

Greek Neo-Noir: Reflecting a Narrative of Crisis

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ABSTRACT

This article proposes a brief chronology/evolution of film noir in the context of Greek Cinema, in order to look at Greek neo-noirs as narratives of crisis. The article has two case studies: Nikos Nikoladis's O chamenos ta pernei ola/Loser Takes All (2002) and Alexis Alexiou's Tetarti 04:45/Wednesday 04:45 (2015). These two films are products of two distinct periods in modern Greek history, that are, however, linked. We claim that Greek filmmakers have used (neo)noir characteristics, such as its tropes, and typology of characters, to represent both the Greek financial and socio-political crisis, but also, vice versa, they have used nationally and historically specific versions of (Greek) crisis as a backdrop for their neo-noir narratives. Therefore, we argue that films like Loser Takes All, and Wednesday 04:45 both reflect and mediate the crisis in their form and content, while they feed these neo-noir representations back into Greek society and culture, as they constitute a lens through which to look at, and make sense of periods of crisis.

KEYWORDS

Alexiou
crisis
film noir
genre
Greek cinema
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Nikolaidis

INTRODUCTION

Whether, as James Naremore (2008: 9, 311) puts it, noir constitutes a period, a genre, a cycle, a style, a phenomenon, or even a discourse, classic film noir of the 1940s and 1950s has greatly influenced global cinema, including European national cinemas. The popularity of classic film noir also gave rise to the neo-noir phenomenon in the late 1960s to early 1970s in the US, which also had a significant impact on world cinemas. Among other European countries, such as Italy, Spain and France, Greece has also been influenced by classic film noir with a number of Greek films, appearing in the 1950s and the 1960s, such as *Eglima sto Kolonaki/Crime in Kolonaki* (Aliferis, 1959), *Eglima sta paraskinia/Murder Backstage* (Katsouridis, 1960) and *Lolites tis Athinas/Satan in Blond* (Papakostas, 1965) among others, that can be said to be part of a Greek film noir corpus. Although after the 1960s there has been a limited number of Greek films of noir style, from the 2000s onwards, a series of Greek films appeared that seem to share some (neo)noir characteristics, while they also refer to narratives of crisis.

This article aims to examine the post-2000s Greek neo-noirs focusing on two films as case studies, Nikos Nikoladis's *O chamenos ta pernei ola/Loser Takes All* (2002) and Alexis Alexiou's *Tetarti 04:45/Wednesday 04:45* (2015), and reflecting on how film noir is re-appropriated in Greek cinema. The article will also trace common threads in these two Greek neo-noirs, and further discuss how neo-noir is used in the Greek context in order to reflect and comment on the narrative of crisis. The two films have been created within a thirteen-year gap, and take place in different moments in Greek history, however both films' narrative, aesthetics, and *mise-en-scène* nod to neo-noir, while referring to economic and socio-political crises, providing, at the same time, a social commentary.

FILM NOIR AND NEO-NOIR: AN INITIAL CODIFICATION

As Naremore notes, it is easier to recognise film noir than to actually provide a definition for it, since not all film noirs share the same common set of characteristics (2008: 9). Some typical noir visual and narrative themes and tropes include low-key photography, dark and wet city streets, neon lights, *femme fatales* and masculinities-in-crisis, Oedipal triangles, the cornered noir patsy, betrayal, greed, lust, existential nihilism and despair, and dark or bittersweet endings.¹ In terms of its history, it has been generally accepted that film noir originated in the US, was created and reached its peak in the 1940s and 1950s, and was *a posteriori* labeled 'black film' in France, when a great number of American crime thrillers were screened there after WWII. Critics like Borde and Chaumeton (1955), and Silver and Ward (1993) initially treated film noir as an indigenous American form that was born under specific socio-cultural and

¹ See for instance Naremore (2008); Ewing (1999: 73); Park (2011: 1).

historical circumstances (post-World War II and the Great Depression). However, classic film noir was later regarded as a transnational phenomenon that permeates cultures and national cinemas,² has undoubtedly influenced cinemas around the globe, and gave rise to neo-noir.

In the late 1960s – early 1970s, neo-noir emerged in the US, at a time when Hollywood was facing a financial crisis, and had thus “turned to the possibilities of a genre that appeared to have died out a decade earlier [...] but which was gaining attention in popular and academic critical writing about classical Hollywood” (Bould et al 2009: 4). While some of the filmmakers of this period used the same notion of film noir to upgrade the detective stories, some of the émigrés filmmakers and film graduates in Hollywood, such as Roman Polanski with *Chinatown* (1974), brought with them influences from European movements with which they infused film noir, revitalising thus the American crime stories (Bould et al 2009: 4). And while classic film noir filmmakers can be regarded as being rather unaware of creating a film noir genre, neo-noir filmmakers *consciously* make films with film noir in mind, and are aware of the historicity of the genre (Bould et al 2009: 5). Richard Dyer in his analysis of *pastiche* noir, as he characterises neo-noir, explains that pastiche noir looks like classic noir but it is “not the thing itself” (2007: 123). Dyer notes three major differences between classic noir and pastiche noir: colour, sexual explicitness, and music (2007: 123). In neo-noir, the film is not black and white any more but the filmmakers find ways to assimilate the black and white atmosphere by using black and white props, costumes and settings, as well as bright colours for contrast, such as bright reds. While in classic noirs sexual lust was present between the characters, it was never spelt out. In the case of neo-noirs, sexuality is explicit. As far as music is concerned, neo-noirs feature anachronistic saxophone and strings music, which has been associated with the film scores of classic noirs of the 1940s and 1950s, even though this music did not in fact feature in classic film noir music scores, and is a product of the 1960s (Dyer 2007: 124).

Although neo-noir emerged in the US, it influenced global cinemas in the same way that classic noir did. According to Spicer, both “film noir and neo-noir frequently engage with social, political, and cultural issues that are particular to [a] nation” (2007: 13) and “[e]ven in [their] postmodern form, some European neo-noirs retain their ability to shock and challenge, and to engage with substantive, and nationally specific political issues” (ibid.: 15). Classic film noir has also been considered implicitly political, as its pessimism has been perceived as a social commentary on the aftershock of US depression, and the aftermath of WWII (Borde and Chaumeton qtd in Ewing 1999: 75). More specifically, classic noir has been read as providing the form and/or the content for a universal

² See Spicer (2007); Fay and Nieland (2009).

critique of American values, and the American way of life, and also the discontents of a globalised modernity, the traumatic clash of the latter with tradition, national and local cultures, the violent permeation of indigenous spaces, the flow, but also the uprooting of populations, the alienation, dislocation, and existential despair that all this entails. Therefore, noir, but also neo-noir, deal with what has been succinctly called by Fay and Neiland “the crisis of the dislocated present – of being left to chance between a vanished past and an unknown future” (2009: 113).

