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Κωνσταντίνος Παρθένης, 1925

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Greek, Australian, Greek-Australian or something else? Alternative identities and communities in John Charalambous' *Furies* (2004)

Abstract

Greek migration to Australia began in the early years of the colonization of the country but it was not until the end of World War II when significant numbers of Greek citizens migrated to this country. Their presence, together with migrants and refugees of many other countries, changed its society from a mainly homogenous one to another one in which almost half of its population was born overseas or has at least one parent born overseas. The construction of collective and individual identities has been studied by theorists such as Manuel Castells, with his identity theory, and Vin D'Cruz and William Steele, with their psychocultural continuum theory. Given the fact that identities are complex constructs which are often explored in literature, this paper presents John Charalambous' novel *Furies* (2004) and uses those two theories to understand the complexities embedded in collective and individual identities.

In the twenty-first century, Australia is considered to be a country of migrants because 46% of its population is either first- or second-generation migrant (ABS 2013). This is a consequence of the immigration policies the country held after World War II, which lessened the White Australia Policy and opened the country to immigrants from many nationalities which had been dismissed before. Greeks became one of the main groups to migrate to the country, but it was not the first time Greek migrants arrived in Australia, as some had already settled there in the nineteenth century.

The following pages explain the influence that Greek migrants have had in the formation of Australian society, introduce John Charalambous, an author of Cypriot Greek and Anglo-Australian heritage, and explore the constructs of collective and individual identity in his novel *Furies* (2004).

Greek migration to Australia

Many of the first Greek migrants who arrived in Australia did not choose their country of immigration while others went there on purpose. As Anastasios M. Tamis explains, between 1829 and 1880 approximately 1000 Greeks migrated to Australia, which made this country a more common destination than America (2005: 33). Some of those migrants were

450 male sailors serving on British vessels, fugitives, fortune hunters, unsuccessful islander traders and unskilled or unemployed persons from the Greek islands interested in the possibilities in a new land. (Tamis 2005: 31)

When gold was discovered in the area of Ballarat (Victoria), Greek gold miners travelled to Australia with the intention of investing their profits “in the flourishing Greek shipping industry of the time” (Tamis 2005: 31), thus, maintaining a strong bond with the homeland. The number of male and female migrants was uneven and two of the first female migrants were Maria Bartides, who landed with her husband and son in March 1830 or Aikaterini Plessas, who arrived with her husband in 1835 (Tamis 2005: 33). The 1871 Victorian Census “recorded 127 males and only nineteen females born in Greece”, data which was not complete given the fact that “the first recorded lists of non-convict Greek settlers to migrate to Australia included more women” (Tamis 2005: 33).

Between 1881 and 1901, the year of the Federation of Australia, about 1200 Greek migrants settled in Australia and by 1940 this number had raised to 15000 individuals (Tamis 2005: 35). But it was World War II, the Nazi occupation of Greece and several dictatorships that forced many Greek men and women into migration and to settle in Australia. In 1952 the two countries signed an assisted migration agreement which allowed more than “250 000 Greek and Cypriot migrants from Greece (1952-74), Rumania (1952-8), Egypt and the Middle East (1952-2) [sic], Cyprus (1974-84) and other politically turbulent countries of Eastern Europe and Latin America” to move to Australia (Tamis 2005: 47).

The newly arrived found different settlement programs which helped them to find accommodation and employment as determined by the authorities. On the one hand, as James Jupp (1992) explains, these programs aimed to teach migrants the basic linguistic and cultural skills necessary for their integration into mainstream society, ensure their basic health, equip them with skills and attitudes relevant to surviving as free settlers after two years of bonded labor and impress on them the need to assimilate rapidly into Australian culture. On the other hand, these programs were also aimed to lessen the anxiety of mainstream Australians as it wanted to highlight that “foreigners would make good ‘New Australians’”, that “working conditions and housing for Australians would not be adversely affected by immigrants” and that British were still the preferred migrants (Jupp 1992: 131). Consequently, the Australian Government sought several goals when implementing the various settlement programs, including easing the assimilation process, avoiding the creation of ethnic enclaves, ensuring “that immigrants became permanent settlers who would not differ too markedly from mainstream society either culturally or socially”, reducing majority anxieties, minimizing public costs and using “migrant labour for projects of national importance” (Jupp 1992: 131).

