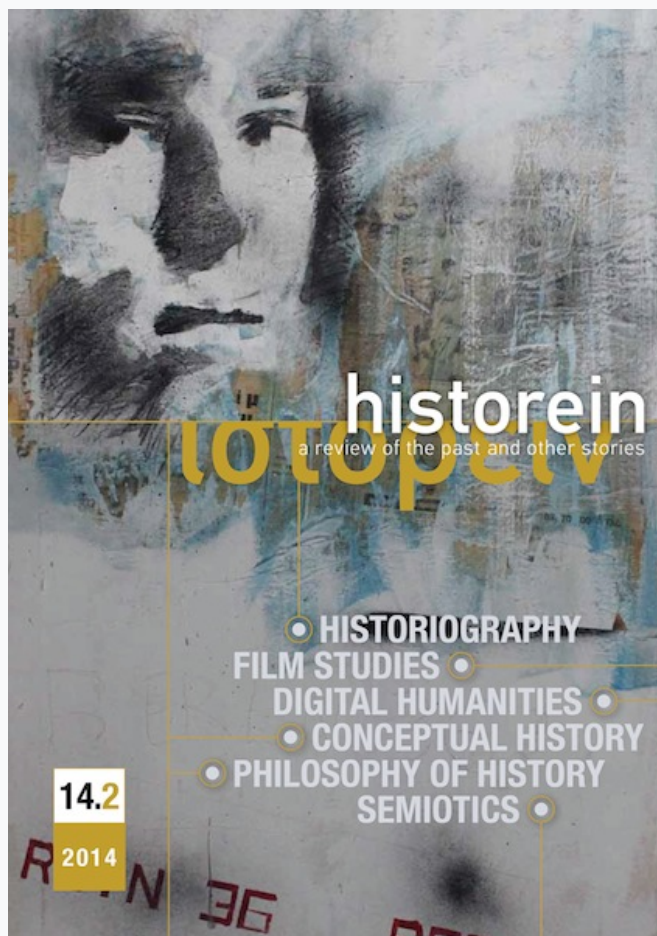


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### From politics to nostalgia – and back to politics: Tracing the shifts in the filmic depiction of the Greek 'long 1960s' over time

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Greek films depicting life in 1960s and 1970s Greece became commercial hits and, to a large extent, shaped the collective imaginary of recent generations on the era and its aftermath. In particular, the Colonels' dictatorship (1967–1974) is a landmark in recent Greek history that makes return appearances in films with varying levels of intensity, affecting the way in which people interpret and narrate their past and present. Apart from references to the historical processes and political changes that appear as a backdrop, these films tend to portray individual microhistories set in the Greek “long 1960s”.<sup>1</sup> Such films constitute a privileged site of memory diffusion and frequently have a manifest autobiographical aspect. By examining filmic representations of everyday life in the 1960s, and especially the period of the Colonels' dictatorship, in Greek film production from the early 1980s to the present, this article argues for a shift in the visual paradigm concerning the representation of the dictatorship years from a purely political to an overtly nostalgic depiction, before recently turning back to politics. The paper further analyses the distinct ways in which Greek filmmakers decided to interrogate and recycle the past by placing their artefacts within a relevant sociopolitical context, thus shedding some light on the complex ways in which this particular moment of Greek history resides in the present.

### ***Early representations: romanticism, heroism and politics***

Filmic representations directly after the junta tended to be either satirical – such as Giannis Dalianidis' 1975 *Ένα τανκς στο... κρεβάτι μου* (A tank in my bed) and Dinos Katsouridis and Panos Glykofrydis' 1976 *Ο Θανάσης στη χώρα της σφαλιάρας* (Thanasis in the land of smacking), or, and mostly, politically *éngagé*.<sup>2</sup> The politically

## ***From politics to nostalgia – and back to politics: Tracing the shifts in the filmic depiction of the Greek ‘long 1960s’ over time***

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oriented films engaged directly with issues such as the experience of persecution, police collaboration and military service during the junta years. In the direct aftermath of the *Metapolitefsi*, the name given to the 1974 transition to multiparty democracy, so-called political cinema was primarily responsible for disseminating a militant version of the recent past. In particular, cinema collectives, such as the Group of Four, or Group of Six, and Kino produced films on extremely topical subjects such as the trial of the dictators, the issue of torture or the fate of exiles on remote islands during the post-civil war and junta years.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, and despite occasional relapses into censorship, cinema was seen as a vehicle that would facilitate radical depictions of the past and an “alternative” historiography. Theo Angelopoulos’ *Ο Θίασος* (*The Travelling Players*, 1975) – and, in fact, his entire trilogy of history – is a good example of that tendency, whereby filmic images entail an embedded analysis and interpretation of dramatic political events such as the Metaxas dictatorship, the German occupation and the Greek Civil War, always from a leftwing standpoint, undermining the hegemonic narrative.<sup>4</sup> Particularly pertinent here is Michel Foucault’s provocative conclusion that filmmakers can give back to society the history of which it has been deprived by the institution of history, pointing to the fact that films can potentially present a version of events close to popular memory and oral traditions.<sup>5</sup> Penelope Papailias’ conclusion about “memory” often being depicted as a “wellspring of popular cultural resistance and an alternative archive of a past reality occulted by the powerful” applies to those 1970s films, too.<sup>6</sup>