GREEK FILM NOIR(S) AND CRISIS: AN ATTEMPT AT PERIODISATION

In terms of chronology and periodisation, on the one hand, the divisions between Old, New, and Contemporary Greek Cinema seem to plead for a basic distinction of the Greek films produced between the mid-1950s and the late 1960s that are black and white, and feature classic noir elements. The first Greek films that appeared to be influenced by classic film noir were produced mostly during the era of the Old Greek Cinema. These films were produced both by big film studios, such as Finos Films, but also by minor ones specialising in genre films (for example, Tzal Films). These films are diverse both in form, style, and in content, were written by pulp detective fiction writers, such as Yannis Maris or Nikos Foskolos, and feature a group of actors who were identified with these early attempts at noir in Greece: Nikos Kourkoulos, Zoi Laskari, Christos Tsaganeas, Maro Kondou, Spiros Fokas, among others. The book *Se Skoteinous Dromous: To Film Noir ston Elliniko Kinimatografo/In a Dark Passage: Film Noir in Greek Cinema* (Dermetzoglou 2007) features an extensive list of films with noir elements produced during this period right before the rise of New Greek Cinema, with the first film mentioned chronologically being *To pontikaki/Little Mouse* (Tsiforos 1954). The list of films, the chronology, and the specific narrative on the genre-in-question offered by the book is precarious and debatable, as the latter does not feature the explicit methodology involved behind the selection of the noir corpus. However, it remains the only publication on film noir in the Greek context.³ According to the specific account, there is a five-year gap

³ Film noir has not been considered a ‘traditional’ Greek film genre. In fact, until recently, film noir as a genre term was very limited in the context of Greek cinema, and was rarely mentioned within the Greek academic and critical discourse. There were, however, references to genres and cycles that have affinities to noir, or are considered subcategories of it, and also references to wider labels under which noir is regularly listed. For instance, Aglaia Mitropoulou talks about a transposition of ‘astynomiko’/cop melodramas into the Greek context (1980: 118), while Yannis Soldatos uses terms such as (Greek) cop/crime/detective movie (1989: 236-244). Until 2012, there were some sporadic references from Greek academics to a Greek film noir cycle, the origins of which can be traced somewhere between the late 1950s and the early 1960s. For example, Maria Komninou addresses the question of whether we can talk about a film noir or a gangster film category in the context of Greek cinema of the

between *O panikos/Panic* (1969) and the next ‘appearance’ of noir, which is *Eglima sto Kavouri/Death Kiss* (Karagiannis, 1974). This seems to fit a provisional chronology and to the – to some extent, arbitrary, but useful – division (between noir and neo-noir) proposed here, not only because the latter film belongs to New Greek Cinema, but also because of the use of colour, and, perhaps most importantly, because of the much more explicit representation of sexual deviance, and sexual violence. As per the chronology implied in *In A Dark Passage: Film Noir in Greek Cinema*, after *Death Kiss* the next neo-noir Greek film can be said to be *Epikindino paihnidi/Dangerous Game* (Karypidis) in 1982. From then onwards, neo-noirs appear sporadically. This can be attributed to the decline of the production companies that came with the transition to New Greek Cinema, and the reduced use of genre as an artistic ‘weapon of choice’ that accompanied the rise of auteur cinema in Greece.

However, from the 1980s onwards, noir elements can be identified in films of the Greek auteurs of the time, such as *Ipogeia diadromi/Underground Passage* (Doxiadis, 1983), *Eleftheri katadysi/Love Knot* (Panousopoulos, 1995), *O ergenis/The Bachelor* (Panayotopoulos, 1997), and *Oi arithmimenoi/The Numbered* (Psarras, 1998), which are linked to neo-noir due to their style and aesthetics, their complicated plots and conspiracies, and their pessimistic, cynical, disillusioned, lonely and alienated characters. Furthermore, in recreating the noir atmosphere, many of these films refer to American classic noirs of the 1940s and 1950s, and some of them even seem to reference the first Greek films that were influenced by classic noir in the 1960s (for instance, *Dangerous Game*, starring Laskari and Fokas, who were featuring in the first Greek films influenced by classic film noir, could be read as alluding to the era of the 1960s). These Greek auteurs, such as Nikos Nikolaidis, were arguably cinephiles and aware of the American classic noir, therefore they were consciously making neo-noirs as “[n]eo noir knows its past. It knows the rules of the game” (Bould 2009: 5). Several Greek filmmakers who appear in the 1980s, like Dimitris Panayiotatos, and the 1990s, such as Nikos Grammatikos and Nikos Triantafyllidis, already reference noir in terms of aesthetics and themes, and will continue – along with, much more recently, directors such as Yannis Economides – to use noir elements in their films produced throughout the current period of Contemporary Greek Cinema. Especially the resurgence of Greek noir in the 1990s can be seen in relation to a wider return to genre that accompanied the transition to Contemporary Greek Cinema, with Greek filmmakers reusing and

1950s and the 1960s (2001: 93). Also, Maria Chalkou recognises “noir-like qualities” that were introduced in the Greek social dramas and melodramas of the 1960s, in “the wider context of generic innovations” (2008: 153). Karalis (2012) also uses the term noir, to talk about Greek films of this era.

reinventing genres, in order to make them commercial again (Chalkou 2012: 246).

This trend continues throughout the 2000s, with Greek neo-noirs seemingly becoming even more common, and with many hybrid Greek films that are mainly influenced by film noir atmosphere. Moreover, some Greek films after 2009 that have been categorised as belonging to the ‘weird’ new wave of Greek filmmaking can also be considered as neo-noirs.⁴ We recognise two categories of neo-noir after 2000. The first instance is the Greek *retro-noirs* that are explicit *homages* to or pastiches of classic Hollywood and European noirs, and of their characters and plots. Indicatively, *Big Hit* (Zonaras, 2012) and *Sti skia tou Lemmy Caution/In the Shadow of Lemmy Caution* (Zervos, 2002) refer to the classic noir *The Big Heat* (Lang, 1953) and to the French science-fiction noir *Alphaville* (Godard, 1965) respectively. These films take place in ahistorical, timeless and placeless hardboiled spaces, their characters are taken directly out of classic film noir, and every national, socio-historical, and culturally specific reference to Greece is basically effaced or hidden. In the Greek context, the retro-noir films might be seen as regressive and reactionary in their attempt to repress the contemporary Greek socio-economic crisis-context (it can be argued though that in the case of Zervos’s 2002 film the crisis is partially foreshadowed), with their timeless, de-historicised or ahistorical, mythical noir settings and nostalgic allusions to (or allusionistic nostalgia for) less complicated times.⁵ For Wager (2005: 91-92), Hollywood retro-noirs, with their “shiny and clean cinematography, and their shallow yet beautiful characters”, are part of a wider postmodern trend that “glorifies surface over depth, accessibility over complexity, and the past as digestible confection over the past as indecipherable problem.”⁶ Especially Zervos’s film uses the couple of Lakis Komninou and Elena Nathanail, both stars of the late 1960s – early 1970s, carrying both retro connotations of a Golden era of expectation and hope for both Greek society and the Greek Cinema, as well as of the disillusionment that followed. Films like *I pareksigisi/Misunderstanding* (Stavrakas, 1983), which is an explicit adaptation of Melville’s *Le Doulos/The Finger Man* (1963), as well as the short film *Humphrey* (Gekas, 2017), featuring a young Greek man who assumes the classic noir persona of Humphrey Bogart, could also be categorised as retro-noirs.