Nevertheless, reality differed from the utopian ideal. Georgina Tsolidis follows Alcorso and Schofield's (1991) claim that women from southern Europe were in better health when they arrived in Australia than Australian-born women or those born in English-speaking countries. However, Greek women had “higher rates of work-related illness and injuries and a greater incidence of conditions associated with poor mental and emotional health” (Tsolidis 1995: 134). Their causes were the working conditions in Australia and the changes and pressures resulting from migration: their duties as wives and mothers, missing their families, their social networks and the alienation from society.

Adults were bonded to work for two years before they could go back to Greece, if they so wished. The number of Greek migrants to Australia reached its peak during the twenty years between 1952 and 1974, when approximately 220,000 Greeks arrived under the auspices of this program. The 1991 census stated that more than 136,000 Greek-born individuals lived in Australia (ABS 1993: 20), and the 2011 census recorded less than 108,000 persons (ABS 2013). Neighborhoods changed. There were restaur-

rants, cafés, terraces and milk bars. More vegetables and dairy products were introduced into the daily diets of many and olive oil became available as a food product, not just as a medicine. Languages other than English were taught in Saturday schools, where the children of first-generation migrants learned the language of their parents and of their community. Social relations also changed at work as many industries functioned due to the work done by migrants. Besides, politicians took a different approach towards their electorates: in the 1970s Australian Liberal Party politicians paid attention to the needs of migrants in order to get their votes. Literature also showed the changes and cultural diversity that Australia was experiencing. Ethnic-specific literary associations appeared, such as the Australasian League of Greek Writers (SELAS) (1964), the Greek-Australian Cultural League of Melbourne (1970), the Hellenic Writers' and Artists' Association of Australia (1978) or the Multicultural Writers' Association (1988) (Kanarakis 1987: 35; Nickas 1992: 21).

The academic study of literary texts written by authors of Greek heritage in Australia began in the 1980s. As Con Castan (1988), George Kanarakis (1987), Helen Nickas (1992) or Hariclea Zengos (2009) explain, different terms have been used to refer to the texts written by authors of Greek heritage. One of the most common debates has concerned the label used to designate the texts written by authors of Greek heritage living in Australia, either those who were born in Greece and moved to Australia (first-generation migrants) or those who were born in Australia of Greek parents (second-generation migrants). George Kanarakis claims language should be the factor to denote the corpus a text is part of, that is, if a text be written in Greek, it should be considered part of Greek literature, regardless of the place where it was written, or if a text be written in English, it should be included in the Australian canon. He explains this is the reason why Cavafy, for example, is regarded as a Greek author despite the fact that he was born and lived in Egypt. Kanarakis (2005) also opposes the label "Greek-Australian literature" as he considers it proclaims its marginalization and it is doomed to disappear. On the other hand, Con Castan (1998) argues that the works of Australians of Greek descent should be known as "Greek Australian literature", without a hyphen, as it marks them as different from other Greeks and other Australians. Another opinion is hold by

Helen Nickas, who prefers the term “Greek-Australian literature”, hyphenated, because it “implies that Greek-Australian literature is an integral part of a (multicultural) Australian literature” (Nickas 1992: 5) and “an equal among equals” (Nickas 1992: 6). A fourth point of view is shared by authors Angelo Loukakakis and George Papaellinas (in Kanarakis 2005 and Nickas 1992), who consider that, given the fact that their works are distinctively Australian, not Greek, these should only be considered part of Australian literature.

John Charalambous' *Furies*

A second-generation author of Greek-Cypriot and Anglo-Australian heritage who deals with identity in his texts is John Charalambous. He grew up in Melbourne and worked as an Arts teacher in a rural town in central Victoria before deciding to open a small business with his wife and devote time for writing. The first of his four novels is *Furies* (2004), which was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writer's Prize Best First Book. Set in Rushburn, a fictional rural town in Victoria, its main character is Nicoletta (Nicky) Flogas, a second-generation Greek-Australian Visual Arts teacher. She is the tutor of Imogen, the 15 year-old daughter of two friends with whom she has been living since she was born. Imogen's mother committed suicide when she was a baby and her father takes no interest in her. The novel is not linear and present and past memories intertwine. It introduces a non-stereotypical family: a divorced woman who takes care of the daughter of some friends and whose way of raising the child is based on respect, dialogue, negotiation and coherence between one's behavior and the household norms. Because Nicky is not a biological mother, she often questions her aptitudes, Imogen's expectations of her as a mother, as well as the comments she hears from other mothers who sometimes problematize her ability to raise Imogen on her own. The novel only states the ethnicity of some of its characters (Nicky's parents are Greek, Nicky and her sisters are Greek-Australian, Nicky's ex-husband is Singaporean and Imogen's mother has an Italian surname), thus, marking them as un-normative and stating that Anglo-Australians are the mainstream also in this fictional world.

