian places of origin (islands for their most part). The first question which arose from the very narratives concerns how they emancipate from or indeed reproduce the diasporic patriarchy after return in the effort to negotiate their settlement in the ancestral origin places. We conceptualize this as a practice of stigma management because these women find themselves cornered in stereotypical patriarchal structures that have assigned to them appropriate roles and behaviours – to the extent that they challenge such roles both in their pre- and post- return life, they are stigmatized. In other words, to what extent are they free from their diaspora ideology?

The second research question focuses more specifically on body politics and on how these women use their gendered bodies, their femininity both to counter and confirm stigma and also to seek to create new categories of judgement and belonging, subverting the ‘moral’ categories imposed on them in the diaspora and upon return or indeed accepting them eventually. In other words, what are the nuances and dynamics of their expat interpellation?

Our informants include twenty Greek-American and ten Italian-American women who have repatriated from the USA to their parents’ home-islands: Crete, Rode and Naxos in Greece, and Sicily, Sardinia and Capri in Italy. Based on the premise that ‘narrative stories shed light on identities and on how people see themselves’

(Creswell 2013: 70), we conducted narrative-biographic interviews with these women (each lasting 2-3 hours). The applied narrative thematic analysis places emphasis on *what* has been said by our informants – that is, on their understanding of their own experience (ibid; Denzin 1989; Denzin & Lincoln 2005). The narrative representation is always grounded in the basic principle of ‘re-storying, or reorganizing individual stories into a coherent interpretive framework’ (Creswell 2013: 90).

This resonates with the post-modernist drive in reflexive qualitative research toward recognition of alternative narrative models of analysis and representation when applied to complex and sensitive issues such as body, sexuality and ethnic stigma (Ellis 1996; Maguire 2006; Wertz et al. 2012). In order to protect informants’ identities yet bring forward the authenticity of their testimonies, the method of composite narrative is recommended (Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Isaakyan 2009; Todres 2007). Creating composite fictional characters from individual interviewees’ narratives, the composite narrative (or composite biography) allows the researcher to reach a desired ‘balance between texture and structure through their blending’ (Wertz et al. 2012: 2). A composite biography, or a generic biographic case, serves to illuminate ‘a composite picture of the sensitive phenomenon emerging from fragile individual stories’ (ibid). In line with these ethical demands, we have re-contextualized and regrouped the narrative segments from our data into three compound case-studies. The chosen approach serves to explain subtle nuances while preserving the wholeness of the life-story and anonymity (given the extreme sensitivity of data) (Denzin 1989; Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Isaakyan 2009).

We are thus presenting three cases (both illuminative and compound) that highlight two opposed types of stigma management (acceptance or rejection) and negotiation of inclusion/exclusion as a female returnee within a system of patriarchal norms. To be more precise, these generic cases have been comprised to illuminate the following differences that were observed in the thirty individual biographies: socio-economic conditions of relocation; family circumstances and in-family relations prior to and post-repatriation; the socio-cultural (re)positioning of the woman and her significant others (later defined in this article as “ethnic capital” or “nativity voucher”); and emerging reactions to stigma.

All names and specific geographical locations are altered with a view of protecting the anonymity of the informants.

The first two composite characters, Elektra and Kerstin, return to Crete and Sicily respectively to make a new start, mainly for personal reasons. Elektra goes back and renovates the ancestral home whereas Kerstin buys a new home in her father’s hometown of origin. They both defy local norms about what is appropriate behaviour by dating local men but they also both negotiate their position through alternative channels – Elektra through her successful real estate firm and Kerstin through her novel writing. The body politics however involved in this negotiation are particularly pronounced. The whole process revolves around their gendered behaviour and personal vs. professional life. There is also a clear contradiction in how they manage the stigma attributed to them: they partly accept it as they are aware of the local norms but they also refuse it at the same time by introducing new dimensions on which to be judged, their professional or intellectual skills. Elektra epitomises this

negotiation in her sentence: that is how they remember I am a person. Among our informants seven person conform with Elektra's narrative and six with Kerstin's.

By contrast, the case of Velvet who has returned to live in Crete, exemplifies the acceptance of local norms – the stigmatised returnee plays by the rules and thus seeks to eliminate the stigma. This story reflects experiences of ten more informants who returned as adults mainly to keep with the expectations of their parents. These are cases of women who eventually accepted the patriarchal relations in the diaspora and in their ancestral hometown eventually turning them into their own social capital and distancing themselves from the 'stigmatised' repatriates like Kerstin or Elektra mentioned above.

