

The Crisis of Gender Identity in the Greek Film Noir: Sexuality, Paranoia and the Unconscious in *Efialtis/Nightmare* (1961) and *O Ergenis/The Bachelor* (1997)

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ABSTRACT

This article uses Lacanian psychoanalytic terminology and a feminist psychoanalytic theoretical framework to analyze the Greek film noirs Efialtis/Nightmare (Erricos Andreou 1961), and O ergenis/The Bachelor (Nikos Panayotopoulos, 1997). While acknowledging both the differences and the similarities between the corresponding sociopolitical and cultural contexts of two films produced during two distinct, but crucial periods in modern Greek history, we argue that both noir texts contain instances (at the level of both form and content) that can be read as potentially subversive in the particular ways they represent gender and sexuality, which they link to paranoia and psychosis.

KEYWORDS

film noir
gender
Greek cinema
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psychoanalysis
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INTRODUCTION

The literature on classic film noir has focused on how various societal factors emerging during WWII and its aftermath were reflected in the American culture at the time, and how these depictions, in turn, influenced the portrayal of the *femme fatale*. The appearance of the *femme fatale* coincides with an important shift in American society. As Anne Leighton in *Harper's Magazine* stated in 1946: "Many American war veterans are silently bearing some unexpected [...] difficulties in returning home to what used to be a pleasantly pliable and even appallingly incompetent little woman and finding a quietly masterful creature recognising no limitations to her own endurance" (qtd. in Snyder 2001). Film noir expressed this threat to normative masculinity through the depiction of menacing, greedy, and lustful female characters that needed to be punished or domesticated by the end of the narrative. Basically "the underlying sense of horror and uncertainty in film noir may be seen, in part, as an indirect response to this forcible assault on traditional family structures and the conservative values they embodied" (Harvey 1998: 38). In a similar way that "the film noir *femme fatale*, with her attendant psychopathology, was at once a creation of the forties and a reflection of profound shifts in the role of American women in that era" (Snyder 2001: 156), we claim that Greek noir depicts the anxieties of Greek society of its time.

Although film noir as a genre was mostly prominent between the early 1940s and late 1950s, this paper focuses on a later period. In an attempt to tap into the idiosyncrasies of Greek culture, we build our analysis around a text from the early 1960s, Erricos Andreou's film noir *Efialtis/Nightmare* (1961). This choice might seem odd. However, it needs to be seen in the light of a relative delay in women's entrance to the workplace and the acquisition of social clout in Greek society. In Greece, WWII was followed by the civil war, which ended in 1949, leaving the country devastated. This obviously led to a significant setback in the process of modernisation of Greek society (Avdela 2002, Kosma 2007). This delay is also reflected in Greek film production, cinematography, etc.

Since the 1960s, Greek society has seen considerable economic growth, the expansion of a lower middle class, intensive urbanisation and internal migration, and the rise of consumerism (Karapostolis 1983 and Tsoukalas 1986a: 312). These changes gradually had several socio-psychological repercussions "including problems of adjustment, loss of ethnic identity, and physical separation" (Kouvertaris and Dobratz 1987: 23). The general loosening of patriarchal authority is represented in film through men who have lost their sense of place in this new, modern society that brings us to Nikos Panayotopoulos's neo-noir *O ergenis/The Bachelor* (1997). Neo-noir as a genre contains many of the elements of the classic film noir, with the addition of greater explicitness with respect to sexual representation" (Tasker 2013: 365).

“The opposition between the everyday and what lies underneath is entirely consistent with earlier examples of noir and its foregrounding of perverse or distorted aspects of human subjectivity” (ibid.: 364).

We maintain that both films analyzed here can be read as reflecting a crisis in gender identity. Moreover, both films are not only produced during periods when Greek society was in a state of flux, but are actually *about* social change, one referring to the process of modernisation of Greek society, and the other to the – also delayed – transition to post-modernity. This transition is tackled in both texts through the lens of gender relations and the status of patriarchy. In particular, the 1960s in Greece were characterised by a profound anxiety about the process of modernization, manifested through the representation of social concerns about female sexuality (Kosma 2007). The 1990s, on the other hand, represent here an era of dysfunctional and damaged masculinities on the eve of Greece entering the new millennium.

NIGHTMARE AND THE MONSTROUS FEMININE

Nightmare (1961) can be considered a noir mostly due to its overall bleak atmosphere of (sexual) paranoia, unease, and perversion. The film borrows heavily from the classic noir *Bewitched* (Oboler, 1945), from thrillers such as Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), as well as from the tradition of gothic horror.

Rich heiress Anna Margo (Voula Harilaou) receives ominous phone calls from Evi Linardou, who claims to be her friend. Anna asks Tonis Karzis (Michalis Nikolinakos), an old friend who is also romantically interested in her, to help her. While investigating Linardou's identity and whereabouts, Karzis is dragged into a seedy criminal underworld of sexual perversion and double (sexual) identities. He also uncovers the salacious secrets and vices of the other members of Anna's family. As his investigation brings him closer to the shadowy Linardou, she goes on a killing rampage. When he finally meets Linardou (Depy Martini) in person, she reveals that Anna was an old school friend of hers. But the most shocking revelation comes when Karzis realises that Anna had been impersonating the real Linardou all along, since Anna suffers from a split personality disorder. This fictional persona is Anna's *alter ego*, possessing all the characteristics Anna has always envied and longed for; she is, therefore, pure wish fulfillment, an ideal ego.¹ Unlike the sexually repressed Anna, “Evi” is assertive, sexually aggressive, promiscuous, and possibly a nymphomaniac.

¹ For Lacan, the ideal ego originates in the mirror phase, and belongs to the order of the Imaginary. Freud first refers to the notion in relation to “the process of idealisation whereby the subject set out to recover the supposedly omnipotent state of infantile narcissism” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988: 201, 202).

Nightmare claims that modern sexual mores and traditional femininity might be incompatible, literally driving Greek women to schizophrenia. Rather pessimistically at first glance, the film seems to suggest that women are trapped between sexual regression (Anna's neurosis) and murdering, castrating nymphomania ("Evi's" psychosis). By the end of the film, viewers are stranded in a sexual no-man's land (pun intended), with no indication of any happy ending whatsoever. Marriage, the usual closure that is supposed to resolve everything, is exposed as an illusion. In its place, *Nightmare* offers a sexually dystopian vision that echoes the film's title. At the same time, we will argue that the film does include strategies (both at the level of form, and of content) to escape the suffocating gender binaries and patriarchal ideology typically reproduced in mainstream commercial (Greek) narrative cinema.

THE BACHELOR AND THE REGRESSION OF MASCULINITY

The Bachelor (1997) revisits several traditional noir themes; troubled and self-destructive heroes in raincoats, vamp-like and poisonous *fatale* women, plots that often unfold in the night, in the seedy parts of town. Conforming to this tradition, these are images which centre "on a male point of view, [and] narratives [that are] structured by a patriarchal logic in which women are always framed as less than men" (Tasker 2013: 355). However, at the same time, and this is where the subversive potential of the film lies, masculinity is deeply problematised, allowing clear homoerotic undertones. Although women are unquestionably objectified, men are also troubled. The film features recurring themes in Panayotopoulos's filmography, such as the exploration of emotional violence and the loss of innocence in an era of vulgar affluence (Karalis 2012: 262). The 1990s in Greece were a time of glossy life-style magazines, easy money earned from gambling in the stock-market, and also an era of conspicuous consumption. Having this setting as its backdrop, *The Bachelor* foregrounds the importance of the image and appearances not only for Greek women, but also for men who are negotiating their position in the contemporary social world.

