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Review article

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Visual Folklore in 1960s Greek Popular Cinema: Athens at the Threshold of Tradition and Modernity

Despite its slow and ambivalent transformation, particularly after WWII, Greek society strived to present a novel and relatively modern face during the 1960s. While tradition in all its facets had been a long-lasting staple, even affecting critical aspects of everyday life, modernity began to take steps and seek changes: peasants left the countryside to explore new opportunities in the urban centers, immigration rose, education emerged as a means to escape poverty, while technology penetrated the Greek household slowly. Such urban shifts have been particularly documented in the popular Greek films of the 1960s, providing a rich framework to explore the notions of tradition and modernity in visual folklore. By employing a qualitative approach, this article focuses on how Greek popular film reflects the critical tensions surrounding everyday urban life by examining customs, rituals, identities, and material culture as represented in particular film case studies. It will argue that the popular Greek film of the 1960s documents glimpses of tradition still surviving in the city and presents to the Greek audience ways of handling, preserving, or even rejecting tradition, while flirting with modernity.

Key words: visual folklore, Greek popular cinema, melodrama, comedy, visual representation

Визуелни фолклор у грчком популарном филму 1960-их: Атина на прагу традиције и модерности

Упркос својој спорој и амбивалентној трансформацији, нарочито након Другог светског рата, грчко друштво се трудило да прикаже ново и релативно модерно лице свету током 1960-их. Иако је традиција, у свим својим аспектима, била дуготрајан и незаобилазан део, и чак утицала на кључне аспекте свакодневног живота, модерност је почела да прави кораке и тражи промене: сељаци су напуштали руралне крајеве како би тражили нове прилике у урбаним центрима, имиграција је порасла, образовање се профилисало као начин бекства од сиромаштва, док је технологија полако улазила у грчка домаћинства. Ове урбане промене су посебно документоване у популарним грчким филмовима из 1960-их, што је створило богат оквир за истраживање представа о традицији и модерности у визуелном фолклору. Користећи се квалитативним приступом, овај чланак се фокусира на то како грчки популарни филм рефлектује кључне тензије које окружују свакодневни градски живот тако што испитује обичаје, ритуале, идентитете и материјалну културу онако како су представљени у филмовима који су у раду узети као грађа за студије случаја. У чланку ће бити изнета тврдња да популарни грчки филм из 1960-их документује инстанце традиције која и даље опстаје у граду те да грчкој публици нуди начине да користи, очува или чак одбаци традицију, док флертује са модерношћу.

Кључне речи: визуелни фолклор, грчки популарни филм, мелодрама, комедија, визуелна репрезентација

1. INTRODUCTION

Audiovisual media's necessity and capacity to document and encapsulate sociocultural practices and their meanings have become vital in contemporary research in various disciplines. Amongst them, folklore has benefited broadly from employing photography or video to provide empirical proof of how tradition transforms, survives, or revives. In the growing field of visual folklore, i.e., visual documentation, representation, and interpretative analysis of folkloric phenomena, audiovisual renderings of tradition seems to promote our perception and knowledge of our culture. To this end, mass media also play an instrumental role in disseminating and producing folkloric discourses. In the early 1990s, Dégh observed

that "we are eyewitnesses to a new era in which folklore gains power and prestige as an authoritative voice [...] The task of the folklorists is to read these meanings of folklore, and this task makes folkloristics an important interdisciplinary science, now more than ever before" (Dégh 1994, 2).

Still, in the late 1970s, "a few folklorists are interested in non-ethnographic film as it relates to traditional narrative" (Danielson 1979, 209); earlier theorizing on visual folklore has tended to focus on folk representations in television, advertising, and the press, revealing folklorists' investment in other mass media than cinema. In providing a decisive kaleidoscopic overview of this shift, Mikel J. Koven observed that folklore scholarship had always had a keen interest in cinema. However, this exploration has always been somehow restricted to particular research areas, like *Märchen* (Fairy Tales), myths, and legends, and identifying specific tale types or motifs (Koven 2003, 190). At the same time, fan ethnographies, emerging from the interplay between folklore and cultural studies, carved out an area for further research.

