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**A Life and Identity in Flux:
Young Pontian Greeks
in Konstantinos Giannaris's
*From the Edge of the City****

PANAYIOTA MINI

In November 1998, at the 39th Thessaloniki Film Festival, director Konstantinos Giannaris¹ presented his first feature-length Greek production, *From the Edge of the City* (*Apo tin akri tis polis*).² Giannaris had established a reputation in the mid-1990s. His British production *3 Steps to Heaven* had been shown in Directors' Fortnight in 1995 in Cannes and nominated for a Golden Alexander in the international competition of the 1995 Thessaloniki Film Festival. The same year, his short film *A Place in the Sun* (*Mia thesi ston ilio*) received the Best Film Award in the national competition and the Best Balkan Film Award in the international competition of the Drama Short Film Festival.³

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¹ In English-speaking literature, Giannaris's first name appears as Constantine, Constantinos, or Konstantinos. I use "Konstantinos," the Latin form of the Greek name, in accordance with the transliteration system of Greek to the Latin alphabet, which I adopt in this essay.

² Giannaris wrote and directed *From the Edge of the City*. The film was independently produced by Dionysis Samiotis and Anastasios Vasileiou. It is available on DVD format in Europe and the United States.

³ Giannaris made his film debut in 1984 with the short British production *Framed Youth*. By 1995, he had completed more than ten short- or medium-length films (e.g. *Trojans* [1989], *North of Vortex* [1991], *Caught Looking* [1991]), most of which won awards in international film festivals such as the Berlin International Film Festival, the Cork International Film Festival, and the Chicago International Film Festival. See http://www.greeceinbritain.org.uk/arch_constantine-giannaris.asp (accessed: 5/10/2006).

In 1998 Giannaris made a dynamic entrance into Greek cinema. At the 1998 Thessaloniki Festival, where the Hellenic Ministry of Culture announced the National Film Awards, *From the Edge of the City* received second prize for Best Feature Film, just a few votes behind Theo Angelopoulos's *Eternity and a Day* (*Mia aioniotita kai mia mera*). The Hellenic Association of Film Critics voted *From the Edge of the City* Best Greek film of the Festival. And in the international competition Giannaris earned a Best Direction nod.

In addition, *From the Edge of the City* became the most-discussed film among audiences and critics. Before the National Film Awards ceremony, 39-year-old Giannaris was being referred to as the most serious rival of the internationally known Angelopoulos, whose *Eternity and a Day* had already won the Golden Palm in Cannes.⁴ Most film critics reported that *From the Edge of the City* brought a fresh aesthetics and challenging thematics to Greek cinema. In terms of style, the reviewers praised the film's rhythm and energy.⁵ The film's subject matter provoked controversy. *From the Edge of the City* concerns the young segment of an ethnic Greek minority – the Pontian Greeks from the former Soviet Union who immigrated to Greece after 1985. Some critics singled out Giannaris's bold depiction of young Pontian Greeks' problems for special praise.⁶ Others, however, thought that Giannaris's story was overly loose and schematic, lacking a serious analysis of Pontian Greek life.⁷ In responding to such criticism, Giannaris declared: "I did not make a sociological film. I am not a social worker."⁸

Indeed, *From the Edge of the City* avoids making clear sociological statements. The film does refer to facts of Pontian Greek life; it uses Pontian Greeks with no acting experience in most of the main roles; it occasionally employs techniques that give a sense of an authentic rendering of the events; and it includes an unseen interviewer (Giannaris) who converses with the protagonist, Sasha (Stathis Papadopoulos). Nevertheless, Giannaris does not offer a clear cause-and-effect analysis of or a didactic solution

⁴ For the behind-the-scenes "rivalry" between Giannaris and Angelopoulos see Kagios 1998, 25; Telidis and Ritzaleou 1998, 61; Danikas 1998b, Z3.

⁵ Eksiel 1998, 41; Kanellis 1998, 41. Similar assessments appeared in the press in January 1999 when the film opened in Athens and Thessaloniki (see Andreadakis 1999b, 31; Georgakopoulou 1999, 21). When *From the Edge of the City* was shown abroad, foreign critics also commented favorably on the film's style (see Krach 2000, 64; Arroyo 2000, 43).