4. Return, gender and negotiating local norms

4.1. Islandness and foreign femininity

We have chosen to study experiences of women returning to Mediterranean islands because these places 'continue to function as privileged spatial laboratories for migration studies' (King 2009: 72). Their socio-cultural contexts make them both very difficult for female migrants and interesting for scholars. First, such places have 'unique but beleaguered culture', associated with very local tradition. Thus one of our informants notes: 'Crete is a very "dancing" society. Almost every week, there is a dance event here.' Second, such islands are viewed as the South-European migration border – or 'sentinel' - which makes any migrants appear 'potentially disruptive of this fragile islandic identity' (Tahir & Schmoll 2014: 3). Another informant mentions:

You just need to participate in all local traditions and to teach your children to do this too. Otherwise you will be seen as one of those annoying tourists. And to be honest, I *am kind of* tired of their continuous dancing holidays. This is the main thing that annoys me.

Given the constant irritation factor of expanding global tourism, such crystallization of glocalization on the islands presents a rather difficult challenge for female migrants who would like to settle there (Baldacchino 2005, 2008). All our informants confess the difficulty of being a newcomer in general and a foreigner in particular to a Greek or Italian island. Moreover, it is not easy to remain 'who you actually want to be', they add. As King (2009: 58) argues, 'Islands involve relatively homogenous and intimate societies with a strong sense of common identity: everyone knows everyone else...and there is an equally close knowledge of the local environment – every house and every beach is known and recognized'. One of our interviewees further notes on the overall climate of sexual stigmatization, related to the environment of tourism prevalent in her Greek island:

Overseas women who come to such islands are *de facto* seen by local men as "sexual tourists, who come for pleasure and sex, while the local guys of all ages feel flattered by an opportunity to satisfy American women's needs".

Looking at all her relationships on the island, she admits (as also confirmed by the rest of the interviewees) that a sexual adventure with an American woman makes an islander-guy proud of his own masculinity and strengthens his social status within his buddy circle and, consequently, within the overall patriarchy-structured local community:

You know, here on the island, there is such an expression as “to go for a *kamaki*”, which means “to go afishing”. Between themselves, they call me “*kamaki*”. If you want to break this stereotype, you must prove that you are an honourable Greek woman. You cannot be both here – American and Greek. If you are American, you are *de facto* labelled as *kamaki*. If you do not want to be seen as a *kamaki*, you should change herself.

This “mirror-glass” *kamaki*-image is very difficult to sustain because the local people have the sexual tourist gaze at foreign femininity and, at the same time, expect American women to have the same sexual tourist gaze at local men. So, to a certain extent, the US migration to such islands (including repatriation) is envisioned by locals as part of the global sex industry, with *a priori* assigned roles. This is the overall impression that all our informants have and which is also supported by a number of other works about American expats living in exotic locations (Fecther 2016).

4.2. Elektra and Kirsten: Defying Local Norms

Elektra is a woman in her late thirties. She grew up in a Greek immigrant family who owns a restaurant business in New York. She was at the age of twenty-two, graduating from NYU with a business degree, when her father started to plan their family return to Greece and Elektra’s marriage with a guy from his home village.

Although Elektra saw her future only in the States, negotiating with the parents was useless. As soon as she had tried to say no, the father started to shout at her while the mother was watching in silence. So Elektra started looking for her ‘own’ ways to stay in the States. She quickly ‘married the first man available’ because she knew that her father would respect her more as a married woman. Her father finally abandoned the idea of returning. In his youth, he had committed a crime in his home village and fled to the USA in order to escape imprisonment. Although many years had passed, he was still remembered badly in his hometown community. He wanted to return there with his diasporic daughter and to show everyone that she was the perfect Greek girl and – his voucher back to the community. And after Elektra had disrupted his relocation plans, he saw no reason for returning anymore.

In the meantime, Elektra found herself married to a man that she hardly knew, was 20 years her senior and she did not love. She admits loving her father despite his selfishness and mistakes of his youth until one day her world perception was suddenly changed by a shocking discovery: her father had a long-term girlfriend. The epiphany that had emerged out of this shocking experience was that ‘human life is pragmatically assembled on the amoral principles of lying to each other and that the only way to emerge though this environment of lying was to invent another lie’.

In the meantime, Elektra, who already had two baby-daughters, was desperately searching for a possibility to divorce her husband. She was abstaining from making an official divorce claim because she still felt like a diasporic Greek woman, who would become a complete disappointment for all her family. So she was looking for a round-about-way to initiate the separation. Her husband was a well-to-do-man, running lucrative family business in New York, which suddenly became a target for local mafia attacks. To save their lives and especially the lives of their children, Elektra very quickly relocated to Greece, to the home village of her parents, where she has been living in their ancestral house for almost ten years at the time of the interview.

