Flesh and Blood: Generic Monstrosities in Contemporary Greek Film

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Abstract

As far as Greek cinema is concerned, the last few decades have seen both a rise in genre –including horror- films and the emergence of the so-called (Greek) Weird Wave, a term that refers not to a specific genre as such but rather to an aesthetic (mostly with regard to the stylistic approach but frequently with regard to the subject matter too). Boasting (relatively) big production value and wide media exposure, a lot of films from both these types tend to touch on the concept of the monstrous: the former mostly in a literal sense (zombies, vampires, etc.), the latter in a more metaphorical one (ghastly behaviors of actual humans). Using a semiotic/aesthetic analysis, the proposed paper explores how this shift towards the depiction of the monstrous can be traced in two examples of horror movies (Evil and Evil: In the Time of Heroes) plus in two of the most characteristic pieces of Greek Weird Wave filmmaking (Dogtooth and Miss Violence). Furthermore, the proposed paper explores how these outbursts of monstrosity are generated in the aforementioned films. Lastly, it examines how the monstrous and its representations are finding their way into more mainstream productions and audiences, and how such audiences have become more accustomed to the depiction of the grotesque in contemporary films, genre, "weird" or otherwise.

Keywords: Greek Cinema, Monstrosity, Weird Wave, Horror movies, Genre Films

Introduction

Although it was never a stranger to genre films – nor to idiosyncratic ones – in recent years, Greek cinema has seen a significant rise in both these kinds of moviemaking. In fact, some of the best and most renowned Greek films of the 21st century fall into either one (or both) of these categories. In continuation of the above, from the late 2000s onwards, the rise of the so-called Greek Weird Wave has also been observed. One element that all these trends tend to feature is that of monstrosity – either literal (zombies, vampires) or metaphorical (ghastly behaviors between actual humans). This paper examines four films that take on the concept of the monstrous, in either one of those senses and stemming from either one of these filmic categories – genre films and Greek Weird Wave.

Greek Genre Films in the 21st Century

The 21st century has seen a rise in Greek genre films. Notable examples include not only the *Evil* franchise, but also the weird/horror/comedy *Norway* (2014), the neo-noir *Tetarti 04:45* (2015), the serial killer thriller *Eteros Ego* (2016), gritty crime films by Yannis Economides and Fokion Bogris, the fantasy/horror *Symptom* (2015) and the fantasy/neo-noir *To Oniro tou Skylou* (2005) by Angelos Frantzis, history dramas such as *The Black Field* (2009) and *Mikra Anglia* (2013), the neo-noirs of Karolos Zonaras and more. These are officially released, (relatively) well-funded, often artistically admirable films, not mere off-kilter curiosities that barely saw the light of day. Some were even box office hits. We are making this clarification because up until recently genre films were widely overlooked or looked down upon, within the local industry (Kagios 2010).

Reasons for this change in attitude possibly include: 1) the Greek film industry's wider and deeper interaction with its international counterpart(s), 2) the creation of more and better schools for cinema studies, 3) more favorable references in websites, blogs and other online and print media, 4) the advent of new technologies, which enable people to better keep up with artistic and industry-related trends, and also to acquire equipment that is cost-effective and reliable enough to help them make their own films.

It could be easily argued that all these developments have made it easier for more idiosyncratic and/or more genre-oriented films to be made in Greece: such films are better appreciated and more easily accepted as "serious" or financially viable cinema. This was not the case in earlier times (Kagios 2010). People who are interested in making genre films now have better chances of achieving this goal, even in just a DIY, low- or no-budget context. Sometimes the finished products are not released in an "official" context. However, in many cases films of this kind were shown both in the Greek and international theatre circuit as well as festivals around the world.

Evil (2005), the first film in the franchise, constitutes an interesting case in point. It was made on a relatively low budget and was the first Greek zombie film to get an official theatrical release. The choice of making a genre film was a conscious one. As aspiring filmmakers, Nousias and his closest collaborators saw that a horror film would be easier to shoot than, say, a drama or an action film. This has been admitted to by Nousias himself, both in a publicly available interview (Papageorgiou and Ioannides 2009) and in an interview given to one of the writers of this paper as part of the latter's Ph.D. Research.