⁶ Andreadakis 1998, 11; Eksiel 1998, 41.

⁷ The most negative reviews were written by Mikelidis, who thought that Giannaris approached his topic "exotically" and superficially (Mikelidis 1998a, 40-1; 1998b, 48; 1998c, 34-5). Film critic Danikas (1998a, 11) noted that *From the Edge of the City* lacked a structured plot and a social approach; Danikas developed his views in later pieces on the film (Danikas 1998c, Z3; 1999, 4). Film historian Soldatos (2000, 191-2) has also talked about the film's "weak scenario" and "schematic" narrative situations.

⁸ Giannaris quoted in Georgakopoulou 1998, 40-1.

to Pontian Greeks' problems.⁹ On the contrary, through an elliptical narration, combination of interview and plot material, and incorporation of imaginary scenes, Giannaris invites the viewers to collect the information scattered throughout the film and to invoke historical reality in order to comprehend the young Pontian Greeks' difficulties and understand the characters' inner world. Giannaris's strategies prompt the spectator to grasp a complicated social reality and many-sided characters, whose lives and identities are in constant flux.

From the Edge of the City alludes to Pontian Greeks' reality in two ways: through fictional situations and through information that the unseen interviewer elicits from Sasha during their conversation, excerpts of which are inserted throughout the film.¹⁰ In this way, we learn that Sasha and his family come from Kazakhstan. The family had moved to Greece in 1990 when Sasha was ten years old, and settled in Menidi, a poor suburb on the outskirts of Athens –at “the edge of the city.” At home, Sasha and his family communicate in Russian, and with his friends Sasha speaks both Greek and Russian. We learn that Sasha dropped out of school, unlike his father who had been educated in Kazakhstan. Sasha has a job as a construction worker; however, he soon quits and tries to earn money first as a street hustler in Omonoia Square and later as the pimp of a Russian girl.

The information hints at complex historical processes. By making the point that Sasha's family emigrated from Kazakhstan the director alludes to the odyssey of thousands of ethnic Greeks who, in the twentieth century alone, endured a series of relocations. Since their plight is generally unknown outside of Greece, a brief account is necessary here.¹¹

Between 1914 and 1924, thousands of Greeks, who had for centuries been living on the south-eastern shores of the Black Sea (Pontus Euxinus), fled Turkish persecution by emigrating to Greece or Russia. In Russia, until the mid-1930s, the Greeks enjoyed relative freedom; they maintained their own schools, libraries, publishing houses, and cultural organizations. In the second half of the 1930s, however, Stalin's harsh nationalities policies struck the Greek population. In 1937 teaching the Greek language was prohibited, and all Greek schools and printing offices were closed. The persecution of Greeks intensified during World War II and reached a peak in 1949, when about 100,000 were deported into the Central Asian regions of Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, and Kazakhstan. Gorbachev's rise to power in 1985 brought additional changes to the lives of Pontian Greeks. The crisis in the Soviet economy deepened, and extreme na-

⁹ Film critic Orestis Andreadakis holds a similar view. See Andreadakis 1999a, 11.

¹⁰ As Papanikolaou explains, the film “was originally conceived as a thirty minute documentary, a format that survives in the interviews” between Sasha and the director (Papanikolaou, 22).

¹¹ The following account is based on: Kasimati 1998, esp. 279-84. Vergeti 2003, 61-9.

tionalism and religious fanaticism rose, especially in the Republics. Pontian Greeks felt ethnically and financially under siege. Thus, when the Soviet borders opened, Pontian Greeks started immigrating to Greece, hoping to start a new life in their ancestral homeland. Sasha's family, which left Kazakhstan in 1990, alludes to those families who settled in Greece, expecting to find jobs and security.¹² And the Menidi suburb, that Giannaris shows early on, constitutes one of the few areas that actual Pontian Greeks inhabited when they arrived in Attiki County.

