

Assessing 'New' Greek cinema of the 1960s and the role of Theodoros Angelopoulos in Hellenic cinematography

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Abstract

In this review of Greek Cinema in the 1960s special consideration is given to the issue of what constitutes 'quality' cinema with a Greek flavour. By examining the period in question as the locus of inquiry, namely the 1960s, the study identifies a number of factors which influenced the Greek filmmaking industry's functional flexibility and seeks to answer a number of important questions. Specifically, the study investigated what constituted 'New' Greek cinema (NEK)? How did it differ from 'Old' Greek cinema (PEK) and what did the Hellenic state do to promote the cultural standing of cinema in its policies? What made films produced in Greece have a distinct Hellenic flavour whilst simultaneously appearing to be authentic? What was the role of Theodoros Angelopoulos *inter alia* in promoting Hellenic cinema and where does it stand today? The film identity of NEK and cinematic culture merge as interpretative meta-concepts evoked within the sociopolitical context of the 1960s. This concept-analytical type article was thus undertaken with a view to have a better grip on the attributes of NEK. With this as the main focus, the study, also sought to highlight the Greek film industry role during a period of rigid Military Junta control in Greece (1967-1974). This article will hopefully contribute towards both a better understanding of NEK, and a realisation that the film industry is more influential in moulding society than is sometimes believed.

Key words: New Greek Cinema, Angelopoulos, Finos Films

Introduction

Film-making is a highly collaborative and creative medium and films *per se*, never exist in isolation. They are the result of many collaborative efforts on the part of the producer, director, actors and different kinds of artists and technicians. However they are mediated through the director who fashions the individual parts and brings the whole into being by collage. Through the artistry of the director, film allows viewers to become omnipresent voyeurs and to experience explicitly an indefinitely expansive set of possibilities of action and settings.

More importantly, viewers are drawn emotionally into the world depicted in a manner unrivaled by any other medium. Given the above, film allows viewers to be emotionally manipulated in an unsurpassed way, but also provides viewers with an enriched and prolonged experience and as such provides for a more inclusive and reflective life.

Erwin Panofsky states: 'it is the movies that mold, more than any other single force, the opinions, the taste, the language, the dress, the behavior, and even the physical appearance of a public comprising more than 60 percent of the population of the earth' (Panofsky, 1977). Films are also related to the wider cultural output of an era and are reactive to changing historical conditions so that they reflect society in many ways.

Having reviewed a wide range of relevant literature and by using a qualitative meta-analytical methodology, it is clear that during the initial forays in to the world of film, Greek film production was lacklustre and virtually came to a complete halt during the Metaxas dictatorship of 1936–1941. The two periods that followed were the most prolific and popular eras of Greek cinema. Greek film production thus occurred in two distinctive periods and can also be divided into two rather broad and somewhat contradictory

groupings of aesthetics. These are the 'Old Greek Cinema' (Palios Ellinikos Kinimatografos) (PEK) from about 1942 to 1974, which is considered to be the typical model of Greek cinema that was arrived at by producers of films and the later 'New Greek Cinema' (Neos Ellinikos Kinimatografos) (NEK), which developed slowly in the latter part of the 1960s and which was in full swing by 1985 and continues today. PEK produced about 200 films annually, but waned considerably in the late 1960s, and after the fall of the Military Junta (1967–1974), a new auteurist cinema emerged in Greece.

The NEK promoted very serious themes and was more of an artform and was also dependent to a large extent on subsidy by the Hellenic state (Hess, 2000). Since the 1990s, there has been reference to 'Contemporary Greek Cinema' (Synchronos Ellinikos Kinimatografos) (SEK), which makes use of contemporary forms and storylines much like what Bollywood is doing for Indian cinema nowadays. The divisions of cinema as explained above are considered important in that they to a large extent controlled the perceptions of viewers concerning how cinema was viewed and studied in Greece (*Opsis tou Neou Ellinikou Kinimatografou [Aspects of New Greek Cinema]*) (2002). Consequently there emerged two distinct divisions of Greek film, the 'Old' and the 'New' and these reflected the huge sway of film critique and research undertaken on Greek cinematography. Film was thus considered to be either a form of high art or popular culture and while Greek films never reflected social reality, they always refracted and mediated it and were to some extent a storehouse of emotion in the age in question. Films could either uncover the dreams and aspirations of their viewers or at least allow them to reminisce. Films could thus communicate loss or desire to their viewers.