The story begins when Thodoris (Stratos Tzortzoglou), a bank employee in his mid-thirties, returns home to discover his wife, Sophie (Leda Matsagou), unaccountably missing. Soon he receives a mysterious phone call from a man called Juan (Akis Sakellariou), a procurer, who tells him that Sophie has become a luxury prostitute. Moreover, Juan claims that Thodoris belongs to a special category of people who cannot remain single, and that he will always attract the same type of woman, the one who is suitable to work as an escort. Juan declares Thodoris as his protégé, since he considers him an invaluable resource; every woman Thodoris will ever have a relationship with, is bound to become a prostitute in Juan's service.

Although the film conforms to several of the generic conventions of the film-noir — melancholy, alienation, bleakness, disillusionment, cynicism, pessimism, moral ambiguity, guilt, and paranoia — it walks the borderline between genre fiction and postmodern fiction. As the narrative unfolds, the line between the real and the fantasmatic² is blurred. Eventually the two planes occupy the same slice of reality. At some point it becomes evident that none of the stories can be taken at face value, and we suspect that everything merely takes place in Thodoris's imagination. The themes addressed in *The Bachelor*, including identity crises, memory issues, and subjectivity, are also typical to the genre of noir and neo-noir (Conard 2007).

Panayotopoulos's film is basically a tale about (the crisis of) contemporary masculinity. The film tells the story of a man, Thodoris, with a 'disassociated' personality (Juan, the nonchalant pimp, can be read as the *alter ego* of the frustrated, milquetoast protagonist). As a response to this disillusionment, the text initially proposes to embrace a solitary, violent, and supposedly more genuine idea of 'proper' manliness—but that alternative turns out to be a disastrous illusion. Also, given the stark homoerotic undertones of the text, one could read it as a critique of heteronormativity. The apparent sources of conflict between Thodoris and his wife include money difficulties, unfulfilled dreams and settlement into a boring, domestic routine, a sexual cooling-off, an unease with the in-laws —Thodoris's ailing father moves in with the couple (the traumatic Real here takes the form of the impotent father, who mysteriously disappears after Juan appears in the scene, signaling that we are now in the world of fantasy). This is the anxiety-laden world of desire. It is opposed to that of fantasy, which supports reality, and allows us to go on with our everyday lives. However, soon the film reveals that the lurid core of our imaginary lives is best kept secret, because as soon as dark fantasies are realised in the light of day, there is something inherently absurd, and terrifying about them.

(a) Power relations

Power relations show the most visible evidence of crisis tendencies. We view power relations through the framework of gender. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as the current configuration of practice that legitimises men's dominant position in society, and justifies the subordination of women, as well as other marginalised ways of being a man (Connell 2005), despite any local reversals (such as women in positions of authority) or the resistance articulated in feminism. This struggle over agency lies at the core of the noir as a genre, since

² Kaja Silverman describes the fantasmatic as "the 'blueprint' for each subject's desire" (1988: 80). Laplanche and Pontalis write that fantasies (or phantasies) are "scripts (*scénarios*) of organised scenes which are capable of dramatization – usually in a visual form" (1988: 317).

these films, on the one hand, portray female characters as direct threats to the patriarchal order, and on the other, they implicitly criticise women for considering alternative roles. Such tensions are evident in both films analyzed here.

From the first scene in *Nightmare* – Anna walking up from a bad dream –, the female protagonist seems to be established as the subject of enunciation. Furthermore, by employing the storm as a metaphor for the troubled female psyche, the director momentarily allows spectators to experience the world the way she does. Yet, there are no point-of-view shots or voice-overs that would explicitly allow the spectators to identify with her. And indeed, in the following sequence Anna assigns the investigation to Karzis, and is automatically divested of her position at the centre of the narrative. Since it is the male protagonist that now occupies that position, the spectator is now forced to identify with the point of view of heteronormative patriarchy. In accordance to Mulvey's (1975) theory, this narrative choice makes viewers – both male and female, heterosexual or homosexual – identify with the male protagonist's gaze, who now controls the narrative, scrutinising, objectifying, and fetishising the bodies of the female characters he investigates. Women are represented as threatening, either to themselves or to society, and thus the female body becomes a site of inquiry and control.

The dream-like first scene introduces the female protagonist as possibly neurotic, hysterical, and paranoid. However, as the film progresses, we discover that her illness is everything but a mild case of neurosis. It is something much more dangerous and lethal to society and people around her – especially the men. By the end of the film, she is diagnosed as a full-blown schizophrenic psychotic, who suffers from a split personality disorder. The male protagonist describes the central character as a “psychopath”, a term with which other characters (the painter, and Evi Linardou) seem to be vaguely familiar with. Karzis explains that his theory is supported by Anna's doctor, which, by extension, bestows the investigator's statement with the authority of Science, and of the symbolic, patriarchal Law. In the film, this concept of the sick, hysterical, phallic, castrating, and deadly female body that needs to be treated, disciplined, and if necessary punished, is interlinked, or in fact, coincides with the modern, sexually active female body. In this context, active sexuality is implied to be the cause of Anna's disorder, and the female protagonist is represented as an insatiable nymphomaniac.

The concept of mental disorder has also a central place in *The Bachelor*. Although it is the male protagonist who suffers a psychotic break here, early in the film viewers are provided with the seemingly irrelevant information that Sophie is on anti-psychotic medication. The prescription drug referred in the film is primarily

used to treat hypothyroidism. However, thyroid disorders can be accompanied by prominent mental abnormalities, and thyroid hormones have also been used in the treatment of certain psychiatric conditions. Whilst Sophie's medical condition is never clarified, this ambiguity seems deliberate. In the specific scene Sophie says that she needs to take a pill everyday for the rest of her life – yet she apparently interrupts her treatment once she abandons Thodoris to become a prostitute.³ Again, sexual assertiveness or promiscuity is linked to mental disorder; female sexuality is represented as inherently problematic, and must be contained. Consequently, Thodoris's position in the gender order is directly linked to, and threatened by Sophie. Since he is not able to control her insatiable sexuality, his masculinity is challenged. Hegemonic masculinity, Connell claims, “establishes its hegemony partly by its claim to embody the power of reason, and thus represent the interests of the whole society” (Connell 2005: 164). Since Thodoris's power of reason is undermined, he is also demoted to a lesser mental condition, that is, he becomes ‘effeminate’; this is further illustrated when he kisses Juan. According to Connell, “gayness, in patriarchal ideology, is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity.” Hence, “from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, gayness is easily assimilated to femininity” (ibid.: 78). Thus, Thodoris too needs to be punished and controlled.

In any case, both filmic texts seem to suggest that the only option women have in the direction of their sexual liberation is to create a promiscuous *alter ego* – a substitute self, which can solely exist in the shadows, lest it be expelled from the circle of legitimacy. Anna impersonates “Evi”, and Sophie becomes a call-girl under a different name. Eva (Karyofyllia Karambeti), Thodoris's girlfriend after Sophie, is also represented as a typical *femme fatale* – reckless, fearless, and sexually provocative. She invents an alternative persona to become a luxury prostitute as well, and is killed in a car accident when she attempts to leave Juan's brothel. Interestingly, she bears the mark of mental disease too; her father was committed to a mental institution, and, as a child, she had witnessed him killing her mother. Both Anna's and Sophie's mental illness, as well as Eva's borderline personality are linked to their deviant sexuality; and all of them are punished. (Female) sexual liberty is represented as a modern disease.

