
**The Greek Crisis in the Greek Cinema: Otherness and
Hope in *Dogtooth* and *Amerika Square***

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1. Introduction

A lot has been written and said concerning the financial crisis that has been tormenting Greece during the last decade. In the beginning, some considered it to be a temporary condition connected with the economic challenges the country was facing at the time; nevertheless, the fact that it has remained at the forefront of discussions to date, and is still deeply felt in Greek society despite the recent end of the international bailout program that had been imposed, has changed the perspectives toward and the understanding of it. Particularly, the crisis has turned into a prolonged, almost permanent condition for Greek society, which has deeply confounded and radically changed people's sense of normality. With the passage of time, the crisis and the changes that it has brought about -for both individuals and society- have progressively solidified as the standards of 'the new normal'.

In other words, the temporal distance from the pre-crisis period and the enormous socio-political changes that took place during this decade, affecting the lives of Greeks most unfavourably, resulted in the citizens' familiarization with the new conditions and, thus, the acceptance of the austerity measures, but also in an inevitable loss of faith that the situation would eventually change. In consequence, it could be said that today, the Greek crisis is no longer seen as a temporary condition; instead, it is accepted as normal - as the dominant 'story' about Greece. On the other hand, it is also essential to mention a considerable readjustment that was made in the political rhetoric after the conclusion of the international bailout program in the country. In particular, a shift has been noticed towards an 'exiting-the-crisis' or 'recovering-from-it' rhetoric, with the aim of mitigating the Greeks' negative attitude towards this period's political decisions and the country's position in the

European Union; all the while, the actual material conditions of the population have not improved in essence.

The far-reaching consequences of the Greek crisis phenomenon have become visible in all aspects of life. In fact, sudden reductions in salaries, bankruptcy of enterprises, spiralling unemployment rates and taxation rises constitute only some of the never-ending economic difficulties. Since 2009, the Greeks have been experiencing grave economic problems that understandably undermined their trust towards the government and social justice in general, resulting in the rise of emigration rates to countries financially and politically more stable (Douzinas, 2013).

However, it is not only the financial and political domains that have been afflicted, but also the social and cultural ones. As a result of their decreasing incomes, the adverse everyday conditions disrupted the Greeks' habits and leisure activities. In addition, more often than not, the new circumstances have also had a deep psychological impact on the population, leading for instance, to a widespread atmosphere of pessimism, characterised by feelings of insecurity, anxiety, frustration, depression and social isolation. Hence, the necessity of and desire for cultural and artistic activities -including cinemagoing- diminished. Concerning the film industry during this period, what has also profoundly affected the Greeks' viewing habits is a growth in piracy that has been observed, almost inevitably causing an increase in illegal, free film watching. Furthermore, with 182 million subscribers currently and offering the low-budget solution of a massive virtual cinematic library, the entry and global expansion of the Netflix giant has re-established the Greeks' viewing practices and film choices, too. Indisputably, Netflix plays a major role in cinematic distribution worldwide, having the

power to define the cinematic choices content on a global as well as local level. Therefore, the financial difficulties have considerably re-ordered the citizens' priorities, taking a toll on their interaction patterns and ways of entertainment.

As can be deduced, the crippling public debt and subsequent austerity measures imposed on the Greek people also influenced their perspective towards art, which came to be regarded as a luxury by some and, hence, not in alignment with the general climate of the country. The tightening of state budgets also occasioned the minimisation of state financial support for artistic production. In her paper *Film Distribution in Greece: formal and informal networks of circulation since the financial crisis*, Lydia Papadimitriou underlines the growing, however diachronically existing, gap between the domestic film productions and the non-Greek ones during the years of the crisis. "To be specific, in Greece the theatrical market consists mainly of US and European (mostly French) films with releases of other cinemas very limited and almost exclusively dependent on festival hits. Indicatively, in 2015 the Greek theatrical market consisted of seventy-seven per cent of the overall gross from US films, [...] leaving a meagre four per cent to be shared among the rest" (Papadimitriou, 2016). Against all odds, art is still of great importance to Greek society, even though this has definitely been influenced by the aforementioned conditions and adjusted accordingly. In this context, new forms of artistic expression seem to be emerging, while existing ones frequently take different forms and directions.

The Greek cinema constitutes one of those artistic forms of expression that appear to have developed differently and flourished during the decade of crisis. After the production of Yorgos Lanthimos' movie *Kynodontas / Dogtooth* (2009), the Greek film industry managed

to gain a central position on “the cinematic map after a long period of failed attempts by the country’s cinema to produce filmic works that would be technically and artistically interesting enough to help the country escape its cinematic isolation at a transnational level” (Psaras, 2016: 63). *Dogtooth* received international recognition and garnered a number of awards at film festivals, including the *Prix Un Certain Regard* at the 2009 Cannes Film Festival, as well as a nomination for an Academy Award in 2011. However, this is not the only Greek film that attained international distinctions. Ever since *Dogtooth*, there has been an ever-growing series of alternative, innovative films made by Greek filmmakers that have attracted international attention. The unconventional, strange plot, as well as the themes and structures of these films led to several terms being coined to characterise this trend, such as ‘Greek Absurdism’ (Fairfax, 2012) or ‘Greek New Wave’; nonetheless, the ‘Greek Weird Wave’ was the one most commonly used. In effect, heated controversy has been raging regarding the accuracy and/or validity of this term on the grounds that, in general, several makers of said films have been resisting the critics’ attempts to categorise or classify their works as belonging to a single movement; and yet, the majority of scholars and reviewers do find common characteristics in these artistic creations. Another object of debate is whether or not the films associated with the so-called ‘Greek Weird Wave’ can be directly or causally linked to the Greek crisis, and, if so, in what way. On the other hand, during the same time period, there has also been the production of less ‘weird’ films, some of which thematise the crisis and its consequences too. A few of these films have been reviewed and analysed either as loosely connected with the ‘Greek Weird Wave’ by some scholars or as subscribing to a different cinematic approach by others.

In order to investigate how contemporary Greek cinema relates to the Greek crisis and how this crisis takes shape in recent films, I will be looking closely at two widely discussed movies, *Dogtooth* (2009) and *Amerika Square* (2016). In the former, irrefutably the most extensively reviewed and conversed about film of the ‘Greek Weird Wave’, the links with the crisis can only be traced by choice of an allegorical reading, whereas the latter takes place in a lot more realistic environment with an undoubtedly less weird plot, so the links to the financial crisis and its social implications are far more straightforward. In my thesis, I aim to investigate the commonalities and discrepancies in the ways these films relate to the concept and context of the Greek crisis, and the way they stage the concept of the crisis on the whole. In addition, as a constituent of the humanitarian crisis and refugee crisis, I will be exploring the representation of the ‘other’ in each of them. By the concept of ‘the other’, I mean anything out of the subjects’ comfort zone that could be considered unfamiliar and possibly hostile. For the theoretical framing of my approach, I use Sara Ahmed’s approach in “Affective economies” (2004), which describes how affects, such as fear and hate, tend to bind a number of people together as a ‘we’ and automatically separate them from another group of the population, ‘the others’. A certain part of my exploration regarding the significant role of the aforementioned emotions and their impact on individuals and collective bodies will be focused on the manner the concept of hope manifests in these films and the way the films depict the ambivalent functions that hope can have in periods of crisis, when it is often used as a mechanism for strengthening the subjects’ resilience but also acquiescence. Even though a lot has been written on the evolution of contemporary Greek cinema and its relation to the ‘crisis’, the originality of my thesis can be substantiated by the absence of comparative studies on *Dogtooth* and *Amerika Square*, through which I undertake an investigation of the affects of fear and hope in the country's film industry today.

Following the presentation of the research topic in section one, a theoretical framework will be included in chapter two. Chapter three contains the analysis of *Dogtooth* and *Amerika Square*: firstly, the chapter provides an investigation into the ways in which the films relate to the concept of crisis, while the representation of the ‘other’ is discussed in parallel. At the end of chapter three, the analysis centres on the notion of hope and the impact that it can have on the subjects’ resilience and spirit of endurance in the face of adversity.