The passage from dictatorial rule to democracy was followed by a gradual transition from minoritarian to mass politics and a strengthening of the Greek state’s perception of itself as “an agent of social justice” and “a sponsor of the country’s first public evaluation of its authoritarian past”, as cultural critic Vassiliki Tsitsopoulou aptly remarks.<sup>7</sup> The rise of socialist Pasok to power in 1981 consolidated this tendency and helped rehabilitate leftwingers as equal, and not lower-class, citizens, without however paving the way to a fairer society, let alone one based on social justice. Growing polarisation, accompanied by populism and corruption, would be the main characteristics of the new political life. Still, the hegemonic narrative regarding the junta years was constructed with the motifs of the defeated, persecuted, martyred left. Pantelis Voulgaris’s epic melodrama *Πέτρινα Χρόνια* (*Stone Years*, 1985) is a typical example of this tendency. The political commitment of the characters and the general exclusion of the “nonpatriotic” or non-nationally minded left from the staunchly anticommunist post-1949 Greek state is the main focus of the movie. The years of the dictatorship are depicted as a revival of authoritarianism and persecution after the brief liberalisation that accompanied the advent of the Centre Union to power in 1964. An endless round of imprisonment finally lands two inmates (lovers separated for years by political persecution) in the same jail, where one of the most poignant moments in Greek cinema was shot: the characters communicating with each other from their cell windows. The film ends in the postdictatorship period and with a final shot showing the main heroine in a state of bewilderment, uncertainty and confusion, of the “what have we fought for” sort.

Nikos Antonakos’ *Δεξιότερα της Δεξιάς* (*Farther Right Than the Right*, 1989), on the other hand, tried to map out the entire topography of resistance and collaboration during the Colonels’ regime. In this representation of the days prior and during the Polytechnic uprising of 1973, in

which Antonakos tries to encapsulate the spirit of seven years of dictatorial rule, heroes and villains interact and intermingle. The focus is on a police informer, a stool pigeon, reminiscent of Alexandros Kotzias' legendary character of Katsandonis in his *Antipoiisis Archis* (Usurpation of authority).<sup>8</sup> The left is portrayed as heroic but divided and the Colonels are pictured as mere pawns in the hands of American imperialism. Here, the whole depiction of the period is a purely political one: family relations, friendship ties and working spaces are all permeated by ideology and politics where the perennial conflict between idealism and cynicism prevails. The characters are very schematic, as they all represent parts of the old and new political order: the traditional left, revisionists, underground bombers, army and navy officers, students, police informers and the US ambassador. There is no room for affect, personal stories and, certainly, nostalgia for the sweet sixties here. In fact, the scenes of torture in the film are among the crudest ever depicted in a Greek fiction movie. Antonakos depicts the junta's Greece as a bleak and claustrophobic universe, dropping all romantic undertones but retaining an explicit condemnation of the regime and its politics.

Even Nikos Perakis' *Λούφα και Παραλλαγή* (*Loafing and Camouflage*, 1984), one of the founding texts of postdictatorship Greek comedy, tends to be quite political, despite its apparently satirical character. Apart from the numerous references to the main character's political involvement before the coup, the army is not only depicted as a space for loafing around – but also as the privileged site of the new regime *par excellence* and a zone of constant nationalistic and anticommunist indoctrination. Above all, people's actions are defined by the political context that frames the story. One can trace all the different trajectories of Greek political life in the 1960s: the pre-1967 restlessness, the abrupt arrival of the Colonels, the abortive counter-coup by King Constantine in December 1967, the 1968 junta constitution, the 1973 referendum and so on.

The year 1989 marked a new era in filmmaking. It was the year of the “unholy” alliance between the right and the left in order to oust Pasok from power, seen by many as the end of an entire era, especially when set in light of the cataclysmic events that accompanied the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. Gradually, the polarisation and hyperpoliticisation of the past started to give way to new trends, and especially a revival of nationalism, which was prompted by the Macedonian dispute that emerged after the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. As Tsitsopoulou argues, in Greek cinema a new sort of “politically correct” mode of representing the past emerged around this time, including a depoliticised, dehistoricised nostalgia.<sup>9</sup> Escapism would, from that point on, attract wide audiences. The cinematic tendency that would appear in the 1990s, most probably drawing on the immense success of Giuseppe Tornatore's *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* (1988) and, to a lesser extent, two 1986 films dealing with the 60s – Rob Reiner's *Stand By Me* and the home-grown *Το δέντρο που πληγώναμε* (*The Tree we Hurt*) by Dimos Avdelioidis would depict the dictatorship years through the eyes of adolescents in an indirect political way, whereby nostalgia for a lost and longed-for world and a bittersweet sentiment would dominate.

### ***Establishing the ‘bittersweet’ canon***

The new film production on the 1960s focused on a teenage male coming of age, in which politics and family conflicts were viewed through the filter of adolescence, where sexual exploration

seemed to be of paramount importance. Antonis Kokkinos' *Τέλος Εποχής* (*End of an Era*, 1994) was the premiere of this kind, becoming the first Greek box office hit after many years of stagnation. The filming in black and white (which is reminiscent not only of the actual films of the period but, above all, its television images and pictures of the time) and the authenticity of the characters (almost all played by nonprofessional actors) were all novel and refreshing elements. The storyline is original too, focusing on high-school seniors in 1969–1970 Athens and, mainly, Christos and his family, who had moved from a small town to the capital so that he could attend a better school. While his father insists that he study hard in order to enter medical school, Christos is only interested in British and American pop music – in fact he is nicknamed Trogg by his fellow students due to his obsession with the eponymous rock band. The groundbreaking elements here are, first, the exploration of sexuality (the opening sequence includes a graphic scene of two teenagers having sex) and pop culture. Transistor radios, record players and teenage parties are omnipresent, whereby youth style plays a predominant role. Politics are peripheral and we only find out about the political situation towards the end of the film when the students launch a mini-resistance act by staging Ionesco's play *Rhinoceros*, boasting about its antiauthoritarian allusions. Sexuality is not always innocent, as the main character falls for his best friend's mother, a rupture from the social norms and conventions that is also to be found in Costas Kapakas' *Peppermint* (1999), where the protagonist is in love with his first cousin – probably an allusion to the guilt-charged context of sexual encounters at the time.

