Critically queer and haunted: Greek identity, crisiscapes and doing queer history in the present

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Abstract

How can one do the history of Modern Greek homosexuality at the present moment, in a country where intersectional precarity, neoliberal control and proliferating austerity measures ensure that rights and political demands are in jeopardy? How can we historicise the ways in which rising levels of ethnonationalism and neoconservative rhetoric create a phobic atmosphere, at the very moment when sexual and gender difference become more pronounced and are finally supported by institutional frameworks? This article offers an overview of the major milestones in Greek LGBTQI political representation as well as of recent attempts to articulate a Modern Greek queer history. Taking its cue from the shaming campaign of a cross-dressed man found cruising in the outskirts of Athens in 2016 and an analysis of the influential film *Strella: A Woman's Way* (2009), it argues that we need to develop a new model of

doing queer history in the present. Such a model will be both sensitive to the fluidity and historical challenge of queer emergence, but also remain ready to dwell on long histories of disavowal, institutionalized homophobia, and suppression.

Keywords

Queer, gay history of Greece, *Strella*, financial crisis, intersectionality, homophobia

Afterwards, there would be panic. But for the moment, in the car, there is risk, desire and expectation. A last glance in the car mirror, checking the make-up, the hair, the way the blouse folds, checking if there is anyone approaching. Cruising in a working class area in the outskirts of Athens. Ziofra, outside Athens, Attica, February 2016.

Of course, I am not sure whether it happened exactly like this. But I need to picture the scene as I am making it up here; I need to start with this reconstruction of cruising, desire and the possibility of sex in public, as a necessary antidote to the toxic description that Greeks read in their newsfeed in the first days of February 2016. The description went like this:[1] a 35 year old man, occasionally employed as a driver in the children's hospice 'The Child's Smile', 'was apprehended on Tuesday, dressed in women's clothes. A resident of the area found him in his car, wearing women's clothes and a fake bra [sic]'. Other residents were immediately alerted 'and trapped the man', until agents of the police special forces, which in Athens is called, not ironically, *Dias* (*Zeus*) arrived on the scene. 'The young man got frightened and tried to escape. In the end, he was arrested.' The report, not without a certain sense of anticlimax, ends by informing readers that 'according to our correspondent, after a search of the man's

house, his questioning by police and other investigations, he did not appear to have had any links with child abuse, neither was there any other evidence of wrongdoing'.

In a string of reports following that first one, readers were assured by the director of 'The Child's Smile' hospice, that the man in question was only employed part-time as a driver. 'He never came into contact with the children', the director hastened to add; the employee would, of course, be dismissed with immediate effect. As further reports suggested, the man, whose main job was to carry chocolates and other junk food that supermarkets offered to the children's hospice, may also have been keeping some of these provisions for himself and storing them in his car and house. Finding these (after finding him in drag), and thinking that they were 'bait for victims' seems to have triggered the investigation for child abuse and the newspaper leaks in the first place.

Cross-dressing may not be illegal in Greece, but moral panics and homophobic profiling are still widespread. Interestingly, after two or three days of intense media exposure, the issue dried up. Even though the Union of Greek Transgender People (SYD) and a number of other activist organizations made announcements criticizing the role of the police on this occasion and urging for the man's privacy and his rights as a worker to be respected,[2] the public was not informed about the way in which this incident was pursued and how it ended. Was this a set-up in the first place? Was the man summarily dismissed from his job because of this unfortunate confrontation with the inhabitants of Zofria and the police? Did he face a dismissal panel? Were all proper procedures followed in his contact with the police, media and his employers? What are 'proper procedures' today in a country like Greece and on an occasion like this?

That the protagonists of this incident chose to keep it a private matter and not to come forward to get help from specialists, or to protest, is unsurprising. Indeed, the

event in Zofria, the eventual 'shaming' of the main person trapped during its unfolding, and his later decision to let it remain a 'private matter' despite the help offered by support groups, is indicative of the arrangements around gender and sexuality in a country where these issues have a tradition of being considered of 'a private', rather than 'public' nature (cf. Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991; for a reconsideration, Herzfeld 2008). As I have argued in more detail elsewhere, in order to assess queer expression and the challenges it faces in contemporary Greece, one needs to take into account a difficult genealogy: a past characterized by the lack of public visibility for queer cultures, the lack of proper debate around issues of gender and sexuality, and the relative absence of a visible archive of non-normative sexual expressions in the Greek public sphere. These have all been interrelated issues that for decades (especially in the 1980s and 1990s) were responsible for a widespread climate of suspicion against any emerging *queer political* expression too (Papanikolaou 2013a; Riedel 2010; Faubion 1994). They are still active, at least in some quarters; in Greece the queer often vanishes, as in this case, not only after being exposed through a shaming machine and being the object of institutionalized homophobia, but also as a political subject demanding rights, voice and public presence.[3]

This is, it would be fair to say, a situation that has been changing in recent years. Queer activism since 2000 has been more visible (and perhaps more successful) than ever before. Gay Prides in most big cities are multiplying, and the central ones, in Athens, Thessaloniki and Patras, have expanded, being supported, after some initial hesitation, by their municipalities and central governmental agencies (Eleftheriadis 2017). A host of more radical collectives have also formed, often providing a critique of the assimilative politics of the more mainstream gay organizations, while also working alongside them on central issues (Eleftheriadis 2015). And, since 2015,

important pieces of legislation supporting LGBTQI rights have passed, in most cases with bipartisan support. Law 4356/2015 introducing same-sex partnership was voted by the Greek parliament in December 2015,[4] becoming the cause of celebration, but also a platform for renewed public visibility for the country's queer activist groups, as well as the country's queer past.