2. Contemporary Greek Cinema and ‘Crisis’

Seen as offering one of the most creative and innovative artistic responses to the crisis today, Greek cinema is, nonetheless, no stranger to the country’s previous political and social crises. In effect, it should be noted that the Greek cinematic production has creatively interacted with other equally challenging and tumultuous historic experiences of the country in the past. A prominent example is the so-called ‘New Greek Cinema’ that emerged in the 1970s in response to the seven-year military dictatorship (Junta). With Theodoros Angelopoulos and Pantelis Voulgaris as the leading figures of the current, the movement rose to international acclaim thanks to films which were fundamentally politicised. The ‘New Greek Cinema’ filmography is marked by an attempt to find new, alternative narratives with which to express the notions of ‘Greekness’ and ‘nationhood’, as these terms had been unfavourably affected by the political turmoil and ideological control attempted by the regime (Constantinidis, 2000).

Turning to today’s cinematic industry in Greece, there are commonalities arising within a certain part of it, which have prompted several critics to view many recent Greek films as forming a new wave. To begin with, contemporary Greek cinema primarily consists of low budget productions with minimal financial support on the part of the state, featuring films that are created on the foundations of solidarity between filmmakers and actors. In an interview of his, Yorgos Lanthimos confirmed this collaboration and mutual support between Greek filmmakers as well as the necessary flexibility and adjustability they are required to show, constrained as they are by the lack of state funding and resources. Specifically, he stated the following regarding recent films connected with the ‘Weird Wave’: “The common

thing is we have no funds, so we have to make our own very cheap, very small films.” When asked about his active participation in the cast of Athina Rachel Tsangari’s film *Attenberg* -another film associated with the ‘Greek Weird Wave’- he said: “I help her with her film, she helps me with mine. This is the only way to get movies made here. There are no real producers in Greece and no public money any more. Most of the time we don't really know how to do it, it's a nightmare. But at least it's done out of love.” (Rose, 2011).

Talking about love in the films of the so-called ‘Greek Weird Wave’, a reference to the recent short humoristic spot *Letter to Yorgos Lanthimos* could not be omitted. This 2-minute 16-second film was shot in the very suburb of Kinetta, Athens, where Lanthimos directed his first, homonymous film back in 2005. The spot was based on an inspiration of the Greek Society of Cinematographers (GSC) and released a few days before last year’s (2019) Academy Awards, in which a film by Yorgos Lanthimos once more constituted one of the nominations; however, this time Lanthimos participated in the Awards not with a Greek but with an international production, namely *The Favorite*. None of this was a coincidence, though. The aim of the spot by the Greek Society of Cinematographers’ was to stress the reasons that compel a significant, worldwide renowned filmmaker like Lanthimos to stay away from Greek cinematic productions and closer to international ones (for instance, with two of his more recent films *The Favorite* and *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*). In no uncertain terms, the following parametres are pointed out: “Lack of strategy, lack of coordination, lack of funding, inefficacy of organizations, dormancy of the Ministry of Culture, apathy of the state.” The creators must have thought that this would be the best time to make their claims heard: now that all eyes were on the Greek director who became international, leaving a country that had never really supported his vision financially - as is the case with the majority

of Greek directors. The film ends with the motto, “Please give a bit of love to the Greek cinema,” clearly alluding to the apathy of both the state and a significant part of the public who have underestimated these films as shown by their limited appeal in Greece. Apparently, this love letter, supposedly addressed to Yorgos Lanthimos, in reality has numerous other recipients: the ministers, channels, agencies, organisations, secretaries, boards of directors, presidents, advisors, as they are the entities and authorities with the power to help Greek cinematographers create films under dignified professional conditions.

The similarities among the recently produced Greek films of the ‘Weird Wave’ are, of course, by no means restricted to the low budget available for film production, but, more importantly, they also extend to their underlying philosophy. Many of these Greek films unsettle viewers since they tend to renegotiate established national narratives that have shaped the country’s self-representation and understanding of its history. They often assume a critical approach towards the patriarchal and normative structures of Greek society: the family, the religion and the political status quo. In his book *The Queer Greek Weird Wave*, Marios Psaras remarks that this new cinematic wave “has brought about an irrevocable destabilization and demythologization of established national narratives that have long been central to the production of national identity and history, exposing them as phantasmatic ideological regimes, in many ways accountable for the present catastrophe” (Psaras, 2016: 4). Not only are these films critical towards national narratives, but they also enter into a “dialogue with the global art-house cinema and modernist traditions” (Psaras, 2016: 5). Thus, it could be suggested that the filmmakers of the ‘Weird Wave’ seem to have opened their perspective from the national to the global and transnational, from inwards to outwards perspectives, from traditional to modernist aesthetics.

In particular, concerning their aesthetics, many of these films are characterised by alternative, unconventional plots, themes and structures which gave rise to the tag ‘Greek Weird Wave’, as previously mentioned. In effect, they adopt innovative perspectives and unorthodox, surprising narratives, going for a noticeable shock effect. However, the term ‘Greek Weird Wave’ has proven quite controversial and problematic as, for example, the strangeness levels in each film differ. Thus, the label includes a broad scale of slightly to obviously weird films, a differentiation that has raised questions regarding the existence of a uniform and cohesive new cinematic movement. Additionally, insisting on the individuality of their work, Greek filmmakers are rather suspicious about attempts to categorise their films within a single movement: “There’s no movement, no common filmic language”, Lanthimos states. “Just different films here and there that are happening. And people are noticing them because of the country’s exposure internationally” (quoted in Chaplinsky, 2012). Indeed, the level of weirdness does not constitute the determining feature of these films, nor does it include or characterise contemporary Greek cinema as a whole. Next to films with ‘weird’ plots there are also several films that assume a critical stance towards conventional structures and reactionary attitudes in Greek society on the basis of more realistic aesthetics and more conventional plots. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, I will juxtapose such a film with a film that is considered emblematic of the so-called ‘Weird Wave’ in order to explore how their critique unravels (differently) and how they intervene in the context of the crisis.

The way contemporary Greek films relate to the Greek crisis has been another major topic of debate, with critics and audiences alike wondering whether this new wave of Greek films is directly associated with the country’s political turmoil. In his article in *The Guardian*, Steve

Rose, the critic who first used the term ‘weird’ for these films, asks: “Is it just a coincidence that the world's most messed-up country is making the world's most messed-up cinema?” (Rose, 2011). Indeed, several scholars and critics have established an explicit connection between the country’s politico-economic state and cinematic production (Scott, 2010; Rose, 2011). This sounds like a reasonable connection considering the simultaneous appearance of the politico-economic crisis and these so-called ‘weird’ films, with the exception of *Matchbox*: an extremely innovative 2003 Greek film which is justifiably considered to be the precursor of this ‘Weird Wave’. On the other hand, other critics -such as Papadimitriou and Chalkou- have argued that, even though the Greek crisis has been instrumental in drawing global attention to these Greek films, we should be quite sceptical about straightforwardly interpreting these films as products of the crisis. According to Chalkou, the contemporary Greek cinematic production is a multi-faceted phenomenon: “It is the result of a combination of factors: the rapid growth and prosperity of the Greek commercial audio-visual industry, the long-standing financial poverty and institutional failure of the Greek film sector, changing forms of contemporary cinephilia, developments in communication and image recording practices arising from new technologies, generational conflict and societal crisis, as well as a growing discord in the Greek public domain between established forms of authority and new modes of articulating public discourse” (Chalkou, 2012: 245). Similarly, Papadimitriou concludes that the film distribution in question follows certain patterns visible on the global market (economic, political, social, industrial) with the local adjustments or differentiations that are to be expected. Further and more specific analysis on this topic will be provided in the next chapter as part of my discussion of *Dogtooth* and *Amerika Square*. Can these films be regarded as a direct response to the Greek crisis, and if so, in what sense?

