

changing worlds & signs of the times

Selected Proceedings

from the 10th International Conference
of the Hellenic Semiotics Society

EDITORS

Eleftheria Deltsou

Maria Papadopoulou

E-BOOK (PDF)

Changing Worlds & Signs of the Times /
Selected Proceedings
from the 10th International Conference
of the Hellenic Semiotics Society

EDITORS:

Eleftheria Deltsou
Maria Papadopoulou

DESIGN:

Yorgos Rimenidis

PUBLISHER:



The Hellenic Semiotics Society
Ελληνική Σημειωτική Εταιρία

© VOLOS, 2016

FOR THE EDITION
the publisher

FOR THE PROCEEDINGS
the authors

ISBN 978-618-82184-0-6

Changing Worlds & Signs of the Times

Selected Proceedings from the 10th International Conference of the Hellenic Semiotics Society

Contents

Preface	11
Introduction	12

PLENARY SPEECHES

Jean-Marie Klinkenberg <i>Thinking the Novelty</i>	16
Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos <i>Continuities, discontinuities and ruptures in the history and theory of semiotics</i>	30
Farouk Y. Seif <i>Resilience and Chrysalis Reality: Navigating Through Diaphanous Space and Polychronic Time</i>	52
Göran Sonesson <i>The Eternal Return of the New. From Cultural Semiotics to Evolutionary Theory and Back Again</i>	68
Κάριν Μπόκλουντ-Λαγοπούλου <i>Γιατί η Σημειωτική;</i>	88

SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES

Mari-Liis Madisson, Andreas Ventsel <i>Analysis of Self-descriptions of Estonian Far Right in Hypermedia</i>	102
Joseph Michael Gratale <i>The 'War on Terror' and the re-codification of war</i>	112
Emile Tsekenis <i>'African modernity': Witchcraft, 'Autochthony', and transformations in the conceptualizations of 'individual' and 'collective identity' in Cameroon</i>	122
Sofia Kefalidou, Periklis Politis <i>Identity Construction in Greek TV News Real-Time Narratives on Greek Financial Crisis</i>	134
Anthony Smyrnaiois <i>Discerning the Signs of the Times: The role of history in conspiracism</i>	144
Όλγα Παντούλη <i>Ο 'αριστερός' και ο 'ανατολίτης' σύζυγος στις αφηγήσεις γυναικών επιστημόνων: διαδικασίες επιτέλεσης του φύλου τους</i>	152
Μαριάννα Ψύλλα, Δημήτριος Σεραφής <i>Η ανάλυση ενός γεγονότος μέσα από τον πολυσημικό λόγο των εφημερίδων: Μία μεθοδολογική και πολιτική προσέγγιση του Δεκέμβρη του 2008</i>	160
Αλεξία Καπραβέλου <i>Ο ρατσισμός σήμερα μέσα από τη σημειωτική ανάλυση γεπορτάζ εφημερίδων</i>	170

SPACE AND/IN SOCIETY

Eleftheria Deltsoy <i>Salonica Other Ways – Otherwise': A Mirror-λ letter and heterotopias of an urban experiment</i>	186
Fotini Tsiibiridou, Nikitas Palantzas <i>Becoming Istanbul: a dictionary of the problematics of a changing city; inside critique of significant cultural meanings</i>	196

Κώστας Γιαννακόπουλος Αναφομοίωτες διαφορές, «εξευγενισμός» και πόλη	206
Ιορδάνης Στυλίδης Η Βιτρίνα ως ελκυστής σημασίας	216
Δήμητρα Χατζησάββα Αναδυόμενες έννοιες για τον χωρικό σχεδιασμό	226
Θεοδώρα Παπίδου Μεταγραφές ψηφιακού υλικού στον αρχιτεκτονικό σχεδιασμό	236
Κωνσταντίνος Μωραΐτης Τοπία σημαίνοντα	248
Νεφέλη Κυρκίτσου Η ολίσθηση των σημασιών στην τοπική θεωρία του Jacques Lacan ..	260
Ανθία Βερυκίου Τόποι απουσίας και Τοπολογικά τοπία	270

