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HOLOCAUST AND TRAUMA IN GREEK CINEMA: MANOUSOS MANOUSAKIS' OUZERI TSITSANIS (CLOUDY SUNDAY)

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Summary

The aim of this paper is to analyze the Holocaust narrative of Manousos Manousakis' film Ouzeri Tsitsanis (2015). Set in 1942 in the city of Thessaloniki, and through two plot lines which run parallel, this film tells the story of the forbidden love between a Christian man and a Jewish girl during the German Occupation of Greece, and the story of the famous Greek composer Vasilis Tsitsanis. By defining film as a cultural artifact which transmits cultural and political values, myths, memories, histories and traditions, this paper analyzes the narrative structure of Manousakis' film in order to present a theoretical perspective of function and importance of the Holocaust narrative considered in the general context of Balkan cinema. Viewed as an example of contemporary historical fiction, Manousakis' film portrays nostalgia with regard to the nations past (Greece in the Second World War) along with transforming the social, national and economic circumstances, bounded identities of the war-time period, and Jewish traumatic, collective memory. Thus, this paper will offer a critical examination of the construction of cinematic memory of the Holocaust; it examines questions that the film Ouzeri Tsitanis raises about representation of the traumatic past and ways in which it locates itself in the context of historical trauma.

Key words

Holocaust, trauma, Greek cinema, memory, Balkan cinema.

All Holocaust films, whatever their critical or cultural status, are objects worthy of analysis. What all Holocaust narratives share is the fact that they reflect the political discourses and the national past and have an equally important task in providing interpretations of history. A large number of significant

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texts in the area of trauma theory have referred directly to the Holocaust of World War II. One might even say that Holocaust studies, if not the Holocaust itself, have been central to trauma theory.

Modern theories of trauma (Shoshana Felman, Cathy Caruth) rely on the testimonies of Holocaust victims and their main thesis is evident in Caruth's proposal that trauma is not subject to the distortions of subjective memory but it is a "symptom of history". Her opinion is that traumatic memory represents a direct manifestation of historical truth. In fact, what is important is the connection between the inner world of memory and the external world of historical events, and the experience of pain. In her work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), she defines trauma as an experience in which the victims are unable to reconcile traumatic experience. Serious mental and physical injuries that a trauma victim seems to overcome are accompanied by symptoms that sometimes do not have a direct causal relationship with the original injury. Unlike many of her contemporaries, she argues that the failure of the victim of a trauma to reconcile with the origin and symptoms of mental illness is a precious moment of authenticity because human beings are given the opportunity to get to know reality directly whenever the cultural significance system collapses in itself. As a consequence, Caruth sees trauma as a "revelation" that helps a person understand the limitations and possibilities of culture. Unfortunately, at the moment of cultural disintegration, a human being is not able to fully understand or successfully demonstrate his/her "inner-self".

The scholarly research of recollection of mass trauma has become increasingly significant. The Hiroshima City Government in Japan has raised a number of memorials to honor the victims of the atomic bomb, dropped on August 6, 1945. Similarly, many churches and schools in Rwanda serve as monuments in honor of the victims brutally murdered during the 1994 genocide. Nevertheless, the Holocaust occupies a central place in collective memory studies and, although its study is a comparatively recent phenomenon, it has expanded greatly since the 1970s.

In the first years after the war hardly anyone engaged in the systematic collection of evidence on the mass murder, and no one was building museums or establishing memorials. The survivors had to recover physically and mentally from years of suffering and to create a new existence for themselves outside of the displaced-persons camps in which they found themselves as the war ended (Laqueur 2001: 15).

As traumatic experiences are associated with long-term effects it takes a long period of time to talk about them. In Greece, as in other Balkan countries, survivors of the World War II spoke about the Holocaust only to each other. Since no one was willing to listen to them, their traumatic experience came to be seen as taboo.

The traumatic experiences of suffering and shame [...] can not integrate into a positive image that an individual or a collective has about themselves [...] it can happen that the traumatic experience only after a few decades, even several hundred years after the historical event, gets social recognition and symbolic articulation. Only then can it become part of a collective or cultural memory (Kansteiner, Weilnböck 2008: 230).