However, this is not an exploitation (or zombiexploitation) film. Exploitation films are not a specific genre unto itself. However, they are "almost always genre films relying on time-tried formulas" (Roche, 2015: 2). *Evil* is not an attempt to make easy money out of a social or cultural trend: in early 21st century Greece, genre and horror films were considered to be commercially unviable, i.e. not worth the effort. Even internationally, zombie films were only beginning to experience the resurgence that eventually made them so popular. So, in contrast to this trend-mongering, *Evil's* creators simply make good use of the tropes, conventions and limited budget requirements of the zombie subgenre in order to realize their goal of actually completing a feature film. They were obviously successful in doing so. Their film's combination of gore, comedy and action contributed to it being accepted by the horror crowd. The above are also true of perhaps the most landmark of all zombie films, George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) – itself an example of both "exploitation" (Roche 2015, 7) and DIY filmmaking (Hardman and Eastman 1997).

The "Greek Weird Wave": A genre unto itself?

Concurrently with the rise of local genre films, Greek –and international- cinema was swept by a significant number of films that were grouped together under the "(Greek) Weird Wave" label. This term includes Greek films that were distributed over the last two decades, during Greece's economic and political crisis (which is also often portrayed in said films). Their common element is that they focus on cultural and political themes in a controversial way (Basea 2016, 63). Greek films of this current were made on a low budget and this is often reflected in the aesthetic and stylistic approach of films. However, indicative paradigms of a unique and distinct management of filmic text in Greek Weird Wave as: walled spaces with extremely stylized interiors and corresponding close-ups, few protagonists, flat, usually factitious dialogues, black humor and boredom, perpetual eye communication and silence. Such characteristics reveal that this aesthetic and stylistic approach is not merely a matter of cost restrictions but rather a regulatory compliance with the aesthetic and stylistic principles of the filmmakers of Greek Weird Wave.

However, it is doubtable whether the Greek Weird Wave is a whole new genre. These aesthetic and technical similarities are not enough to constitute a separate genre unto itself. Instead, Weird Wave films belong to or draw on elements from various genres. For example, a structural analysis of Yorgos Lanthimos' *Dogtooth* (2009) and Alexandros Avranas' *Miss Violence* (2013) places them in a hybrid film genre where horror films and drama films coexist.

As far as horror films are concerned, *Dogtooth* and *Miss Violence* replace the dark isolated castle with the isolated, luxurious and luminous house where dreary incidents happen, the nocturnal activity of monster/s with the unseen activity of the parents, pollution of the environment with the desecration of their children, the outer deformation of monsters with inner ugliness, the formation of monsters' new hierarchy with the father's dominancy, the confrontation among monsters and humans with confrontation between father and children, monsters extermination with father's gradual loss of control of his offspring (in *Dogtooth*) and monsters' death by as it seems ritualistic murder of the father (in *Miss Violence*), (Dimitriou 2011, 236-237). On the other hand, both films use the structure and codes from the drama spectrum in a reverse way: instead of focusing on reproduction of the individual importance and promoting appropriate and regulatory models of gender behavior and social roles which contribute to the maintenance of social (ethical) order through their protagonists and sub protagonists (Dimitriou 2011, 239), both stories portray disturbed and disrupted individuals and societies.

One key aspect of the Greek Weird Wave is its persistent tendency to touch on the concept of monstrous, mostly in a metaphorical way. As it will be shown later, this is true of both *Dogtooth* and *Miss Violence*. It is also something that said Greek Weird Wave films share with horror films such as *Evil* and *Evil in the Time of Heroes* (2009). However, the latter films delve in the monstrous in a more literal sense. The paper will first focus on this more obvious version of monstrosity, before examining the other, more indirect one. Since *Evil* and *Evil in the Time of Heroes* share so many key elements, they will be examined together.

Evil's Zombies

The immense flexibility of the zombie has been repeatedly pointed out (Platts 2013, 550; Hunt 2015, 108). Unlike other monsters, zombies can include and literally be about anything – and they are. Zombie films touch on all kinds of social, political, historical, gender-related issues and serve as symbols of any possible negative or positive force, social group, political phenomenon etc. At the same time, however, zombies can simply be a signifier that signifies itself (Hunt 2015, 109). Zombie films can just be about zombies. In the "exploitation" vein that was discussed earlier, *Evil* can simply be read as a film made for the sheer joy of making a zombie film and with the purpose of generating joy and pleasure to those who will watch it. (However, short instances of social commentary do show through).

Recent trends in zombie fiction and the evolution of said monster are also visible in *Evil*. Made around the same time as *28 Days Later* (2002), *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) and the remake of *Dawn of the Dead* (2004), *Evil* presents us with its own variation of the so-called "fast" zombie, which is not only accelerated but more violent, more aggressive, and perhaps a little more intelligent. Of course it continues to be bloodthirsty and violent. But it is also more viral: it spreads over space very much like a virus might. The makers of *Evil* consciously chose to depict this by showing the zombie virus first break out in two venues that can greatly

assist this wide kind of spread: a football stadium and a night club. (The film also ends in a football stadium that is gradually filled with zombies).

