

## BOOK REVIEW

# *Time and Space in Contemporary Greek-Cypriot Cinema*

by Lisa Socrates

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Lisa Socrates's book *Time and Space in Contemporary Greek-Cypriot Cinema*, published by Peter Lang in 2015, is based on her doctoral thesis on post-1974 Greek-Cypriot cinema and coincides with the publication of another important English-language academic work on Cypriot cinema, the anthology *Cypriot Cinemas: Memory, Conflict, and Identity in the Margins of Europe*, edited by Costas Constandinides and Yiannis Papadakis (2015). Using different styles, both books explore the problematic issues of "memory", (national) "identity", "diversity", and "immigrations" in Greek-Cypriot cinema, issues relevant also to other Cypriot cultural forms such as photography.

Socrates's book provides, in a very interesting way, an analysis of the concept of historical time and its impact on geographical space through Gilles Deleuze's film philosophy in order to present a theoretical perspective on the development of the new Greek-Cypriot cinema of the post-1974 period. A range of Greek-Cypriot feature films such as *Kato apo ta astra/Under the Stars* (Georgiou, 2001), *Akamas* (Chrysanthou, 2006), etc., short films such as *Espresso* (Florides and Nicolaidis, 1999), *Hellmets* (Koukoumas, 2009) and *Grandmother's Hands* (Georgiou, 1992), the experimental work by Lia Lapithi Shukuroglou and also documentaries, are analyzed through Deleuze's categories of the "time-image", "movement-image" and "recollection-image".

As the book demonstrates, there are two basic types of images according to Deleuze, the "time-image" and the "movement-image". The movement-image,

which characterizes the classical Hollywood cinema, is the basic image which gives rise to a sensory-motor whole “and emphasizes a masquerading of time in deference to the continuity of the moving image” (p. 22). This means that time and space in the movement-image are in line with our rational categories. Such organization of time and space is in accordance with our daily habits, needs, and desires. Socrates, relying on Deleuze, suggests that “it is the Second World War which shatters this action” (ibid.). After the war there is a new direction that cinema takes, and “a new kind of image” is “born” outside of Hollywood (p. 26). In this new type of image, which characterizes European cinema, “the characters begin to demonstrate their uncertainty and inaction” (p. 103). That means that the time-image is built on the ruins of the sensory-motor formula and of the action-image leading thus to discontinuity and nonlinearity in narration.

Based on this explanation of the cinematic image, Socrates examines and delivers an interesting perspective on the issues of “memory” and “identity” in Greek-Cypriot cinema as central preoccupation of film narratives and key aspect of the development of the film language. As Socrates points out, “the recollection-image is seen to insert itself in the gap between the stimulus of an event and the response, without the tendency to push forward and formulate an action-image” (p. 114). “The formation of the recollection-image is the product of an internalization of thought and perception” (p. 115). In this sense and through the Deleuzian concept of recollection-image, Socrates describes how individual memories shaped the landscape of post-1974 Greek-Cypriot films. The author argues that filmmakers “create their own distinctive recollection-image” (p. 99) “reflecting a new perspective of time” (p. 178), which makes the Greek-Cypriot cinema innovative. For example, in *Nekri Zoni/Buffer Zone* (Kyriacos Tofarides, 1996), narrative’s “real” time is the mid-1990s including recollections of the immediate events of the 1974 war (p. 115): “*Buffer Zone* creates distinct recollection-images through childhood memories where the loss of motor action becomes a prominent feature” (p. 134).

The starting point of Socrates's study on Greek-Cypriot cinema is David Martin Jones's *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Context* (2006). Martin-Jones examines the construction of national identity in cinema through Deleuze's “philosophy of time”, analyzing aberrant narrative constructions in various national cinemas. Martin Jones's case studies center on “how national narratives are re-written when a crisis brings historical transformations” (p. 19-20) while Socrates offers a discussion of “how the impact of historical events on real spaces is remembered collectively” (p. 72).

Lisa Socrates's book is divided into three parts and an introduction. Each part is broken down in chapters, which typically fit logically into the topic of the part. In the introduction, Socrates discusses the historical context of the island focusing on the political events of 1974 and presents the aim and the structure of her

book. However, what is missing from her introduction is a clear definition of the contemporary Greek-Cypriot cinema and a clarification on how she situates film genre – from the anthropological angle, from the position of film theory, etc.