Main characters:

Nicky Flogas is the youngest daughter of two Greek migrants. In his village in Greece, Nicky's father was a shepherd, but in Australia the family business is a fishmonger's. There Nicky's father manages the shop and deals with suppliers, representatives and the accountancy while her mother serves customers. This organization can be seen as an extension of the house and of their traditional roles: the husband enjoys social prestige, the wife manages the house and the shop, and their tasks complement each other's.

The Flogas are part of an established Greek community and they send Nicky and her two older sisters to Greek school on Saturday mornings in order to learn Greek language, culture, mythology, patriotism and duty:

There she [Nicky] learnt that the Greeks had always travelled far, and that she and her friends were little ambassadors, heirs of Odysseus, heirs of Jason. 'Remember where you come from,' said Papa Stelliios, 'remember Greece, remember your parents. If you do this you'll always feel strong.' He didn't need to mention God. (Charalambous 2004: 49)

Her Greek identity is enhanced by the films she watches with her father's uncle, her sisters and her speaking Greek until she goes to school. On her first day, her teacher sits her next to another Greek girl, thinking that they will support and help each other. However, her classmate wants to fit in with the Australian students and speaks English all the time. After the first upsetting day, she is sent to English lessons and helped by her mother and sisters. At the end of the week, her father teaches her the relevance of interpersonal relations and to differentiate between family and others, regardless of their ethnicity:

'Eh, my Nicoletta,' her father began, 'say tomorrow you were squashed under a car -who'd care?'...

'You'd care,' she said.

'Of course, I'd care. I'm your father. Who else?'

'Mana.'

'Naturally. You're a part of her. Your mother and I would be in pieces. And your sisters too.'

Having got the idea, she cited all the Mildura relatives.

'Family,' her father concluded.

'And Papa Stellios,' she said tentatively.

He gave her a sceptical look. 'Papa Stellios? Would he bang his head and pull his hair? Would he be in pieces? Or would he say "Shame about that Nicoletta Flogas getting squashed flat like a pancake. Still, there are plenty of other girls!"'

'Not Papa Stellios,' she admitted...

'But Soula Hadjiantoniou is supposed to be a Greek!,' she erupted.

'What's that got to do with it? The Greeks are the biggest bunch of crooks in the world.'... 'Niki-Niki-Niki,' he crooned, 'only family can make you cry.'

(Charalambous 2004: 57-58)

The extended family does not include many members. Nicky's father has no family left in Greece and his only remaining relative is the uncle who lives in Mildura and his family. Therefore, there is no reason for him to go back to Greece. However, Nicky's mother does have her parents and other family members in Greece and she wants to visit them. As a result, Nicky's father promises his wife that they will all travel to their country of birth. When Nicky is 12, he announces he is travelling to Greece alone. In spite of all the arguments and pleas from his wife, he does not relent and goes to Greece on his own. He assures them that it is a business trip, although his purpose is to take care of his parents' remains. During his stay, he gets toothache which turns into a severe blood infection and has to have all his teeth removed. When he returns to Australia, Nicky's mother finally realizes that her dreams of going back to Greece will not come true.

Until the trip, Nicky's father was caring towards his daughters and sometimes violent towards his wife. However, the trip also changes his behavior: he becomes "snappish and unreasonable, interfering in their established routines in the house and shop" (Charalambous 2004: 59). The Flogas do not want their daughters to further their studies when compulsory education finishes, but to work full-time in the shop and to get married to a suitable groom of their election. Nicky's older sister, Eleni, is to get married some months after her father's trip to Greece, but the preparations cause numerous arguments among the family members, mainly between her father and her father's uncle. When Alex, the second sister, turns 15, she is instructed to leave school, to work full-time in the shop and to get married. Nevertheless, the suitability of the chosen groom again causes bitter disagreements between her father and his uncle, who "soon saw that the match

was unsuitable” (Charalambous 2004: 59). However, as her father feels that his prestige is questioned, he encourages her to get married by stating that she has “to be patient [as] love [takes] time” (Charalambous 2004: 59).