These venues, especially the night club, also serve as two of the many signifiers associated with youthfulness: the youthfulness of both the zombies (the already discussed attributes of strength, speed, aggressiveness) and the majority of the live humans who are struggling to escape them. Electronic music (and less frequently, the rock genre) is present throughout both *Evil* films, to accompany fight scenes, to create suspense, to accentuate wistfulness and so on. But it also accentuates the fact that this is a film made by young people, for young people and about young people (and young or at least youthful zombies).

Various other gimmicks are employed to accentuate this youthfulness: split screens, computer-generated virtual effects, unusual camera angles, witty dialogue, street-smart vocabulary, trendy clothes (both for the living and for the living dead). It is a new, fun kind of zombie film. *Evil*'s zombies do not show signs of intelligence or consciousness, but they are different to those of *Night of the Living Dead* and closer to the "fast" zombie.

Along with the advent of this new subtype, Hunt has also shown that, during the 21st century, zombies have four main uses/roles as antagonists [1] : they are sources of danger, sources of pleasure, sources of laughter, or objects of pity (Hunt 108, 113). They are threatening in that they seek out to kill or zombify the survivors, but their sight is much less horrific or uncanny.

In the *Evil* franchise, zombies fulfill all of the above roles: they pose a threat to the protagonists. They are laughable. The latter element fits the wider world of the franchise, which is one of humor rather than fear and misery. The third element, pleasure, is derived from the simultaneously violent and comedic ways in which the living characters kill off the zombies. Cinema as a whole serves as a safe context for viewers to "live out" their fantasies, including their more violent ones, because they cannot or should not carry them out in real life. The graphic, gory scenes in films like *Evil* offer such a context, with the added element of humor.

Typical of the above is one of the first scenes in *Evil in the Time of Heroes*. Having escaped the football stadium horde, the four survivors of the first film get in an abandoned car and drive through the horde, mutilating, beheading and generally exterminating many of its members. The graphicness of the action is accompanied by the hysterical, diegetic laughter of Lieutenant Vakirjis (who is sitting in the backseat, simultaneously a participant in the action and a viewer) – a reaction that perhaps reflects or tries to incite a similar one in the exodiegetic viewer. The sequence ends with a headless zombie walking outside the stadium, a spectacle that is at the same time funny and pitiful (hence the fourth item in Hunt's list).

On the other hand, this remorseless, pleasure-inducing extirpation of the zombies has not gone without criticism: becoming familiarized with the killing of these dehumanized creatures in audiovisual fictions might also familiarize us with the extermination or marginalization of individuals and social groups who have also been deprived of their "voice" (immigrants, LBGTQI+ persons, and so on) (Backe and Aarseth, 2009). Humor, laughter, enjoyment render this depiction even more familiar and, for that very reason, even more problematic.

The video game comparison is not arbitrary. Many scenes in both *Evil* films unfold as if having been lifted from such a medium. Most representative of this is a short scene in *Evil in the Time of Heroes*, wherein Androkles crosses a whole zombie-ridden town. Shot mostly from above, within a very specific and constricted space (very castle-like, complete with corridors and large stone walls, and surprises at every turn) and featuring an impressive choreography, the sequence is strongly reminiscent of a video game. The gory sound design and graphic depiction of blood spurts further stresses this effect.

Digging up the Zombies / Digging up the Past

However, the source of these zombies is not so youth-oriented and pop, but rather more chthonic, age-old and buried deeper down. One of the central characters of both *Evil* films is an abstract, invisible entity which moves in the air and infects humans, thus kicking off a zombie outbreak: To Kako (translated in English as The Evil) has remained buried underneath the earth, until three paleontologists discover a secret cave and become infected by it.

