

## Chapter 10

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### Family as Internal Border in *Dogtooth*

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Greek filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos' second feature film *Kynodontas/Dogtooth* (2009) received much critical acclaim in the international festival circuit, prestigious awards including *Un Certain Regard* at Cannes and nomination for the Foreign Language Film Academy Award. The low-budget film is set in a secluded country estate fenced in by a high bush-lined wall, affluent with luxuries such as a swimming pool and a large garden. Within the bounds of the property three young adults (Aggeliki Papoulia, Mary Tsoni and Hristos Passalis) are confined by their parents (Christos Stergioglou, Michele Valley) who are obsessively protective under the pretence of providing their children with proper education. To justify the confinement the parents feed the children with myths of monsters lingering outside the fence to attack them. The siblings are taught that they will be allowed to go out of the estate once their dogtooth falls, hence the title of the film.

This chapter reads the disturbing tale of a pathological family in *Dogtooth* as an allegory to internal borders in and of Greece, and in extension those in and of Europe – Greece being its periphery that serves as a centre both in terms of mythical origins and of intense confrontations with non-European foreigners (Balibar 2004: 1–2). I argue that the 'gated' family in Lanthimos's *Dogtooth* is a crucial commentary on the social problems that have emerged from the migratory confrontations that have preoccupied post-1989 Greece and Europe. *Dogtooth* does not explicitly deal with migration and population movements in Greece, yet the film captures a critical stance that is more extensive than just that of an oppressive family: the family in *Dogtooth* represents the protected zone of the 'inside' and the extent of protective measures that frequently takes a pathological shape, the fear of the foreign/outside which translates into xenophobia. The enclosed and incestuous family in the film is a trope for the increasing anxieties to protect the internal borders of Europe, an exclusionary turn in response to the changing composition of European society due to the dynamics of post-Cold War migration.

In what follows, I briefly trace the movement in Greek cinema from the 1990s, a period during which many works on migration were produced, to the mid-2000s when many young filmmakers focused on dysfunctional families – what I call a cinematic turn from the investigation of external to internal borders. Expanding on Etienne Balibar's theorization of 'internal borders' constructed within Europe anxious of its multicultural present (2004), I analyse the ways that the concept of family becomes a central allegory that defines and outlines these borders. *Dogtooth*, with its focus on a family that disciplines its borders through the protection of language, the control of communication technologies and an



obsession with purity and hygiene, insightfully captures how external borders of a nation/civilization are reproduced internally.

### From external to internal borders in Greek cinema

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In 2006, the 47th Thessaloniki Film Festival had a retrospective on migration in Greek cinema which attested to the increasing number of Greek films on the topics of borders and migration. The festival organizers' selections reflected the fact that the post-1990s immigration films are considered as an extension of the longer tradition of Greek cinema on emigration, with well-known examples ranging from *America America* (Kazan, 1963), *Anaparastasi/Reconstruction* (Angelopoulos, 1970) to more recent major productions such as *Nhfs/Brides* (Voulgaris, 2004). The constellation of more recent films on immigration portrayed the identity challenge Greece was going through in the 1990s: a nation of emigrants (from the end of nineteenth century through the 1970s) has turned into one that attracts immigrants through the end of the twentieth century.

After 1989, with the collapse of Soviet socialism, Greece has become a host country for migration from neighbouring Balkan countries, primarily from Albania. Post-Cold War migration towards Greece has initiated demographic, social and cultural changes that shifted many coordinates of Greek society, especially regarding the country's place within the Balkans and in relation to the new and expanded Europe. Greek cinema of the 1990s has depicted such experience of confronting the other, revealing established borders (literal and metaphorical) that reinforce an unequal encounter of migrant from the Balkans with the Greek host. Katherina Zacharia describes the decade as 'repositioning of Greek cinema' as filmmakers responded to the challenges and anxieties associated with the increasing migrant presence in Greece: 'Greek cinema is attuned with the global fascination with cultural flows and circulations, syncretism and migrancy, engaging in the post-colonial discourses of multilayered identities and deterritorializations, and deconstructing dominant national discourses' (Zacharia 2008: 15).