However, since it is masculinity that is fundamentally at stake in *The Bachelor*, the most important *alter ego* is the one of Thodoris. We have seen that in both

³ Whether the medication actually belongs to Thodoris (who projects his own condition on Sophie), or the prescription drug is indeed hers, but was left behind when she supposedly left is not clear; both options, however, clearly hint that something is not quite right. It is possible that Thodoris killed Sophie, and then ‘escaped’ into his psychosis, nightmarish visions, and noir fantasies. Here the film echoes Alexis Alexiou's neo-noir with a similar theme and plot, *Istoria 52/Tale 52* (2008).

films, assertive female sexuality is linked to mental instability, which is manifested through a split personality. A similar device is used in Panayotopoulos's film to represent the male protagonist's waning masculinity. Thodoris falls short within the dominant gender order, since he is incapable of controlling female sexuality (Sophie's and subsequently Eva's). To compensate, he conceives the persona of 'Juan the Pimp', the man who by definition manages and profits from female sexuality. Not only does Juan brag that he is poncing on his girls, but also that he has sex with them without contraception. This extraordinary case of 'consensual trafficking' is an exemplary illustration of the "manufacture of consent" (Gramsci 1971) in a 'perfect' patriarchal society – or else a male chauvinist's dream/fantasy. And this links our analysis to the second element in the structuring of gender; production relations and the labour of love.

(b) The labour of love

In Greece in the 1960s, changes in the production relations, along with adjustment to western consumerist ideals created a series of tensions in the traditional gender order. In the 1990s, and while Greek women's participation in the labour market has become a given, Greek women are still "caught between two worlds" (Vaiou 1989: 89), and these tensions remain present. More specifically, in *Nightmare*, the schizophrenia and split personality disorder of the female protagonist reflects the crisis of femininity in the traditional, conservative, patriarchal, and religious Greek society of the 1960s, but also a crisis in representation. In the film, the clash between traditional and modern sexual norms produces schizophrenic female subjects, by posing impossible demands on them. Also, like most noirs, *Nightmare* reflects castration anxieties, embodied by the modern fatale woman. These anxieties take a historically, and socio-culturally specific form. Anthropological, sociological, and ethnographic studies of the 1950s and 1960s argue that "backward" traditions persist as Greece enters a period of frantic modernisation (Gallant 2001: 191). And even though these conclusions are drawn from ethnographies about the Greek countryside (Sanders 1962; Campbell 1964; Boulay 1974; Friedl 2002), it is true that, to a large extent, those elements remain present in the context of Greek city life of the time. From the late 1950s, and until the advent of the junta (1967), Greek cities become spaces where the old and new elements mix and coexist, sometimes more harmoniously, others in stark contrast. This means that, on the one hand, marriage is regarded as an imperative for both for Greek men (Hirschon 1988: 107–9) and women, while female chastity is considered very important, with women who have pre-marital sexual relations being seen as bringing shame to themselves and their families (ibid.: 149). At the same time, however, Avdela (2002: 19) notes how this unwritten Law starts to lose a significant part of its legitimacy.

In any case, important steps towards female emancipation are indeed taken in Greece during this time. In 1952, Greek women win the right to vote (Pantelidou-Malouta 2002: 217). In the 1960s, more Greek women enter the workforce (Valaoras, et. al. 1965: 277), become financially independent (Simeonidou 2004: 150; Maratou-Alipranti 2004: 119; Lambiri-Dimaki 1983: 189), and gain access to higher education (Tsoukalas 1986: 188; Lambiri-Dimaki 1983: 85). This process is demonstrated in popular representations such as films, where women are dressed in mini-skirts, dance at night-clubs, smoke and drink alcohol, read fashion magazines, and drive cars (see also Kornetis 2006: 54). Although these representations presumably do not reflect the norm for Greek society of the time, nevertheless it is obvious that Greek women begin to claim their position in the public sphere, at least in the urban context.

All this constitutes the backdrop against which the representations of women and of gender relations appear in *Nightmare*. Marriage and compulsory heterosexuality are not represented as particularly attractive in the film (see Evi and Alexandros's failed marriage). The protagonist is afraid that her premarital sexual activity might be considered sinful and immoral, and at the same time she is afraid of being seen as a spinster. Within the film, modern pop-psychoanalytic discourses are represented as condemning female sexual abstinence as pathological frigidity, neurosis, or hysteria, while female sexual freedom is linked to deadly psychosis. On the one hand then, a (pseudo-)scientific discourse seemingly (re)produces the dominant gender order:

Anna: *My parents were very upset when they found out [that I didn't dance with any of the boys]! In front of me they didn't say anything. At night I heard them talking in their room. I eavesdropped outside the door. "A person is born a certain way... What a shame not to have a daughter like Evi!"*⁴

However, significantly, *Nightmare* upsets these suffocating binaries (healthy/abnormal, traditional/modern, chaste and virginal/liberal) by blurring them, or by having them co-exist in the same female character.

⁴Anna's description of her eavesdropping outside her parents' bedroom as a child is not just reminiscent of the Freudian primal scene, but specifically of the auditory dimension of it, that Silverman describes. In her study of the paranoid woman cycle, Doane notes the strong link between paranoia and the primal scene, and how "the fixation to the primal scene elucidates the paranoiac's activation of sound and image as the material supports of the symptom (the obsessions with hearing voices and being watched) [...]. Sound has a double polarity at the level of this originary fantasy: it can potentially 'betray' not only the parents for their act, but also the child for its desire to see that act." (Doane 1987: 132).

In *The Bachelor*, the myth of the perfect marriage is also represented as poisonous, and so are normative gender embodiments. A first hint that the film is about masculinity-in-crisis are the lyrics of the song heard during the credits, "I saw a man falling...". This suspicion is confirmed in the first scene where the male protagonist returns from work only to discover that his wife, Sophie has left him. In the flashback that follows, the viewers get an insight of the couple's life. Thodoris's initial idealised presentation of his marriage soon crumbles, exposing boredom and alienation. We are introduced to Sophie who is constantly desiring, never satisfied; she is disappointed that Thodoris did not become a famous photographer, but remained a modest bank accountant. Women are represented as susceptible to corruption, easily lured by luxury, money or excitement. However, what is at stake here is not the newfound position of women in society as in *Nightmare*, but masculinity that is faltering. Men, no less than women, are chained to the gender patterns they have inherited. The protagonist's failure to gratify his wife's demands means incompetence to fulfill his role as provider, but, also, as a husband/lover.⁵ Just as *Nightmare* identified active female sexuality as a form of madness, *The Bachelor* raises the possibility that marriage and (male) insanity are inseparable. Also, one can hardly empathise with any of the characters in the film, since all of them are annoying narcissists. Sophie seems to be completely self-absorbed. In the few glimpses we get of her she projects an air of self-importance, and a frozen, vain smile. Thodoris seems to love her, or even is obsessed with her, but after the ominous phone call from Juan, he discards the option to go to the police in order to declare her as missing. The same goes when he loses Eva to Juan. Since in patriarchy women are considered a possession and an object of exchange between men, masculinity is measured against the capability to control female sexuality.