To Kako is reminiscent of το Αερικό *(Aeriko)*, a mythical entity to be found in Greek tradition. This type of spirit is associated with strange, eerie sounds that are actually generated by the wind but are given metaphysical, sinister attributes by the local folklore. Its presence in Greek fiction, tradition and even philosophy dates back to ancient times. However, this is not the only potential reference point. The use of subjective shots (at times we see the other characters and the world at large through its own eyes not theirs), plus its ability to manoeuvre in the air make To Kako very similar to the flying spirits and demons that the *Evil Dead* franchise has used. The similarity becomes greater because the subjective shots are used during the respective evil entities' flights towards their targets (the human characters). Furthermore, the two franchises share the word Evil in their respective English titles. Like in Sam Raimi's films, contact with this entity turns humans into demonic, ghoulish creatures, which in the case of the *Evil* franchise are outright zombies. Building on both these references, Nousias' films have To Kako generating a virus which soon takes on the form of a pandemic – a narrative drawing both on Greek/traditional and on international, pop culture elements, even though it does not directly acknowledge either one of these influences.

In *Evil in the Time of Heroes*, the zombie outbreak is associated with the past in a clearer, less vague way: it is seen as having plagued classical, ancient Greece, the titular time of heroes. Opening with subjective shots of To Kako making its way under the earth's surface, the film then introduces us to a squad of ancient Greek

warriors, complete with shields, swords etc., plus to the daughter of one of them. Their conversation is interrupted by another member of the squad, who has turned into a zombie and attacks his comrades, followed by a whole horde of zombies. Then roll the opening credits, informing us that "what was shall be again" (meaning that To Kako and the zombie outbreak will take place at least twice).

The film tells the story of two different heroes who are called upon to face this evil: one in ancient Greece and one in the present. They are both brought back to life as they were, not as zombies. Following the opening credits, we are back in modern Greece. The four survivors of the first movie enter the football stadium (as they had done at the end of *Evil*). Despite being surrounded by zombies, somehow they manage to escape. At the same time, Argyris, the taxi driver who died in the first movie, is shown to be magically resurrected. He is the modern-day hero.

In both films the problem but also the solution stems from the past. This is indicative of present-day Greece's overall tense relationship with its history, both ancient and modern. Secrets and unresolved issues have to be buried, and if they are dug up they cause havoc, conflict, the disruption of normalcy. It is also interesting to note how each of the two heroes, the old and the new one, are depicted (and why). The former personifies the classical ideal (handsome, athletic, brave and willing to take on the zombies). His name is Androkles, literally meaning the Glorious Man.

The other hero is not athletic (although he is a sports fan), but he is prone to silliness, along with being morally ambivalent. The two heroes' respective stories are told in a parallel fashion, starting from their deaths/resurrections and climaxing in the resolution of the two zombie outbreaks. Consciously or not, this juxtaposition between the authentically and the reluctantly heroic, the near-perfect and the bundle of contradictions, speaks volumes of how many modern Greeks see themselves, especially in relation to their idealized ancient counterparts.

Familiar monstrosities

Both films touch upon how problematic (Greek) families can be, whether patriarchal (*Evil*) or matriarchal (*Evil in the time of Heroes*). In *Evil in the time of heroes*, the character of Lieutenant Vakirjis is bullied – both in the pre-zombie and the post-zombie world - by another man for being "a momma's boy". Interestingly, Lieutenant Vakirjis's mother is sexually attracted to the bully. This third party notwithstanding, Lieutenant Vakirjis and his mother seem to have a symbiotic, codependent, love-hate relationship. Greek children's over-attachment to their parents and vice versa has often been the subject of criticism in various studies, films and other media, Yorgos Lanthimos' *Dogtooth* being a prominent example (especially of the latter version).

In *Evil*, the problematic, potentially toxic structure of the Greek family is featured early on in the film. One of the paleontologists in the opening sequence is also one third of a different group: his own family (he has a wife and daughter and the three of them live under the same roof). After the cave sequence, we see him sat in his armchair, watching the football game on TV. We have already come across a group of subjective shots – those of To Kako – in the cave sequence. While the paleontologist is watching TV, a new series of subjective shots is interjected with those of the paleontologist in the armchair plus those of his wife who is trying to start a conversation with him.

The subjective shots of the villain/monster in hiding, peeking to catch a glimpse of their victim before attacking are a common trope/motif in horror filmmaking. Because it is such a well-known convention, because *we know* we are watching a horror film, we also understand that this signifier is calling us to be afraid. This unease is augmented by the non-diegetic electronic music that is starting to play.

However, as is often the case in genre films, this convention is turned on its head: the person peeking from behind the doorstep is actually the daughter of the paleontologist. This is revealed to us when the last subjective shot is followed by a mild jump cut, showing the girl embracing her father from behind. In retrospect, we understand that these subjective shots are of someone who is awkward, not of someone who causes fear. We had been called to identify with the person looking, not with the person receiving the look.

