

MODERN GREEK PROGRAM

A New Greek Film: “The Journey: The Greek American Dream!”

by Artemis LEONTIS

A telephone call from film director Maria Iliou reached me out of the blue in March 2006. “I’m making a film about Greek Americans. Dan Georgakas said I have to talk to you. Come to New York for an interview.”

I had never heard of Maria Iliou and knew nothing about her filmmaking skills. Certainly, she was enthusiastic about the new film she was making, aptly called *The Journey: The Greek American Dream*. A sense of serendipity fills the story she tells of how she ended up making it, as if a mysterious force was guiding her to a treasure chest with her name on it:

A sudden opportunity in the form of a Fulbright Award brought me to New York three years ago and a chain of coincidences led me to various archives in various cities around America where I encountered many images of the Greek immigration of America, forgotten, locked away in cupboards. The materials were so stunning that I could find no peace. It was a combination of personal history, my father who had sold tobacco in America in the 1950’s, glances full of melancholy and hope which stared out at me from the photographs, coupled with the certainty that the collective memory is something vitally important which one should not let slip away, that cast me into an adventurous round of research and travel from one US city to another.

<http://www.thejourneygreekamericandream.org/film.htm>

After agreeing to meet Iliou in New York, I studied her credentials. Born in Greece (Iliou later told me she is the granddaughter of the famous Antigone Metaxa, or “Theia Lena,” who raised her), she had studied in Greece and Italy. She had received international awards for her earlier documentary films (Houston Film Festival Platinum Award for *Alexandria*; Würzburg Festival Prize for *Three Seasons*; Greek Ministry of Culture Award for *The Encounter*). She had come to New York City on a Fulbright to make a film on Smyrna, but the unexpected unearthing of heretofore undiscovered pictures and footage of Greek immigrants in the U.S. turned her attention to the Greek diaspora in North America.

In late March 2006, I met Iliou for the first time in Manhattan at the National Arts Club building on Gramercy Park, the splendid Gothic Revival mansion of onetime presidential candidate Samuel J. Tilden from 1860 until his death. As I waited for Iliou and her cameraman to receive me on the second floor with their cameras, I chatted with Martha Klironomos, Professor of Modern Greek at San Francisco State University, who had just completed her interview. “It isn’t easy,” she warned. It now dawned on me that film would be capturing my talking head, and that I was not prepared to speak before a camera. What exactly was the story Iliou’s film would tell? This would be partly in the hands of the people she was interviewing. I was now feeling the pressure of having to get things right.

As a documentary filmmaker, Iliou is trained to draw out fresh material from her subjects. Although she put forward a set of topics and themes, now she sat rather impassively opposite me and commanded me to talk. Nothing in her face suggested what I should say. So I began to take my cues from my elegant surroundings.

“I anticipate a big surprise...”

Old Victorian grandeur contrasted sharply with the frugal life Greek immigrants and their children had lived. What a strange world they had stepped into when they set foot on Ellis Island! How, really, had they made themselves at home? I don’t remember what I said that afternoon (and I haven’t seen the film yet, so I anticipate a big surprise), but I know the subject of difficult transitions and impossible transmissions of a vanishing inheritance was on my mind. Then too I was thinking about the dissonance between the immigrant parents’ wishes and their American children’s desires: how seductively the American Dream pulls people in one direction while the imagined requirements of the homeland make people feel perpetually drawn and quartered. For the women, especially, “the journey” was, deep down, a difficult dream.



Poet Olga Broumas; novelist George Pelecanos; writer Elias Kulkundis; film critic and Greek-American historian Dan Georgakas; scholar Martha Klironomos; Senator Paul Sarbanes; archivist George Tselos, director of immigrant archives at Ellis Island; researcher Gus Chatzidimitriou; Father Robert Stephanopoulos, and others all pick up different threads of the immigrant story, while Maria Iliou and historian Alexander Kitroeff, the film’s consultant, narrate in broad strokes the story of Greek migration to America from the period of mass immigration (1890-1920) and Americanization (1920-1960) to the revival of ethnicity (1960-1980), when people of my generation found new meanings in Greekness.

The Journey: The Greek American Dream and director Maria Iliou are coming to U-M on Sunday, March 9 at 3pm in Angell Hall, Auditorium B. Enjoyed by capacity crowds at the Benaki Museum in Athens and the Metropolitan Museum in New York, *The Journey* is the 2007 Official Oscar submission from Greece for Best Foreign Language Film. It is a must-see film. Mark your calendars.