While sparking interest in cinema has been slow, it has gained particular currency in highlighting how film fiction can provide an exciting and alternative starting point for examining folklore. Towards this direction, concepts such as "folkloric film" (Sherman 1988) and "filmic folklore" (Zhang 2005) are crucial to our thinking of tradition as a vehicle for a more elaborate approach to its visual aspects, may it be documentation or representational strategies. Moreover, Sherman & Koven's edited volume *Folklore/cinema. Popular Film as Vernacular Culture* (2007) makes a systematic and concerted effort to bring fiction film's folkloric aspects to the forefront. This wonderful exchange between both fields is critical as:

> "It provides an awareness not only of popular cinema's indebtedness to traditional forms of human expressive behavior (beliefs, ballads, stories, and other traditional communication) but also of the ways folklore changes because of its mass-mediated variants and dissemination in a variety of situations and cultural contexts in addition to cinema." (Sherman & Koven 2007, 7).

Contributing to this interesting dialogue, this article will focus on how the popular Greek film of the 1960s can become an essential source of visual folklore. In the light of Greek urban folklore, it examines how different film genres (comedy, melodrama, film musical) represent and comment upon the visual and aesthetic aspects of subjectivities, the place, and tradition in Athens. By employing a qualitative approach, it will argue

that the 1960s Greek popular cinema renders or reconstructs folklore still surviving in the city and presents to the Greek audience ways of handling, preserving, or even rejecting tradition to give space to modernity.

2. FITTING FOLKLORE INTO THE BIG SCREEN: EARLY CONSIDERATIONS ON FILM AS A DOCUMENTATION MEDIUM

A consideration of visual folklore in a localized background could provide fruitful insight into the interaction between folklife and aspects of the visual in Greece. Therefore, we will explore it briefly. In the early 1960s, conscious attempts were made at documenting Greek folklore culture. For instance, prominent folklore professor and director of the Academy of Athens' Folk Archive Georgios K. Spyridakis had pinpointed the pertinence of visual documentation in folkloric research: illustrating an object or rendering a performance audiovisually should be inseparable from ethnographic fieldwork (Spyridakis 1962). For Spyridakis, the development of film as a tool of folkloric insight had been one of the significant milestones for documenting tradition (Spyridakis 1964). His cooperation with folklore researcher Georgios N. Aikaterinidis proved more than substantial. Throughout his course, he managed to visually render tens of audiovisual themes and salvage folkloric expressions bound to die from the increasing influence of capitalism, social mobility, and overseas immigration (Aikaterinidis 2009). Admittedly, Aikaterinidis's folklore photographs and films had been, in several aspects, valuable ethnographic material, as he had been the first to implement an alternate method (now widely adopted) to support folklore research with audiovisual evidence.

Nevertheless, he who advanced the idea that visual renderings could provide an additional information area is urban folklorist Dimitrios S. Loukatos. In his seminal book *Folklorica Contemporanea* (1963), he emphasizes the role played by the photographic offices as "the first museums of local private life" in the provinces, as well as the photographers' assumption of the debt of ethnographic research (Loukatos 2003, 39). He refers to 'moving' and 'popular' subjects, appreciating that the film lens will assist in the preservation of 'rural memory,' as it will attempt to document the new social conditions of internal migration and asymmetrical urbanization that affected the Greek cities in the 1960s. After all, what Loukatos calls 'urban folk life' and needs to be preserved is something very much alive for the era of Modern folklore since, as he argues, "there are people in the neighborhoods, just as there is a popular subconscious in the people of the (urban) centers." (Loukatos 2003, 15)

Besides, film has a unique gravity and urgency in *Folklorica Contemporanea*: In the book's annex, Loukatos, understanding the importance of audiovisual recording, not only urges the municipalities of 'big cities' to establish archives of folklore cinema (Loukatos 2003, 136) but suggests to the filmmakers – who, together with journalists and photojournalists, constitute the 'valuable collaborators of contemporary folklore research' (Loukatos 2003, 5) – of his time a series of thirty-one subjects to be filmed, which concern the urban folk culture (Loukatos 2003, 138-139). Some of these themes are the following: New Year's Eve traffic in the capital or other cities (toy market, food market, caroling, buses, etc.), the Epiphany (the diving of the cross) on the shores of the Saronic Gulf (Piraeus), Lotteries (lottery tickets, agencies, symbolism, psychology of the buyers), Periptera (kiosks) as a characteristic feature of city life (their external exhibits, depending on the days and festivals), carnival in the neighborhoods (carnival games, carnival animals, etc.). Overall, the thirty-one examples listed by Dimitrios S. Loukatos constitute an ideal film subject, primarily when the transfer of rural and popular culture elements to the urban center is consolidated. This filming bears the character of a cultural document and a testimony to a rapidly changing society.