The other category includes films like *To mikro psari/Stratos* (Economides, 2014) and *Oi aisthimaties/The Sentimentalists* (Triantafyllidis, 2014), but also *Loser Takes All, Kourastika na skotono tous agapitikous sou/I’m Tired of Killing*

⁴ 2009 has been considered as a turning point for Greek filmmaking. See, for instance, Papadimitriou (2014); Chalkou (2012).

⁵ “In retro-noir”, Wager writes, “the varied pleasures of the classic noir text are replaced by a reactionary nostalgia for a fantasized past”; “this retro fantasy is a burgeoning and regressive trend” (2005: 91-92).

Your Lovers (Panayotopoulos, 2002)⁷, *J.A.C.E.* (Karamaghiolis, 2011), and *Wednesday 04:45*, which keep some classic noir themes, character archetypes, and iconography, but at the same time they take place in an unmistakably contemporary Greek setting. The films of this category appear more hybrid, as they use elements from other genres or even mediums, such as the short film *The Noir Project* (Vardarinos, 2014) that deals with domestic violence during the time of crisis, and uses live action together with animation that heavily references the noir style and atmosphere.

The fact that the Greek neo-noirs feature a narrative of crisis and reflect a specific socio-political situation is not atypical, since neo-noir has also been seen as a political commentary and, as noted above, noir and neo-noir frequently engages with nationally specific, social, political, and cultural issues. After 2000, Greece started being affected by socio-political and economic turmoil. The 2000s were, for the most part, a period of intense economic growth for Greece, fuelled by extensive external borrowing that was facilitated by the country's entry to the Eurozone. The organisation of the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004 played a major role in fuelling the growth of the economy. However, according to one narrative, in retrospect this choice has proven catastrophic, as it triggered huge borrowing that affected the Greek economy. Eventually all this, along with phenomena of governmental corruption and economic scandals, led to the outburst of the Greek financial and socio-political crisis in 2009. By the end of 2009, the shock of the size of the national debt had just emerged. Since 2009, Greece has been struggling with financial stagnation, very high levels of unemployment, as well as crippling social welfare cuts. These issues are represented in the films of this category. The films produced before 2002 (*Loser Takes All*, *I'm Tired of Killing Your Lovers*, among others) were created before the crisis, but clearly depict a socio-political and economic crisis that was building up, and led to the socioeconomic and political turmoil of 2009, with the official announcement of the crisis. The films produced after 2009 (*Stratos*, *The Sentimentalists*, *Wednesday 04:45*, among others) take place against the backdrop of the Greek socio-political situation, and the economic crisis.

The Greek socio-economic crisis appears in various mediated forms in numerous contemporary Greek films, from mainstream (with films such as *An ... /What If...*

⁷ *I'm Tired of Killing Your Lovers* features a noir plot and characters, using Athens of 2002 as its background. It is interesting that, just like in *Loser Takes All*, even though this is pre-crisis Greece/Athens, already there are some ominous signs of what is to follow. The protagonist, a publisher, is described just like Alexiou's Stelios in *Wednesday 4:45*: he lives 'beyond his means', spends money to stay in fancy hotels and to travel the world, he has kept mistresses, and as a businessman he is up-to-his-neck in debt, as he has managed his publishing house's finances poorly. In order to cope, he constantly borrows from his rich aunt, and also overcharges his credit cards.

[Papakaliatis, 2012]), to films of the Greek Weird Wave (such as *To agori troei to fagito tou pouliou/Boy Eating the Bird's Food* [Lygizos, 2012]). In the case of Greek neo-noir, this attempt on the part of contemporary Greek artists to grant, through film, visibility to the Greek crisis, and its effects on the body of the city and of the Greek people, could be seen in relation to a few Greek noirs, or films with noir elements, produced during the late 1960s, such as *Kierion* (Theos, 1967[1974]), and *Listeia stin Athina/Robbery in Athens* (Serdaris, 1969), where the city-in-crisis plays a central role in the film through outdoor shots that reflect the life of the Greek city. Greek neo-noirs after 2009 refer specifically to the current crisis. For example, *The Sentimentalists* features a representative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Athens (the fictional equivalent of real-life IMF representative Paul Thomsen), who is represented as a pervert, who sadistically tortures, and practically rapes a young Greek woman who prostitutes herself, and leaves her to bleed to death, suggesting that the IMF is raping Greece's working youth. In a similar vein, in *I teliki apopliromi/The Final Payoff* (Leontaritis, 2013), the narrative takes place in Greece of the crisis, where usury and debt prevails, and where debt needs to be paid off at all costs. Feelings of loss and alienation, existential angst and despair linked to the Greek financial and social crisis and economic depression can be felt on the body of crisis-ridden Athens and its people, as expressed in the contemporary Greek neo noirs, such as *Wednesday 04:45* and *Stratos*. Especially in *Wednesday 04:45*, one can trace the effects of the Greek socioeconomic crisis and neoliberal policies that have been implemented, effects that the director paints in a noir form.

The two films that will next be examined as case studies have been selected because they are filmed and set in two different moments in time with regards to the recent socio-political and economic crisis in Greece; while the films have very different narratives, they share elements that meet under the generic characteristics of film noir, and the way that film noir reflects a crisis. *Loser Takes All* was filmed and takes place in 2002 Greece, during the transition from the drachmas to euro, and the preparation for the Athens Olympic Games of 2004, the time that led up to the crisis. Although the crisis was not yet explicit in Greek society, some of its aspects were present since the transition to the new Millennium. With *Loser Takes All*, Nikolaidis for the first time clearly maps his film onto Athens of the 2000s, leaving the placeless and timeless spaces used in his previous films aside,⁸ and conjures up an image of a city in despair. *Wednesday 04:45* is clearly set in 2010; it was filmed during the crisis, when its impact on Greek people was evident, although preparations for the film had started before the outburst of the crisis. The decision for the story to be set to

⁸ *Ta kourelia tragoudane akoma/Wretches Are Still Singing* (1979) and *Glykia symmoria/Sweet Bunch* (1983) are the only films that can be said to make references to places and times, but still they are not explicit, neither do they feature any landmark or space that is characteristic of Athens.

coincide with the beginning of the crisis was not a coincidence. With this film, Alexiou shows the ramifications the crisis has to a middle-class man who acts as if he belongs to the upper-middle class, and leads a life that he cannot afford (Chalkou 2016). In what follows, we will attempt to show how the two films reflect a crisis through three main elements: the representation of the main characters that constitute the usual typology of noir, the representation of the city of Athens, as well as that of a general change in Greek society.

LOSER TAKES ALL: TOWARDS A CRISIS

Nikolaidis's use of noir is exemplary in Greek cinema,⁹ as he pastiches film noir together with other genres and creates a body of work that is personal, political, and self-reflexive.¹⁰ Nikolaidis's greatest concern in all his films is the future of society and of cinema, a concern that takes the form of a nightmare that is imminent.¹¹ However, with *Loser Takes All*, Nikolaidis leaves the 'futuristic' touches aside, and shows that the nightmare he anticipated is here (in Greece of 2002), and it is not fictional.