To grapple with the full range of issues about women's position in patriarchy, we also need to consider gender relations within the economy of the look. In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, women's subordination is reflected in the way they are being objectified by the controlling male gaze. In this context, *Nightmare* problematises the notion of the female body-as-spectacle, propagated by modernity. On one hand, Anna's *alter ego* is obsessed with exposing her body to the fetishising and voyeuristic heterosexual male gaze of the painter and the photographer. Her ultimate, narcissistic goal is to give her body maximum visibility, by turning it into a museum exhibit for the entire world to see (an internationalisation of the Greek woman's body as part of the cosmopolitan

⁵ Thodoris's symbolic castration is illustrated in an inventive way in the scene when his wife sends him money – money that she acquired by prostituting herself –, ironically depositing it to *Trapeza Pisteos*, literally meaning in Greek: 'Bank of Faith', or 'Bank of Fidelity', which can be contrasted to Sophie's infidelity, and untrustworthy character.

vision of modernisation).⁶ The corresponding thematic motif seems to be: visible/hidden from view. At the seedy nightclub, the sexualised, naked female body is further objectified during the strip-number. But this space, including a porn photographer's studio, is hidden from plain view; it only exists in the dark, at night. Simultaneously, the sexually repressed Anna wants to remain locked in her room, to keep "all this [modern] ugliness outside", and to avoid any contact with the traumatic, penetrative gaze of the Other. Anna's impersonation of "Evi" is also hidden from view until the end of the film. The text grants visibility to the naked, sexualised female body as an object of male desire (woman-as-spectacle), while it envelops in darkness the body of the woman-as-a-subject (agent of female desire). In this sense, *Nightmare* cannot seem to imagine but a shadowy space where women can articulate their desire from.

Visibility of the female body is organised in a similar manner in *The Bachelor*. There are several scenes where Sophie's and Eva's bodies are constructed as objects of the male gaze, exposing plenty of cleavage or a slightly leg; there is also a nude scene in the shower. In the sequences where these characters are introduced, both clearly connote to-be-looked-at-ness (Mulvey 1975). Once Sophie and Eva become call-girls, however, they are nowhere to be seen, which is curious, since their new profession could offer ample material for saucy scenes. Instead, there is only Sophie's disembodied voice over the phone, on the single instance when she establishes contact with Thodoris, and just few scenes with Eva, but only after the latter has already quit her life as a prostitute. An obvious explanation would be that Thodoris is oblivious of the women's whereabouts ever since they left, and so their absence is necessary for suspense to be retained. However, we claim that the castrating female body is foreclosed from vision, because is too unsettling to be watched. In the dream scene, the night after Sophie's weeping phone call, Thodoris hardly seems happy to see her at all; they have sex but her obscene sexuality is too much for him to handle. Finally he strangles her, but she would not die; she keeps provoking and he keeps strangling, until he wakes up exasperated.⁷ In this film too, female sexual agency

⁶Interestingly, in Freud's 'A Case of Paranoia Running Counter to the Psychoanalytical Theory of the Disease' (1915) the female patient's paranoid delusion involves a camera, and being photographed by a man hiding behind a curtain, who wants to compromise her. In the context of the noir gothic horror, and more specifically of the "paranoid woman" cycle of films, Doane (1987: 123) writes that 'the woman's delusion involves having her picture taken—that is, being photographed by men who intend to use the compromising photograph against her [in *Nightmare*, Anna is being blackmailed by the porn photographer who has taken compromising pictures of her; a version of this narrative can also be found in *The Bachelor*, with Juan possessing compromising photographs of Sophie, and possibly of other women too, having sex with men].

⁷The fact that Thodoris keeps repeating "I have strangled you, you don't exist anymore, you are dead", to his wife's body that refuses to die can be read as supporting the theory that he has murdered her early on in the film, and then he has escaped into psychosis,

is represented as a nightmare. Towards the end of the film, just like Anna in *Nightmare*, Thodoris decides to isolate himself; he quits his job and rarely, if ever, exits his apartment. He hides from the penetrative gaze of the big Other, because he has now become Other to hegemonic masculinity.

At the same time, both films problematise the male gaze. In *Nightmare*, male vision is not to be trusted. In a darkly funny exchange between Karzis, who investigates the case, and the modernist painter, Fokas, about whether Linardou sat for him as a nude model (it turns out it was Anna's psychotic persona, "Evi"), the two men briefly comment on the painter's nontraditional style. The painter states that abstract art is "the only kind that fits our times". But, when the investigator wants to see one of the paintings depicting "Evi"/Anna, because he needs to know what she looks like, the painter shows him a female nude painted in a cubist way, in the style of Picasso or Braque, something that makes it impossible for Karzis to identify the model. The theme of abstract art is employed to express the incredulity of the text towards modernity and the influence of the West on Greek culture. Yet, it also reveals the problem of female sexuality, and the puzzle of female representation in narrative cinema. Through modernist art, however, the film represents the modern female sexual body as opaque, inaccessible, and impenetrable to the male gaze, which can no longer draw pleasure from it. Fessas (2017: 169) notes that, in a way, modernism and feminism coalesce here, forming a front of resistance against the commodification of the female body – a body typically used to produce both surplus value, and surplus enjoyment – and against capitalist heteropatriarchy: a female body distorted in such a way is of no use to either the male voyeur, or the male pornographer (Valentino in *Nightmare*).

In *The Bachelor*, on the other hand, the female body is represented as merely a commodity. Women change hands like objects, and even if working for Juan is presented as their own choice, once they surrender, they are trapped. Their attempts at sexual self-determination end up as anything but liberating. What is worse is that, if nothing else, they seem to prefer Juan's firm hand. One must, of course, acknowledge the ironic, even comical representation of Juan's hyper-

creating a noir fantasy in his head. At the same time, if Juan is a fictional character, and a creation of the protagonist's deranged mind, it is Thodoris who murdered Eva too! (the plot and themes of *The Bachelor* bear striking resemblances to Lynch's famous neo-noir of the same year, *Lost Highway*, while many scenes are reminiscent of Spanish mystery thriller *Abre Los Ojos/Open Your Eyes* by Amenábar, again released in 1997). During the sex scene with a prostitute named Dolores, the latter abruptly changes into Sophie, producing an uncanny effect. Sophie won't die because she embodies the object of desire (see McGowan's [2007: 164] analysis of Lynch's film). As Thodoris is about to enjoy the fantasy object (Dolores), the real object (Sophie) intrudes, making the fantasy terrifying (again, see: McGowan 2007: 171).

masculinity. The problem, however, is whether, despite the subversive function of irony being “apparent to a postmodern audience”, the text eventually reproduces the hegemonic gender order it seeks to problematize (Hutcheon 1992: 433, 436). Objectification and coercion are still presented as the ultimate female fantasy. It is true, however, that this quintessential patriarchal vision is presumably only a fabrication of Thodoris’s deranged mind. What does ultimately salvage the text is its almost surreal preposterousness that can be used to crowbar the dominant gender order at its fissures.

(c) Cathexis: Mirror, mirror on the wall...

