

## BOOK REVIEW

# *Cypriot Cinemas: Memory, Conflict, and Identity in the Margins of Europe*

edited by **Costas Constandinides and Yiannis Papadakis,**  
**New York/London: Bloomsbury, 2015**

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The anthology *Cypriot Cinemas: Memory, Conflict, and Identity in the Margins of Europe*, edited by film scholar Costas Constandinides and social anthropologist Yiannis Papadakis, is the first academic work on Cypriot film to join the growing English-language literature on peripheral cinemas. It offers a general introductory overview, narrating Greek-Cypriot film as a phenomenon that arose after 1960, the year Cyprus became independent from Britain, and Turkish-Cypriot cinema as emerging after 1974, because, in the 1960s, Turkish Cypriots were “living mostly restricted in enclaves” (p. 6). As the first work on the subject, the book is careful to give a concise yet inclusive introduction to this sensitive and complex field, mapping all key aspects of the discussion in its title.

The use of “cinemas” in plural emphasizes that Cypriot film is addressed not as a single or homogeneous entity but as a cultural plurality. Although both editors are of Greek-Cypriot origin and there are no Turkish-Cypriot contributors, the collection is careful to avoid partiality or monoethnic positions and be inclusive. However, from the outset it is evident that the notion of plurality is not merely a politically correct approach to the ethnic and regional duality within a divided island, but embraces the multifaceted diversity inherent in every “national” film culture and “in the makings and meanings” (p. 232) of all films. In line with recent developments within Film Studies, the term “national cinema” is taken as a problematic critical concept in need of reevaluation, as films today are

increasingly understood and studied within the frames of transnational and supranational exchanges – human, political, cultural or economic – that undermine the notion of a monolithic “national cinema”. In this context, issues of immigration, diaspora, and cosmopolitanism, interethnic collaboration, transnational co-production (with European, Balkan, and Greek funding bodies), and the international circulation of the films are raised frequently to challenge the notions of concrete borders and national purity. Cultural multiplicity in Cypriot cinema is further discussed with the inclusion not only of canonical art- and festival-oriented films, which is the dominant practice in Cyprus, as editor Constandinides argues (p. 228), but also commercial, generic or “low” cultural forms such as (s)exploitation and trashy movies. Diversity is also manifest in the variety of political, historical, and ethnic perspectives, points of cultural and artistic reference, articulations of cultural origin, gender representations, production and promotion policies, and many others.

All these approaches underlining the heterogeneous, cross-cultural, hybrid, and transnational character of a “national” cinema are inextricably linked to the controversial issue of “identity”, the other major preoccupation of this volume. Identity crisis appears as a twofold problem: on the one hand, there are questions about the originality of Cypriot cinema, which as this book suggests shifts between locality and Europeanness, with Greek-Cypriot films having an ambivalent, overlapping and even “messy” (p. 208) centre-periphery relationship with Greek cinema, in terms of content, creative personnel, funding methods, and cultural ownership. Consider, for example, Cypriot filmmakers, like Yannis Economides, who moved to Greece and make Greek-focused films. (Notably the problematic relationship between Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot cinema is mentioned but not discussed in detail [p. 216].) On the other hand, there are anxieties around the impossibility of a singular, distinctive, and fixed national identity (the notion of Cypriotness) of a peripheral, postcolonial, bicultural, and diasporic society, of a divided and geopolitically marginal territory. The elusive concept of Cypriotness is often addressed in the films, but is examined in the book only within the Greek-Cypriot frame and from a Greek-Cypriot perspective.