Loukatos' contribution to strengthening contemporary folklore research with moving images has been unanimously critical, but it is noteworthy that cinema has been explicitly neglected with a few exceptions. For instance, Meraklis attributes Greek films' popularity to their innate relation to folklore, and, for him, Greek cinema could be held as folk art. Its generic standardization, typecasts, and thematics had always been widely favored by the different Greek audiences - particularly those consisting of internal immigrants and workers. Yet, any attempt at analyzing popular film within the context of folklore has been insightful, but relatively scarce (Lydaki 2012; Kaplanoglou 2009; Papazachariou 1980). This raises a fundamental issue in investigating how folklore is rendered in fiction films and, conversely, and popular cinema takes advantage of crystallized iconographic conventions to illustrate facets of folklore. A proper study of this area must presumably belong in the domain of film or cultural studies, but, until today, popular Greek film has been treated as an ideological medium (see Delveroudi 2004; Athanassatou 2001; Sotiropoulou 1989) or scholars have highlighted its generic and aesthetic traits (Kassaveti 2017), attributed to popular arts. Still, in her monograph *The Greek Film Musical. A Critical and Cultural History* (2006), film scholar Lydia Papadimitriou scrutinized the significance of tourism and folklore in shaping the visual premises of the Greek film musical.

They are both subscribed to an imaginary fairytale setting, which is, in turn, instrumental after the Colonels' coup-d'etat of 1967. Karalis (2012) also places importance in popular films, particularly in how the genres contribute to a wider cultural dialogue. Despite being mass-produced, genres, such as comedy, maintained an "ethographic" function, as they documented "a society in transition from the customs of a rural mentality to the structures of an urban and capitalist organization of time and space" (Karalis 2012, 129).

3. GREEK POPULAR CINEMA IN THE CONTEXT OF URBAN FOLKLORE: PUTTING FORWARD A HYPOTHESIS

As the overview shows, only a few acknowledge the importance of representing folklore in popular Greek cinema. While film analysis has been developed in different ways appropriate to distinct backgrounds, one of the exciting aspects to emerge from studying popular film is the role of realism in the construction of representation on screen and the latter's role in showcasing folkloric elements still active in Greek society. These findings could be perceived as audiovisual testimonies (mainly if they are shot on location) that showcase the persistence of tradition or comment on the country's gradual cultural transformation. Lest we forget that although the documentary "was a film genre that employed all possible sources: photographs, personal testimonies, current events, interviews, archives, etc.", popular Greek cinema

> "documents tastes and highlights aesthetics related to architecture, clothing, decoration, food, and entertainment. All this is a unique wealth if we consider the speed with which changes occur in our time. Athens in the 1950s and Athens in the 1970s and today are so different that the images of the respective films are now a valuable source of information…." (Sotiropoulou 1998, 152).

In this light, this article aspires to re-engage a discussion of visual folklore in popular Greek films, in particular those that have been ascribed as "Old Greek Cinema," i.e., the popular Greek movies of different genres produced between the 1950s-1970s by Greek production companies, such as Finos Films. The conceptual framework in which we are brought to think about folklore in cinema will draw upon different theoretical starting points: Greek folklore (and, importantly, urban folklore), visual folklore, cultural studies, and Greek film history. With reference to the field of urban folklore (Varvounis & Kouzas 2020, 301-

379; Avdikos 1994), popular Greek films will be analyzed on a threefold axis of thematics: social construction (mainly, identities living in the city), mores and customs (e.g., rituals), and material culture. The article will deploy a qualitative standpoint and address issues located in the thematics proposed by Kouzas and Varvounis. A sample, which spans several genres (comedy, melodrama, musical), of three films has been determined, as a quantitative analysis, despite its discrete insight (i.e., frequencies of rituals, cultural identities, etc.), may efface valuable audiovisual cultural data. In that sense, the article will scrutinize the filmic sample and explore different urban folklore perspectives without the crucial ramifications imposed by a qualitative approach. Finally, it will seek to explore various instances of folklore (real or staged) and propose explanatory readings of the films on the contraposition of pre-modernity and modernity in Athens.