Within essentialist patriarchal discourse, “sexual desire is so often seen as natural” (Connell 2005: 74), something that de-emphasises desire as a significant aspect of the gender order. In both films, sexual transgression is the Other to heterosexual normativity; it can either entail too much desire (nymphomania), or too little (frigidity/neurosis), but the ultimate challenge is homosexual desire. In *Nightmare*, Anna’s homosocial/homosexual obsession with her childhood friend is directly linked to her terrifying “frigidity” (the term used by Evi), and her psychosis. According to her own account, all the boys wanted to dance with Evi – dance typically symbolises (hetero)sexual union in narrative cinema –, and Anna did not want to dance with any of them. She only drew voyeuristic pleasure from watching Evi dance. The root of Anna’s illness, the cause of her crisis of subjectivity and her fragmented sexual identity, seems to be a traumatic event. She narrates a story⁸ where she was found with blood in her mouth, after having fallen in a ditch (the mouth is seen as an erogenous zone, a cavity; blood is a possible symbol of the loss of virginity, while the wounded mouth can also be read as “a mark of castration, but a quite specific castration of the woman in relation to the symbolic order of language—a signifying system to which she has no access” [Doane 1987: 127-128]). There are hints that Anna might have been sexually abused, exploited, or even raped, although the text is unclear about whether these are real memories or just hysteric fantasies that are symptoms of her sexual repression. In her childhood, Anna was forced to give up her same-sex object of desire (Evi married her brother, and thus Anna was forced into heterosexuality, with tragic, detrimental results). From that point onwards she completely repressed what happened with Evi, and internalised the lost object of desire (she created “Evi”) – note how, by the end of the film, she wears the same black fur hat as Evi.

⁸ It is important that Andreou chooses to give this story not in the form of a flashback, but through the mediation of language, thus forcing the spectator to rely on the heroine’s unstable and potentially untrustworthy narration and voice. The male gaze has no access to her story.

In fact, throughout the film, and until the film's awkward attempt at a romantic ending, Anna expresses repulsion towards men. She even keeps her friend, Karzis at arm's length, whom she finds "obscene" and "vulgar", and whose persistent flirtation and sexual passes she tries to deflect. In *Nightmare*, the answer to the enigma of the Sphinx is impenetrable Otherness, meaning that, from a patriarchal perspective female sexuality is ultimately inaccessible, a lack in the Symbolic Order that is filled here with an act of violence. In noir, this violence usually takes the form of *femme fatale*, or *la femme castratrice*. Her explicit function in the film is to force patriarchal ideology to look itself in the mirror. In *Nightmare*, the mirror that, as a prop (and a trademark element of the *mise-en-scène* in the gothic horror genre, especially the paranoid woman cycle), is present during Anna's psychotic episodes (she looks at her reflection and talks to the mirror, and the mirror looks and talks back to her in the voice of her psychotic *alter ego*), plays a crucial role. One might argue that this is an apt visualization of Lacan's mirror stage, where the heroine (along with the female spectator) is forced to (mis)recognize herself as the monster; the mirror reflects back to the woman an image of her own lack, and of her castration (Doane 1987: 142). The mirror also functions here as an all-seeing eye; it is the eye of the camera, and also that of patriarchy – the male gaze that objectifies, criticises and condemns the deviant female body, and transgressive female desire.

Typically, in myths and fairytales, mirrors bear mystical connotations (see *Snow White*, *The Snow Queen*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Through the Looking Glass*, and the myth of Narcissus, among others). Following Lacan's theorisation of the mirror stage, film scenes featuring the protagonists in front of mirrors are typically seen as symbolising a crisis of subjectivity. And indeed, just before the end, Andreou's text spells out the function of the oval-shaped mirror-as-the-eye/gaze of the Other; the painter, the photographer, and Anna's mother and brother appear on its surface, and stare right back at her. As a hysteric, Anna does not seem to know what she is in the Other's desire.

Paradoxically, however, and in a progressive twist, the mirror is also the eye that offers a glimpse behind the curtain of patriarchal ideology. Anna, in an unorthodox, deconstructive take on the classical *femme fatale*, turns the magic mirror around, so that the male characters, but also the viewers – who are forced to align with the male protagonist's gaze – would look into it, and gaze at their own reflection, and into the abyss of their own fragmented and unstable identity. The male protagonist and the masculinised spectator are confronted with their fetishistic scopophilia and sadistic voyeurism, and, therefore, are forced to accept their 'abnormality' and sexual deviance, their castration and lack. Anna/"Evi" – along with the omniscient 'eye' of the mirror – are able to see through patriarchal ideology, to see patriarchy for what it is. And by assuming the role of an avenging angel (she kills the men who mistreated, abused and

objectified her one by one – along with some women), she becomes a hypertrophic superego, constantly reminding every character in the film, including herself, of their sins/violations of the law of the Father. Although in the beginning we have seen her assign the investigation to Karzis, turning *him* into the bearer of the look, it is ultimately Anna who knows of all the characters' vices and perversions, their deviant sexual identities and all their dirty secrets. She is the one who possesses the repressed/forbidden knowledge, and this is her biggest transgression. In the same way that Eve was punished for knowing too much (she consumed the fruit from the tree of knowledge), so is "Evi". She is arrested and about to be expelled from (patriarchal) society.

In his analysis of the particular function and use of the voice in relation to the representation of female sexuality in *Nightmare*, Fessas (2017: 177-186) argues that, apart from the Lacanian mirror stage and the screen-as-mirror (see Metz 1986, and Mulvey 1975) that solely focus on the visual element, the talking mirror in *Nightmare* is also a particularly impressive visualisation of Silverman's "acoustic mirror" (1988). According to Silverman, there is another variation of the mirror that can be found in narrative film that does not merely relate to the female image, but also to the female voice. Starting with the assumption that the female voice is "a generator of gender-differentiated and erotically charged sounds", Silverman claims that the careful suturing of the female voice with the female body is a crucial part in the process of constructing sexual difference (ibid.: 67). In most narrative films this process happens smoothly, as the soundtrack and editing are employed in a way that there are no abrupt pauses, silences, or discontinuities between image and sound. By assigning each female voice a body as a place of origin, the female voice is rendered reassuring, comforting and maternal; an acoustic mirror through which the male spectator can (mis)recognise himself in relation to the Other, and therefore disavow his castration anxieties. This process has obvious ideological implications, since it confirms the dominant gender order. Yet, any disruption of this process can be strategically employed to undermine this function. A simple example of this destabilising effect is when the artificiality of the process is foregrounded. In classical narrative cinema, the disconcerting randomness entailed in the process of attributing the female voice with a body is concealed, in order for male anxieties about the female voice to be dispersed, and male fears to be appeased (a bodiless female voice, the voice-as-object, the voice as the phallus, is the source of castration anxiety). However, both avant-garde cinema, but also commercial films such as *Singin' in the Rain* (Donen and Kelly, 1952), and more recently, *Mulholland Drive* (Lynch, 2001) use the subversive technique of adding a random female voice in post-production to a female body, and this mismatching produces comical (in the case of *Singin' in the Rain*) or highly disturbing, uncanny effects (in the case of *Mulholland Drive*).