3. *Dogtooth & Amerika Square*

It cannot be denied that *Dogtooth* is by far the most emblematic and well-studied film of the so-called ‘Greek Weird Wave’ cinema; on the other hand, *Amerika Square*, though less known than *Dogtooth*, appears to have also commanded considerable attention from critics and scholars. Based on Yannis Tsibras’ novel *Victoria does not exist* (2013), *Amerika Square* was created in 2016; this means that, in terms of production, the films are set 7 years apart, and, at first glance, their perspectives seem to have virtually nothing in common. Therefore, in order to trace the films’ different approaches towards the common ground of the crisis, I will start with a brief presentation of their plots in the following paragraphs.

To begin with, Lanthimos’ movie tells the story of an overprotective, patriarchal family consisting of the parents and three children of unspecified age, but seemingly in their early twenties. The impression is given that the parents have created an idyllic home environment in a spacious villa with a swimming pool and a big garden. Nonetheless, from the very beginning of the film, clues are gradually introduced that we are dealing with a family quite out of the ordinary. As a matter of fact, the very opening scene presents a cassette recorder playing the vocabulary lesson of the day for the three siblings, who are listening extremely attentively. However, soon enough, we understand that, although the words featured are quite familiar to us, their meaning and use are not at all. After the introduction of each new word come its definition and an example of its usage:

The new words for today are the following: *thalassa* [sea], *aftokinitodromos* [motorway], *ekdromi* [trip], *karampina* [carbine]. The *sea* is a kind of leather

armchair with wooden arms, like the one we have in the living room; for example:

‘Do not stand. Take a seat on the sea so we can talk without rush’. The *motorway* is the very strong wind. The *trip* is a very tough material that we use to make floors.

The *carbine* is a very beautiful white bird.

In the sequences that continue afterwards, it becomes quite obvious that the children’s world is constrained within the high fences of the house. Specifically, the mother and the siblings live secluded in the villa, while the father is the only member that can leave it in order to provide for the family. The sole invasion of the outside world that is condoned out of necessity is that of Christina, who works as a security guard at the same workplace as the father and is employed by the parents with the purpose of satisfying the son’s sexual needs. The children have never left their house over all these years, being raised on fallacies about the outside world, as their parents have made a point of constantly cultivating grossly exaggerated fears for it in them. According to one of the common narratives the children seem to be frequently told, they will be able to exit the family home only after they have shed one of their dogteeth. They are firmly convinced of this story and afraid for their safety to such an extent that, even when the garage door is left open, not one of the children even considers venturing outside.

In addition, on a regular basis, the siblings are made to compete against each other in several activities which reward the winner with stamps; the entertainment section of their day is characterised by constant repetition and boredom as they are often compelled to watch the same family videos, or generally repeat entertainment practices that aim to keep them complacent and unaware of the real world beyond their completely isolated home. Even

though the parents seem to have well predicted and structured the children's daily life, inventing quite a few stories in order to misguide their inquiries and curiosity, there are a few invasions of the outside world into the villa that prove impossible to anticipate: the Hollywood videotapes that Christina gives the eldest daughter as a gift or token of appreciation for offering her oral satisfaction, and an 'uninvited' cat, which enters the garden and ends up slaughtered by the son since it is perceived as a menace to the family. The parents make sure that every sign of the outside world violently disappears; any kind of stimulus that could make their children doubt the reality they have been experiencing in the villa and trigger the idea of an escape is treated as a concrete threat to the existence of their meticulously prepared construction, a hazard that must be immediately neutralised. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the film's oddness and peculiarity have led to a wide variety of interpretations regarding its purpose and implicit message, which will be analysed in the sections below.

On the other hand, the film *Amerika Square* is situated in a far more realistic and recognisable space and time. In this case, we are to follow the lives of four principal characters with different backgrounds, but with the Amerika Square of Athens serving as their common point of reference. Nakos is a 38-year-old Greek unemployed man who holds racist beliefs; Billy, Nakos' friend, is a tattoo artist, with a totally different mindset, believing in people not in nations; Tereza is an African singer, who tries to escape from the Greek mafia she was involved with and exploited by; and, finally, Tarek is a Syrian immigrant, who aims to leave the country along with his daughter who is still a minor.

The film kicks off with a long shot of Billy's illegal tattoo shop; thus, we are first introduced to Billy who is tattooing the phrase 'Refuse to sink' on his own skin. In the beginning, the rationale and meaning of his actions remain unclear. However, a few scenes later, we come to a better understanding: Tereza arrives as a new customer, asking him to tattoo the same phrase on her body, while also erasing her current 'Property of Mike' tattoo, a sign that she belongs to Mike's mafia, from which she wishes to escape. From their discussion, it becomes obvious that 'Refuse to sink' is the most popular and typical tattoo among the refugee community. In general, this tattoo makes for the only personal element that people can actually take and safely keep on them when leaving their homeland in Africa or Asia and traveling to another continent under adverse conditions. And, as Billy points out, "Even the ink, the humble ink, lasts longer than we do. Longer than our lovers, our sweat, even our body. One and a half years it takes a year for a tattoo to fade. After you die...". Tereza is an illegal refugee, but Billy is not. Nevertheless, for both of them, the 'Refuse to Sink' tattoo acquires the meaning of a life-jacket that could give them power and protect them during any of life's storms, both in a literal and metaphorical way.

On the other hand, from the beginning of the film, Nakos manifests an unquestionably racist and nativist behaviour towards immigrants, attributing all of his personal misery as well as the country's dysfunctionality to them. Not many scenes later, he starts counting how many Greeks and immigrants live in the same block of flats as himself concluding with: "18-32. They've almost doubled our score. We've become a minority. It's *my* neighbourhood, man. *My* square". At this point, it must be emphasised that the apartment he lives in does not belong to him but to his parents. Nakos is almost 40 years old, and yet he still cannot make ends meet without his family's aid. For this reason, he is forced to keep living under the

parental roof and is constantly borrowing money from them in order to cover his personal needs.

It becomes abundantly clear that Nakos is practically obsessed with Amerika Square, comparing his childhood memories of it with its present state; he sees everything only through the distorting lens of the purported disastrous impact that immigration has had on it and, by extension, on the whole country. His jealousy of immigrants transforms into pure and tangible hostility towards them, which escalates when he decides to poison as many as he can in order to make them vanish firstly from the square and, step by step, ultimately from all of Greece. Even though this idea strikes us as insane at the very least, even more shocking and disturbing is the method he chooses to employ: he bakes poisonous loaves of bread and hands them out around the area. In a voice-over monologue, Nakos deviously remarks to himself: “And what would you hear? An Afghani trash picker found dead from poisoning? And what do you want him to die from? High cholesterol? Who cares? Tomorrow another one and two after that. Find me a journalist, a cop, a doctor who will put two and two together. What is this, CSI Las Vegas? They won’t even notice. They don’t even talk to one another. They fight like animals”. To him, refugees are but a modern-day pest; he believes that by implementing his misanthropic strategy, he will create a better world, he will rid the community of this filthy and infectious ‘virus’. Indeed, Nakos thinks that immigrants’ lives are unimportant and therefore their deaths are inconsequential since they are not entitled to the same human rights and respect as the rest of the Greeks: in his mind, they are deprived of a human hypostasis, being demoted to a lowly, dangerous, disgusting species, who arrived in Greece in order to encroach on undeserved opportunities, government benefits and public space, such as squares and benches, taking them away from the locals, their rightful beneficiaries. Hence, he cannot

hide his deeply felt pride and satisfaction as he watches them suffer from the poison, his malevolent gloat registering on his face.