4. LIVING AND BREATHING IN THE BIG CITY: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION, MORES AND CUSTOMS, AND MATERIAL CULTURE IN 1960S GREEK POPULAR FILM

O Tyherakias / The Lucky One (Errikos Thalassinos, 1968)

This section aims to give a couple of filmic examples based on generic diversity and spanning throughout the 1960s decade. Comedy films have been a staple of the Greek film industry since its first steps, following its popularity from the theater. Its generic diversity, ranging from farce to rom-coms, and its capacity to transcribe contemporary social shifts have been two of its most significant merits. The Greek comedy of the 1960s provides an interesting frame of folkloric visual analysis regarding typecast living in the city or an iconographic index of valuable records in the urban space. It reveals investment in certain standard characters, while particular importance should be attached to comedies shot on location and not in constructed/reconstructed spaces (e.g., indoor sites). Peasants from small villages all around Greece that immigrate to urban centers, i.e., Athens, are one of the most recurring film characters in Greek comedy of the 1960s. As already demonstrated, this typecast is not new to the Greek spectators, as it exemplifies one of the most striking transformations the Greek society underwent: internal immigration and urbanization. Moreover, along similar lines, Greek theatrical comedy and revues often deployed such characters. Even today, actor Costas Hadjichristos has been closely linked to the peasant typecast in most popular comedies, which focus on the character of „Vlachos", which should not be associated

with the ethnocultural group of Vlachs rather than how peasants were often disparagingly perceived by the urban inhabitants. Hadjichristos impersonated Thymios (or Dimos, among others), a villager leaving his native city to find better luck in Athens. As Greek urban folklore focuses on identities living in Athens, one wonderful instance of analysis is the film *O Tyherakias* / *The Lucky One* (Errikos Thalassinos, 1968). Thymios is a street vendor at the train station of Lianokladi (a small village near Lamia). He sells souvlaki (a traditional Greek street food consisting of small pork meat cubes on a skewer accompanied by fresh bread) to the bypassing trains. When he is fired from his job, he always talks back to other customers, resulting in fighting with them. As he cannot stand his boss, he leaves his village and his beloved fiancée Anthoula (Elsa Rizou) and heads towards Athens, where he plans to hit the big time. He finds work at a souvlaki restaurant, where he rengages in trouble until he meets a pair of swindlers, Stavros and Suzanna (Nikos Rizos & Miranda Zafeiropoulou), who want to pick his pockets. When he wins the lottery, he is systematically ripped off by the crooks that encourage him to spend more money on useless luxuries by luring him into the high life: they teach him to dress well and eat correctly. In the meantime, Thymios also has Karate classes. Everyone in the village is concerned with him, Anthoula mostly. When Thymios realizes his "friends'"' dirty tricks, he returns to his hometown and donates his money to the local community.

Nevertheless, how did Hadjichristos render the villager character visually? With prior theatrical experience (Georgiopoulos 1991, 122-124), and other comedy films[1], the villager is represented as someone who still dressed up traditionally: he wears the "poukamisa" pleated shirt and "tsarouchia" shoes, which peasants had worn in mountainous areas in Greece. He appears to be illiterate, reading popular female magazines, like "Romantso" upside down, and he wants to go to Athens to win the lottery (PRO-PO) and become an aristocrat. The film's opening titles play on scenes shot in the Omonoia Square (a central Athenian square where all internal immigrants used to meet) and Syntagma Square, where Thymios wanders with a small suitcase, being stunned at the people and the traffic. Such a visual convention is recurring in various films of Hadjichristos.

[1] *O Thymios ta'kane Thalassa* / *Thymios messed it up* (Allekos Sakellarios, 1959), *O Thymios ta'hei 400* / *Thymios, Sharp as a Tack* (Giorgos Tsaoulis, 1960), *Tis Kakomoiras* / *World Gone Mad* (Ntinos Katsouridis, 1963), *Siko, Horepse Syrtaki* / *Get Up, and Dance the Syrtaki* (Kostas Strantzalis, 1967), among them.

Before arriving at Stamatis (Nikos Fermas)'s souvlaki restaurant, he mistakes a man with long hair for a woman; he gets imprisoned because of the fuss he made at an expensive hotel. Besides, due to the smell of delicious souvlakia all over the place, he exclaims that "he did not arrive in Athens, but in Levadia." Thymios begins working at Stamatis's place but cannot get rid of his harsh manners and village pronunciation. Despite wanting to attract customers by "europeanizing" the traditional dish, his boss is almost adamant that he advertises its traditional taste; Thymios's appearance works instrumentally for the tourists. The swindlers' attempts at modernizing him seem pointless. Whatever he does, he places tiny hints of traditional spirit, e.g. when performing modern dances, Thymios chooses figures from traditional folk dance routines while he can not abandon his tsarouchia. The peasant typecast certainly represents the spectators' strong identification with the internal immigration and social escalation in Athens and other urban centers. An illiterate, harsh, and sharp-witted villager always produces laughter, but he is laughed at when spectators identify with him.

