

## Review of *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema. 1949-1967*

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### Abstract

This is a historical-sociological study based on the premise that cinema is a social institution that is 'interactively changing along with the society in which it is produced and viewed'. As such, the representation of masculinity in the Greek films produced in this transitory period 'becomes obscured, uncertain and problematic'.

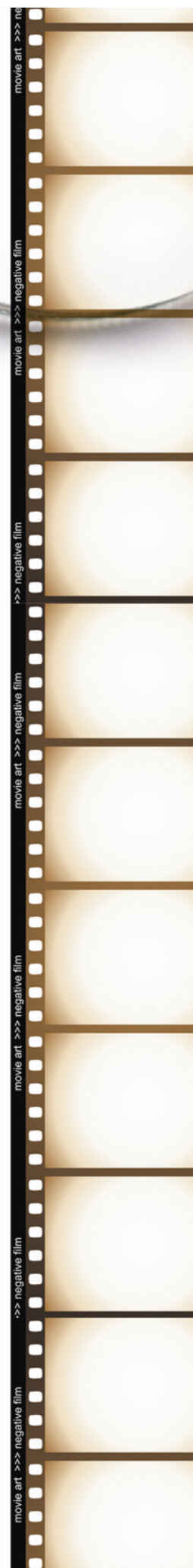
**Keywords:** Greek Cinema, Gender, Masculinity, New Greek Cinema



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Review of Achilleas Hadjikyriacou, *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema. 1949-1967*. New York, London, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013. viii + 316 pp. ISBN 9781441109385, \$130.00 (hbk)

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While contemporary Greek films like *Dogtooth* (Lanthimos, 2009) and *Miss Violence* (Avranas, 2013) deal with oppressive patriarchs, Achilleas Hadjikyriacou decides to go back in time in order to explore how masculinity and gender roles are represented in the popular Greek films of the period 1949-1967. This is a cinema that came to be widely known as ‘Old Greek Cinema’ or ‘popular Greek cinema’ and, after the arrival of television in Greece, gradually gave way to the ‘New Greek Cinema’ that placed the late Theo Angelopoulos at its center. In *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema. 1949-1967*, Hadjikyriacou captures the interaction between this popular cinema and post-war society, a society that, as the author is at pains to explain, was in flux. This is a historical-sociological study based on the premise that cinema is a social institution that is ‘interactively changing along with the society in which it is produced and viewed’ (p. 5). As such, the representation of masculinity in the Greek films produced in this transitory period ‘becomes obscured, uncertain and problematic’ (p. 1). This contradicts the rigid image of patriarchal Greek society that, for the author, has dominated the work of early ethnographers and social anthropologists.

Chapter One, ‘Masculinity and Gender Relations in Greece: 1969-67’, offers a painstaking record of sources to show the complex ‘construction and reconstruction of masculinities and femininities during a period when the traditional patriarchal model was repeatedly challenged by tremendous social transformations’ (pp. 24-5). With the scars of WWII and the Civil War (1946-49) still open, Greek society entered a phase of Westernization. Thus, attempts were

made to reconstruct the national economy, consumerism increased and demographics changed due to internal and external migration. For Hadjikyriacou, in such a society, placed in between tradition and modernity, more and more women realized that they ‘can do it’. Furthermore, the youth was ready to be emancipated, by means of higher education, their own (sub)culture, free time and pocket money to spend freely on consumerist products and various leisure activities. In this context, ‘gender ideas became more flexible, transparent and open-ended’ (p. 54). This is a working hypothesis that the author later tests against the representation of masculinity in key films.

The second chapter, ‘Greek Cinema: 1949-67’, describes the exceptional character of Greek cinema in the period under discussion: it was the most popular form of entertainment in Greece and the most productive film industry in Europe. This was a cinema of stars and key genres (mainly comedies and melodramas), where a few long-standing production companies dominated over a great number of minor ones. Here, Hadjikyriacou draws on various visual sources, from ads in the press to front covers of film and women magazines, to show the influence of American lifestyle on Greek life, as well as the objectification of the female body and the growing popularity of local and international stars.

In his third chapter, entitled ‘Masculinity and Locality: Rural vs Urban Gender Identities’, Hadjikyriacou is preoccupied with the representation of masculinities in connection to rural and urban space, as well as tradition and modernity in the films *To Koritsi me ta Mavra* (Cacoyannis, 1956); *Ayoupa* (Tallas, 1957); *Mandalena* (Sakellarios, 1960); and *Patera Katse Fronima* (Karayannis, 1967). As the title of Chapter Four suggests, ‘Money, Pride or Both? Masculinity and Class’, masculinities were also negotiated in films in relation to class identities. Hence, the depiction of men in crisis in *Mia Zoi tin Ehoume* (Tzavellas, 1958),

*Synoikeia to Oneiro* (Alexandrakis, 1961), *O Krahtis* (Andritsos, 1964) and *Prosopo me Prosopo* (Manthoulis, 1966). Chapter Five, 'Modern Men: Masculinity and the Challenges of a New Age', is devoted to *Stella* (Cacoyannis, 1955), *I Theia apo to Chicago* (Sakellarios, 1957), *Katiforos* (Dalianidis, 1961) and *Despoinis Diefthintis* (Dimopoulos, 1964), to show the impact of emancipated women and the rising youth on masculine and family models.

The limited space of this review does not allow me to do justice to the rich analysis of films and their representation of 'men in crisis' that the author provides. Indeed, the thoroughness of the study is one of the book's great strength. But I felt that perhaps a different structure of the book around key genres (comedies, dramas, but also musicals) and emblematic (male and female) stars than films would have allowed the author to supplement and enrich his film narrative analysis with film theory, gender theory and an analysis of film style. In addition, it was felt that from the film reviews the reader understands that, although gender roles were changing in the Greek 1950s and 1960s (as Chapter One convincingly shows), critics were far less prone to discuss this in their film reviews. Rather, they were mostly interested in encouraging the formation of a high quality, art cinema in Greece that would depict a certain, acceptable and exportable image of the country. I therefore find it unlikely that something that remained unsaid or hidden in public critical discourse can trouble or complicate the image we want to create of gender roles in post-war Greek society.

Finally, the book directs our attention to other fruitful avenues of inquiry that a scholar might want to take in the future. For instance, bearing in mind Judith Butler's analysis of the performativity of gender, one cannot but want to learn more about the power of film as a medium in forming, disseminating and encouraging a performativity of (a certain kind of) Greek masculinity. Here, one is reminded of the work of Dimitris Papanikolaou on the

emblematic Anthony Quinn as the stereotypical Greek man dancing the iconic syrtaki in *Zorba the Greek* (Cacoyannis, 1964), a dance that ultimately became the Greek dance performed for and danced by tourists seeking fun under the Greek sun. Also, an exploration of homosexuality in popular Greek films could further highlight and perhaps elaborate the argument the author is putting forward, namely that films represent masculinities in complex ways. How do, for instance, Greek musicals (most notably, the colorful Cinemascope musicals by Yannis Dalianidis) play with images of queerness and camp? Finally, since Greek cinema was – and unfortunately still is – a male sacrosanct domain, one is tempted to ask whether women filmmakers, such as Lila Kourkoulakou and Maria Plyta, showed gender roles in a more nuanced way.

While Greek ‘new wave’ films garner recognition in international film festivals around the world, Achilleas Hadjikyriacou’s book contributes to existing scholarship on Greek cinema. The book is a product of extensive research in various archives, an important achievement especially if one takes into account the great number of archives that still remain unavailable, inaccessible or missing in Greece.