In Crisis: Greek Cultural Heritage, Masculinity and a Female Pig

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ABSTRACT

Masculinity in crisis has been a re-emerging theme in cultural production and criticism, especially when established norms and realities are deemed to be under threat (from the feminist movement, financial pressures or stock market crashes, war, immigration, LGBTQ+ legislation, to name but a few). While dominant stereotypes of toxic masculinity are seen to be under pressure in such moments, new, more fluid, masculinities become more apparent in cultural discourse. However, these alternative masculinities are perceived to be the result of such threats and pressures, rather than the result of patriarchy's inherent structural contradictions. Moments of crisis, then, in turn can be understood and interpreted through their impact on established, dominant forms and expressions of masculinity, and the restoration of order is seen as an opportunity to reinstate stereotypical masculinity itself. Many recent art-house Greek films have dealt with the theme of an all-encompassing crisis – social, political, cultural, ensuing from the financial calamity of the last decade or so, and which these films often trace back to a menacing patriarchy. In this article, I argue that this preoccupation is not a new theme, nor indeed is crisis a new reality, but in fact these have perennially resided in the Greek national cultural heritage. Returning to Olga Malea's Honey and the Pig *(2005), a film that is historically, politically and socially removed from this most recent pressure point, allows for this argument to be put forward most effectively.*

KEYWORDS

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Masculinity in crisis has been a re-emerging theme in cultural production and criticism, especially when established norms and realities are deemed to be under threat (from the feminist movement, financial pressures or stock market crashes, war, immigration, LGBTQ+ legislation, to name but a few). While dominant stereotypes of toxic masculinity are seen to be under pressure in such moments, new, more fluid, masculinities become more apparent in cultural discourse. However, these alternative masculinities are perceived to be the result of such threats and pressures, rather than the result of patriarchy's inherent structural contradictions. Moments of crisis, then, in turn can be understood and interpreted through their impact on established, dominant forms and expressions of masculinity, and the restoration of order is seen as an opportunity to reinstate stereotypical masculinity itself.

Much has been written already about Greek cinema's response to the devastating financial crisis for the country since 2010: many art-house films have dealt with the theme of an all-encompassing crisis – social, political, cultural – ensuing from the financial calamity of the last decade or so, and which these films often trace back to a menacing patriarchy.[1] Concurrently, discussions about toxic masculinities and masculinity/ies in crisis have resurfaced globally.[2] In this article, I argue that this preoccupation is not a new theme, nor indeed is crisis a new reality, but in fact these have perennially resided in the Greek national cultural heritage, rather than having been singularly examined in contemporary arthouse filmmaking. Returning to a film that is historically, politically and socially removed from this most recent pressure point, allows for this argument to be put forward most effectively. The current article discusses how Olga Malea's fourth comedy, *Loukoumades me Meli*/*Honey and the Pig* (2005), portrays patriarchy as being associated with power structures complicit in reiterating certain oppressive models of masculinity (white, heterosexual, potent) that are damaging to both men and women, and which have a strong hold on the national imagination. In this film, the director maintains faith in the popular form and genre of comedy, in spite of its central theme being the difficult issue of paedophilia and sexual abuse; and despite the fact that it was originally scripted as a drama by Apostolos Alexopoulos.[3] Alexopoulos took the script to Malea and the two re-worked it as a comedy, decidedly changing the tone in which it was originally written. Malea and Alexopoulos added a series of "surreal events", as she calls them (Malea and Alexopoulos, 2004:11-12), to introduce a

[1] See, for example, Çelik (2013), Metzidakis (2014), Lykidis (2015), Tyrer (2017).
[2] See, for example, Voela, (2005), Allen (2002), Baker (2015).
[3] The script is based on a story he read in a newspaper, but also contains autobiographical details.

tone of black humour in the film.[4] Malea employs a set of comedic incongruities, whose "whole point […] is that the parts do not fit together, cogs fail to mesh, things [...] fall apart, and humour results" (Parkin, 2006:121).

I have discussed elsewhere how the structures of comedy can serve as a vehicle to examine the double-standards and contradictions of patriarchy; how Malea appropriates postfeminist discourse to advance a feminist argument about the performance of gender and the underlying patriarchal scaffold that supports this performance; and how her authorial voice enables her to expose the precarious nature of the constructs that underlie the surface of such performances.[5] In this film, the humorous and the strange or surreal usually follow a painful revelation, serving as an alienating device and making the choice of genre a strategy that allows the characters, and the audience, to increasingly come to terms with harsh truths, confront the consequences of secrets and find the means of, to use Gaëtan Brulotte's words, "bearing the unbearable" (2006: 16). Although the audience are not entirely sure or even aware at first of the sinister theme at play, increasingly the metaphor of *loukoumades* (a honey-glazed doughnut), of 'sugar-coating' (or more appropriately 'honey-glazing') of the truth by the characters is revealed, resulting in an awkward discomfort in the final scenes of the film, especially as the comedic tone is reinstated after a brief moment of solemnity. Black humour is in operation throughout, with the comedy acquiring sinister qualities, when, for instance, the pig finally catches the perpetrator in the act and 'punishes' him by 'attacking' the *loukoumades* resting on his crotch (a scene that will be discussed later in more detail). Indeed, a variety of comedy sub-genres are employed in the film: slapstick, romantic comedy, sex comedy and farce, which are deliberately mobilized in order to depict the most serious of themes. To borrow Cristina Degli-Esposti's phrase, the film is organized around a "playful eclecticism of styles" (1998: 10), demonstrating a postmodern streak which, for example, appropriates links to Greek history and heritage in the characters' names (discussed later), playfully placing them within a contemporary context which is torn between modernity and tradition, a society more like a collage of incongruous elements, rather than a coherent, and cohesive, social and cultural system. At this point, a hinge in the director's work is detected: she returns to a rural space, more strongly associated with tradition than the modern urban environments of her previous two films,[6] in order to scrutinize the perennial

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[4] In an interview with me (Athens, July 2009), Malea has used the term 'surreal' to describe elements in this film; I believe these involve primarily aesthetic and narrative choices that relate to the prevalent black humour, though *Honey and the Pig* is certainly not a surrealist film. At the same time certain aesthetic choices, like lighting, the use of colour etc. in the film rather impose a hyperreal tone.