When Nicky is 14, her parents start telling her the plans they have for her future. However, Nicky is adamant and ready to fight: she is an outstanding student and takes every chance to study and do her homework, even when she is working at the shop. Her parents throw her uniform away in a bid to force her give up school. However, her Cypriot Greek Visual Arts teacher and the deputy principal pay a visit to her parents to explain what a brilliant student Nicky is and that she should be allowed to further her studies. Only Nicky’s mother is home and, aware of the importance of her family’s reputation in the Greek community and of the Greek understanding of the concepts of honour (*philotimo*) and shame (*drope*), she is a hospitable host.

However, when her father learns about the visit, he considers that Nicky had “brought educated people to his house to shame and castigate him” (Charalambous 2004: 65) and he canes her. Nicky’s father is aware of the different education and social classes: while the teachers received specific tertiary education, he is not educated; and, although in Australia he is a businessman, that is, a member of the “old” middle class or petite bourgeoisie, and teachers are members of the “new” middle class, he considers himself a peasant and teachers to be authoritative figures. Consequently, he feels insulted and humiliated. As Nicky recalls, her father “regarded her eagerness to stay on at school as amusing and annoying [but by] the time she turned fifteen it was betrayal” (Charalambous 2004: 54). Nicky also feels she does not live up to her father’s expectations because she is a girl and given that “A son is a Greek man’s right hand” (Charalambous 2004: 54), Nicky doesn’t know “what part of his anatomy she represented” (Charalambous 2004: 54).

The concepts of honor and shame are embedded in the collectivist nature of Greek identity given the fact that the whole family gain or suffer from the successes and misdeeds of one of its members. A person’s identity is defined in relation to one’s status and position within membership groups (the family, the clan, the village/ neighborhood) and their sense of self-fulfillment is not attained when achieving personal goals which have been defined with their own particular ethical system. As Adamantia Pollis

defends, “self-worth is judged by the person and by others in terms of how well the prescribed obligations and loyalties are fulfilled, and self-fulfilment is attained by performing well the assigned role within membership groups” (1965: 33). The psychological mechanism that imposes sanctions on misbehavior is guilt, which leads to shame, that is, “the psychological penalty for behavior inappropriate *vis-à-vis* the group” (Pollis 1965: 33) and which discourages deviation from traditional ideals.

In spite of the punishments and threats and without the support of her father's uncle, Nicky goes back to school the following academic year, when she is 15. Nicky's defiance is contested by her father: he threatens to throw her out of the house if she does not obey her mother, that is, if she does not obey him, stops studying, begins to work in the shop and then gets married to whomever they choose. In an unprecedented decision in her family, Nicky packs her belongings and leaves the house that night. That is to say, Nicky breaks the expected compliance towards her parents' decisions and stops being an obedient and dutiful daughter. Nicky subverts the role of the family as main carer and provider: she knows the state can take care of her while she continues her studies. In fact, she lives with state wards, is “assigned a social worker and a child advocate and she complete[s] the school year” (Charalambous 2004: 69).

A mediating process exists between Nicky's parents and her. The Flogas say Nicky can go back home, but when her advocate insists on having a written document with the negotiations and the assurances, the conversations come to standstill. Some weeks later, Nicky observes that her parents' shop is closed and she learns that her family has moved to Mildura. Later on, when she is in long-term foster care in Bendigo, Nicky receives the news that her father is in jail for trafficking with raw tobacco.

Nicky manages to study at the Teachers' College and specializes in Visual Arts. Nevertheless, her feelings when studying are not those she expected:

Under her parents' roof books had smelt of private exultation, of alternatives. Finally of escape. Here [at college] they weren't even called books. They were texts, and texts, she discovered in a flash of unpleasant insight, smelt of loneliness. (Charalambous 2004: 85)

At this time she lives in a room in a shared house close to the university. One of the housemates is Bala, a Singaporean young man who

recommends the house to her and who lives there just between jobs. After 18 months sharing the house, they start going out together and Nicky decides to trust him:

