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The issue of the post-gender and transgressive identities in contemporary Greek reality in the cinematic work of Panos Koutras.

ABSTRACT

The issue of the identities is a subject which has influenced, for many decades art and cinema, it is considered until today as a subject taboo. In his book *Dissimilarity and Eroticism*, Konstantinos Kyriakos mentions that: *“the pursuit of otherness and the lack of similarity in the kind, the class, the religion, the sexuality and the nationality it is orientated in greek space, regarding the sciences of cinema, art and theatre, still in an investigated stage.”* (Kyriakos 2001:8). In Greek cinema, the printing of different racial identities it is not a contemporary phenomenon. But this printing is facing changes and mutations over time. In the older movies, the homosexual is a comic figure that is confronted with racism or as a ridiculous personality, while in the later movies represents mainly the special being who is confronted more with suspiciousness than a human character which is outlined via a “guilt-free look” (Kyriakos 2001). This is a proof that until today the racial issue and the identities constitute a subject taboo in Greek cinema.

So the aim is this “guilt-free look” in the cinema by putting the subject of the racial identity in a second level. As Foucault mentions “the meaning of the gender made possible to batch in an artificial unity anatomic data, biological functions, behaviours, senses and pleasures and permitted the use of this notional unity as causal principal, as ubiquitous meaning. In this way the genre managed to function as the only and the blanket meaning” (Foucault, 1978: 48-51). So by talking for this guilt-free look, essentially we talk for a final aim, which is the voluntary elimination of the gender itself via the science, which is one of the main and the basic principles of the Post-Gender movement.

The cinema, wanting to touch on in such movements and aims, has tried to approach this look. In Greek landscape the filmmaker who has approached more crucial this issue is Panos Koutras. As Jacques Mandelbaum wrote in the newspaper *Le Monde* that Panos Koutras is someone that deserves to be attended narrowly because he is one of the few Greek directors that really film his country taboos. In his first feature film, *The attack of the giant mussaka* (1999), a man (Giannis Aggelakis) plays a woman as initial convention and without references

in transvestite condition. It constitutes an exemplary camp movie, because it is important the intersexuality as a modification game of the parts which specify the genders (Kyriakos, 2001). In his movie *Strella* (2009) Koutras approached even more dynamically the issue of the gender and transgressive identity by getting inside in its own root, which is the incestuous relationship of Strella with her father. Judith Butler supports that the negation becomes the establishing moment of what Freud calls “consolidation of the gender”. The boy, by refusing his mother as an object of desire, either internalizes the loss identifying himself with the mother or transfers his heterosexual mooring and in this way fortifies the mooring with his father embedding thus his masculinity (Butler, 1999). With this reasoning we come to the conclusion that the determination of the gender is indissolubly connected with the Oedipus complex and the incest.

The investigative questions that are going to be answered in this research are: How are presented the transgressive identities in the movies of Panos Koutras? How Panos Koutras is approaching the Post-Gender movement? Which is the basic different with the existing greek queer cinema?

KEYWORDS

post-gender, queer cinema, transgressive identities

INTRODUCTION

The representation of identities is an issue that, even though today it is considered a taboo, has influenced the art of cinema for several decades. Constantine Kyriakos mentions in his book ‘Diversity and Eroticism’ (2001) that: ‘the quest for diversity and the lack of similarity in kind, class, religion, sexuality and ethnicity, is still in exploratory stage with regard to the science of arts of theatre and cinema in Greece.’ (Kyriakos 2001: 8). If this is translated to the question of the representation of the ‘third gender’. In the context of the contemporary Greek reality in cinema, is an issue of concern, while it is treated as a taboo and in many cases, it is the very reason for not funding and promoting the cinematographic work.

OLD GREEK CINEMA (OGC)

The representation of gay figure has begun since the time of Old Greek Cinema in the Greek reality. The boom of OGC covers the period from 1965 to 1975, when the Greek reality was in a period of reconstitution, having undergone an economic and national fragmentation after the end of the German Occupation (1941-1944) and the Greek Civil War (1946-1949). With the dominance of the National Army and the Rightism after the end of the Civil War, the new regime had to integrate its ideological projects and directions in cinematographic art. The issues that the governments of those times wanted to raise were mainly the issue of family and conservatism, which they wanted to impose through