Wendy Everett similarly describes the 1990s in Greek cinema as a period predominantly concerned with themes of 'immigration, borders (geographical and temporal), and problematic and unstable identities' (2005: 26). Everett highlights Theo Angelopoulos's leading role in the articulation of the path for both Greek and European cinema during the decade and describes Angelopoulos's films as 'key illustrations of the move from autobiography to journey narratives that marked films across Europe in the 1990s' (2005: 26). Soon after the collapse of the communist regime in neighbouring Albania Angelopoulos shot *To Meteoro Vima tou Pelargou/Suspended Step of the Stork* (Angelopoulos, 1991) and later *Mia Aioniotita kai mia Mera/Eternity and A Day* (Angelopoulos, 1998). The two philosophical inquiries on the solitude of humanity divided by borders were among the first works to depict then recent phenomenon of migration to Greece and the Greek-Albanian border. Migration and borders are explored by several Greek directors from various angles over the 1990s and



early 2000s – the themes ranged from critique of leftist politics of migration [*Mirupafshim/ See You* (Korras and Vourpouras, 1997)], the hardships faced by illegal migrants on their way to Greece [*Ap'to Hioni/From the Snow* (Gortisas, 1993)], the victims of sex trafficking [*O dromos pros ti Dysi/The Way to the West* (Katzourakis, 2003)] and marginalized lives of minority youth in the ghettos of Athens [*Apo tin Akri tis Polis/From the Edge of the City* (Giannaris, 1998)]. These films introduced characters and themes that were, at the time, marginal to Greek cinema, and addressed the exacerbated identitarian anxieties of Greeks as well as social exclusion and xenophobia faced by migrants in Greece.

Within the framework of this recent legacy of migration films, when *Dogtooth* was premiered, it was seen an anomaly in Greek cinema.<sup>1</sup> The film has been compared to Michael Haneke's *Das weiße Band/The White Ribbon* (2009) in its perverse pedagogy or *Der siebente Kontinent/The Seventh Continent* (Haneke, 1989) that portrays a suicidal family. The director's style is described as one that is 'between Bunuel's surrealism and Haneke's surgical blade'<sup>2</sup> (Danikas 2009). Lanthimos's vision was deemed as closer to Austrian cinema rather than being part of Greek or Southern European tradition: 'with pristine clarity, refrigerated light and deadpan stabs of violence, it looks unmistakably like something by Michael Haneke or his Austrian contemporaries Ulrich Siedl and Jessica Hausner' (Bradshaw 2010).

Such comments dismissed a movement within Greek cinema towards the exploration of dysfunctional families, a common theme in recent Greek films made by young and upcoming directors. In a short retrospective on contemporary Greek cinema Steve Rose names this hard-to-define movement as 'the Greek Weird wave'. One of the filmmakers of the 'Weird wave' Athina Rachel Tsangari – director of *Attenberg* (2010), a film that portrays a 23-year-old girl isolated from the world apart from her strange relationship with her dying father – states that family is the recurrent theme to preoccupy Greece's new generation of filmmakers: 'It's a Greek obsession. The reason our politics and economy is in such trouble is that it's run as a family. It's who you know'<sup>3</sup> (Rose 2011). What marked the beginning of the era of unconventional and malfunctioning family films in Greek cinema is *Spirtokouto/ Matchbox* (Economides, 2002), a film that focuses on a Greek family in shreds. Offering a strongly contrasting situation compared to *Dogtooth*, the father of this family loses all control and authority in his relation to a capricious wife and disrespectful children.<sup>4</sup> More recently, *Strella/A Woman's Way* (Koutras, 2009) which premiered almost simultaneously with *Dogtooth*, also follows the trend. *Strella* shows the torturous path of a transsexual prostitute who ends up having a relationship with his long lost father.<sup>5</sup>

In short, towards the mid-2000s, a younger generation of Greek directors moved away from exploring migration, the arduous travels of illegal migrants and the xenophobia and exploitative working conditions they experience in Greece. Can this representational shift from the theme of migration or external borders of Greece and Greek identity to that of family be explained through the camera's withdrawal from the public and move into the private space? Despite appearances, I suggest that the younger generation of filmmakers in Greece do not turn significantly away from the route that Greek cinema took in the 1990s,



its focus on external borders. The contemporary Greek filmmakers' emphasis on the family reflects a response to the increase, spreading and deterritorialization of such borders within the society. The pathological concern to protect the 'inside' carries the family to the core of 'internal borders' to be secured. In order to further clarify the larger social connotations of family implied in *Dogtooth* allow me to take a close look into the contemporary focus on the institution in Greece and Europe, and the policies that give family the status of an internal border.