On the other hand, the Allies were in denial mainly because they were pre-occupied with the problems of recovery and reconstruction.. There was a coalescence of factors that contributed toward maintaining silence about the genocide in Europe in the immediate postwar era: the beginning of the Cold War, the need to rebuild an economically and physically devastated continent, and even the shame among those who had been involved in the execution of the Final Solution or had stood by and done nothing to save lives.

The genocide of more than 45,000 Greek Jews of Thessaloniki – also named “Second Jerusalem” or the “Jerusalem of the Balkans” – is considered to be the highest in Europe, after that of Poland. Yet, for many decades this tragic event was totally silenced by both the official state and historiography studies. The first book that chronicled the event was *In memoriam: Dedication to the Memory of the Jews Victims of Nazism in Greece*, written by the Thessaly monks Michael Molho and Joseph Nehama. Published early in 1949 in French language by Jewish Community of Thessaloniki it was read only by the Jews. In Greece, silence over the Holocaust is related to the fact that the winners of the Greek Civil War (December 1944- January 1945 and 1946-1949)² included those who helped in the displacement of the Jews, or people who benefited from their extermination. Thus, the interest in studying the Holocaust begins with a few years of lag compared to other countries. Yet “it is a fairly neglected topic that has seen documentary research only in recent years. In addition to the abiding neglect of Greek studies by Jewish and general scholarship, the complex problems of Greek Jewry and its sources almost seem to encourage scholars to avoid the topic for better-plowed fields” (Bowman 2009: 1).

2 <https://www.britannica.com/event/Greek-Civil-War> date of accession July 12th 2017

Jews have lived in Greece since ancient times and there have been organized Jewish communities in Greece for more than two thousand years. The oldest Jewish group that inhabited Greece was the Romaniotes. The Romaniotes were located in Ioannina, Thebes, Corfu, Arta, and Corinth and on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Rhodes and Cyprus, among others. In addition to the Romaniotes, Greece was also home of Sephardic Jews who lived primarily in the city of Thessaloniki. It was in 1492 when Spain took the drastic step of expelling Jews from Spain and, as a result, waves of Sephardic Jews settled in Ottoman-ruled Greece. Thessaloniki had one of the largest Jewish communities in the world and a solid rabbinical tradition. The Greek Sephardim community included a unique blend of Ottoman, Balkan and Hispanic influences, well known for its high level of education. According to the Jewish Virtual Library:

Greece became a haven of religious tolerance for Jews fleeing the Spanish Inquisition and other persecution in Europe. The Ottomans welcomed the Jews because they improved the economy. Jews occupied administrative posts and played an important role in intellectual and commercial life throughout the empire. These immigrants established the city's first printing press, and the city became known as a centre for commerce and learning.³

In the spring of 1941, Nazi forces invaded Greece. Even though deportations of Jews did not start until March of 1943, Greece lost at least 87 percent of its Jewish population during the remaining years of the war. Between 60,000 and 70,000 Greek Jews perished, most of them at Auschwitz. However, between 8,000 and 10,000 Greek Jews were saved due to the unwillingness of the Greek people to betray them to the Nazis and through heroic acts of defiance by the leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church and local government officials. Of the 46,091 Jews of Thessaloniki sent to concentration camps, 1,950 survived.

Holocaust Cinema

Most Holocaust movies are based on actual events or on book adaptations that attempt to find a visual language for the representation of the past that is relatable to viewers.

3 <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/> date of accession May 17th 2017

Contemporary Holocaust cinema exists at the intersection of national cultural traditions, aesthetic conventions, and the inner logic of popular forms of entertainment. It also reacts to developments in both fiction and documentary films following the innovations of a postmodern aesthetic. (Bayer 2015: 4).

It nonetheless “places them in a wide range of texts of fictionalization of reality and raises the question of the ethics of evocation” (Daković 2014: 162). Holocaust cinema is as much about the present in which films are made as about the past which they depict. For example, *Ouzeri Tsitsanis* is a film about the turbulent year of 1942 and the years that followed, and it is explicit in the period’s time reference. But as the film was produced in Greece in 2015, it also reflects the current historical period and socio-political situation in Greece.