Fully unaware of his friend's obsession with refugees and his plans of exterminating them, Billy holds a totally different mentality and vision of society and of those who find themselves on its margins. He goes out of his way to help Tereza escape from the mafia and leave the country, as he does for Tarrek. The fourth protagonist, Tarek, initially invests all his savings in what he thinks is the 'safest', albeit illegitimate, way to flee the country: it costs him dearly to secure fake passports and flight tickets to Berlin for himself and his underage daughter. However, after his first unsuccessful attempt, he is left with no other option but to board the boat to Italy and then on to Berlin; it is on this journey of despair and anguish that he meets Tereza. Their second attempt to escape by boat is yet again met with failure, bringing us to the very point where the lives of the four leads become irreversibly intertwined. Hasan, the middleman who has arranged for the immigrants' illegal transports, is poisoned by Nakos' bread, so the boat escape is once more cancelled. But in tandem with Nakos' transformation into an angel of death, Billy, his counterpart, also morphs into an angel of mercy. In light of this new setback, Billy provides both Tereza and Tarek with shelter; as soon as Hasan recovers, he offers him more money in order to secure another boat escape for the two immigrants as well as a good diversion, so that Mike, the mafia leader, will not be able to stop them. This time, the plan does bear fruit as the immigrants finally manage to reach the boat to freedom; however, success does not come without a heavy toll: Billy decides to exchange his life for theirs. It is at that final moment, however, that he seems to be more lucid than ever. In a profound voice-over just moments before he is shot to death by Mike's people, we hear him vocalise his final thoughts in a deeply felt epiphany: "I am not

an artist, but I figured out that I can live. You do not need to lose yourself to find someone – you can keep both. Maybe I figured it out too late.” There can be no doubt that he has not regretted his decision to sacrifice his life for Tereza and Tarek, while the philosophical nuances of his words express his satisfaction in finding himself and the meaning of his existence through this eventful journey that came to no happy ending.

Unsurprisingly enough, Nakos does not change his own mentality at all, even after Billy is brutally murdered. Instead, we are abhorred to hear that he also finds something positive has come out of his friend’s death: the fact that there are 2 immigrants less on Amerika Square! Nakos continues undaunted on his racist path, invariably searching for ways to harm the refugees of the square. As the film draws to a close, it leaves a subtle hint regarding Nakos’ next plan; while delivering coffee to two coloured men as part of his new job, he spends a few seconds with his gaze locked on them, then breaks into an obscure grin. Has he come up with a new way to poison them by pouring poison in their coffees this time? It seems like a plausible scenario; and yet we will never really know for sure as the movie is brought to an open end, leaving the audience with several questions.

Both *Dogtooth* and *Amerika Square* place a form of crisis at the forefront. When talking about crisis in the context of these films, I do not restrict the concept to the Greek politico-economic crisis. As argued by Anna Carastathis in her article under the title “Nesting Crises” (2018), in recent years, multiple types of crises on an economic and political, but also on an ecological and humanitarian level, have been unfolding in Greece; the most recent one among them is, of course, the critical refugee situation in the country, which has been referred to as ‘a crisis within a crisis’. In Yannis Sakaridis’ film, this new reality becomes

glaringly obvious and, through Nakos' story line, it is constantly being contrasted to a 'better' or 'safer' past. At the same time, the movie also graphically unveils the politico-economic crisis at its core: dizzying unemployment rates, low salaries, difficult living conditions, people in their 40s unable to be financially independent.

The relation of *Dogtooth* to the circumstances of the Greek crisis is much less obvious and can only be surmised through an allegorical reading (Metzidakis, 2014; Lutas, 2014; Lykidis, 2015, Aleksić, 2016). Interpreting *Dogtooth* as an allegory, I thus consider that life in the house could symbolise life in the milieu of the Greek crisis, the siblings standing for 'the Greeks'. In this reading, the parents could assume the role of the country's systemic authorities, which, by providing a fictitious image of reality and false hopes, endeavour to maintain the people complacent and passive in order to avert public upheaval. To this allegorical reading we could also add a scathing critique of the country's educational establishments and the media as they form part of the system, managed, controlled and abiding by it. Although *Dogtooth* has prompted a wealth of interpretations, not all of which sought links with the Greek crisis, I believe that reading the film from this standpoint gives prominence to its connection with the spacetime that it was created in and possibly inspired by. Along similar lines, Metzidakis expanded the allegorical undertones present in *Dogtooth* by seeing the patriarchal family model of the film as a representation of both the State and the Orthodox Church of Greece.

Given the patriarchal nature of the Greek Orthodox Church today, too, as exhibited by the Church's recent declarations about family life, it is hard not to see the very strict father in the movie, who runs the entire proverbial show at home, as a metaphor

for both Church and State, since both are pretty much still bound together in Greece. That the Church or its ideology does not appear as such in any explicit form in the movie does not, I believe, diminish its implicit impact on the overall structure of *Dogtooth*.

(Metzidakis, S., 2014: 376)

According to Metzidakis, the fact that the world of politics and the Orthodox Church are interconnected in Greece could justify this parabolic use of the *Dogtooth* family. In this sense, one could also detect some inherent criticism of the dominant religion in Greece that attempts to control the practitioners' way of life by sometimes resorting to misinformation or what could be considered the false hope of paradise after death.

Through the prism of the politico-economic crisis, *Amerika Square* sheds ample light on the refugee crisis, too: it portrays the viewpoints of the people who have illegally arrived in the country, hoping for a better future. They were forced to leave their homelands in order to survive and, for them, Greece is either a chance to start a new life or their temporary passage on their way to a better life in the next European country they reach. Tarek has to pay 8,000 euros in order to ensure what seems to be the safest escape to Berlin with his daughter. He strives to avoid boat passage as he is aware of the high risk and the alarming numbers of refugees losing their lives during these perilous transfers. In a voice-over, we listen in on the protagonist's thoughts during his first attempt to leave the country by plane with the use of fake passports:

I used to believe in borders, but not anymore. Now I believe borders are business. A big business that makes lots of money, like war does. I have seen a lot of money

during the war, more than I have ever seen in my whole life. Foreign money and our money. Money everywhere. Lots of borders too. Borders within borders. Turkey is a border: business. Aegean Sea is a border: business. Athens, Victoria square: more business. And business needs a constant supply of products. What products? People...like myself and Maya.

The film presents various aspects of the difficulties that the refugees are faced with in the Greek community, from having to sleep in the streets or on benches to being on the receiving end of racist behaviour and extreme violence, physical and verbal abuse. As can be easily deduced, they can be made to feel unwelcome and fearful of what the future may be holding for them.

These people think we came to stay. They think we came here to take over the squares and squat [on] their benches. Some of them think we come from places where things are human-like. Well, like they are here anyway... They think we became humans the moment we set foot in their squares. I'm sure they didn't even care about the squares before we arrived and started sleeping on their benches. They get greedy when they see us. How many of us there are. How much in need we are. Seeing a person in need makes them greedy, thirsty even. All of a sudden, they love their squares again and want to sit on the benches that they abandoned long ago.

In this cinematic approach, the sentiments and concerns uttered through Tarek are meant to verbalise the pain and disappointment of immigrants in general. Indeed, he critically addresses some of the attitudes that refugees in Greece have faced since the so-called refugee-crisis erupted and some locals seemed to fear their own 'space' was being

appropriated by others. Through his inner monologue, Tarek underlines the desires, traumatic experiences, histories and places that the refugees carry with them, stressing that they did not just appear on Greek squares out of nowhere; evidently, they must have had pressing reasons for going out on a limb and taking a boat to Greece at the terrible risk of drowning. Above all, they made the journey out of desperation: they did not arrive with a view to straining the benefits of the Greek system, but in the hope to survive, because their own country was in a state of emergency.