### The family as allegory

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Lanthimos describes *Dogtooth* as a film that explores the obstinate desire to cling on to the idea of family and the obsession of raising children within this realm in a world where the concept of family is slowly disintegrating:

To me it was basically thinking about the future of family – and if it's something that could stay the same forever and raise the children the same way [...] and if such a thing is necessary [...] what if, at some point, families were extinct? If that happened there would definitely be people that would really want to keep that as they know it, really try to keep their families together forever. I thought that people would go to extremes to maintain that. (Lanthimos in Anon 2010)

The director emphasizes the contrast between the aesthetics of the idyllic estate with the beautiful children and the 'horrible and tragic' pedagogy of the parents (Zelenko 2010). Lanthimos has been reluctant to offer social and political commentary on *Dogtooth* beyond his critique of the perverted sense of family that blindly protects itself. He prefers to leave the question of political allegory open to many interpretations that the audience would bring in: 'it is a political film, but I didn't start making as an allegory to political issues' (Adams 2010).

In parallel with the director's comments on his film the reviews so far focused on the film's original critique of the claustrophobic family life, the extremes of pedagogy and of suburban isolation. Roger Ebert of *Chicago Sun Times* writes: 'God help children whose parents insanely demand unquestioning obedience to their deranged standards', while *The Guardian* reviewer Steve Rose makes a tongue-in-cheek comment on the 'overprotecting parent syndrome': 'No wonder Greece is in economic crisis. Family life is plumbing drastic new levels of wrongness over there' (Rose 2010). Most reviews hint at the broader connotations of everyday power and control that overwhelms the household of *Dogtooth*: 'Everything in the family's world – from sex to language to the use of mouthwash – becomes subject to a precise ritual control that becomes all the more ludicrous the more solemnly its arbitrary diktats are observed' (Fisher 2011: 23). The reviews fleetingly hint at the film's allegorical potential, describing family in *Dogtooth* as 'a walled city state with its own autocratic rule and untellable secrets'



(Bradshaw 2010) or 'castle of xenophobic purity' (Azoury 2009), while they fall short of exploring the larger connotations of such strong statements.

What, then, are the larger connotations of family in today's Greece and Europe? In his review of *Dogtooth* Mark Fisher quotes Alain Badiou's critique that family has become once more the nexus of society in today's Europe: 'it is striking to see that as the century draws to a close the family has once more become a consensual and practically unassailable value' (Fisher 2011: 25). Family 'as an unassailable value' in Europe has been appearing in various levels that range from scientific conferences on the topic to popular culture and state policies. Major EU-funded conferences in the mid-2000s ['Families, Change and European Social Policy' (Dublin 2004), 'The Demographic Future of Europe – from Challenge to Opportunity' (Brussels 2006)] showed an upsurge of institutional interest both in population policies and the well-being of families. Demographic concern is commercialized in Swedish government sponsored Björn Borg advertisement campaign in 2001, which featured a group of midwives gathered in the hospital nursery with empty cribs. Sixteen midwives, each representing an EU member state, looked sternly at the camera in support of Borg's advice for the people of Europe:

One quick, and you're home free! We have a bit of a delicate problem here in the Western world: there aren't enough babies born, if nothing drastic happens soon there won't be anyone who can work and put up for our pensions [...] Get to it! Fuck for Future.

In the realm of state policies a striking example is the former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's 2006 offer of a baby bonus to parents who had a second child. Those migrant parents who were accidentally sent baby bonuses were asked to return the money (Joyce 2008).

As the Berlusconi policy highlights, frequently at the centre of debates on family is an anxiety about not having enough of the 'right' babies born, a problem intimately connected to the growing presence of migrants and minorities of non-European origin. In Greece, journalist Tasoula Karaiskaki's article titled 'Dramatic Population Decline' rang the alarm bell as early as May 1995, soon after the first influx of migrants to post-Cold War Greece: 'We are doomed to turn into a state of foreigners unless every [Greek] couple has at least four children' (in Athanasiou 2003: 239). The connection between demographic anxiety and migration is more immediately felt in Greece due to the country's geographical position on the European border, open to so-called intrusions of illegal migrants. Being the country with the lowest 'native' birth rate and highest percentage of migrants in proportion to total population among other countries in Europe, there has been a growing nationalist public discourse of demographic crisis in Greece (Halkias 2003: 213). Hence, the Greek context provides a fertile ground to contemplate on the anxiety about the protection of family, and the nationalist concerns of a demographic crisis.

Etienne Balibar, in his book on the frontiers of post-1989 European identity, observes the intimate link between the concepts of family, nation and race: 'the interference of family politics [...] with the definition of the national "community" is a crucial structural mode



of production of historical racism' (2004: 123). Balibar articulates how family becomes a predominant metaphor through which racial ideology is perpetuated in the nation: 'the racial community has a tendency to represent itself as one big family or as the common envelope of family relations' (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 100). The metaphorical link between nation and family (nation as family) is established through securing and promoting the genealogical link (nation/family protecting the purity of its blood). Such discourse inevitably excludes those groups who do not 'belong' to the genealogy.