If the focus on adolescents in 1960s Greek movies was on juvenile delinquency, *End of an Era* launched a new film genre focusing on teenage sexuality and, to a lesser extent, parent–youth conflict.<sup>10</sup> While it paved the way for a teenage representation of the junta years, it was *Peppermint* that actually set the rules for many successors and imitators. *Peppermint* initiated the trend of nostalgia in terms for the Greek 1960s. Whereas *End of an Era* tackled some of the problems of young people in that period, and in particular adolescents, including the themes of alienation and hostility, these issues are absent here. In contrast to the multicharacter approach of *End of an Era*, *Peppermint* approaches the young protagonist's problems solely through his point of view. Spiced with erotic detail, it shares a fascination with the sexual initiation of its young character by an older woman. Sexuality in general represents a crucial subtext, and we get the first glimpses into this world of male adolescence, involving masturbation and peeping – which became the standard filmic topos of a number of films regarding the period. Popular culture is again present: the very name of the film points to a popular alcoholic beverage of the period – in fact, in a crucial scene the adolescents binge on peppermint liqueur, getting drunk for the first time. At another point, the young protagonist boasts to his mother that the party he is going to will have Coca-Cola, obtained from a US military base at a time when the soft drink was not generally available in the country.

Yorgos Tsemberopoulos' film *Πίσω Πόρτα* (*Backdoor*, 2000) was not much different in both its themes and dramatic treatment of the individual experience. The motto of the movie, "Revolution starts at home", indicates the growing need for the emancipation that its young protagonist craves. The setting this time is not a petit bourgeois one as in *End of an Era* or the lower middle class as in *Peppermint*, but an upper-class, politically conservative household. Tsemberopoulos makes occasional references to some markers of the 1960s in Greece – such as the *Lambrakides* (a youth movement that emerged in the mid-1960s as the result following the assassination of leftwing MP Grigoris Lam-

brakis in 1963) or the booming construction sector. Here too, however, the focus is on the growing sexual awareness of its male protagonist and the countercultural features of the 60s rather than their political underpinnings. Accordingly, the second half of the movie includes items such as rock and roll, a hippy commune, and above all, drugs. Tsemberopoulos's own explanation is telling:

I was liberated by the 1960s, myself and many others. In the 60s there was room for everything. Politics, social issues, changes in morals. Still, out of all things that were said back then, out of all the things that I heard, that I experienced, if something changed me it was a Beatles song: *She's leaving home*. An 18-year-old girl leaves home because her parents do not understand her. These things happened back then, when the parents were unbending and monolithic.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, Tsemberopoulos was considered to be one of the most politically engaged young filmmakers of his generation. His 1974 documentary *Megara*, codirected with Sakis Maniatis, on the Megara farmers' protest against the junta's granting permission to the tycoon Stratis Andreadis to build an oil refinery in their fields, is a political film *par excellence*. The director is quite honest about the changes that occurred in his attitude regarding filmmaking, which were connected to broad changes in politics: "When I shot my first film, *Megara*, I really believed that I could change the world . . . Today I don't believe anymore that I can change the world with one film. In the best of cases, it might change some viewers for the next hour or the next three hours."<sup>12</sup>

Consequently *Backdoor* reflects a sort of artistic transition for Tsemberopoulos. Incidentally, it is a film about the rite of passage from presexual childhood to adult sexuality, so it deals – like most of these movies – with yet another transition, that from childhood to adolescence. Once again, masturbation, pornography and prostitution are some of the standard *topoi*. Tsemberopoulos' film does not differ significantly from the rest, despite the fact that the director uses special effects in the concluding scene to place his heroes within history, in this way fusing them with footage of the infamous "Celebrations of Hellenic Military Virtues", which were regularly organised by the dictators at the Kallimarmaro stadium in Athens.

What was the trigger behind these quasi-identical cinematic accounts of the junta years and the "long 1960s" in Greece? One could argue that a major role was played by the autobiographical twist, which caters to nostalgia. However, it is not a given that this would necessarily condemn the cinematic representation to a bittersweet overview. Turkish cinema, for example, has used the same trope in order to depict the years of the Evren dictatorship – in films such as Muharrem Gülmez and Sirri Süreyya Önder's *Beynelmilel (The International)* and Ömer Uğur's *Eve Dönüş (Home Coming)* – both 2006 – whereby the physical and psychological repression of the regime cannot be missed. The Turkish depictions of the dictatorship look more threatening than funny, while the young characters are not untouched by the watershed events that are taking place around them. The direct effects of these different representational strategies were the perpetuation of an increasingly politicised Turkish cinematography and an increasingly apolitical Greek one and the creation of a collective memory that produced a relatively realistic versus a romanticised reflection of the past in the two cases, respectively.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Turkish films on the dictatorship seem to encourage reflection from the audience regarding the recent past,<sup>14</sup> in contrast to the Greek production that, by and large, belongs to the "feel-good" category.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore – and to introduce a different comparison that crosses genres – in historiographical terms, too, there is an impressive contrast between the abovementioned films and the recent historical production on the Greek long 1960s. The main exponents of the latter did as well, to some extent, deal with hitherto unexplored and under-researched issues, such as the intellectual climate and the cultural environment of this decade, by focusing on youth rebellion. Interestingly, however, they managed to balance the cultural with the political, the personal with the collective, the autochthonous with the foreign, always keeping in mind the sociopolitical context, and thus placing their works firmly within their historical parameters. Although no one would expect the same kind of precision to historical detail from a film – after all it is just fiction – the fact that these films did not manage to convey truthfully not only the general canvas, but also the ethos of the epoch they depict, constitutes a major handicap in as far as the director's duty as both *auteur* and *historian* is concerned.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, I argue that historiography on this era is both connected to and somehow disconnected from the film production on the same period.