In the film, Giannaris addresses the implications of the Pontian Greeks' language problem. When we see Sasha's family speaking in Russian in the opening scene,¹³ we understand that the Greeks of the Soviet Union arrived in a homeland, whose language they had not been taught. Scholars have argued that the Pontian Greeks' limited knowledge of Greek resulted in social isolation and insecurity.¹⁴ Scholars have also noted that this problem forced even well-educated and professional Pontian Greeks to accept menial, low-paying jobs.¹⁵ In the film, although Sasha's father had been educated in Kazakhstan, in Menidi his four-member family occupies a small house, in which Sasha sleeps on the sofa. We conclude that Sasha's father is under-employed, like thousands of other Greek Pontians. Furthermore, the father turns violent against Sasha when the boy quits his job. Giannaris implicitly links language ignorance, financial difficulties, despair, and domestic violence.

A clearer manifestation of the language problem appears in the case of Anestis (Anestis Polychronidis), one of Sasha's friends. Anestis, who understands but does not speak Greek, laments: "How is it possible to be something when you don't speak the [native] language?" Afterwards, Giannaris shows Anestis experimenting with intravenous drugs, something that proves fatal. Although most of the film's young heroes smoke pot or snort cocaine, Anestis's experimentation with injected drugs pertains to his status as a young man who cannot communicate in Greek and is consequently excluded from Greek society. Inability to speak the native language, Giannaris implies, results in alienation; thus, risking one's life becomes tempting.

Sasha also has a language problem. Like most of his Pontian Greek friends, Sasha speaks Greek, but with a Russian accent. We know that after arriving in Greece at the

¹² During the last decade of the twentieth century, around 200,000 Greeks from the Soviet Union immigrated to Greece. The figure for 1990, the year Sasha's family arrived in Greece, was approximately 14,000 (Vergeti 2003, 78-81).

¹³ I am referring to the scene after the credit sequence. In fact, the spectator received some narrative information during the credit sequence: the director switches between the credits and shots of youths stealing a car's cassette player, youths whom we soon identify as the film's protagonists.

¹⁴ The language problem is discussed in most surveys on Pontian Greeks. See, for instance, Kasimati 1998, 294-5; 2000, 537.

¹⁵ Vergeti (ed.) 1998, 47.

age of ten, Sasha dropped out of school. His decision to leave school hints at the education problems that most immigrant children of the Soviet Union faced. At school, these children were stigmatized as foreigners. Furthermore, the Greek language curriculum that had been designed for Pontian Greeks failed to hold their interest long enough for them to master speaking, reading, and writing.¹⁶ In the film, Sasha says that he quit school because he was not smart enough. However, the viewer assumes that the real reason was his difficulty making the cultural and language transition from the Russian- to the Greek-speaking classroom.¹⁷

Giannaris's interest in language resurfaces, albeit in a different way, in the depiction of Sasha's sexual encounters with two Russian women. Early in the film, Sasha visits a brothel where he meets Olga. In Olga's room, Sasha greets her in Russian: "Dobryi vecher" ("Good evening"). To her question "Govorish' po-russki?" ("Do you speak Russian?"), Sasha replies, "Konechno" ("Of course"). Right afterwards, Giannaris interjects a series of freeze-frames, suggesting a long and intense sexual encounter. Olga and Sasha seem to go through an experience that is rather unusual in the typical brothel visits, as if their common language creates a measure of intimacy. Sasha's attachment to a Russian-speaking woman is underscored when he meets Natasha (Theodora Tzimou), a pivotal character in the film. Natasha also works in a brothel, giving part of her profits to her pimp, Giorgos (Dimitris Papoulidis). Having tired of her, Giorgos plans to sell her to two Greeks from Patras, and asks his friend Sasha to keep an eye on her while he makes the arrangements. When Giorgos is away, however, Sasha develops feelings for Natasha. Natasha and Sasha's ties to Russia forge a bond that is lacking in Sasha's affair with a wealthy Greek girl (Thodora). Granted, Giannaris does not establish a clear causal connection between language and Sasha's sexual life. The viewers are left to assume that by being uprooted from Kazakhstan and by alternating between the Greek and Russian language, Sasha feels close to people who are in the same vortex.