Balibar calls this anti-democratic construction of the transnational space 'European apartheid': a zone that puts the migrant labour at the service of European citizens yet, much like a colonial regime, while it expects the workers who economically produce inside the EU border to reproduce, socially and sexually, outside the EU. Thus, Europe is constructed as an ever shifting borderland where the inside and the outside become ambiguous, and where the population and social welfare policies promote the social and physical reproduction of its hereditary insiders while discouraging that of migrants and minorities – as in the case of Berlusconi.

As the borders of Europe become ubiquitous the dynamics of 'inside' and 'outside' has undeniably changed: 'differential inclusion of European apartheid in the process of globalization no doubt explains why, more and more, the traditional figure of external enemy is being replaced by that of the internal enemy' (Balibar 2004: 172). The external borders of Europe are duplicated in the form of 'internal borders,' that stigmatizes and represses certain populations 'whose presence in European societies are nonetheless increasingly massive and legitimate' (Balibar 2004: x). As borders increase and become deterritorialized, what remains 'inside' shrinks while the obsessive protection of that realm inflates the concerns and measures of security and control, carried away from the geographical borderlines into the heart of public space:

[B]orders are vacillating. This does not mean that they are disappearing. [...] on the contrary, borders are being multiplied and reduced in their localization and their function; they are being doubled, becoming borders *zones, regions or countries* one can reside and live. (Balibar 2002: 92)

In this realm, family (the right kind of family) becomes a frontier, an internal border in the core of society, to be protected from external intervention, controlled and disciplined in a way that promotes it to further close in on itself.

### Disciplining the borders of the house

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*Dogtooth* is Lanthimos's second solo feature film. Many critics were pleasantly surprised by the uniqueness of *Dogtooth*'s script and cinematography attained at such early stage in Lanthimos's career. After studying film in Athens throughout the 1990s he directed a number



of TV commercials, music videos, short films and theatre plays, and contributed to the organization of opening and closing ceremonies of the 2004 Olympics in Athens. *Kinetta* (2005), his debut feature, screened at Toronto and Berlin film festivals, is the story of an odd group of three – a policeman, an employee of a photo shop and a hotel chambermaid – gathered in an old seaside resort restaging crime scenes of local women murdered by a serial killer. While the curiosity for strange experimentation of human behaviour in *Kinetta* prepares the way for the later film, the use of shaky handheld camera in the film sharply contrasts *Dogtooth*'s fixed shots that frame characters and carry the inescapable borders of the *mise-en-scène* into the cinematography.

*Dogtooth* is a film about the obsessive desire to wall out and protect the realm of family from outside corruption; a bordering and control mechanism that goes to such extremes that the family ends up becoming incestuous. How are borders of the household and family regulated in the film? One of the key ways that regulate the inside outside boundary beyond the closed gates of the mansion is the control of language and other forms of media and communication. All items in the house are carefully restricted with the only available media being a few medical books and homemade educational videos and cassettes that teach the grown up children incorrect definition of words.

The opening sequence of *Dogtooth* immediately establishes the boundaries of inside and outside by showing how communication and speech in the house is contained. There are no establishing shots providing a clue of the space and context. After the title shot, the camera is fixed on an old-fashioned cassette player (Figure 10.1). A finger presses the play button and we hear a woman's voice – that later we learn belongs to the mother. The recording slowly explains 'Today the new words are the following: sea ... motorway ... excursion ... and carbine.' The camera cuts to a medium shot of a young boy in his 20s anxiously looking off screen while he listens to the tape. He stands in a minimally furnished bathroom with