### ***Don Camillo and Peppone in the Greek countryside***

Two consecutive films that found it even more difficult to engage with the social realities of the time they depict were Grigoris Karantinakis' *H Χορωδία του Χαρίτωνα* (*Chariton's Choir*, 2005) and Kapa-kas' *Uranya* (2006). The former, in many ways influenced by the French *Les choristes* (*The Chorus*, 2004), is a typical representative of this genre. The basic story revolves around the local schoolmaster, a bohemian and flamboyant Don Juan of Russian origin, who is loathed by the school's conservative proregime philologist. The schoolmaster and a sergeant major – both in pursuit of the beautiful maths teacher – settle their scores through a choir contest, in which, unsurprisingly, the former and his students triumph with a song containing antiregime allusions.

This chronicle of life during the junta years is remarkably flavourless, even though the unnamed provincial town in question has some of the qualities of the village of the Gauls in *Asterix*. For example, fights are part of the everyday repertoire and have a comic quality: in the first scene the men who are involved in a fight freeze when a good-looking woman passes by, only to resume fighting immediately. The film mostly reproduces facile preconceptions about what Greeks are like: hot-tempered, warm-hearted and always prone to forgiveness and reconciliation. The dramatis personae are mostly identical, following the pattern laid down by Italian cinema, and above all Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973) regarding Italian fascism; we have the village fool, the greedy but naïve local gendarme, the town's nymphomaniac or good-hearted whore, all of which transcend caricature.<sup>17</sup> So do the stereotypical Don Camillo and Peppone-like duels between the mayor and the teacher. Even though that duo had to do with Catholicism (church) vs. communism (local government), I believe the analogy is an accurate one, despite the different angle.

A similar pattern is to be found in *Uranya*, again a light copycat version of an Italian hit, Giuseppe Tornatore's *Malena* (2000)<sup>18</sup> – unsurprisingly starring Italian actress Maria Grazia Cucinotta. As a treatment of adolescence in the years from 1967 to 1974, this film is again ordinary. Boys are at the age when they are beginning to recognise the charms of women, but too young to be anything except oglers. However, the omnipresent sexual initiation is geared towards conventional comedy.

Once again, history is relegated to a backdrop and nostalgia and romanticism are elevated above analysis and above any urge to reveal and question. Was life so careless in the Greek countryside during the junta? Was sexual indulgence the only thing youngsters cared about? Did little actions of everyday resistance – like in *Chariton's Choir* when the students decide to go against the line imposed by the authorities and sing a song that makes references to freedom or in *Uranya* when boys play a banned Mikis Theodorakis' record during the visit of US Vice-President Spyro Agnew – remain unpunished? And if not, why are they presented as such? What was the social and cultural impact of the junta's populist decision to donate 216 television sets to various remote villages, as we see in *Uranya*, precisely at the moment when it became aware of the propagandistic power of this medium? What was the effect of the claustrophobic rural environment and the constant and asphyxiating presence of the church and the local gendarmerie on people's lives – even on youngsters?<sup>19</sup> The past is highly romanticised; instead of touching on these issues, the film does not even take them into consideration. What we have is a distinctly stylised version of life under the dictatorship on a simplified canvas, in terms of historical topography and human geography.

Accordingly, films on the dictatorship became homogeneous with respect to narration, shooting and editing processes, exhibiting identical conceptions of memory and historiography. Nostalgia, in Raymond Williams' words, is a "structure of feeling" that involves a positively evaluated past, in response to a problematic present.<sup>20</sup> The great temporal and semantic distance between past and present, involving a period of dramatic sociopolitical transformations, definitely altered the self-perception of the directors in question. Additionally, as cultural theorist Stuart Tannock has argued, "the nostalgic subject turns to the past to find/construct sources of identity, agency, or community, that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present".<sup>21</sup> This tendency to idealise the past presupposes a certain loss, be it physical or symbolic; in this case the "paradise lost" involves the golden age of childhood, an "age of innocence" that has never really existed, whereby the repressive junta period inevitably becomes sanitised.

These films tell us how filmmakers and screenwriters expressed their queries about the past in the 1990s and early 2000s. Accordingly, instead of faithful insights into an adolescent's psyche during his or her coming of age under the junta, by affording us insights into her inner turmoil, frustrations and angst, most of these movies are the nostalgic gaze of middle-aged directors. As Kapakas confessed in an interview, "I am nostalgic for my childhood years, when the longing for something was very strong and when joy could last. When we entered cinema to watch the *akatallila* [age-inappropriate films], when we saw the Rolling Stones at Panathinaikos stadium, when we saw the dictatorship fall. The dizziness of our first kiss."<sup>22</sup> This explains why most of these movies favour the flashback narrative device in an attempt to reconcile the present persona of the filmmaker with himself in the past, in a continuous temporal back and forth, promoting a constant interplay between the past and the (equally shallow) present self. There is a further fixation with the sky, the stars and the universe. *Peppermint's* boy wants to be a pilot, *Uranya's* wants to become an astronaut, while in Tassos Boulmetis' *Πολιτική Κουζίνα* (*A Touch of Spice*, 2003) – which one could add to this list of films, in spite of its different focus – the protagonist becomes an astronomer.<sup>23</sup> If this is an attempt to integrate the fascination with the moon landing in the late 1960s it is a quite clumsy one. The fact that actor Georges Corraface is almost always the impersonation of the older self in



these movies, becoming the absolute “nostalgia icon”, is an element that reinforces the impression of repetition and *déjà vu* in the viewer.<sup>24</sup>

