

CHAPTER FIVE

TELLING THE EWES FROM THE RAMS: ECONOMICS AND GENDER DISORDER IN PETROS MARKARIS'S INSPECTOR HARITOS MYSTERIES

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I remained there, alone, looking at the parfait ice-cream, which I hate, in front of me. The image popped into my mind of the hulk on the balcony who had started blubbering a few days ago when his girl had slapped him. I had made a mistake then. It was not only the men who grow their hair long who cry. Those who cut it short cry too; and cry like women into the bargain. The clothes are unisex, the clocks all show the same time, and the slaps are now handed out both ways. How are you to distinguish the ewes from the rams any more? (*Zone of Defence* 2006, 152).

Inspector Costas Haritos, protagonist of the popular crime series by celebrated Greek writer Petros Markaris, finds himself in the midst of a gender disorder that triggers a broader existential crisis. Yet in a genre where the quirky, gender-role-defying woman sleuth/crime-fighter has become an increasingly prominent and popular figure—from Sarah Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski, Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander, and Nora Roberts's (as J. D. Robb) Eve Dallas, to such television and film hits as *La Femme Nikita* and *Alias*—Haritos's confusion seems belated, anachronistic; even the plaint, "How are you to distinguish the ewes from the rams any more?" feels hopelessly pastoral. Moreover, his disquiet is rendered all the more poignant by the fact that Haritos himself is hardly the hardboiled, masculine type of yore: he nurses his confusion not in the seclusion of a dark bar with a stiff drink in hand—that stereotypical, trusted solace of the detective—but in a brightly lit cafeteria in front of a hated bowl of parfait ice-cream. Indeed, the scene is remarkable for the way it mingles and parodies competing modes of detective narration --the "hulk" of traditional

hardboiled narratives with its ass-kicking or face-slapping feminist revisions—that are presented to us as a series of emptied out gestural shells, a ritualized exchange of slaps and tears that underscores their dialectical relationship, their kinship and inversion. Even more importantly, however, the scene ends by drawing our attention to the *uniformity of temporality and consumption* that shapes this blurring of roles: “the clothes are unisex, the clocks all show the same time.” Besides Haritos’s obvious nostalgia for lost certainties, which are clearly related to the very workings of crime fiction itself,¹ this overarching uniformity is the main source of the anxiety at the center of the passage.

If, as Robin Truth Goodman contends, the contemporary “detective novel, evincing skepticism of liberal humanism, is born of social chaos” (9), Markaris dramatizes the contradictions and antagonisms of the contemporary moment in order to confront a global economic system, and related patterns of consumption constituted by a temporality of “progress,” that rely on the silencing and exploitation of vast swathes of the world’s population. In both this and his complication of gender roles and stereotypes, Markaris follows the path paved by Sara Paretsky, who, during a writing career that spans over three decades, has been widely credited with the wholesale revision of the hardboiled detective genre. Indeed, her protagonist, the tough, independent, sharp-tongued and sexually liberated V.I. Warshawski embodies a pointed critique of a whole network of systemic gender and class biases that connect the macro-levels of contemporary “social chaos,” from corporate malfeasance to labor racketeering, to local examples of disenfranchisement and marginalization, like the fate of V.I.’s poor, aged, and incapacitated neighbor, Hattie Frizzel in *Guardian Angel* (1992). Not only does V.I. supplant the role of the hardboiled male detective and, in so doing, radically complicate the detective novel’s conventional gender roles,² but she is also a dogged

¹ In an interview for “Writers and Company” with Eleanor Wachtel on CBC Radio (“Interview with Petros Markaris”), Markaris describes the crime novel as the most “religious” of literary forms, because “the bad guys always get punished.” His novels, however, go against the grain by blurring the line between victim and murderer: “You never know when the victim has been a culprit, and the culprit a victim,” explains Markaris.

² The much commented upon ritual punishment of the femme fatale’s transgressions in classic hardboiled and noir fiction and film is repeated and reversed by writers like Paretsky, Roberts, Patricia Cornwell, or, arguably, Larsson in his Millennium trilogy, who put women in the position of avenging social adjudicator traditionally held by the male detective. It is no accident, after all, that Roberts’s Eve Dallas and Larsson’s Lisbeth Salander are daughters of men who

pursuer of social justice for the downtrodden, so that as Goodman notes, “social problems are feminized” (70) in the novels. These are interrelated concerns in Paretsky’s oeuvre: the interweaving of gender and economics, along with very self-conscious references to the hardboiled genre—in *Hard Time*, for example, V.I. declares ‘I certainly didn’t feel like drinking. No Philip Marlowe I, downing a pint of rye every time I got injured’ (213). And these concerns cohere in V.I.’s investigations, which depend on her trail-blazing audaciousness just as much as her canny community-building, often with the help of her proxy mother and father, Dr. Lotty Herschel and Mr. Contreras. In the face of a social chaos brought about by deep systemic inequities, then, V.I. instantiates a tentative model of grass-roots community building that depends on her ability to move beyond the constraints of identity conventionalized in the detective novel. This is a model that Markaris also deploys to particularly evocative effect in his work.