The Hellenic national cinema discussion reveals the problematisation of sociopolitical and cultural subjects that were prevalent in the 1960s. It also takes into account the impact of the growing local cinephile culture in Greece.

Problems in approach

The above described and accepted approach to Greek cinema as the 'Old'-versus-'New' is highly problematic since it is based on artistic principles and production type criteria, and has been used as a way of assessing Greek films. The terms used manifest the conceptual and ideological context in which cinema was understood at particular times by people who invented the distinction in typology. By its very sound, the 'Old' implies fading and conservative film typologies, while 'New' implies fresh and original ideas in film production that bring change to mind. For decades NEK films have been shown over and over again on Greek television and yet audiences prefer PEK films in which acting greats such as Manos Katrakis, Giogrios Kourkoulos, Thanassis Vengos and Aliki Vougiouglaki, *inter alia*, starred. Such films are considered to be more thought provoking and they promoted 'true' Greek culture whereas NEK films are generally considered to be highly boring, nonsensical and devoid of ethical and moral value promotion.

The dual antagonism of the 'Old' versus 'New' has thus become a recipe of judging films that prioritizes the representation of cinema, in terms of a viewer's point of view. Such a methodology with a binary view also poses the problem that there is no possibility of any overlap between PEK and NEK. Consequently, many critics and scholars today regard PEK films as mainly commercial and industrial ventures where film as an artform was far removed from the equation during production and directors of those films are relatively unimportant. On the other hand, reviews of NEK have failed to consider the economic and commercial motivation of film-making and also not proposed a or offered a structure for taking into consideration NEK filmmakers and their many films that draw on popular or common narrative forms such as films by Nikos Nikolaidis, Pantelis Voulgaris and Nikos Zervos *inter-alia*. The current approach has led to over-generalisations about the PEK and NEK periods of Greek cinema and current research has failed to address the diversity and delineation within PEK and NEK. The different kinds of production

practices and the variety of production companies has also not been considered. Neither the aesthetic, thematic and ideological trends, nor any optional kinds of economic and creative motivation have been fairly considered.

Background

PEK was the Greek film culture that was fashioned after the Second World War period when it became evident that cinema was a lucrative commercial activity as well as a highly popular form of entertainment for the masses (Rouvas & Stathakopoulos, 2005). It also included a diversity of production modes and advertising practices and followed aesthetic trends and narrative forms emulating European cinema. Of all the postwar film movements, the French New Wave was the most influential and it impacted on Greece. Its practitioners were divided into two distinct camps. Firstly, there were those who had formerly been critics for the French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*, amongst them were François Truffaut, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, and Claude Chabrol. Then there was the more politically conscious "Left Bank" group of film-makers including Agnès Varda, Alain Resnais, and Chris Marker.

The first group tended to combine fanciful stories of youth rebelling against societal structures and was replete with political and philosophical investigations of cinematic language. Whereas the the Left Bank film makers occupied themselves with meticulous formal experimentation to explore the relationships among cinema, memory, history, and politics. These film makers influenced Greek cinematography as did the 1960s, Italian directors who made a concerted effort to stray from the tenets of neorealism, thereby creating autobiographical and mythical films that fêted artistic imagination. They moved attention away from the urban and rural poor and shifted towards the alienation of the cosmopolitan middle and upper classes and this too was to an extent echoed in Hellenic film-making. While political content was to an extent lost, the films gained in stylistic innovation. A prime example was Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1970).

Until 1967 Greek cinema, was protected from being used for political reasons, more specifically as a vehicle for the official anti-communist and 'nationalistic' ideology. It was only from 1953 onwards that Greek cinema received even a modicum of state support. Pavlos, who was the King of Greece at the time, created an increasing awareness for the necessity of using cinema as an instrument of propaganda. (Meletopoulos, 1993). In fact, the Greek Newsreels from 1953 onwards were produced at the behest of the Press and Information Office of the Ministry of the Presidency of the Government of Greece, and were thus propagandist in orientation, promoting the state (Dimitriou, 1993).

When television was developed Greece in the mid-1960s this happened to coincide with the coup d'etat by Greek colonels, led by George Papadopoulos on 21 April 1967 which ousted the King Constantine. The rather mediocre films produced by the studio system were not considered a match for Greek television, and the strict censorship applied by the military junta kept any socially engaging films well away from Greek cinema screens. Consequently, the studio system collapsed, and the only filmmakers left in Greece were young writer-directors who sought to take Hellenic cinema into a new direction. They were vehemently opposed to the populist art of the studio system and envisioned an ultramodernist cinema controlled by auteurs. This somewhat recalcitrant group began making films during the era of the military and their movement sprang to the fore in the ten years subsequent to the 1974 fall of the military junta.