[5] See Kazakopoulou (2011; 2014; 2017).

[6] After her first film, *O Orgasmos tis Ageladas/The Cow's Orgasm* (1997), which is set in rural Greece, Malea's second and third features, *I Diakritiki Goitia ton Arsenikon/The*

hold of traditional masculinities over the Greek psyche. Indeed, the notion of returning is an important structuring device in the narrative of *Honey and the Pig*, in the construction of Malea's critique and in the argumentation presented in this article.

HOMECOMING: FOOD, SEX AND DEATH

The film tells the story of Manos, (Christos Loulis), a young man, who returns to the village he grew up in order to escape the harsh realities of a modern man's life in the city. Upon his return, it becomes imperative to face up to the underlying reason for his problems, stemming from older experiences; in that, he enlists the help of his old sweetheart, Phenia (Fay Xila), and his pet pig, Marikaki.

At the start of the film, we are introduced to Manos's stressful reality in the big city.[7] Manos and his girlfriend live and work together. An early sequence establishes Manos's discomfort at work, a pastry workshop. He shudders at the touch of the dough for *loukoumades*, and his anxiety results in clumsiness that gets him fired. It soon becomes clear why he was working there in the first place, considering his aversion to its main produce: he needs money for rent. In the film's opening sequence, he and his girlfriend are chased out of their apartment by the landlord, who demands the payment of arrears. This is the first time the film also shows his failed attempts to have sex with his girlfriend; yet, Manos is curiously relieved about the interruption, despite the fact that he is now broke. His girlfriend, however, is later determined to entice him again to have sex by placing *loukoumades* on her body – which has quite the opposite effect on him but is consistent with his aversion to the sweet seen in the pastry workshop sequence. Although the question about Manos's problem with this particular sweet is hinted at early on, it is quickly abandoned and not picked up until much later in the film. At this point in the narrative, he is simply portrayed as a modern man, perceived as "in essence, emasculated, passive, lacking in self-esteem and out of touch with nature and [his] instincts" (Edwards 2006: 27). Manos resolves to leave the city in an attempt to avoid the problems that surround him in this hectic and hostile environment, where he is 'threatened' by a sexually voracious girlfriend, an aggressive landlord and unemployment – a city where he cannot adequately perform as a man (as a partner and a provider). For Manos, it is the impersonal and unsupportive city living that cannot provide the solutions he is looking for. However, I argue that his crisis does not stem from this modern,

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Mating Game (1999) and *Risotto* (2000) are firmly set in the big city, which is presented as supposedly devoid of the burdens of (Greek) tradition and cultural heritage. In her fifth film, *Proti For a Nonos/First Time Godfather* (2007), she continues this 'backward' trajectory revisiting the past, where much of this conflict between tradition and modernity originates.

[7] We know the city is Athens from the character profile on the script notes, but the city is not named or marked in any way in the film. See Malea and Alexopoulos (2004).

urban world, but from an old, pervasive patriarchy, both for the expectations it places on men and for the hierarchies it enables and supports, as will be discussed below. Still, the need to escape the city initiates the narrative and provides the motivation for the character to face his anxieties within what he believes to be the more supportive environment of the village where he grew up, raised by his uncle and aunt. This is the first of the film's 'returns'.

The new location is introduced with Manos getting off the bus at the edge of (the fictional) Eleon. The village could be anywhere – indeed there are many villages with that name (*Eleon*, or *Eleonas*) in Greece, meaning 'olive grove'; *elia* (olive tree) is considered Greece's national tree since antiquity, but is also one strongly associated with the Mediterranean region, and carries biblical connotations. In that sense, this is 'everyvillage' and as such stands for the whole Greek country(side). Manos's outsider status, the sense that he does not quite feel at home there either, is established in this sequence. He looks around and a subjective camera shot establishes a rural scenery of fertile fields, wild flowers in bloom and active wildlife; in this respect the name of the village is quite appropriate and matches the focus on nature and fertility of the land. The cinematography emphasises the potency of the landscape: nature in this film is stylized, and the light and colours are distinctly brighter than in the film's cityscape, establishing a hyperreal mood, and further displacing the main character. The beauty of the environment is heightened, it is almost too perfect in the Spring light.[8] However, Manos looks preoccupied with something, and the camera follows his movement as he bends down and separates two turtles mating. He makes sure he moves them a fair distance apart and looks content once he has done that. The second *coitus interruptus* in the comedy, this visual joke, incongruous and crude, has a number of functions: it breaks the solemnity of this encounter with nature, while it emphasizes Manos's discomfort with all things sexual, a sign that perhaps the threat to his masculinity does not come from the city after all. At the same time, it offers Manos a degree of satisfaction and control over the situation, foreshadowing the film's resolution: his uncle (Pavlos Haikalis), who is also Mayor of the village of Eleon, is revealed as a paedophile and, through Manos's endeavours, gets caught in the act at the end of the film.