In *Nightmare* it is not just the mirror that scrutinizes the male characters as a huge surveilling eye, but also “Evi’s” seemingly omnipresent, omniscient, all-knowing, and omnipotent voice that too performs a superegoic function; “a gigantic ear or eye, a kind of paranoiac agency which sees all and hears all” (Žižek 2001: 119). Until the end of the film “Evi” remains a shadow, a faceless absence, a disembodied voice that does not materialise, as she occupies an impossible space, and a point-of-view from which patriarchal ideology is looking at itself. This effect is enhanced because, instead of using Anna’s voice, or the voice belonging to the real Evi Linardou, Andreou employs the voice of a third woman who remains outside the frame, bodiless and invisible during the entire film.⁹ This traumatic, phallic voice tears across the symbolic order and patriarchal ideology in a way even more unsettling than the phallic/castrating pair of scissors that “Evi” uses to slash male bodies with. Its unnerving quality has such disruptive potential, because it offers an alternative to the limiting binaries in Mulvey’s theory and the construction of sexual difference in classical narrative cinema. It decisively undermines the process of male subjectification, as there is no (female) body that corresponds to that voice on the screen, from which the male subject-as-spectator can distinguish himself from.

Since the voice of psychotic “Evi” comes from the body of a different, separate third actress (Kia Bozou), the text creates a jarring effect by forcing the spectator to accept that it comes from the same body, Anna’s body. In *Nightmare*, the disturbing effect for patriarchy is that the female body can be the source of multiple, contradictory voices. The voice sounds cruel, malicious and obscene, and does not fit the virginal, romanticised, idealised, desexualised, sexually repressed body of Anna – just like the demon’s obscene voice does not correspond to the teenage girl’s body in *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973). It is the voice of the Other. “Evi’s” voice is what Chion (1999) calls an “acousmètre”. It is an “abject” voice that disturbs the inside/outside binary in multiple ways. Where does this voice of obscene enjoyment come from? Chion writes that “it is the law of every off-screen voice to create this desire to go and see who’s speaking” (1999: 141). And indeed, the male investigator is looking everywhere for the source of this voice, except for the place that is eventually revealed to be located: the uncanny space of the female body. It is a voice that the male protagonist and

⁹ This device is also used in the classic noir *Bewitched* (Oboler, 1945). The film features a sexually repressed female protagonist (Phyllis Thaxter) who suffers from a split personality disorder, and who uses a pair of scissors as a murder weapon against men. Plot-wise, *Bewitched* seems to be one of the main sources of inspiration for *Nightmare*. Also, just like in *Nightmare*, in *Bewitched* another actress (Audrey Totter) is used for the voice of the alternate personality. The crucial difference between *Nightmare* and *Bewitched* is that in the latter the protagonist is distinctively represented as the only one who can hear the (only very slightly distorted) voice inside her head, while in *Nightmare* the rest of the characters hear it too.

the male characters cannot exercise their control on; an evasive, uncontainable female voice that spills over the text. By not attributing this voice to a specific female body, or by locating its source and origin in multiple female bodies, the filmic text does not allow for a seamless and unproblematic process of construction of sexual difference, as it is usually the case in classical narrative cinema.

In *Nightmare*, the source of this voice is usually outside the frame. But in the scene where Anna is listening and also talking to the voice that comes from the telephone, the body/origin-source of the voice is both inside and outside the frame. Because viewers never register the voice of the psychotic “Evi” emerging from Anna’s mouth, they cannot know whether its source can be located inside or outside Anna’s body. This is a case of what Chion calls “impossible embodiment” (1999: 140). This way, the filmic text retains a radical potential, in the sense that neither the characters in the film or the viewers can tell whether the psychosis is real or not, judging from the text only. The psychotic female voice in the film sounds as real as any other; and so the female protagonist is represented less as a psychotic, than as possessed by a demon. If the voice cannot be contained in the body of the female protagonist that is regarded as pathological in patriarchy; instead, it suffuses the whole filmic space and text. As a consequence, if the representatives of patriarchy within the text, but also the masculinised spectators, can hear the voice just like Anna does, that makes them equally paranoid, schizophrenic, and psychotic. This is the ultimately subversive message of *Nightmare*. Even though Anna uses just a slightly distorted voice for her *alter ego*, once it is revealed that she is psychotic, male spectators have been – even momentarily – forced to identify with the psychotic female voice. This cannot but have radical ideological implications. In Žižek’s words, “the subversive effect hangs upon the rupture, the passage from one perspective to the other, the change which confers upon the hitherto impossible/unattainable object a body, which gives the untouchable thing a voice and makes it speak – in short, which subjectivises it” (2001: 66).

Moreover, the male spectators cannot simply fetishise away this female voice; therefore, they cannot keep a safe distance from it, and avoid castration anxiety. The sinister laughter (the unsymbolisable excess of the Real that intrudes) coming from the telephone in Andreou’s film haunts the unconscious of the male spectator, and it is the stuff nightmares are made of. At the same time, the female spectator is offered another option. Instead of having to simply identify with the passive object of male desire, through fetishism and voyeurism, she can identify with the object itself, what Lacan calls *objet petit a* (the unattainable object-cause of desire), which, in *Nightmare*, actually articulates its own desire. The voice here is an “object” in the sense that the gaze in Lacan (or the Gaze with a

capital G, in feminist psychoanalytic film theory) is an object.¹⁰ This is what makes this voice terrifying (for men/masculinized spectators) in *Nightmare*: patriarchy cannot find a place for it in the Symbolic order, as the film refuses to offer a reassuring answer to the question “what does the female voice want?”¹¹

In *The Bachelor* there is no such narrative device as a speaking mirror. Nevertheless, there is one decisive scene where Thodoris shaves his head in front of the mirror that signifies his final step into the underworld of the unconscious. Since it is never clear whether anything that is happening in the film is real, or if viewers are merely trapped in the protagonist’s distorted perception of events, the text seems to be employing the mirror as a symbol of reality-versus-fantasy, or as a threshold between them (as it happens in many popular narratives). If a mirror reflects reality—at least some element of reality—everything shot through a mirror’s reflection is accurate or trustworthy. Conversely, everything captured without a mirror to filter the truth – in other words, everything we have seen so far – cannot be trusted. Through this lens we see Thodoris for what he really is; a psychotic on the verge of complete self-destruction. One can claim that Thodoris is undergoing the terrifying experience of what Lacan calls separation, meaning “the overlapping of two lacks: when the subject encounters a lack in the Other, he responds with a prior lack, with his own lack” (Žižek 2006: 39).

¹⁰ Chaudhuri (2006: 113, 114) notes how Lacan “deanthropomorphises the gaze, arguing that it can never be ‘at one’ with human vision”, but rather, “a function of light and Otherness, arising from all sides, rather than from one viewer, and all subjects, male and female, are subordinate to it”. As Chaudhuri succinctly puts it, the main distinction between gaze and Gaze with a capital G is the same as the one between the phallus and the penis: “The male voyeur may think he possesses the Gaze, which endows him with the power to control and objectify, yet the Gaze (like the phallus) is impossible to grasp” (Silverman 1992: 145 in Chaudhuri 2006: 114). Unlike the gaze with a small g that is marked by lack, the Gaze is “transcendent and all-powerful”, it “oppresses and controls”; “it ‘confirms and sustains the subject’s identity’, although it does not determine the form which that identity takes” (Silverman 1992: 145 in Chaudhuri 2006: 113, 114). Finally, “an individual can sadistically identify with the Gaze by projecting his or her own lack, insufficiency, or desire onto another” (Chaudhuri 2006: 114). We claim that the same happens with the terrifying female voice-as-object in *Nightmare*.