cinema. The funny feature of marriage in the end of every Greek film is not a coincidence. Greek morality and customs, as well as the promotion of morality, were some of the basic characteristics of the narrative. A special example is the effort of the son of the family to marry off his sister, as well as the gathering of the necessary dowry for the groom (Lambiri-Dimaki 1986). The gay figure came at the OGC in the 1950s and was portrayed as a weird caricature. Characteristic example was *Fifis*, which was performed by Stavros Paravas (Kyriakos 2001). All these appear within the framework of the popular cinema of entertainment, which had many theatrical characteristics without paying particular attention in aesthetics and cinematographic form. This species was characterized as low comedy (Diamantopoulos, 2015). As Kyriakos mentions “The homosexuals in the Greek low comedy appear to be commonplace. There is no authenticity. It is replaced by *deja-vu* and *cliche*.” (Kyriakos 2001: 65). Low comedy, therefore, spurred the ideological propaganda of governments by promoting sexism, misogyny, homophobia, and patriarchy, covering them with the cloak of the cheap and marketable humor that the Greek people needed urgently after what they had been through. Homosexuality, feminine sexual emancipation and the communist danger are the main features of fear during the OGC period. At the same time, the phenomenon of homosexual creators who have acquired a heterosexual public life in order to be able to keep their careers has appeared. The phenomenon of queening (according to David Van Leer) is also observed at the same time. Queening is a silent introduction to heterosexual fiction patterns surrounding the homosexual community. Thus, there are many films in which a cryptic testimony of homosexual experience can be recognized (Kyriakos 2016). During the period of the dictatorship of the colonels, the OGC was very profitable and promoted more intensely sexist and racist elements. There are many examples of such films, such as: *‘No matter how much you wash a black person, you are wasting your soap.’* (Kostas Karagiannis, 1973)

THE MODERN GREEK QUEER CINEMA

Modern cinema has treated homosexual people as particular beings. Their existence is outlined by a mystery, mainly issuing problems of their everyday life, such as the film *Angel* (Katakouzinis, 1982), which was directed by Katakouzinis. At the same time is noticed the presence of a new homosexual, the one of the young, handsome, melancholic man (Kyriakos 2016). *Angel* is the first Greek film to deal with issues of homosexuality and transvestite in Greece and received some awards. The film addresses the loneliness and the problems faced by a homosexual man in the center of Athens without conflicting at the same time with the stereotypical gay figure of that time. The impressive fact is, as Kyriakos says: “Firstly, the strict criteria of the militant homosexual community and reliable gay publications that seem to be disturbed by the defeat of the central character and the spirit of lyrical fatalism in the recording of a stifling reality. Secondly, the comments in the left-wing newspapers, where it

is recognized that a film is “likeable” but does not conflict with the established image of homosexuals in the collective unconscious of the public.’ (Kyriakos 2016: 182)”.

In addition, from the film derives a very pessimistic side of the homosexual. A typical example is the dialogue: “He always has to hide and defend himself because he is always an easy target” (Katakouzinis, 1982).

The radicalization of the homosexual cinema and the entering of the notion “queer” cinema, which covers a much clearer political spectrum, strengthens the degradation of the enforcement of the social gender that has been created over the last centuries. Butler in ‘Body that matter’ says: “The term “queer” has acted as a linguistic practice that intended to shame the subject that it called so or, to be more precise, to produce a subject through its embarrassing call. The power of the word “queer” stems precisely from the repeated evocation that linked it to incrimination, pathologisation and insult. If the performative utterance operates as sanction that creates the heterosexuality of the social bond, it may also be introduced as a shameful taboo that makes “queer” all those who resist or oppose themselves to this social form as well as those who occupy it without the hegemonic social sanction’ (Butler 2008: 413)”.

At the same time, a queer film poses threatening questions about the masculinity of certain viewers: the admission of interest in some queer films is a challenge to patriarchal principles (Kyriakos 2016).

CAMP AND QUEER AESTHETICS IN THE CINEMA OF PANOS H. KOUTRAS

From the films of 1980s, such as ‘Angel’, until now, the main feature that characterized the films was the particular and hostile world that faced homosexual people. In the ‘new queer cinema’ are included according to Kyriakos: “The quest for sexual partner and pleasure, the cost of the creation of a male or female couple, the genesis of the gay adolescent and the dignified admission of sexuality, the range of consequences of AIDS and globalization, the world of transgender’ (Kyriakos 2016: 238)”.

Panos H. Koutras, from his very first full-length film, showed that he is a director who approaches the “new queer” cinema from his own aesthetics and perception. At first, Koutras cinema does not deal with the issue of homosexuality only on the part of narration, but also on its own aesthetics, something that several creators have not conquered. Koutras films are characterized as Camp, as Babuscio says: ‘Camp consists of four elements. The first of these is the irony and, more specifically, irony, style/aesthetics, humor and its theatricality.’ (Babuscio et al., 1991: 80-112). These three elements can be identified very much to Koutras cinema from his very first film ‘The Attack of the Giant Moussaka’, in 1999. Camp and gay friendly aesthetics can exist in a cinematographic work without the narrative itself referring to this issue. As Kyriakos states: ‘Those elements of a person, a state or an activity that express or that are created by a homosexual sensitivity’ (Kyriakos 2016: 91). A characteristic example,

which is well-known, is the interview of the director N. Koudouros (ANT1., T. Stefanidou's show 2007), who criticized the TV series 'Just in time' (2005-2007, Greece: Mega TV) for having homosexual content, although this TV series did not deal with the subject at all and none of the characters ever appeared as a homosexual (Kyriakos 2001).