Why is the daughter afraid – or at least ill-at-ease? As with his wife earlier, the father is not eager to start any type of conversation, resorting to abrupt answers. Even though he is slightly more tender towards his daughter, he also asks her to go to the kitchen and not to bother him (or her sleeping younger brother) while he, the father, is watching the game. The same dynamic is followed in the next scene they are featured in: the women of the family are met with either indifference or calls to be silent, so that the father can continue to watch the game while eating. Predictably, it is he who is zombified, while the daughter escapes and joins the rest of the main characters in a shared effort to survive. The daughter is played by Mary Tsoni, also one of the daughters in the extremely dysfunctional family of *Dogtooth*.

A slightly healthier relationship is that between Argyris and his father, in *Evil in the Time of Heroes*. They are often antagonistic towards each other, and susceptible to sexist jokes and inappropriate behavior. They are also prone to heroic antics and are willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good.

Other characters in *Evil* and *Evil in the Time of Heroes* are similarly colorful, and they ring familiar to anyone who has spent time in Greek society (or even outside of it). However, the two *Evil* movies do not offer the same kind of social commentary that other zombie films do (e.g. George A. Romero's). The vividness and funniness of the characters serve more as comic relief, an extra tool to keep the audience amused and engaged, rather than as comments on the state of Greek (and international) society, economy and politics.

The characters of the two movies are vignettes, small-scale portraits instead of parts of large

canvasses. Each of them represents a microcosm of specific, limited social relationships: a small, closed up world inside the larger, pre-apocalyptic one. These men and women seem to care about little other than themselves, their professions and their immediate social environment. In the post-zombie era, these microcosms meet and they either collaborate or collide. But Nousias does not criticize them. He simply cares to focus more on the actions of the characters during the zombie outbreak than their back stories or their social and political views, pre- or post-zombie apocalypse.

Furthermore, Nousias does not care to present an image of how he thinks that a post-apocalyptic society would or should be organized. There are neither condemnations nor praises for a sort of communal way of life. No dystopian use of biopower is depicted either. The state –or what might be left of it- is absent. No army, police or medical sector intervenes to save the day. The protagonists are left to their own devices. Moreover, the second film in the series ends with the curse being lifted and the zombie apocalypse ending, so there is no need for a reorganization of the sociopolitical system. Neither of the *Evil* films is actually post-apocalyptic.

Interpersonal relationships are more likely to be commented on than those of the wider society. The members of the main group of survivors are helpful to each other but only in a shared effort to survive, not in an effort to "build a better world", be it a utopia or a dystopia. New "families" are formed, but they are equally, if not more, problematic than the previous ones.

At the same time, many other living characters express another kind of monstrosity, unlike that of the zombies – violent behavior towards other humans. Even though these inhumane (but not zombified) characters meet their just end, neither of the *Evil* movies tries to convey any "serious" messages about politics, society and society in general. Perhaps there is no need for such rhetoric either. As we have already mentioned, these two zombie films are more an attempt to make fun, accessible, genre-oriented cinema, than to explain or comment upon things.

Beyond the Greek crisis: Dogtooth and the introverted monstrosity of incest

As it has already been mentioned, the two Greek Weird Wave films examined in this paper take on the concept of monstrosity in a more metaphorical manner. This manner is associated with incest (and with patriarchal authority and violence). The universal prohibition of incestuous relations between close relatives marks, according to Levi Strauss, the transition from the pre-cultural, primitive phase of the human species to civilized society (Levi-Strauss 1969, 9). The principle of extramarital affairs, as the transition from the blood system to the kinship system, favors the formation of kinship ties with individuals outside the family and forbids marriage and intercourse between consanguineous brothers, parents, and children (Levi-Strauss 1969, 29-30).

However, the uninterrupted constant practice of incest over the centuries up to the present time reveals that it is not a modern sociocultural invention found in specific societies and populations. As numerous studies have shown, incest is practiced in many different types of societies and populations worldwide (Bennet et al. 2002, 99), even though on the one hand it is punished by the law as one of the forms of child abuse and on the other hand it is also condemned by the five dominant religions (Alvarez, Quinteiro et al. 2011: 24). Incest remains, up to this date, culturally and universally forbidden and the involvement in such relationships leads to criminal prosecutions and social condemnation.