VISUAL CUTLURES

George Damaskinidis <i>Are University Students Followers of the World's Semiotic Turn to the Visual?</i>	284
Dimitrios Koutsogiannis, Vassiliki Adampa, Stavroula Antonopoulou, Ioanna Hatzikyriakou, Maria Pavlidou <i>(Re)constructing Greek classroom space in changing times</i>	294
Polyxeni Manoli <i>A multimodal approach to using comics in EFL classrooms</i>	308
Αικατερίνη Τάτση, Μαρία Μακαρού Πολυτροπικά πολιτισμικά παλίμψηστα: η περίπτωση ενός κόμικ	318
Αναστασία Φακίδου, Απόστολος Μαγουλιώτης Σημεία και κώδικες: Πώς αντιλαμβάνονται τα παιδιά τη γλώσσα εικόνων που αναπαριστούν την παιδική ηλικία;	332
Έφη Παπαδημητρίου, Δήμητρα Μακρή Πολυτροπική κοινωνική σημειωτική προσέγγιση στη δημιουργία νοημάτων-σημείων από μαθητές/τριες της πρωτοβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης	346
Θεοφάνης Ζάγουρας Ο σχεδιασμός πολυτροπικών κειμένων για το γλωσσικό μάθημα στο Δημοτικό Σχολείο	360
Dimitra Christidou <i>Does pointing in the museum make a point? A social semiotic approach to the museum experience</i>	374
Παρασκευή Κερτεμελίδου Οι μετασχηματισμοί του μουσείου τέχνης στην εποχή της κατανάλωσης	386

ART

Eirini Danai Vlachou <i>The Beatles Paradigm. Transcending a collection of 'ropey', scrappy, multi-cultural breadcrumbs into a whole new semiosphere</i>	398
Μαίη Κοκκίδου, Χριστίνα Τσίγκα Η κουλτούρα των βιντεοκλίπ: η περίπτωση των μουσικών βιντεοκλίπ δια-τροπικής ακρόασης	408
Angeliki Avgitidou <i>Art imitating protest imitating art: performative practices in art and protest</i>	420
Spiros Polimeris, Christine Calfoglou <i>Some thoughts on the semiotics of digital art</i> ..	430
Χρύσανθος Βούτουρος, Ανδρέας Λανίτης Η Σημειο-αισθητική προσέγγιση της Βυζαντινής τέχνης ως Εικονική Κληρονομιά	440
Άννα Μαρία Παράσχου Τοπογραφία διάρρηξης: Φωτογραφικές απεικονίσεις πολέμου από τον Simon Norfolk, ως μια αφήγηση ανατροπής	454

Pirjo Kukkonen <i>Signs of times and places in Aki Kaurismäki's films. The existential subject and the semiotic modalities of being and doing</i>	466
Christina Adamou <i>Swarming with cops</i>	478
Yvonne Kosma <i>Picturing 'Otherness': Cinematic Representations of 'Greekness' in "My Big Greek Fat Wedding"</i>	488
Χρήστος Δερμεντζόπουλος, Θανάσης Βασιλείου <i>Προσεγγίζοντας μια αφαιρετική κινηματογραφική μορφή: "Το Δέντρο της Ζωής", του Terrence Malick</i>	498
Νίκος Τερζής <i>Η σημειωτική μέθοδος ανάλυσης μιας ταινίας</i>	508
Ηρώ Λάσκαρη <i>Σύστημα γενεσιουργής οπτικοακουστικής αφήγησης</i>	524