In the film, a man in his forties (Yannis Aggelakas), who is sick and on medication, stays with Elsa (Iphigenia Asteriadi), who owns a bar called 'Decadence', and her nineteen-year-old lover (Simon Bloom), whom he calls Kid. Man drives Odette (Tzeni Kitseli), a drunken customer, from Elsa's bar to her house, has sex with her, and steals a ring and her car. The next day, a private detective asks Man to watch Madalie (Louise Attah), an African stripper in the nightclub 'Eldorado', infamous for drug trafficking. Man meets Madalie and her friend, joins Madalie in a drug sale, and the nightclub owner hires him and Kid for a drug-dealing errand. Suspecting that it is a trap, Elsa, Odette, and Madalie join the two men in a mission to investigate the case. When they realise that Madalie's friend is collaborating with the police, they swap cocaine with icing

⁹ When Nikolaidis died in 2007, the 48th International Thessaloniki Film Festival presented a film retrospective of his work, together with a special event titled *In a Dark Passage: Film Noir in Greek Cinema*, which hosted screenings of fifteen Greek film noirs from 1958 to 2004, while an eponymous book was published by the Film Festival press. The festival's press release about the Greek division of the festival reads that the special event for the Greek film noir is "directly linked to Nikolaidis's retrospective" (48th International Thessaloniki Film Festival). This is because the selected Greek films "locate the commonalities between a genre that redefined the notion of time, life and death on the big screen, and of a pioneer Greek filmmaker who has set these notions in a completely distinct way from the established Greek cinematography" (ibid.).

¹⁰ Mikela Fotiou claims that Nikolaidis's cinema abides by Richard Dyer's analysis of pastiche, and that his films are specifically a "pasticcio of pastiches" (Dyer 2007: 126), meaning a pastiche of various genres and films that are mixed together, but keep their characteristics intact. See also Fotiou (2017).

¹¹ For this reason, Nikolaidis has also named the trilogy consisting of *Evridiki BA 2037/Euridice BA 2037* (1975), *Proini peripolos/Morning Patrol* (1987) and *The Zero Years* (2005), "To Schima tou Efialti pou Erchetai"/"The Shape of the Coming Nightmare" (Nikolaidis 2006).

sugar, keep the money, and escape as soon as the police opens fire. Kid is shot and dies at the hospital, Man gives the women their share of the money, urging them to leave, and he stays back, throws away his last pills, and dies.

In line with film noir and neo-noir, *Loser Takes All* has a claustrophobic feeling, and the sense of finality is pervasive. Man is sick and he knows that he will die. Man and Kid's obsession with the Apocalypse of John, to which they keep referring, and which concerns a catastrophic future for humanity, as well as their existential nihilism, foreshadows the characters' respective deaths. Finality and disillusionment are reinforced by the motto "what matters is *here no more*" ("σημασία έχει όχι πια εδώ") that the protagonists utter. Man seems to have lost faith in everything; he has nothing to look forward to, and is nostalgic about the past, but has come to terms with the fact that that past is gone. For example, the only references to his past life is his canary, named Belafonte after the American singer, songwriter, and actor Harry Belafonte, as well as Sid Vicious's solo album *My Way*¹² that he hands to Kid as memorabilia from his time, showing that the time when rebellion was still an option is now merely a recollection. Moreover, while the characters of the film do not actually form a gang (like they do in other films by Nikolaidis), still, feelings of isolation and solitude propel them to stick together for as long as they can, because in this way they feel that they belong for a while, albeit they know they might not survive. While they do stick together, strong bonds evolve between them, especially between Man and Kid.

While Nikolaidis in the rest of his films pastiches specific films as well as genres, in *Loser Takes All* he does not allude to any specific film, but only pastiches film (neo)noir in general. Cinema does not have the importance it enjoyed in Nikolaidis's previous films, and the 'death' of cinema that Nikolaidis was scared of (Triantafyllidis 1986) is now acknowledged. This is confirmed in a scene taking place in a cinema: as soon as Man is found in the streets in the beginning of the film, he gets inside a cinema, and goes straight to the bathroom in order to freshen-up. There, a film is heard playing from the cinema room. But he is not interested in it; he does not go into the cinema room like, for example, the protagonists in *Morning Patrol* and *The Wretches Are Still Singing*. Man's indifference to the film is probably connected with the filmmaker's concern for the descending course of Cinema, and perhaps for this reason, the film does not pastiche any particular films, but is limited in pastiching the film noir genre.

The representation of the immigrants is also pivotal in the film. The strip-club 'Eldorado' is a made-up place, and it has been given this name as an implicit comment on the situation of the immigrants in Greece of the time. The club employs immigrant women, and it can be considered these women's 'Eldorado':

¹² Sid Vicious's swan song, and his last expression of resistance to the *status quo* through punk rock in 1978.

the place where they ended up in search of a better future. Despite being a fictional place, this club carries cultural connotations. Furthermore, Madalie's inclusion in the film is interrelated to film/neo-noir. As Kaplan states, black characters were missing from classic film noir due to American racism (2000: 183). This absence is substituted by the 'Black' virtue assigned to "women, bad guys and detectives" for "occupying indeterminate and monstrous spaces that Whiteness traditionally reserves for Blackness in our culture" (Manthia Diawara qtd in Kaplan, 2000: 184). Moreover, white characters in classic film noir are 'blackened' by the high contrast lighting that characterises film noir's cinematic language, signifying the "rotten souls of white folks" (Eric Lott qtd in Kaplan, 2000: 185). Therefore, in an attempt to equalise the gang members in this pastiche noir, Nikolaidis casts a black actress¹³ to play alongside the white characters, who are already socio-politically marginalised, and who are 'blackened' by their marginal *milieu* and the film's *mise-en-scène*.

Moreover, in *Loser Takes All*, Nikolaidis projects police brutality against immigrants. In 2002, police attacks and threats towards immigrant populations in Greece became increasingly publicised, and Nikolaidis showcases these incidents as a comment on the overall situation in the new Millennium. The actual representation of the urban setting can be further linked to the classic noir *milieu*, and "the antipathy towards the city" (Thomas 1992: 60-61). Deborah Thomas suggests that the "characteristic anxiety provoked by the contemporary urban setting of film noir" is rooted in the immigrants that populated American cities in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, ascribing a sense of 'Otherness' in the urban spaces, and rendering the cities strange and uncivilised (ibid.). The urban milieu of classic film noir can therefore be further linked to the urban milieu that Nikolaidis projects, where immigrants play a central role in constructing the modern metropolis. At the same time, while Nikolaidis shows the lack of civilization, he does not 'Other' the city through the use of immigrants, and the various social problems they represent, but instead ascribes the role of 'Othering' to the police, and their intolerance towards the immigrants. Subsequently, he suggests that the authorities are responsible for the estranged urban milieu and for the lack of civilization, in the sense that the police fails to have control over what is going on in the city, and ultimately fails to do what it should be doing.