In keeping with the director's eclecticism of styles, though, the performances do not uniformly indulge in this tone. Highlighting the complexities of the subject matter, in a key early scene Pavlos Haikalis delivers a nuanced interpretation of the role of the Mayor, demonstrating the insidious and corrupting nature of

[8] Interestingly, the light in these hyperreal exterior scenes is natural. The director made a point that "a very important characteristic of *Honey and the Pig* is the exterior [natural] springtime environments" (Malea and Alexopoulos 2004: 24). My translation.

patriarchal power. Placing the camera in a medium close-up and a reverse angle from inside a shop-window displaying *loukoumades*, the director closes down the image, reducing the background activity and focusing attention on the two characters central to this scene. Both the Mayor (his name has not been revealed yet as everyone addresses him by his title, adding to the importance and authority of the character in his community) and a local young boy, Achilleas (Spiros Kitsanelis), are framed by the *loukoumades* at the bottom of the frame and traditional embroidery decorating the window at the top (Fig. 1). They are discussing the reasons why they cannot eat the much desired sweet. Achilleas is restricted by a vow (*tama*)[9] his grandmother made to a Saint for his grandfather's health; the grandfather has since died, but Achilleas and his family are still bound by the religious vow. The Mayor suffers from hyperglycaemia. As they are discussing their troubles the Mayor confirms that he knows Achilleas' grandmother, "a good woman and loyal voter", and that he has the solution for Achilleas to enjoy *loukoumades* without breaking the vow. The young boy is intrigued as the worry about consequences is lifted: the vow is not broken if someone else buys him *loukoumades*.

Fig. 1 *Forbidden loukoumades*

The whole sequence maintains an innocent tone while at the same time drawing attention to some interesting elements in the adult actor's performance; for instance, he looks down at the young boy, smiling nervously, and hesitates before proposing the 'solution' to Achilleas. It is important to note here, that as much as the actor, the character is also performing – power in the guise of complicity. However, only in retrospect do these become meaningful signs of something sinister in the film. Part of the strategy of the film is to not reveal its theme, or

[9] *Tama* (a religious vow) is an important stronghold of Greek religious and cultural imaginary, unbreakable for fear of inciting the Saint's, or God's, wrath.

what is at stake, right away. Instead the film presents a fairly benign world; it is not immediately obvious what would be wrong with the relationship between the Mayor and the young boy. At a first glance, they both rather harmlessly yearn for the forbidden sweet. The uninterrupted medium close-up in this scene however (glaring at the shop window) affords a few noticeable details, even if their meaning is only fully realised in hindsight. More specifically, Malea's camera effects a systematic organisation of the audience's and characters' looks: the audience look at the Mayor, who is looking at the boy rather than the sweets. He pauses, swallows dryly, speaks increasingly faster and quieter after his initial hesitation and leans closer to the boy when he proposes a secret plan on how to enjoy the *loukoumades* without compromising the vow. After a big smile from the child at the prospect of eating the desired sweet without consequence, the camera finally pulls away; for the time being this is an innocent 'conspiracy' to subvert abstract religious rules, and sympathy is canvassed towards the Mayor, as someone who wants to subvert the arbitrary impositions of established tradition – only the director is sending the audience off-track. Of course, the Mayor is in fact attempting to groom the boy, and the *loukoumades* are the means to achieve this.

Sexual and gastronomic desires are thus conflated. The director embarks in a process by which a transgression (eating forbidden *loukoumades*) becomes a tool facilitating a further transgression (the crime of paedophilia), but also later a metonymic figure of speech used to refer to that crime. The pastry shop in front of which the above sequence takes place belongs to two twin sisters, Ismene and Antigone (both played by Sophia Philipidou), who are renowned for their delicious sweet. It is established through dialogue that no one else in a long radius will make *loukoumades*, because they cannot compete with the sisters' recipe. From the very beginning then, eating becomes a motif, and *loukoumades* the figurative way of exploring the problems of indulging or succumbing to the temptation. As the film progresses, the desire to eat sweets (or not, as may be the case) drives the plot forward. In terms of the film's signification system, a chain of equivalences (a strategy where one thing stands for another) is used in order to address paedophilia in an oblique manner and at the same time critique this very euphemism as a practice with tragic consequences.

Another link in the director's chain of equivalences is death. Together with the pastry shop, the funeral home is the most prominent business in the village square, and both are locations frequently visited by the characters. Clear associations between eating, sex and death are drawn in a series of sequences. For instance, Phenia has sex by a coffin with young Pericles (Haris Mavroudis), Ismene's son; and Manos' diabetic uncle, the Mayor, keeps revisiting the Sisters' pastry shop with Achilleas for fresh helpings of *loukoumades*. For much of the film, Manos, Phenia and a number of other characters attempt to stop themselves

and others from fulfilling their yearning for the sweet. Early in the film, then, we see an association of "[f]ood, sex and death, the three main anthropological components of Aristophanes' comedies, [which] had to be deregulated so the comedy could start. Food has to be abundant, genders have to be destabilized, death has to be ridiculed" (Slapšak, 2013:264). These Aristophanic echoes in the film pointed out by Slapšak are, I claim, part of a wider re-appropriation of themes and forms of the national culture, a culture perennially associated with crises of masculinity, which in turn puts the female body in a double bind.