This leads us to an issue that is closely related to language: ethnic identity. Some scholars argue that while in the Soviet Union the Pontian Greeks preserved their Greek identity;¹⁸ others contend that in the absence of Greek education and language, preserving such an identity was almost impossible.¹⁹ Whatever the Pontian Greeks' sense of identity in the Soviet Union, their immigration to Greece resulted in serious problems. Native Greeks referred to the Pontian Greeks as "Russians" and "Pontian Russians." In fact, when the interviewer asks Sasha "Pos se lene?" ("What's your name?"), he says: "My name is Pont, Rosopont; my friends call me Sasha." By introducing himself as "Pont, Rosopont," Sasha "mimicks the James Bond catchphrase (...) while pok-

¹⁶ The issue is discussed in some detail in Terzidis 1995, 100-21, esp. 105-9.

¹⁷ On the difficulty in making this transition see Leze 2003, 38-9, 96-7; Vergeti (ed.) 1998, 48-9.

¹⁸ Agtzidis 1998; Vergeti 2003, 69-72.

¹⁹ Angelidis 2000, 28-9.

ing fun at the word Rossopontios, the immigrant category he's been interpellated to fit."²⁰ At the same time, Sasha reveals his ambiguous identity: Greek people do not see him as one of their own, but as someone who is other than Greek.²¹

Later, Anestis also refers to the Greeks' use of "Pontian Russian" and seems to accept it ("Here, people consider us Pontian Russians. They are right"). At the end of the film, when Sasha accidentally kills Giorgos and the police arrest him, Giannaris inserts Sasha's early shot in which he declares "My name is Pont, Rosopont..." Giannaris then concludes the film with a close up of Kotsian (Kostas Kotsianidis), a man younger than Sasha. Kotsian was Sasha's closest friend. He accompanied Sasha on walks, bus trips, and clubs and was his partner in pilfering and street hustling. At the end, when we see Sasha and right afterwards Kotsian, we infer that Kotsian's life will be similar to Sasha's: shaped by alienation from the society in which he is living.

What do the young men themselves think of their identity? Sasha does not consider himself Greek. Talking about Elenitsa, his ex-girlfriend, he states, "She is one of us, a Pontian," distinguishing her from the Greek girls he is dating. Anestis more clearly expresses the young Pontian Greeks' sense of estrangement from the native Greeks. "Why did our parents want so much to bring us here? (...) Didn't we have a good time in Russia?" he asks. To Sasha's reaction, "How can you remember the past, man? Everything is so far away," Anestis replies "I remember, man, I remember." It has been argued that young Pontian Greeks "were tied to their original place more strongly than their parents" and that "they were suddenly forced to part from their friends and come to a land [Greece], where many perhaps did not want to come."²² Like other young people from the Soviet Union, Anestis considers it, not Greece, to be his homeland.²³

Nostalgia for the Soviet Union is accentuated through recurrent images of the characters in an idealized Kazakhstani landscape.²⁴ The motif first appears while Sasha and Kotsian are on a bus. The boys, presumably stoned, close their eyes. After a shot of Sasha, accompanied by rhythmical non-diegetic music, Giannaris cuts to a golden wheat field. Silence reigns. A small boy runs across the field towards the camera, stops, and smiles. Later, when Sasha and Thodora have just smoked pot and are about to

²⁰ Papanikolaou, 21.

²¹ For discussions of the highly problematic term "Pontian Russian," see Bada-Tsomokou 1996, 52; and Angelidis 2000, 42. See also Bramos's discussion of Giannaris's film in Bramos 2004, 67.

²² Terzidis 1995, 112.

²³ Regarding *From the Edge of the City* Giannaris (1999, 30) has claimed: "I was interested in the tragedy of those who go through an uprooting, especially [in the tragedy] of young people who search for their identity within a world that denies them one."