Ordinarily she was happy to be misread. Other people's misconceptions were a blind behind which she could exist in safety. Something about this man –his brotherly manner? His foreignness? The muted beauty of his almond eyes?- made her want to break cover. For just a moment, swaying beside him on the tram, she bristled with raw assertiveness. He should know the misery she had endured! The loneliness! Then came anger, a sudden reflux of the fury she continued to feel towards her parents. It left her flushed and incapable of speech. (Charalambous 2004: 104)

After finishing her degree, Bala and Nicky decide to go north to pick fruit. On their way, they stop at Rushburn and fall in love with a plot of land. Two friends of theirs, Delores Antonelli and Karl, join them and they decide to settle there, so Bala reaches an agreement with the owner of the land and Nicky buys it. They start building a community and more friends join them, one of whom is Willie. Karl and Willie do not get on well and Nicky and Delores often have to separate them because Karl constantly fights with Willie, who only wants to help. Nicky gets a job as a Visual Arts teacher at the secondary school in Rushburn and hers is the only steady income. Bala and the former owner of the land become close friends and when he is hospitalized some time later, Bala is devastated and leaves for "nine months out of twelve" (Charalambous 2004: 210). Karl and Delores have a daughter, Imogen, but they do not raise her. Delores commits suicide and Karl spends little time in the community. Therefore, both Willie and Nicky take care of the baby. Willie sees to her physical needs (feeding her, changing her nappies, bathing her and putting her to sleep) and Nicky entertains her. Bala, now working in Melbourne, decides to enroll in a fine-arts course and never visits Rushburn. Willie continues to take care of Imogen and Nicky is happy with the arrangement:

Sometimes she quite liked to hold her, quite enjoyed bathing and dressing her if Willie did the dirty work. But then she handed her back and didn't think of her during all the hours she was away at school. Never felt guilty. Particularly as Willie seemed to possess all the right instincts –he had to have *some* talents! She regarded him as a wry challenge to the milky mothers.

See, there is more than one way! (Charalambous 2004: 249) (emphasis in the original)

This new family of hers is another subversion of the traditional family. The relation between Nicky and Bala is not typical as, although they eventually marry, each goes their own way. Delores and Karl's parenting leaves much to be desired and instead of taking care of their child with the support of others, they often ask Nicky to take care of Imogen so they can go away for several days. Also, Willie is well able to take care of Imogen and he seems to know what to do and how to do it, he cares about her well-being and her development. Before taking care of Imogen, he is described as not having many talents other than being kind-hearted. Nicky, on the other hand, treats Imogen as if she were a doll she can play with. Willie and Nicky take on reversed roles as parents: Willie behaves like a caring mother and Nicky like a provider father. Masculinity and femininity are, thus, also challenged. According to R.W. Connell's types of masculinities (1995), Willie is an example of a non-hegemonic type, as he is neither domineering nor aggressive, does not consider women should be obedient to him and does not see himself as the main provider (hegemonic masculinity). Willie displays a subordinated masculinity with other men, as he is described as weak and sensitive: "He was almost crying at the injustice" (Charalambous 2004: 302) or "he wasn't the bad guy your father says, just weak" (Charalambous 2004: 302). But he is also an example of complicit marginality in the way he takes care of Imogen and the compromises he reaches with Nicky regarding parenthood: for example, he insists Imogen should be vaccinated and Nicky points out Karl's objections. Nevertheless, Willie insists and, as Nicky says:

with her he had the fire of righteousness, and perhaps of love –for the kid, love for the quiet domesticity he'd done nothing to earn- and swore that Karl would shit bricks if little Immy got polio or TB or something terrible. (Charalambous 2004: 302)

The changes in her new family unit, mainly Delores' suicide and her separation from Bala, deeply affect Nicky, so she goes to Mildura to see her parents given that eight years have passed and they are on speaking terms. There she learns that her father's uncle has died. Her mother takes the chance to show her the shop she wants to buy to create a business but she needs money. Nicky decides to do her duty as a daughter, extend her

mortgage and give her mother the money she needs. However, Nicky's mother dies two months after the opening. When six months later she asks her father for the money which has not been used, he does not want to give it back and she drops the subject.

On the night Nicky arrives home after her mother's burial, she does not find either Willie with Imogen or a note about their whereabouts. She panics and calls the police thinking that Willie has left with the baby. When Willie gets back home with Imogen two days later, he is completely unaware of the worry caused and of the ongoing police search. Nicky takes Imogen from him and threatens Willie with a knife. Heartbroken, he leaves the place. When Karl finds out about the search, and in spite of Nicky explaining Willie's ignorance of the consequences of his acts, Karl beats him up. From that moment on, Nicky is the person to raise Imogen. Nicky is aware that she hurt Willie's feelings, but she recognizes "there was no solidarity at the time. We were indifferent to one another's wounds" (Charalambous 2004: 303).