Given the devastating effects of the financial crisis on Greek society, which has practically demolished the social safety net and left the majority of the country’s youth with virtually no prospects, it is not at all surprising that a critique of the global economy and financial crime is pursued at this time by a Greek author like Markaris. Indeed his recent Inspector Haritos “Crisis Trilogy” novels tackle these issues head-on.³ Of course, Markaris is not alone in this endeavor. As William J. Nichols and others have argued, a large part of hardboiled noir’s resurgence as a global phenomenon is attributable to the fact that writers at the margins of Anglo-U.S. cultural hegemony recycle the sense of disillusionment and anti-institutional worldview found in canonical American noir, while parodying many of its conventions, in order to “explor[e] the social effects of globalization” and “examine the revolutionary possibilities of literature and popular culture” (Nichols 2011, 15).⁴ Markaris does this both by tapping into the way noir

are cartoonish amalgams of every single permutation of male evil—pimps, abusers, criminal kingpins—and that they use their expertise with certain supposedly male technologies—Salander’s hacking skills, for example—to exorcise them from society. Relatedly, Paretsky’s PI, V.I. Warshawski, is the daughter of a police officer who is able to stay one step ahead of the police because she knows them and their tactics so well.

³ As Markaris states in an NPR interview with Sylvia Poggioli, “globalized (...) financial crime” is at the heart of the European crime novel (“Athens Cop on the Trail of Modern Greece”).

⁴ Nichols writes that the “novels of these authors [anti-globalization noir writers] are populated with a parade of frustrated and disillusioned Leftists (...) what [Manuel] Vázquez Montalbán has referred to as the ‘huérfanos de 1968,’ [the

crime writers before him use culturally resonant gendered anxieties to “unleash demons bottled up in the national psyche” (Christopher 1998, 37), and by underscoring the genre’s thorny relationship to commodity culture, which often treads a fine line between pointed critique and covert reinforcement. Christopher Breu, for example, has argued that the hardboiled masculinity of the classic noir novel represented both “an aggressive reformulation of male hegemony,” and “an adaptation to, as well as a reaction against, the workings of corporate capitalism” (5). In a related manner, Goodman argues that certain kinds of feminist revisions of the noir crime novel in the U.S., “pos[t] feminism as a condition of independence, justice, empathy, and freedom that—without necessarily challenging its basic practices—will lead capitalism out of its self-interested and shackling corruptions (...) and other systemic evils” (66).⁵ Markaris radically disrupts the gendered dynamics of identification and resolution that characterize conventional noir crime plots to thereby also disrupt the processes of commodification central to this subgenre.

This essay analyzes Markaris’s boldest and most self-conscious experimentation with the noir crime form, *A Long, Long Time Ago* (2008)⁶, in light of the parodic interrelation of nostalgia, commodification and disordered gendered identity characteristic of his work. The last of Markaris’s crime novels before the “Crisis Trilogy’s” more explicit critiques of globalization and Greek financial ruin, *A Long, Long Time Ago* conceptually sets the stage for these novels by systematically deconstructing the conceptualizations of gender and history contained in

orphans of 1968] who roam a commodified landscape lost, unable to find their own relevance within a framework of neoliberal ideology, and irremediably trapped in a nostalgic yearning for their irretrievable utopian ideals” (15). Himself an “orphan of 1968” and an outspoken critic of politicians and intellectuals that grew out of, and ultimately failed, the radical potentialities of that moment, Markaris uses the recurring character of the old Leftist Zisis to dramatize the tensions between socialist and market utopias.

⁵ Goodman also argues that in feminist revisions of the hardboiled novel, “feminism ... appears as built on the relics of the public welfare state, taking up its wasted reins, and it imagines itself—in conformity with the new economic culture of the 1980s—as its privatized form. This conjunction (...) makes professional, managerial, entrepreneurial, and capitalist class interests seem as though they conform to the interests of the marginal. That is, professional-class feminism should be seen as helping the capitalizable classes to enter the system in order to affirm that their system can represent the interests of the capitalizable classes as much as and in conformity with their own” (55).