²⁴ It is unclear whether these images function as the characters' subjective visions or as the director's commentary on the construction of memories. According to Papanikolaou, the images "stand, rather, as subtle critiques of the constructedness of such fantasies of ethnic authenticity, memory and belonging" (Papanikolaou, 23),

have sex, Giannaris cuts from a medium close up of Thodora to a medium close up of Elenitsa in the field. Elenitsa is lit by a bright sun and is further purified by an absolute silence. In the field scene, Sasha also appears in a white shirt, and Elenitsa looks at him with an innocent smile. This shot resurfaces when Sasha tells the interviewer that he plans to marry Elenitsa when he becomes twenty-five. Afterwards, Anestis's recollections trigger the image of happy children in the same field. Later, the field provides the setting for an imaginary depiction of Sasha and Elenitsa's wedding banquet. Their friends, including Kotsian, dance a Pontian rhythm.²⁵ Giorgos arrives, taking a knife out of his clothes. Sasha also gets a knife, and the two friends begin a variant on the Pontian ritual "dance of the knives," during which Giorgos stabs Sasha to death. The field motif is used for the last time when Sasha takes Natasha to his home. Once again, we see small boys happily approaching the camera.

These images idealize the protagonists' personal history. The small boys' innocent faces and smiles, the golden colors of the field, the bright sun, and the comforting silence evoke nostalgia for a harmonious world to which they can mentally escape. In this imaginary world, traditional customs prevail. Sasha, in black and white, marries his beloved. The music and dance that accompany their wedding banquet are based on Pontian rhythms. Sasha and Giorgos's rivalry is expressed through the ritualistic "dance of the knives." And after killing Sasha, Giorgos makes the sign of the cross over Sasha's face and kisses his dead friend's forehead.

Giannaris's camerawork underscores the transcendental quality of the field images. The director incorporates many long shots that capture the vastness of the landscape. When he films the boys, he positions the camera almost directly in front of them, showing them approaching the lens in happy innocence. He bathes the scenes in a light that transcribes the field setting into a sublime realm. As foreign reviewers have noted, Giannaris's staging of the protagonists' imaginary life starkly contrasts with the depiction of the grimness of their actual life.²⁶ In contemporary Athens, the boys are often shown in dark streets and clubs or in dimly lit brothels.²⁷ Instead of the friendly, golden field of idealized Kazakhstan, they walk the dusty roads of Menidi and the congested streets of the city. The Pontian rhythms and dances give way to the electronic music of the clubs and the radio stations. The virginal Elenitsa at the field is not the real Elenitsa, a tawdry fifteen-year old who is trying to look older. In most cases, Giannaris's disjunctive editing, moving camera –sometimes handheld–, and lack of compositional balance in the shots underscore the roughness of the characters' contemporary life.

²⁵ The music in the scene is not an authentic rendering of Pontian music, but a somewhat updated variation on a Pontian rhythm. Nevertheless, it is intended to evoke traditional Pontian sounds.

²⁶ Arroyo 2000, 43; Holden 2000, E22.

²⁷ For more details on the way the city of Athens is depicted in the film see Thanouli 2004, 100-6.

Moreover, the film's last segment, set in Menidi, is the reversal of Sasha's imaginary marriage and death. Both the imaginary sequence and the last segment involve Sasha, Giorgos and a woman (Elenitsa in the imaginary sequence, Natasha in Menidi); a fight between Sasha and Giorgos; and a murder. However, Natasha is life's sad equivalent to ideal Elenitsa. In fact, the Russian prostitute is seen three times behind some wheat stalks, reminiscent of the earlier field images. Furthermore, instead of the tranquil field, the protagonists' tragedy unfolds on the rough landscape of Menidi. Here we do not see a fair fight between Sasha and Giorgos. In Menidi, Sasha uses a tricky move that kills Giorgos. Right afterwards, Natasha seems to welcome submissively the wealth and powerful Greeks from Patras. And Kotsian, who had danced at the imaginary wedding, becomes the one who leads Giorgos to Sasha, and unintentionally to Giorgos's death.

As the comparison between the protagonists' imagined and actual life shows, Giannaris constructs characters who experience a chasm between their past and present. Giannaris has said, "Think of these kids from Kazakhstan.... [They have] one foot in Greece, their new homeland but also their aboriginal land, and the other [foot] in their past, of Kazakhstan, their country, there where they grew up, where their memories were born."²⁸ "These people both are and are not Greeks. They both are and are not incorporated here."²⁹ In the film, these ideas emerge through contrasting scenes, suggesting people who move mentally from a harsh Greek life to an ideal life in the Soviet Union, and vice versa. As a result, Giannaris's heroes have no clear homeland, traditions, and future. Although Pontian Greeks are considered people remarkably tied to their culture, the young characters of *From the Edge of the City* live at a point in Pontian Greek history, in which long-lived traditions vanish in face of an unfriendly new life. In this life, their single interest is to obtain and spend money.