'This is for those who lived and died hunted' read the editorial of Greece's most popular freepress and news website, *Lifo,* on 22 December 2015, the day the Partnership Bill passed in the Greek parliament. The main illustration of that article was the photograph of 'Antona', a cross-dressing man photographed in the public toilets of Omonoia Square sometime in the 1980s. Antona had been one of those legendary fixtures of Athens, that I remember everyone referring to when I was growing up (another one was Fterou; the 'feather she-man'): queer men, often in drag, who would make their presence visible, and became known for their acerbic humour, but also for the abuse they had undergone during their life, visible on the body, visible also in that photograph of Antona that illustrated the editorial of popular *Lifo* in December 2015:

> This is the legendary Antona, in the old toilets of Omonoia Square. She would not have imagined that, some years later, the Partnership Bill would be voted. The only thing she knew was beatings and bullying. She was preordained to live outside the society of the good people. One cannot but think today of the thousands who, like Antona, were submitted to unmeasurable and repeated violence, without the possibility that they deserved something better ever to have crossed their mind. (Tsagarousianos 2015, my translation)[5]

It is obviously intriguing that the scene with which I started this article happened just outside Athens not before, but two months *after* the Partnership Bill and its celebrations and positive press. In the event in Zofria we have someone being hunted just like Antona had been hunted for decades in the past, within the same economy of violence, homophobia and abuse that is described by the *Lifo* editorial now as characteristic of a bygone era. Seen from this perspective, the old photograph in the jubilant editorial is not only about being hunted, but also about being haunted. Antona's image haunts the jubilation for the Partnership Bill as its queer and effaced past, but is itself also haunted by the trauma of the marginalization and violence it signifies being replicated, even at the moment of it being declared a thing of the past.

What I am trying to describe is, of course, much more general and one of the underlying arguments of this article relates to the ways contemporary neoliberal precarity intensifies these moments of double haunting, as it also propels the need for radical historical projects that would take them into account. Risky and overgeneralizing as it may be, it is also analytically productive to keep in mind a global political economy of gender and sexuality where legislation and public recognition make advances celebrated as "progress" in many parts of the world and in the global public sphere of new media. Yet at the same time, and often in the very same 'locations', homophobic, ethnophallocentric and homonationalist apparatuses work to undo, sometimes in spectacular ways, these achievements (Weiss and Bosia 2013; Puar 2017; Brown 2012).

In Greece, after the 2015 Partnership Bill, an even more radical set of legislative initiatives on sex and gender identity (including the right of same-sex partners to child fostering and the right of transgender people to self-identification in public documents) as well as other provisions against racist and homophobic violence

have also made it into law, not without resistance, but always eventually being passed. New collectivities also have made their presence felt in the public domain: from the Pride Committees of the big cities, to SYD (Union of Transgender People), LOA (Lesbian Group of Athens), Trans-T and *Θετική Φωνή* (Positive Voice), the Athens Museum of Queer Arts (AMOQA), the Thessaloniki collectives Mov Kafeneio and Homophonia, and the various committees against racism and homophobia that have sprung up with impressive consistency and interconnectedness all over Greece since 2010.[6] Moreover, the 'claiming' of public space and a presence in the public sphere becomes increasingly a central issue in LGBTQI political mobilization (an evidence of which was the 2018 Athens Gay Pride promotional video, centred around the slogan 'I am present').[7]

But what I want to draw attention to, as my first tentative argument, is that all this political mobilization is happening alongside, or rather together with, a strengthening of homophobic cultures and incidents of violence, instances of a resilient anti-queer rhetoric, and most importantly perhaps, a strengthening of a very specific and dominant discourse that precisely undermines the possibility of gender/queer political presence as too identitarian, too narrow, too enclosed in its own agenda and too extreme.

An accepted argument in Greek critical debate is that the Crisis brought with it 'the strengthening of gender hierarchies' already existing in Greek society, which had often been pushed out of view during a previous period of social mobility and 'Europeanization' (Psara 2012; Athanasiou 2012). This strengthening of gender hierarchies, evident in a public discourse now obsessed with the 'survival of the Greek family', or in the rise of ethnonationalist claims, is generally taken as the reason of the concomitant rise in gender-related violence and homophobic attacks. It is thus that the

deadly politics of austerity seem to have converged with a thanatopolitics of the Greek extreme right which found a new audience during the Crisis and does not conceal the fact that it has been thinking of Others as exterminable (Carastathis 2015; Papanikolaou: 2013b). If we want to think about resilient structures in today's crisiscapes, then a very good example would be the resilience of gender violence and homophobia in contemporary Greece and the diverse forms and articulations it is ready to adopt in what has aptly been called the new regime of 'biopolicing of the Crisis' (Kotouza 2018; see also Kirtsoglou 2018; Riedel 2009).

The violent attack against Thessaloniki mayor Boutaris by nationalist activists in May 2018, because he had allegedly permitted Gay Pride events to happen in his city on the same day as the Pontic Genocide Remembrance day, shows this dynamic at work (Smith 2018).[8] This is not, to be sure, an event of the same nature as the articles and books written by respected intellectuals periodically reminding their readers of the pitfalls of gender studies and identity politics (Tsoukalas 2010); and these are not of the same nature as the occasionally sexist or outright homophobic remark that one can find in editorials of the sensationalist or the not so sensationalist press (Kassimatis 2017; cf. its detailed debunking by Kirtsoglou 2017). They are not driven by the same agendas; but it might be high time we entertained the possibility that they belong to the same continuum, one often hijacked by neoconservative strategies. It is a continuum that ranges from skepticism to outright hostility against queer political expression, and is today sitting together with the various thanatopolitics of the extreme right and an ecosystem of neofascist, racist and homophobic proclamations producing cultural, political and social work that might not be visible in the same ways as in the past, but is certainly felt (cf. Athanasiou 2012; 2017).