As the volume demonstrates, there are two tropes of “national” identity that recur in the film narratives: the legacy of Aphrodite (the Greek Goddess of love) linked to the idea of the island as a desirable tourist destination, and the legacy of the unresolved Cyprus Problem, i.e. the interethnic conflict of the 1960s and the war of 1974, and the subsequent division of the island. And here, at the core of Cyprus’ identity lies a major historical trauma, which has determined the majority of film narratives and shaped the character of post-1974 Cypriot cinema. As revealed throughout the volume, films set in and about Cyprus are haunted by history and politics, memories of violence and displacement, and the

question of what actually happened and how the wounds can be healed. The films' obsession with the past, the flourishing genre of documentary, the blurring of the lines between fiction and reality, the employment of film for political ends and historical enlightenment are shown to be key attributes of Cypriot film and symptomatic of painful historical experiences. The editors and authors examine the many manifestations of the recent historical trauma – which seems to have suppressed the colonial past – in documentaries and fictional narratives from both sides, drawing particular attention to the increasing presence of reconciliatory voices which, interestingly, emerge mainly through collaborations between filmmakers of both communities.

The volume contains seven chapters, three of which are authored by the editors, and an introduction. The introduction details the historical and cultural context of the island, comments on existing non-academic literature on Cypriot film and offers a scholarly foundation. In the following chapters, contributors from a variety of academic and professional backgrounds (anthropology, European studies, photography, and literature) approach films from diverse standpoints and with a range of methodological tools, with Constandinides undertaking the major task of exploring film from the Film Studies perspective.

The opening chapter 'Archive, Evidence, Memory, Dream: Documentary Films on Cyprus', by Elizabeth Anne Davis, introduces us to Cypriot cinemas' fixation with history. It explores how contemporary Cypriot documentaries use private and public archival material to uncover the relationship between the present and the traumatic past, while functioning as archives in themselves by collecting and preserving unknown evidence. Most of these documentaries contest entrenched nationalist positions and articulate reconciliation discourses, while also including conventions often inherent in the older material they use and quote. Moreover Davis focuses on the venues and public screenings of these documentaries, including audience reactions and discussions between filmmakers and the public, which manifest a newly-emerged socio-cultural space, especially in Nicosia and Limasol, where inter-community and inter-generational reevaluation of the past is starting to take place.

In 'Aesthetics, Narratives, and Politics in Greek-Cypriot Films: 1960-1974', Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert and Nicos Philippou examine two groups of Greek-Cypriot productions – including one Greek and Greek-Cypriot coproduction – made during the formative years of the Republic of Cyprus: on the one hand, nostalgic bucolic dramas, set in an unspecified past and in traditional villages, dominated by folklore and idyllic rural landscapes (the equivalent of Greek *foustanela* film); and on the other, romantic comedies, set in contemporary cities and cosmopolitan beaches resorts, focusing on tourism and modernity. Through this dualism that portrays Cyprus as an unspoilt folk paradise or as a modern

tourist destination, the article discusses alternative definitions of Cypriotness and anxieties over national identity. Furthermore the authors attempt a comparative analysis of the films with other modes of visual culture of the time (still photography and painting) that share similar thematic and aesthetic traits. It is noteworthy that all these filmic representations almost entirely ignore the presence of different cultures and interethnic conflict.

The next chapter by Laurence Raw 'Cyprus Past, Present, and Future: The Derviş Zaim Trilogy' shifts attention to three contemporary films – both fiction and documentary – directed by Turkish-Cypriot Derviş Zaim (two of them in collaboration with Greek-Cypriot filmmaker Panicos Chrysanthou) which explore the country's recent history. Zaim, who does not adopt a specifically Turkish-Cypriot standpoint, considers alternative ways of addressing the past and destabilizes nationalistic discourses by exploring how ordinary people experienced conflict and how the traumatic past continues to impact on their lives. By using a number of diachronic narrative and visual symbols, he reflects on the intersections between past, present, and future to suggest that confronting the past can help make sense of the present and create new frameworks for the future.

'Tormenting History: The Cinemas of the Cyprus Problem', written by the two editors, examines a wide range of films from national, ideological, and political perspectives. The analysis, drawing on Jameson's notion of "national allegories", establishes links between the private and the national and allows allegorical readings of content and form. It distinguishes three main positions in relation to the Cyprus Problem: the Greek-Cypriot, focusing on the events of 1974 and Greek victimization; the Turkish-Cypriot, centred on the 1960s, a traumatic decade for the Turkish community; and the reconciliation narratives of collaborative works that adopt multiple perspectives to challenge official views and promote peace and unification. The analysis is further complicated by right-wing and leftist approaches that operate beyond ethnic lines. According to the authors Cypriot films are marked by "an excess of the political", a "powerful intrusion of politics" (p. 135) even when it is not necessitated by narrative and are comparable with the cinema of other neighboring nations that are similarly haunted by conflict and historical traumas, such as Israeli cinema.