In the film, money affects family ties, love, and friendship.³⁰ Take, for example, the protagonist. Eighteen-year-old Sasha looks forward to marrying Elenitsa in seven years and to establishing a family. However, she rejects him for a man with a flashy car and golden watch. In his turn, while he makes plans for a marriage and a career as a dancer, Sasha earns money as a male prostitute in Omonoia. When no man picks him up, Sasha takes a part of Kotsian's hustling profits or ends up with Nikos (Aimilios Cheilakis), a wealthy man who pays 20.000 Drs. (about 60 Euros) per visit. Sasha is also dating rich Greek girls because, as he says, they help him get into fashionable clubs for free and they have two or sometimes three cars.³¹ As far as Giorgos is concerned,

²⁸ Giannaris 1999, 30.

²⁹ Giannaris quoted in Eksiel 1998, 41.

³⁰ On this see also Andreadakis 1998, 11.

³¹ Nikos lives in Glyfada, an affluent southern suburb of Athens, and the rich Greek girls in the so-called "Northern Suburbs" ("Voreia Proastia"), another wealthy area of the city. Giannaris's explicit references to Glyfada and the "Northern Suburbs" are intended to suggest the sharp contrast between these areas and Menidi.

he lives off the money that Natasha earns as a prostitute, and then arranges to sell her for 2 million Drs. to buy a new girl. When Sasha develops feelings for Natasha, he accepts her offer to become her pimp. Another young man, Panagiotakis (Panagiotis Chartomatsidis), turns from the “top” in homosexual liaisons to the “bottom” to double his profits. Later, Panagiotakis falls for wealthy Nikos, an attachment that leads to a fatal accident.

Money also plays a role in Sasha’s tragic end. Sasha gives Kotsian some money to bring a taxi to a desolate place in Menidi, so that he and Natasha can escape Giorgos and her would-be buyers. Kotsian, however, loses the money by playing slot machines. Kotsian then comes across Giorgos who is willing to pay for the taxi Sasha had requested. Thus, Kotsian takes Giorgos to Sasha, a meeting that will end in Giorgos’ death and Sasha’s arrest. Earlier in the film, the two men from Patras and Giorgos from Sochum, Caucasus, had argued about whose place is better. One of the men declared, “Everywhere is fine, so long as there is money.” This seems to be an axiom for most of the film’s characters, an axiom that involves sex for money, lost love, and death.

In *From the Edge of the City* Giannaris evokes most of Pontian Greeks’ social and cultural problems. The filmmaker uses these problems as a subtle background against which he maps the theme of money-grubbing. At a further level, Giannaris raises in the viewers’ mind a series of questions about the connection between money, relationships, and romantic love. Does Panagiotakis fall for Nikos or for Nikos’s wealth? Is Sasha attracted to Natasha’s vulnerability or her willingness to share her profits with him? Does Elenitsa really not care for Sasha, or is she just looking out for herself by choosing the man who is in the better position to provide for her? To what extent is Sasha responsible for Kotsian’s street hustling? To what extent is Kotsian’s gambling habit responsible for Giorgos and Sasha’s tragic ends?

Unable to answer these questions, the spectator also feels unprepared to make any moral judgments. He or she may only try to understand these complicated characters. *From the Edge of the City* “captures a gritty urban reality without moralizing or sentimentalizing its hapless young protagonist,” observes Stephen Holden.³² The same holds true for almost all of Giannaris’ characters. They are vulnerable and cruel, weak and aggressive, sensitive and cynical, humorous and tragic. Furthermore, by juxtaposing excerpts from the interview and plot material Giannaris presents Sasha not only many-sided, but also full of contradictions. Sasha assures the interviewer that he lives a quiet family life, but we see him fighting with his father. He declares that he will marry Elenitsa, when the viewers know that Elenitsa has already rejected him. He implies that he cares only about Natasha’s money, but he defends her honor against a taxi driver who humiliates her. Sasha appears as the epitome of self-delusion. In the final analysis, to understand Sasha one has to understand the problems endured by