It might be worth thinking again, then, about that event in Zofria, with all the narrative details of its media presentation: the predatory but slow-moving stranger; the neighbours getting together and trapping him until the police arrived; the uncanny description of his appearance; his eventual disappearance. If it reads like the setting of a Zombie movie, it is because, culturally, it corresponds to its equivalent. The queer person in the centre of this chase was presented, by mainstream Greek media at least, as a zombie; his/her story was presented with the conventions of a zombie narrative, a threat to heteronormative peace and propriety, to its futurity; his/her presence was in many ways the presence of the un-dead, as well as the necropolitical presence of the 'set-to-die', symbolically or literally; and his/her image, together with the homophobia and the violence it conjures, seems to bring on at the same time an undead nightmare of the past and the very latent but everyday presence of vicious and still culturally effective homophobia. The undead, here, is not only the queer body, but also the very homophobic structures that have created it as such. The first call of this article, therefore, is to pause and reflect on the ways the spectrum of gender violence and strong gender hierarchies, the possibility of utmost and institutionalized homophobia, and a deep-rooted tendency to undermine any queer public/political presence, keep shadowing (and threatening) their opposite today in Greece – what you could call a mobilization on LGBTQI rights and a political discussion on sexual citizenship that is also happening at the very same period.

The second argument I want to make is related to this shadowy presence of antifeminist and antiqueer discourses, and has to do with our own critical dispositions and vocabularies. Precisely because of the return of the Undead homophobia and gender violence in today's context, we need today to return to and update our political and critical vocabularies, to keep considering their contemporaneity, or in other words

keep doing what Judith Butler has called for since the early 1990s: to remain *critically queer*. To keep considering, that is, 'who is represented […] and who is excluded', 'what kinds of policies are enabled by what kinds of usages, and which are backgrounded or erased from view' (Butler 1993: 19).

Let me demonstrate what I mean by returning for a last time to my initial story. Notice how spectacularly in that case precarity experienced in Greece due to gender and sexuality was suddenly exposed as interrelated with the precarity caused by the prolonged austerity measures in the country, the concomitant rise in unemployment, the dismantling of workers' rights, expansion of black market and unprotected labour. Whereas the former (precarity in gender/sexuality) has had a long history of being persistently framed (and closed off) by a discourse of propriety and privacy that proposed itself as 'natural' in the Greek public sphere, the newer precarities that are more directly related to austerity, are suddenly now also being shrouded by discourses of privacy and individual propriety. As more and more people have found themselves working in the black market, being underpaid, facing illegal pay-cuts or dismissal, and being unable often to claim their earned wages, 'coming out' about all this has also become more and more difficult. While the structural forces determining conditions of precarity are less and less spoken of, the individual is supposed to be (privately) resilient and able to survive, to keep 'bouncing back' (see Sarah Bracke, in Butler et al. 2016: 52-75). Younger people in particular are thus afraid to publicly describe the way they are being exploited, and it is certainly not rare for workers themselves (especially in the service industry) who are not properly registered with national security, to be held accountable if government officials register them working during their random checks.

In the roundup of Zofria, the young man was suddenly exposed, not only as a queer cross-dresser cruising, but also as a precarious part-time worker. In both cases he stayed silent, not necessarily in an effort to salvage propriety or privacy, but in order to comply with systems of power/knowledge that use propriety and privacy as a tool for ensuring people's acceptance of the precarities hidden behind them. If staying silent and not holding the police to account in the face of an apparently homophobic attack and overeager police profiling, is the 'safer option', acting similarly when your employer is exploiting you in today's Greece seems also to be highly advisable. One does not need to know everything about sexual closeting, coming out, and cultures of secrecy and imposed disavowal, in order to understand what is happening today with a number of work-related identities and positions in the Greek social scape; and certainly this is not what I'm arguing. Yet, what I am suggesting is that decades of queer theorizing on these issues could enrich an informed analysis of similar and/or related issues that present themselves to us today with a vengeance.

Remaining critically queer can help us remain attuned to the intersectionality of our identities and our precarity, in terms of citizenship, movement, work and basic freedoms. Today's predicament makes the fact that each one of us is more than one thing at the same time, our intersectionality, all the more palpable. It persistently reminds us that intersectionality is not just a complex identity game, that it happens to us precisely because we are put in check from so many angles and corners at once (Taylor et al. 2010; Nash 2008; Carastathis 2016; Kantola and Lobardo 2017). In the states of precarity that we have learnt to recognize as 'crisiscapes' (Papailias 2011; Vradis and Dalakoglou 2016; Dalakoglou and Agelopoulos 2017), intersectionality becomes evident in an even more spectacular fashion, because it defines the various ways in which structures of control and orders of dispossession intersect with liberties,

rights and political demands confirmed or undermined (Rakopoulos 2018; cf. Vigh 2008 and Dalakoglou and Agelopoulos 2017). And it is because things are so messy but also so spectacularly connected, that new queer activism, across the world, is revisiting its demands and reorganizing its views about its politics, often informed by theoretical, theoretico-political and intersectional activist discourses (see indicatively: Haritaworn 2015; Haritaworn et al. 2016; Sabsay 2016; Butler et al. 2016; Butler and Athanasiou 2013)