Images 1-3. Kostas Hadjichristos is a villager that tries to conquer the big city; therefore, he should be at Omonoia Square, where people from different Greek places meet. Additionally, it is where traditional fast food (souvlaki) is sold. Notwithstanding his attempts at becoming an Athenian, he still wears his new clothing with traditional shoes (tsarouhia). Courtesy of Karagiannis-Karatzopoulos Film Company.

Furthermore, what is visually stimulating in this film is how particular site locations are documented: many souvlaki restaurants and their customers are spread in downtown Athens, and Stamatis's is one of them.

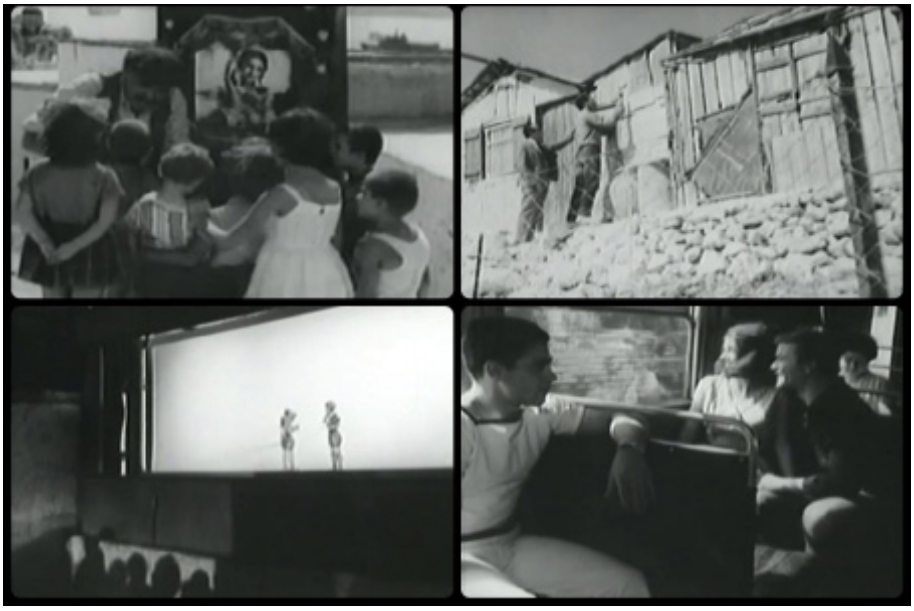
The comedy chronicles these places, which are part of the urban folk experience, and night venues with bouzouki and karate dojos (which are very modern for even Athenians). Ultimately, Thymios's descent to Athens may resemble any other villager's permanent visit to any urban center. Perhaps his image may be so extravagantly incompatible with city people to make spectators laugh. However, gradually it developed to become implicit in those who did not stand a decent chance in the countryside and left it for a better future in the city, as many internal immigrants did (Varvounis & Kouzas 2019, 301).

Dyskoloi Dromoi / Difficult Roads (Nestoras Matsas, 1965)

Along with comedy, the Greek melodrama film emerged during the 1960s as a popular genre that reflected social injustice, resulting in a temporary reconciliation between classes; love conquers all and relieves all pain from the pure hearts of the poor and the rich. Greek melodramas usually center around intra-class romance and their complications, usually with a happy end. Quite conservative at their core, they exemplify the role of fate and fundamental values conquering the characters' lives, such as integrity and hard work. Very often, they follow the trajectories of a fairytale as they culminate in the characters' dream accomplishments. Melodramatic films' popular style is also implied by their extensive use of popular songs, whose lyrics serve as a parallel film commentary, and sometimes by cinematography (reminding popular magazines with photo stories) (Kassaveti 2017, 83-93). Additionally, as they were mass-produced, melodramas took advantage of the poor neighborhoods and authentic locations in Athens to demonstrate their plausibility. *Dyskoloi Dromoi / Difficult Roads* (Nestoras Matsas, 1965) is one of them. Matsas, an amateur folklorist, a director of folklore documentaries (Kassaveti 2022), and an author, had already processed parts of the story in his older fiction book *Kleistoi Dromoi* / *Closed Roads* (1963). The film focuses on Dimitris (Lefteris Vournas), a former student who lives in Perama and abandons his studies to work at a factory. His father (Lavrentis Dianellos), a one-time shadow theatre player, is very sick and dreams of playing with his figures at a new shadow show again. Dimitris loves Maria (Katerina Vassilakou), but she has to marry Andrikos (Thanassis Mylonas), a popular singer and musician. Dimitris is devastated and wants to immigrate to Australia to find a job, but he does not know he is destined to become a coal mine worker.