Against the backdrop of the refugee crisis, the film portrays a common fear that has been intensely revived in contemporary societies: the fear of the other. 'The other' could be any individual or group of people who differ from the norm in terms of their values, beliefs or preferences. In view of the high figures of immigrants in Europe since the outbreak of the immigration crisis in 2015, the fear of the other is mainly associated with 'foreigners'. Unfortunately, the xenophobic rhetoric advocated by populist and anti-immigration politics has grown into a widely accepted doctrine; at the same time, the existence of alternative narratives conveying the migrants' perspectives captures much less attention (Farrier, 2011; Limbu, 2009). As a result, it is hardly startling that the refugee crisis in Greece coincided with the increase in the Golden Dawn's popularity and supporters. Described as neo-Nazi and fascist by scholars and media alike (Dalakoglou 2012 & 2013; Smith, 2011), the Golden Dawn is an ultranationalist, far-right political party in Greece, blamed for racism and crimes against refugees. The party rose to prominence amid the Greek economic crisis, reaching its peak in 2012. Back then, the Golden Dawn succeeded in occupying 18 parliamentary seats, which means more than 7% of the total votes; the figures are staggering, especially if compared to the country's 2009 general elections when the party had not even managed to

land 20,000 votes. In his recent article in *The Guardian*, Daniel Trilling stresses that, “no outright fascist party in Europe had made such gains in a general election for years” (Trilling, 2020). This development speaks to the ‘crisis-within-a-crisis’ concept that underlies Yannis Sakaridis’ *Amerika Square* and fearfully proves that the extremist actions we watch on screen are not far from the Greek reality.

In order to better illuminate the way the film renders this climate of distress and resentment towards others, we may turn to Sara Ahmed’s article “Affective economies” (2004); in it, the author explains how affects, such as fear and hate, tend to bind a part of the people together (‘we’) and, automatically, separate them from another part of the population (‘the others’). Achille Mbembe (2003) goes one step further to analyse the ‘politics of death’ through the term *necropolitics* which particularly emphasises the idea of exclusion on a racial level as well as the redefined interrelations of power, terror and death in the contemporary world. Mbembe argues that sovereignty has the power to control and decide whose lives are worth living and whose are not and, thus, who should die. In specific, he defines necropolitics as “the perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security” (Mbembe, 2003: 18). This perception of the ‘other’ materialises in the sharp divide between natives and refugees.

Both movies make a marked distinction between the ‘we’ and the ‘others’. Starting with *Amerika Square*, Nakos is a representative of racist and neo-Nazi ideas in Greece, as championed by the Golden Dawn party. For him, the difference between the ‘we’ and the ‘others’ is based on purely national(istic), nativist criteria. He lays the blame on refugees for

all the misery of his life as well as for the decadence of Greek society, and seems constantly preoccupied with these thoughts. Even at family dinners, he mentions how Americans exterminated the Indians or, similarly, how the Japanese eliminated the Chinese during the war. Likewise, during random conversations, he seems to abruptly steer the topic towards immigration:

-Baker: "What's up?"

-Nakos: "Not much. We're full of immigrants... It's hopeless. I mean, they don't bother *me*. They haven't done anything to *me* personally, but I'm not used to this."

On a daily basis, Nakos comes in contact with immigrants only when he needs their illegal cheap cigarettes, incapable as he is of affording the ones on the Greek market. For everything else, he considers them a contagion that has spread over his square and is, therefore, unable to continue with his life until he annihilates them. As a matter of fact, he does not only keep to his racist thoughts, but also acts violently upon them, even before he starts poisoning unsuspecting immigrants. One such example is a scene with an immigrant eating his ice-cream in a care-free manner and holding a box of sweets. We watch the envy and spite reflected in Nakos' eyes, possibly stemming from the fact that he cannot purchase an ice-cream of his own. He stops the coloured man and, after making sure that nobody is watching, he lashes out on him, "What's that? Where did you find it?". He thrusts the ice-cream onto the ground and grabs the box out of its owner's hands. When the young man runs away in horror, Nakos opens the box and helps himself to its contents. The scene exemplifies the way in which openly aggressive attitudes towards perceived 'intruders' in the national space are triggered by the fear of appropriation of what is ours (here, the pleasure of ice-cream eating) to the extent that these others are denied any pleasure that may humanise

them: their pleasure is directly seen as an act of appropriation of things that belong to the 'we'. His nativist, racist ideas are also predominant while he is distributing the poisonous loaves of bread, hanging them outside of rubbish bins in the neighbourhood; he elaborately details how he will assure that only 'the others' will be killed by means of his tactic, while all of 'us', the Greeks, will be kept out of harm's way:

The one who puts the bag there is obliged to wait. You hide somewhere close by. If he looks like one of us, you try to get his attention or buy him a loaf of bread, so he does not eat from the trash. I tell you, this is like the modern cockroach poison, have you ever read about what they do? The cockroach takes it to its nest and all the other ones die too.

On the other hand, *Amerika Square* also incorporates alternative narratives, which articulate the immigrants' perspectives and those of the natives standing by their side. Nakos' best friend, Billy, goes to great lengths to help and save the two immigrants escaping, to the extent that he even sacrifices his own life in the process. He falls in love with Tereza, but due to the circumstances in Greece, he prefers to help her leave the country rather than keep her there. In this context, Billy makes an interesting comment on the refugee crisis, drawing a comparison between the narrow-minded, set-in-their-ways Greeks and the change-daring, decisive immigrants:

All of the others, the immigrants, the unwanted who gather here on the square and bother those who have never left Athens, they know where they want to go. They tell you Goteborg, Copenhagen, Marseille, Paris and you see their faces light up. There

are borders and controls and tons of constraints. Those who want to leave cannot and those who can don't want to.

There is a striking contrast in the patterns of the two friends' behaviour and mentality. The director deliberately highlights it with a parallel shot of them both on their motorcycles: on the one hand, we watch Billy struggling to rescue Tereza in order to afford her freedom from the mafia, while, at the other end of the spectrum, there is Nakos, trying to locate the best spots for his lethal loaves of bread with a view to poisoning as many immigrants as possible.





The motives behind their actions and their way of thinking are fundamentally dissimilar. In his interview to Stergios Pouleres, the director Yannis Sakaridis explained that, in this way, he wished to emphasize that racism is not an innate characteristic, something that you are born with, but an attribute that you can acquire later, during the course of your life. Nor can it be attributed solely to a person's nurture. Even two people like these protagonists who were raised in similar environments -the same neighbourhood and square- can eventually develop very differently. The peculiarity of their relationship lies in the fact that not only did they grow up in the same local community, but they also seem to consider each other friends, spending hours together; and still, there exists a huge gap between them, substantial differences and so many unspoken thoughts. Is it possible for these two people to have befriended each other by sheer coincidence, only because they happened to be brought up in the same area and square? In essence, the answer is obviously not - the interaction between the characters in this film, however, could raise a lot of questions considering the superficial nature of human relations in contemporary societies and the lack of meaningful communication.

Turning to *Dogtooth*, although at the time when the film was created the so-called refugee crisis had not yet taken place, it is quite possible that Lanthimos aimed to hint at the diachronic fear of the ‘other’ as a symptom of social pathology and the way it has taken shape in our societies. In the film, there is again an equally rigid distinction between the ‘we’ and the ‘others’, with the villa fences serving as the major divisive boundary between them. Nevertheless, as was mentioned before, there are a few invasions of the ‘others’ in the house, represented by Christina, the video-tapes and a cat. The scene that succeeds the cat’s unsanctioned entry vividly allegorizes how the system (including the educational system, the religion and the media) can brainwash the masses and propagandise, drawing on the ‘politics of fear and death’. The father’s explanation well exemplifies such sort of manipulation:

The animal that threatens us is called a ‘cat’. It is the most dangerous animal that exists. It feeds on human flesh, and specifically that of young people. With its claws, it rips the skin of its victims and, subsequently, with its sharp teeth, it eats the face and then the whole body. As long as you are inside, you are not in danger. You are protected. However, we have to be prepared in case something invades the house or the garden again.