After her father's death, Nicky's oldest sister, Eleni, decides to maintain the bonds among the sisters. Eleni and Nicky phone each other sometimes but every year they send a Christmas card with the main news and their best wishes. The relation with Alex, the second sister, is more distant. Even though Alex tries to behave as if nothing had happened, and Nicky has told her they are adults and there was nothing to forgive, their relationship is not as diplomatic as that with Eleni and, consequently, their contact is less frequent.

When Imogen is 15, Nicky decides that they should go to live in Melbourne as Imogen will have more opportunities in a big city than in a rural town. Nicky applies for, and gets, a job as a Visual Arts teacher in Melbourne. This will become a meaningful change in their lives and it implies that Nicky is evaluated for a position, faces her past and dreams about a future. When reflecting on her life, Nicky considers herself "A tough nut... Resilient, resourceful, equal to the challenge [, a person who had] come through the narrow straits. Excelled" (Charalambous 2004: 130). After her job interview, she can even sense that her interviewers recognize in her "competence and strength, even a degree of deference" (Charalambous 2004: 131) in her abilities as a professional. And, when wondering about what her fellow villagers will say regarding her decision, Nicky reflects that

“now that she chooses to leave, in her own good time, and without regrets, no one can say she’s running away” (Charalambous 2004: 79). Nicky has been an active member of the community and she is proud of her accomplishments and of her main roles:

an educated woman with a job, a ratepayer, a school councillor, a netballer, a tennis-club secretary, a person who [helped] raise money to send exchange students to America and [gave] up her weekends to clean rubbish from the creek. (Charalambous 2004: 78-79)

Analysis of Nicky’s identity

The terms “identity” and “role” cannot be exchanged as they have different implications. Sociologist Manuel Castells defines identity as “the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning” (2010: 6), whereas roles ““are defined by norms structured by the institutions and organizations of society” (2010: 6). While the former organize meaning, the latter categorize functions, such as being a mother, a worker, an environmentalist, etc. Castells claims that identities are “stronger sources of meaning than roles because of the process of self-construction and individuation that they involve” (2010: 7). Nicky understands that all her roles (a teacher, a ratepayer, etc) are just parts of who she is, but they do not define her, that is to say, if she stops being a teacher or paying taxes, she will still be the same person.

Castells introduces three types of identity in his *The Power of Identity. The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture* (2010). The first one is named “legitimizing identity” and it can be considered mainstream or normative because it follows the processes imposed by the nation-state and it produces a civil society. As Castells explains, legitimizing identity is “introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination *vis à vis* social actors” (2010: 8). The second form is resistance identity, which is generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus, building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society. (Castells 2010: 8)

An example of legitimizing identity can be found in the Australian immigration policies of assimilation and integration and in the “Good Neighbour Movement”, which was created to speed the assimilation of migrants, but in a very paternalistic way. Some migrants tried to have a legitimizing identity by acting and being considered members of the mainstream society as much as they were allowed to and as long as they followed the ruling institutions.

The second main type of identity introduced by Castells is “resistance identity”, which implies “the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded” (Castells 2010: 9) and, consequently, resists mainstream organizations, tries to organize its members in alternative communities, which may also resist other alternative communities, and aims to create a society on its own terms and, if possible, imposing itself onto others. Some migrants can also be considered to have a “resistance identity” because they decide to exclude those who exclude them and try to live apart from them, in their own communities, with their own rules. This type of identity is defensive as it appears as a consequence of a perceived aggression, physical or not.

The third class is “project identity”, which has the purpose to create a new society by negotiating its terms with others. It takes place

when social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by doing so, seek the transformation of overall social structure.

(Castells 2010: 8)

This third type is not a synthesis of the previous two categories because it aims to transform society as an extension of this identity, consequently, converting “its symbolic content into a communicable form” (Valtanen 2007: 6) and negotiating meanings and ways of reaching its goals. Thus, Castells concludes that “new *project identities* do not seem to emerge from former identities of civil society of the industrial era, but from a development of current *resistance identities*” (2010: 422) (emphasis in the original). Some migrants have project identities because they try to change the society they live in through negotiation with other communities and mainstream institutions: they do not accept the norms imposed on them and devise alternatives.