Filmmaker Maria Iliou

Filmmaker
Maria Iliou
will introduce
her movie on
March 9 at 3pm
Angell Hall,
Auditorium B



Κ. Π. ΚΑΒΑΦΗ

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ENDORSED BY THE FOUNDATION FOR MODERN GREEK STUDIES

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A Growing Program!

by Vassilis **LAMBROPOULOS**, Director of the Modern Greek Program

Enrollments are the big news from the U-M Modern Greek Program. The program is simply bursting at the seams. Winter 2008 enrollments in Beginning (27) and Intermediate (22) Greek are exceeding capacity, and most of our other classes are full. 37 students are participating in Modern Greek conversation classes. Over 20 have expressed their intention to participate in the Athens Study Abroad Tour. In total we have 204 students enrolled in exclusively Modern Greek classes this Winter term. Add the 122 from Fall 2007 classes and our enrollments are 326 students, a record number, which does even not include students taking courses with a substantive modern Greek content outside our department, for example, the 51 students in Greek Myth in Cinema.

We are also seeing record numbers of students graduating with a Modern Greek degree. We currently have 14 students Majoring and 11 Minor in Modern Greek.

There is growth in other areas on the academic front. **Maria Hadjipolycarpou** arrived last fall to pursue a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature with modern Greek specialization. A native of Nicosia, Cyprus, she holds a MA in Comparative Literature and Education Administration from Purdue University. Maria is interested in Cypriot literature, postcolonial theory, questions of gender and history, and literary translation. Her presence on campus will help us pay closer attention to neglected areas of Cypriot culture.

Artemis Leontis is now Associate Professor of Modern Greek, a promotion from adjunct to tenured, full-time faculty. This means she will be able to offer more courses and in general contribute even more to the life of the Program.

In addition to this very important development, three excellent hires will expand the sphere of Modern Greek Studies at U-M.

As many of you know from our Fall 2007 newsletter, **Dr. Panagiotis Pafilis** began working as Lecturer of Modern Greek responsible for Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced Greek language classes. Dr. Pafilis holds a joint appointment as Research Fellow in the School of Natural Resources and Environment and conducts research on Aegean ecosystems. His fit with our program is excellent. He is charismatic and effective in the classroom, while outside of class students come to him with not just language questions but requests for other assistance, such as finding internships or establishing contacts in Greece.

The Department of Political Science established an endowed chair to lure **George Tsebelis**, a worldclass authority in "rational choice theory," from the University of California-Los Angeles. A native of Athens, he has come to Michigan as

Anatol Rapoport Collegiate Professor of Political Science. He works in Comparative Politics and specializes in political institutions, using Game Theoretic models to analyze the effects of institutions. His work covers Western European countries and the European Union, and, more recently, institutions in Latin America and in countries of Eastern Europe. His wife is **Barbara Koremenos**, a Greek American from Indiana who is Associate Professor of Political Science at UM. Her interests are equally diverse and include World Politics, Political Economy, Public Law, and Public Policy and Administration. They have a daughter named Selini.

The Departments of Slavic & East European Languages and Comparative Literature have hired as Assistant Professor **Tatjana Aleksic**, a highly promising scholar specializing in Balkan literatures and cultures. A native of Serbia with a Ph.D. from Rutgers University, she is particularly interested in Serbian and modern Greek fiction, Balkan myth and folklore, the mythical subtext in literature, and questions of migration and exile. Last year she edited a rich collection of essays, *Mythistory and Narratives of the Nation in the Balkans*.

Ruth Scodel, D. R. Shackleton Bailey Collegiate Professor of Greek and Latin and a steadfast supporter of Modern Greek, started her tenure as Chair of Classical Studies last fall. Among many contributions to Modern Greek, she organized a conference in 2002 and edited a special issue of the journal *Classical and Modern Literature* devoted to Cavafy and classical poetry. We express our gratitude to outgoing Chair, Prof. **Richard Janko** for his multifaceted support. After a well-earned sabbatical, he will return to the Department in Fall 2008 as regular faculty.

We welcome a new staff person with an impressive portfolio. **Kimberly Johnson** took over as Modern Greek Public Relations Coordinator on January 2, 2008. She comes to us with a great deal of higher education experience and a certificate in graphic arts. Kimberly is responsible for assisting the Modern Greek Program with event planning, newsletters, promotional materials, web site management, and general support. She is also the web site manager and graphics designer for Classical Studies. She succeeds Carrie Romant, who set the course and standard for the job with her beautiful work and manner.