THE ATTACK OF THE GIANT MOUSSAKA (1999)

In the Attack of the Giant Moussaka, Panos Koutras makes his debut with a very special film, combining the elements of fantasy and reality and presenting an excellent first sample of camp cinema. Panos Koutras combines the aesthetics of soap opera, news and science fiction films with a strong sample of pop culture and aesthetics, as well as an irony that comes out of every part of the narrative. The reality that maps before the attack of the moussaka does not explain whether it is the modern reality of Athens or a certain utopian / dystopian dimension of science fiction. Koutras raises issues such as the corrupt political system of modern Greece, the misinformation of the media and the game of money and power through a purely ironic and imaginative point of view.

Trash and gay aesthetics can be observed throughout the film. From the uniforms of the astronomers that are pink to the flying UFO which has the colors of the LGBT flag. The influences from musicals and soap operas are also harmonized in the context of the aesthetics that Koutras wants to emphasize. At the same time, it is observed a number of choices, moves and patterns of behavior, all made by the gay community. These are observed throughout the whole film and not just as features of the characters that are gay.

One of the most important features of the film, which will be analyzed later, is the concept of the gender of the heroine Tara, a divine of Athens interpreted by Yiannis Angelakis. Tara is not characterized as transvestite in the entire film and those surrounding her are comfortable with the particularity of her gender. Alexis Alexiou, who has a love affair with her, does not seem to be troubled by the fact which is not even mentioned (as happens in *Strella* before her first erotic encounter with George). More generally, in Athens as it is described in the film, it seems that the concept of gender and sexual choices do not play any role in the narrative as the characters are free to choose whoever they want. There are heterosexual, homosexual, transsexual and transvestite characters, but there is no mention to these terms.

REAL LIFE (2004)

Real Life is a post-queer look of the same director who, using references to Greek black and white films linked to class stratification, American soap operas and archetypes, portrays his second full-length film. There are several queer reports in the film, which are part of aesthetics. They focus on the fetishisation

of the male body and the costume choices of K. Kalligas (Kyriakos 2016), as well as her movements and behaviors. As Kyriakos states: 'impermeable masks, eccentric, luxurious clothing in bold colors, accessories (necklaces, long gloves, sunglasses), impressive hairstyle and intense makeup, motions and poses. An imposing and intimidating resident of the "created world" that names science the lie, the undermining and the concealing.' (Kyriakos 2016: 264). The costume and aesthetic choices as well as the moves are so intense that they end up having a connection with drag. The swimming pool of the house has a special role in the story as it can act as revival and the beginning of a new life (Aris, Alexandra) or as a shelter that has been transformed into a prison (Ms. Kalliga). In the second case, it is like the pool itself hides and in some cases brings to the fore the wrong choices and the crimes of the Kalliga family (the appearance of the huge fish), which can be linked with them 'The Hunters' (Angelopoulos, 1977) of Angelopoulos and the crimes of the bourgeoisie during the period of the Greek Civil War which were under the snow in the form of a rebel corps. Trying to explain the pool under the queer point of view, we can see the exclusion from the heterosexual society. This is clear from the color palette of the sky that Aris and Alexandra see when they dive into the pool.

STRELLA (2009)

Strella is one of the most well-known and widely discussed samples of queer cinema in Greece. A film that, according to its screenwriter, Panagiotis Evangelidis: 'Is a story about free will and, hence, freedom' (Evangelidis and Koutras, 2010: 112). This film was blamed and not funded because it described love and a particular, but real, form of family, without bringing some kind of nemesis to the protagonists. Panos Koutras states that 'The excuse of denial was the end and the fact that I deal with a very serious issue and I "humiliate" it was the "happy end" (the fact that there is no punishment)' (Evangelidis and Koutras, 2010: 117). Koutras, radicalizing the queer community's psychology and the love without border (border of any kind), presents us his side of the story of Oedipus using Freud's analysis. The way in which the queer community, and more specifically the trans community, is presented in the film, is something very original and real in Greece. People so sexually freed and cool, who confront their everyday problems with humor and laughter, make the viewer see this mysterious world of fancy dresses and special expressions in a way they never expected.