When the fraud is revealed, he confronts those who want to exploit him, decides not to leave Athens, and reunites with Maria. Filmed in coastal Perama, the far western part of Athens, *Dyskoloi Dromoi* revolves

around the loves and disappointments of the underdogs living on the outskirts of what is called "the modern capital." Minor Asia refugees settled in Perama, on its rocky mountain sides, and they were connected to Piraus via a small tramline, active until 1977.



Images 4-7. *Dyskoloi Dromoi* serves as a visual documentation of "a city within a city": the settlement where Asia Minor refugees live is portrayed vividly. It is also full of Greek folk art elements, such as the music organ or the shadowplay theatre. Images Courtesy of Marvik Film (Athens - Patras).

Small Greek popular music venues and tavernas opened there, echoing the music tradition of the Greek refugees. Despite its somewhat schematic screenplay, written by Matsas, the film renders and reconstructs themes that reveal a folkloric visual view of the city. The filming takes place in one neighborhood of the refugee settlement in Perama, providing valid visual documentation. The small houses with tiny yards, made by whatever was handy at that time, and the stone steps, painted in white to resemble an island, provide an excellent backdrop for the film's characters. One is Stratos (Vassilis Avlonitis), a former musician who became a barrel organ player. Children surround him while he tunes his organ, decorated with a photo of a beautiful woman. Dimitris's father plays his final shadow

show at a small open theater in the neighborhood (actually played by old shadow theater player Panagiotis Michopoulos) with high attendance.

Also interesting are indoor locations, which, despite their recurring formal traits, give a small clue about places, like entertainment venues (taverna with live bouzouki music, and tiny, poor houses, such as those of Dimitris or Miltos (Angelos Antonopoulos). Hand-woven textiles on the walls, an iron cast bed, and kitschy traditional paintings decorate a three-member family's tiny bedroom, kitchen, and living room. This image starkly contrasts the rich man's interiors, purposely aiming at highlighting the extreme end-points of Greek society. Despite their ordinary nature, it is essential that Matsas deploys standard visual conventions to talk about the lives in the outskirts of Athens – not the usual small working-class neighborhood near the capital's center. In addition, the filmmaker offers persisting documents of an era long ago, where urban folklore with music and cultural and social practices was still alive. One can hold *Dyskoloi Dromoi* as a semi-fictional, semi-factual document that echoes the social construction and organization in the urban plain (Varvounis & Kouzas 2019, 301-302).

Oi Thalassies oi Handres / The Blue Beads from Greece (Giannis Dalianidis, 1967))

The Greek film musical has always been considered an essential aspect of popular film. As already wonderfully pinpointed by Papadimitriou, "musical is, by definition, an escapist genre," and it "does not address political or social issues in any direct way" (Papadimitriou 2006, 7). However, the radical changes in Greek society underwent, i.e., modernization and consumerism, influenced the plot repertoire of the genre. Explicitly, in the second half of the 1960s, there had been a conscious turn in constructing "national" musicals, which exemplified working-class ethics, Greek popular dance, and music and gave hope that class barriers could be easily shifted (Papadimitriou 2006, 7). The Greek film musical is a rich field for examples of different forms of tradition in the urban plane and how they reflect social tensions and distinct perceptions of modernity. Before moving on to discuss these issues, it is important to stretch that even though the majority of Greek musicals were shot in a studio, the latter is reconstructed according to plausible and shorthand visual conventions already met in other genres. The only difference one could locate lies in the interchange between imaginary dance and realist sequences and the accumulation of commonplace symbolic imagery (i.e., the small poor courtyard where the working class resides). *Oi Thalassies oi Handres* (Giannis Dalianidis, 1967) is one of the most famous Greek musicals, and it revolves around the intraclass love story between popular musician Fotis (Faidon Georgitsis) and wealthy pop group leader Mary (Zoe

Laskari) in the old neighborhood of Plaka, just under the Acropolis. The plot involves other characters, such as friends and family members. At the same time, there is a subplot with a rich American businessman who wants to buy an old music hall with live bouzouki music. Despite the difficulties, the couple manages to get together. Yet, Fotis must reject his working-class (and more traditional) attitude: he had to save his mustache for the love of Mary, which, among his friends, is considered a great disgrace.