In Greece, she was met with welcome as local people remembered her mother very positively and after all she was a mater familia saving her children from the evils of America. She settled in the abandoned ancestral house, which she and her rich husband renovated. She was therefore seen as ‘a mature Greek returning home because it was the best place’. Her mother-side relatives helped her to establish her own real estate firm while her US degree and prior experience of running her husband’s firm were seen as the proof of her professionalism. She proudly says, ‘My business is important and I know how to run it. That is why I am wanted and respected here – for my American professionalism, which local people here do not have.’

However, being bored with the everyday local life and still wanting to divorce her husband, Elektra began dating local men, who invested in her business though at the detriment of her reputation. She eventually ended up in a long-term relationship with a colleague, who was her neighbour, married and father of her younger daughter’s best friend. The situation was silently tolerated by all (the man, his wife and Elektra) as in her own words ‘This is what everybody here does, and this is fine until it is undercover.’

The situation drastically changed after the affair became known in the community and also exposed her daughters and the whole family to the fierce criticisms and even derision of other parents at school. Elektra admits having now a very negative reputation and feeling torn among three different categorisations imposed by the community: ‘the new Greek business woman’, ‘a slut from New York’, or ‘her impudent father’s daughter – an apple from the same tree’. As she concludes, ‘This is how they actually remember that I am still someone’.

Kirsten is a former business executive from Chicago in her late forties who now lives in an Italian island. Having grown up in an Italian diasporic family, she always wanted to become a writer. After having worked as a small newspaper correspondent and having lived on her own for a few years, she was advised by her father on changing her profession to that of business administration. She recalls that one day (when she was already in her thirties), her father said: “Kirsten, you should requalify and become a lawyer or a business executive. Don’t you understand that America is the country of lawyers and businessmen? And who are you? A becoming writer? What the hack is that!” Kirsten admits not being very happy with that decision but sighs, ‘What could I do? An Italian daughter must not contradict her father. This is how I was brought up, and at that time I was not quite ready to defend my life position yet.’

She spent another four years studying in business administration while her father paid for her studies, and did a two-year internship in a firm to which her father had recommended her. Having then worked in this firm for a few years as a business executive, she opened her own media business with her father's financial support. She never married – she says that this was because she was not able to find a guy whom her father would like and who would like her father.

After her father died a few years ago, living in Chicago without him did not make sense for Kirsten. She 'needed a grieving space and wanted to pay a tribute to his memory'. She decided to move to this Italian island because it was her father's birthplace and because he always wanted them to go there together. When she arrived in her father's native town, no one there seemed to remember him anymore. But having inherited the money, she bought a house on that island and eventually stayed there as she fell in love with a local fisherman, Franco, twenty years younger.

She felt that this love story brought together the different pieces of her biography, and ignored the frowning and stigmatisation from local people as the 'easy' American woman having an affair with a younger man. She admits that her relationship with Franco was a 'roller-coaster' and even violent at times. She was harshly criticised by his mother who kept telling her that 'Franco would marry a decent young girl of his age'. At a certain point indeed Franco ended the relationship, and Kirsten was faced both with loneliness and exclusion by the community. Her neighbours noted "you are not one of us – you do not even have an ancestral house!"

However, this experience has not forced Kirsten to go back to the States. She has stayed in Italy, wrote a novel about her life there and her relationship with Franco – which she aims to publish in the USA - seeking thus to turn her personal sadness into a self-invigorating experience and also seeking to overturn the stigma of the 'easy' amoral American woman to that of a successful writer.

4.3. Velvet: Accepting Local Norms

Velvet, a woman in her late forties, comes from Los Angeles and now lives in Crete, the birthplace of her both parents. She graduated from UCLA. However, the same year, her father had an infarction while her mother became a cancer patient, both predicted to live for no more than a year. They wanted to return to Crete in order to die in their homeland. Her mother is still alive and her father died a year prior to our interview.

Having grown up in diaspora, Velvet was always kept isolated from the outside world, apart from the time when she had classes at school and at the university. She almost never went to the beach because her parents did not allow her to go out on her own, even when she was already a young adult in her early twenties.

Velvet wanted to stay in Los Angeles because she clearly saw her future (including career) there. However, she admits the zero possibility of contradicting to her parents: 'Greek daughters who grow up in diaspora are scared to say no to their parents - so I was just forced to come here [in Crete]'.