The character of Nicky is an example of project identity because, although as a child she lives with her family, follows traditions and obeys her

parents, when she is pressured to leave her studies, she rebels and abandons her parents' house. She decides to live in an alternative community, that of state houses, until she creates her own community. She buys the plot of land where she and her friends build the house – considered a shack by other villagers-, annexes and garden they want and dream of, which are never finished. In this community, the relations among its members subvert the established idea of the patriarchal family, of the roles of men and women, and of masculinity and femininity. Even though Nicky does not aim to change the overall society, she is consistent with her beliefs and raises Imogen to be a mature and coherent young woman, thus, she changes the world by means of leading by example.

Another theory which can explain the evolution of the character of Nicky is Vin D'Cruz and William Steel's psychocultural continuum theory. During the novel, Nicky goes through different stages: first, when she is a child and lives with her family and community; then, when she is an adolescent and a young adult, leaves her parents and studies a degree; and a third phase when she is Imogen's tutor. This last stage includes the novel's open ending: Nicky has got a new job in Melbourne and her house is destroyed by a bushfire. These two events imply a new beginning and it will not include possessions to remind her of past times. Vin D'Cruz and William Steele's theory develops the idea that cultures, and individuals, are part of a continuum, whose poles are two metaphors: "concreteness" and "abstraction". Accordingly, cultures and individuals can be towards the more concrete or towards the more abstract because there are no pure types, that is, no purely concrete or purely abstract cultures. Furthermore, humans and societies are both concrete and abstract, but the levels are different. This is why one's position on the continuum is not permanently fixed at birth and it can change depending on time, place and circumstance. This is also the reason why one can access the other within oneself, and then reach the other in others, because individuals have concrete and abstract characteristics in themselves. Consequently, individuals as well as societies can go on two journeys: first, to acknowledge the suppressed self, and second, to use that knowledge to approach the other. The first journey is the hardest and it involves facing fears and taboos.

In a culture located towards the more concrete end of the psychocultural continuum, the group is privileged over the individual and there is a

hierarchical social form and ethics rather than an egalitarian one; kinship and blood relationships are of utter importance, together with the key values of reciprocity, respect for wisdom out of experience and group loyalty. In consequence, group privacy is more important than individual privacy and, when there is a problem, it tends to be solved face-to-face but also relying on the interpretation of the unsaid. Besides, there is a preference for the near and tangible in all areas of life, which includes an inclination towards gift-giving and doing favors rather than taxation, commerce by barter and not with money, and the maintenance and creation of social relations with neighbors instead of with networks of contacts who live faraway. Also, a culture positioned towards the more concrete end enhances a partnership with the natural world -which is not subjugated. Gods and goddesses, "each with their own sphere of influence" (D'Cruz and Steele 2003: 174), are unavoidable, unchosen parts of the daily lives of the devotees, who feel close to and familiar with them. Members of a group in a more concrete culture share a strong sense of belonging, "a basic human need, just as strong as the needs for eating, drinking, warmth and security" (von Herder qtd. in Jahanbegloo 2009: 142-143).

On the other hand, in a culture sited towards the more abstract, individuality is emphasized and valued, "even if it means that individuals must stand against the state and their own community" (D'Cruz and Steele 2003: 175). As a result, autonomy, disengaged rationality, all-embracing love, professionalism and direct communication styles are valued. Consequently, strangers come together in different groups according to their common preferences and create social networks, such as "government and non-government civic organizations, inter-cultural, environmental, literary and religious groups" (D'Cruz and Steele 2003: 175). Regarding problems, these are solved either by mediated relationships, often without face-to-face contact, or through direct communication. Besides, money and intangible things such as shares and stocks are preferred to gift-giving or barter. Regarding religion and spirituality, God is chosen, it is general, august, pure and distant, removed from all evil and negotiation.