The military junta stalled the momentum of NEK but also gave rise to a new period of NEK, since independent film activity was even more politicized in terms of content and the emergent cinephile culture. NEK films became more prestigious in foreign festivals and many films such as *Face to Face*, *Shepherds* and *100 Hours of May* were shown abroad at length abroad. These paved the way for the groundbreaking film *Anaparastasi* (1970), of Theodoros Angelopoulos who obtained his film training in France, where he worked alongside Jean

Rouch. Once he returned to Greece, he became a film critic for left-wing journals. *Anaparastasi (Reconstruction)*, was his first feature film. It examined a murder through multiple tellings in the same fashion as Japan's Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950). This was groundbreaking cinema for the Hellenic film industry (Galt, 2006). Ironically, the military junta created a new impetus for art-house films, and politicized left-wing cinema. In addition to this many film directors immigrated for fear of prosecution and while abroad had closer contact with European film advances which further influenced the creation of a 'new' film culture based on European 'new' cinema values which promoted liberalism.

The origin of NEK

NEK refers to the trend which existed between 1960 and the late 1980s, which was the culmination of the Hellenic film culture. This was fashioned on a broader and more creative and innovative high cultural understanding of the cinema and this innovative film culture gradually took root as it brought in varied production practices and forms and ideologies in cinema. NEK was not by any means a definite and sudden break with established popular cinematic models that existed during the 1960s. It was in fact, to a large extent prefigured and anticipated in cinematic developments already existing in the commercial industry and market in the 1960s that required expression (Rigos *et al*, 2008).

Stathis Valoukos maintains that NEK essentially refers to all independent films made outside the commercial sector by new and relatively young filmmakers from 1966-1980 (Valoukos 2002: 65). The period 1960-1967 represented the initial phase of 'New' Greek Cinema, and began with the creation of the 'Week of Greek Cinema' which subsequently became known as the Greek Film Festival in 1966. The 1960s were a very creative period for the conventional Hellenic film industry, which arrived at its productive peak, technical complexity and commercial appeal (Karali, 2005). This led to an increase in the production of 'quality' films, and ended with the rise to power of

the military junta, when George Papadopoulos drastically altered the political and cultural framework within which film making existed (Sakellaropoulos, 1998).

The contemporary critical discourse on NEK identifies it with the emergence of a generation of filmmakers including *inter alia*, Theo Angelopoulos, Tonia Marketaki Pantelis Voulgaris and Nikos Panayotopoulos (Konstantinos, 1998). Its profile also altered considerably and it was linked with terms such as: 'art', 'modernism', 'auteur cinema', 'conflict with the establishment', 'leftist ideology', 'formal experimentation' and 'theme renewal'. State subsidies and independent film-making were terms linked with NEK but the most important result was its 'alienation from wider audiences'. The majority of younger writer-directors embraced a leftist political orientation and many admired Italian neorealism. It was highly problematic for them that their political positions in a sense drove them to seek mass audiences while their take on what was aesthetically pleasing very often drove audiences away.

Leventakos (2002) compares and contrasts PEK and NEK as 'Old' versus 'New', 'art' versus 'commercial', 'independent cinema' versus 'cinema of the producers', and 'politically progressive' versus 'politically conservative' (Leventakos, 2002: 5-10). Bacoyannopoulos (2002) explains that NEK is not merely a new wave, but a fundamentally different type of cinema in terms of forms, modes of production and how subjects are treated. He states that the film *Reconstruction* produced in 1970, was the starting point of NEK and it came to an end in the latter years of the 1990s (Bacoyannopoulos 2002: 11-34). Greek cinema thus sought to be part of a modernist aesthetic that was in contempt of the star system, montages, three-act narratives (Balathras, 2003), and a plethora of other Hollywood norms that had become associated with popular cinema. What basically came to the fore as a new phenomenon in the 1960s was the growth of a whole alternative film culture, which included a wide range of cultural and institutional movement surrounding cinema, especially characterized by precise attitudes