ADVERTISEMENT

Luiz Carlos Migliozi Ferreira de Mello <i>Viagra: New Social Forms</i>	536
Nikos Barkas, Maria Papadopoulou <i>'The house of our dreams': A decade of advertisements in building magazines</i>	544
Stamatia Koutsoulelou <i>Advertising strategies in times of crisis: A semiotic analysis</i>	560
Περικλής Πολίτης, Ευάγγελος Κουρδής <i>Κοινωνιόλεκτοι σε ελληνικές τηλεοπτικές διαφημίσεις. Η περίπτωση της «γλώσσας των νέων»</i>	572
Ευριπίδης Ζαντίδης <i>Αναδυόμενες ταυτότητες και εθνικότητα σ' ένα φλιτζάνι κυπριακού καφέ</i>	588
Ελένη Συκιώτη, Γενοβέφα Ζαφειρίδου <i>Σημειωτικές παρατηρήσεις στη σύγχρονη διαφήμιση: Η περίπτωση της εμπορικής και της κοινωνικής διαφήμισης</i>	600
Βασιλική Κέλλα <i>Η διαφήμιση ως λεκτική πράξη</i>	612

LANGUAGE, TEXTS AND TEXTUALITIES

George Androulakis, Roula Kitsiou, Carolina Rakitzi, Emmanuel Zerai <i>Linguistic cityscape revisited: inscriptions and other signs in the streets of Volos</i>	622
María José Naranjo, Mercedes Rico, Gemma Delicado, Noelia Plaza <i>Constructing new identities around Languages and Media</i>	634
Ιωάννα Μωραΐτου, Ελευθερία Τσέλιου <i>Ανάλυση Λόγου και μεταμοντέρνες προσεγγίσεις στη συμβουλευτική / ψυχοθεραπεία: η «στροφή στο λόγο»</i>	642
Φίλιππος Τεντολούρης, Σωφρόνης Χατζησαββίδης <i>«Κατασκευάζοντας» το κείμενο και τον συγγραφέα: οριοθετημένα και μη-οριοθετημένα σημειωτικά πλαίσια της σχολικής γλωσσικής δημιουργίας</i>	652
Βάσια Τσάμη, Δημήτρης Παπαζαχαρίου, Άννα Φτερνιάτη, Αργύρης Αρχάκης <i>Η πρόσληψη της γλωσσικής ποικιλότητας σε κείμενα μαζικής κουλτούρας από μαθητές της Ε' και ΣΤ' Δημοτικού</i>	664
Αναστασία Χριστοδούλου, Ιφιγένεια Βαμβακίδου, Αργύρης Κυρίδης <i>'Lego-Legends of CHIMA'. Κοινωνιοσημειωτική ανάλυση της συναρμολόγησης του θρύλου</i>	676
Μαρίνα Σούνογλου, Αικατερίνη Μιχαλοπούλου <i>Η Σημειωτική στη διαμόρφωση της έννοιας του πολίτη στο νηπιαγωγείο</i>	686

BODIES & MINDS

Fotini Bonoti, Plousia Misailidi <i>Graphic signs of jealousy in children's human figure drawings</i>	700
Eirini Papadaki <i>The Semiotics of Children Drawings, A Comparative Study of Art, Science and Children Drawing</i>	708
Myrto Chronaki <i>Changing practices and representations of birth and birth-spaces in maternity clinics and at home</i>	720
Athanasios Sakellariadis <i>Metaphor as a Hermeneutical Design of the Mental Phenomena: The role of narrative speech in the cognitive field of the Philosophy of Mind</i>	730
Anita Kasabova <i>A semiotic attempt to analyze delusions</i>	738

LITERATURE

Miltos Frangopoulos <i>The Task of the Translator</i>	756
Fitnat Cimşit Kos, Melahat Küçükarslan Emiroğlu <i>Reality as a Manner of Transformation</i>	766
Angela Yannicopoulou, Elita Fokiali <i>Transmedia Narratives for Children and Young Adults</i>	778
Ioanna Boura <i>The expression of worldviews through narratives and chronotopes of liquid times</i>	790
Evgenia Sifaki <i>The "Poetic Subject" as "Subject of Semiosis" in C. P. Cavafy's "Going back Home from Greece"</i>	798
Αγγελική Παννικοπούλου <i>Το εικονογραφημένο βιβλίο χωρίς λόγια</i>	808
Μαρίνα Γρηγοροπούλου <i>Κόσμοι που συγκρούονται και σημεία των τεχνών: οι «Σκοτεινές Τέχνες» του Νίκου Κουνενή</i>	818
Σοφία Ιακωβίδου <i>Εις τα περίχωρα της δυστοπίας: αφηγήσεις της κρίσης στη λογοτεχνία για νέους</i>	826
Πέγκυ Καρπούζου <i>Το παιχνίδι και η ηθική της μετανεωτερικής συμβίωσης</i>	834
Αγλαΐα Μπλιούμη <i>Ρευστοί καιροί και μεταφορές – Σημειωτικές προσεγγίσεις στη λογοτεχνία της ενωμένης Γερμανίας</i>	844
Παναγιώτης Ξουπλίδης <i>Ένας οικείος δαίμονας: προς μια προσέγγιση του σημείου της λογοτεχνικής γάτας σε 7 κείμενα παιδικής λογοτεχνίας του Χρήστου Μπουλώτη</i>	856
Conference Credits	868