The viewer realises that *Loser Takes All* takes place in Athens in the 2000s through the narrative and the *mise-en-scène*. Man's reluctance to accept euro currency when selling Odette's stolen ring in a pawn shop, and his request for "Greek money" instead, suggest that the film takes place between January 2001 and February 2002, when there was a dual circulation of drachmas and euro.

¹³ This is rare for Greek films of the time, although African immigrants started to appear in Greece early on.

The film is a pastiche noir and consists mainly of night-shots that feature shadows, *chiaroscuro* lighting, neon lights (mostly red to signify blood and finality), and Venetian blinds among others. It also features a film noir milieu, such as bars, nightclubs, and the detective's office. The referentiality of the *mise-en-scène* is also paramount in the film. For instance, the historicity and the importance of the environment can be clearly seen in Elsa's bar, 'Decadence', and its surrounding area. 'Decadence' does not only denote a decadent contemporary society on the verge of a crisis, but it was also a well-known rock club in Athens city centre, which closed down in 2009 – the beginning of the crisis (**Fig. 1**). Specifically, 'Decadence Club' was situated in Exarchia, an area known as a place of congregation for young people with antifascist and anti-authoritarian ideals. The Exarchia area is visually mapped out in the film as Man walks around the city. The camera operates in an observational mode, recording the space in a passive way, and allowing the audience to think, and reach their own conclusions about what is happening in/to the city. Without naming the area, the camera records images that are characteristic of the district: distinctive steps, narrow pedestrian streets, and graffiti-covered buildings.



Fig. 1: The 'Decadence' bar

In particular, graffiti plays a central role in establishing the identity of Exarchia, since it is generally associated with youth culture, and it constitutes a form of resistance towards the legal, political, and religious authorities (Ferrell 1995). Graffiti in Exarchia seems, indeed, to be associated with resistance, since it is frequently used to express attacks on the authorities, and conveys the creators' political messages.¹⁴ Depicting graffiti and Exarchia by night as a dark and almost abandoned area, Nikolaidis contradicts the procedures for rejuvenating

¹⁴ See, for example, Kornetis (2010: 174).

Athens' city centre for the Olympic Games at the time, and specifically contradicts the Chromopolis project. As part of this project, local and international graffiti artists were called to "re-colour the greyness and drabness of the country's industrial past in cities that were to hold Olympic, or parallel events" (Leventis 2013: 2). This fact might signify that the procedures to change the way the city looks are just a mask for the 'decadent' Greek society. A specific real graffiti projected in the film features two young people's faces, and reads "Rest in Peace". This graffiti is dedicated to two young men who were killed when the motorbike they were riding in 2001 was crashed by a police vehicle – the policeman driving it did not stop at the red traffic light. The rage against police brutality reached a new level when the police officer was set free soon after the incident. The inclusion of this graffiti in Nikolaidis's film can be said to anticipate the tragic 2008 incident that shaped Greece's recent history, the murder of fifteen-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos in Exarchia by a police officer, highlighting that history repeats itself, and that the past informs both the present and the future. Additionally, this specific graffiti also confirms that these are not isolated events, but this is a situation that is perpetuated in Exarchia.

The observational mode that Nikolaidis's camera uses to film outdoor locations records homeless people sleeping roughly, along with scavengers, and looters. These images are an exaggerated version of real images detected around the centre of Athens in 2002, but which are very real today in Greece during the crisis, thus they foreshadow the grim future of a decaying society, and foretell the situation the Greek capital can be found nowadays. Likewise, the piles of garbage that suggest the inability of the state to work properly, and the subsequent feeling of chaos and claustrophobia, do not necessarily refer to an imaginary scenario of a collapsed State; they refer to actual and frequent bin collector strikes that lead to the piling up of the trash, thus to real-life situations in the metropolis (**Fig. 2**). Hence, the urban milieu in *Loser Takes All* can be framed as an actual reflection of Athens' city centre in the 21st century.

Drug use as well as drug trafficking are also presented in *Loser Takes All* as a societal problem. The rave party that Man and Kid attend in a deserted warehouse helps us set the film in the early 2000s, since rave parties were hosted at that time in Greece. Rave (sub)culture is strictly linked to the 1990s generation and to its self-destructive tendencies, since the techno music, in conjunction with MDMA drugs has been proven to have psychological implications for the ravers (Mizrach 1997: 139). In the rest of Nikolaidis's films, youth culture was never concerned with drugs, whereas in *Loser Takes All* they are central to the formation of the gang and its mission. The use and the trafficking of drugs, the dark atmosphere, the void in the lives of the young people depicted in the film that need to take drugs to feel something, are linked to the sense of finality, and are presented as a consequence of the lack of

companionship, understanding, and trust. For this reason, when the gang is formed and they build strong bonds, the members of the gang do not need drugs, and dispose it down the toilet, instead of using it or selling it. Although Kid and Man die in the end, they have found their way, as they have accomplished to belong somewhere, and to create strong relationships.



Fig. 2: Images of a dystopian Athens

Music plays an important role in the film. Nikolaidis in his previous films had been mostly using anachronistic rock 'n' roll music from the 1960s and 1970s (see *Sweet Bunch* and *The Wretches are Still Singing*) in order to convey the atmosphere of that time. In *Loser Takes All* Nikolaidis introduces new music in his oeuvre. Apart from the rave/techno music heard in the scene mentioned above, the film is accompanied by experimental music composed by Giannis

Aggelakas. The mere choice of Aggelakas as the protagonist of the film is paramount: Nikolaidis wrote the script with Aggelakas in mind and aimed to cast him exclusively. When Nikolaidis first met Aggelakas he identified in him traits that the protagonist in his novels have (Sotiropoulos 2013). Moreover, Aggelakas has stated that he admired Nikolaidis's films because "at last, a Greek filmmaker was speaking about us... About himself, who looked like us" (Chouliaras 2011). When *Loser Takes All* was filmed, Aggelakas had just left the iconic rock band 'Trypes' in order to create personal work in experimental Greek folk music, and the soundtrack of *Loser Takes All* is his first solo album. *Loser Takes All* being Nikolaidis's first film that is clearly placed in Athens, it is fitting that the soundtrack is also Nikolaidis's first to feature distinguishable Greek folk tunes, enhancing the spatiotemporal significance of the film. Furthermore, the presence of Aggelakas carries the anti-capitalist/leftist, anti-conformist, and anti-*status quo* connotations of his extra-filmic persona, something that affects the text's ideological position towards the causes of the crisis, as well as its empathetic view of the people that function at the margins of capitalism.

WEDNESDAY 04:45: DURING THE CRISIS

Alexis Alexiou is a filmmaker who, like Nikolaidis, also works with genres. With *Wednesday 04:45*, he pastiches the style and atmosphere of classic noir and neo-noir, and uses the noir genre as it is in line with the socioeconomic situation of the country, which is also presented in the film. Alexiou has confirmed in interviews the preoccupation of the film with the wider socio-economic reality in crisis-stricken Greece. The filmmaker chooses to present this through the genre conventions, the typology and iconography, the norms and tropes of noir. In fact, Alexiou has described *Wednesday 04:45* as "a neo-noir about the Greek crisis" (Kaimakis and Fountzos 2015). The film has indeed been characterised as a "Greek debt film" (Pfeiffer 2016), as it deals with a businessman who has a debt, something that is representative of many contemporary Greek people. The film is also centered around the notion of responsibility, and the question of who should take the blame when things go wrong (Chalkou 2016). This can be seen in relation to the current situation of socio-economic crisis in Greece, but at the same time, it extends to other types of crises, on multiple – including more personal – levels.