Over the past twenty years or so, there have been an increasing number of films about the Holocaust worldwide. As Anne-Marie Baron points out, “although the problem of evil is much older, the Shoah has removed it from the metaphysical sphere and turned it into a contemporary real-life collective experience. It also stimulates thought on other crimes against humanity, committed before and since against other human groups” (Baron 2016: 7). All those film texts are important narratives of cultural memory.

There are many Balkan films that examine the cinematic memory of the Holocaust. *Stars*, a Bulgarian-East Germany co-production (1959), directed by Konard Wolf, is a black and white film about a German officer (Walter) who falls in love with a Greek Jewish girl (Ruth) and although he wanted to help her escape, he could not. Italian director Gillo Pontecorvo’s 1960 film *Kapò* was nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Foreign Language Film category and it was filmed in Yugoslavia. The narrative manipulates the ethics of surviving – a teenage Jewish girl changes her identity and becomes a kapò⁴ in order to survive in a concentration camp. *The Ninth Circle* (1960) is a Croatian film directed by Slovenian director France Štiglic. The plot focuses around a Croatian Jew, Ruth, who becomes the target for elimination by the anti-Jewish race law. She marries Ivo in order to avoid the concentration camp, but she gets caught and dies climbing the electric fence. *When Day Breaks* (2012) is a Serbian film directed by Goran Paskaljević. The film’s narrative manipulates memory, remembrance, identity and history; the Belgrade Fairground becomes Nora’s “site of memory” and Misha’s family story narra-

4 Prisoner functionary in charge of the other prisoners.

tive transforms the individual memories of the Holocaust victims = Jews and Roma, into cultural memory. All these examples show that the perception of the Holocaust depends on personal experience and raises moral and ethic questions not only about the historical truth but also about the way the cinema reconstructs the historical event and creates a specific point of view.

The list of contemporary Holocaust documentaries containing testimonies of Jewish survivors from Greece is quite extensive; in *39405*, a documentary directed by Kyriake Malama (2001), Auschwitz survivor Zana Sadikario-Saatsoglou shares her story with students from the Inter-Cultural High School of Thessaloniki; *Testimonies* (1992) by Giorgos Petritsis centers on the Holocaust in Greece and the rescue of Greek Jews⁵; *Children in Hiding* (2011) by Vassilis Loules focuses on the lives of Jewish children hidden in occupied Greece; *Farewell My Island* (2001) by Isaac Dostis records the deportation of the Jews of Corfu. Most recently, the Greek documentary *Treasures: the Lost Jews of Kastoria* (2016) by Lawrence Russo and Larry Confino uses archival footage and interviews with survivors, and serves as a tribute to, and reminder of, the Jews communities afflicted by the Holocaust.

Greek feature films about Holocaust and trauma are usually melodramas based on real events or on books or theatrical plays: *Brother Anna*, a 1963 film by Grigoris Grigoriou chronicles the life of a Jewish girl who cross-dresses as a monk in a Christian monastery in the immediate aftermath of World War II; *Amen*, a 2002 film by Kostas Gavras, is based on a 1963 play by Rolf Hochhuth titled *The Deputy, a Christian Tragedy*. The film tells the story of a German officer who during the World War II designed a program for the purification of water and the destruction of vermin, but found out that his discovery was being used for killing Jews in concentration camps. *Amok* (also known as *The Rape*) directed by Dinos Dimopoulos in 1963 recounts the love between a German man and a Jewish girl. The same theme is also depicted by Kostas Manousakis in his monumental 1964 film *Treason*, which relates the story of the genocide of Greek Jews focusing on a German soldier (Carl von Stein), who finds out that his Greek lover (Liza) is Jewish and betrays her to the Gestapo. The German Nazi ideology is embodied in the character of Carl von Stein. As Carl said:

Arius (Aryan) is the most perfect type of man because he is always ready to put himself at the service of others. He ignores his own needs and desires

5 The documentary is available at the National Greek Television (ERT) Digital Archive.

and stands ready to make a sacrifice if circumstances require. Our highest duty is to preserve our pure race. Because only the race that does not mix with others can overcome any danger. Mixing of the races is the biggest sin that can be committed against the nature. Such an act hinders progress of men and culture. Jews are the opposite end of Aryans. We cannot expect progress from them, because they have failed at building things, all they have ever done is destroy. Jews are our worst enemies, they contaminated our Aryan blood (Treason, Kostas Manousakis, 1964).