to modes of film production. During the 1960/61 season 58 new films were screened in Greece and this number increased at a rapid rate: 82 in 1962/63; 93 in 1964/65; 117 in 1966/67 (a new record) and the number did not fall below 90 until 1972. In the same period, cinema audiences increased sharply, with over 100 million admissions per annum. This reached a peak in 1968, when over 137 million tickets were sold, amounting to roughly fifteen tickets per capita. Greece was thus one of the film loving nations in the world and the boom experienced coincided with economic growth and social progress in the whole of Western Europe. It was also at this time that foreign films established themselves in the Greek market while the 'local' domestic 'art' cinematic model developed. This included the rise of film festivals, laws pertaining to cinema, independently produced films and critical writing and publications on film issues. The national culture of Hellenic film was now an 'art form' and not only for commercial gain. NEK was thus a multi-faceted cultural, political and socio-economic phenomenon which incorporated a wide range of interrelated activities as well as institutional structures, including individuals and their relations, which sprang up around Hellenic cinema, and which to large extent, sustained one another.

Resolving form and content issues

The main proponents in resolving form and content issues for Hellenic cinema were Theo Angelopoulos and Pantelis Voulgaris. The former embarked on a series of aesthetic experiments in film and he obtained a huge popular Greek audience as well as international acclaim for his *The Traveling Players*. This production essentially re-wrote Greek political history with a strongly slanted leftist perspective. Voulgaris on the other hand remained in touch with the neorealistic standard in his highly successful productions including, *To Proxenio tis Annas (The Engagement of Anna*, 1972), *Petronia Chronia (Stone Years*, 1985), and *Ola Ina Dromos (It's A Long Road*, 1995). Tonia Marketaki's film *Timi tis Agapis (The Price of Love*, 1984) established new cinematic standards as far as Greek feminism was concerned while

many Greek social problems were given expression by Nikos Papatakis's in for example, *I Voski* and *Thanos and Despina*, (1968). Due to such daring thematic material possessing great cultural, socio-economic, political and existential significance, NEK ideas permeated popular films and transformed areas of commercial production into hitherto neglected, critical and cinematic expressions.

'Old' Greek films prior to the 1960s were not interested in psychological and spiritual aspects of characters but rather mores, etiquette and social situations. In these films, characters were for the most part defined as being two-dimensional and stereotypically possessed a range of fixed qualities. In such films, characters were for example either, good or bad, rich or poor. In the 1960s this trend shifted as there was now a greater interest in the characters portrayed on film and in their subjective world. The psychological makeup of characters became complex and drama films dealing with personal dilemmas and dramas increased.

A number of independently produced documentaries and fiction films had historical themes. Amongst these were *Tragodia tou Aegeou / The Tragedy of Aegean* (1961, Vasilis Maros) and *Eleftherios Venizelos* (1965, Lila Kourkoulakou) which introduced the full feature-length documentary. Films with a historical emphasis became very popular amongst NEK film-makers in the following years. For the first time, male or female melodramas were shown in which existential protagonists were introduced. Characters portrayed were now facing many moral and social dilemmas and sought to 'find themselves'. Greek films improved both technically and artistically and colour films came to the fore. Recognizable genres were established, each appealing to a unique audience. The life portrayed in films was somewhat ahead of the social revolution occurring in Greece in which there was a rapid adoption of the facets of what was deemed to be a western lifestyle.

The producer, Filopoemin Finos, invested extensively in studios, equipment and in films. He controlled the programming, the

machinery as well as the technical and artistic work. He modeled his company Fino Films on Hollywood and had many directors, actors and technicians on his payroll. There were middle class situation comedies as well as traditional popular comedies and even lampoon and slapstick films in which the great actor Thanassis Vengos starred. There were also detective films starring actors such as Nikos Kourkoulos and Jenny Karezi, historical films starring actors such as Tolis Boskopoulos, war films, spy and adventure films and melodramatic social films promoting moral conduct. Dinos Dimopoulos included all the genres in his productions and brought out the talents of the two most popular film stars, Aliki Vouyouglaki ("Madalena", 1960) and Jenny Karezi ("Jenny Jenny", 1966). Films portraying the Greek Civil War were conspicuously absent. Above all, censorship was in force but the domestic market grew immensely and the demand for films (both foreign and Greek) increased dramatically. Vast amounts of money were invested in film production and more than 170 new production companies, fiercely competing with one another, were created in the Hellenic film industry. These developments meant that the 1960s were undoubtedly the halcyon days of the Hellenic art film industry.

What defined NEK?