A central issue all this current work returns to, is how much we need to take into account the new domains and the new frontiers where citizenship is being acknowledged or withdrawn; the new frames of recognizing the human; the new forms of precarity and how they intersect with older forms of exploitation. How, today, forms of exclusion, socialized phobias (including homophobia and transphobia), older forms of patriarchal order and kinship oppression make a comeback in a climate of new conservatism, states of exception and fear that reinforce a new conservative agenda working in line with the neoliberal order (Cooper 2016; Brown 2015; Butler 2015). In Greece, the impact of these arguments is not only evident in the rise of courses, debates and the public profile radical gender theory has seen in Greek academia (see Athanasiou, this issue). It is also, perhaps more crucially, evident in the plural use made of critical and queer theory by new collectivities and publishing ventures that have sprung up in recent years (QV; Terminal 119; Ntalika; 10%, Roz Planetes; Mov Kafeneio; AMOQA; Kiouries, Sabbat, Queer Ntekapaz, Blender, Conqueer, Loxa; cf. how most of these are discussed by Marinoudi, this issue). What energizes these collectivities and their critical mobilizations, is the realization that the common thread of precarity and vulnerability can make us not only organize resistance, but also rework our theoretical, political and historiographical agendas to include the constant

haunting by that Other who is denied a place, at the very moment one is finally allowed one. As Konstantinos Eleftheriadis has so clearly shown, 'queer groups in Greece face austerity as having dramatically changed society's structures, not only at the economic-political but also at the social-cultural level'. This includes the rise in homophobia and racist rhetoric, but also the need of these new queer groups to articulate autonomous spaces of response, inclusion and the unmasking of new exclusions and taxonomies (Eleftheriadis 2015: 1053; see also Ledaki and Manesi 2018).

It is with this in mind that I want to turn to a question hovering in the background since the beginning of this article, unacknowledged but persistently there: how can one do the history of a queer culture in the specific national context and in a historical juncture like that of today's Greece? How can one turn to the past while being pushed, like Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, to the future? Why is this so important in the effort to address current oppression and homophobia? What is the model in which we could turn to tell our stories, but also express our thirst for history? What is the model that would do justice to today's intersectional challenges, while also keeping the record of the past, in both its identitarian and its more fluid, desire- and act-based, expressions? What form might such histories take? How can one *do* the history of Modern Greek homosexuality – and how can one do it as an engaged, intersectional and contemporary political project?

How (not) to do the History of Modern Greek (Homo)sexuality

Recent political mobilization has created the need for a stable and reproducible historical narrative. In central Pride events, for instance, collectivities distribute

pamphlets with ‘an indicative chronology of Greek LGBTQI events’. One that was produced and debated for Athens Pride 2018 includes the opening of the first gay bars in Plaka in early 1970s as a prehistory, the Greek Homosexual Liberation Front convened in 1976 as a beginning of mobilization, the eventual opening of more bars and ‘queer spaces’ in the 1980s as important steps, police raids that created moral panics in the 2000s as events of consciousness raising. And then it celebrates as milestones the first organized Athens Gay Pride in 2005, the proliferation of homosexual publications and collectives in the 00s, the gay prides outside Athens, the legal recognition of homo-partnership, the expansion of today’s LGBTQI collectives and associations in the whole country.[9] I do not want to underestimate this historiographical mapping or the performative contexts in which it happens; they are both extremely productive. However, today perhaps more than ever, one realizes that producing such a history also entails working through its opposite. It means also finding the ways to show the various articulations with the radical feminist movement, a story that is often absent in these accounts, precisely because there has not been an adequate historicization of this co-existence. It means finding ways to underline the reasons it is not (and should not be taken as) a unidirectional itinerary of liberation. It also means finding the ways to show the (not always unproblematic) intersection of the LGBTQI movement with the antiracist and the feminist movements.[10]

Producing an LGBTQI chronology in Greece today means, therefore, underlining that the moment such a chronology is produced and distributed is not the time of freedom looking back at the ‘subjugated’ images of its past, but a complex engagement and continuous struggle. How can these histories of liberation also include forms of reflection on their contemporary undoing? How can they also include a critique of homonationalist rhetoric that may even help (or produce) their circulation

(cf. Puar 2007; 2013)? How can we narrate the untold gay histories and at the same time re-energize their critically queer potential?

An argument often made in Greek queer studies in various forms is that, especially because there has been no stable and acceptable concept of a 'homosexual past' acknowledged in the public sphere and by the institutions of the modern Greek state, a certain traditional and belated narrative of identity based 'gay history' of the 19th and 20th centuries can still develop unencumbered alongside its queer and radical feminist destabilization. For this reason, queer in Greece has not been so much a critique, or an opening up, of the concept of gay, as its belated legitimization and retrospective historicization.[11] Within this context, one can discern two distinct critical projects. On the one hand an archaeology of Greek gay (pre)histories of the 19th and 20th century, an effort to search for concrete identities of sexual dissidence in the Greek past, and a critique of institutional culture for their disavowal. The republication of semi-biographical novels about lesbian and gay characters from the early 20th century (Rosetti 2012; Tsokopoulos 2014; Taktsis 2008; Tsoukalas 2013); the re-reading of major intellectual figures as homosexual (Mathiopoulos 2009; Papanikolaou 2014; Sampatakakis 2017; Antonopoulos 2013; Roussou 2014); the re-visiting of past homosexual groups, subcultures and practices; the various histories of gay cultural expression or the representation of homosexuality in mainstream media (Kyriakos 2017; Zestanakis 2017); the histories of homosexual suppression by the Junta during the 1960s, of the emergence of the Homosexual Liberation Front in the 1970s (Mais 2015), of the gay and lesbian collectives in the 1980s (Kantsa 2012), and the further efforts of self-organizing since the 1990s (Riedel 2005 and Dendrinos 2008 for Greece and Kamenou 2011 for Cyprus): all these are attempts to reconstruct a 'Greek gay past', which are informed by and in turn inform public debate and radical demands

today. On the other hand, critics have pointed out the historical persistence of queer modes of relationality and sociability in Greek society that have existed outside the contours of concrete sexual identities and thus may be incongruent with the demands of gender activists (Yannakopoulos 2010; 2016; Kantsa 2010; Faubion 1994; cf. Papadogiannis 2016; cf. Kirtsoglou 2004). Various practices of accepted homosociality, or of acknowledging sexual/gender difference without concrete identitarian politics, are thus becoming the focus of attention (Karayanni 2004), and used as a caveat for the normativity of contemporary demands (Yiannakopoulos 2010). Here the talk is about the parks and the pickups, the culture of the 'subtle ones' (*poniroi* – men who were seeking sex with men but led a heterosexual life), the various homosocial spaces and their ethics (Yiannakopoulos 2016; Papadogiannis 2016; Marnelakis 2014), the tradition of homosociality present in canonical cultural genres and the presence of gender bending performing artists celebrated nationally (Dixon 2018).