Picturing 'Otherness': Cinematic Representations of 'Greekness' in "My Big Greek Fat Wedding"

Yvonne Kosma

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF THESSALONIKI

yvoko@act.edu

Abstract

The subject of this paper is the construction of 'Greekness' through its cinematic representation in the popular film 'My Big Greek Fat Wedding' (2002). I use this film as an example to initiate discussion of a phenomenon, which Michael Herzfeld refers to as crypto-colonialism. In this framework I employ Said's concept of 'Orientalism' as a discourse that literally constructs its object of knowledge. I claim that the film draws upon crude ethnic stereotypes that form our conceptions about 'Greekness', but which also have a 'self-Orientalizing' effect. Self-orientalism makes evident the productive nature of Orientalism proposing that the 'Orient' itself participates in its construction, reinforcement and circulation. However, I claim that this contribution is not necessarily passive; it also serves as a strategy to counter the overarching homogeneity of the hegemonic culture. In my analysis I draw both on discourse analysis, and semiotics - the work of Roland Barthes in particular.

Keywords

discourse , otherness , orientalism , representation , identity , film

Introduction: Crypto-Colonialism, Orientalism, and My Big Greek Fat Wedding

My paper explores the construction and representation of 'Greekness' through the example of "My Big Greek Fat Wedding" (2002), a Canadian-American romantic comedy film written by and starring Nia Vardalos, and directed by Joel Zwick. In particular, I am interested in conceptions of nationality, which define discursively what it means to be 'Greek' from a Western perspective, and what implications such illustrations have for the subjects involved. In other words, my aim is to explore the reproduction of power relations and the construction of identities and subjectivities. My approach is, therefore, mainly concerned with the ideological impact of film, and it focuses on the effects and consequences of the cinematic construction and display of national subjects.

While much literature in the field of cultural and film studies have been devoted to the analysis of colonialism, I want here to initiate discussion of a rather specific variety of that phenomenon, which Michael Herzfeld refers to as crypto-colonialism. Herzfeld defines crypto-colonialism as:

(...) the curious alchemy whereby certain countries, buffer zones between the colonized lands and those as yet untamed, were compelled to acquire their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence, this relationship being articulated in the iconic guise of aggressively national culture fashioned to suit foreign models. Such countries were and are living paradoxes: they are nominally independent, but that independence comes at the price of a sometimes humiliating form of effective dependence. (Herzfeld, 2002, pp. 900-1)

Whereas such phenomena have been well documented for colonies in the strict sense of the term, and they are frequently addressed by a number of papers in the field, the model of crypto-colonialism proposed by Herzfeld suggests that this hierarchy was not confined to the colonies alone. Today many critics even claim that Greece (and the European south in general) has moved past the status of crypto-colonialism, and we are now dealing with an evident neo-colonialist subjugation. Such (neo-)colonialist subjection is imposed by the limitation of democratic politics, the declining economic sovereignty, and the enlistment of state administrations in the service of global circuits.

Whereas Greece is certainly not the only example of crypto-(or neo-)colonialist subjugation, it is distinguished by a curious paradox: it is both the collective spiritual ancestor and a political pariah in today's 'fast-capitalist' Europe. At the same time, Greece serves as the moral segregation of the West from the rest of the world. Although its location seems to account for this rationale, it is important to note that geography is also discursively formatted. Greece as a geographical territory can be described as an 'undecidable' structure, not only because it articulates different and competing logics (i.e. Greece as 'the cradle of democracy and civilization' as opposed to Greece as the margin of Europe), but also because its identity depends on a series of 'constitutive outsides'.