With its outstanding enrollments and so many new arrivals on campus, the Modern Greek Program is in its strongest position since its creation nearly twenty years ago.

My Greece

by Natalie BAKOPOULOS



My novel-in-progress, *We Will Sleep Like Little Children* (whose title is taken from “Sleep,” a Kostas Karyotakis poem translated by Keith Taylor and William Reader), is set during the military dictatorship in Greece (1967 to 1974). The junta serves as both a historical backdrop and a source of dramatic conflict in the lives of the main characters: three siblings—Anna, Taki, and Sophie; their mother, Eleni, a physician, whose husband has died ten years prior to the novel’s opening; and her brother, Mihalis. Mihalis is an itinerant, well-known poet in the city who periodically lives in Eleni’s basement. He is arrested in the middle of the junta’s sovereignty and spends some of the novel at a detention center. Though he is not the principle character of the book (the novel is multiperspective), his feelings about the creation of art during an oppressive regime serve as what I hope to be one of the piece’s major themes: art as a medium for political protest, the cessation of its creation as political protest, and the responsibility of artists to respond to the political and social climate in which they live.

GREAT UNCLE, MIHALIS KATSAROS

The character of Mihalis was inspired by stories I’ve heard of my great uncle, Mihalis Katsaros. And while the book’s character is only loosely based on the real man, whom I’ve never met, Katsaros’s ideas of resistance, politics, and poetry definitely have helped shape this fictional character. When, in 1950, he published his poem “My Testament” in a paper called “Democratic Press,” it was censored. Katsaros reacted immediately by writing a postscript, which now appears as

George Seferis wrote, in his diary: “Man is always double: he who acts, and he who sees himself acting; he who suffers, and he who sees himself suffering; he who feels, and he who observes himself feeling.” This intense self-awareness is rooted in the experience of the writer, who Nadine Gordimer says is made from the “tension between standing apart and being fully involved.” I always feel this conflict. And, more expressly, I feel it when I go to Greece, a place not only from where my father hails, but wherein my artistic imagination currently resides.

My father was born in Athens and came to the United States in 1966, but his two sisters, Eleni and Vassia, have always lived in Greece. When Eleni died in September 2006, I felt the devastation that comes from not having said goodbye. Because she did not wish me to know of the cancer that ravaged her body—though I already did, in fact—our last meeting, only two months earlier, was forced, cordial. I pretended not to notice when she, a normally energetic woman who’d wake me far too early in the morning, had to sit down while we perused the art museum. When she tried to mask the layer of pain that had taken over her bright face, I would quickly say I needed a nap. In turn, I had to mask my sadness. She was living two different lives: around her sister and my cousins, she cursed her doctors and riled at the unfairness of the world. Around me, she, too, suffered, but chose to observe herself differently.

My Greece exists in boxes of random objects, many given to me by Eleni: an owl ring, like so many peddled to tourists in Plaka; a tiny datebook from 1967; a series of postage stamps issued by the dictators, decorated with their pompous and ridiculed Phoenix, sardonically referred to as The Bird. In fact, so much of the Greece I know has come through my aunt, who, by profession, was, aptly, a tour guide. When I began writing my novel, which is set in Athens during the military dictatorship, she sent me gorgeous letters filled with details of the period: a trip she remembered to Istanbul, a hike on an island, a frightening run-in with the military police. She offered me the past, perhaps a type of self-preservation. Yet how worried she was I’d get something wrong.

part of the poem in the collection *Against the Sadducees*. The poem gained popularity during the dictatorship within the resistance movement. Here is part of the postscript:

***They altered significant phrases
bent over it, in terror, for hours
they erased the places with the rivers,
the new rousing of the forest;
they killed the wind—
Now I understand what I have lost
and who it is who chokes.***

And how I worry the same. Though a novel is an act of the imagination, I agonize I’ll never capture the place, or that I’ll inevitably reduce it to clichés. Then again, most writers, in one way or another, are, or have been, outsiders. In some ways, I belong to so many elements of Greece—as tourist, historian, writer, observer, child; in other ways, I belong to none of them.

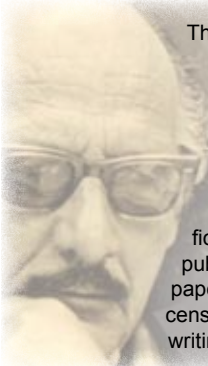
Because I do not live there, Greece exists for me in relics of the past: forty years ago, one year ago, twenty minutes before. News from the country washes over me in blips: an email from a friend in Athens, a cousin announcing her pregnancy, an article in the *New York Times*. My great-uncle, Mihalis Katsaros, a poet, exists for me in a DVD documentary, in stories I’ve heard from friends and family, and in the lines of his poems. For me, he is more fully realized in the fictionalized poet who exists in my novel, where I can fashion my own version of a man like him. To paraphrase Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the role of the poet, after all, is not to tell what actually happened, but to imagine what inevitably could or might have happened.