BODIES IN CRISIS

Phenia, who works and is the poster-girl for the local funeral home is represented as a completely liberated character; for her there is no guilt, fear or taboo attached to sex. In that respect, she is the opposite to Manos, who is very reserved and full of anxieties and secrets. Like Manos, she had left the village; and after her studies she is now temporarily back, waiting for her appointment to the civil service to be effected.[10] She too retains an outsider status, which reinforces their alliance. When they first meet in the film, Phenia is driving a hearse. Although she is dressed in black, her rather passé sexy rock-chick style, complete with bleached blond hair and full make up, comes surprisingly and perhaps humorously in complete contrast with the vehicle she is driving and her occupation. Contrary to Manos's sober demeanour, she runs out of the hearse full of excitement towards him, while openly 'flirting' with the local farmers that are passing by. In a single sequence, Malea consolidates the association between sex and death, two important motifs running through the comedy. Moreover, in the commodification of death, being conventionally sexy (i.e. slim), brings commercial advantage.[11]

Phenia's slim, sexy image is reinforced by its contrast with other women in the film: during a funeral sequence, a distressed and overweight wife is stopped from leaning over her dead husband's coffin for fear of breaking it. The comedic style in *Honey and the Pig* exposes the idea of patriarchy as an organising force that is corrupt and unfit for purpose, policing women's bodies and engendering crises. For instance, the visual gag of Manos's aunt Eleni (Fotini Baxevani) getting stuck jumping down a well in a tragicomic attempted suicide exemplifies

[10] Another critical nod by the director to a lasting dependency on jobs created by the Greek State. Subsequently, and during the financial crisis of the last decade, the overinflated civil service in Greece becomes one of the key battlegrounds, but this is a discussion for another article so I will not indulge any further here.

[11] She calls this "public relations", which perhaps also explains why Phenia remains unphased by the farmers' rather openly sexist catcalls. Malea here effectively and economically observes that the Greek countryside is much more in tune with a cruder expression of patriarchy, in terms of gender at least, where new norms, such as political correctness, are an alien concept.

Tasker's suggestion that "in the context of comic performance, the female body is already at issue, out of place" (1998: 168). Malea makes use of this displacement to make a point about the patriarchal expectations imposed upon women (and men), and how these affect the performance of both femininities and masculinities alike.

Of course, body dysphoria[12] and anxieties about sexual performance are not exclusive to women. In this film, Malea foregrounds the effects patriarchy, and its close association with hegemonic models of masculinity, has on other masculinities. Even within the director's generally heteronormative universe, expectations of potency and displays of virility, associated with an impossibility for men to express any feelings (lest they might be considered gay), impose a sense of crisis onto characters like Manos. The 'new man' is incompatible with old patriarchy. A number of questions have been raised about Manos's inability to perform sexually and his phobia of *loukoumades*; as already mentioned, one of the links established in the film's chain of equivalences is that between sex and food. Most importantly, we see that the crisis in masculinity is brought about by patriarchy, and precedes the most recent (financial) crisis.

However, it is clear that women bear the brunt of expectations in relation to their bodies and sexuality. Early in the film, Eleni's pleasant demeanour is met with a cutting comment by the sour Mayor about her unattractive weight, establishing a strained relationship between the couple. Quite stereotypically, Eleni is convinced it is all her fault, and that her weight is the reason why her relationship with her husband is not working. Examining the work of Thomas Gershick on hegemonic masculinities and bodily normativity, Tim Edwards states that "bodies, male and female, are stratified according to a host of factors including age, weight, colour and size, into a kind of pecking order through which 'people are privileged by the degree to which they approximate cultural ideals' (Gershick 2004: 372)" (2006: 154).[13] Eleni's guilt is compounded by the fact that she believes the Mayor's "perversion" is also her fault: she has made him so, because she is fat and undesirable (this perhaps goes some way towards explaining her covering up for him). As before, a complicated relationship with food is established, and dietician Thrassos (Vladimiros Kyriakidis) tries to console Eleni, convincing her that her weight is not to blame – she looks beautiful as she is. In dietician Thrassos, then, we see contradiction re-enacted: he has introduced the incongruous proposition that one can lose weight by eating – a modern diet fad within a traditional village setting. Eleni engages (along with

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[12] I am re-contextualising Ju Gosling's expression, who writes about British contemporary society, body image and disability. See Gosling (2011).
[13] Reference in quote from Edwards: Gerschick (2004).

other women of the village) in the 'Thrassos-robics' technique, eating without restraint and exercising regularly in a bright yellow, high visibility thermal suit. Edwards continues: "In addition [...] people are going to ever-increasing extremes not only to discipline their own bodies but to discipline others through processes of stigmatisation and valorisation" (2006:154). In the case of Eleni, this disciplining operates on three levels. A set of beauty standards that are a product of contemporary culture, at odds with the established Greek lifestyles which associate women with food; her husband, who berates her for her lack of shape; and, most damaging of all, herself, internalising the other two disciplining acts and externalizing them through her own ridiculous attempts to lose weight. Her aim is to recapture her husband's desire and avert his paedophilic impulses. Malea exposes the absurdity of this proposition, the futility of the women's attempts to lose weight – no amount of discipline will ever be enough for patriarchy – and the incompatibility between the expectations imposed on women by contemporary images and traditional ways of life. Their yellow body-suits are an eyesore (though admittedly humorous) among the traditional regional costumes displayed in the cultural centre where they join their Thrassos-robics class; and in the forest, where their exercise disrupts the natural beauty and serenity of the place (Fig. 2). In each case, this mismatching leads to a disaster: one of the women's uniforms rips open in the cultural centre, and the group almost gets shot in the woods.