⁶ This novel has yet to be translated into English. All translations are my own.

commodified versions of noir.⁷ In other words, the crimes committed in this novel resonate on multiple, interconnected levels that are always ultimately traceable as crimes of/against genre and gender. In *A Long, Long Time Ago*, we find our unlikely protagonist, the reticent, street-wise family-man Haritos, known for his adeptness at navigating Athens's labyrinthine streets and infamous traffic—indeed, Markaris has been “hailed as the master writer of traffic jams” (“Athens Cop on the Trail of Modern Greece”)—on a package tour holiday in Istanbul, where he has gone with his wife to escape the disappointment of his daughter, Katerina's, civil wedding. When he is approached by a Turkish writer of Greek descent desperate to find the ninety-year-old woman who used to be his nursemaid, and who has mysteriously disappeared while traveling from Greece to Turkey, Haritos grudgingly agrees to help, only to find himself embroiled in a baffling case of serial murder: the old woman, Maria Hambou, embarks on a killing spree that leaves a trail of poisoned, vomit-covered corpses. Haritos therefore finds himself juggling the demands of sightseeing with his wife and of collaborating with a Turkish partner, Mourat Saglam, to track down a killer in a city he does not know. Matters become even more complicated when Katerina finally agrees to also get married in church, for Haritos's wife becomes hell-bent on shopping as much as she can for the approaching wedding, and Haritos has to beat the clock and make sure to solve the case in time to attend his daughter's wedding.

A Long, Long Time Ago thus represents a detour—a displacement, a time out of official time—from both Markaris's and Haritos's usual *modus operandi* and narrative space. Interestingly, Haritos's holiday in Istanbul results in a layering of crime, tourist and marriage plots that enables an unusual mirroring of characters and author. Born in Istanbul in 1937, of an Armenian merchant father and a Greek mother, Markaris studied in Vienna and Stuttgart before settling in Greece in 1965. This trajectory is reprised in part by all of the novel's main characters: Haritos, who is in Istanbul on a package-tour holiday; his Turkish partner, Mourat Saglam, who grew up in Germany, but returned to Turkey because of German xenophobia; and, most importantly, the missing murderess at the center of the crime plot, Maria Hambou, whose life-story is shaped by repeated displacements and returns from Greece to Turkey. This novel, then, is a homecoming of sorts for Markaris, a return to and examination of origins

⁷ Indeed Markaris's crime novels very much constitute a body of work that ought to be read as a whole. His commentary on gender in the crime novels, for example, can be traced in Haritos's changing relationship to this daughter, whose role becomes increasingly central and complex, particularly in the “Crisis Trilogy.”

of both the domestic and literary kinds. The return to Constantinople, the lost, maternal city entails a parallel return to the constitutive elements of the noir novel itself that, like all such returns, is structured by incompleteness and disappointment.

Nostalgia: The Vicissitudes of History

In his influential “Notes on Film Noir” (1972), Paul Schrader defines nostalgia, “a passion for the past and present, but also a fear of the future” as the “fundamental” noir theme: “The noir hero dreads to look ahead, but instead tries to survive by the day, and if unsuccessful at that, he retreats to the past. Thus film noir’s techniques emphasize loss, nostalgia, lack of clear priorities, insecurity” (221). Indeed the noir novel, the preeminent and certainly most stylized subgenre/style of urban modernity articulates nostalgia as an “ache of temporal distance and displacement” (Boym 2001, 44), layering, as it does, competing relations to time and urban space—the bright, forward-looking face of progress with its dark, seamy primordial underside, for example—so that the noir protagonist, hounded by a constitutive malaise and detachment, acts as the “involuntary explorer of the society” (Jameson 1995, 70). If as Svetlana Boym has argued, nostalgia is coeval with modernity, its “alter ego,” because it is symptomatic of a “new understanding of time and space” (xvi), then the noir novel dramatizes the tensions inherent in this new understanding.

In keeping with Markaris’s Brechtian literary pedigree,⁸ *A Long, Long Time Ago* is a novel predicated on the workings of noir nostalgia in a way that both parodies and *creatively rethinks* them.⁹ In fact, the riddle of the title, *A Long, Long Time Ago*, is a parodic *mise en abyme* of the very notion of nostalgia, immediately calling our attention to the constitutive

⁸ Markaris started his literary career as a translator (he translated Brecht and other German authors into Greek), playwright and screenwriter. His “The Story of Ali Retzo,” a play very much in the Brechtian vein, was staged in 1971, during the regime of the military junta in Greece (see Van Steen). The play did extremely well and brought Markaris’s work to the attention of filmmaker Theo Angelopoulos, with whom Markaris collaborated on numerous screenplays.

⁹ Boym describes an “off-modern” tradition of nostalgia that critiques the “deterministic narrative of twentieth-century history.” She attributes this more creative use of nostalgia to “eccentric traditions,” “those often considered marginal or provincial with respect to the cultural mainstream, from eastern Europe to Latin America Creative rethinking of nostalgia was not merely an artistic device but a strategy of survival, a way of making sense of the impossibility of homecoming” (xvii).

role of the past in the novel, but in a way that clearly depicts that past as endlessly receding and ungraspable: the past always seems to be just out of our reach. Moreover, the title poses as a key to the crimes in the novel, a possible point of origin, only to send us on a wild goose chase: we're never really sure as to *what* exactly happened in the multiple possible, elusive pasts conjured by the title and *how*, if at all, they bear on the present. Ultimately, then, by both proclaiming and then disclaiming the desire for teleology and a clear point of origin, the title resists what Svetlana Boym describes as "restorative nostalgia": the desire to rebuild the lost home and "patch up memory gaps" (41). This type of nostalgia manifests as a narrative in which the past is both remade in the image of the present and seen as foreboding present disasters (50). Instead, the focus on time as *passage* or *duration* proclaimed by the title and elaborated on in the novel signals a "reflective nostalgia" that weds "longing to critical thinking (...) compassion, judgment" (Boym 2001, 49-50): "If restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialize time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space" (Boym 2001, 49).