The politics of the time in the 1960s precluded established forms of culture and entertainment, and required new ones in which the problems of the era could be expressed. NEK is measurable in terms of three significant influences which affected it at this time. The first of these influences was the producing of independently made films which reflected more than simple entertainment, which were privately funded or partly state subsidized. These films were not dependent on commercialization for success. Secondly, films were viewed as artistic creations which allowed for self-expression in a rather innovative formal and narrative style. They tended to evaluate the socio-political and existential problems facing especially Greece and adopted the European art-house film culture as a stimulus and central locus. The the growth

of cinematic exhibitions, such as the Thessaloniki Film Festival, and the emergence of film societies and arthouse type cinemas, provided the means for the dissemination of NEK films (Iordanova, 2006). The festivals perceived their mission to be the promotion of artistic rather than commercial cinema. Among their priorities was the provision of space to Balkan film producers as well as, first-time directors. A third development was the growth of journalism and critical writing on cinema which promoted the view that it was prestigious to attend cinematic performances.

The NEK period saw the emergence of a commercial 'quality' trend in film-making including *inter alia* films of well established *auteurs* such as *Electra* (1962, Cacoyannis) which was produced by Finos Films and *Young Aphrodites* (1963, Nikos Koundouros) by Anzervos Films. Films such as these enjoyed great success in foreign film festivals and won international recognition. This enabled them to obtain access to lucrative international markets and set the tone for future Greek films in the ilk of art films. Some outstanding films which promoted historical concepts and stories which were set during the German and Italian Occupations and with anti-war and anti-heroic content, were produced (Ferro, 2002). *Diogmos / Persecution* (1964, Grigoris Grigoriou) is an example of such films which had a huge impact on Hellenic cinema. Pre 1960s films did not lay stress on nationalism *per se*, but generally provided alternative viewpoints of the past, and any issues relating to the Greek Civil War were for the large part subconsciously related to.

The year 1966 was a landmark year in which the production of independent artistic films reached a zenith. Eight independent features participated at the Thessaloniki Film Festival. These included *The Hot Month August*, *Short Break*, *Face to Face*, *Excursion*, *With Glittering Eyes*, *Until the Ship Sails*, *The Death of Alexander* and *Dafnis and Cloe*.

The festival was marked by fierce competition between independent films and 'quality' commercially made films, especially

due to the fact that the prize for the best film with its 200,000 drachmas prize money which was first introduced that year, went to *Xechasmeni Iroes / Forgotten Heroes*, a resistance film directed by the cinematographer Nikos Gardelis and produced by James Parris. Many films accentuated the smothering sociopolitical and economic dilemma facing Greece context in explored themes such as social injustice, poverty and unemployment (Kolioidimos, 1999). The inferior role of women in society and ethical and moral issues were also emphasized as was political corruption which was rife. Some films made a stand against dictatorship and the stand-out production in this genre was *Kierion*, (1967, Nikos Papatakis), which was begun only a few months before the military junta assumed power and it was completed during the course of the dictatorship. The Civil War was transferred onto other types of conflicts, and was very often hidden in the arrangements and storylines of popular movies. In many ways NEK was fixated on the Civil War and is thus a link with PEK. NEK films were for the most part independently produced and the result of collective voluntary work. It sought to challenge the commercial sector with its new themes and the formal aspects such as Neo-Realism, which were to an extent copied from European art cinema. Due to severe state censorship policies, NEK came into conflict with the state as it exposed socio-political problems and attacked the regime in power. Films promoted themselves by virtue of press statements before and after their release and NEK thus used conflict between itself and the state to promote its offerings as was the case with a number of films by Angelopoulos.

In any event, the 1950s and 1960s are considered to be the *Golden Age* of Hellenic cinema as over sixty films were made per year. Many directors and actors of the NEK era were regarded as important historical figures in Greece and many of them obtained international acclaim for their work. Undoubtedly the most famous actors were Melina Mercouri and Irene Papas. Jules Dassin, the American director, selected Greece as his second homeland and made the famous *Never on Sunday* (1960) and A