In the film, Stelios (Stelios Mainas) is a jazz-club owner in contemporary Athens. Stelios received a loan from a Romanian, in order to renovate his club. However, recession renders Stelios unable to pay his debt, and he is now blackmailed by the Romanian mafia, who threaten to take his club, should he not pay them off. In an effort to save his business within a time-frame of only a few hours, Stelios wanders around Athens, in a dark world, full of drugs, prostitution, adultery, and violence, in order to find a solution, while at the same time, he gets a final warning from his wife (Maria Nafpliotou), who wants him to be more actively

involved with their children. While forced to run some errands for the Romanian (Mimi Branescu), Stelios has to collect from Omer (Giorgos Symeonodis), an Albanian immigrant who is a strip-club owner, on behalf of the Romanian mobsters who are blackmailing him too. In the process, Stelios witnesses the murder of Omer. Stelios finally meets the Romanians at the top of a building in order to transfer the ownership of his bar to their boss. However, he also carries a gun and opens fire at them. He is also shot in the process. After the shoot-out, he returns home, where presumably he dies (the film ends before we get to see this).

Stelios is accused on several occasions for being reckless when it comes to managing his finances, as well as for his escapist lifestyle, even though he cannot afford it anymore: he lives in a big house, owns an SUV, has a mistress, is a cocaine user, and he is considering having a second mortgage on his house in order to borrow more money from multiple banking institutions. Initially, Stelios is reluctant to take responsibility for his actions as an entrepreneur, husband, father and Greek citizen. Although Stelios could be accused of going against family values, he seems to abide by his own strict moral code; for example, he gives money to people in need, like his employee, or to a beggar. Stelios is also the only one amongst his 'friends' who tries to save Omer, and he is the only one who cares about Omer's underage son. At first Stelios looks as if he is trying to roll the responsibility of paying back the debt that he has created, even though he knows (as he repeats in voice-overs) that everyone's time is limited. Stelios changes his behaviour in the final sequence, where he eventually takes responsibility for his actions, but at a deadly price. Stelios is represented as having been carried away by a chimerical vision, or even by a deadly delusion.¹⁵ His only 'hubris' though can be seen as linked to an individualistic drive and mentality, and to a dream that deviated from the mainstream – that, in this, case is identified with traditional, or popular Greek music, and also with dance music or R&B music. Stelios insists on having a jazz club, while he knows that most of Greeks prefer "to listen to *bouzoukia* [Greek popular music] when they go out", and does not care for the type of entertainment that the Romanian mobster's son plans for Stelios's club. Contrary to Stelios, Omer found it extremely hard to become an entrepreneur. The current crisis has gravely affected Omer's business, facing a sharp decline in his regular clientele. Omer also owes money to the Romanians, and complains that he cannot pay his taxes, the mafia, and his

¹⁵ The delusional obsession to get loans in order to start a business that might not be profitable can be said to be a characteristic of a large part of the Greek middle class that aspired to ascend to the echelons of the upper middle class before the crisis. This tendency can also be found in the film *Spirtokouto/Matchbox* (Economides, 2002). In this film, set before the crisis, the middle-class café owner wants to get a loan in order to open a piano bar-restaurant in Korydallos, Athens, something that is out of his league, just because there is none in the area, and therefore he believes that this will be a successful endeavour.

employees. He claims that, unlike many Greeks, he always pays his taxes, but still cannot get a loan from the bank, because he is Albanian. Even though Omer might be the object of racism as an entrepreneur in Greece, his profession does not allow him to be seen as respectable; he is taking advantage of the situation with the immigrants and makes money out of them, and is essentially a racist himself: he is a strip-club owner who exploits both Greek and non-Greek (African and Eastern-European) women to make a profit. His apparent ruthlessness towards his female employees, as well as his cruelty towards his young boy, make him an instant figure of obvious controversy. Eventually, even though he insists that people should assume their responsibility, he himself fails to do so.

Assuming responsibility is one of the messages of *Wednesday 04:45*. This could be seen as one of the meanings of the motif of the untied shoelaces of both Stelios's and of Omer's son. Coming unprepared, not assuming your responsibility under conditions of crisis (financial, or any other type), presupposing that others will help you means (political and moral) infantilisation, i.e., a view of the Greeks as irresponsible, spoiled, pampered children, as Omer describes them. There is yet another meaning of the thematic motif of the untied shoelaces and it has to do with the reason Stelios seems so scared when he sees the untied shoelaces of Omer's son, while a few scenes ago he jokes about it when his brother points out to the fact that Stelios's own shoelaces are always untied. This could be linked to another scene, when Stelios and his lawyer talk about seeing ghosts of dead people who foreshadow the future of the living. Stelios walks away from the boy's untied shoelaces because he remembers how time flies, how adult life with all its responsibilities hits you without any notice, forcing you into maturity or adulthood, and how you must survive in life without expecting any help from anyone. In the boy's helpless image, Stelios sees himself as a boy. And *vice versa*, Omer's son is the mirror image of Stelios as a child. Stelios realizes that the boy could grow up to be like himself in the future, a prospect that does not sound so bright, under the current circumstances.

In *Wednesday 04:45* there are many noir thematic, stylistic, and aesthetic elements: dark, wet and foggy streets at night, neon signs in red, green, and blue lights (which Katrina Glitre calls "the new black" [qtd in Bould 2009: 15]), cars wandering in the rainy night (contrasted to the name of Stelios's bar, 'Summer Town'), dim, expressionistic, and *chiaroscuro* lighting, stark contrasts, minimalist settings, men in raincoats. Stelios's jazz bar, with its neon-lit sign, is quintessential neo-noir (**Fig. 3**). There is also a voice-over, unexpectedly high or low camera angles, and a general atmosphere of claustrophobia, and existential despair. As with *Loser Takes All*, violence, pessimism, and disillusionment are all-pervasive. The archetypical noir city is represented as dark, threatening, a

cesspool of filth and corruption. Just like in the classic and neo-noir, the city here is a character in itself: it is transformed in order to reflect the characters' troubled psyche. And even though Athens is, on the one hand, represented as any noir and neo-noir cosmopolitan metropolis of global capitalism, at the same time we get more than glimpses of elements that localise the narrative: the noir Athens of *Wednesday 04:45* is also the Athens of financial crisis and Greek depression.