The burden of the past, and the correlative insistence of reading the present through the past, is a particularly critical issue for the contemporary Greek writer. Still resonant with the echoes of an illustrious classical legacy, Greek culture continues to be beleaguered by questions of continuity and identity that have only been exacerbated by the way the economic crisis has cast doubt on Greece's role in Europe. The location of the novel, Constantinople/Istanbul, underscores these issues. On the one hand, it clearly calls to mind the narratives of trauma and lament marking the Greek imaginary of Constantinople (Laliotou 2010, 136): it is the "lost homeland" essential to Greek notions of continuity and wholeness. On the other hand, as the "crossroads of the world" between Europe and Asia, modernity and tradition, it is an essentially hybrid city that equally clearly calls into question such nostalgic and homogeneous evocations of identity. It is no wonder, then, that almost every character in this novel is both haunted by history and split between East and West/Turkey and Greece, most notably Maria Hambou, whose killing spree marks her return home and is an integral component of the revisiting of her past.

Despotopoulos, one of Haritos's more annoying travel companions on the package tour—"he manages in some mysterious way to always find himself next to me" grumbles Haritos (17)—is one of the most obvious parodies of a stultifying obsession with the past. Mockingly described by Haritos as the "triumphant commander in retirement" (146), he is both a

caricature of the hardboiled type and a mouthpiece for the delusions of restorative nostalgia. He poses as a hardened, no-nonsense strategist, simultaneously cautioning Haritos about police procedure and the innate untrustworthiness of the Turks (147), and holding forth about the importance of the Straits of Bosphorus: "The Straits, our contemporary ThermopylaeWhoever has the Straits, has struck it big. Remember Leonidas: 'Guard Thermopylae!' He said it first...If we were the ones holding the Straits just imagine the brown-nosing we'd be getting from the Americans" (42). Yet it is clear, as Haritos points out, that he sees very little as he travels, simply strutting around and scoping tourist sites for their strategic military value (43). Seeking refuge in the authority of a classical and much mythologized history, Despotopoulos ties the notion of a clear origin to the idea of progress and expansion: "Greece is the birthplace of western civilization (...) [and Constantinople] is the "natural space for the extension" of its borders (17). What makes these proclamations, and Despotopoulos's constant homosocial attention, a little less unbearable for Haritos is that Despotopoulos is so clearly compensating for personal failures: he does not know what to do with himself in his retirement—in fact, he calls it a "well-paid redundancy" (187)—and is ignored by his wife, who "dreamed of marrying Lord Mountbatten and instead ended up with a brass hat" (43). Despotopoulos clings onto an obsolete, but fetishized, identity and history, and his dreams are obviously full of bombast—the other side of mourning.

Shadowed by Despotopoulos's obsolete masculinist delusions, Haritos is also driven by the attempt to remedy his daughter's complete disregard for the past. Indeed, the reason for his and his wife's trip to Istanbul is a rift with Katerina, who, in her "stubborn" and "inflexible" (24) refusal to get married in church, as custom requires, threatens to break the family apart: "And so her civil wedding turned into a funereal procession, with us [Haritos and his wife] under a black pall of bitterness and disappointment, Fanis's [the groom's] parents with long faces all the way to the ground, and Katerina not picking up on any of it" (25-26). Katerina's cluelessness, her youthful, forward-looking, individualist resistance to tradition ends up, in effect, acting as the mirror-image of the retired Despotopoulos's fixation with it: it leads right back to an empty, fraudulent Constantinople. Indicatively, Haritos gets the idea for the holiday because, when he and his wife ask Katerina to consider how negatively Haritos's colleagues in the police force may view the civil wedding, she tells her parents to lie and say that a church wedding took place in Constantinople. Prey to another type of nostalgic longing, that of familial reunification, Haritos fears that he too suffers from the deathly "inflexibility" that he may have bequeathed

to his daughter (24-25), or possibly even shares with Despotopoulos (a retired military attaché), who reminds him of “the sacred alliance between the military and civil forces” (12). Haritos’s main challenge in the novel, therefore, is to find a compromise between equally dead, but radically opposed, relations to time; he is a noir protagonist who has to resolve his own, and the noir crime novel’s, deadly addiction to the past and in so doing “temporalize space.” His investigation into the figure that most clearly encapsulates this equation of time with death, Maria Hambou (herself at death’s door), necessitates an obvious exchange and collaboration between Greek and Turk as well as an exploration of the city’s hidden neighborhoods and buried histories. The murders themselves, we soon realize, are but the most blatant expressions of a complex web of forgotten/repressed and interconnected historical crimes and traumas that need to be aired and put to rest.