Upon repatriation, Velvet had problems with employment because her degree was not locally recognized but her relatives helped her to start a business of her own – a private English language school. Her parents had inherited two ancestral houses and turned one into the school building. Velvet’s relatives also supported her business financially so as to help her stay in Crete. After she had opened her private school, her aunt introduced her to her future husband and they married very fast. Her new in-laws restructured her school into a family-owned tourist company, in which she is now the administrator.

Velvet admits being an obedient daughter and an exemplary wife, who does not question her relationship with her husband. She consciously uses the network and socio-cultural resources offered by her relatives and the wider local community adapting thus to the role prescribed for her as a diasporic returnee daughter.

4.4 Multiple Layers of Inclusion/Exclusion

The three life stories above exemplify two main types of negotiation of a returning woman’s position in the local community. Actually none of these women is fully included or fully excluded. They may be symbolically excluded from certain domains of local life and included in others. Velvet is fully included in her extended family network and local community but excluded from outside-the-community social life and from many possibilities of her career development. On the contrary, Elektra is fully included economically within the local framework of her professional development: she has her own real estate firm and many local clients who support her business. She is not fully excluded from the local communal life either as she is still the mother of her Greek children, who disseminates values from her culture inter-generationally and who lives in the ancestral house. She is also seen as “the daughter of her father” or “the apple having not fallen far from the tree”, with the “father” and the “tree” categories perceived as “residual” yet “intrinsically Greek”. So even in such a stigmatizing categorization, she is still understood by her neighbours as “Greek” – untraditional but local and more than just *kamaki*. However, her mode of participation in the local culture is different from that of Velvet.

Velvet’s choice in favour of accepting the ‘stigma’ of being Greek American turns it into a social asset: She admits really benefiting from the everyday support of her relatives. Although this support comes as symbolic power, blocking her decision-making in many ways, it provides herself and her children with a high level of security and safety. However, the price for this kind of cultural membership is Velvet’s respect for and eventual internationalization of the stigma rules. This pact includes her recognition of the legitimacy of the “bad Anglophone foreigner stereotype”, limiting her socialization with other non-ethnic co-nationals and taming her female body in order to keep it within the legitimate framework of the socially accepted local norms.

Elektra’s choice to defy the stigma and to continue to promote her “illegitimate” body has, in fact, made her highly visible in local life, thus blocking her access to the communal female culture and, at the same time, enabling her pass to career development within the local male-dominated environment. In this reference,

Reissman (2000) notes on the contextual situatedness of stigma, saying that in the eyes of some people some experience may look stigmatizing - while, when understood by others, it may seem as an advantage.

Elektra's case illuminates the phenomenon of positive stigma – or the beneficial aspect of ethnic sexual stigmatization. While her promiscuity is rigidly criticized by her relatives and neighbours, it is welcomed by her male colleagues and clients, who perceive her as “an aggressive and fearless risk-taker from America” and who consequently view her as “a woman worth trusting and investing in business” (quotes from her interview). Although her business was initially supported by her relatives, this support would not be enough for its proliferation. Constantly expanding her local clientele network through intimate relations with influential local men (both for pleasure and business) has become a levelling force between the domains of her inclusion and exclusion on the island.

5. Negotiating a Gendered Belonging

Taking stock of this rich empirical material, we would like to point to three elements that come out from this study. First, how stigma is actually created while already at the diaspora and before return so that when stigma as a foreigner is repeated at the homeland, the women have already interiorised it. Second, that local norms are partly accepted and used in negotiating one's position in the community even when her behaviour explicitly defies them. Third, that the overall process of inclusion/exclusion can be best conceptualised through the notion of nativity voucher that refers to the ethnic and social capital that each returnee has at her disposal or manages to mobilise.

Stigma is assigning to someone a socially undesirable attribute/mark to separate someone from the mainstream population (Chen 2011; Stafford & Scott 1986). It is an attribute that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular society (Crocker & Major 1998). Reissman (2000) has shown that migrants or returnees experience the so-called “minority” stigma – they do not fully belong at destination but they are also ‘foreigners’ in the homeland. Our informants were raised not to fully belong already while in the USA. They were reminded that fully mainstreaming and integrating into the USA culture was not desirable for their parents. Restricting walks to the beachy or play time with class mates or even choices about study and work was part of making and keeping them ‘authentic’ Greek/Italian daughters. But this involved already then the stigmatization of “a bad American girl/woman” – this is what they should avoid becoming or being. This is what can be conceptualized as the pre-stigma - or the pre-repatriation, diasporic stigma. It was an overt process of stigmatization, based on the symbolic power of the parents rather on straightforward societal labelling. It was the in-family stigma experience.