Fig. 3: Stelios's bar

The world of *Wednesday 04:45* is a pastiche of film noir and dystopian films, along the lines of *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982).¹⁶ This world is an almost post-apocalyptic, noir setting that represents what happened when the Greek 'bubble' burst: endless empty streets, menacing subterranean passages, blank advertising billboards, decrepit warehouses, abandoned shopping centres, spaces of a globalised, capitalist modernity-in-crisis/decline. The condition that the city is projected to be in *Wednesday 04:45* is in line with how Ingeborg Hoesterey sees *Blade Runner* to be: the city has the "aesthetics of decay and disintegration" (2001: 47). Moreover, the long-gone past of prosperity is a distant memory, and its vestiges are still visible in some parts of the city. Indicatively, the glorious days of the past are depicted in a scene in *chiaroscuro* lighting, when Stelios goes to a dingy café, where the meagre, ghost-like owner wears an Athens Olympic

¹⁶ It can be said that *Wednesday 04:45* also pastiches *Night and the City* (Dassin, 1950) in terms of its plot. Just like in *Wednesday 4:45*, the central character of Dassin's film is in debt to a mobster, whom he tries to pay back by creating more debt. Just like Alexiou's film, in *Night and the City* the hero appears in a frantic race against the clock, as he tries to figure out ways to settle his debts, before the mafia catches up with him and shoots him dead.

Games t-shirt. The café itself is decorated with a cheap plastic Greek flag and an old, destroyed poster on the side of the fridge that used to promote tourism in Greece (**Fig. 4**). This poster could be read as signifying worn-out Greek nationalistic myths that are exposed here as going hand-in-hand with the illusions and delusions capitalism feeds people – the Olympic Games being a prime example. However, it can also be read as signifying a pre-globalisation Greece that Stelios feels nostalgic for. At the same time, at the top of the fridge a TV set shows real footage of the news of the city's Christmas tree being burnt by antiauthoritarian groups at Syntagma Square in Athens in 2008, reinforcing the idea that this is a post-apocalyptic space. All these elements of the urban landscape and the noir *mise-en-scène* signify a decadent postmodernity, and also capitalism-in-decline.¹⁷ These images of the city of Athens and its people are “a far cry from the ‘Strong Greece’ that hosted the 2004 Olympic Games and became a massive construction site during the 1990s and 2000s” (Dalakoglou and Leontidou qtd in Basea 2016). An effect of this urban decline is the “material transformation of public spaces that took place during the last years” (Basea 2016: 67).



Fig. 4: Worn-out images of Greece

¹⁷ One could also contrast here the image of Stelios's affluent house to that of the dingy, small, dark apartment of his brother, who works double shifts as a security guard, in order to barely survive.

Although the film appears to take place in a dystopian world, there is a series of events that make the setting unmistakably Greek, and also unmistakably contemporary. For instance, one can detect anti-police anarchist political graffiti on the walls. Stelios encounters violent riots and protests in the streets. The voice of the former Prime Minister George Papandreou (who, for many Greek people, is the man who, to a large extent, is responsible for the crisis – indeed, he was the one who formally ‘announced’ the crisis) can be heard from the television. Moreover, there are also a couple of violent incidents that reflect Athens of the time: children throwing bottles of milk at a security guard while they scream “fuck the police” (in English), after the man pushes their bikes and asks them to move away from his house door; they do so because the guard looks like a policeman to them. Later on, Stelios witnesses a band of wild teenagers brutally attacking and killing another teenager, in order to mug him. Both these two scenes in the film echo Grigoropoulos’s murder and the riots that followed, resulting in the burning of the Christmas tree at Syntagma Square, mentioned earlier.

In classic noir, the crisis of modernity that arrives in different countries at different historical times is represented as a crisis that leaves people feeling lost and dislocated, stuck between a past that is long gone, and an unknown future. This also seems to be the case in a neo-noir like *Wednesday 04:45*. At the same time, in neo-noirs such as *Wednesday 04:45* (and in *Loser Takes All* as well), the implicit critique of (post) modernity and global capitalism found in classic noir here becomes explicit. In *Wednesday 04:45*, within the narrow noir conventions, this critique never takes the form of a complete rejection of capitalist values. However, in Alexiou’s film the characters refer repeatedly and extensively to the devastating effects of unregulated capitalism and free-market economy that were imposed both in Greece, but also in former communist countries. In the film, capitalism is implicitly and explicitly blamed for the dislocation, and uprooting of entire populations in search of jobs (such as the Albanian immigrant-turned-strip-club owner; the dancer from Eastern Europe; the African seller of pirated CDs). The protagonist in *Wednesday 04:45* as well as other characters in the film refer to the period of the late 1990s and the early 2000s in Greece, a period of a manufactured, virtual euphoria that did not correspond to the economic reality. The Greek version of capitalism is exposed in the film as a particular aberration, where there is no heavy industry producing something concrete, or goods that can be exported (like fruits, which are mentioned in the film in relation to the pre-euro era), while at the same time the goods that are imported to Greece are of low quality (for instance, cheaply made, imported car-tires). The Greek economy is represented as parasitic, based on the ‘entertainment business’. Through the character of the Romanian gangster, Alexiou seems to implicitly criticise rapacious venture capitalism – contrasting it to real economy –, and, indirectly, the transition from national currencies to

euros as harmful, along with the misleading opportunity to borrow money with low pay-rates, when one cannot afford to pay it back, and therefore consequently loses everything: his home, and eventually his home-country.

In *Wednesday 04:45*, immigrants, who are now a big part of Greek society, are represented as sharing a common fate that includes the destructive, devastating effects of a violent, imported globalised capitalism, neoliberalism, and austerity. Still, all this seems to affect ethnic and racial 'Others' and immigrants (both legal and 'illegal') in Greece even more, compared to the Greeks. Omer is expendable, and treated like garbage both by Greeks (with the exception of Stelios) and by other immigrants. Another example of this is the strip-club dancer whose father is Greek, who has a Greek name, but nevertheless she is still considered African. These characters signify extreme exploitation by neoliberal capitalism that knows no ethnicities or skin colour, in the name of profit.

Moreover, while Stelios cruises through the city, he chances upon an anaemic beggar at the traffic lights. The beggar can be read a symbol of/metaphor for Greece. He might be in a sad, decrepit state, but he insists on being treated with dignity, as he is "a human being too, and not garbage". He proclaims that his condition is not contagious, and shouts out that no one who touches him dies. This is reminiscent of the rhetoric about the supposedly 'contagious' character of the Greek economy, the 'domino effect' that the Greek crisis can cause, as represented in media and other discourses. The figure of the beggar however is polysemic, symbolising also the internal 'Other' at the heart of Greek society, that part of Greek people that has become destitute during the years of the crisis, people who remain largely invisible, and are not treated as human beings. The character of the beggar reminds the viewer of the huge socio-economic differences in Greece of today, and the gap that keeps widening as long as the crisis goes on, or aggravates.

In *Wednesday*, apart from the characters and the plot, the crisis is also reflected in the form of the film: there are shots of random objects or of the sky that disrupt narrative continuity. Following Dyer's argument about colour in pastiche noir (2007: 123), the yellow/green saturation and the hues in the film connote a (social, but also Stelios's bodily) sickness, the type of which classic noir would express through the use of black and white, and stark contrasts and shadows. The abrupt, frequent zoom-ins and outs, and the hallucinatory fade-outs that whiten the screen, the blurred surroundings, and the close-ups on faces, the slow motion scenes reflect both a protagonist-in-crisis, and also a time that is unrealistically out-of-joint. At the level of the soundtrack, it is through the use of silence, or the absence of music, where one can hear only the raindrops, or the buzz of high voltage coming from the neon signs, that *Wednesday 04:45* attacks the senses to create mildly dizzying effects, reflecting a subjectivity of crisis, and also a subjectivity that is itself in-crisis. The time-out-of-joint theme is also

highlighted through the use of disjointed music notes played in the soundtrack. Finally, crisis is depicted in a metaphorical/metonymical way in the dark, gloomy, rainy or stormy weather.