In 'Transnational Views from the Margins of Europe: Globalization, Migration, and Post-1974 Cypriot Cinemas', Costas Constandinides considers the various manifestations of the transnational within Greek-Cypriot film culture. He examines, (s)exploitation in the 1970s, which appropriated the global cinematic idiom of sex and violence, with particular reference to Eurowesterns and Greek Mountain Films. His other main focus is recent art-house cinema, which moves away from the Cyprus Problem and in terms of theme, artistic influence,

production system, and exhibition networks, challenges the idea of a single national identity. Some of the films fit what Hamid Naficy terms *accented* (migrant, exilic, postcolonial, and diasporic) cinema and bear Tarkovskian influences, while others, responding to the needs of international co-production, reiterate transnational narratives revolving around migration, mobility, journeying and border-crossing, and the notions of dislocation and home.

Nayia Kamenou in 'Women and Gender in Cypriot Films: (Re)claiming Agency amidst the Discourses of its Negation' spans larger time frames – from the 1960s to 2010s – examining a wide range of films of both sides from a critical feminist perspective. The chapter, organized around three main sections, "Women as victims", "Women as (co)perpetrators", and "Women as Agents", reflects on constructions of male and female identity to question the limits of Cypriot cinematic imagination in relation to gender representation and rendering female subjectivity and agency. It suggests that even when film narratives attempt to challenge stereotypes, blurring the lines between femininity and masculinity or "afford(ing) women wider space to (re)claim agency" (p. 199), ultimately they fail to challenge the dominant patriarchal and heteronormative structures.

In the concluding postscript 'Borders of categories and categories of borders in Cypriot Cinemas', which seems like a follow-up to the chapter on 'Transnational views', Costas Constandinides provides a comprehensive analysis of the editors' use of the term "Cypriot cinemas". In dialogue with recent academic debates on "national cinema" – as well as on the "identity" of Cypriot literature – and using post-1989 theoretical tools of contextualizing socio-political and cultural phenomena, he attempts to map Cyprus's discursive cinematic landscape by challenging rigid identities, boundaries, and typologies. Constandinides identifies a series of tensions and multiple transnational exchanges that challenge the idea of a single and homogeneous "national cinema". He proposes instead an open definition of Cypriot cinema as product of a variety of cinematic and cultural hybridities, addressing issues of language, production practices, market developments, and new formations such as recent migration to Cyprus and the impact of new technologies.

By introducing this neglected and complex topic in such a wide-ranging and pluralist volume, the editors have achieved a very critical balance: their careful thematic and methodological choices have ensured the discussion is both organized and inclusive. One of the main virtues of this work is its ability to conceptualize and contextualize, smoothly guiding the reader through extended and multidisciplinary literature, contributor's personal experiences, a variety of points of view, and a wide range of issues under discussion. It also offers a comparative angle by looking at other cultural forms such as photography and literature or other national cinemas such as Greek and Israeli. Similarly it

engages with contemporary academic discourse by avoiding parochial binary dichotomies, fusing the art and the popular, intersecting the historical and the political with the textual and the formal, and tackling cultural specificity alongside transnationalism. Moreover, its multiple readings of the films is a particularly interesting and appealing aspect of the book, as several films are examined by different authors from various perspectives. The volume also throws light on the broader culture surrounding film: public debates and controversies, antagonistic film festivals, funding mechanisms and limitations, venues, archives and government institutions, links between film and television, political activism related to film, reception issues and issues of censorship, and so on. Eventually this ambitious and surprisingly fresh work makes a significant and very welcome contribution: it properly incorporates hitherto overlooked yet important films and filmmakers, as well as long-ignored film cultures into the discursive narrative of European cinema.