Beyond the issue of the lack of historical veracity and proper placing of the plot in the sociopolitical context of the past, the problem here is one regarding affect and the depiction thereof. In my view, these films do not comply with Robert Rosenstone’s famous distinction between film as a carrier of emotions as opposed to scholarly history, which focuses on grand narratives – a distinction that has nevertheless been superseded by developments in historiography.<sup>25</sup> Still, these films fail to fulfil this mission too, promoting a less than authentic version of past affect. As Spanish writer Antonio Muñoz Molina aptly argues in an article entitled “Desmemorias”, on the literary and filmic representations of the Spanish Civil War and Franco’s dictatorship – a further interesting case, with many similarities, to weigh against the Greek one – such artefacts have a damaging effect in terms of collective memory: “the result of this . . . sentimental brand of memory is forgetfulness about the very thing one is trying to remember”, in this case the dictatorship period.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, fellow novelist Isaac Rosa concludes, regarding the memorialisation of Francoism, that “instead of a memory based on facts we create a memory based on gossip; instead of a memory based on words, deeds and responsibilities, a memory of anecdotes”.<sup>27</sup> One could argue exactly the same for the case of Greece and the Greek Colonels – adding Fredric Jameson’s conclusion that “nostalgia film is historicist, rather than historical”.<sup>28</sup>

This powerful canon seemed to be briefly challenged by director Elissavet Chronopoulou’s *Ενα τραγούδι δε φτάνει* (*A Song is not Enough*, 2003), a film sharing similarities with Marco Tullio Giordana’s Italian epic drama of the same year *La meglio gioventù* (*The Best of Youth*), whereby a female character decides to join the Red Brigades in the early 1970s, abandoning her daughter to do so. Here too, the mother protagonist positions herself as the active figure who joins the underground resistance against the Colonels, is arrested and imprisoned, while the father is portrayed as a passive, apolitical bohemian. Surprisingly, the film does not dissolve into sentimentality and plays intelligently with the past–present, parent–child, politics–culture binaries. Chronopoulou structures her filmic narration in a succinctly different way, her personal gaze being much more observational and often semidocumentary. Here the confusion and sexual disorientation are not an attribute of the female adolescent character nor is it a metonym for something else. In fact, Chronopoulou takes a conscious ideological *prise de position* against the spectacular conventions of commercial cinema to which the other films aspire. Her protagonists are a pair of adults, while their child is a girl who is not so much a participant as she is an onlooker. The past is not glorified as in the other films, in contrast to a gloomy present, nor does adolescence seem a paradise lost, as opposed to the pain of adulthood. Sexual indulgence is not an issue here either, as the main concern revolves around the problematic relationship between the parents and the cost that the mother has to bear for her participation in urban guerrilla activities. Despite occasional glimpses of the emotional and psychological life of the characters, sociopolitical factors are not just a flashy background, but the real matrix of all developments – particularly resistance and the enormous personal cost of participation in it – which has nothing of the heroic overtones of past movies. *A Song is not Enough* is probably a unique instance in which elements of both representations – that is both a political and a personal one – are blended in an intriguing way. An equally sophisticated microhistorical approach is offered by fellow female-director Penny Panayotopoulou in her *Δύσκολοι Αποχαιρετισμοί*:

*Ο μπαμπάς μου* (*Hard Goodbyes: My Father*, 2002), pointing to a remarkable discrepancy between genders regarding emotional economy in film.

This body of films of the 1990s and early 2000s stands in sharp contrast to the ones that preceded them in the 1980s, and the ones that have followed them, both of which are characterised by acute political elements. However, the critique of nostalgia and over-simplification does not mean that all the aforementioned movies are lacking in merit. Moving away from the big picture that was always in the background or even at the core of earlier filmic representations, these films try to penetrate private microcosms. In addition, resistance, one of the key issues in those earlier films of the 1980s, takes a different meaning, in a way switching from “heroic” deeds to individual “micro-freedoms”, constituted by subtler defiance. Moreover, complex identities seem to be replacing the solidly heroic ones, whereby youth culture and subcultural elements become a prerogative. Issues concerning gender relations, generation gaps and city–countryside cleavages seem to surpass the acute divisions of class and politics, in many ways reflecting general trends in historiography itself.

A nonfictional example of what I call the nonpolitical depiction of the dictatorship is Elias Kanellis and Anastasis Agathos’ *Η Κωμωδία της Χούντας: Η ελαφριά πλευρά μιας σκοτεινής εποχής* (*The comedy of the junta: the light side of a dark era*), a documentary produced and distributed by *Ta Nea* newspaper in 2010 and probably the last remnant of the previous tendency due to the fact that it is so recent. As the title suggests, the documentary focuses on the farcical aspects of the dictatorship. Narrated by Apostolos Doxiadis, a well-known public intellectual in Greece, the film purposefully focuses on the laughable Colonels, neglecting several important sides of the regime – obscuring even Doxiadis’ own father’s collaboration with the Colonels on the hot subject of the so-called “Nation’s Vow”, namely the planned construction of a monumental temple in Athens. Kanellis and Agathos’s portrayal of the junta focuses on its comical side, the grotesqueness of the dictators and the ridiculous aspects of the regime, instead of its barbaric one. By understating the seriousness of everyday repression and overstating the vulgarity of the regime, Kanellis and Agathos create a picturesque image, spiced with details that point towards the direction of the Colonels’ Greece as a “banana republic”. The fact that they reduce the Colonels to cardboard characters of a kitschy and light culture is highly trivialising. In reality, however, the junta persecuted, censored, tortured, manipulated and repressed in a systematic and methodical way, creating a heritage from which we are not entirely liberated at present. More importantly, even, this period was treated as distant and definitely over.