We have recently had, in other words, two distinct types of inquiry into the dissident sexual cultures in Greece of the 19th and 20th centuries, the one searching for identities and the cultural silencing mechanism that operated against them, the other documenting a complex history of sexual diversity and gender non-conformity that cannot be reduced to clear sexual identity positions. Or, to put it more simply, the one type of inquiry largely insisting that in Modern Greece 'there have always been homosexuals' (but were hidden from view), the other arguing that 'we have always been queer' (but without a concrete sexual identity).[12] We have learnt to see these two as parallel undertakings, projects that fall onto each other, are intersecting or standing together, mapping a sex/gender economy that ought to be reviewed in its own terms.[13] Yet, what we were perhaps slow to realize, is that, today more than ever, these projects

are not just complementary, or intersecting. In today's crisiscapes they hold each other in check, they are haunted by each other. Talking about those queer and fluid practices of the Greek past, locating their archives and their complex histories of surreptitious emergence is no longer enough if we fail to take into account the complex effacement of these histories, the denial of sexual citizenship and identity expression that they were met with, in specific moments, by specific institutions, with specific results in shaping attitudes, official policy and people's lives (Tzanaki 2016; cf. Papadopoulos 2002 and a slightly diverging view by Apostolidou 2017).

It is one thing to celebrate a culture of sexual fluidity in a Greece 'before sexual identities', or to critique the culture of concrete coming out as a western conceptual framework that cannot stand as the sole benchmark of liberation.[14] But it is something quite different to also realize that these 'non-identitarian' and hidden queer pasts, of which Greek culture indeed has plenty, were marked through by the impossibility to develop into anything other than diffuse and hidden; that they were marked by the violent barring of any space where political subjectivity could be claimed on their basis.

At the same time, trying to do the opposite and unearth 'gay identity' and queer citizenship emergence in the Greek past runs the risk today of creating a cleansed, 'white-washed', stable history of gay emergence,[15] that could possibly support homonormative if not homonationalist agendas and undermine the ability of queer politics to address the contemporary intersectional demands of queer subjects in extreme precarity.[16]

A radical historiographical project emerging in the current juncture will need, therefore, to exploit further and analytically centralize this intricate intertwining, this double haunting; it will attempt to merge an effort to locate instances of concrete

demands for expression and visibility by queer subjects in the past and the present, with a discussion about the fluid queerness that has played a central role in Greek culture. Moreover, it will need to allow the one to influence and take inspiration from the other. These are not uncharted territories; on the contrary, this is exactly what has been heuristically attempted in the theatrical work of Vassilis Noulas and many of his queer performance contemporaries (see Sampatakakis in this issue), the performance and literary work of Marios Hatziprokopiou (for an example, see his article in this issue), the films of Constantine Giannaris and Panos Coutras and a group of new directors who seem to follow on their path, the auto-archival projects of trans legend Paola, and the archival/performance work of collectives such as AMOQA, QV, Terminal 119, Mavili movement, the Park sit-in collective, the work of the performance group Fyta and artists associated with their collective Fytini (Anagnostopoulos 2017).

How to further organize this into a more concrete historiographical project still remains a question for many of us in Greece, and I can here only provide another heuristic answer coming from my own work and a specific case study. In recent years, I have been drawn time and again to a brilliant insight in Laurent Berlant's magisterial *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (1997), her concept of diva citizenship. It does not solve the riddle of how to do the history of modern Greek homosexuality; but it urges us to untie knots, to work cultural texts and historical inquiry together, and to scan for moments of subaltern emergence in the past that are worth analyzing, que(e)rying and re-expressing (cf. Burke-Wood 2017, Isin and Nielsen 2008). Diva citizenship is precisely a moment of spectacular emergence of a gender/sexual subaltern, who demands to be taken seriously. And scanning the past for moments of subaltern emergence becomes a deeply critical historical project in that it

shows, *in the present*, the ease with which sexual subalterns' 'bodies, their social labour and their sexuality are exploited, violated and saturated by normalizing law, capitalist prerogative and official national culture' (Berlant 1997: 222).

Diva citizenship, for Berlant, is:

> […] a moment of emergence that marks unrealized potentials for subaltern political activity. Diva citizenship occurs when a person stages a dramatic coup in a public sphere in which she does not have privilege. Flashing up and startling the public, she puts the dominant story into suspended animation; as though recording an estranging voice-over to a film we have all already seen, she renarrates the dominant story as one that the abjected people have once lived sotto voce, but no more; and she challenges her audience to identify with the enormity of the suffering she has narrated and the courage she has had to produce, calling on people to change the social and institutional practices of citizenship to which they currently consent. (223)

Keeping this analysis in mind, I return to a familiar scene of the recent Greek past, but this time taken from a fictional setting. It comes from a film that has produced public debate and arguably a change in attitudes towards trans and queer visibility in Greece in recent years, calling on people to rethink citizenship, history, belonging and political urgency.