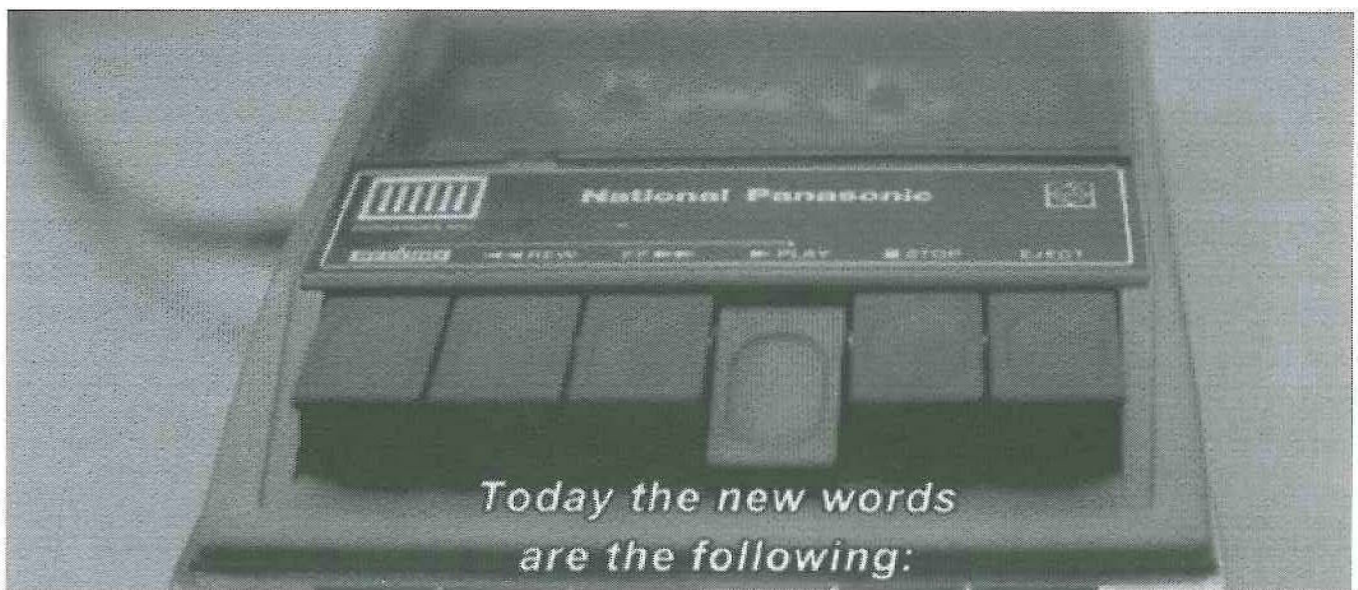


Figure 10.1: The opening shot.



shampoo bottles that have no tags in the background, no written or spoken words/texts are available outside those that emerge from the cassette player.

Soon we hear the incorrect definitions affiliated with the words: 'the sea is a leather armchair with wooden arms ... like the one we have in our living room ... For example: Don't stand on your feet. Sit on the sea to have a quiet chat with me.' While the exemplary sentence commands obedience and passivity, the word of the outside realm 'sea' becomes contained in a word of an object that can be found in the house. Then the motorway is described as 'a very strong wind,' and 'excursion' takes the meaning of 'very resistant material used to construct floors.' The lessons strategically replace the meanings of words that would be unknown for the listeners with objects familiar to them, convert the vocabulary that signifies movement to rigidity and immobility. Later we notice that even anything that uncontrollably passes by the house, will be turned into a home object: the parents convince that the planes flying by are toys that sometimes drop into the garden. This perverted pedagogy introduces us to a contained life, where the language describes a limited habitat, words of nature are limited to the ones that can be found in a garden and all other objects are bounded with the ones within a household. The erroneous teachings do not only erase the meaning of outside but also contain any possible communication with an outsider as the terms of speech between 'the insiders' and those on the outside would never be the same. Even the names of the characters in the household are reduced to their roles within the family, the father, the mother and the children.

As the homemade educational tape runs the jump cut first shows a girl, nearly the same age as the boy, and then a younger second girl, all beautiful and blond, healthy looking young people with similarly confused, anxious and unhappy looks on their faces. In separate frames that emphasize their isolation despite being in the same space, we are introduced to the main characters, the three siblings as they are homeschooled by their parents who record the day's lesson on cassette tapes. The door is shut, the window is closed with a curtain which gives the feeling of entrapment. The muted tones and domination of white in the bathroom, a colour scheme similar to other rooms in the house, give a hygienic and cold hospital feel. We are not only introduced to the siblings, but also to the mother through her voice in the recording. In the next sequence we meet the father in the same manner, first we hear his voice as he drives the car while the camera captures a blindfolded woman stiffly sitting in the passenger seat. Being introduced to the voices of the father and mother before the camera captures their figure increases their omnipotent presence and power over the other characters. Throughout the film, frequent use of sound bridges and voiceovers carry or insert the mother's and more often the father's voice to another scene where the parents are not physically present. Their omnipresent voices, which may be running in the siblings' heads, suggest an omnipotent control of their lives. Their voice presented both as on and off-screen sound makes the film itself take the role of the cassette player, the film becoming part of the homemade media that further encloses the narrative, accelerates the entrapment. Film becomes a meta-border within the frontiers of the household.