³² Holden 2000, E22.

many young people who left their familiar surroundings in the Soviet Union to find themselves without a home, communication skills, and jobs in a “homeland” that labeled them “Russians.”³³ This is not to say Sasha is a typical young Pontian Greek.³⁴ *From the Edge of the City* is the story of a fictional protagonist; but this protagonist’s traits are validated by a series of historical and social processes that affected thousands of his fellow Pontians.

From the Edge of the City provides narrative threads, which, when woven together and measured against historical reality, shed light on the lives of the fictional protagonists, and through them, on the problems of the Pontian Greeks. “I make films because I believe I can change the way people see reality,” Giannaris states.³⁵ Appropriately, *From the Edge of the City* invites the viewer to reflect on the Pontian Greeks’ Soviet past and Greek present. To do this is to appreciate cinema’s potential to stimulate thinking about a particular ethnic group’s background history, contemporary life, and quest for identity.

Panayiota Mini

Department of Philology
University of Crete
GR-74100 Rethymno
e-mail: pamini@mail.otenet.gr

³³ Bada-Tsomokou 1996, 49.

³⁴ On this, see also Andreadakis’s excellent comments in Andreadakis 1998, 11.

³⁵ Giannaris made this statement in a conference on “Immigration and the Human Rights” in Thessaloniki, on April 5, 2005. Excerpts of Giannaris’s speech are available at: http://www.cinemanews.gr/v4/doc2005/doc_report.php?n=289 (accessed: 5/10/2006).

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**Ρευστή ζωή και ταυτότητα:
Νέοι Ελληνοπόντιοι στο *Από την άκρη της πόλης*
του Κωνσταντίνου Γιάνναρη**

ΠΑΝΑΓΙΩΤΑ ΜΗΝΗ

Περίληψη

Το *Από την άκρη της πόλης* του Κωνσταντίνου Γιάνναρη αποτελεί την πρώτη μεγάλου μήκους ελληνική ταινία του σκηνοθέτη. Η ταινία, που προβλήθηκε στο Φεστιβάλ Κινηματογράφου Θεσσαλονίκης το 1998, προκάλεσε έντονες συζητήσεις σε κοινό και κριτικούς ως προς τη μοντέρνα αισθητική της και την απεικόνισή της μιας ομάδας νεαρών ελληνοποντίων από την πρώην Σοβιετική Ένωση. Το παρόν κείμενο αναλύει τους τρόπους με τους οποίους η αφήγηση του Γιάνναρη, ο συνδυασμός πλοκής και αποσπασμάτων συνέντευξης και η ενσωμάτωση σκηνών φαντασίας ωθούν τον θεατή να συλλέξει πληροφορίες που βρίσκονται διάσπαρτες στην ταινία και να ανακαλέσει την ιστορική πραγματικότητα, έτσι ώστε να κατανοήσει τις δυσκολίες των Ελληνοποντίων και τον εσωτερικό κόσμο των ηρώων. Οι στρατηγικές του Γιάνναρη υπονοούν μια σειρά καίριων κοινωνικών προβλημάτων: της γλώσσας, της ταυτότητας, της αποξένωσης και του διχασμού ανάμεσα σε ένα εξιδανικευμένο παρελθόν στη Σοβιετική Ένωση και μια σκληρή σύγχρονη πραγματικότητα στην Ελλάδα. Με φόντο τα ζητήματα αυτά, ο σκηνοθέτης οικοδομεί μια πλοκή όπου η νεότερη γενιά μοιάζει να καθορίζεται από το κυνήγι του χρήματος με τραγικές καταλήξεις. Την ίδια στιγμή, οι ήρωες αναδύονται ως πολυδιάστατες, έως και αντιφατικές οντότητες, οδηγώντας τον θεατή περισσότερο σε μια προσπάθεια κατανόησής τους και λιγότερο σε τελεσίδικες κρίσεις.