Part I, entitled *Nation, Identity, History*, sets the “contextual and conceptual horizons for reading Greek-Cypriot cinema” (p. 7). It contains the analysis of Deleuze’s film philosophy, exploration of nationhood and identity taking Panicos Chrysanthou’s film *Akamas* as a case study. Socrates’s goal is to examine how time and space link to the questions of the representation of national identity in cinema. The author relies on Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991). His theoretical views on collective and social memory and the nation is a powerful means for the explanation of the social and cultural importance of national film narratives.

In chapter 1, Socrates gives an interesting conclusion that “a spatial division is another prominent feature in the real and imaginary landscape depicted by Greek-Cypriot cinema” (p. 34) because “after 1974 the island’s real space was transformed through the politics of conflict and division” (p. 30). Due to this geographical deterritorialization and the deterritorialization of identities as well, in its Deleuzian sense, and also due to external social factors, the perception of ourselves as integrated subjects becomes dislocated and decentered. An example of such deterritorialization and an attempt of reterritorialization of the national identity can be found in the movie *Akamas*, which “presents an imaginary space of the Cyprus’s population possibility of living together without ethnic diversity” (p. 76). As Socrates writes in chapter 3, “*Akamas* proposes the importance of history, depicting how the colonial struggles can be re-examined from the point of view of 2006” (p. 89). Socrates argues that by using the terms territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, “which are not exclusively cinematic concepts” (p. 18), one can explore the transformation of physical spaces or analyze “the connections between national cinema, identity and time” (p. 32). However, she never uses these Deleuze’s categories in her film analysis. This is unexpected because the finest examples of construction, deterritorialization and attempted reterritorialization of identity (personal, social, and national) can be found in the “narratives of memory” given that identities can be constructed by narrating the past in a book or a film.

Another point of this chapter that would require further analysis is the connection between “nation” – “identity” – “history” and in which way the media (film, for example) produces contexts for the interpretation of the issues related to nation, history and identity. It is an important issue because the media represents cultural mnemonics that groups of people use to build collective identity and orientation in time (Assmann 2010). Therefore, the reminiscence and memory seem to have special importance in the process of constructing the national identity.

In part II, titled *Division, Memory, Time*, Socrates presents how the cinematic image visualizes memory and time. Socrates is interested in “how Greek-Cypriot films visualize the problem of time: aesthetically, philosophically and technically” (p. 21). She describes the new “crisis-image” as time-image and examines the separation of sound from the visual in cinematic images. In this part of her study, Socrates identifies the buffer zone as a powerful visual metaphor. She points out that through the buffer zone filmmakers explore issues of memory, dislocation and the representation of time. In *Under the Stars*, Nicosia’s buffer zone is “any-space-whatever”, “a shattered space empty of movement and the flow of human exchange” (p. 106). In *Espresso*, the buffer zone is an “ideologically neutral space” (p. 109) and “a marker of ethnic division” (p. 227).

Films about 1974 represent the trauma of those whose lives were shattered irrevocably as they lived through different experiences of loss. “Losing a home, with its connection to a place, and losing family members are experiences that often encompass human bonds to real space” (p. 100) as, for example, in Stella Karageorgi’s *Spiti mou, glykia patrida/Home, Sweet Hope* (2007) which explores refugees’ dreams and hopes to return home. The strong point of this part is Socrates’s conclusion that the way in which “filmmakers used cinematic elements, such as sound and cinematography, has been proved instrumental in creating a culturally specific treatment of the experience of the war” (p. 101).

In Part III, entitled *Spaces, Movement, Unity*, Socrates explores the terms “movement” and “mobility”, which are linked to the experiences of new immigrants in Cyprus that helped creating new social formations. Socrates, relying on Michel Foucault’s concept of “heterotopias”, in a very comprehensive way, explains the process of constructing heterotopias in Greek-Cypriot cinema by giving as example Adonis Florides’s film *Kalabush* (2002). She concludes that “*Kalabush* explores the heterotopias precipitated by the arrival of immigrants to Cyprus in the late 1990s” (p. 189), a development that brought “changes in the socio-economic and political landscape in Europe” (p. 193). According to Socrates, Florides shows how “the arrival of new identities might have a positive influence on the social transformation of the island” (p. 210).