In *Dogtooth*, the pedagogy reinforces a cherished and contained inner world, a barrier that inherently limits communication with the outside world. What is more striking is that

even the means of pedagogy refer to a border between them and the outside world. There is no media, TV, radio or even telephone except for the pedagogical tapes. Along with the voice recordings that enclose the realm of meanings into the household, the borders of the house are ensured by the only other media available in the house: the homemade videos of themselves. These videos provide rare entertainment which the siblings watch *ad nauseam*, they remember and reiterate every word and sentence (their own) that has been previously recorded. Hence, even their entertainment is watching videos of the inside, images turned inward in a vicious circle of entrapment repeated in the frame within the frame, by the camera within the camera. Communication is further bounded with memorized videos that refer only to what has happened inside the gates of the house (Figure 10.2).

The only person in the family to leave the mansion is the father who works in a factory. He occasionally brings home an employee of the factory Christina (Anna Kalaitzidou), the only person named in the film, to satisfy the sexual urges of the son and they mechanically go through the actions. The walls around the highly protected environment start shaking when the elder daughter blackmails Christina – who gives her little presents in exchange for oral sex – to lend the videotapes she has in her purse, copies of *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975), *Rocky* (Avildsen, 1976) and *Flashdance* (Lyne, 1983). The elder daughter becomes obsessed with the films, often quoting them and re-enacting scenes. When the father finds out, after punishing both the daughter and Christina, determined to never let any other outsider have ‘bad influence’ on his family he assigns the elder sister to the ‘task’ of having sex with her brother.

The videotapes coming from and depicting the realm outside the house eventually shatter the extremely well orchestrated checks and balances of the cloistered realm. How would these



Figure 10.2: Watching homemade videos.



videotapes acquire such function, especially considering these films are three Hollywood blockbusters *Jaws*, *Rocky* and *Flashdance*? All three films came out during 1975–85, a decade of blockbuster hits and major publicity campaigns, of new technologies and special effects (Hoberman 1985: 34–59) when Hollywood started to ‘invade’ the global homes through the introduction of home entertainment, the VCR. Hence, these films represent an era of further globalization of Hollywood, from the global movie theatres into the global homes. Moreover, all three films show heroes winning against the odds – a deadly shark, an undefeatable fighter or the most competitive dance school rehearsal. The videotapes represent a window into another world, a utopian Hollywood world that has the capacity to challenge the idyllic space that the parents of *Dogtooth* provide their children. In comparison, the outside world of *Dogtooth*, the factory where the father works, for instance, presents no charms. Sharp geometric shapes, gray and pale tones contrast the delicately lit interiors of the family home, the beauty of a garden with well-trimmed plants and swimming pool. So only the videotapes have the capacity to challenge this protected zone with an offer of another idyllic world. In turn, the father reframes the function of the videotapes as punitive/educative rather than pleasurable by using one to beat the daughter on the head.

Another element of ‘border control’ in *Dogtooth* is the obsession with bodily hygiene and health consciousness, which includes concern about the son’s sexual health which eventually leads to incestuous relationship. Hygiene and taking care of the body’s health is a daily ritual and routine for the children. In the factory-like house (no wonder the father works as a manager at a factory) the kids have a regulated schedule of exercise, meals and they continuously drink freshly squeezed fruit juices. The son polishes his shoes before the nightly family dinner, washes his father’s car diligently while the older daughter vacuums her room ‘to keep the germs off.’ The younger daughter, on the other hand, keeps track of the medicine and plays the family doctor while initiating strange games such as that of anesthetizing oneself.

Before the first sex scene between the son and Christina, the father makes sure Christina has taken a bath, and asks if she washed her hair. When the father enters the son’s room and sees that he is working out, he patiently waits until the exercise is finished so the health routine is not broken. When the father leaves the room, the son and Christina start to take off their clothes dutifully, they lie on bed. They do not talk or kiss; sex is performed mechanically. They barely look at each other, they are focused on his penis which is their sole point of contact. The sexual encounter between the son and Christina consists of a single long take from a fixed camera set at about waist level at a steady distance from the characters as if a security camera is filming. As in all other scenes indoors – there are no tracking shots, the movement is captured only through jump cuts that give the sense of ruptured mobility, reflecting the cruel stillness in the lives of the characters. A result of this steadiness peculiar to this scene as well as some others inside the house is that the frame is constantly broken vertically by the characters, we see torsos without heads, fragmented bodies (Figure 10.3). Yet they never break the frame horizontally; while they break the edges of the frame, they never exit the frame. They enter the off-screen space only by using a door placed in the