Dream of Passion (1977), both of which starred Melina Mercouri. Irene Papas played a role in the *Guns of Navarone*, a 1961 British-American Action/Adventure war film which was directed by J. Lee Thompson and based on Alistair MacLean's 1957 novel about the Dodecanese Campaign of World War II. She starred alongside greats such as Gregory Peck, James Robertson Justice, David Niven, Anthony Quinn, Anthony Quayle, and Stanley Baker. Some of the acclaimed directors of the period include Theodoros Angelopoulos, Mihalis Kakogiannis, Alekos Sakellarios and Nikos Koundouros amongst others. Who could forget *Zorba the Greek*, a 1964 film based on the novel *Zorba the Greek* by Nikos Kazantzakis. The film was directed by a Greek Cypriot, Michael Cacoyannis and the title character was played by Anthony Quinn. The supporting cast included Irene Papas, Alan Bates, Lila Kedrova and Sotiris Moustakas. Cacoyannis received Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Film Oscar nominations for *Zorba the Greek* (Osborne, 1994). Finos Film contributed to this period with a number of great films such as *I theia mou apo to Chicago* (My aunt from Chicago) and *To ksilo vgike apo to paradeiso* (Hidings come from Paradise).

Between 1960 and 1967 a number of productions both of the commercially made and independent variety were produced. Some of them were feature films while others were shorts and all of them generally explored historical and contemporary subjects (Papayiannidis, 2001) and were mainly inspired by European art and new wave films produced in France. The common factor in these productions was that they engaged the new cinephile audience in an 'alternative' domestic mode of cinema. The production of short films in Greece was a new occurrence in the 1960s. The 1960 film *Macedonian Wedding* exemplified the artistic possibilities of short films in NEK and a vast amount of documentary and fictional shorts were produced which blended fact and fiction. There were a myriad of themes but main themes were history, politics, class structure in society and the issue of what constitutes 'Greekness'. Due to the nature of certain documentaries, the government saw it to

ensor or even ban certain productions which were considered to be seditious in nature, for example, *100 Ores tou Mai / 100 Hours of May* (1963-1964, Dimos Theos / Fotos Lambrinos). Critical film writing also grew in stature at this time and this in turn created a supporting framework for art and new wave films (Kastrinaki, 2005). It was through this writing that the term 'New Greek Cinema' came to the fore. After 1972, the production of mainstream films in the PEK mode dropped to almost zero, and the stage was taken over by NEK. The significant difference between the two was in the techniques employed in production. It also was a matter of time before a very extensive cine club network took root in cities such as Athens and Thessalonica. This network soon spread to outlying rural areas as well. Many art films were screened by cinephile film societies and cine clubs during this period and even foreign art and new wave films were screened. The commercial success enjoyed by the screening of these films led to the creation of the first art house cinemas in Greece (Karalis, 2012). Many young and upcoming directors assumed control of producing their films and sponsored themselves or took out loans. This allowed for the promotion of freedom of subjective expression and this flourished on the part of the director, both in terms of the theme and form of films produced. Unlike the factory type standardized production of Finos Films, the new directors sought uniqueness and innovation and strove for "auteur" art status. The result was that the cinema of the actor became the cinema of the director. Stories made way to subjects, and drama and action were largely replaced by time and experience. Films of a political or historical nature moulded the social conscience of the youth and thus promoted critical thinking.

The impact of Theodoros Angelopoulos on Hellenic film

Theodoros Angelopoulos was undoubtedly the supreme and most significant filmmaker in the history of Hellenic cinema. He was also a screenwriter and film producer of note. His first film which was a short film, was produced in 1968 after the coup that was the start of the Greek military dictatorship known as the Regime of the

Colonels. He expressed the opinion that for film to have a radical impact, its form and content must be seen to defy convention. He achieved this by having very slow pacing and continuous shots that tended to last considerably longer than the usual minute or two. This was particularly evident in the epic production *O Thiassos (The Traveling Players, 1975)*, which is considered one of the greatest films of the twentieth century (Arecco, 1999). In this film he employed less than one hundred shots to discover the history of mid-century Greece. He also made the political feature film about modern Greece called *Days of '36 (Meres Tou 36, 1972)*. He controlled time by going back and forth chronologically in single shots (Horton, 1997) and made great use of motionless montages and actors making direct addresses to the camera when uncovering their film identities such as in *Alexander the Great* (Georgakas, 2002). Angelopoulos was so respected that in 1978, he was asked to be a member of the jury at the 28th Berlin International Film Festival (*Berlinale*; Juries, 1978).

In three of his films, namely, *Taxidi sta Kithira (Voyage to Kythera, 1984)*, *O Melissokomos (The Beekeeper, 1986)*, and *Topio stin Omichli (Landscape in the Mist, 1988)*, he considered traditional Greek values in contrast to those of the developing Europe. Many of his films had dead spots that gave viewers time to think about what they had just witnessed on screen. He received the prestigious the Palme d'Or for *Mia Aioniotita kai mia Mera (Eternity and a Day)* in which he carefully examined the problem of national borders and what constituted ethnic identity.