Fig. 2 *Thrassos-robics*

The pressures on women's behaviours are again stressed in the scene in which Ismene (conveniently) dies in the funeral home, where she goes to complain about Phenia's flirtatious behaviour to Mr. Billy (Dimitris Piatas), the owner of the funeral parlour. He also flirts with Ismene despite her protestations and openly admits his desire for her, put on hold for twenty-two years, as many as she has been a widow. Slapstick comedy takes over the scene and the characters coil clumsily around each other as Mr. Billy attempts to embrace Ismene. She

clenches her chest and takes in short breaths (mimicked by Billy, who initially perceives this as part of their flirting ritual; he literally takes her breath away it seems). Ismene stumbles back and rests into a coffin leaning open against a wall; she dies in it and the coffin slides down and lays horizontally on the floor with Mr. Billy falling on his knees next to it (Fig. 3). He laments the twenty-two years he waited, though the film has powerfully demonstrated the effect of indulging in desire. Antigone, then, has to see to Ismene's burial.

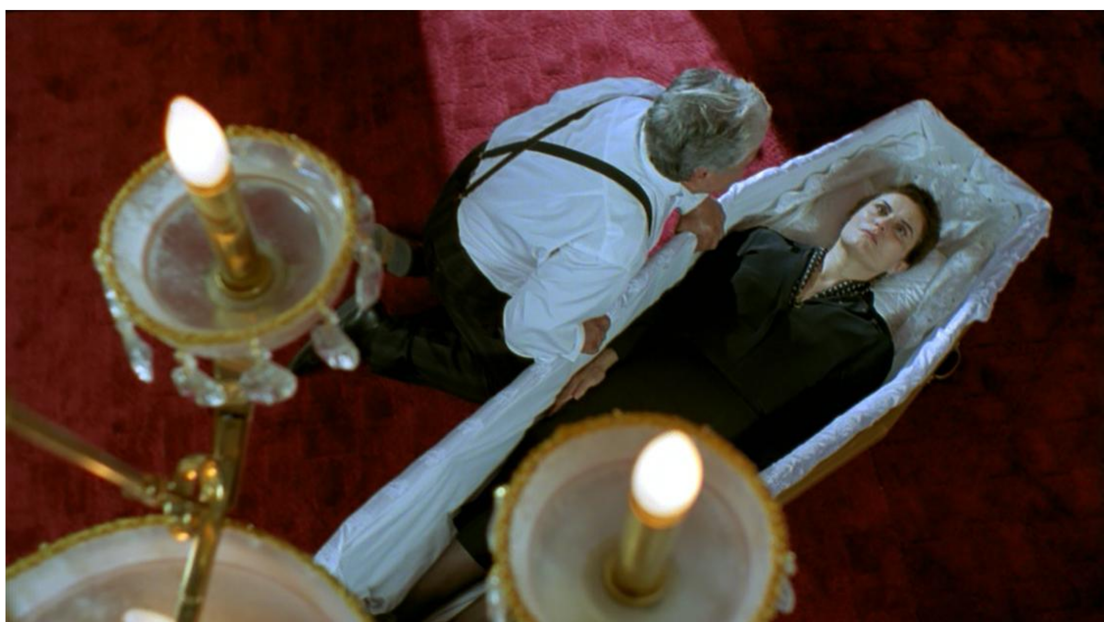

Fig. 3 *Ismene's death*

Funny appropriations and a weird re-telling of the eponymous Tragedy by Sophocles, "parodic renderings of ancient women's cults and rituals" (Slapšak, 2013:268), are devices that help plot development. Yet, Antigone is not doing a very good job of burying her sister – unlike her namesake who does too good a job at burying her brother; it takes multiple attempts and even more food before the funeral is successfully completed with a burial. Apart from their comic function, these multiple attempts drive the narrative towards revelation, and also reflect the permanence of crisis as a mode in Greek cultural heritage, and the impossibility of laying the past to rest.

RETURNING TO THE PAST: MYTH AND GENDER

The director effects a re-appropriation of the past by promoting the return of two foundational elements of the Greek national imagination: ancient history – specifically the 'golden age' of Athenian democracy in the 5th century BCE; and myth, whose primary expressions are the Tragedies of that period. The names of the film's main characters in this context acquire significance as they make interesting and playful allusions to ancient Greek historical figures or characters in important Greek Tragedies. For example, Pericles, whose name is a reference to the Athenian general and politician, who presided over the most successful

period of democratic 5th century BCE Athens, is an ironically unbecoming name for a naive young man who lives with his mother, Ismene; Manos' uncle, the paedophile Mayor, bears the name of the legendary general Leonidas of Thermopylae. Thrassos, the dietician, short for Thrassyvoulos,[14] is named after the general who led the resistance against oligarchy in Athens and restored democracy in the 4th century BCE; in some respects, Thrassos does initiate a change of heart in Manos's aunt/the Mayor's wife Eleni in terms of how she deals with her husband. This leads to plot resolution, but such 'heroism' rests on a rather selfish desire for Eleni. While promoting its return through metonymy, the director simultaneously and playfully undermines the potency (I use the word advisedly) of this history. This engagement with, and unearthing of, cultural heritage points towards the roots of patriarchal rule. At the same time, the director seems to be stating that these power structures are inextricably linked with a traditional understanding of what it means to be Greek. As Benedict Anderson points out, "[i]f nationalness has about it an aura of fatality, it is nonetheless a fatality embedded in *history*" ([1983], 2006: 145).[15] The director's conscious re-appropriation of history highlights this.