The film also emphatically demonstrates the conventional character of language in relation to the politics of fear and death. We are confronted with the scary impact that the linguistic choices of sovereignty could have on the control of our personality and mentality. In his “No Bones to Pick with Lanthimos’s Film *Dogtooth*” (2014), Metzidakis observes: “*Dogtooth* ties into social institutions outside the film when the father figure uses such language in order to control, tyrannically, the very world which the children characters inhabit.” After watching *Dogtooth*, we may start wondering, for instance, why the term *sea* should have the meaning of “a large body of saltwater that is surrounded in whole or in part by land”¹ and not “a kind of leather armchair with wooden arms”. Who can guarantee that our reality is not an illusion too, a ‘fairy-tale’ like the one that the siblings in *Dogtooth* live in? In the same direction goes Angelica Ourri’s comment (2016) on the conventional, subjective character of reality by making a comparison between Plato’s cave allegory and the family’s life in *Dogtooth*. More

¹ Karleskint, G. (2009). *Introduction to Marine Biology*.

specifically, she mentions that the children's false notion of reality is quite similar to that of Plato's prisoners:

Being part of a society and a system means being constantly exposed from the moment of birth to a version of the truth and real and accepting it as the only norm in which nothing outside can exist or be right. However, the truth and the real can be altered based on perspective and not originally what one thought. Plato's allegory of the cave is an example of false reality. The prisoners chained in a cave are continuously looking at shadows the guards are creating on the wall. They believe those visions as the truth and reality and when faced with the outside of the cave they are overcome with disbelief since the shadows are the only reality they ever knew. Humanity has created a variety of social and economic systems, based on shared values and beliefs. (...) So, who decided what is the norm?

(Ourri, A. 2016: 2)

By means of this comparison, Ourri provides a penetrating critique of the perception of normality, correctness or wrongness, which is applicable -far beyond the family in *Dogtooth*- to any human society in general.

Apart from the politico-economic and refugee crisis, which is overtly thematized in *Amerika Square* while only allegorically addressed in *Dogtooth*, both films also broach the topics of the crisis and dysfunctionality of the Greek family as a major pillar of society. With few exceptions -for instance, the 2002 film *Matchbox*- this theme was treated as a taboo until quite recently, since the image of the Greek family almost exclusively projected was that of a healthy unity with strong familial ties, full of love and happiness (Psaras, 2016). Some

international cinematic examples of the kind are *Mamma Mia* and *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. These polished narratives reached their peak in 2004, the year when Greece hosted the Olympic Games at the same time as winning both the UEFA Euro football championship and the Eurovision song contest. All these international distinctions and the national pride they brought with them fortified the sanctification of the Greek family as an archetype. On the whole, those circumstances led to the promotion of a romanticised image of Greek society, a perception that dramatically changed in the course of time and, obviously, with the onset of the economic crisis (Gourgouris, 2004; Papadimitriou, 2010; Psaras, 2016).

Undeniably, the dysfunctionality of the Greek family constitutes a central topic in both movies. In the case of *Dogtooth*, the film has been considered an exposition of the faults of Greek –and maybe not only– families, who arguably turn a blind eye to the fact that the natural development for children is to grow up and become independent individuals soon after adolescence. In Greece, it is quite common for ‘children’ to live with their families until well into their 30s or 40s; more often than not, even if they do not share the same house, the parents still keep taking care of their housekeeping and play a major role in their sons’ or daughters’ lives. This uninterrupted involvement furnishes families with a feeling of control over their offspring; however, even if they are driven by the best of intentions, such attitudes harm young people and restrict their freedom. This becomes obvious in the film through the extreme idea of parents raising and secluding their children in a villa in order to shield them from the dangers which they could be beset with when living in society. Although the parents in *Dogtooth* appear to be motivated by their love and care for their daughters and son, their actions unequivocally have a disastrous impact on all of the family members’ lives: from the parents’ constant state of alert in their relentless effort to conceal reality from their

children, devising stories upon stories in order to keep them complacent, to the siblings who seem like birds trapped in a golden cage, unaware of their ignorance without which they may be unable to survive.

In his interview to Pamela Jahn and Michael Zelenko, Lanthimos also discusses how the parents' overprotective attitude was one of his sources of inspiration for *Dogtooth*:

It didn't really start as a story about family dysfunction as such. In the beginning, I was wondering about family life and parenting in general, and if the way we think about it would ever really change. But I had a conversation with some friends one day, and I was making fun about the fact that two of them were getting married and having children because today many people get divorced, and kids are being raised by single parents, so I said there was no point in getting married. But although I was obviously just joking, all of a sudden, they got extremely defensive about what I had said. This made me realise how someone I knew and who I would never have expected to react that way freaks out when you mess about with his family. And that's how I got the initial idea about this man who would go to extremes to protect his family, and who would try to keep his family together forever by keeping his children away from any influence from the outside world, being firmly convinced that this is the best way to raise them.

(Electric Sheep magazine, 05/04/2010)

I knew I wanted to create this contradiction. Not to make a film that was dark and violent throughout. I wanted the contrast of parents trying to create a very beautiful environment where the kids were beautiful, where everything's beautiful. And next to

all of that, these things that they're doing are horrible and tragic – they're destroying and deforming their kids in many ways.

(The Rumpus, 25/06/2010)

Thus, according to the filmmaker, the family's overbearing frame of mind and the ghastly consequences it could have on their children was the starting point for the film. This idea can also be traced in *Amerika Square*, with the most conspicuous example coming from Nakos' family. Even though he is in his late 30s, Nakos still shares the same house as his parents and his mother still treats him as if he were a child. She cooks for him, takes care of his clothes, hands him an allowance to cover his expenses, and fights with her husband whenever he puts pressure on Nakos to find a job. In addition, even though throughout the film the parents do not appear to be making any racist comments against refugees, they do express their dislike of Billy and his sister, Nadia. They believe that they both exert a negative influence on their son because they have decorated their bodies with tattoos and piercings. This stereotypical and superficial way of thinking has them horrified at the thought that, at some point, Nakos may become one of 'them', sporting tattoos and earrings, or at the possibility of their son falling in love with someone like Nadia. However, it is all too ironic that reality comes to fully contradict and disprove their preconceptions as their own son turns out to be the more dangerous one in the end. Much to their embarrassment and dismay, Nakos is actually the one that becomes the harbinger of doom. He is the one who comes up with the appalling idea of poisoning and killing the immigrants around Amerika Square, the one who sets the evil and inhumane plan in motion and takes it upon him to see it through; and, on top of everything else, he is the one who proves a threat even to his own mother. Will Nakos' family still blame his friends for being a harmful influence after all this? This sounds more

likely than the possibility of them taking responsibility for their son's behavior. However, their fear of difference and the resulting belief that different is somehow perilous or detrimental can be seen as a milder version of the same racist and nationalist ideology and disposition that marks Nakos.

In addition, there is another way in which *Amerika Square* spotlights the problematic nature of the Greek family. The parents not only have an abnormally strong presence in their children's lives, but also strive to uphold the socially acceptable profile of the happy and successful family, even though they are painfully aware of the dysfunctionalities conveniently swept under the carpet. Confronting their reality and problems or trying to be honest about them and find solutions both prove challenging tasks for these family members who frequently prefer feigning happiness to having deep discussions, offering apologies or acknowledging mistakes. In Nietzschean philosophy, this has been clearly described as a human tendency to idealise and project morality as well as beautify life by avoiding the harshness of reality and the pain it can bring. This harshness is utterly incongruous with the meaning Nietzsche attaches to his emblematic idea of 'Amor fati', which can be translated from Latin as the 'love of one's fate'. The phrase is used to describe an attitude in which individuals perceive everything that happens in their life, including suffering and loss, as beneficial or, at the very least, necessary:

I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who makes things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I

do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking *away* shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: someday I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.²

(Nietzsche, 1882: 275)

In the film, oblivious to the fact that the bread has been poisoned, Nakos' mother tries some of the leftovers she stumbles upon in the kitchen. She immediately starts feeling unwell, while Nakos, on realising what has happened, is petrified with fear. He remains a bystander, almost paralysed, just watching her in agonising pain but unable to take any action. Paradoxically enough, the person who *is* able to assist and save her life is no other than Tarek: he hears the screams and instantly offers his help. After the incident, we watch the family steeped in silence. The parents' facial expressions attest to their disappointment and shock; yet, none of them has the strength to confront the truth of the situation or discuss it further. They seem to have decided to put the unfortunate event behind them and behave as if it had never happened. Evidently, this is the easy way for them to suppress a horrifying reality (that their son intentionally added poison to the bread), thereby precluding any possibility for 'catharsis' or a development in their relationship. In all probability, the members of this family feel more comfortable hiding their real selves and pretending to behave like the others expect them to behave; this façade allows them to feel aligned with the stereotypical narrative of the 'holy' Greek family. Their self-image depends on 'what others will say'. Thus, *Amerika Square* offers insight into the superficiality of family relations as a convenient cover for a deeper violence, thereby revealing the dysfunctionality discussed earlier.