Markaris’s use of Constantinople/Istanbul as location in this novel is clearly a heightening of the much-commented-on importance of place in the contemporary crime novel that is also exemplified in Paretsky’s use of Chicago as setting in her Warshawski series.¹⁰ Most obviously, Constantinople is at the center of the multiple intersecting crimes of the novel. Importantly, the city also provides an imaginative space of deflection and reflection where the layering of national and personal histories enables a careful resurrection of the city’s complex, fragmented histories. It is no accident, after all, that Haritos, in his many peregrinations throughout the city, seems to invariably find himself on one of the Bosphorus bridges that connect the European and Asian parts of Istanbul.

Consumption: Wanting, Remembering, Being, Buying

Nostalgia, Boym writes is a “feature of global culture,” as well as one of its main currencies (xvii). According to Arjun Appadurai, the function of this currency is to inculcate the “pleasure of ephemerality at the heart of the disciplining of the modern consumer”: “The pleasure that has been inculcated into the subjects who act as modern consumers is to be found in the tension between nostalgia and fantasy, where the present is represented as if it were already past” (83). One of the world’s bestselling genres, the crime novel, particularly in its noir varieties, demonstrates a well-

¹⁰ See, for example, P.M. Newton’s essay “Crime Fiction and the Politics of Place,” which analyzes the role of location in shaping the crime novel’s plot and politics.

documented obsession with commodity culture, from the dominant role of products that Jameson comments on in Chandler's work (1970), to the explicit critique of the dehumanizing effects of a corporate culture run amuck in Paretsky and Larsson. Moreover, noir novels, in their status as global commodities—a fact that is reinforced by the addictive nature of their serialization—often divert the fundamental ambivalence of the genre into the disciplining (and depoliticizing) pleasures of the consumption of ephemerality: they present us with a present that always just seems to have escaped us. Even the genre's embroilment in cliché, the overly deterministic language of a commodified social existence, is testament to this focus. *A Long, Long Time Ago* is a novel that very self-consciously dramatizes and simultaneously unravels this relationship to commodity culture both from the perspective of its overarching imagery and its commentary on the conventions of the genre.

If the central crimes in Markaris's novel are structured by the workings of nostalgia—after all, Hambou starts to kill as soon as she starts her pilgrimage back home—they are also equally structured by the workings of consumerism. Once again the choice of locale (Constantinople) and premise for the action (package tour) are essential. On the one hand, Markaris is tapping into the recent vogue for Greek/Turkish rapprochement evident in the increase in Greek tourism to Istanbul, craze for Turkish television shows, and unprecedented popularity of films such as *Touch of Spice* (2004), a love story between a Greek boy/man and a Turkish girl/woman that is also based on the premise of the nostalgic return to the lost homeland. On the other hand, the package tour is one of the clearest expressions of the way nostalgia functions as, or is diverted into, a mode of consumption:¹¹

They've laid out all their shopping on the armchairs [in] the reception area (...) the sight is reminiscent of a flea market (...) dominated first by leather goods, and second by gold and selections of scarves; and we end with a profusion of knick-knacks of the ashtray, lanterns-for-the-veranda, embroidered-cases-for-sofa-cushions and decorative-plate variety. (143)

These lines, occurring at the beginning of one of the novel's central chapters, describe the fruits of the tourist endeavor in a way that, as Vangelis Calotychos has written of filming technique in *Touch of Spice*,

¹¹ John Frow has described the "ontological homelessness" at the heart of nostalgia as a "central condition" of tourism: "the *Heimat* functions simultaneously as the place of safety to which we return, and as that lost origin that is sought in an alien world" (80).

“transforms the site of past conflict into a commodity of the touristic leisure market” (152). The dogged Despotopoulos, once again articulates the clearest and most clichéd parody of this collusion between nostalgia and an unfettered consumerism. Describing his years as a military attaché at the Greek embassy in London, Despotopoulos observes, in his stereotypically masculinist way, “Every morning I’d leave the house with my wife. I’d go to the embassy and she would go to the shops. Every evening, upon entering the house, I’d find the spectacle [referring to the shopping strewn on the reception area armchairs] in front of me (....) Unfortunately, for women the most successful antidote to loneliness is shopping” (145). Despotopoulos’s better half translates his absurd strategies to regain geopolitical power into an avid participation in a global consumer culture.