We define the pre-stigma as the first stage (equivalent to preparation for stigmatization or training for becoming used to the stigmatization experience) in stigma processes with more complex structures such as those related to migration and diaspora. The majority of studies work with more classic understanding of the minority stigma – when the stigmatized population is the ethnic minority. Our examples of pre-stigma show that the mainstreamed majority (the American society)

can be understood as stigmatized by the minority (diaspora) prior to rather than just in response to or after repatriation.¹ For the stigma to shape tastes and habits, a fixed structure or a fixed societal mini-context such as family is important. Stressing the social effect of stigma, Link and Phelan (2001) define it broadly as ‘something that is created and affixed on people through social processes’ rather than in a static, pre-given fashion. One such social process of stigmatization is education or family upbringing, and our informants’ pre-stigma was a family educational process preparing them for the repatriation and somehow already attributing to them a negative gendered identity.

Although the informants’ parents had left Greece and Italy for the USA before the digital divide in the 1950-1960s, the majority of our informants (20 women) did maintain contacts with their ancestral homes through regular summer holidays, regular post, telephone conversations and later correspondence. However, such previous knowledge of the country did not prevent them from the difficulties of settlement and also from stigmatization. Our findings and many other studies confirm that such brief visits are akin to tourism, during which the person has a very limited perception of the country; while virtual communication strongly contributes to romanticized versions of the ancestral homeland and diasporic ideology (Rumyantzev 2012; Isaakyan & Triandafyllidou 2014; Rappoport & Lomsky-Feder 2008).

Upon returning to the ancestral homeland, women take a new step in their diasporic condition. They test the limits of their acceptance or rejection and re-negotiation of the diasporic norms which upon return become the mainstream communal norms. Velvet was never able to contradict her father while in the States. Similarly she did not contradict his will after return. On the contrary, Kirsten and Elektra showed the first signs of resistance to their fathers while still in the USA. Their acts of resistance were not identical, ranging from moving out to a separate apartment, to choosing an occupation or marrying a man not approved by the father. If we compare Elektra and Velvet, their parents’ decision to relocate to the ancestral home in Greece was met by separation in the former case and by compliance in the latter case.

Earlier research argues that forcefully-repatriated second-generation women are better mainstreamed than romantic and circumstantial returnees (King & Christou 2011). Our findings show that this may be explained by the symbolic power of the father who is directly present at the moment of repatriation. When the father is geographically distant, his transnational avatar in the face of the lover/husband becomes a much softer substitute and cultural dominator as he provides the woman with more space for trying the new Greek type of identity (Elektra).

However, defiant behaviours are not fully discouraged by the informant’s family and may be supported through diasporic female solidarity. Her female relatives (mother or sister) may suggest that she re-style stigma responses, or re-pack her body politics. The recommendation may be to become a more complacent lover – that is, to avoid making public scandals and to be ready to wait for several years. Thus when the wife of Daphne’s Dad came to Elektra’s house for a fight, Elektra (from her mother’s advice) chose not to fight back and to receive a black eye. In other words the negotiation takes place with a partial acceptance of the prevalence of local norms.

The gendered dynamics of the returnee integration are also influenced by the richness of the woman's nativity voucher. We use this term to speak of her wider ethnic capital, that goes beyond just ancestry. The nativity voucher includes ownership of an ancestral family home in the hometown, the reputation of both father and mother, and density of the kin-network – all factors that are important in negotiating one's position in the local community.

Velvet and Elektra have the strongest nativity vouchers but chose to use them in opposed ways. Velvet accepts the local norms and seeks to assimilate while Elektra mobilises her nativity voucher to defy them. Kerstin is probably in the weakest position and thus chooses to re-negotiate her role and reputation transnationally (publishing her book in the USA) rather than locally.

The nativity voucher can actually have a paradoxical effect: women with strong nativity vouchers may be more prone to challenge dominant local norms compared to those women who feel they have weaker resources. This is indeed an interesting finding worth researching further in diaspora and returnee studies with a special focus on gender. The role of nativity vouchers can shed more light to the dynamics of what we call a transnational system of diasporic patriarchy that appears to shape our informants' biographical narratives.

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Endnotes

¹ Reissman (2000) notes the counter-direction of ethnic stigma management – a situation when an ethnic minority group [e.g.: Blacks, immigrants, etc.] is stigmatized by the majority [e.g.: white population, host society] and, in response, starts stigmatizing the majority population while constructing its own ethnic minority ethos.