¹¹ Hanson has also written about the construction – and the destabilisation – of normative gendered subjectivities, the “haunting of the male discourse” through the use of the voice in the female gothic films, and about the uncanny female voice that comes from a blind space (Hanson 2007: 101-110, 121-131). In her analysis that is similar to the one of Fessas, she draws not so much from Chion or Silverman, than from the work of Gorbman, and the theorisations of Didier Anzieu. In a way parallel to Silverman, Anzieu talks about an “auditory imaginary”, describing “a phase that precedes the Lacanian mirror phase, which signals the child’s entry into language and the Symbolic”; Anzieu calls this an “auditory mirror” (qtd. in Hanson 2007: 123).

To understand the protagonist's radical down-spiralling course we need to look into the relationship between masculine identity and desire. Thodoris seems unable to handle the loss of his wife. The film opens with Thodoris contemplating on his marriage in a voice-over. Almost miraculously we are introduced to Juan. Juan's narrative function is quite similar to Evi's, even though he is not so much the protagonist's ideal ego, as his superego: it is not coincidental that Juan appears when Thodoris starts to become jealous and paranoid about his wife being constantly away (with her girlfriends, at the gym, etc.), while the two of them grow apart sexually (see McGowan's analysis of *Lost Highway* [Lynch, 1997], 2008: 160). This is when the superegoic figure of Juan appears, a cruel and insatiable agency that surveils and records everything (he presents Thodoris with photos of Sophie having sex with other men for money), while it also bombards and torments Thodoris with impossible demands, and mocks his failed attempts to meet them.¹² To look at oneself from that (patriarchal) point-of-view is what pushes Thodoris to his gradual deterioration. The nightmarish effect is that now not just his 'normal' life, but also his fantasy seems repulsive, as he is unable to enjoy, and remains castrated in all possible universes (see Žižek 2000: 15). In the end, faced with the prospect of an endless repetition of failure, the hero rebels against the patriarchal fantasy, and opts for the radical one, of liberating self-annihilation.

We also suspect that Sophie is not his true object of desire after all; nor is it her substitute, Eva. His real fixation is with Juan. Thodoris's rage against his antagonist testifies to repressed homoerotic desire. All their verbal exchanges call attention to penises, testicles and male bodily functions, while, apart from their kiss, there is also a metaphorical sex scene with Juan: during Thodoris's anal sex (his self-confessed ultimate forbidden fantasy) scene with Dolores, he repeatedly calls her Juan. This scene has a multiple signification; on the one hand, it provides a fantasmatic answer to the question "what does the woman want?", that torments Thodoris: Dolores merely wants what Thodoris wants. At the same time, anal sex has been repeatedly used in film to "signal women's filth and inferiority" (Purcell 2012: 133); however, on the other hand the connotations of domination and debasement are basically aimed at Juan, something that obviously does not leave patriarchal hetero-norms unproblematised. This is the point of no return for Thodoris; in his dream he kills Sophie (the castrating woman) and announces her forever gone; from that point

¹² The superego is the imperative of *jouissance* (Lacan 1998: 3). This imperative to enjoy is a kind of twisted ethical duty, which takes the form of a violent intrusion that eventually brings more pain than pleasure (<http://www.lacan.com/essays/?p=182>. Accessed: 25 September 2017). This is precisely what Juan does; he sanctions Thodoris for not enjoying, for giving up on his desire. The guilt the protagonist experiences under Juan's superegoic pressure demonstrates that he is effectively guilty of betraying his desire (see *ibid.*: 314).

onward he only tries to find Juan, whose traces he has (also) lost. While looking for him, he finds Eva instead, something that supports the theory that Eva never was, there was only Juan, and it is with him that Thodoris embarks on a brief relationship with. In fact, the narrator is incapable of entering a loving heterosexual relationship until he destroys Juan, the film coding their relationship as a metaphor for sexual confusion. And since Juan is a part of Thodoris, his demise ends in self-destruction.

The “acousmètre” – the voice of the Other – is also employed in *The Bachelor*, rendering the story uncanny, as if narrated from the protagonist’s unconscious. This effect is enhanced by the cyclical narrative of the film itself; Thodoris’s unreal voice-over and obscene laughter at the beginning and at the end of the film comes from an impossible place, as he is already dead. Furthermore, in lieu of the unsettling psychotic female voice in *Nightmare*, here we have the voice that belongs to Juan, who exerts a mesmerising influence over the character (see Chion 1999: 17-29). Thodoris’s first encounter with Juan is over the phone; we never see Juan speaking on the other end of the line. At this point one could well object, since on other occasions Juan *does* appear on screen (however, crucially, although there are scenes with Juan present, he is never shown when conversing with Thodoris on the telephone). Nevertheless, we argue that he may still be considered an *acousmètre*, since his presence is decisively unreal. It is not merely that he has the power to manipulate Thodoris; he appears to be omniscient, omnipotent, and ubiquitous. Juan is in several ways reminiscent of the “Mystery Man” in *Lost Highway* (Lynch, 1997). In this context we could also employ Lacan’s use of the Moebius Strip (Arrigo and Young 1998: 236). Like the notorious slip of paper that represents an impossible topology, the Lacanian analysis of psychosis describes it as infinitely cyclical, and so its repetition echoes the return of the repressed;¹³ an apt way to demonstrate the uncanny erasure of the distinction between inside and outside. The encounter with Juan is a turning point “denoting the suture of the imaginary and symbolic in a way that ‘hides’ the primordial cut”, which “instigated this topological figure in the first place; the cut that is the unconscious (or, in Lacanian terminology: the Real)” (see Herzogenrath 1999, online article). For reality to remain a coherent illusion, it is necessary to suture off the Real; this is the only way to prevent “the subject from falling into psychosis” (ibid.). So, just like the Mystery Man, Juan appears when a change of personality is close. And precisely because there is no external vantage point from which to contemplate the story, viewers are forced to adopt the protagonist’s deranged perspective. If Juan is a figment of Thodoris’s

¹³ McGowan writes that “fantasy is not an escape from an unsatisfying social reality, but a way of repeating it; one fantasizes oneself a different person, but the traumatic disruption of the impossible object-cause of desire remains” (2007: 156).

imagination, in the scene where he is talking to the latter on the phone we have Thodoris talking to himself in a different voice, or Thodoris speaking in two different voices (hence the acousmatic dimension and function of this voice), the voice of his superego completely externalized, while the impossible (i.e., Thodoris being simultaneously on both ends of the telephone line) is represented in a realistic way. This narrative device challenges the patriarchal premises of the text, and destabilizes the seamless construction of masculinities; by dragging viewers into an ugly journey inside Thodoris's unconscious, where there is no way out, the film seems to criticize how the modern, capitalist-driven world has erased men's sense of self, leaving them impotent. This is effectively exemplified by the constant presence of lustrous billboards throughout the film, that do not seem to serve any narrative function other than to demonstrate the contrast between the ideal embodiments of masculinity illustrated on the posters, and the male characters in the film (the most telling example of the latter being the ridiculous flabby gangster, whom his mother calls to ask what he would like for dinner).¹⁴