### ***The junta did not end in '73: The return of politics***

Almost from the onset of the economic crisis, there has been a change of paradigm regarding the ways in which the junta is being framed, radically departing from both its nostalgic and grotesque representations. Its more brutal aspects began to be stressed in a thinly veiled attempt to highlight the continuities between past and present, the police violence and authoritarian practices of the 1967–74 period and that of the 2010–12 one, best encompassed in one of the popular slogans of the Greek *indignados*: “The junta did not end in '73.” Syllas Tzoumerkas’ 2010 film *Χώρα Προέλευσης* (*Homeland*), a considerable box office success, was regarded by many, just like Yorgos Lanthimos’ metonymical family in *Κυνόδοντας* (*Dogtooth*, 2009), as a critique of the repressive Greek society that has not been healed of its authoritarian residues. Both Lanthimos and Tzoumerkas

deconstruct the “holy Greek family”, depicting it as an ultraviolent institution, a microcosm of the authoritarian state of affairs in the country. In particular, Tzoumerkas’ film is peppered with occasional glimpses of mass movements from the 1950s to 1980s and present-day clashes between policemen and protesters and the extremely harsh repression of the latter. To quote Pam Cook, “past and present are conflated, as contemporary concerns are superimposed on earlier historical periods in the process of reconstruction” – a typical trait of the so-called memory films, which is reinforced in this particular case.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of nonfiction, Fotos Lambrinos’ series of documentaries under the rubric *Χούντα είναι, θα περάσει;* (It’s just a junta. Will it pass?) carves a middle ground, balancing uneasily between the farcical and the political. Lambrinos is a filmmaker with a long involvement in historical fiction projects and a pioneer in newsreel research.<sup>30</sup> His groundbreaking documentary series of the early 1980s *Το Πανόραμα του Αιώνα* (*Panorama of the Century*), co-directed by Leontas Loisis, focuses on the first decades of the 20th century on screen through such reels. Not surprisingly, newsreels were the primary material of Lambrinos’ new documentaries too – produced and broadcast on public television in 2011.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, in an interview, Lambrinos – like Kanellis and Agathos – tried to stress the grotesque side of the regime: “It is above all an entertaining gaze on the period of the dictatorship, a series that uses both sarcasm and self-irony.”<sup>31</sup> Still, the reference to the current situation through the ambiguous title – a play with words, referring to the standard phrase “It’s only a storm; it will pass” – is a very interesting choice. At a time when the evocation of the junta has become a “must”, it was clearly not a coincidence, especially given the fact that Lambrinos is an experienced theoretician of the complex and intricate relationship between history and cinema.<sup>30</sup> Lambrinos has explicitly rejected this: “To say that we still have a junta would be a popularised, vulgar and dangerous point of view,” he stated in an interview, only to add that: “Truth is, however, that the way in which Greek society dealt with the junta has left us at the crucial point where we find ourselves today.”<sup>33</sup> In my view, the use of the aforementioned wisecrack regarding the storm – too direct a hit to pass unnoticed by today’s hyperpoliticised audiences – was a conscious choice, linking the junta to both violence and the current situation. In this sense, the case of “It’s just a junta. Will it pass?” seems to be a transitional one between the two tendencies.

Much more affirmative in terms of its politics is Alinda Dimitriou’s documentary *Τα κορίτσια της βροχής* (*The Girls of the Rain*, 2011), one of the first depictions of the junta years that clearly shifts the focus of the Greek 1960s to violence and, in particular, torture.<sup>35</sup> Her documentary is a departure from earlier documentaries – such as Kanellis and Agathos’ for sure, but also others, such as Rena Theologidou’s much acclaimed TV documentary *Το πολιτιστικό έγκλημα της χούντας* (*The cultural crime of the junta*, 1997), which focused on cultural politics. Instead, Dimitriou shifts the attention to human suffering and gendered trauma. The film, which is the third part of a trilogy on Greek women who were politically active during the occupation and the civil war, focuses solely on women. It is the economic crisis and recent political events, however, that inform much of its subtext. Dimitriou made a choice that was a direct political statement regarding the current state of affairs in Greece. In key moments in the documentary, after some of her interviewees recounted the ways in which they were brutally interrogated, beaten up or tortured, Dimitriou makes jump cuts showing images of present-day police brutality, mostly during clashes with protesters at Syntagma Square in Athens. By adopting a current topos – mainly that the repressive mechanism of

the state has democratised since then and that a hardline antidemocratic structure has remained basically intact – Dimitriou makes a powerful, albeit controversial, statement regarding the supposed continuity of authoritarianism.<sup>36</sup>

These are but two representative examples of the shift in the filmic treatment of the junta and its poetics and the ways in which it may affect (and are affecting in turn) public memory regarding the past at present. However, despite the indirect treatment of this subject matter by Lanthimos and Tzoumerkas, both Dimitriou's and Lambrinos' treatments are documentaries, not fiction. In this respect, it can be argued that even though there are examples of documentaries – such as Kanelis and Agathos' aforementioned documentary – which flirted with apolitical generalisations, this genre in general is, by nature and tradition, more anchored to the political repercussions of events than fiction films, without necessarily neglecting issues such as affect and emotions. Still, there were parallel developments in the two genres; for example, although they never really embraced the nostalgic trope, earlier documentaries could be accused of other types of distortions, such as the depiction of resistance against the Colonels as pandemic and heroic, a manner similar to that of earlier fiction films.

### **Conclusion**

In a controversial essay-interview entitled "The Fascism Within Us", Federico Fellini wrote, in reference to *Amarcord*, that "fascism and adolescence continue to be . . . permanent historical seasons of our lives . . . remaining children for eternity, leaving responsibilities for others, living with the comforting sensation that there is someone who thinks for you . . . and in the meanwhile, you have this limited, time-wasting freedom which permits you only to cultivate absurd dreams."<sup>37</sup> A similar fantasy regarding authoritarianism and adolescence seems to have guided Greek directors in the 1990s and early 2000s in their depiction of the dictatorship years in films steeped in nostalgia. François Truffaut, another champion of filmmaking involving adolescents, often spoke of the responsibility of the filmmaker towards spectators when filming them, on account of "people's inevitable symbolic self-projection into the past when confronted with a screen image of a child".<sup>38</sup> The spectator's identification with the projected images is indeed inevitable, fostering the myth of youth and perpetuating a highly problematic cycle of a somewhat distorted view of the past.

