

“The West Is (Not) the Best” – Anti-Gender Narratives and Queer-Feminist Struggles in Greece

On March 20th, 2024, Judith Butler introduced their new book, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* at the LSE Event addressing how the fear of gender has become the common ground of reactionary politics in many countries around the world and described their experience of being portrayed as the gender devil while visiting the colloquium on “The Ends of Democracy” in Sao Paolo back in 2017. Butler themselves, in other words, gender scholars and therefore gender studies, seem to represent a threat (the evil danger) to the natural order of gender, sexuality, and the family, which causes despair and fear to many different social groups. Another two events, also in March of this year, had a marked impact on my research: A mob of young boys (ca. hundred persons) brutally lynched and also attacked two trans young persons on Aristotelous central square in Thessaloniki. Two days after far-right groups attempted to disrupt the premiere screening of Elina Psykou’s “Stray Bodies” at the Thessaloniki Film Festival¹. Only the appearance of the film’s poster on social media (featuring a crucified woman on display) fueled numerous reactions from the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the right-wing nationalist spectrum in Greece. If it is so that the anti-gender movement gains more ground globally within the past years, I have to recall another biographical case of intellectual resentment against outspoken gender positionalities. One of my first encounters with the perspective that “Gender (theory) is an ideology” did not come from a religious, conservative, authoritarian, or even fascist context. It was a comment made by an art historian and media theorist, a cis male colleague at the University of Arts in Zürich, who situates his political stance within liberal democracy. Resonating the above-mentioned

¹ The documentary, a travelogue in medical stations of Italy, Malta, Greece and Switzerland, depicts the stories of three women who are denied access to abortion, in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and euthanasia. Film Review: <https://cineuropa.org/en/newsdetail/458570>

cases of anti-gender actors, my initial point relies on the necessity to analyze the current anti-gender narratives through a critical lens that looks primarily into white supremacist ideology and fatalist religious dogmas but also beyond those two obvious aspects. In other words, I wish to outline that the anti-gender ideology movements that lead to the growing backlash towards sexual and reproductive rights for cis women and trans people (and the ongoing pathologization of queer people) have to be analyzed in a broader spectrum (Goetz 2020, Fábíán 2023, Bempeza 2023).

In this paper, though, I will emphasize the patriarchal and racist hierarchies which lay at the core of the anti-gender arguments in the US and the European context, arguments that derive mainly, but not exclusively, from reactionary, authoritarian, and antifeminist ideologies. Both content directions resonate with my previous research of the cultural practices of the New Right and Alt-Right (Bempeza 2023, 2017) and my research of cultural activism, which gives account to the latest counter-queer-feminist struggles in Greece. Here, I am writing of the refused perspective of a social anthropologist, most notably through the embodied mind of a queer-feminist artist involved in queer-feminist cultural spaces, feminist institutions, and endeavours in Athens². I am also writing from the position of a diasporic subject living in German-speaking countries for two decades. Therefore, my research is based on multilingual scholar resources and my own site-specific involvement within queer-feminist communities in Athens, Zürich, Berlin, and Vienna. As queer-feminist scholars and practitioners concerned with gendered oppressions and constitutive inequalities – from the anti-abortion activism to the alt-right manosphere and the organized transphobia and homophobia in conservative milieus – we need to foster intersectional analyses of gender and sexuality regimes and shed light on the multifaceted topic of the anti-gender actors.

“The West is the best” – white supremacy and the alt-right context

There is the crisis of constitutional democracy, identified above all with the ethnonationalist, authoritarian, or neofascist political formations taking hold in many established as well as newer liberal democratic nations worldwide. And there is the crisis of equality, expressed in unprecedented extremes of wealth and poverty, and in pitched battles over the present and future of racial stratification and imperial right, within and between nations and hemispheres. (Brown 2020)

Today, authoritarian governors, neoliberal think tanks, and angry white male supremacists inspired by nihilist (Pinto 2017, Wimberly 2021) and fa-

² Since 2017 I am affiliated to the Athens Museums of Queer Arts, the Beaver Collective, Lesvies sta Prothyra, and the feminist editions A) Glimpse) of). I was co-founder and curator of the queer-film festival Aphrodite* and a research associate at Diotima Centre for Gender Rights and Equality within the EU project PRESS on cyber gender-based violence.

talist concepts are leading to the dissolution of responsibility for us people and the planet, for human and non-human creatures. I am initially relating to Wendy Brown's analysis of the radical antidemocratic forces linked to neoliberalism to give a glimpse of the current challenges of constitutional democracy in different parts of the world. As argued by Brown, neoliberalism, and most prominently the inherently antidemocratic tendencies of the neoliberal reason, can be seen as a moral-political project that aims at protecting traditional gender, racial, and sexual hierarchies (Brown 2019, 28). Besides, to give another aspect of the contemporary challenges in social research, the framework of homonationalism (Puar 2007) highlights the ways in which the acceptance and tolerance of the LGBTQ+ in liberal Western democracies has become the barometer for assessing the capacity to exercise national sovereignty in non-western countries. Similarly, femonationalism (Farris 2017) proves the complexity of identity politics and, more thoroughly, how the "friendliness" of some far-right parties towards women's and LGBTQ+ rights is the outcome of a racist and anti-Muslim stance on ethnic and religious diversity.