Manousos Manousakis' film *Ouzeri Tsitsanis* is a melodrama inspired by real events. It is adapted from George Skarbadonis's novel of the same name published in 2001. The English title is *Cloudy Sunday* and it refers to the famous song "Συννεφιασμένη Κυριακή" (Cloudy Sunday) written by Vasilis Tsitsanis during the German occupation. This song became a national anthem, evaded censorship and has become a symbol of a bloody era.

Set in 1942 in the city of Thessaloniki, and through two plot lines that run parallel and then overlap, this film tells a story about the forbidden love between a Christian young man, Giorgios, and Estrea, a Jewish girl, during the German Occupation. The second plot line recounts the story of the famous Greek composer of rebetiko Vasilis Tsitsanis, then 28 years old, who penned some of his most lasting songs, including "Cloudy Sunday".

The opening scene shows German soldiers in front of the monument known as the White Tower in the centre of Thessaloniki. It is followed by a shot of Jews and a shot of German soldiers asking Greek citizens for ID cards at the "Ouzeri Tsitsanis", Vasilis Tsitsanis' live music venue and tavern. For a while Manousakis chooses to show the two parallel plot lines: one of Jews (at their homes, compelled to close their shops and newspapers hoping that if they followed the German orders everything would be fine), and the second plot line that shows Tsitsanis at work, his wife Zoi and his baby daughter wondering about the meaning of the war. He asks Zoi: "People are dying every day, what am I doing?" to which Zoi responds: "You are writing songs about the war." Zoi's words exemplify the human need for remembrance and memory. The music of the wartime period expresses the world collective experience of trauma similar to the way that Benedict Anderson believes national novels and press do; music and the media shape national consciousness, and their consumption leads to the feeling of belonging to a national community.

The film is characterized by a linear time structure which means that the order, duration and frequency of events coincides with the manner in which they appear in the plot. It's a cause-and-effect narration built around the main characters (Giorgos, Estrea, Tsitsanis). As a classical *syuzhet* it presents a double causal structure of two plot lines: one involving heterosexual romance (Giorgos/Estrea, Tsitsanis/Zoi) and the other line involving the war. These two lines coincide at the climax: the resolution of one (Estrea's decision to leave) triggers the resolution of the other (to end the relationship with Giorgos who watched her leave).

Through the characters' memory, the Second World War is used as a context which ascribes value to the heroism of Greeks and Jews and to the courage of men and women (shown through the characters of Zoi and Estrea, who both help in the resistance against the German Occupation). Multi-cultural dynamics also portray the need for connection and national identity. In the scene where Estrea's family is at home after the meeting at the Square, Estrea's mother says: "I'm not going anywhere! I was born here, I gave birth to Estrea here and my homeland is Thessaloniki." Estrea's father responds: "And five hundred years ago our homeland was Spain. Wherever we go it's our homeland." At this point Manousakis refers to the more than 20,000 Jews who came to Thessaloniki from Spain. "They were forced either to convert to Christianity or leave. Those who came to Salonika kept their Spanish language that uniquely defines its Jewish population up to the present day" (Hagouel 2013: 2). This is visible in Manousakis' film, since whenever the family is together they speak Spanish to each other.