The role of the music in the film is paramount. Stelios is obsessed with jazz music and has a nostalgic passion for old jazz (as evinced by his record collection). Moreover, the film uses romantic vintage light pop and jazz popular Greek music of the 1940s – 1960s. This serves at least two purposes: on the one hand it can be read in relation to the protagonist's apparent nostalgia for an idealised past (and a pervasive melancholia for its irretrievable loss), when everything supposedly was more pure, innocent, and optimistic, when Stelios and his brother fooled around as kids, when people still bought LPs and cared about good music, when "there were still houses with mosaic floors", as Stelios fondly reminisces. The choice of these non-diegetic retro/vintage songs during crucial moments of the film,¹⁸ and also of some diegetic jazz music, constitutes a counterpoint to what is shown on the screen, i.e., to the brutal violence and general bleakness of most scenes. The use of anachronistic music abides by Dyer's claim regarding one of the aforementioned three main differences between classic noir and pastiche noir (2007: 123). *Wednesday 4:45*, as many neo-noirs do, alludes, through the use of jazz, to the classic noir, while, at the same time, through the particular use of Greek vintage music, Alexiou's filmic text shows a self-reflexivity and self-consciousness in relation to the (noir) genre tropes, to its form, and to the genre history. Also, this music alludes to post-War Greece (especially Greece of the 1960s), partially to the time when classic noirs were made in the U.S., and brings in a nostalgia for the lost past. In the final showdown, gunshots are muted by the loud romantic vintage Greek music, something that underscores the artificiality of the filmic narrative, its fictional character.

On the one hand, Alexiou's film seems to vilify the lenders, by turning them into noir gangsters. But at the same time, the elderly mentor of Stelios in the film puts the blame for the current situation of Greece both individually on each Greek citizen, and also on the sheer incompetence of the political leaders of the Greek people, to which the film adds the corruption of public officials and representatives of the law (two crooked Greek cops work for the Romanian mafia). As a neo-noir, *Wednesday 04:45* offers a fantasmatic solution that involves the hero – even momentarily or briefly – regaining his phallic potency by enforcing his brand of street justice, and by unleashing hell against his blackmailing tormentors/lenders, a scene from which the viewer is allowed to draw generic pleasures. But at the same time, Alexiou's film shows the viewers that, in the process, they will have to go down too, in order to "traverse the

¹⁸ The rest of the soundtrack features some contemporary Greek eclectic pop/electronic music by Felizol.

fantasy”, as Jacques Lacan would put it,¹⁹ or simply in order to face reality and their own delusions. Alexiou’s film seems to advocate that, at this day and age, when everything is in constant flux, or even subjected to cataclysmic change, when nothing is for certain and all can be lost in a moment, one is responsible for standing their ground. Stelios is the typical noir hero, in the sense that he is ready to fight when he knows that he is going to die defending a (for him, noble) cause that, however, is already lost. Both classic and neo-noir is full of such tragic, existential heroes.

Wednesday 04:45 is not simply a parable or an allegory about the Greek financial crisis, in the sense that the main mantra “we are responsible” that is repeated throughout the film acquires many meanings, depending on the context. It can both be read as the need for Greece and the Greeks to assume their responsibilities, and rise up to a difficult occasion in their modern history. But the phrase also works on a more personal level, that of the individual (the husband/father/son/wife/Greek and non-Greek citizen) who is also called to assume their responsibility towards others (their children/friends/family/colleagues/immigrants among others), but also, perhaps most importantly, the responsibility to ourselves. The crisis that one has to be prepared for is not simply a financial one. Stelios seems to be a perfectionist (in the tradition of a long line of lonely, melancholic noir perfectionists/purists), and realises that one should be prepared for any kind of crisis, rain or shine.

CONCLUSION

Since film noir has dealt with crisis since its birth, and its style and atmosphere are dark, grim, gloomy, with disillusionment and despair prevailing, this genre has been used around the globe in order to narrate various types of crises. Greek neo-noirs have been ample since 2000, and a further rise is noted after 2009, with the announcement of the Greek socioeconomic crisis, to which these neo-noirs begin to specifically refer.

The Loser Takes All and *Wednesday 04:45*, although filmed during two different moments in time, are both characterised by what has been described, in another context, as the “aesthetics of decay and disintegration” (Hoesterey 2001: 47); their characters and the city of Athens are represented in a decadent state. Building up to the crisis, *The Loser Takes All* features a society that has given up,

¹⁹ “Lacan’s name for what occurs at the end of the [psychoanalytic] cure is traversing the fantasy. But since what the fantasy does, for Lacan, is veil from the subject his/her own implication in and responsibility for how s/he experiences the world, to traverse the fantasy is to reavow subjective responsibility. To traverse the fantasy, Lacan theorizes, is to cease positing that the Other has taken the ‘lost’ object of desire. It is to accept that this object is something posited by oneself as a means to compensate for the experienced trauma of castration” (Sharpe,online).

has no hopes or dreams, and does not care about companionship anymore, and, at the same time, a city that is in derelict condition, a State that has collapsed, and is not concerned with its citizens. 'Illegal' immigrants are everywhere, and the police "others" them even further, projecting the noir "antipathy towards the city" (Thomas 1992: 60-61).

On the other hand, *Wednesday 04:45* features a man at the point of realisation that he has been living a life based on delusions, spending money he did not have, ignoring his family, cheating on his wife, and caring only about his jazz bar, his vinyl records, and his nostalgia for jazz music and his childhood, which is connected to the nostalgia for the past that the film's form and content conjure up. The dark, rainy city represents the protagonist's psyche, while the decrepit and abandoned buildings reflect the real image of the Greek metropolis during the recent crisis. The representation of the immigrants in *Wednesday 04:45* further shows that, after all these years of being a country that receives immigrants, Greece fails to integrate them fully, and considers them Greek whenever there might be some kind of benefit to be drawn from the situation.

Films like *Wednesday 04:45* attempt to turn traumatic events like the faceless global crisis of capitalism into graspable (noir) narratives, investing them *a posteriori* with meaning. Alexiou's film also offers a message of hope (that is not, however, free of ideology): as Stelios puts, it, "As long as you bleed, you are still alive" (even if in-debt). One, however, has to be prepared for a crisis that might break at any moment (see the umbrella motif), and at the same time realise that his/her remaining time to fix things is limited. By keeping the noir style and aesthetics, as well as the film noir *milieu*, both Greek films analysed here constitute narratives of crisis, about a country in disintegration, while they confirm an ongoing appropriation of film noir in the context of Greek cinema.

Note: The part of *The Loser Takes All* is based on Mikela Fotiou's PhD thesis.

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