This means that its external frontiers have to be constantly imagined as a projection of an internal collective identity. This sense of identity always involves both sameness and difference, which are the product of a constant negotiation. Hence, the central axis of this negotiation is 'the deep fear of becoming too closely identified with some vague category of barbarians' (Herzfeld, 2002, p.902). But this fear also exposes a fundamental anxiety at the heart of European nationalism; 'Europeanness' is quintessentially rooted in the classical past, which is seen 'both as the ideological imprimatur of cultural respectability and at the same time as a necessarily less complex, less sophisticated version of the European present' (Herzfeld, 2002, p.917). Therefore, the assumption that, 'the Greeks' are somehow originators of the West as a whole, means that through hegemonic discourses such as popular filmic representations, they need to be invoked and suppressed at the same time. This 'rationalized framing inadvertently exposes the secret side of the tale: that heart of darkness that resides within "our" modernity where, as Walter Benjamin once famously reminded us, every document of civilization is also, at the very same time, a document of barbarism' (Chambers and Curti, 2008, p.389).

In this framework I will employ Said's concept of 'Orientalism' as a discourse that literally constructs its object of knowledge. This is approximately what happens with the representations of national identities in film. The way Greece is represented is largely an invention; for example, a place of myth and heroic deeds, an origin of culture and democracy, an exotic tourist destination, or a traditional, backward and underdeveloped country. Simultaneously, the attempt to represent national parameters also entails the illustration of a portrayal of Greek national identity in which the Greek audience could recognize itself, or identify with, that is based on common stereotypes. Hence, the central theme of my paper is how the West classifies, categorizes and represents another culture through the construction of difference; my main objective is to examine the way 'the Greeks' are represented in recent popular filmography. Here, I employ semiotics, and in particular the work of Roland Barthes, combined with concepts from discourse analysis to analyze *My Big Greek Fat Wedding* (2006). I chose this particular example because of its enormous popularity. A sleeper hit, the film became the highest-grossing romantic comedy of all time, and grossed \$241.4 million only in North America, despite never reaching number one at the box office during its release (being the highest-grossing film to accomplish this feat). The film was also nominated for the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay at the 75th Academy Awards (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Big_Fat_Greek_Wedding).

Cultural signifiers and the construction of 'otherness'

My Big Greek Fat Wedding (2002) is a typical boy-meets-girl romantic comedy with an orientalist twist (though we have seen the same story in multiple variations about other ethnicities). Fotoula "Toula" Portokalos (Nia Vardalos), a single second generation

Greek immigrant in Winnipeg, is going through an early midlife crisis because, at thirty, her family thinks she is a spinster. Eventually, she falls in love with a non-Greek, and struggles to get her family to accept him while she comes to terms with her heritage and cultural identity. Through Toula's story, the wished-for integration in the American way of life is contrasted with the desire to maintain a double identity, to be the same and different all at once. Initially Toula is embarrassed and rejecting of her cultural background, but finding herself mirrored in the gaze of the 'other' (the American teacher, Ian), she finally discovers and accepts herself through that gaze. Yet, however reconciling the tale may be, Toula's voice-over narration, which is full of humorous if vaguely familiar observations about life in the middle of an overbearing ethnic family, also plays upon crude national stereotypes. Throughout the film, Greeks are generally represented as nationalists, traditionalists, zealously religious, regressive, superstitious, naive and unsophisticated. Their only incentive in life (except for Toula, who has assimilated the values of American culture and is represented as progressive and different) is to marry another Greek, have children, and reproduce the traditional lifestyle and mentality. This difference is also embodied:

"When I was growing up, I knew I was different. The other girls were blond and delicate. And I was a swarthy 6-year-old with sideburns."