The social and cultural response to the enemy's identification is the construction of a hero-patriot. Estrea is a real hero in the movie. She secretly helps Giorgio (who is Christian, as Jews call them) in a battle against the German occupation; she falls in love with a Christian, which is unacceptable for the Jews community; she chooses to tell her parents about her love although she knows she will never have the support of her father. Before they sent them to Poland, her father tells her: "I don't have a daughter anymore. For me, you are dead. And for your mother. And for all of us." And although she could stay with a fake identity and go to Athens with Giorgos, in the final scenes of the movie she chooses her family and possible death, as she boards the train to Auschwitz. Thus, we may say that Manousakis' film portrays the bond Jews family connections, national identity of the Jews in Greece during the wartime period, and their traumatic, collective memory especially visible in the character of Estrea's father. In his letter to his wife from the forced-labor

camps for Jews he writes: “Everything is fine here. In the morning we work and then we rest. Don’t worry about me. I’m taking my medicine. David is taking care of me. God bless him. I miss you and can’t wait to be near you again.” In this scene we can also see German soldiers beating Jews and killing one of them.

The train symbolizes a life’s journey. In *Ouzeri Tsitsanis* (as in other Holocaust movies such as *Stars*, *Kapò*, *Treason*) the train is an instrument of fate. It’s a real crossing line where the hope of the Jewish people for a brighter future dies. They are pushed in the train without the possibility to take their belongings with them. As the train leaves the station the suitcases of the Jewish people remain. There are many scenes in which Jews believe that they will be sent to Poland to work and live a regular life, because they were told so. In the last sequence of *Ouzeri Tsitsanis* a Greek-speaking voice states: “The Germans will give you money until you start earning your own from your own business. Married people will have their own home.” In the Bulgarian film *Stars* a Jewish grandma also states: “Don’t worry Sarah, everything will be fine. They are taking us to Polish village called Auschwitz, and we’ll work there in the vegetable gardens.”

The music for the film was made by Themis Karamouratidis. He covered some of the best Tsitsanis’ songs like “Night’s Magic” and the emblematic “Cloudy Sunday”. Those 27 songs work as a second narrative and they increase the emotive power of nostalgia and remembrance transforming the Holocaust into symbol of horror in modern world.

Uncertain Conclusion

Although some critics in Greece have written negatively about the poor mise-en-scène and bad acting techniques, *Ouzeri Tsitsanis* remains a very important film about Holocaust which raises questions about the traumatic past of the Jews and locates it in the context of historical trauma. As Manousakis said:

My aim for the realization of this film, is to provide a reminder of the atrocities committed during the Second World War to those who have chosen to forget, and an opportunity to teach for those who are unaware, in the hope that those crimes will never be repeated. This story, despite its

*chronological setting, reflects current events, where racism and neo-Nazism lie in wait menacingly, eager to infect the global community.*⁶

It is only fitting to conclude that “the narrative of memory depends on cultural and historical circumstances from which it arises” (Stewart 2006: 1). Many traumatic examples drawn from history (Rwanda, Hiroshima and the Holocaust) indicate a future-oriented paradigm memory that seeks to use knowledge of the past, especially trauma and violence, in order to create a better present and prevent a repetition of repression and violence in the future.

This is one of the main reasons why there is a revived interest in Holocaust narrative in Greek cinematography. There is also nostalgia that the Greek people feel about the past, as a time that represents unity, unlike the present time where the society is divided and under serious socio-political crises that started in 2008, including aspects of race, ethnicity and diversity because of the wave of immigrants from Syria and Palestine. There is also the moral obligation of Holocaust Memory. The dilemma about political identity is connected to the tension between a “rational” identity and an identity burdened by memory and responsibility evolving from the legacy of the past. In addition, it appears that the common past is more of an obligation than an actual memory, just as Pierre Nora, said that being a Jew today means remembering that you are a Jew.⁷

In the context of Balkan cinematography one may say that *Ouzeri Tsitsanis* is another film that seeks to examine the region’s memory and trauma and confirms the stereotypical image of the Balkans. But most importantly, this film reminds us that cinema, as both a popular and artistic form, “has assumed the narrative potential of handing down history and applied itself to representing genocide and crimes against humanity” (Baron 2016: 8). As Nevena Daković points out, it also reminds us that the narrative of the Holocaust is “a never-ending process that goes through various film genres and media forms [...] narrative that is not a closed set of facts but an archive project of memory in constant development” (Daković 2014: 165).