The references to ancient Greek myth and theatre also abound. They start of course with Ismene's and Antigone's names referring to Sophocles' famous Theban plays. Echoing the well-known Tragedy, Antigone has to try and bury yet another sibling; but there is also a funny reversal, since in the Tragedy it was Ismene who had to suffer her sister being buried alive for love and disobedience to traditional rules. Malea's less-than-innocent Phenia (short for Iphigenia), who re-signifies the connotations of submission and sacrifice for a modern female audience, is more than a match for the classical Iphigenia, an innocent tragic heroine sacrificed for a great war. The role of the sacrificial victim is in fact appropriated by the pig – which also, in the end, is not killed. Malea forcefully denies the tragic resolutions of these texts, where the innocent (mostly women) lose their lives in the altar of patriarchy. Eleni, the Mayor's seemingly unattractive wife, is the namesake of Helen of Troy, purported to be the most beautiful woman in the world. Her relationship with traditional paradigms of beauty and femininity proves fundamental to the development of the plot, and is further explored below. Finally, Ismene's long dead husband, whom she will finally meet once she is successfully buried, is called Orestis, the tortured son of Agamemnon and Klytemnistra, and brother to Iphigenia and Electra. Incest, sex and death are familiar themes of classical Greek Tragedy and comedy. Malea mobilises the national cultural referents and appropriates their convention of dealing with such taboo issues, while establishing a connection between these cultural referents and the longevity of patriarchal hegemonic discourses. These

[14] Also spelt Thrasybulus.
[15] Italics are in the original.

discourses are part of what Frederic Jameson calls the "geopolitical unconscious [...] which now attempts to refashion national allegory into a conceptual instrument for grasping our new being-in-the-world" (1992: 3), and the director invokes this geopolitical unconscious only to alienate it through her narrative and stylistic choices, disrupting it and effecting her own refashioning of myth.

Thus, the film's content and structure evoke traditions rooted in Greek culture; there may indeed be Aristophanic components in the way Slapšak describes,[16] but elements of Tragedy are also recognisable; and observations of contemporary culture create a liminal space between tradition and modernity, with the villagers caught in this tense coexistence. Degli-Esposti observes that in postmodernism[17] this "self-conscious theorisation of culture in a parodic reflexivity [...] becomes the way – possibly the only way – to inform contemporary creativity" (1998: 10). In this sense, Malea's 'semiotic shuffle' is a way of dramatizing the confusing (post)modern landscapes of 'choice' and the schizophrenic qualities of Greek life in the mid-2000s, always torn between the strong pull of an historic, fixed sense of identity and a fluid, unfixed, modern and multiple subjectivity.

Malea offers to this problem a solution steeped in the Greek classical theatrical tradition: the *deus ex machina*, here embodied by Marikaki the piglet. Leonidas, the Mayor, is on a mission to find *loukoumades* in order to entice Achilleas, who is not interested in any other sweet. Manos, for his part, is trying to prevent his uncle from hurting the young boy. The camera trails the characters in a decidedly sunny, bright setting, which makes it even more difficult for Manos to hide as he is following his uncle's every move. He spies on his uncle from the roof of The Twin Sisters' closed pastry shop. A low angle shot reveals that he is not the only one looking down at the Mayor; Marikaki also trails the roof ledge sniffing for the sweets. Once she locates her target, she performs an accurate jolt from above on the box of sweets, leaving the uncle frustrated, and Manos marvelling at the break offered by the pig's tracking abilities. Marikaki's training starts immediately and Manos also enlists Phenia's help to coach the pig and catch his uncle. The training takes place in the lush fields around the village (Fig. 4), which also provides an opportunity for Phenia's and Manos's relationship to develop. The protagonists, however, face the same problem as Leonidas: there are no

[16] See Slapšak (2013).
[17] As was mentioned in passing in the opening section of this article, postmodernism is a useful critical framework for understanding the structure of this film; its *organisational anarchy*, one may say. Moreover, parody, reflexivity and referentiality are concepts closely associated with postmodern critique, and are practices observed in this film and Malea's work as a whole. However, engaging further with this does not form part of the present article's remit, though it is important to identify the connection.

loukoumades available and Marikaki must learn to only seek *them* out. With Ismene's death, *loukoumades* are in short supply.

Fig. 4 *Marikaki's training*

Once the first attempt at Ismene's funeral is under way, the Mayor, Leonidas, seizes the opportunity to get hold of some of the *loukoumades* Pericles has made for Phenia in a desperate attempt to woo her during his mother's funeral. Marikaki is chasing the *loukoumades* in Leonidas's possession. Manos on foot and Phenia driving the hearse with Ismene's corpse chase after Marikaki, in order to get to Leonidas; and the funeral procession chase after the hearse and Phenia. All the while, musicians are accompanying the action with traditional melodies, sometimes appropriate for a funeral and often not, commenting effectively on the cartoon-esque quality of this sequence. The sequence ends with a failed attempt to catch Leonidas, who has escaped in time with Achilleas; and a car crash that has the hearse towed away and the funeral postponed. Antigone's voice is heard in the distance promising that she will bury her sister better the next day, thus concluding this surreal, and absurdly funny, sequence. Given the seriousness of the subject matter, the threat of tragedy is never far away, and Malea's use of black humour allows for this balancing act to be conducted effectively. As Wendy Everett posits, "film is not *either* serious *or* enjoyable: in this as in everything else, the identity of film is too complex to be approached in such simplistic terms" (2005:14).[18]

The seriousness of the situation almost assumes tragic contours in the second attempt to complete Ismene's funeral with a burial. Again, the ritual starts with making *loukoumades*: this time Leonidas convinces Antigone to prepare some, by appealing to her religious piety, superstition and by flirting with her (earlier on it

[18] Italics are in the original.