A number of his films such as *Oi Kynighoi (The Hunters, 1977)*, and *Megaleksandros (Alexander the Great, 1980)* in which he dealt with the predicament of power and utopian ideas of social justice. He thus brought the ancient legend down to the frantic times at the turn of the 20th century. In his, *Taxidi sta Kythera (Voyage to Cythera)* (1984) he made reference to the return of a political refugee, to a state of complete isolation and presented the history of Greece from a highly anti-authoritarian leftist perspective (Horton, 1997).

Angelopoulos thus created a landmark trilogy on the turbulent history of Greek politics, with the Civil War and its catastrophic and tragic consequences (*Days of '36*, (1972), *The Travelling Players*, (1975) and *The Hunters*, (1977). In 1999, he launched a cinematographic project including a trilogy that would comment on the history of Europe in the twentieth century through the experiences of Greece. Part one of the trilogy, *To Livadi pou Dakryzei (The Weeping Meadow*, 2004), was completed. It has greater character development than previous films and deals with the issue of Greek refugees from Asia Minor through the end of the Greek Civil War in 1949 (Georgakas, 2006).

Parts two and three were not completed since the award-winning film director died tragically after being hit by a motorcycle while filming scenes on his latest movie. At the time of his death, he was in the process of directing *The Other Sea*, a film stressing the huge impact of Greece's economic crisis on its citizens. The films produced by Angelopoulos were Hellenic and yet universal and had wide global appeal. "His films were masterpieces in that they dared to cross a number of borders: between nations, between history and myth, the past and the present, voyaging and stasis, between betrayal and a sense of community, chance and individual fate, realism and surrealism, silence and sound, between what is seen and what is withheld and not seen, and between what is 'Greek' and what is not" (Horton, 1979). It is due to his work that especially Hellenes although not exclusively, redefined what they felt cinema is and can become. His films opened new vistas for people through which the world could be viewed (Horton, 1997). From the 1990s Angelopoulos' films increasingly involved non-Greek funding partners and attracted international stars such as Marcello Mastroianni, Harvey Keitel and Willem Dafoe amongst others. English was also often used as the main language (Mitropoulou, 2006). The important role of co-production and the use of internationally acclaimed actors in the cast is also evident in some of the latest box-office hits.

The state of contemporary Hellenic Cinema

The history of Greek cinema is essentially very obscure. It started gradually and then collapsed and for decades it struggled to reinvent itself. It then produced the first of its 'mature works', then again totally collapsed and has to all intents and purposes almost vanished totally (Karalis, 2012). Audiences left New Greek Cinema up to the end of the 1980s but this was counteracted by the ongoing popularity of Old Greek films as there were many repeat screenings on state television. There has since the late 1990s been a return by cinephiles to anarrative-centred, genre-based and thematically accessible cinemas. This "New

Classical Greek Cinema", tends to concentrate mainly on the stylistic characteristics of post 1990s productions. Many films were co-produced with other nations but this practice lost momentum as many directors were highly idiosyncratic and somewhat eccentric while lacking true vision. Consequently, audiences in Greece began to avoid Greek-language films as foreign made films drew 85 percent of all screenings and about 500 000 admissions compared to a meagre 10 000 drawn by Greek films. At this juncture, older studio films were shown regularly on television and these proved to be rather novel and appealing to the younger generation. By the late 1990s a new generation of film-makers arose and they began to challenge the political economy of Hellenic film by targeting popular audiences with a range of independent low-budget productions.

In this environment, films such as *I epithesi tou gigantiaou moussaka (The Attack of the Giant Moussaka*, 2000), were created. This was a spoof science fiction film that criticised the Greek mass media and had a hilarious gay subtext and yet reached an international cult audience. The big cinematic hit of the 1990s, however, was *Safe Sex* (1999). This was a soft-core pornographic film that scaled new heights on the Greek film charts with over one million admissions. Its appeal lay in the fact that actors from Greek television sitcoms were placed in compromising sexual situations. Critics