Sometimes migrants may have been raised in the cultural values situated more towards one end of the continuum while living in a culture sited more towards the other end. Consequently, this could lead to friction among different groups in society. Being aware of differences, finding strat-

egies to cope with them and suggesting alternatives are some of the *raisons d'être* of literature. As philosopher Martha Nussbaum says,

Literary works... show us general plausible patterns of action, “things such as might happen” in human life. When we grasp the patterns of salience offered by the work, we are also grasping our own possibilities. (2001: 243)

The character of Nicky that John Charalambous creates in *Furies* is an example of different types of identity. When Nicky is a child, she was taught to prioritize the group, kinship and blood relations, to follow and respect social hierarchy and show group loyalty and privacy, that is to say, she was more inclined towards the more concrete end of the continuum.

However, when she was 14 and 15, Nicky defended her individual wishes, her autonomy and rationality using social networks to achieve what she wanted. Also, she used mediation and direct communication to solve problematic situations as well as professionals to help her. Nicky believed in an egalitarian society and fought to construct one. Consequently, her identity had most of the traits of “abstractness”.

Nevertheless, when she lives in the community, first with Bala, Delores, Karl, Willie and Imogen, and then only with Imogen, Nicky shows a more mixed identity as she has concrete and abstract characteristics. On the one hand, she believes in group loyalty, does what is best for the group, does favors, expects reciprocity and has a clear partnership with the natural world, as Nicky and her friends build as ecological a community as they possibly can. That is, she follows many features of “concreteness”. On the other hand, she defends her individuality and an egalitarian society, her community is based on common preferences, not on blood relations, she is rational, professional and autonomous, all characteristics of “abstractness”. In her new life in Melbourne, one would expect her to maintain the balance she has achieved as an adult.

The character of Nicky, thus, suffers a profound alteration: as a child, she is inclined towards the more concrete end of the psychocultural continuum; and, as an adolescent, she prioritizes her wish to study and she radically changes towards the more abstract end. However, she experiences a third change: as an adult she manages to understand –not agree with– her parents and she reconciles herself with part of the concrete in her, so her identity moves to a mid-position between the concrete and abstract ends

of the continuum. John Charalambous creates a character who defies and breaks with traditions, who faces difficult and challenging situations but overcomes them to reach her goals and live her life the way she decides and wants, not the way she is expected to by her parents and community.

Conclusion

John Charalambous, of Greek-Cypriot father and Anglo-Australian mother, was born and raised in Australia and went to school at a time when integration and then multiculturalism were the approaches towards migrants. This means that he had tools available to explore his identity and that he had learnt his rights and duties as an Australian citizen at school, contrary to first-generation migrants, who are born and raised in a different country and migrate as adults (following Wenche Ommundsen's terminology, those who migrate as children are considered to be 1.5-generation migrants and are often studied together with second-generation migrants).

In his first novel, *Furies*, Charalambous constructs a main character who is a middle-class second-generation female Greek-Australian, whose parents own a business and who works in a liberal profession (as a Visual Arts teacher). He presents different strategies to explain the constructs of duty and obedience, which are intrinsic to interpersonal relations: being born in her specific family, Nicky has learnt the expectations imposed on her by her parents and the communities. Her sisters live according to these expectations, but Nicky subverts them and her life is profoundly affected by Australian institutions because they help her. When she wants to continue her studies, Nicky trusts institutions, asks them for help, goes to live with state wards, and then in long-term foster care. She benefits from the existence of social institutions which help her reach her goal: to continue studying. According to Manuel Castells' identity theory, Nicky clearly reveals a project identity as she rebels against what she does not like about the society she lives in and creates a society of her own, with her own rules. This does not mean that she lives apart from the rest of society, on the contrary, Nicky teaches at a school, that is, at one of the main institutions which transmit power relations and social regulations.

Following Vin D'Cruz and William Steele's psychocultural continuum theory, Nicky goes through different phases in her life, from towards the more concrete, to towards the more abstract, but then she faces her other-

within, is able to approach her parents and it seems that, as an adult, her personality has a similar amount of concreteness and abstractness.

Nicky does not feel she belongs to her family: being a daughter and a sister are some of the roles in her life, but not who she is. The feelings of home and belonging are determinant factors in a person's identity, and in the case of Nicky, she feels her belonging is not so close to her family as that of her parents, for whom their sense of identity is linked to the expectations created by Greek traditions. Nicky feels different from other Greeks and from other Australians. If the terminology to label the literature written by authors of Greek ascendancy is used for this character, it can be argued that she feels Greek-Australian, hyphenated, because she feels different from other Greeks, from other Australians, an integral part of multicultural Australia, and "an equal among equals" (Nickas 1992: 6).

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