Physical appearance bears specific connotations that reproduce a normative ideal, and serve the western hegemonic discourse. Difference here is not a neutral term, but the inferior counterpart to 'Americanness', which is represented as uniformly white, blond and fair (i.e. bearing European American/Aryan features). Not only is this misconception orientalist, but it also excludes Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans and other ethnic minorities in North America (domestic Orientalism). At the level of myth, the lack of physical delicacy and conformity to prevailing beauty standards are indicators of primitivity and insufficient cultural refinement. The fact that 'others' need to get rid of evolutionary remainders such as facial hair in a woman (we see cousin Niki depilating her 'mustache' before the wedding) can be read as racist biological evidence of this argument. Despite the fact that Toula's father, Gus, is convinced that everything can be traced back to Greek civilization - actually a plea for recognition and respectability - his attempts are so pitiful that he confirms the dominant hierarchy of culture.

- Now, give me a word... any word, and I show you, how the root of that word is Greek.

- Okay, Mr. Portokalos, how about the word "kimono"?

- "Kimono." Good one. Kimono, kimono. Of course, "kimono" comes from the Greek word... "cheimonas," which means "winter." So, what do you wear in the wintertime... to stay warm? A robe. You see, "robe," "kimono." There you go.

The indifference or even derision with which others react to his appeals, suggests that his claims to civilizational superiority are completely disproportionate to his own

social status and the political influence of his country. Whereas Gus sees his effort as an affirmation of Greek cultural leadership, the bearers of the dominant culture simply see it as an attempt to catch up with the West. Herzfeld claims that, countries which share this particular status 'have been placed, or place themselves, on high cultural pedestals that effectively isolate them from other, more brutally material forms of power, and that this ironic predicament is the defining feature of crypto-colonialism' (2002, p. 902). So, 'the crypto-colonies - which in the postcolonial world cannot persuasively lay claim to economic or cultural "reparations" - must continue to struggle, burdened by their ancient pasts, with a future for which there is as yet no clear categorical slot' (Herzfeld, 2002, p. 920).

Greek cultural supremacy is further compromised by the representation of domestic culinary habits.

- What do you do for Christmas with your family?
- My mom makes roast lamb.
- With mint jelly?
- No.
- And? And... I'm Greek, right?
- Right.
- So what happens is my dad and my uncles... fight over who gets to eat the lamb brain. And then my Aunt Voula forks the eyeball, and chases me around... trying to make me eat it, because it'll make me smart.

Far from being a simple physical need that serves sustenance, eating is central to the construction of subjectivity. Hunger, appetite, taste and food preferences are largely products of the sociocultural environment into which we are born and raised (Lupton, 1996, p.1). Food preparation, distribution, and consumption authenticate both social order, and moral and aesthetic beliefs and values. In this context, eating habits mark multiple boundaries between different cultures, social classes, genders, life-cycle stages, religions, occupations and geographic regions (Lupton, 1996, p.1). Food preferences that may appear different, strange or even disgusting to some, are likely to be integral to the process of subjectivity formation or to denote the process of distinguishing one cultural group from another. In this context, food consumption serves as a common marker in film to signify cultural difference, usually constructing the 'other' as exotic, primitive, outlandish or even savage (remember the wildly orientalist dinner-scene in Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*).

Accordingly, eating habits are also a direct signifier of class and cultural capital. For example, vegetarianism in this context is a marker that denotes the difference between two opposing symbolic systems.

- When you come to my house and I cook for you?
- Okay. Thia [aunt], that might be a problem.

- Problem? I'm the best cook in the family. Tell him.
- I did, didn't I? Twice.
- Okay, then.
- It's just...
- Yeah?
- Ian is a vegetarian.
- He doesn't eat meat.
- He don't eat no meat?
- No, he doesn't eat meat.
- What do you mean, "He don't eat no meat"?
- That's okay, I'll make lamb.