Although it is an unfathomable and delicate topic to be publicly discoursed -it is indeed tacitly disapproved-, at the same time it is a subject matter widely approached in Greek Weird Wave films, either as the main subject of the film or as a side one. *Dogtooth* (2009) and *Miss Violence* (2013) are, in our opinion, the two films most characteristic of the weirdness of the so-called Greek Weird Wave[2], but here they are discussed because they deal with the subject of incest. These films' context managed to shift between the disturbing subject and the filmic characters and the tolerance of their audiences as a well-balanced wheel which contains equal or semi-equal measures of art, exploitation and popularity (Theo 2017, 5-6) and both of them managed to find their way to more mainstream audiences globally. They were both honored in numerous national and international festivals: *Dogtooth* was nominated in several film categories and won in 2009, among others, Un Certain Regard at Cannes, Feature Film Award at Montreal Festival of New Cinema, Bronze Horse at Stockholm and Special Jury Prize in Sarajevo, in 2010 the Golden Hook at the Festival of Mediterranean Film Split (Petkovic 2010), while *Miss Violence* was also nominated and won four prizes at the 70th Venice Film Festival in 2013.

Dogtooth portrays a family with two daughters and a son, aged between twenty and thirty. The children have lived their entire life in an isolated but luxurious home, cut off from the outside world by choice of their parents. They are socially amputated, and know nothing about the outer world except what they are taught by their parents, which most of the times is deliberately false (the telephone is described as a device doing the work of a saltshaker; pudendum as a big lamp; sea as a leather armchair, etc). Moreover, in order to keep them from leaving home they persuade the son and two daughters that they run the risk of being devoured by the most vicious animal in the world, the cat, if they step outside the walls. The children are told that they cannot be independent and free unless one of their dogteeth falls off.

This lack of social interaction leads to a rather childlike behavior and delays their adulthood. However it does not restrain their natural curiosity and freedom instinct. The son's sexual needs are covered by the father's female employee until her influence as a seductive outsider gets her kicked out of the house, fired and brutally killed. This will lead to sexual

intercourse between the son and the daughters with the blessing of their parents. It seems the daughters' sexual needs have not been fully awakened, given that they explore their bodies through playful games among themselves. One night, the older daughter violently removes her dogteeth and absconds. She hides in her father's car to explore the real world outside the fences of the house. The final shot shows the car parked outside the father's workplace, - an open ending that is both suspenseful and potentially pessimistic, very much like the first *Evil* film.

It is important to note that the act of incest in Dogtooth is a mechanism of parental authority, especially from the patriarchic figure of the father. Incest is imposed on the offspring, both to brother and to his sisters to postpone their adulthood and independence and to keep them subdued and confined. It is not an act of the children's own choice. In this filmic family, Levis Stauss' statement about the preference of exogamy and extra family relationships and the forbiddance of sexual intercourse among family members and relatives is totally reversed. The brother's sexual needs are directed towards his sisters, and it is his sisters that through their obedience (and their obedient body) keep the family united. This closed family system, the ruling father, the partially subjugated mother, and the submissive offspring illustrate an introverted picture of a family of the highest dysfunctional level.

As Basea (2008, 64) claims there was an encouragement for this film to be perceived as an allegorical representation and critique of neoliberal government during Greece's long-term economic crisis in the first decade of 21st century. After all, the father mirrors the Greek austerity governance and submissive mother and offspring mirror the equally submissive Greek people that were deceived by the politicians.

We find that this interpretation limits the multiplicity of potential readings of this filmic text. Instead, we would like to emphasize the crucial role of incest in the film. We propose that there are many and different ways to speak of the government's oppression. Incest is something more than a simple metaphor of the crisis' tyranny. Incest might be oppression, but it cannot be applied outside its limited space; it is an introverted, inward-looking monstrosity that turns against society's inner core, the family, and not society itself. It cannot harm society or government or the larger population, although it is a monstrosity that destroys the individuals involved in it. In *Dogtooth*, the act of incest doesn't define the central elements of this film, such as characters, plot, dialogues, and scenes. We suggest that the incest in *Dogtooth* defines family's incapacity to succeed in its extrovert mechanism of socialization; that the monstrosity in Lanthimos' film is the realization that those family members that are inadequate to be socialized are sentenced to live in the primitive and pre-cultural stage of incest relationships, and thus to be expelled from a civilized and cultured society.

Incest as Ritual and Tradition: *Miss Violence* and Patriarchy

The second examined film is Avranas' *Miss Violence* (2013), which, like *Dogtooth*, refers to incestuous relationships. Unlike *Dogtooth*, however, in Avranas' film incest is not a side theme of the plot, nor an allegory of the sociopolitical or sociocultural state of Greece, even if, according to director, there is a parallel line that connects the oppressed citizens of Greece and his protagonists (Llanos Martinez 2014). *Miss Violence* is a straightforward, intensively realistic, illustration of a Greek highly dysfunctional family and its hidden, unacknowledged secrets. *Miss Violence's* incest is the main theme that reflects to every aspect of the film: characters, plot, dialogues and silences, facial and physical gestures, mise-en-scène, time, space, close-ups, shots, everything revolves around the incest conditions.