² In this instance, the "Yes-sayer" is not approached from a socio-political perspective, but refers to individuals who are capable of the uncompromising acceptance of reality per se.

Last but not least, apart from the politico-economic, refugee and humanitarian crisis, and family dysfunctionality, the environmental crisis also joins the nexus of intersecting crises the film addresses, when Billy's sister, Nadia, makes comments on this crisis. She is passionate about ecology, so she actively tries to raise awareness of environmental issues and engage the people surrounding her, including even the regular tattoo clients who listen to her while she is tattooing. There is a scene where she becomes very aggressive to a customer, criticising his unecological way of living, his unethical choice to work for a petroleum company and the fact that, in general, though petroleum has invaded every aspect of society, nobody seems to care:

They work for the oil tycoons, pollute the seas and you never find a clean beach to swim. [...] It's not about swimming, but there are fifteen types of alternative energy, Billy. And these guys make fun of us and just do it for the money. Crooks. Do you see this? It's made out of petroleum. This one, too. This, too. And this! The sign outside is made out of petroleum. Everything is made out of it. Even your shoes!

However, soon enough Billy alerts her to the fact that the client she has been admonishing has lost his job and has been struggling to survive for the previous 8 months. In this way, the politico-economic crisis is restored to its centre stage position again as is the idea of a 'crisis within the crisis' (Carastathis, 2018). As different types of dysfunctionalities in the country are addressed one after the other, the audience could wonder if they all appeared concurrently or one ensued as the consequence of the other. All in all, the concept of crisis in Yannis Sakaridis' but also in Yorgos Lanthimos' films takes such multi-layered dimensions that, while one type of crisis unfolds, another is brought to surface, and vice versa.

After thoroughly discussing the concept of crisis in both films, I will dedicate the last part of my analysis to another potentially relevant concept, that of hope. It could be claimed that hope provides a form of resilience which is often thought to be essential in periods of crisis when constructive or even utopian narratives are very much in need to boost people's morale. It can encourage people to endure the hardships of life, but it can also assume another, far more political function: it can also serve as a powerful tool of the system when it needs to keep the population content, docile and obedient (Jameson, 2005; Fisher, 2008). To be more precise, although hope has the ability to empower individuals and enable them to anticipate a better future, it often fails to constitute the driving force for change. The faith in a better future which will arrive one day often leads to increased passiveness as well as acceptance of the current situation until the change itself materialises. Thus, instead of activating individuals, hope can also make people focus on the limbo of anticipating a certain future without really acting in the present in order to create the conditions for this future to come into being.

Additionally, when hope generates a much coveted yet unfounded optimism, it comes close to the affective structure that Lauren Berlant calls 'cruel optimism' in her homonymous book (2006):

[O]ptimism is cruel when the object/ scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the

relation...What's cruel about these attachments, and not merely inconvenient or tragic, is that the subjects who have x in their lives might not endure the loss of their object/scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being, because whatever the content of the attachment is, the continuity of its form provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world.

(Berlant, 2006: 24)

In her book, Berlant analyses optimism as a cruel structure because it makes individuals sustain goals and hopes that are unattainable within the precarious conditions of late capitalism. She puts emphasis on the present, talking about contemporary frameworks of chronic crisis in late capitalist societies and the subsequent idea of the normality of daily life:

The conditions of ordinary life in the contemporary world even of relative wealth, as in the United States, are conditions of the attrition or the wearing out of the subject, and the irony that the labor of reproducing life in the contemporary world is also the activity of being worn out by it has specific implications for thinking about the ordinariness of suffering, the violence of normativity, and the "technologies of patience" that enable a concept of the later to suspend questions about the cruelty of the now.

(Berlant, 2006: 28)

This also encompasses the problematic aspects of the notion of hope that I mentioned above: if the unstable conditions shaped by a chronic crisis and its implications become the norm,

people's optimistic attachment to an unattainable future goal -which is a form of hope- becomes cruel. This may also deflect attention away from a hazardous present, which people face with an attitude of passive acquiescence, while those in power seem to be the only ones who benefit from the constancy of this status quo.

These structures are also visible in *Dogtooth*, which presents the siblings compliantly resigning themselves to their weird condition at home for years on end, in submissive anticipation of the day when their dogtooth falls and they are finally able to live outside. For years they have been dreaming about how the outside world could be, but they have only been contemplating the possibility of the change to come without even knowing how long it might take. The siblings seem to have quietly and patiently consented to the given 'ordinariness' of their present as well as the vagueness of their future. Only the older sister seems to be exasperated at a certain point; she finds herself at a loss and refuses to continue just clinging to the mere hope of change occurring at some indefinite future point without acting on her own in order to bring about that change. She thus decides to hurt herself by forcibly removing her own dogtooth in order to escape and be permitted to live outside the villa/prison. However, her revolutionary gesture in the end is not bloodless, nor do we ever find out the outcome of her bold decision due to the film being open-ended. Even though she breaks the pattern of hope as acquiescence, the film also shows that the power of hope, understood in this particular way, is so strong that it can keep individuals in an inactive, dormant state for much too long. Moreover, the open end of the film may also suggest that her revolutionary gesture might not render any results either because it took too long to take place or because the system has too much power to be affected by a minor insurgent act. As I discussed in my allegorical reading of the film, the system, represented by the parents,

attempts to control individuals by providing misleading education and media information as well as using the concept of “hope” for change as a strategy conducive to the children’s complacency. In addition, the children seem entrapped in cruel optimism -manifest both in their illusory belief that their life is ordinary and in the misguided conviction that their dogtooth will automatically fall one day- and are, at the same time, so attached to the reality they live in that they cannot think their life on different terms. In other words, enjoying their freedom out of the villa and exploring the unknown scares them more than spending their whole life in their golden prison of ignorance. Therefore, it seems that, in the film, two ways are presented for dealing with structures of power: either the safe way of passively conforming to the reality as chosen by the sovereign, or the risky way of reacting and trying to effect the change at any cost, which the older daughter follows.

Turning to *Amerika Square*, the concept of hope is moulded and approached in different terms. The focal point here are the refugees, who have arrived in Greece in hope of a better future. Instead, they seem to be spending their days at squares socializing with other people in similar situations and simply discussing the next steps possible. Some of them have a more complacent attitude too, hoping that an external power, for instance society, formal institutions or even god, will bring change. Refugees are already aware that they are the minority in the Greek society, strangers surrounded by strangers, a powerless ‘other’ surrounded by a strong, and in many cases, hostile ‘we’. Therefore, this understanding and the fear deriving from it intensifies their passiveness and acceptance, resulting in an expression of hope as a form of resilience during the crisis they are experiencing as they struggle to survive. On the other hand, *Amerika Square* also stresses the importance of alternative narratives regarding hope’s impact on individuals. There are a few refugees, like

Tereza and Tarek, who do not merely yield to circumstance but try to find ways to escape against all limitations and hardships, as did the older sister in *Dogtooth*. Tereza decides to break free from the mafia knowing the high risk she runs of being killed in case her attempt is unsuccessful, while Tarek -in pursuit of a better future for his daughter- chooses to take the risk of an illegal way of departing for Germany. Therefore, Tereza, Tarek and the brave sister of *Dogtooth* could constitute examples of hope's positive impact as a force that can grant people agency and initiate change.