In addition, resistance, one of the key issues in earlier films, took a different meaning, in a way switching from "heroic" deeds to subtler defiance and personal rebellion. However, in all of the movies discussed – with very few exceptions – the regime is presented as a ludicrous and, therefore, harmless interval. While in the 1970s and 80s there is a focus on suffering and politics (and the politics of suffering), the new films are tainted by nostalgia for lost childhood. Things seem to be turning back to politics – and hard politics this time – with the onset of the economic crisis. There was a visual paradigm shift regarding the use of the Greek long 1960s and a radical departure from both its grotesque and nostalgic depictions. Rather, its more brutal aspects – especially with reference to the dictatorship years – began to be stressed in an attempt to highlight the continuities between past and present, the police violence and authoritarian practices of the 1967–74 period and the 2010–12 one. It remains to be seen whether films on the Greek 1960s and the dictatorship that emerge from the crisis will revert to a sort of earnest heroics or not, without suggesting that this sort of representation would not entail its own sort of sentimentality.

NOTES

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- 1 For an analysis of this term, see Kostis Kornetis, *Children of the Dictatorship: Student Resistance, Cultural Politics and the "Long 1960s" in Greece* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).
  - 2 Maria Komninos, *Από την αγορά στο θέαμα: Μελέτη για τη συγκρότηση της δημόσιας σφαιράς και του κινηματογράφου στη σύγχρονη Ελλάδα 1950–2000* [From the market to the spectacle: studies on the composition of the public sphere and cinema in contemporary Greece, 1950–2000] (Athens: Papazisis, 2001), 166.
  - 3 See, for example, *Agonas (Struggle)*, by the Group of Six and *Martyries (Evidence)* by Nikos Kavoukidis (1975). Yannis Soldatos, *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Κινηματογράφου* [History of Greek cinema], vol. 4 (Athens: Aigokeros, 1991), 219. Even New Greek Cinema directors, such as Pantelis Voulgaris, dropped their more cryptic filmic language and embraced more political subject matters, such as Makronisos, in *Happy Day* (1976). The civil war became a filmic subject matter *par excellence* in the early 1980s. See Giorgos Andritsos, *Η Κατοχή και η Αντίσταση στον ελληνικό κινηματογράφο 1945–1966* [Occupation and resistance in Greek cinema, 1945–1966] (Athens: Aigokeros, 2004). Also various entries in Photini Tomai, ed., *Αναπαραστάσεις του πολέμου* [Reenactments of war] (Athens: Papazisis, 2006) and Lambros Flitouris, "Ο εμφύλιος στο «σέλιλοϊντ»: μνήμες νικητών και ηττημένων στον ελληνικό κινηματογράφο" [The civil war in "celluloid": memories of the victors and the vanquished in Greek cinema], in *Μνήμες και λήθη του ελληνικού εμφυλίου πολέμου* [Memory and forgetfulness of the Greek civil war], eds. Riki Van Boeschoten et al. (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2008), 387–404.
  - 4 See in this respect Michel Demopoulos and Frida Liappas' interview with Angelopoulos, "A Journey through Greek Landscape and History: *The Travelling Players*," published in *Synchronos Kinimatografos* 1 (1974) (in Greek) and reprinted in *Theo Angelopoulos: Interviews*, ed. Dan Fainaru (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), 16–22.
  - 5 Cited by Marc Ferro, *Cinema and History* (Detroit: Wayne University Press: 1988), 20. Also see Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du Savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).
  - 6 Penelope Papailias, *Genres of Recollection: Archival Poetics and Modern Greece; Anthropology, History and the Critical Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 5. An interesting exception to this tendency was Nikos Nikolaidis, *Ta κουπέλια τραγουδάνε ακόμη* (*The Wretches Are Still Singing*, 1979), which was the first attempt to depict the Greek 1960s in an alternative way, that is beyond the topoi of the time and the strict focus on the country's democratic deficit.
  - 7 Vassiliki Tsitsopoulou, "I earini synaxis ton Agrofylakou/The Four Seasons of the Law (1999, Dimos Avdeliodis)," in *The Cinema of the Balkans*, ed. Dina Iordanova (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), 251.
  - 8 Alexandros Kotzias, *Αντιποίησης Αρχής* [Usurpation of authority] (Athens: Kedros, 1979).
  - 9 Tsitsopoulou, "I earini synaxis," 252.
  - 10 Antonis Kokkinos' subsequent film *Ο αδελφός μου κι εγώ* (*My Brother and I*, 1997) is an interesting depiction and critique of 1960s nostalgia at present, whereby the protagonist's brother is by and large

stuck in the “glorious” past.