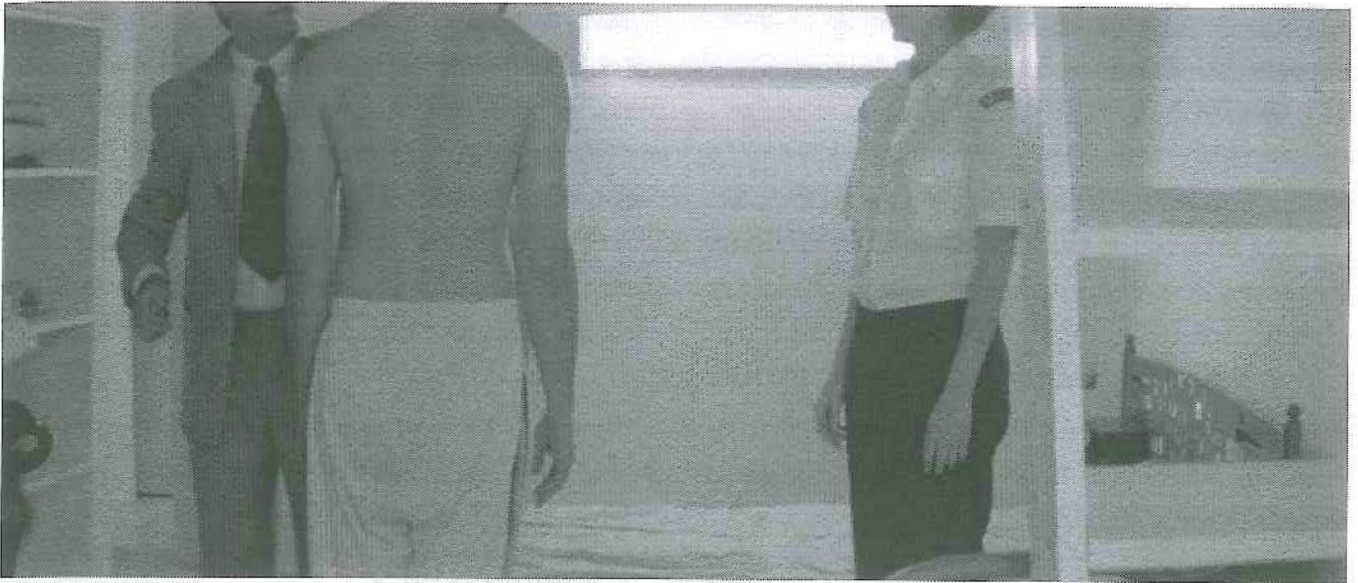


Figure 10.3: Fragmented bodies, preparing to have sex.

background. Hence the filmic frame that 'captures' them is never broken which enhances the feeling of confinement.

The camera in *Dogtooth* becomes a border in itself, skilfully articulating the limits of space and movement. Lanthimos's camera does not only imprison the characters in its static nature, it erases the possibility of off-screen space, the character's inability to break the frame horizontally makes the off-screen always contained by the screen space. In the framed/bordered, protected and hygienic realm of the *Dogtooth* estate, after the contamination of the delicately balanced life of the family by the blockbuster videotapes, the urge to continue providing a healthy sexual life to the son leads to a complete enclosure of the house into an incestuous relationship. Inbreeding is prophesized when even the dog that will soon be brought into the house is introduced as something that the mother will give birth to. The parents' fixation on preserving the purity of the family goes to such extremes that it creates the absolute societal transgression: incest. Soon after the incestuous affair the daughter in desperation knocks out her own dogtooth. This is also one of the rare incidents when the fixed camera finally moves and tracks the older daughter who runs out in the garden at night, to her freedom or death. She hides in the trunk of the father's car. The ambiguous final shot shows the car parked in front of the father's factory, the daughter does not emerge from the trunk.

## Conclusion

In an analysis of *Dogville* (von Trier, 2003) Thomas Elsaesser suggests that the film does not make an immediate reference to Europe's borders and immigration policies, but through 'abstractions and schematisms' it stages borders, 'what constitutes inside and out', and ideologies of exclusion (2005: 123). On a similar line of argument, we may contend that

young Greek directors who produce films on dysfunctional families in the mid-2000s reconsider the meaning of borders and exclusions, a topic already explored extensively in Greek cinema of the 1990s, from a more abstract perspective, which is at the same time closer to the heart of the Greek society, the very nucleus of it: the family that becomes an internal border of a society through the obsession to discipline and control it.