The deeper we are dragged into Thodoris's unconscious the more sordid the world becomes, as it loses its symbolic meaning, and as the fantasy that supports it collapses. Thodoris starts collecting cockroaches as pets (a possible allusion to Kafka's *Metamorphosis*), which he puts in jars, and frequents in a seedy underground bar where you can see, hear, and smell the building's sewage pipes (the stain of the Real); a place "where even vodka tastes like shit"—shit symbolising that, by now, the protagonist has been reduced to an excremental existence. Just like the brothel in the film, this peculiarly sunny and ridiculous place is too a place of obscene enjoyment, or *jouissance* (the opposite of bachelor Thodoris's squalid, gray apartment – i.e. the drab, lonely world of desire), where Thodoris is confronted with his Id (the misogynist idiot bar owner), as well as with his ideal ego, the sworn bachelor Sarantaris (Stathis Livathinos), who represents a perfectly self-reliant, hegemonic phallic masculinity. At the bar, in a final blow to Thodoris's sanity, Sarantaris forces him to re-enact his Oedipal trauma and fear of castration (he brags about having sex with a woman, while her young son is present at the apartment, which is essentially a description of

¹⁴ The poster ads represent gender utopias, where men and women know exactly what they want: on one of the posters the slogan reads: "She is sure of one thing...", underneath the picture of a sexy woman. This is basically the opposite of how Sophie, Eva, and the rest of indecisive, enigmatic women are represented in *The Bachelor*—remember that film noir typically revolves around the hero solving some mystery, the mystery being the enigma of female sexuality. The advertising posters also depict heroic males/ideal egos (interestingly, one of them bears a striking resemblance to Juan) against landscapes from the American West, and deserts—by extension, contemporary Athens, the Greek capital, is represented as an urban frontier. The posters function as a Lacanian mirror (or rather the movie screen-as-mirror), and they also interpellate the hero through tautological taglines such as "Be you, be Cooper!".

the primal scene). What follows is a complete collapse of Thodoris's subjectivity, due to the intrusion of the Real. As Thodoris burns the cockroaches, which represent his last attachment to any meaningful reality (he tells himself "this cockroach means something, the cockroaches want to tell me something"), he sheds the last shred of his identity (notice also how he has tattooed a cockroach at the back of his head), and descends into insanity.

It would be tempting to claim that representation of a masculinity-in-crisis in *The Bachelor* necessarily leads to the rejection of the dominant order. However, thinking about the dynamics of societies as a whole, we may recognise the complicity of subordinate male groups with the hegemonic project. "The number of men", Connell claims, "rigorously practicing the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from this hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend [and] the overall subordination of women" (2005: 79). Thodoris does not care to consciously try to overturn the dominant gender order; However, even though male viewers can always identify with the hyper-masculine Juan, or Sarantaris (the sworn bachelor who consumes women and then discards them), those two characters are cartoonish parodies of masculinity. Juan is the persona that Thodoris's deranged mind creates after the image of what he thinks his wife – and women in general – desire (a 'Latin lover'—the exotic Other that supposedly has access to some secret *jouissance*). This explains his name (Juan), as well as the nickname given to Thodoris in his fantasy (Carlos).¹⁵ Not only does Juan know perfectly what women want (which, in Thodoris's paranoid fantasy is a giant phallus, as the latter describes Juan at one point). He seems to know not simply the answer to Sophie's enigma, but also to the famous enigma posed by Freud, and recorded by Ernest Jones (1953: 421): "What does a woman want?" (*Was will das Weib?*) In other words, he is an impossible character, part of a fantasy that provides a – tentative, often ridiculous – answer to the unbearableness of (Thodoris's) desire. But even Sarantaris seems too 'perfect', from a patriarchal perspective. Essentially, he is just a lampoon of yuppie hegemonic masculinity, propagated by lifestyle magazines of the time in Greece. Consequently, male spectators can eventually only identify with the bodiless voice of Thodoris, with his fallen, pathetic, impotent masculinity, with Thodoris who fails to possess his object of desire (on which his identity depends) even in fantasy (he eventually kills himself), or to identify with fantasmatic bodies and impossible masculinities, since all the other male characters in the film are obviously figments of Thodoris's deranged imagination.

¹⁵ Of course the double names also signify a crisis of identity (see also how Eva calls Thodoris "Theodoriadis", combining his name and surname, until at some point Thodoris uses it himself at the bank in a slip of tongue).

Women (including female spectators), however, still seem to have no real place in the narrative. They will always remain the Other, even to the castrated masculinity represented by Thodoris. At least at first glance, female characters exist only for the men's pleasure. However, it is very important to note that while "noir is undoubtedly organised around male desires and [a] male point of view, [...] noir films articulate concerns that are hugely important for women and for feminism" (Tasker 2013: 360); Neo-noir's self-reflexivity has significant implications for the representation of noir women (ibid.: 363). In *The Bachelor* female characters are perceived as both pleasurable *and* terrifying, nightmarish visions. Even if the text itself does not explicitly push any feminist agenda, it does invite such a reading through its deployment of female characters who model a certain "femininity that is both absolutely consonant with contemporary norms of gendered identity, while also being in some significant ways off-key" (ibid.: 353). The fact that every male character is represented as either moronic, distasteful or obnoxious offers another opportunity for subversion. Women are indeed objectified and portrayed negatively, but from the point of view of *these* men.

Finally, it is crucial to add that, in terms of representation, male psychosis in *The Bachelor* (just like female psychosis in *Nightmare*) may be read as a form of resistance against the dominant patriarchal discourse and hegemonic gender norms. Viewers are mercilessly dragged into Thodoris's world of violence, nihilism, and misogynistic outbursts, but it seems that it is particularly for male viewers that there is no safety exit.

CONCLUSION

In our article we discussed the Greek noirs *Nightmare* (1961) and *The Bachelor* (1997), both representing Greek society in-flux. *Nightmare* reflects anxieties about modernity, while *The Bachelor* exemplifies the postmodern transformation of the country, a process marked by a proliferation of Media, celebrity TV, pretentious clubbing, and conspicuous consumption. Through multiple screens we are watching a version of the American dream in Greece gone awry. Our basic argument is that representations of gender reflect transformations. In *Nightmare*, 'modern' female sexuality that deviates from patriarchal standards, and female desire that transgresses traditional mores in Greece of the time are identified with paranoia and psychosis. However, drawing from theorists like Silverman, we have seen how Andreou's film offers – through its particular use of the female voice – female characters and female viewers a space to recuperate their desire, even when by the end of the film patriarchy is restored (but at what cost?). *Nightmare* provides an example of how Greek noir of the 1960s can create a crucial critical space that allows for alternative gender and sexual ontologies, which challenge the stifling binaries of the dominant gender order. In this sense

it can be part of a wider political project that re-appropriates specific Greek popular culture texts for progressive purposes.

On the surface, *The Bachelor* is a misogynistic fantasy. At the same time, we have also seen how, through the use of irony, and through the representation of masculinity and male psychosis, it can be read as undermining its own premises. Panayotopoulos's text features moments of surprising lucidity where patriarchy painfully recognises female agency (such as the scene where Thodoris admits to a bartender that Sophie might have left him to become a call-girl merely because "she wanted to; it was her choice").

In conclusion, although neither of the films could be straightforwardly characterised as progressive in their overriding ideology, they nevertheless manifest a plethora of contradictions and ambivalence in their narratives, *mise-en-scène*, and the portrayal of gender embodiments that illustrate a patriarchy that is at stake. This has allowed readings against the grain, which show that alternative meanings may always surface, threatening to undermine the hegemonic discourse on gender and sexuality.

Note 1: An extended version of the part about *Nightmare* can be found in the chapter titled 'Female desire, schizophrenia, and the female voice in the psychoanalytic Greek *film noir Nightmare*', which is part of Nikitas Fessas's PhD thesis.

Note 2: All translations are the authors'.

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