

## EDITORIAL NOTE

# Righteous Images, Moralizing Screens: Censorship in the 20th Century Revisited

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The current special issue of *Filmicon: Journal of Greek Film Studies*, titled *Righteous Images, Moralizing Screens: Censorship in the 20th Century Revisited*, delves into the domain of censorship. The origins of this endeavor lie in the post-doctoral research program “Censorship in Visual Arts and Film: The Greek experience from the post-war years to the present” (CIVIL, <https://logokrisies.wixsite.com/civil>) financed by and implemented through the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (H.F.R.I.) and the General Secretariat for Research and Innovation (G.S.R.I.) (project contract number 883).

In February 2022, in the context of the aforementioned research, the conference “You can teach an old dog new tricks! Old and new forms of censorship” (<https://logokrisies.wixsite.com/civil/about-4>) took place. Divided into two parts, one historical and one contemporary, the conference had the main goal of showcasing the different aspects, modalities, and forms of censorship across a wide array of fields. From theater to religion and from cinema to the law, censorship is an issue that transcends the stereotypical image of the scissor-holding public or military officer and pertains to almost every aspect of public life. Along with traditional concepts like direct repression, censorship studies have recently focused on alternative forms of “new censorship”, contextualizing such cases in the broader framework of power relations, freedom of speech and cultural politics.

Following this vein of thought, five articles and one photo essay are published in this special issue of *Filmicon*, with the aspiration of continuing and broadening the discussion initiated in the research program and in the conference. The common thread between these papers is that censorship is a complex historical, political and sociocultural matter that can be traced in many different forms; based on papers presented in the conference, the authors expand their initial arguments to show how specific examples of censorship illuminate the broader censorship apparatus. Thus, it is emphasized that the repressive practices of institutional censorship are just the tip of the iceberg; the authors reveal that a whole world of networks, people and discourses lie just under the surface.

Given the nature of *Filmicon*, it is evident that the papers included in this issue deal with visual media: cinema, theater and photography. Petros Koris opens the discussion with two German case studies: the film *Die Frau mit den Millionen* (Willi Wolff, 1923) and the operetta *Der Fürst der Berge* (1932). Drawing insights mainly from the methodology known as “histoire croisée”, Koris analyzes the attempts of the Greek state to censor them, explaining the role of public discourse, national stereotypes, Greek political divisions in the context of the National Schism between Venizelist and Anti-Venizelist forces, diplomatic endeavors and the trauma of World War I, effectively enriching the research on the Interwar period with new perspectives and new sources. The legacy of the traumatic recent past also holds a central role in the article by Chiara Boatti, concerning a “forbidden film” about the Italian occupation in Greece. *L’armata s’agapo* was intended to be an anti-heroic look on the events of World War II, proposed by Renzo Renzi through the pages of the prominent magazine *Cinema Nuovo* in 1953. The backlash against the proposal included persecutions, a trial and extensive public debates, constituting an elaborate case study on the relationship between Italian cinema and censorship, on postwar power networks, and on working through the trauma of the war in European societies.

Indeed, the consequences of World War II in Europe were felt across a vast array of fields, including censorship logic and practice. Yannis Glavinas illustrates this in his article concerning the unofficial censorship network in Greece during the postwar semi-authoritarian democracy (1950-1967) and the military dictatorship (1967-1974). Using state archives, Glavinas points out that, apart from the official preemptive and repressive censorship apparatus operated by the anti-communist Greek state of the post-Civil War era, an extensive array of associations, organizations, pundits, and government officials, including the Church, felt that their role was to safeguard the Greek national-minded ideals against communist or other “unethical” influences in cinema, theater and music. However, defense mechanisms were employed by film professionals, as showcased by Ursula-Helen Cassavetes in her article. During the military dictatorship, while box office decline was beginning to affect mainstream Greek cinema, softcore erotic film directors provided a financial alternative and used self-censorship extensively in order to bypass the dictatorial ethical regulations.

Greek softcore films during this era developed a distinct filmic language and style, using idyllic landscapes, famous mainstream actors and actresses, a constraint in the depiction of nudity and sex, and maintained a strict moral code in their narratives.

Apart from eroticism, horror and violence have constituted the other major scapegoat since the inception of cinema, as outlined by Christos Triantafyllou in the final article of the issue. Horror films functioned as a mirror image of societies' fears and anxieties, and have frequently faced backlash and generated moral panics. All over the world, from the 1920s until today, this filmic genre has found itself in the crosshairs of the state, of religious and other groups, of psychologists, politicians and pundits for its supposedly negative influence on parts of the population perceived to be in need of paternalistic guidance: children, young people, women, workers, migrants and others. In Greece, such moral panics were scarce, but indicative of the interrelations between politics, public debates, and culture, as shown mainly in the fierce reactions of the military dictatorship against Ingmar Bergman's *Hour of the Wolf/Vargtimmen* (1968) and in the state's repressive reaction against *Joker* (2019).

The construction of visual ethical standards via censorship also pertains to the photo essay by Nayia Yiakoumaki, concerning the "killed" negatives of farmers' photographs in the USA during the New Deal. Yiakoumaki argues that the selection process for the publication of photographs constituted a form of censorship. This censorship did not aim at hiding the truth per se, but at fitting to the political and cultural narrative of the New Deal initiative. According to the latter, on the one hand, the rural population of the USA was on the verge of attaining economic security; on the other hand, the country was supposed to be re-united through these depictions of "authentic" life.

Finally, honoring the memory of Lakis Papastathis, a major figure of New Greek Cinema, who recently passed away, *Filmicon* presents "Lazaros", an unpublished script of a short fiction film, written by Papastathis and Dimitris Avgerinos, which was rejected by the military Junta censors in 1968 as antisocial and pessimistic. The script demonstrates the radical approach in thematics, form and narrative by a new generation of filmmakers who aspired to change Greek cinema at the time, producing a strand of innovative short films, the impetus of which the dictatorship momentarily interrupted.

As editors of this issue, we would like to thank all authors for sharing their original work and for contributing to the development of a research field that showcases the deep influence of visual media and culture on major historical processes of the 20th century.