The film has a specific and privileged potential to comment upon how tradition has already receded in the cities and how some elements seem to survive and imply particular cultural meanings. The plot's setting is located in Plaka, a traditional neighborhood, which until today is a tourist destination, and not unreasonably. Since the 1960s, Greek folklore has been commercialized and transformed into a mass-produced commodity. At the film's beginning, Fanis's friends sell small souvenirs to tourists, i.e., woven betel bags with folklore decoration, miniature "tsolia" dolls ("tsolia" refers to

Images 8-13. *Oi Thalassies oi Handres* purposefully offers imaginary folklore images of a traditional Athenian community with class characteristics, posing questions on modernity. Folklorism has become a norm in the Plaka district, where images of Greece are sold as souvenirs. Still, it reflects the survival of some traditional elements (i.e. folk dance, witchcraft, street life, and culture), which starkly contrast modern (at least superficially) trends - it is a visual juxtaposition that also involves Fotis and Mary. Courtesy of Finos Film.

the Evzones light infantry unit that served the Greek War of Independence against the Turks and wore a characteristic uniform with a pleated skirt) or big "komboloia" (worry beads), which are embedded in Greek folk and popular culture. Many folk implications can be located on the streets of Plaka, where Bouzouki venues prevail. Some are named after traditional artifacts, such as "To kompologaki" (small kompoloi). The street is where street vendors of "koulouri" (traditional small sesame bread rings) sell their products; the old barber shaves his customers, small "psilika" shops (corner stores), and barrel organ players play their laterna in the mornings. Most of the blue-collar residents live in simple folk houses decorated in excessively kitschy styles with framed popular flower patterns or ornamental doilies.

In the meantime, Fotis's sister Mary (Martha Karagianni) has fallen in love with Kostas (Kostas Voutsas), but he plays hard to get with her. She resorts to gypsy fortune telling and popular witchcraft and tries to secure a pair of his hair to mix it with other extraordinary ingredients. Of course, the film draws attention to the big contradiction and gaps between tradition and modernity, as illustrated by the careless Mary, a rich girl who plays in a pop band. Her parents believe this is one of her crazies. Modern music is contrasted with the popular folk music of bouzouki and all its connotations: Fanis is culturally benighted and dresses up in a more conservative, old-fashioned way – plus he has a mustache. When he decided to cut it, Mary ridiculed him; it was the one who commented upon his style and manners. When the two lovers finally manage to get together, there is another obstacle to overcome: Mary's upper-middle-class wealthy parents. Still, Fanis and his friends' fears are unsupported. Other banquet attendants start doing the same when they eat with their hands instead of forks, as they remember "how they ate back at their village."

Oi Thalassies oi Handres offers a view of Greek society under transformation and on the verge of folklorismus, i.e. the renegotiated and staged representation of tradition (Meraklis 2004, 109-125). It captures some stereotypical behavior and visual imagery linked to premodernity, the working class (some of them are internal immigrants), and the reaction toward the advent of modernity. It provides as well significant comments on the penetration of different (i.e. foreign, or modern) cultural patterns (Varvounis & Kouzas 2019, 307), folk culture and its practices still surviving in the Athenian suburbs, rendered in an extravagant style (as musical films tended to represent an overall excess from other film genres). The spectators, having the foreknowledge of the detailed visual imagery, identify themselves with characters and situations that constitute their folk sensibility. The latter was about to change soon.

5. BEING 'IN BETWEEN': GREEK POPULAR FILM EMBRACING / REJECTING MODERNITY?

The study of visual folklore in Greek film is critical in understanding how folklore finds its place in fiction films and reflects tensions and shifts in society and culture. Visual imagery's centrality to popular film indicates verisimilitude with a world that the spectators already know: film iconography operates as an instrument of constructing a plausible parallel universe that contains all aspects of tradition and modernity. According to E. Papazachariou, popular cinema in Greece has operated on two different levels: as "mysterious, apocalyptic initiation of a hypothetical superior culture" oriented and assimilated as it was by the spectators, or served as "a dialectical antithesis" between the local social forces and values, pointing at particular moral issues for the collective (Papazachariou 1980, 287). The latter would process such questions about the mores, and the tropes (both socially, and culturally) and think about itself and the community.