XENIA (2014)

In his last full-length film, Panos Koutras decided to deal with a road movie that focuses on adulthood. Xenia is one of his masterpieces, which combines the magical realistic elements and offers a special example of writing and concern about the present-day reality in Greece. Koutras works in many levels in the

film, and as Kyriakos states: “Is an imaginative and oblique commentary on “Greekness” as a confrontation with the archetypal myth and the stereotype of the national characterization. From the search of the Father and the hospitality (xenia) to the re-writing of some aspects of the myths of Odyssey, Atreides and Lavdakides.’ (Kyriakos 2016: 268)”.

The director presents the hostile country of hospitality and maps the reality of the two young brothers who conquer their goals and adulthood during their journey. A crucial moment is the death of the stuffed rabbit, which marks the entry into the adulthood of the heroes. In this film, as well as in *Strella*, Koutras uses gender in the way it is treated in the modern Western civilization and, more specifically, in Greece of the crisis. In the scene in the abandoned hotel *Xenia*, the director presents symbolically the reasons of this treatment, which are homophobia and sexism, as well as the racism that endure the economic immigrants. The name ‘*Xenia*’ (hospitality) plays a purely symbolic role in the mise-en-scene of Koutras as the heroes are located in a hostile place, which is strongly illustrated in the abandonment of the hotel and the isolation of heroes in it. The history of the state-owned hotels ‘*Xenia*’, which were built with money given by Marshall Plan (in order to fight Communism), their current decline (something that all state-owned entities face) as well as the modern capitalist economy that favors only the private development, play an important role during narration. This way Koutras makes a reference to the root of the problem of today’s reality, which has to do with the English-American colonialism in Greece and the Greek Civil War.

The creator uses the color palette of camp aesthetics through the light. He uses purple in many places in order to emphasize the importance of the character or the scene (*Paradiso* night club), or at the points where he wants to show the upcoming danger (attack of homophobic adolescents to Danny). Blue is also of high importance, highlighting the safety and the security as well as the continuance of the journey (the dream on the lake, the robe of their uncle). Finally, green, which is a color that symbolizes the double meaning, is strongly used by the director to show both sides of the characters as well as the double role that they will play in the narrative (uncle-father figure is the person who grew up Danny). Finally, the use of the camera works with a purely realistic perspective, emphasizing in the narrative action.

POST-GENDER FEATURES IN PANOS KOUTRAS CINEMA

From his first film, Koutras deals with the homosexual issue from a completely different look, which derives from the narrative itself as well as from the aesthetics of the director on the work. In the ‘*Attack of the Giant Moussaka*’, Tara, as well as the homosexual astronomers, is a complete personality that does not need the label of transvestite in order to live, fall in love and work. *Strella* removed the incrimination from the trans community and gave it glamor and aesthetic quality. As Kyriakos states: “they are not performers with female clothes but prestigious

displays of female glamour. Against a perception of human sexuality, which is strictly divided into “normal” heterosexual and “deviated” homosexuals, queer theory insists that there is a general covering among all kinds of human sexuality and that all kinds of sexuality are shaped by the words and images we use to describe them.’ (Kyriakos 2016: 266)”.

This way, Koutras makes a strong critique to the very concept of gender. He does not just aim at the recognition of the homosexual rights by describing a social issue through his films. He aims at the complete abolition of gender and the voluntary choice of it. Stella is a typical androgynous sample not only because she has a male molecule but because she has both characteristics in her character without refusing them in any way. She is not a boy who decided to become a girl. It is the perfect union of both to one person with its special characteristics. Sontag states that androgynous is: “the finest form of sexual attractiveness, because it means that no one must be opposed to the nature of the other. What is more beautiful to virile men is their feminine characteristic. What is beautiful to women is a virile characteristic’ (Sontag, 1983: 105-120)”.

This image contrasts with the excesses of the two sexual model identities for the creation of the two official sexual identities with the virile man and the explosively female woman.

The writers of Stella mention characteristically that today we are in a post-queer era and add that: “Neither we justify, nor rationalize, nor explain this situation. This is the situation and we move to our story with these people. As we would have done if we had a builder, a straight... No one would ever bother to explain his heterosexual sexuality.’ (Evangelidis and Koutras, 2010: 118)”.

CONCLUSION

To sum up and answer the research questions of the announcement. The cinematographic work of Panos Koutras differs from the rest samples of the Greek Queer Cinema because it does not have this incriminated look that sees the homosexual as a contract that does not need explanation and justification. Thus, the fluidity of gender and sexuality as well as the natural characters in Koutras films are directly linked to the post-gender approach and the abolishment of gender with the help of science (Nicholas 2014). So, as art always preceded science, perhaps this is a first glance at a sexless future without sexism, racism and homophobia, where every person without suspensions can act in line with their wishes.

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