In the very first sequence of the film, we watch the birthday party of Angelica, an eleven-year-old girl, who is surrounded by her happy relatives in a rather cheery but somehow threatening atmosphere. After a while, much to everyone's surprise, Angelica commits suicide by falling off the balcony. Police and Social welfare services investigate the causes that led to Angelica's suicide and, much like the film's viewers, they suspect that something is wrong in the family. As time advances, viewers are captivated caught by the despotic figure of the fathers that tyrannically controls all the members of his house: an accomplice wife and mother, a submissive, powerless daughter, and the scared, frightened grandchildren. Gradually, it is revealed that the father is also the grandfather of his oldest daughters' children and that his middle and younger daughter are being both sexually and financially exploited by him and his friends. As viewers, police and social welfare services discover, the age of eleven marks the beginning of the father's incestuous sexual relationship with his daughters.

The same patterns that are observable in *Dogtooth* are are also prominent in this film, however in *Miss Violence* the filmic journey into the monstrosity of incest is even harsher, both in terms of directing and in term of visualization. The camera is mostly confined in the narrow, closed space of family's house. Closed doors, closed windows, small rooms, cramped cars, and stuffed attics signify that nothing and no one can penetrate the family's inner survival and coexistence core but the father -let alone the camera. Close ups in father's facial gestures and posture reveal the magnitude of his power and influence; close ups to the victims reveal their unspoken emotions and their fragility. Police and care workers are unable to reveal the chaos of the ongoing family tragedy. Viewers are trapped in the same increasing intensity of the film's claustrophobic atmosphere as they watch a father figure who not only dominates all the female members of the family but also sexually abuses them and pushes them to prostitution for his own benefit.

Those continual acts of incest are rapes; the transgression of the incest taboo is monstrous;

Rapes are monstrous; Manipulations of the weaker members of the family is monstrous. The emotionless and petrified wife, the obedient eldest daughter, the rebellious but exploiting younger daughter, the shocked viewers, all of them -and us- are entangled in a guilty maypole of a contemporary story of family incest disguised in a context of regularity, behind closed doors and shutters. These atrocious and unsettling depictions distress viewers and it becomes rather impossible to justify these acts. *Miss Violence* dared to show the family code of silence and to speak out against the disturbing truth of incest.

Comparing the two Greek Weird Wave Films

Like *Dogtooth*, *Miss Violence* father's perpetual acts of incest are a mechanism of patriarchic authority over the female members but mostly it is an act of ownership and hegemony. Contrary to *Dogtooth*, when incest is imposed on the daughters it doesn't delay their adulthood; it rather hastens it. Again, as in Dogtooth, the Levi-Strauss forbiddance of sexual intercourse among close relatives is totally transposed. The father's actions don't aim towards the unification of his family, but only towards the satisfaction of his sexual needs. This tears apart and destroys the members of the family. Alike *Dogtooth*, this extremely closed family system illustrates an introverted picture of family at the highest level of dysfunction. I would suggest that, apart from the monstrosity of the incest caused by the father, the worst monstrosity in Alexandros Avranas' film is that the father indulges his own tendency towards brutal violence. This violence is directed at the very family that he was supposed to protect. It is understood that in the context of the forbidden incestuous condition and the secrecy and guilt that comes with it, the socialization of all the family members becomes unattainable.

Conclusions

This paper examined the ways in which monstrosity, both literal and metaphorical, is depicted in contemporary Greek films. Zombies and incestuous individuals seem to have common backgrounds, in that they both reflect an archaic, primitive and fear of human uncivilized origination. In *Evil*, zombies start to appear because three paleontologists set free a malicious, infective age-old entity that had been buried in a cave for almost three thousand years. In *Evil in the Time of Heroes*, the same entity continues to torment the present-day world but is also shown to wreak havoc in Ancient Greece as well.

Similarly, incestuous individuals return through their actions to the archaic, primitive state of humankind in order to please their sexual urges. In doing so, they ignore the socio-cultural norms and regulations. Nevertheless, their main difference is the range of results caused to society and individuals. The transgression of the incest taboo is a violation that is directed at individuals and/or nuclear families. Incest has a highly psychological impact on families and therefore an impact on society, but only a relative, immediate one. But incestuous individuals are protected by the code of silence and victims' sense of guilt; what happens in the family stays within the family, their actions and effect are inward. Society is harmed by the acts of incest only indirectly and not in the massive extent pertaining to the zombies. The latter is an external, outward-looking threat that terrorizes society and the people who form it.