And my Greece exists in memories of each trip, none more memorable than my most recent, that summer of 2006. On a quiet day on a wonderfully uncrowded beach on the island of Kythnos, my cousin and I stood with our feet in the water, talking. Further down, someone had dragged a four-post bed out into the sand, and an old yia-yia, dressed in requisite black, took her afternoon rest there, beneath a tree. When she awoke, she made her rounds to see what she might have missed.

“Girls!” she called to us. “You’ll catch cold!” And as she got closer, she examined our bodies up and down and then focused solely on our faces. She did not recognize us as locals.

“Tinos eiste,” she asked, her...with curiosity, *To whom do you belong?*

She hadn’t meant the question to be complicated. But I’m still unable to give her an answer.

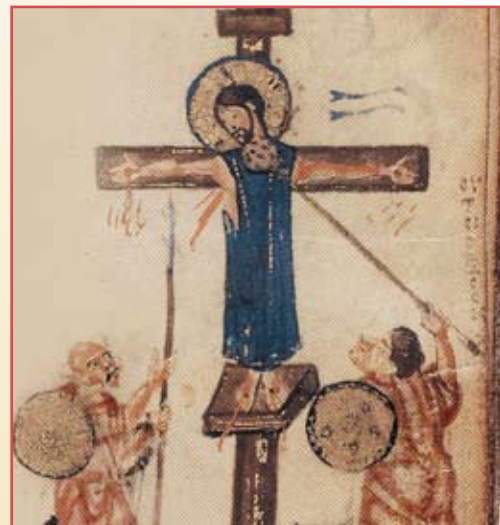


(Original)

Αλλάζανε φράσεις σημαντικές
ώρες σκυμμένοι πάνω της με τρόπο
εξαφανίσανε τα μέρη με τους ποταμούς
τη νεα βουή στα δάση τον άνεμο τον
σκότωσαν---τώρα καταλαβαίνω πια τι
έχασα ποιος είναι αυτός που πνίγει.

2007 Annual Platsis Symposium on the Greek Legacy

ICONOCLASM: *The War on Images*



An Event to Remember!

Upper left
Artist Michael R. Kapetan, who spoke on "Creating Sacred Art"

Middle left
Prof. Webb Keane, U-M Department of Anthropology, responded to Prof. John Haldon's lecture on "Iconoclasm in the Byzantine World"

Lower left
Professors John Haldon and Vassilis Lambropoulos

Upper Right
Prof. Ruth Scodel, Chair of Classical Studies, with Barbara Platsis and Perry Katsikas

Lower Right
Prof. Charles Barber, who spoke on "The Afterlife of the 'Iconoclastic Controversy' in Byzantium," with Laurie Talalay, Assoc. Director of the Kelsey Museum, who responded to his lecture



6th Annual Pallas Lecture in Modern Greek Studies

Wed, Feb 13, 2008 • 7pm
Michigan League,
Vandenberg Room

*"The Struggle for Greek
Independence and the
International Diplomatic
War in the 1820s"*

Lecture by
Prof. Andre Gerolymatos,
Simon Fraser University

Mark Your Calendars!

2008 MODERNGREEK WINTER EVENTS

Mon, 3/3/08 • 4pm
"Julian the Apostate
in Modern Literature"
Lecture by Dr. George Syrimis,
Yale University
2175 Angell Hall, Classics Library

Sun, 3/9/08 • 3pm
Greek Film "The Journey:
The Greek American Dream"
Special guest, Filmmaker Maria Iliou
Angell Hall, Auditorium B

Tues, 3/18/08 • 7pm
Tryfon Tolides Poetry Reading
Shaman Drum Bookstore

Wed, 4/2/08 • 7pm
"The Holocaust and the
Jews of Greece"
Lecture by Prof. Mimis Cohen,
University of Illinois-Chicago
Michigan League, Hussey Room

Sun, 9/28/08 • 2pm
7th Annual Platsis Symposium on the
Greek Legacy, "Greek Science and
the Antikythera Mechanism"
Rackham, Ampitheatre

For more on these events, check our
web site: www.lsa.umich.edu/modgreek