Greek popular film is a rich field of visual examples that show how tradition in the city is perceived, constructed, or manipulated. It offers simplistic but alternative ethnographic knowledge on folklore that could further be deployed in an extensive cultural and folklore analysis. Comedy, melodrama, and film musicals share, to some extent, the commonsense and everyday visual perception of folk survivals in the urban suburbs, where modernity appears to be relentless: single-family homes are demolished, and condominiums take their place, small business gives their place to more significant enterprises, and tradition is confined in souvenirs. While these films respect the rules of the genre form, they also embody, at least visually, social and cultural norms apparent in public opinion. It is not part of my intention here to play down the importance of other genres, such as "fustanella," and particularly bucolic melodrama that heavily relies on what Zhang refers to as "filmic folklore" (Zhang 2005, 267). Nonetheless, narrowing our genres has brought issues of urban visual folklore in 1960s Greek cinema to light.

Given that this is the case, the kinship of tradition in the city and its representation is evident in Greek genre films that operate in the light of "filmic folklore," i.e., they construct an imaginary and negotiated tradition: identities, place, and practices in the setting of pre-modernity and modernity are showcased and echo cultural stereotyping. Peasants from small villages are always dressed in traditional clothing and seem uneager to conform to the city's alluring life. If they are bold in doing so, their efforts are poor imitations of modern imagery and way of living.

Hadjichristos's character is indicative of this kind of casting; Yet, we should consider that genres like comedy surpass any inherent meanings and turn to satire. Unlike Hadjichristos, actor Tassos Giannopoulos continued to impersonate peasants, such as Kitsos[2], even in the 1970s, when urbanism had somehow slowed down in contrast to the 1950s-1960s.

Moreover, genres like melodrama tend to rely much on a place to construct the characters and their interaction. What is critical, though, is how it documents the world of the underdogs (whether internal immigrants or Greek refugees[3]) living in a city within a city, just like Dourgouti, where filmmaker Nikos Koundouros shot one of his first neorealist films *Magiki Polis* / *Magic City* (1954). When local people as extras are involved, this can become a useful reconstruction of mores and practices in places that no longer exist, i.e., Asyrmatos[4] or Drapetsona[5] of former decades. Respecting the genre is critical, but constructing visually something that everyday people acknowledge as accurate is far more than crucial. Then, film musicals encourage the idea that social classes can exceed all barriers - this is an overall common thread in popular Greek cinema. However, these worlds should be the ones that people should correlate with. It is evident that despite visual reconstruction, visual folklore analysis easily locates folklorism and how it has permeated Greek society with caricatures of older traditions.

One last important point is how popular genres contest both the planes of tradition and modernity. Karalis argues that comedies and melodramas were culturally significant; still, "they domesticated modernity by de-radicalizing it" (Karalis 2012, 87). In that sense, popular films "functioned as confirmations of conservative values and practices, legitimizing them as modern and acceptable, since they were presented and disseminated through the focal art of modernity, the cinema" (Karalis 2012, 87). While modernity often laid in stark contrast with tradition, it appeared to be compromising with "the way we were" and was often encapsulated in the past.

In spite of its formal characteristics and categorizations, Greek popular

2 *Praktor Kitsos kalei Gastouni / Special Agent Kitsos Calling Gastouni* (Giorgos Papakostas, 1967), *Empaine Kitso! / Come on Kitsos!* (Giorgos Papakostas, 1968), to name a few.

3 *Katigoro tous Anthropous / I Blame the People* (Nikos Foskolos, 1966), which documents the refugee house complex at Alexandras Avenue in Athens.

4 *Synoikia 'To Oneiro' / A Neighborhood named 'The Dream'* (Alekos Alexandrakis, 1961), *O Poulimenos Anthropos / The Sold Man* (Panagiotis Konstantinou, 1968). It is also interesting that the film *Dyskoloi Dromoi* begins with the protagonist's voice-over, who talks fondly about his neighbourhood. It is reminiscent of the opening sequence of Koundouros's *Magiki Polis*.

5 See Anoikti *Epistoli / Open Letter* (Giorgos Stamboulopoulos, 1968).

cinema of the 1960s offers valuable insights to younger viewers regarding cultural knowledge, beliefs, and opinions prevalent during that era, which also influenced cultural products as well. To gain a deeper understanding, it would be beneficial to conduct a quantitative analysis to determine the frequency of selected themes, subjects, and their visual representation, revealing what Greek tradition has bestowed on us. As Sergis contends: "It would not be an exaggeration to say that (Greek) cinema of the 1950s-1970s became, in the end, 'another social history', as we could trace in its films records of a transitional period" (Sergis 2020, 239).

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