Evangelia Kindinger, Homebound: Diaspora Spaces and Selves in Greek American Return Narratives.

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Evangelia Kindinger’s first book is an important contribution to Greek Americana as it is the first volume dedicated to the analysis of eight autobiographical return narratives of this ethnic literature. The author brings to the fore these lesser studied works written by Greek American authors and adopts an interdisciplinary prism for their analysis. Well-read and thorough, Kindinger manages to define a new sub-genre of travel writing, the return narrative, with an overall critical exploration that sets intriguing questions about the crucial concepts of transnationalism, home and identity in the broader field of American Studies.

Influenced by her bicultural background as she notes in her “Introduction,” the Greek German Kindinger uses Jeffrey Eugenides’s Middlesex (2002) and its references to return to the ancestral homeland as her stepping stone. The author acknowledges the complexity of her topic as “a concept that unleashes various processes and experiences of belonging, not belonging, and of laying claim on a home (land)” (15). Following a brief outline on the role of return for Greek American studies in this introductory chapter, Kindinger discusses the history of this understudied ethnic group and its literary production. Most importantly, she
emphasizes the unchartered waters of Greek America and her aim to amplify attention and interest.

Kindinger opts to display her theoretical background later, in the first chapter entitled “The Home(s) of Diaspora.” There, she utilizes an older novel depicting migration and first generation Greek American return, Roxanne Cotsakis’s 1952 *The Wing and The Thorn*, to comment on central notions for her study. Even though in this section the author unnecessarily takes up space preparing and announcing what is to follow in her monograph, the concepts of home, return, homeland, diasporic homecoming and nostalgia are carefully considered and well supported by relevant theoretical readings. The interpretive readings of the chapters that follow, though, are stronger and far more interesting.

The focus of the second chapter is the constantly changing identities that are delineated in return narratives with Daphne Athas’s *Greece by Prejudice* (1963) as a case study. The author first calls particular attention to travel writing only to move to what she calls a “working definition” of the return narrative as a sub-genre. For Kindinger, it is essential to note that compared to the effects of travel writing on national identity and the nation, “return narratives formulate identities beyond singular national affiliations; they write the diaspora and establish a transnational, diaspora consciousness” (85). As a case in point, Athas’s novel and narrator, Daphne, are closely followed to successfully demonstrate the shifting position of the returnee, between native and traveler, in “constant negotiation and fluctuation” (86).

“Women’s Diaspora Spaces” is the third section of the monograph with an exclusive female interest, the exploration of women’s return, a much needed approach for Greek Americana. The author pinpoints the limited considerations of voicing the female diaspora story of the past and stresses the recent trend that feminist studies brought about, “rearticulating so called female experiences of ‘placement’ and ‘dwelling’. The scholar goes on to tellingly present the obscure image of the Greek female migrant, her absence from statistics, her seclusion in the realm of her kitchen and her identification as either daughter, wife or sister, mother of a male. Kindinger is
quick to underline the still unknown, but existing presence of dynamic female figures in life and letters. Constance Callinicos’s American Aphrodite is rightly suggested as a significant step towards the recognition of women’s role. As regards the return movement, Kindinger, based on Theodore Saloutos, states that whenever women were mentioned, they were considered the emotional forces behind reverse migration. In her critical reading of Catherine Temma Davidson’s *The Priest Fainted*, the author underscores the rewriting of history as a collective project of women who are empowered by their sharing of culinary secrets. On the other hand, in Eleni Gage’s *North of Ithaka* the author reacts to male authority by rewriting her family history and recording the rebuilding of her grandmother’s family home, a site of past terror and trauma. Kindinger sees the two authors under a favorable light as in her words they offer “techniques that re-evaluate gender and highlight female experiences of diaspora, migration and return” (122). However, the reader is left with a feeling of incompleteness: the author abstains from critically exploring the broader socio-historical framework, the reality of contemporary women that these authors address, assisting or misleading them, as well as the contemporary stance of feminist studies as regards works like these.

Counterbalancing the female pens of the previous chapter, Kindinger cleverly offers the masculine point of view and identity quest in the fourth chapter entitled “Regional Return Narratives”. Michael N. Kalafatas’s *The Bellstone: The Greek Sponge Divers of the Aegean* (2003) and Elias Kulukundis’s *The Feasts of Memory* (1967/2003) are critically viewed with regard to the authors’ search for Greekness and their preoccupation with regional history. Kindinger takes the opportunity to analyze the genre of popular autoethnography resorting to the theoretical framework of Penelope Papailias, Artemis Leontis and, most importantly, Yiorgos Anagnostou. Based on the latter’s insightful argumentation, the scholar highlights that the popular autoethnographers “make use of their ‘cultural connections with immigrant, ethnic, or diasporic worlds’” (128). For Kindinger, the role of this genre is intrinsically connected to the authors’ process of self-identification since “through their affiliation to regional Greek culture, they access Greek national culture as well” (131). In Kalafatas’s book the masculinity of the people of Symi is transmitted
both temporally and spatially, affirming the ethnic identity he wants to be a part of. Kulukundis’s ethnic identity is equated with belongingness in a family and participation in storytelling and local traditions.

The final chapter of the volume has a popular topic, a spatial center, Athens as the realm of chaos and disorder as opposed to the order and cleanliness of American space. This time, the author insightfully opts for a comparison between male and female writing, first and second generation respectively. Comparing George Sarrinikolaou’s *Facing Athens: Encounters with the Modern City* (2004) and Adrienne Kalfopoulou’s *Broken Greek: A Language to Belong* (2006), Kindinger reveals as a common basis the “homeland myth.” While both authors envisage Athens as the antipode to the U.S. through diverse shades of an Orientalist approach, Sarrinikolaou concludes by realizing his Americanness. Nonetheless, Kalfopoulou, wishing to belong as her title states, rejects order to embrace Greekness.

In the conclusion of the monograph Kindinger whets the reader’s appetite for a broader scope of comparison between other diasporas and postcolonial writing (199). Unfortunately, the proposed comparison comes too late, almost as an afterthought. The inclusion of postcolonial works or scholarship on home and return could certainly assist in procuring a richer understanding of Greek Americana, working against its current insularity and limitations. All in all, Kindinger’s first study is original and noteworthy despite the few rough edges. Her critical enterprise foregrounds significant, though still unknown, works by Greek American authors, thus fulfilling one of her main aims. The close readings lead to thought-provoking conclusions on contemporary issues of transnational movement and identity rendering *Homebound* a possible starting point for more returns to ethnic literature.
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