It is plausible to draw some immediate connections between the internal borders of the family in the film and external borders supported by migration policies. The language containment in *Dogtooth*, for instance, eerily recalls the particular ways that preserving the national languages becomes a crucial concern through which borders of a nation are defined and protected from alien 'intrusions'. This practice displays itself in language tests that migrants and minorities have to pass in order to attain citizenship in many European countries. In the Netherlands, for instance, migrants take a two level test. Naturalization requires testing the command of the Dutch language. But another aspect reminding mediated pedagogies of *Dogtooth*, its enclosed video trainings and entertainments, is the pre-arrival exam on Dutch culture which requires (only non-Western migrants) to watch a training video entitled 'Coming to the Netherlands', a video that 'includes images of homosexual men kissing and of female nudity' (Etzioni 2007: 356) made to test the levels of tolerance of especially Muslims. While the tapes appear to train Muslims into European ways of life they only emphasize and reconstruct the assumed barriers between Muslims and Europeans. Just as *Dogtooth* establishes the function of videotapes both as a border within a border (homemade videos) and a utopian escape (three blockbuster films), the video trainings of migrants similarly construct Netherlands as a utopia and a border impossible to cross.

The concern with health and hygiene in *Dogtooth* also reminds how the physical boundaries of the nation are supported with 'symbolic borders (criminality, deviance, dirt, disease), a fictional preservation of racial purity against "alien contamination"' (Tzanelli 2006: 40). Keeping the body of the nation clean becomes another internal border. Nadia Serematakis, in an article written in the mid-1990s about public health panic in Greece due to migration, notes:

There appeared a series of media panic stories about waves of infections crossing Greek frontiers: AIDS, hepatitis B, cholera, embola, and the list goes on. Borders were leaking not only people but also contaminated and contaminating substances, old and new viruses. The border now represented an infection. This medicalization of the border and of mobile people pointed to new forms of violence emanating from this space. (Serematakis 1996: 510)

The obsession with hygiene becomes a part of the protection of the borders from various 'penetrations'. *Dogtooth* presents the extents that the protection of hygiene, both literal and metaphorical, from external intrusions leads to: the ultimate enclosure of family into inbreeding.



While such parallels between exclusionary migration policies and the film's representation of a pathologically inbreeding family may appear viable yet forced, *Dogtooth* certainly presents the affective dimension of the socio-political changes taking place due to migration and the threat to the national family, and to nation as family. In Lanthimos's microcosm the overly-protected beautiful bodies are doomed to be consumed by incest, violence and deformation; they burst open, close down, emotions are discharged through sudden impassioned action. The reproductive economy of the family closes in on itself. The obsessive protections and walls inherently undermine the goal to secure future healthy adults. Lanthimos deconstructs the idea of national/genealogical union by taking it to the extreme through borders and enclosure. His film is not a simple allegory of nation as a family in crisis; it is a film that explores the impossible experiment of protecting a community through the multiplication of borders around it. The end result shows myriads of ways that everyday violence gets produced in a xenophobic space. Lanthimos's grotesque realism dissects the politics of exclusion that surround the focus on protection of family and its values both in Greece and in Europe, seen from its border zone most vulnerable to migrant penetrations.

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## Notes

- 1 In Greece there have even been accusations that Lanthimos plagiarized the Mexican film *El Castillo de la Purezza/Castle of Purity* (Ripstein, 1973), a film that depicts the story of Gabriel Lima who keeps his wife and three children locked for 18 years in a deteriorating colonial mansion under the pretence of protecting them from a corrupt world (Danikas 2011).
- 2 All translations from French and Greek are mine.
- 3 Tsangari and Lanthimos work together in many projects (Rose 2011): In *Attenberg* Lanthimos appears in the role of the experimental lover of the main character; Tsangari is the producer in Lanthimos's recent film *Alps* (Lanthimos, 2011).
- 4 Aggeliki Papoulia, the older daughter in *Dogtooth*, plays the rebellious daughter in *Matchbox*.

- 5 The recent focus on dysfunctional and 'abnormal' families is not limited to filmmaking in Greece. Sotiris Dimitriou, a famous short story writer and novelist who has produced most of his works during the 1990s and 2000s, has frequently explored families in the margins of Greek society, stories of mothers involved in incestuous relations with their sons or daughters committing matricide. In an interview the author describes family as 'a workshop of fear. A small army camp where one frightens the other. A pathological love is manufactured within the family, love that is reduced to malice, since it enslaves the other, leaves no space to breathe' (Aggelikopoulos 2006). Dimitriou associates family with claustrophobia, pathology and fear, feelings similar to being in an army. His careful choice of terminology such as workshop and manufacture also suggests a view of the body as a machine of enforced production. Dimitriou's description eerily recalls the way family is conceptualized in *Dogtooth*.