***Strella*: Diva citizenship does Greece**

Towards the end of the film that has her as its protagonist, Strella leaves her lover in a fully lit Athenian hotel. The Acropolis (heavily featured in the previous scene) is behind her; tragedy has been both her undoing and her making, and something new is happening while this trans woman is starting her long night walk in the centre of contemporary Athens. The camera focuses on Strella, with medium shots that track the city as they follow her steps, while Maria Callas dominates the soundtrack. Even though in many ways a scene of liberation, this is also a scene of a complex haunting. At the level of narrative the film is haunted by the difficult pattern that kinship, abuse, desire, and the archives of the past always make in their intermingling. But in the larger context of the film, this walk of a transgender sex worker (played by the real-life transgender artist Mina Orfanou) in the centre of Athens and on the screens of national representation, was decisively also haunted by the many other scenes of trans people forced into and/or erased from the public scene in the past. Within the film narrative but also with its potential to break out of it, this was exactly what Berlant calls diva citizenship: an exodus into the public space, a demand made in the public sphere.

Strella: A Woman's Way (dir. Panos Koutras; 2009) is a new queer melodrama that engaged audiences from its first release. A story of a trans woman sexworker who first decides to avenge and then falls in love with the father who once killed her own lover, it created a debate on trans/queer representation in Greece from the outset, and has become a strong cultural reference point thanks to its ability to elicit complex political and gender insights (Butler and Athanasiou 2013; Gavriilidis 2011; Psaras 2016; Coavoux 2013). Here, focusing on the film's last scenes, I want to further flesh out two of its most intriguing, diva citizenship, characteristics. First, the complex temporal relation it developed with its specific sociocultural context. And second, its potential to bring with it, to retrieve, other similar re-imaginings of the public space,

other previous moments of diva citizenship that may have lost momentum, gone astray, or been forgotten in the previous decades. I will explain both of them briefly.

Strella*'s queer temporalities:* As it tells a story of emergence and parrhesia, of a trans woman wanting to stand up for her own history of subjugation, suffering and patience, *Strella* insists on its location and the dynamics it can bring with it; it is, after all, a tale of the private turning inside out as public, and in its last scenes the painstaking filming of the Athenian metropolis underscores this. The film was shot just before, yet was screened a year after, the big demonstrations of December 2008 in Athens, which many critics have pinpointed as the beginning of the Greek Crisis. Watching Strella walking out (after standing up and coming out, in various ways) in the public space in the film's final scenes, took on, therefore, additional meaning in the years after 2010. Suddenly this melodramatic story of identity, trauma and loss, was underpinned with an allegorical quality; it became able to recall the multilayered outings in the public space that followed during the Crisis, the demonstrations, the sit ins, the public protests of the Squares movement, the mobilization after the public shaming of women sex workers in 2012, the public protests staged by migrants, the celebrations after the 2015 referendum, the demands, the eventual defeats (cf. Douzinas 2013; Mavroudi 2013; Simiti 2013; Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos 2011). The impulse to stage an exodus into the public sphere, often from a space of secrecy, shame, disavowal and invisibility, is what ties most of these and other contemporary events together and mobilizes today their archives as interconnected. Of course I am mixing here gender-centred and less gender-centred expressions of disobedience, mobilization and protest; yet, as I see *Strella* haunted by their coming, I also see them as haunted by that previous image of Strella. This is how I want to reclaim them, to reconsider how much they were (and can still be, continuously) instances of 'crossing

police barricades and the civilizing standards of public life, [in which] Diva Citizenship takes on as a national project the need to redefine the scale, the volume, and the erotics of "what you can do for your country"' (Berlant 1997: 224). Considering their diva citizenship characteristics means that these public mobilizations are not seen as defeated, forgotten or final; they remain, instead, always there to be redrafted, in a processual political economy that resists closure. Diva citizenship, let us not forget, is a persistent call not simply for citizenship, but also for realizing the entitlements of existing citizens and the continuing disavowal of others. To that extent it is also, at the same time, a productive destabilization of citizenship, in the way imagined by Anna Carastathis as the challenge 'to recognise and to whatever extent possible relinquish [our] entitlements as citizens in forging resistant attachments and transformative intimacies that carry possibilities for other ways of feeling, belonging and surviving together' (2015: 91).

In 2009 critics celebrated the success of *Strella* as the victory of a progressive, modern, new queer Greece over a traditionalist, patriarchal and homophobic past. Yet it was very soon and in the urban setting in which Strella walks at the end of her film, that the rising power of the neo-fascist Golden Dawn party made itself felt in violent attacks against migrants, queers and unionist activists (Ellinas 2013); or that neonationalist movements expressed their anger against austerity in a neo-macho rhetoric that did not hide its hatred for anything falling outside the idea of traditional family values (Carastathis 2015). Watching it today, one cannot underestimate how, in a queer-time reversal, *Strella* is imprinted with the phantom of an uneasy political future: as its protagonist comes out and walks outdoors in the final scenes of the film, the intersectionality of her demands previously implied within the film's narrative becomes more pronounced and more related to the public space she traverses. These

images, as they are watched and rewatched today, are imbued with what came afterwards. The picture of that space is now indelibly marked by the fact that it would become the theatre of an intense and agonistic intersectionality for so many people in the years after the film and the proof that the battle against forms of racism, exclusion and violence is open ended.