A Long, Long Time Ago is a crime novel that repeatedly stalls on scenes of shopping. We have, for example, an entire chapter (Chapter 21) dedicated to finding and haggling over the cost of a leather jacket in the Grand Bazaar, or heated exchanges about the virtues of the Turkish bath towels that Mrs. Haritos sends Katerina (193). These episodes are counterposed to the headlong momentum—the dogged following of clues, the hot pursuit on the heels of the murderer—of the crime plot, so much so that not only do they create a sense of suspension, but they also literally compete with Haritos’s investigations and threaten to derail them. They are scenes that therefore appear as further elaborations on the dynamic of diversion, detour or tangent that fundamentally shapes the text. The deadening stranglehold of the consumerist impulse, then, is literally and figuratively linked to the novel’s main crimes in a variety of different ways that clearly demand negotiation and working out. “Tell me, do people come to Constantinople just to go shopping?” Haritos asks his wife; “Well, it’s certainly more common than looking for murderers,” she answers, as if the two endeavors are both in competition and somehow linked. Most troubling, as Haritos explains early in the novel, is that this consumerist impulse supplants an agonistic historical legacy—both Haritos and Markaris are shaped by the polarization between left and right during the 1960s in Greece—and diverts it into a systematizing and homogenizing obsession with brands:

Whoever came up with the inimitable line ‘the sins of the father are visited upon the son,’ was surely childless. Because I take a look around and I don’t see a single parent tormenting their child. Most of them dress them up with whatever brand-name is at the height of fashion, even those who don’t make the required income find a respectable knock-off that can be mistaken for the original. (18)

Just as the novel parodies and rejects a fixation with the past as a viable strategy, so it also dispenses with the patterns of consumption associated with this touristic nostalgia only in order to re-envision a different trajectory for the noir novel. Like nostalgia, consumerism shapes the novel's central crimes and is conceptually linked to their solution. It is not incidental, after all, that one of Hambou's victims is the owner of a chain of clothing stores; or, for that matter, that Haritos mistakenly believes he may finally find out where Hambou is hiding based on a supermarket shopping bag she has left behind at one of the murder scenes. As the novel progresses, however, it becomes increasingly clear that the type of lived, complex history that Haritos investigates is most easily accessed through another type of consumption, one that is becoming more and more popular in crime fiction: eating food.¹² Initially, scenes of food as sumptuous spectacle appear to steer overly close to cliché—the orientalist sensuality associated with the non-European—that, like the avalanche of shopping, seems to paralyze and ensnare the viewer/reader in its pacifying delights: “She stares at the trays full of oil-based dishes, the selections of meatballs, the rice and meat, looks at the gyro stands by the wall, and she can’t turn her eyes away” (36). Yet as the novel progresses it is clear that Markaris, as Robert Polito writes about Jim Thompson’s use of cliché in *The Killer Inside Me*, “detonates the cliché” by “sinking into the cliché so deeply it is flipped on its head” (quoted in Anshen 2007, 404), and food rather than serving as distraction becomes the means for grappling head-on with the crimes in the novel. Indeed, the trend in much contemporary crime fiction for sleuths who “double up as guides to food cultures,” has been attributed to the use of food as a form of “information gathering,” and as a way of communicating an “appetite for being alive in the face of continuous death” (“Hungry Detectives”). Food, in other words, is the image for a kind of consumption that escapes alienated serialization by bringing us back to *lived* history and granting insight into the material relations that shaped it. It is through a sharing of food, both with the German-Turk Mourat, and another of his package-tour companions, the aptly named Mrs. Mouratoglou (an exiled Constantinopolitan Greek) that Haritos starts to build an increasingly complex understanding of the city’s diversity and the history of Greek and Turkish relations there. It is at a restaurant, after all, where he is first approached by Vasiliades, the writer, and asked for help in finding Hambou, the woman who acts as his ghostly guide through the city and beyond. And it is at yet another dinner that Haritos uncovers the one essential piece of information that will

¹² See, for example, “Hungry Detectives.”

finally lead him to her. Early in the novel, Mrs. Mouratoglou initiates Haritos into a practice of consumption that serves as an image for the trajectory of the whole novel: it signals a sensory form of knowledge that underscores the discontinuities between past and present and encapsulates cultural practices of hybridization.

‘Put a cube of sugar under your tongue, Mr. Policeman.’

Usually, out of professional perversity, I steer clear of temptation (...) But I don’t want to deny Mouratoglou this favor, and I do as she says.

‘Now take a sip of your tea.’