was established that the unmarried Antigone has a secret crush on the Mayor). Leonidas does not hesitate to steal some of these sweets from the side of Ismene's coffin, an offering for the dead. It is interesting to note here how the established patriarchal power, personified in Leonidas, having previously dismissed religious piety in order to advance a sinister agenda (at the start of Achileas' grooming, as we have seen) now makes use of religious piety and discourse for his own purposes. He does not know, however, that the sweets have been spiked by Phenia and Manos with the same sleeping potions used regularly at the funeral parlour for dealing with impassioned relatives. As is expected, the pig finds its way into the coffin with the *loukoumades*, too.[19] Marikaki only wakes up as they are about to lower the coffin in the grave after the last offerings are laid down: Ismene's and Orestis's wedding rings. In the confusion, Marikaki swallows the rings and is chased by all parishioners into a hunters' cabin in the woods. The crowd of mourners acquires the function of the chorus; classical Greek Tragedy and comedy traditions merge in this sequence where another set of secrets are revealed. The main act of the sequence involves Manos discovering that Eleni, his aunt, has known everything all along and has been covering up for her husband. Eleni enters the cabin first and makes sure that both Achilleas and Leonidas escape before anyone sees them, confirming her involvement in concealing the appalling truth.[20] The plot of Tragedy, however, demands a sacrifice, and Marikaki is set to be the victim. The crowd/chorus, oblivious to the real events, demand that the rings the pig has swallowed be cut out from her stomach in order for the burial to be continued; agonising before imminent death, Marikaki coughs up the rings. Like a chorus, the crowd have gathered around in a semi-circle to witness the event. Once the pig divulges the wedding rings, however, they disperse, disappointed at the anticlimax of a non-burial and a non-sacrifice, and thus returning to the comedic mode. At the end of this lengthy sequence it is established that it is too late in the evening for a burial, and so once again it has to be postponed until the next day. The plot twists and turns of the film make it, according to Slapšak, "'Aristophanic' in the sense that the world is turned upside down. It is not a comedy of characters but a satire on the political texture of today's world." (2013: 263). Precisely, the eternal crisis pointed at is that of masculinity and power, not a personal one. Even if some men

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[19] The absurdity of the scene – and by implication the traditions in which it is inserted – is observed by the Pakistani guest-workers who notice the sleeping pig inside the casket as they are closing the lid, and comment on the weird funerary rituals of "these Christians". Indeed, the presence of foreign workers, functioning as commentators on the incongruities of Greek social reality has been a well-established technique in Malea's comic authorial repertoire, and rings ever more important and apt in commenting on the current immigration and refugee crisis, and the unseemly role of the Greek Orthodox church in conceptualizing 'otherness' from a macho, patriarchal vantage point.

[20] I have written elsewhere about the complicity of women in protecting or maintaining patriarchal structures. See Kazakopoulou (2016).

may have changed, the system remains. Patriarchy is exposed, becoming the central theme.

THE ETERNAL RETURN

The conjoining of generic convention and commentary on power structures informed by gender and sexuality means that completion of the burial can only happen once the ghost of sexual abuse has been laid to rest. It must be noted that the fact that the abuse is directed at a boy further dissociates patriarchy from masculinity. Not even men are immune to patriarchy's attacks. Earlier in the film, Manos and Phenia hide away in a barn removed from the village "to relax" and be alone. It is suggested that they used to visit this place more often when they were younger, raising familiar connotations of a lovers' hide-out. However, this time they are not the only ones who have decided to take advantage of the isolated barn. Soon enough, Manos's uncle appears with Achilleas and a box of *loukoumades*. While Manos indulges in some intimacy with Phenia, he catches a glimpse of his uncle with the young boy entering the barn. There is bright sunlight from the entrance of the barn which makes visibility rather hazy, and the combination of this with a point of view shot make the two figures entering the barn quite unreal, as if a dream, or rather a really bad memory for Manos. The image operates much like a Freudian 'Primal Scene', the picture that becomes "the point of departure for further manifestations of anxiety" (Freud [1917-1919] 2001:39) and which had been repressed by Manos. The performance of the protagonist at this stage is rather ambivalent; on one level, he feigns moans of pleasure, turning Phenia's back to the barn entrance so that she does not also see his uncle there with the boy. On a less literal level, what he sees, and what he tries to conceal, are memories of him being abused. His feigned pleasure is conflated with genuinely agonising moans at the sight of *loukoumades*, which conjure up the traumatic experience and a confirmation that what he sees is not an illusion. These are of course read quite differently by Phenia, who wonders whether she should be flattered or disappointed – they both still have their clothes on. The director effects a kind of gender reassignment to the cliché, with the man faking an orgasm. In effect, she castrates Manos. At this turning point in the narrative, when he is faced (literally) with his past, Manos decides to take action and expose his uncle. His return to the village has promoted a return of the repressed (the *Unheimlich*), which needs to be dealt with. [21] It is clear now that Manos's personal anxieties about sex and *loukoumades*, are the result of a crisis that is not his, but of masculinity itself, and the patriarchal power structures to which it is subjected.

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[21] While psychoanalysis is not a framework used in this article, some of its key vocabulary is useful for the discussion of this sequence. Arguably, this and other instances of playful nods towards psychoanalysis may stem from Malea's educational background in Psychology.

The uncle's reaction, when he hears that someone is there, is very comical but also very disturbing. He looks around frantically and urges Achilleas to run for the exit, while he gets rid of the *loukoumades*, as a criminal destroying the evidence of his crime. This very popular honey-glazed sweet that all characters are after, becomes an effective vehicle in the film for a tendency to keep secrets.

Style and black humour serve an argument against patriarchy which comes now to the foreground. It has become evident by now that this is a confrontational film: the incongruities of the world in which it is set are most aggressively evident, both in narrative and visual terms. In that respect, the funeral acquires another level of meaning: the burial cannot happen, just like the secret can no longer be 'buried'. In other words, the visual incongruity of the characters wearing black in the bright, colourful setting reflects the uneasy content of the plot.