lambasted the film for its vulgarity, but despite this, *Safe Sex* brought mass audiences back to Greek language films and as a result more Greek language films began to surpass 100,000 admissions. As arts funding structures and policies have changed in the last two decades, this has contributed to a shift in emphasis for producers towards more mainstream productions and also towards cinema with a universal orientation (Constandinidis, 2000). It is also notable that films by young and upcoming directors have been receiving funding, such as *Telos epochis /End of an Era*, 1994. As such films appealed to audiences, funding too began to be revisited (Kartalou *et al*, 2000). Cultural identity problems associated with the new and developing Europe, such as the rapid influx of refugees fleeing collapsing states has become a theme of new generation films in the 21st century. A major success in this genre of film in 2003 was the Tassos Boulmetis film *Politiki Kouzina (A Touch of Spice)*, which dealt with the expulsion of Greeks from Constantinople (Istanbul) in the 1950s. This film was part financed by Village Roadshow Productions and was thus the first venture of a distribution and exhibition company into film production in Greece. Its other funders were the Greek Film Centre and a Turkish company. The film also boasted an international cast, and also made use of the English language in parts of the dialogue. In similar vein, Voulgaris released his film *Nyfes (Brides)*, 2004). This film was about a group of picture brides who immigrated to the United States in 1922 and dealt with the theme of emigration upheaval. These two films were major box office hits realising in excess of one million admissions each. Theodoros Angelopoulos, who is discussed later on in this article, took up similar themes in his trilogy and wished to reflect the history of Europe throughout the twentieth century by focusing on the history of the Greek nation. The first film of his trilogy, *To Livadi pou Dakryzei (The Weeping Meadows)*, 2004), describes how Greeks from the Black Sea region fled from the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the storyline continued through the end of Greek Civil War in 1949. Today the vast majority of contemporary Greek films are the result of co-productions and after the demise of the

the Greek junta in 1974, the country entered a new period of film-making. State funding was an established fact and many quality productions began to appear.

Modern Greek films also raise feminist issues and various award-winning works have been produced by women, such as *Alexandria* (Maria Illioú, 2001), *Diskoli Apocheretismi: O Babas Mou (Hard Goodbyes: My Father)*, Penny Panayotopoulou, 2002), and *Close, So Close* (Stella Theodoraki, 2002). Hellenic film-makers continue to seek and reach popular audiences both locally and abroad. Greek cinema today is clearly the result of multiple formal and cultural influences and it has been used to express a wide range of ideologies. It has a universal identity which has been created by many factors over a long period of time (Iordanova, 2006).

Conclusion

The sociopolitically turbulent 1960s in Greece still produced a creative cultural prosperity in which new ideas and forms were introduced to Greek cinema. This was rather impressive since the state intervened in cinema and introduced stringent censorship measures. The youth grew up on resistance politics and many new innovations in the art of cinema were developed. This began with short films and these appeared after 1970 when Greece became popular as a location for the shooting of foreign films and this encouraged by state policies. The period offered aspiring directors the opportunity to study filmmaking techniques in other countries (Vatouyiou, 2006). The very productive popular domestic film industry was a fertile training ground for film practitioners, and provided the required infrastructures for the development of art films activity. Greek national cinema established a framework of expectations about how Greek cinema should be. Standards were to be based on especially French standards and films had to exude Greekness while being creative and highly innovative art subjects. In an area of Generals, left-wing and militant critics manifested themselves: Angelopoulos, Bacoyannopoulos, Marketaki and Rafaelidis

amongst others. They vigorously promoted art and 'new' cinema and attacked local productions. Soon most cinephile activities became associated with left-wing politics (Constantinidis, 2000), so that cine clubs and film weeks etc. began to subtly indoctrinate the youth.

The Greek film industry in the 1960s was hugely affected by a myriad of sociopolitical and economic upheavals, cultural creativity and an expanding cinephile culture. Despite this Commercial cinema and NEK was highly responsive to the demands and challenges of the 1960s. Popular film products were created and adapted to the new conditions facing the Hellenic market. In this period the short film production expanded and the cultural status of the commercial film was uplifted as Greek films began to attract international audiences and competed with foreign products in the domestic market. Many young film directors began to express themselves and they were motivated by their endeavours to get to the core of forms and appearances, and to the meaning of life within the sociopolitical context of their time. They introduced social issues in cinema as well as political and historical themes. Once Theodoros Angelopoulos' *Anaparastasi*, won an award at the Thessaloniki Film Festival, New Cinema became well and truly established and the course of Hellenic cinema moved into a new dimension. Today, despite huge economic problems in the country, Greek Cinema is still in the process of evolving and all bodes well for the Hellenic film industry.

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