The analysis of this film has shown that the narrative manipulates the memory of the characters to express national Jewish identity whereby individual

6 http://mgff.ca/el/cloudy_sunday/ Montreal Greek Film Festival, date of accession May 27th 2017.

7 Pierre Nora’s often cited phrase from *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, Vol. 1 – Conflicts and Divisions, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

memories of Estrea, Giorgio and others are visually transformed into cultural memory. In that way, *Ouzeri Tsitsanis* reflects the national past of Jewish people and their traumatic history confirming the premise that memory has established it as one of the main discourses in film studies not only to explain the past but also to explore the present. Manousakis uses the Jewish memory to provide an answer to the question of how the Holocaust happened and how the individual stories of the Second World War are turned into the war history. In that way, this film raises many questions that can lead to further academic research, including ways in which narratives of collective trauma express national identity, and the question of remembrance of the Holocaust in relation to political crises of the present time.

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HOLOKAUST I TRAUMA U GRČKOM FILMU: MANUSOS MANOSAKIS OUZERI TSITSANIS (OBLAČNA NEDELJA)

Apstrakt

Tema ovog rada je slika Holokausta i trauma u Grčkoj kinematografiji analiziranim na primeru filma *Manousa Manousakisa Ouzeri Tsitsanis (Oblačna nedelja)*. Cilj rada je da ispita na koji način savremeni grčki film koristi i konstruiše narative Holokausta uz pomoć traume i sećanja. Osnovna polazišta istraživanja su savremene teorije traume pojmljene kroz svedočenja preživelih žrtva Holokausta i oblikovane u *Karutinoj (Cathy Caruth)* tezi „simptoma istorije” tj. tezi da traumatsko sećanje predstavlja direktnu manifestaciju istorijske istine. Ključna uloga u procesu pripada vezi između unutrašnjeg sveta pamćenja i spoljašnjeg sveta istorijskog događaja i iskustvo bola.

U Grčkoj istoriografiji koja je u poslednjoj deceniji prošlog veka počela da se ozbiljno bavi Holokaustom prisutan je stav da traumatska iskustva imaju dugoročne posledice i da je često potrebno mnogo vremena da se o njima počne govoriti. S jedne strane su žrtve koje se ne osećaju spremnim da se sećaju i pričaju o tome, a s druge strane je socijalno okruženje koje uglavnom nije spremno da čuje te priče stvarajući na taj način tabuizaciju traumatskog iskustva. U ovom kontekstu, traumatsko iskustvo tek naknadno dobija društveno priznanje i simboličku artikulaciju tako da tek onda ono može postati deo kolektivnog ili kulturnog pamćenja.

U istraživanje sećanja na masovne traume – koje je u naučnim krugovima postalo veoma značajno – Holokaust zauzima centralno mesto. Danas je sve više prisutno postojanje osećaja obaveze sećanja (*Avishai Margalit*) i mišljenje da biti Jevrejin danas znači sećati se da si Jevrejin (*Nora*); odnosno stav da je savremeno bavljenje Holokaustom manje iskreno sećanje na ubijene Jevreje a više potreba savremenih sila da demoniziraju protivnike (*Kuljić*). Mnogi grčki igraniji dokumentarni filmovi bavili su se temama rata i traumatskih iskustva. Film *Ouzeri Tsitsanis* izražava aktuelne političke diskurse i socijalnu-društvenu situaciju Grčke; oslikava transformaciju narativa u različitim kontekstima i istražuje prošlost Jevreja i njihovo traumatično sećanje kroz linearnu narativnu strukturu i klasični Holivudski model pripovedanja zasnovan na pravolinijskoj uzročno-posledičnoj naraciji. Konstruisani vremenski model, zauzvrat, iskazuje kontinuitet identiteta Jevreja.

Takođe, film artikuliše multikulturnu dinamiku, etičke i moralne vrednosti Jevreja te rat kao egzistencijalnu situaciju u kojoj se elementarna ljudskost dovodi u pitanje.

Ključne reči

Holokaust, trauma, Grčki film, sećanje, Jevreji.