- 11 Yannis Zoumboulakis, “Άνοιξε την Πίσω Πόρτα. Αρχίστε την επανάσταση χωρίς εμένα” [Open the back door: start the revolution without me], *To Vima*, 1 October 2000.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 On this comparison see Kostis Kornetis, “Tragicomic Chronicles of Defiance in a Greek and a Turkish Town under Dictatorship” (paper presented at the meeting of the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies on “Urban Mediations”, Kadir Has University, Istanbul, 24–27 July 2010). I am grateful to Panagiotis C. Poulos for suggesting this interesting comparative approach.
- 14 On the issue of a category of nostalgic films that still manage to foster reflection, see Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 4.
- 15 Here, however, one should not overlook the important similarities between the main themes of Greek movies on the 1960s and films abroad. Such a catalogue would range from Lawrence Kasdan’s *The Big Chill* (1983) to Stephen Frears’ *High Fidelity* (2000), all movies that consolidate the image of the 1960s – at least in the west – as a romantic age of innocence.
- 16 See, in this respect, Kostas Katsapis, *Ήχοι και απόηχοι. Κοινωνική ιστορία του ροκ εν ρολ φαινομένου στην Ελλάδα, 1956–1967* [Sounds and echoes: Social history of the rock and roll phenomenon in Greece, 1956–1967] (Athens: IAEN, 2007); Nikos Boziniis, *Ροκ παγκοσμιότητα και ελληνική τοπικότητα. Η κοινωνική ιστορία του ροκ στις χώρες καταγωγής του και στην Ελλάδα* [Rock globalism and Greek localism: The social history of rock in its countries of origin and in Greece] (Athens: Nefeli, 2007); Dimitris Papanikolaou, *Singing Poets. Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece, 1945–1975* (Oxford: Legenda, 2007); Philip Hager, “From the Margin to the Mainstream: The Production of Politically Engaged Theatre in Greece during the Dictatorship of the Colonels (1967–1974)” (PhD diss., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2008); Nikolaos Papadogiannis, “From Coherence to Fragments: ‘1968’ and the Making of Youth Politicisation in Greece in the 1970s,” *Historein* 9 (2009): 83; Dimitris Asimakoulas, “Translating ‘Self’ and ‘Others’: Waves of Protest under the Greek Junta,” *The Sixties* 2/1 (2009): 25–47; Efi Avdela, “Νέοι εν κινδύνω”: επιτήρηση, αναμόρφωση και δικαιοσύνη ανηλίκων μετά τον πόλεμο [“Youth at risk”: Supervision, reformation, and justice for minors after the war] (Athens: Polis, 2013); Kornetis, *Children of the Dictatorship*.
- 17 See Foster Hirsch, “Amarcord by Federico Fellini,” *Film Quarterly* 29/1 (1975): 50–52.
- 18 On this issue, see Yannis Zoumboulakis, “Έλληνες σκηνοθέτες: οι πιο καλοί αντιγραφείς” [Greek directors: the best copycats], *To Vima*, 10 December 2006.
- 19 See, in this respect, Kostas Katsapis, *Το «πρόβλημα νεολαία». Μοντέρνοι νέοι. Παράδοση και αμφισβήτηση στην μεταπολεμική Ελλάδα, 1964–74* [The “youth problem”. Modern youth: tradition and dispute in postwar Greece, 1964–74] (Athens: Aproveptes, 2013).
- 20 See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
- 21 Stuart Tannock, “Nostalgia Critique,” *Cultural Studies* 9/3 (1995): 454.
- 22 Yannis Zoumboulakis, “Κώστας Καπάκας: Η πολλή φιγούρα έφερε λιγούρα” [Costas Kapakas: too much showing off produced craving], *To Vima*, 8 April 2012.
- 23 Another film that could be added to this far from exhaustive list of bittersweet depictions of the Greek 1960s is Olga Malea’s *Πρώτη φορά νονός* (*First Time Godfather*, 2007).
- 24 On this issue, see the very insightful article “Το εμπόριο της νοσταλγίας” [The trade in nostalgia], *To Vima*, 10 December 2006.

- 25 See Robert Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- 26 *El País*, 6 September 2008. Quoted by Ruth McKay, "The Good Fight and Good History: The Spanish Civil War," *History Workshop Journal* 70/1 (2010): 204.
- 27 Isaac Rosa, *El vano ayer* (Madrid: Seix Barral, 2005), 32.
- 28 Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–1998*, Verso: London, 1998, 130. See also Vera Dika, *Recycled Culture in Contemporary Art and Film: The Uses of Nostalgia* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2003), 1.
- 29 Cook, *Screening the Past*, 10.
- 30 Lambrinos makes a useful classification of the newsreels regarding the junta period in "Εμβλήματα εικονογραφημένα. Κρατικά κινηματογραφικά επίκαιρα στην περίοδο της δικτατορίας (Α΄μέρος: 1967–1970)" [Illustrated marches: state cinematic newsreels during the dictatorship (part 1: 1967–1970)], in *Archeiotaxio* 13 (2011): 86–91.
- 31 Lambrinos also published a book based on the series, bearing the same title *Χούντα είναι, θα περάσει;* [It's just a junta: will it pass?] (Kastaniotis: Athens, 2013).
- 32 See Yannis Zoumboulakis, "Χούντα είναι. Θα περάσει;" νέα σειρά στν NET" ["It's just a junta. will it pass?" New series on NET], *To Vima*, 12 December 2001.
- 33 Lambrinos himself notes in his much-acclaimed book on the relationship between cinema and history that each film – regardless of whether it is fiction or documentary – reflects the questions, queries and demands of the time in which it is created. *Ισχύς μου η αγάπη του φακού* [My strength is love of the lens] (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2005).
- 34 See Asteropi Lazaridou, "Πώς η χούντα μας οδήγησε στην κρίση" [How the junta drove us to crisis], *To Vima*, 24 April 2012.
- 35 Kostis Kornetis, "Public History and the Issue of Torture Under the Colonels' Regime in Greece", in *Ricerche storiche* 44/1 (2014): 81–100.
- 36 Dimitriou's film, in the words of a critic, "is addressed to the young who once again are forced by current circumstances to 'grow up abruptly' just like the young women of the anti-dictatorship movement grew old from one moment to the next". See Dimitris Pavlidis, "Η Βροχή είναι ζωή! Και η ζωή είναι μια διαρκής μάχη για την ανθρώπινη ελευθερία και αξιοπρέπεια" [Rain is life! And life is a constant battle for human freedom and dignity], accessed 7 October 2014, <http://olaeinedromos.blogspot.com/2012/01/blog-post.html>.
- 37 Here I am using the translation by Fellini specialist Peter Bondanella, "Amarcord," *Current* 22 (1999), accessed 7 October 2014, <http://www.criterion.com/current/posts/18-amarcord>.
- 38 Georgiana Colville, "Children being filmed by Truffaut," *The French Review* 63/3 (1990): 444.