The retrieval of past divas: In classic diva citizenship mode, *Strella* also dragged along not only its agonistic future, but also a similarly demanding past, a difficult genealogy, voices from the queer and trans past that had made its own present possible. Lecturing on the new queer aesthetics of the film in 2010 and 2011, I was confronted with these other stories, in the form of audience questions or, often, of people wanting to speak out, share old histories and take a stance. An archive of the past was emerging again, calling on us to retrieve possibilities, probabilities, potentials. The scenes from *Strella* were used as a catalyst in order to remember, for instance, those trans women sex workers who had appeared in Athens in the 1970s and 1980s and had tried to claim public space, voicing radical, but eventually disavowed, demands about sexual citizenship. A classic 'gay history of Greece' would catalogue those instances as relics from the past, a prehistory of today's successful queer movements. However, seeing them in the context I describe urged us to reconsider them as diva citizenship events – and to focus on how they had endured, how they faltered, how they could eventually be remembered and revisited as political performances in contemporary Greece, picked up by different agents and claims. We were, thus, forced to take into account diverse temporalities and contours, survivals and capitulations, moments of emergence and histories of resilience.

With that image of Strella in mind (or in a Powerpoint behind one's back), one felt the need to go back and reconsider, for instance, the story of Paola Revenioti, the

trans anarchist activist who published her own fanzine, *Kraximo* [shouting out/shaming] in the early 1980s; it was to Paola's own queer archive that people returned in order to reconfigure contemporary demands (or, even, in order to use queer ephemera from a different era, like the photograph of Antona discussed in the previous part, which was retrieved from Paola's old interviews once published in *Kraximo*). Paola herself came into public view in that period, giving lectures, putting together hand-made documentaries, re-narrating her life in new media (cf. Karayanni in this issue) and offering her own queer past as undone, redone, but also there to be politically reenergized. Something similar happened to Betty Vakalidou, another legendary trans activist from the 1970s – who, in a self-conscious gesture, was cast in the role of the trans mother figure in *Strella*. After 2010, she too became once again a public figure, participating in debate while also talking about her own past (see, for instance, her talk about sex working on Sygrou avenue in the 1970s in Vakalidou 2011).

In one of the most intriguing aspects of her recent public engagement, Betty was cast by avant-garde theatre group Bijoux de Kant in 2016 in their performance *Amaranta* (Amaranths/Evergreen) as Antona, a gender-bending figure who stands up, in the middle of the performance of a different play, and recalls a story of abuse, ending in her own death. A couple of scenes later Antona would stand up again and interject another monologue, detailing another story of abuse, ending in yet another grotesque death; and then another, and another. The result is unsettling not simply because of the violence described, but for the complex archival challenge it provokes. Antona (notice the name used – able to recall and memorialize that older queer figure of the Athenian underworld) delivers monologues penned by contemporary author Glykeria Basdeki, written to be interjected into the performance of one act play *To Ftero* [The Feather] by

Pavlos Matessis (1984), an older author known for his queer (but never clearly homosexual) novels and plays. In the one-act original play a man mourns the death of his theatre double act companion, in a homoerotic manner palpable as well as unacknowledged. Itself a political and national allegory, but also a coded reference to queer affect, Matessis's play became radically re-queered in 2016, as it was confronted with the inclusion of a new text and a new dramatic appearance. The soliloquies written by Basdeki, performed by a gender activist who had formed her identity in the period Matessis's original play was written, communicated gender violence as the rupture of giving an account of oneself, and creative rewriting and performance as an effort to reverse that dynamic. *Amaranta* – a word that can freely also be translated as 'the Undead Ones' – was asking us to see disavowed gender-political histories as haunted by queer affect and antiqueer violence, and vice versa, queer affect and the violence it confronts as haunted by its untold political histories. Thus the performance produced a palimpsest of queer, gay, Greek, contemporary, past moments of speech-capturing, and asked the audience to actively take a stance, to put together, to historicize and repoliticize (cf. Sampatakakis 2017).

All these moments – real-life political accounts of oneself, fictional scenarios, or their in-betweens – cannot any more be seen as exercises in postmodern playfulness or complex identity games in a country where identity is always at stake and its politics often questioned. They are, most crucially, exercises of historical retrieval and archival reappropriation, projects directly evolving from and revolving around moments of diva citizenship, and able, today, to reorganize radical archives of belonging, demanding and political mobilizing.

Diva citizenship, seen through these examples, is an assortment of such moments of intersection between past, present and future, that demand to be taken as a

genealogical exercise. This in practice means a demand for a history of the present, one that foregrounds our intersectionality as present continuous; our need for historicization as present archival; our citizenship claims as present processual; and our multilayered precarity as present biopolitical.

In conclusion, what we have understood very well in recent years in Greece is that the relationship between past and present is neither singular nor unidirectional – in other work, I have called this more general feeling (and artistic radicalization) *archive trouble* (Papanikolaou 2011, 2017). It is precisely the exigency and urgency of the present moment (including the present of queer activism in a fast-changing and precarious Greece), that makes so evident the ways *it is haunted* by the unfinished histories, the unclaimed territories and the untold stories of the past. Within this larger context, Greece today has become a vantage point from which to see the demand for (homo)sexual history not as a parallel undertaking to contemporary queer politics, but as its inescapable yet productive hauntology. And vice versa: history, history-writing and history-making, to be seen not as a linear project, but a queer project that sits uneasily with the narratives of national, cultural and social belonging mobilized today to frame the subjects of crisis and the constitution of crisiscapes.

Our current predicament requires *queer histories in the present* to remain both critical and haunted. And this means, among other things, that it requires queer histories in the present to fight in order to keep their claims as open processes: open towards their historical narrative and archival meddling, the political inclusivity of their demands, and the relationship to their future undoing.

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[1] I am quoting from the piece with which the biggest selling Greek newspaper and news site *Proto Thema* reported the story on 9 and 10 February 2016, to be followed by other newspapers and websites with similar descriptions. See Lemnios (2016).

[2] See the announcement by SYD on 11/2/2016 archived at http://www.transgender-association.gr/

[3] As will become clear in the rest of this article, I intend to show how the emergence of new queer voices is working at the same time as its opposite, the emergence of a new antiqueer agenda. For this reason, I do not dwell as much on internal taxonomies, for instance on the fact that the homonormative couple becomes hypervisible through mobilizations like the gay prides, whereas a transqueer person cruising for sex in public may still vanish. My main aim is not to discuss dialectics of acceptance and normativization, but the role of resistant and institutionalized homophobia and the continuities one can discern in its employment.