Digging up these secrets brings on the disruption (or interruption) of introversion and of normalcy. Digging up the monstrous entity of To Kako brings about the monstrous entities of zombies, who in turn bring about chaos, end lives and/or relationships and destroy society almost irrevocably. New relationships are formed between the survivors, but they too are problematic. At the same time, the problematic nature of already existing, pre-zombie relationships between living humans is also brought to light because of the zombie outbreak. The two *Evil* films, very much like *Miss Violence* and *Dogtooth*, point out how dysfunctional and toxic Greek families can be. In this context, the father figures tend to keep for themselves the lion's share of toxicity and monstrosity, both in the pre- and the post-zombie world. The new families that are formed in the post-zombie world are again aced with an external danger. An image made all too clear in the climax scenes of both *Evil* films and especially the first one: the protagonists being literally surrounded by zombies who draw nearer and nearer. The outside world collapses and attacks the nuclear family.

The revelation of incestuous relationships or the imposition of such relationships on family members who did not ask for them also brings about chaos. Likewise, being liberated from these incestuous relationships only affects the individuals and the immediate family, for better or for worse (e.g. Angelica's suicide in Miss Violence or the older daughter's escape in Dogtooth, the results of which the audience is left to imagine on its own).

Another significant issue in both sets of films as a divergent element is the concept of authority: acquiring it, being deprived of it, and the fear between these two states. Incestuous individuals appear to gain authorship through their actions against their family members; family members lose control of their self and live in fire, while zombies' attacks cause massive deprivation of power and trigger fear in humanity. It seems that power, authority, and fear make up a three-way dynamic.

Greece's ambivalent, problematic relationship with its own past is also shown in these two sets of films. In *Evil*, in *Dogtooth* and in *Miss Violence*, this only has to do with the generation gap and hidden, unresolved issues from the past. In *Evil in the Time of Heroes*, however, there is a clearer juxtaposition between to specific historical periods: the idealized past of ancient Greece and the controversial, ethically ambivalent present. Even if it is unintentional, the comparison between these two periods in Evil in the Time of Heroes, paints a much more favorable picture for ancient Greece than it does for its modern version.

Both sets of films reveal humans to be the real monsters, albeit in a metaphorical way. Both the Evil franchise and the two Greek Weird Wave films we examined (Dogtooth and Miss Violence) depict monstrous actions carried out by living, actual humans. The only difference is that Evil also features hordes of literal (i.e. physically obvious and repulsive) monsters. But the interaction between living humans or the actions from living humans towards zombies can also be described as brutal and monstrous.

Lastly, the critical and (relative) commercial success of these two sets of films also shows that audiences in the 21st century are more open to literal and/or metaphorical monsters. It is highly interesting that audiences were ready to absorb *Dogtooth* and *Miss Violence* stories as it proves that a significant amount of moviegoers is not appalled by difficult, even monstrous topics. Either the spectators were able to identify themselves with the characters and their conditions or the amount of monstrosity/perversity was not highly exploitative, in our opinion it is a matter of story construction and audience's acceptance of transgression rather than a matter of film genre (Theo 2017, 6). Likewise, the zombies and the monstrous living humans are what attracts the audiences in Evil and Evil in the Time of Heroes, instead of "lessons" about what human society could or should look like in a post-zombie world.

Monstrosity, horror, unresolved issues from the past, problematic families, incestuous and authoritative patriarchs, introversion and strict family rules as a hellish situation, the disruption of introversion as a negative process that sabotages normalcy: these are patterns that run through all four of these films and, in doing so, speak volumes about the society that spawned them. But the international acclaim that these films were met with, also speaks volume about the universality of these issues.

Final Notes

[1] Hunt's paper is focused on video games but it does feature a comprehensive look into the evolution of the zombie genre as a whole. His findings can be easily applied in other media, including films.

[2] A more detailed list of Greek Weird Wave films would include: *A Woman's Way* (2009) directed by Panos Koutras· Knifer (2010) by Yannis Economides· *Attenberg* (2010) by Athina Rachel Tsagkari· *Boy Eating Bird's Food* (2012) by Ektoras Lygizos· *Suntan* (2016) by Argyris Papadimitropoulos, etc).

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