“The year 2003”, as Socrates points out, “marks the rise of a new cinematic landscape that responds to political attempts at unifying Cyprus’s fragmented territories. The so-called ‘post-border’ wave of filmmaking uses new images” (p. 219). This means that Greek-Cypriot filmmakers deal with terms like history, memory and national identity in different ways than before. Borrowing Mikhail Bakhtin’s term “chronotope”, Socrates applies the term “chronotopic-image” to include the entire trajectory of post-1974 Greek-Cypriot cinema, which “has created recollection-images and reached its limits regarding the time-image, before creating new images” (p. 217). As she suggests, “until 2003, recollection- and time-images have dominated the landscape of Greek-Cypriot cinema but,

when the UN buffer was lifted in 2003, filmmakers would take cinema beyond the time- and crisis-image” (p. 225). This “new chronotopic-image is characterized by distinctive techniques such as an accelerated use of tracking and panning shots to emphasize the idea of mobility” (p. 225). This brings us to David Bordwell’s discussion of the importance of film style, main role of which is to meet the demands of the narration. It is often that filmmakers play with narrative possibilities and style techniques which require even closer attention and mental activity by the viewer for comprehending the film (Bordwell 1985). In this context, Socrates explains Florides’s use of cinematic techniques such as framing, which not only determines what the director wants spectators to see, but also how they see: “Florides uses framing to express his ideas about belonging, inclusion and exclusion” (p. 201-202). Socrates concludes that the most important characteristics of this new film style are the use of inside and outside spaces and the separation of sound from the visual image.

Socrates shows that “films of the ‘post-border’ wave are characterized by narratives that respond differently to the presence of the border, which despite signifying a space of division and conflict, it also opens new horizons for inter-ethnic dialogue and spatial unity. Narratives become concerned with journeys across the buffer zone” (p. 225). Socrates proposes that these films “should be defined by their propensity for movement, actors’ mobility and freedom to make the crossing, continuous rather than disjointed narrative sequences and the privileging of flowing time rather than stillness. In ‘post-border’ films the continuity of movement anticipates the island’s spatial unity” (ibid.).

In her book Socrates, in a very analytical way, presents some major problems within the Greek-Cypriot national film funding system, distribution and exhibition network, and political scene as well. As Socrates explains, the main problem is that the film projects do not receive official financial support and the market is small with only a limited number of venues being available for film exhibition. Many filmmakers are forced to “use alternative media platforms such as Vimeo, YouTube, etc.” (p. 59). Another major problem, as she suggests, is censorship. For example, although *Akamas* was selected by the jury of the Venice Film Festival to participate, the Cyprus Cinema Advisory Committee (CCAC) reacted and asked Chrysanthou not to attend the festival stating that “a particular scene, in which EOKA fighters kill a suspected traitor in a church, was problematic” (p. 71). The problem that arises from this discussion is who controls what version of the past will be remembered and forgotten.

Socrates’s book is a welcome contribution to Film Studies because, as she writes, “Greek-Cypriot films remain absent from academic forums and scholarly investigation in spite of the expanding research of national cinemas in film studies” (p. 17). However, we can identify some weak points: the major problem is in the structure of the book. In Part II, for example, Socrates analyses *Poleitai*

*aerodromio/Airport for Sale* (Farmakas, 2009) before giving a theoretical explanation of the time-image. It would be also useful if her analysis of “memory”, which begins in part I, was based not only on Paul Connerton’s theoretical views but also on the views of theorists of (contemporary) memory studies like Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann and Pierre Nora without whom, one might say, it is almost impossible to have a constructive discussion about memory. Also, it would be useful if there was some consideration of the concept of “flashback” as a film technique that describes the experience of memory, because flashback is the most prominent way of articulating memory and explaining to the viewer why a certain event happened the way it did. It would also be interesting if the book included more detailed analysis about the time structure of the films and some explanation of how “non-linear” narrative form functions, which, in my view, is missing completely from the discussion of the films.

Despite these shortcomings, however, Socrates’s book provides a valuable introduction to Greek-Cypriot cinema for film scholars who want to obtain more information about it and have basic insights in Deleuze’s film philosophy. The most interesting part of Socrates’s book is that she uses Deleuze’s theory in a very clever way to explain some aspects of the films such as duration in *Airport for Sale* or heterotopias in *Kalabush*. It also raises critical questions that can lead to further academic research, for example, how war films and films about war trauma use memory in order to create narratives of deterritorialization, how individual memory can be transformed into cultural memory and in which way narratives of collective trauma express national identity.

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