[4] On the long debate and activist mobilization that made the partnership legislation possible, see Kantsa (2014). On the law, its ramifications and the debate before and after it, see Papanagiotou, in this issue.

[5] Some readers of this quotation have found it problematic, in that it construes Antona as lacking not only political agency, but even the political imagination to think of the possibility of a different world. Such a typecasting could be seen as the product of internalized homophobia, working not only against but also within the queer community. Yet, my argument, as I will explain in the last part of this article, is that one is urged to reconsider these stagings in the public sphere (including Antona's posing for a photograph, for instance) as *diva citizenship moments* with the potential to be reclaimed, even where they were initially seen as just the signification of abuse and defeat.

[6] In my effort to provide a macroscopic discussion, I slightly differ here from other recent mappings of the same milieu which emphasize the presence of the more radical of these groups, underestimating their interconnectedness with the more mainstream institutional actors. Cf. Eleftheriadis 2016 and Marinoudi, this issue.

[7] See the Athens Pride 2018 TV spot, which aimed to unmask the complicit attitude that 'in Greece there are no gender issues'; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppxMNN9Co68

[8] I wrote these lines (and the whole article was finished) long before the shocking lynching of activist Zak Kostopoulos in the centre of Athens on 22 September 2018, an event which many contributors to this issue, including the editors in the introduction, felt the urge to address at the moment of going to press. Kostopoulos's death and its aftermath was one of those moments when the intrinsic homophobia and the (discursive and physical) violence it can still produce emerges in full force in the public sphere. For the record, it should be noted that one of the men charged with bodily harming Kostopoulos had previously posted homophobic comments on Facebook and congratulated, with a sexist joke, mayor Boutaris's attackers.

[9] I am quoting here from the impressively meticulous list produced by academic Theodosis Geltis, and the comments as it was then debated and partly reproduced by the SYRIZA group of gender and

sexuality during the 2018 Athens Pride (personal communication). For a critique of the Pride discourse, see Chalkidou 2017, and here, fn. 13.

[10] The intersection of the feminist, radical feminist and LGBTQI movements in Greece has a long history that has not yet been told – or, even, adequately researched. New collectives, including the one behind the journal *Feministiqa*, have recently embarked on exactly this project. See feministiqa.net

[11] This is, among other things, evident in the ease with which the term queer was adopted, untranslated, in the relevant public discussion, often in order to perform the cultural work associated with an older LesBiGay activism, criticism and letimization. The untranslated *κουίρ* seemed by many able to unlock problems that the word *ομοφυλόφιλος* (homosexual) had encountered in the past (cf. Kanakis 2011; Apostolleli and Chalkia 2012, passim), but often remained its exact synonym (Spiliotis and Chaliatsis in Apostolleli and Chalkia 2012, esp. 126-128).

[12] It has been pointed out during the peer review process that these two types of research may be reflecting what anthropologists call the emic and the etic approaches (that is, denoting viewpoints from within the social group and from the outside). They do, but more so when they are combined. In other words, the more sociological histories of the biopolitical management of difference in Greece emerge as etic research projects – such as Tzanaki 2016 –, the more we will need the emic research design that tries to historicize Greek queer emergence but does it from a position within the discourses of queer identity, identification and desire.

[13] It is interesting, for instance, how recent collections such as Apostolleli and Chalkia (2012), Kanakis (2011), and Vasileiadou et al. (2013), include articles adopting one or the other orientation, and many that try to balance between both. That said, cf. Yannakopoulos (2016) and Papanikolaou (2014), two articles on a similar topic (Greek queer cultures on the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s), which are offering very similar material, yet diverge in their viewpoint, as each one decisively adopts one of the approaches described here.

[14] This is a narrative often proposed based on the work of Costas Taktsis and Elias Petropoulos, both of whom were invested in documenting and discussing fluid sexual practices in the Greek world of the long 20th century, and towards the end of their lives expressed a certain unease with the homosexual liberation movements. See Taktsis (1992) and Petropoulos (1980). Of course, historicizing and contextualizing Taktsis's and Petropoulos's positions could offer a very different picture, as explained by Terminal 119 (2012) on Petropoulos and Papanikolaou in Taktsis (2018).

[15] In a insightful recent critique, Aspa Chalkidou points out that institutionalized celebrations of LGBTQ acceptance, including the Athens Pride and its promotional material, tend to erase the historicity of their own emergence (for instance, that the first Athens Prides were events of anger and mobilization against police crackdowns), while *at the same time* presenting the subjects of (their) liberation as middle class and white. More intense historical understanding and archival questioning, she implies, would also help avoid the race- and class- agnosticism that some LGBTQ celebrations run the risk of displaying. Having said that, the recent focus of so many queer collectives on the state of refugees (including queer refugees) in Greece, as well as the reaction against hate crimes that had a class element too, sheds light on complex histories of racialization and class structuring that the Greek public had not been exposed to in the past.

[16] This is precisely the point made by Papadogiannis (2016), who, among other things, insists on the case of non-western queer migrants and what he sees as their exclusion from contemporary political gains in Greece; for a world context of this process, see Weeks 2016: 96-114 and for incisive analysis of specific examples Haritaworn et al. 2014. In order to circumvent this risk, new queer debates in Greece sometimes opt to 'forget history' and bracket out the genealogy of their own demands, insisting on their contemporary emergence (see, for instance, many contributions in Anagnostopoulos 2017 and Klades et al. 2018))– a tactic that risks becoming part of the problem rather than its solution.