The pattern of hope as acquiescence in *Amerika Square* could also be analysed from another perspective, that of Nakos' family. The excuse of the financial crisis has turned Nakos in his late 30s into a totally dependent individual who cannot survive without his family's support, financial and otherwise. The parents have similarly resigned themselves to the situation as explained earlier; particularly, the mother persistently avoids any deep discussions which could make the family members feel uncomfortable but could also pave the way for a change. It is obvious that the family is looking to blame Nakos' situation on external factors (the financial and political crisis, refugees) instead of reflecting upon their own mistakes. The same passive attitude is also apparent regarding the resolution of the problems; the parents appear hopeful that the country's economic issues will be overcome one day and their son will then find a proper job, while Nakos envisions a future without refugees. He is convinced that only then will he be able to move on with his life. Thus, as opposed to Tarek and Tereza, Nakos' parents move around in an acquiescent atmosphere of passive acceptance, anticipating the end of the crisis without taking their lives into their own hands.

4. Conclusion

As was mentioned in chapter 1, the aim of my thesis was to investigate the Greek cinematic production during the crisis and, more specifically, how it relates to and has been shaped by the country's politico-economic crisis. To narrow my topic of investigation, I focused only on two of the contemporary Greek cinema's widely discussed films, *Dogtooth* and *Amerika Square*. Prior to the in-depth analysis of the aforementioned films, I dedicated chapter 2 to outlining the commonalities within today's cinematic industry in Greece and the agreement of several critics on viewing many recent Greek films as forming a new current. Continuing to chapter 3, the concept of crisis in *Dogtooth* and *Amerika Square* was explored as well as the representation of the 'other' in both movies. At the end of section 3, the concept of hope was elaborated on in conjunction with the impact that it can have on the subjects' resilience and outlook on life.

As was described in the beginning of chapter 2, the tendency to categorise the Greek cinematic production is not unprecedented. The spacetime from which they were inspired and in which they were created as well as the unconventional, strange plots and aesthetics of a big part of contemporary Greek films have led to the emergence of the 'Greek Weird Wave' term, directly linking this cinematic production with the country's problematic politico-economic state. Nonetheless, this gave rise to a debate, with several critics, like Papadimitriou and Chalkou, taking a sceptical stance and advocating a broader interpretation based on a combination of factors which present the contemporary Greek cinematic production as a multifaceted phenomenon.

After discussing the relevant background literature in greater detail, in the following chapter I turned my focus on *Dogtooth* and *Amerika Square*. Through the films' analysis, it became apparent that the concept of crisis in *both films* is anything but one-dimensional. To begin with, the allegorical character of *Dogtooth* has led to a wide range of interpretations that link the film to the concept of crisis, but not restricted to the Greek one. Aside from the Greek financial and political crisis, the film has been associated with the humanitarian crisis and family dysfunctionality. As similarly supported by Aleksic (2016), the message of *Dogtooth* should not be constrained to Greek reality. In her recent article, she mentions that the fact that the movie is not localised and temporally defined should be connected with Lanthimos' aim to provide "a more universal link between family and society, regardless of the ideological or political context" (Aleksic, 2016: 156). Moving on to *Amerika Square*, the film conveyed more straightforward messages, yet still multidimensional. Set in Greece during its period of pronounced financial difficulties and arrival of refugee waves, it has been directly related to the politico-economic and refugee crisis ravaging the country. In addition, there is a notable focus on the dysfunctionality of the Greek family which seems to revere and defend morality, while in essence the family members are just avoiding their problematic reality. Indubitably, it is obvious that they are unable to truly and sincerely communicate with each other, projecting their personal psychological problems or complexes on the family and, consequently, on society. The film also highlights racist and violent human behaviour, while comments on the ecological disaster are present too. Thus the crisis of the Greek family as well as the humanitarian and ecological crisis featured in the film were also traced and analysed.

Furthermore, a part of my analysis was dedicated to the representation of ‘the other’. As was aforementioned, ‘the other’ refers to anyone or anything unfamiliar that is distinct from the so-called ‘norm’ and, thus, hard to connect with or relate to at first sight. The films discuss how individuals approach otherness or react towards it. For the theoretical framing of my approach, I used Sara Ahmed’s article “Affective economies” (2004), which describes the significant role and impact of the affect of fear on individuals and collective bodies, tending to bind a number of the people together as a ‘we’ and automatically separating them from another part of the population, ‘the others’. In *Dogtooth*, ‘the other’ is symbolised by any existence outside of the villa, invariably viewed as hostile and unwelcome by the family. The fence around the house makes the boundaries between the ‘we’ and the ‘other’ very concrete and specific, while Lanthimos underlines this distinction by adding the scenes of the cat and video tape invasion. In both cases, the family reacts violently, evicting the ‘outsiders’ from home, while the parents obviously attempt to brainwash children by cultivating an offensive, war-like attitude towards anything different from the ‘we’. The only invasion that seems to be condoned is that of Christina’s, but only as long as she obeys the parents’ rules and facilitates their purposes. The moment that she introduces something out of the family’s comfort zone, she is violently and irrevocably banished from the villa. Similarly, Nakos’ attitude towards refugees, ‘the others’, is constantly dismissive. Not only is he unfriendly towards them, but he is also explicitly aggressive and violent. For Nakos, ‘the other’ is represented by anything different on a racial level, which causes all his nationalistic and racist instincts to surge. He is convinced that his life, his neighbourhood and generally his country are at risk because of the refugees’ arrival. His family seems to harbour similar feelings towards Nakos’ friends, Nadia and Billy, as they have a different, more extreme appearance, diverging from the norm, because they have tattoos and piercings on their bodies. Therefore, both films stage an

unmistakable negative attitude towards ‘the other’ and its representation, thereby serving as a cinematic commentary of how ‘otherness’ is received and construed nowadays, both within and beyond the Greek reality.

Finally, the concept of hope was also discussed and delineated as a dynamic, two-fold mechanism. On the one hand, in both films, hope was interpreted as a form of resilience that helps individuals endure suffering and go through the hardships of life, passively anticipating change. Through my analysis, this was connected with the affective structure that Lauren Berlant calls ‘cruel optimism’. To this category belongs the attitude of the children in *Dogtooth*, as the hope of the falling tooth had an altogether disadvantageous impact on their development, adding to their passivity and acquiescence. Moreover, *America Square* also provides relevant examples describing the acquiescent attitude of the refugees on the squares or Nakos’ passivity towards his own life, hoping for a better future when the country is ‘clean’ from refugees. On the contrary, hope was also depicted as a force that activates agency in the case of the oldest daughter in *Dogtooth* as well as in the cases of Tarek and Tereza in *Amerika Square*. These characters seem to distance themselves from the norm; they consciously take risks and employ all means available to them in order to bring about change against all odds. Hoping for a better future beyond what they have provides them with motivation and courage to strive for change and take a different path from the norm. Therefore, the analysis of both films has led to the conclusion that the concept of hope in periods of crisis can assume ambivalent functions: from reinforcing complacency to fuelling resistance or insurgent acts.

All in all, as Lars Von Trier once said, “a film should be like a stone in your shoe” (Trier, 2005). This statement seems to perfectly epitomise the effect that contemporary Greek films of the so-called ‘Greek Weird Wave’ can have on the audience’s mind. Undeniably, *Dogtooth* and *Amerika Square* have played a pivotal role in jump-starting and evolving this new cinematic approach in Greece. Hard to understand and analyse, thought-provoking and multi-layered, these films have fulfilled the challenging task of turning international attention onto the Greek cinema after what seemed too long a period of silence.

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