The tea sweetens lightly in my mouth. ‘That’s how they used to drink *raki* [unsweetened, anise flavored alcoholic drink]. They didn’t take it with ice cubes, like a knock-off whisky, as they do now; instead they used to first take a sip of *raki* neat and then a sip of water. The old Greeks and Turks liked to taste things clean and then adulterate them. (45)

Femme Fatale or Angel in the House? Dis/ordering Gender Conventions

Food, of course, is both Maria Hambou’s main talent and her deadly weapon of choice. Yet we have to get to the very end of the novel to finally meet the ghostly murderess at the center of the crime plot. Even then, her description remains terse, enigmatic, and insubstantial: dying from lung cancer, bed-bound and raving senselessly, Maria Hambou is barely there: “On the bed lay a woman with snow-white hair, full, sensuous lips and a moustache. She was skin and bone and her cheeks had sunk into her gums” (309).¹³ The only vitality in the description—a vitality reinforced by the incongruity and Freudian overtones of the image—is present in the lush, full lips of the femme fatale juxtaposed to the masculinizing moustache of the battered old woman. Throughout the novel, Hambou teeters dangerously and interchangeably between these two equally fetishized roles: on the one hand, she is the apotheosis of the soft, sexualized, victimized woman, repeatedly abandoned and exploited; on the other, she is an extremely canny, masculinized vengeful murderer

¹³ This description is very reminiscent of a very well known character in the Greek literary tradition, Hadoula in Alexandros Papadiamantis’s masterpiece, *The Murderess* (1903). Markaris’s novel is clearly in dialogue with this literary precursor, which similarly uses the murderess’s actions to launch a pointed critique of the social and economic forces that create them.

who repeatedly and to the end outwits the police. By bringing together and interweaving these two poles of gendered identity in the novel, Hambou acts as the novel's central enigma, both *symptom and cause* of the collapse of the truths of the noir crime novel: "I look at her and wonder how that skeletal body found the strength to kill four people, bake cheese pies, get around the city and all the while find herself one step ahead of us," muses Haritos.

Haritos's bewilderment is also ours, for throughout the book Hambou remains a ghost in the machine, whose role is to embody all the tropes—nostalgia, history, consumerism and gender disorder—that shape the plot. The very first lines of the novel show us Haritos in that most sacred space of Greek homecoming, the church of Aghia Sofia, contemplating an image of that most nurturing, self-sacrificing and asexual of figures, the "Holy Mother," who "looks at me from on high sternly, almost reproachfully. That's what it looks like to me, but it could be my imagination, that ridiculous Helleno-Christian conceit" (11). These lines immediately announce Haritos's and the novel's distance from conventionalized narratives of identity (in national, religious, and gendered terms). Yet by the end of the novel, full in the grips of a noir plot of return and revenge, Haritos's confusion remains unabated: we see him contemplating and trying to understand the mysteries of another, much more profane, Maria with equal futility: she never confesses or explains; in fact, Haritos and Mourat never even report finding her since they know that she is about to die. To the end, Hambou is a body that is not officially recognized or registered: we never really know what made her snap and she disappears into a quiet and unobserved death, a dormition of sorts.

Hambou, then, is less a full-blown character as such than an amalgam of the effects of a variety of injustices and forms of exploitation. She is the body on which these crimes are practiced and elaborated. As Haritos gleans from the various people he interviews, including Vasiliades the writer, Hambou was born in 1915 to a family of the Greek minority in Pontos who fled to Constantinople, presumably to escape the ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire. Once in the city, her mother re-married her brother-in-law after her husband died in battle against the Ottomans. The new couple had a baby boy and decided to relocate to Greece, but they left Hambou behind in Constantinople with cousins of her father's, who didn't want her in the house and sent her to work as a domestic servant in the homes of other ethnic Greeks. From this vantage point as a minority (an unattached, unwanted woman) within a minority community, she witnessed the various measures taken against the Greek community—notably, the pogrom of 1955, also known as the

“September Incidents” (*Septemvriana*)¹⁴, the deportation of 40,000 ethnic Greeks from Istanbul in 1964, and the subsequent confiscation of Greek properties. Even when Hambou fell in love with a handyman who came to work on one of the homes in which she was employed, she was unable to finally make a family of her own, as he turned into an abusive drunk of a husband who died young and left her penniless and in poor health (she drank with him in order to reduce the amount of alcohol he knocked back). Prized for her delicious pies, good housekeeping and cleaning abilities she moved from home to home until settling with Vasiliades’s family until her retirement. Even then her peregrinations do not come to an end, for as the writer guiltily confesses to Haritos, his parents put her in an old people’s home when they decided to move to Greece, and she remained there until her long-lost and now geriatric half-brother summoned her to Greece because he needed someone to take care of him. As one of the characters in the novel observes, Hambou’s story is thus one of unrelenting pain (141), of a constitutive missing and homelessness. Completely subject to the whims of others and powers beyond her ken, she seems completely lacking in agency, and is consistently deprived of legitimate social standing and recognition for her labor; in the end, she is left with nothing but her broken and exploited body. Hambou is thus literally what is expelled in order to facilitate sanctioned, conventionalized conceptions of family and nation. She is universally loved because she uncomplainingly feeds, cleans and become a repository for all the dirt/detritus left behind by others. It is not surprising that when Vasiliades, finally reunited with his long-lost caretaker at her deathbed, asks her “Do you remember me, Maria?” she responds, “I eat your shit and drink your piss” (311).