Whereas for Toula's family the offering of meat signifies that it is able to provide for its members, for Ian (who is a vegetarian) eating meat is potentially unhealthy and possibly morally objectionable. This antithesis cannot be ascribed solely to personal preference; its significance becomes meaningful only on a structural level. Taste is determined by class, because people develop preferences for what is materially and culturally available to them. Although the current generation of Greek immigrants does not suffer from food shortage and hardship, the excessive provision of food reflects a collective anxiety from a not-so-remote past. In this context, taste is 'an incorporated principle of classification which governs all forms of incorporation, choosing and modifying everything that the body ingests and digests and assimilates physiologically and psychologically' (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 470). For the American bourgeois middle-class, however, excessive provision of food is an indication of gluttony and immoderation. Unhealthy and unrestrained eating connotes a lack of control, which signifies a particular class-related perception of taste and the body. The antithesis between quantity and quality or substance and form, corresponds to the opposition (...) between the taste of necessity, and the taste of liberty or luxury (Bourdieu, 2010).

This contrast is evident in the opposition between the enormous provision of food, particularly meat, as a sign of hospitality and generosity by first generation immigrants, who were raised in a society that still recalled famine due to war and extreme poverty;

- The meat is here, everybody.
- Meat. Very good. Very good.
- You like some meat? Some Greek meat, very good.
- Red meat, everybody.

and the ostensibly thrifty offering of a small cake (with a hole in it!), which belongs to a completely different symbolic system, where gluttony or even a hearty appetite are considered as lack of discipline and good manners.

- Hello. I am Maria Portokalos... and welcome to our home.
- [Ian's mother gives her a bundt]

- Thank you. What is it?
- It's a bundt.
- A "bonk"?
- Bundt.
- It's a cake! I know! Thank you. Thank you very much. There's a hole in this cake.

In this context, ethnic individuals, as well as their cultures, are clearly objectified and exoticized; the way they are represented is infantilizing, trivializing and reducing. Such representational dynamics inevitably lack perspective and depth while running the risk of essentializing ethnic cultures by oversimplifying complexities and particularities. So, although cultural stereotypes are based upon certain true elements, to generalize such cultural differences or to take them out of context, is a typical way of sanctioning hegemonic normativity and classifying 'otherness' as coarse, unprocessed, inferior, and at times dangerous. Such a classification connotes a broader inclination towards savagery and primitive law:

- I've got to tell you, I've never seen my sister so happy. If you hurt her, I'll kill you and make it look like an accident. Jesus, look at your face. It's just a joke.
- Good one.
- No, the good one is, "I've got a gun". Yeah, I've got a gun... and I swear, I'll jam it up your... Ian, I got you again!
- Come on, lighten up.
- I'll lighten you when I take out your kidneys.
- One more time, Ian.
- Hey, Angelo.
- Hey, Ian, we're going to kill you!

A basic component of this rule is patriarchy, which is expressed by the imperative to protect and control female family members. Without doubting that patriarchy is deeply embedded in Greek society, I sustain that this pun crudely exonerates liberalist America; by ascribing patriarchy to the 'Orient', more subtle forms of sexism that sustain the dominant gender order are simply denied. Orientalism can thus be regarded as a manner of regularized (or Orientalized) vision, dominated by imperatives, perspectives, and ideological biases ostensibly suited to the Orient; thereby western male chauvinism is let off the hook.

Another such bias is the conception of the 'other' as undifferentiated and indistinguishable; the distillation of essential ideas about the Orient - its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness - into an unchallenged coherence;

- Rodney, didn't you once have a Greek receptionist?
- No, Harriet, she was... Just a minute. No, she was Armenian.
- Is Armenia close to Greece?

- Not exactly.
- What was she?
- Who?
- My secretary, for heaven's sake.
- Everyone like cheesecake? ...
- Guatemalan!
- That's right, dear. She was Guatemalan.

Obviously, at this point the joke is on Americans. However, the fact that such a generalization crops up amid casual small talk, makes evident how orientalist illusions are imposed as canonical truths.