Fig. 5 *Manos's offering of loukoumades*

The third attempt to bury Ismene starts and ends with *loukoumades*. For this final act, Manos has to prepare the *loukoumades* himself and offer them to his uncle (Fig. 5). Blinded by desire perhaps, the uncle does not perceive this as a ploy, but as Manos's attempt to make amends and 'understand' him – the same expression used by Leonidas to describe his own relationship with his godfather, whose portrait has pride of place in his home, hinting at a cycle of abuse – another indication by the director that the problem is systemic, rather than individual; perennial, rather than contextual. Thrassos is co-opted into the plan by Manos, who is aware of Thrassos's affections for his aunt, and enters the action more prominently, making sure Eleni leads the funeral procession to where her husband and Achilleas are set to be. Eleni, her desire liberated and confidence returned after Thrassos's declaration of love, this time does not hesitate. Eventually the entire community congregate in Antigone's and Ismene's shop cellar, following Eleni, who is driving the hearse this time, and Marikaki as

she discovers the last remaining *loukoumades* in the village and catches Leonidas in the act. The distressed Achilleas and the spilled *loukoumades* on the Mayor's crotch force everyone to face up to the truth and their own responsibility for what has happened. In other words, the community has to recognise that it has not been fulfilling its duty to protect its members; and only when the community faces their own shortcomings can the burial be completed successfully. Tragedy (the sacrifice of the innocent) is averted. The shift from sombreness (the revelation is confronted by the villagers' stunned silence) to crude comedy and humiliation becomes a structural necessity in this moment. Malea goes back to comedic mode exactly because what is happening is so poignant; in Aristophanic terms, for power to be dismissed the figure of authority needs to be humiliated. The Mayor is not caught by the police, but by a (female) pig; with his trousers undone, he is dragged out of his hiding place by the villagers, i.e. the citizen's authority, not the established state structures of discipline and punishment. And while the villagers are busy with the Mayor, Manos covers the boy's body and comforts him, telling Achilleas (and perhaps himself) that it is not his fault. Manos's embrace of the child is not charged, and Malea again carefully re-signifies (now in *her*, rather than her characters' vocabulary) the closeness of an adult-child relationship. Although the moment that precedes this is quite serious and emotional, with a distressed child and a crowd lost for words, when the pig enters, the scene loses its subtlety and Haikalis's performance changes to grotesque. The attack by the pig on the uncle's crotch and his grimaces of pain are all filmed in close-ups. This overtness is crude in a way that the rest of the film is not; the scene of the uncle's arrest contrasts with the discreteness with which the issue had been treated so far. To re-appropriate Malea's phrase, humour saves – but here it also accuses. The grotesquery of the performance points towards the grotesque nature of the act itself.

The spectacular jumps by the pig, the car collisions, the slapstick moments at the funeral, the aerobics exercise class with ducks following and hunters shooting in the distance; with their cartoon-esque quality, all are instances where the strange and the comical follow moments of seriousness, but also in a comic and peculiar way pave the way back to the confrontation of the main issue. Tasker suggests that "comedy provides a space in which taboos can be addressed, made visible and also contained, negotiated" (1998:163). If Malea's films before this have been about dealing with taboo around sexuality, gender and relationships, this film is the logical climax with paedophilia, as the ultimate sin of patriarchy. In this respect, the comedy also has to be heightened to surreal or even crude levels. Strongly ideological material is presented in a way that is critical and humorous. The semiotic shuffle characterising the film has all the conventional thematic binaries employed but scrambling and mismatching them into incongruous combinations.

At the end of the film, returning to the romantic comedy mode, Manos runs after the bus Phenia is on (she is leaving the village), and reveals his secret and admits his love for her. Even this revelation is treated with care – he finally confesses to Phenia that he has also "eaten *loukoumades*" with his uncle. The sensitivity of not naming the act, but knowingly admitting and facing the dreadful truth is now liberating, as Manos takes ownership of the metaphor of his abuse, which is used as a cover to articulate what Edwards calls "men's ongoing difficulties in relation to emotional expression or communication and interpersonal intimacy" (2006: 13).

Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla, writing about Almodóvar's *Volver* (2006), suggests that "our present and past existence is subjected to the fate of remembering our traumas and our incompatible memories, forgetting them, acting them out, enacting them, or working through them" (2011: 323). The translation of that film's title is, of course, 'to return'. There are many returns in *Honey and the Pig*: to the village, to the past – and importantly *of* the past, in the form of the repressed, of ancient Greek cultural referents, and of Phenia, the childhood sweetheart with a liberated sexuality; and even Mr. Billy, the returned expat and funeral home owner, who offers an alternative model of masculinity. They all point towards a liminal space between tradition and modernity, past and present, that the characters inhabit. It is important to note, however, that modernity is not just the intrusion of Western or urban values into a traditional location, but a crisis of patriarchal values, too. As Achilleas Hadjikyriacou points out in relation to the classic Greek film *Stella* (Cacoyiannis, 1955), the film "offered a unique representation of modernity as a product of domestic patriarchal crisis and not simply as an imported modus vivendi" (2013: Location 5198). This eternal crisis – and its corollary a process of perpetual modernisation – is precisely what Malea highlights, as a result of the precariousness of the established traditional models of masculinity.The eternal crisis needs to be discerned from specific contexts; while specific historical moments may exacerbate and bring to the surface some of patriarchy's inherent contradictions, Malea's film highlights masculinity in crisis as a permanent state effected by contradicting and threatening patriarchy. Moreover, it is shown to be a permanent preoccupation and trope of Greek cultural production, allowing us to understand its relation to the country's history and heritage more holistically, rather than attempting to justify each recrudescence in terms that are contingent upon specific moments in time.

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