Paradoxically, it is only at the very end of her life, as she is dying, that Hambou manages an uncharacteristic mobility and resistance. Appropriately, her chosen method of revenge is the very tool of her abjection: her ability to both feed and clean. She laces her famous cheese pies with an agricultural poison and turns her victims, in their turn, into horribly abject corpses that contaminate the domestic spaces in which they are found with an overpowering stench that stops the police in their tracks. Her trail of victims maps the connection between particular personal injuries to larger systemic ones: she starts by redressing immediate family wrongs—her abusive half-brother, the first victim, is found dead by the kitchen sink—and moves on to punish those involved in financial crimes against her community. Another one of her victims, Kemal Erdemoglou is a Turkish clothing-store owner who, during the 1955 pogrom, made his fortune by

¹⁴ See Vryonis.

participating in the raids that allowed him to buy his Greek neighbor's business at a cut-rate price. Her final victim is a an ethnic Greek lawyer who made a fortune from buying properties on the cheap from fleeing and desperate Greeks and then re-selling them at market prices. Maria Hambou thus turns into a clear embodiment of the return of the repressed, the caregiver turned murderess; the compliant, silenced domestic worker turned into an equally silent avenging terrorist.¹⁵

In both these iterations—as pliant, uncomplaining victim and silent avenging murderess—Maria Hambou remains a ghostly figure. She is always already dead, too late, obsolete: “What will you tell your boss?” Haritos asks Mourat as they walk away from the dying woman, “What you will tell yours. That we arrived too late and found her dead. I arranged with the doctor to put today's date on her death certificate,” Mourat responds (314). Unable to escape the deadly dialectic that shapes her, Hambou is the embodiment of a much-mythologized relic—a history, economic system, and literary tradition that must be traced, confronted, and dismantled.

Conclusion: This is not a story to pass on

Nothing feels right about this case: neither the murderess's profile....nor the writer's interest in the woman who raised him sixty years ago and whom he hasn't seen for decades; not even Mourat's behavior towards me. Something's wrong, and I can't put my finger on it. Although it's not impossible that my anti-professional attitude is to blame. After all, it's not at all easy to make the transition from tourist to policeman. (91-92)

Haritos's unease is attributed to his “anti-professional” attitude, his reprieve from the strictures of his job and conventions of the genre. *A Long, Long Time Ago* is, after all, a novel that lacks most of the main ingredients of the conventional crime plot: a clear villain, a clear victim, motive, confession and resolution: Mourat and Haritos decide to let the old murderess/victim die in peace, outside the institutional confines of both prison and hospital. It is a novel that resists the deadly seductiveness of authority and authoritative narratives: what Dominican American author Junot Diaz has described as “the dictatorship of the book itself” “our

¹⁵ Interestingly, Hambou also calls to mind Karl Jasper's famous study of nostalgia, *Homesickness and Crime* (1909), which studied cases of girls from poor rural families in Switzerland who were sent to work as maids in distant towns and who committed crimes—murder and arson—in order to go back home. See Ritivoi.

desire for “purity; we all dream that there's an authoritative voice out there that will explain things, including ourselves” (“Interview with Pulitzer Prize-Winning Author Junot Diaz”).

Markaris's novel thus systematically undoes the main tropes of nostalgia and consumption of the noir novel by exorcising its main gendered prototypes. Haritos's pursuit of Hambou very literally diverts him from the dangers of restorative nostalgia, tourist consumption and, ultimately, the gendered identities they condition. Throughout the novel, he is both haunted and driven by this image of the past—Maria Hambou. It is only in the novel's very last lines that Haritos, most unusually for a noir protagonist, refuses what Schrader describes as the passionate retreat into the past. Having already resisted most of the conventions of his role and genre, Haritos instead dares to look towards the future and, by extension, a continuing engagement and struggle with a story that is still very much in the making. He turns away from Hambou and towards the port, towards home, as the image of Katerina and her husband take pride of place in his mind's eye. At the very end of a novel weighted down by death, Markaris himself dares to gesture towards the resurrection of beginnings embodied by the youth, promise and alternative literary, political and economic systems represented by feminist revisions of the genre like Paretsky's: he turns to Haritos's tough, sharp-tongued daughter Katerina, who goes on to earn a Ph.D. in law and advocate for the rights of exploited immigrants. Indeed, in the “Crisis Trilogy” novels that follow *A Long, Long Time Ago*, Katerina's trials and tribulations as she struggles to find a meaningful, socially engaged place for herself in a society reduced to tatters take an increasingly prominent role. In this transitional novel in Markaris's oeuvre, he both dismantles the traditional hardboiled noir novel and references the innovations of feminist revisions like Paretsky's, in order to counteract social chaos with the of the pioneering community-building represented by a younger generation whose “feminization” is a sign of promise and potential.

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