This attitude is not only disparaging and candidly condescending, but it is also paternalistic in that it constructs specific subject positions as appropriate for non-western 'others' (such positions would typically be in the tertiary sector and service provision). Through this tactical maneuver the Orient is transubstantiated from resistant threat, into obliging and submissive partnership. This positioning implies that there always 'lurks the assumption that although the Western consumer belongs to a numerical minority, s/he is entitled either to own or to expend (or both) the majority of the world resources' (Said, 1995, p.108). In this context 'integration' is just another manifestation of (crypto-)colonialism. Such a contemporary Orientalist attitude floods the media and the popular mind, and in the film this is reaffirmed by being represented as a choice. Toula may be unhappy as a seating hostess at the family taverna, but she is perfectly content as an employee at her aunt Voula's travel agency, which isn't really an alternative within the dominant discourse. In a globalized world, westernization is perceived as the precondition for accomplishing modernity (Shih, 2001). In the process, conformity to the orientalist discourse (self-orientalism) becomes the medium to be assimilated in western society. Whereas Toula's extended family portrays in conformity to the western imagination of the 'oriental' other, Toula herself is presented as an embodiment of western femininity, but within a homogeneous - and overtly conservative - interpretation of modernity. So, although she seeks to be different, get an education (which her father considers unwarranted for a woman), and seemingly makes something out of her life, actually she merely conforms to the conventional ideal of finding true love, getting married, and raising a family. The only point she deviated from the prescribed scenario, was that her husband was not born Greek. But even this was effectively dealt with; Ian was christened to become Greek-Orthodox, and he himself claims: "I am Greek now!"

Conclusions

As we have seen, 'the fundamental premise of Said's Orientalism is that the East is represented as ontologically different from the West in western cultural consciousness (Yan and Santos, 2009). It proposes that the West carries moral, intellectual and cul-

tural superiority over non-Western civilizations (Hung, 2003). This logic of ‘othering’ is applied in *My Big Greek Fat Wedding* with a subtle twist. The film implicitly reminds viewers that there is a ‘self’ and correspondingly an ‘other’; yet, although the ‘self’ is generally identified with the American normative ideal, there are instants when identification shifts in favor of ethnic Greek individuals (the most notable example being the ending). In this context Toula’s presence functions as an attestation that the ‘primitive’ character of her ethnic group is interpreted as a critical and ‘authentic’ component of traditional Greek culture. Hence, self-orientalism makes evident the productive nature of Orientalism proposing that the ‘Orient’ itself participates in its construction, reinforcement and circulation (Dirlik 1996; Ong 1998; Zhang 2006). This contribution, however, is not necessarily passive; it also serves as a strategy to counter the overarching homogeneity of the hegemonic culture by ‘recollecting and, in some cases, reinventing traditions to recreate an ancient, historical, and unchanging identity’ (Yan and Santos, 2009). Therefore, self-orientalism has often become a logical framework dominating the project of subjectivity formation of ethnic minorities. Consequently, such film representations enable the construction of points of cultural identification, and this is probably why the film was generally well received by the Greek audience, despite being pigeonholing and rather racist.

References

- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. London: Cape.
- Barthes, R. (1975). *The Pleasure of the Text* (R Miller Trans.). New York: Hill and Wang.
- Bourdieu, P. (2010). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Routledge Classics Series). Oxon: Routledge.
- Chambers, I., & Curti, L. (2008). Migrating modernities in the Mediterranean. *Postcolonial Studies*.11(4), 387-399.
- Dirlik, A. (1996). Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism. *History and Theory*, 35(4):96–118.
- Herzfeld, M. (2002). The Absent Presence: Discourses of Crypto-Colonialism. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101, 899–926.
- Holmes, D. (2000). *Integral Europe: Fast-Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hung, H. (2003). Orientalist Knowledge and Social Theories: China and the European Conception of East-West Differences from 1600 to 1900. *Sociological Theory*, 21(3):254–280.
- Laclau, E. (1990). *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. London: Verso.
- Lupton, D. (1996). *Food, the Body and the Self*. London: Sage.
- Ong, A. (1998). *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Said, E. (1995[1979]). *Orientalism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Shih, S. (2001). *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917–1937*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Yan, G., & Santos, C. A. (2009). “CHINA, FOREVER”: Tourism Discourse and Self-Orientalism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 36 (2), pp. 295–315.
- Zhang, X. (2006). The Globalized Logic of Orientalism. *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, 37(4):48–54.