"The West is the best" is a motto used by Proud Boys self-described as "Western chauvinists" which is a euphemism for white supremacism. As Dante Nero, a former leading figure of the group, states about its ideological background, this slogan is not far from advocating that, "white people are the best"³. Proud Boys were one of the prominent alt-right hate groups involved in the storming of the Capitol in Washington DC (January 6th, 2021) alongside the Patriot Movement, the anti-state militia group Oath Keepers, supporters of QAnon and other far-right groups such as the Three Percenters. Proud Boys stage extremist rallies in the US; for example, they marched at the "Unite the Right" white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia (2017) alongside numerous radical-right groups⁴. Prominent figures of the group, such as Gavin McInnes glorify violence and manhood while favouring Islamophobic and misogynist rhetoric in social media to generate fear, rage, and resentment (Park 2022, 189). Besides, known alt-lite figures in the States and UK hold the belief that "the West is the best" as they make use of anti-democratic, racist, and gender discriminatory language in a provocative or relatively conforming mainstream version. Also, men's rights leaders like Paul Elam and conservative edge lords like Jordan Peterson advocate for the fundamental assumptions of Western civilization⁵ and male supremacy.

To put it briefly, the proponents of the far-right and the alt-right come out as defenders of "white identity" and the Western civilization. To their perception, far-rights have to fight against numerous, heterogeneous 'oppo-

³ cf. Zoe Chase. 2017. "Lost in Proud," White Haze, Radio broadcast in This American Life, September 22 <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/626/white-haze>

⁴ Proud Boys is listed as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center: <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/proud-boys>

⁵ Jordan B. Peterson, "12 principles for a 21st century conservatism" June 15th 2017, Lanark County. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nyw4rTywyY>

nents' like feminists, gender and post-colonial studies, queer theory, Black Lives Matter and refugees/migrant movements, Antifa groups, the Islamic world (seen as a homogeneous monolith), as well as the so-called social justice warriors and cultural Marxism⁶. In a philosophical alignment with white supremacy, the alt-right and parts of the manosphere (including men's rights activists, pick-up artists, Men Going Their Own Way, the Red Pills, Incels, etc.)⁷ celebrate the greatness of the European ancestors and glorify the universal perspective of white men. The Red Pill ideology⁸ underlies much of the discourse among white male supremacist online communities that glorify Western culture and embrace misogyny in Greek and Roman literature. For example, Aristotle's theory of natural slavery and the inferiority of women is very attractive to the Red Pill (Zuckerberg 2018, 25) as it promotes the Western canon and the reactionary vision of the ideal white masculinity. Elsewhere, the poems of Hesiod and Ovid are used as reference for womanizers and pick-up artists to highlight the remarkably misogynistic tones in the ancient texts. So, one overarching narrative of the alt-right and the manosphere relies on a reductive use of the writings of antiquity to promote hegemonic masculinity and the cultural supremacy of the West. The latter, as expressed in reactionary platforms and white supremacist online communities, correlates with the systematic devaluation of cis and trans women, trans men, and nonbinary people. Male supremacism works in tandem with other systems of oppression such as xenophobia, racism, and antisemitism.

Anti-gender arguments beyond borders

This article has been written to convey the following proposition: the anti-gender narratives in Western and Eastern (European) countries have profound social consequences that invoke both scholarly considerations and questions of agency and activist politics. The term gender ideology, perceived either as a cultural import or a totalitarian ideology, is used by right-wing, conservative governments and non-state actors, common people, and intel-

⁶ The term Cultural Marxism has been used within the British and American humanities (80s/90s) as a synonym for cultural studies. It has been coopted by the alt-right and thereby refers to a conspiratorial term with antisemitic implications. See i.e. Mirrlees, Tanner 2018. "The Alt-Right's Discourse of "Cultural Marxism": A Political Instrument of Intersectional Hate", *Atlantis Journal*: 39 (1): 49-69.

⁷ Terms: Men Going Their Own Way: a toxic male, anti-feminist ideological movement emerged in the 2000s as part of the manosphere in the UK and USA. The Red Pills: the red pill symbolism originates from the film *Matrix* (Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 1999) and has been appropriated by the alt-right for mainstreaming right-wing and bigoted beliefs as the only true way to view the contemporary world. Incels: mostly young men describing themselves as "involuntarily celibate", part of the manosphere forums like Reddit, 4chan, etc.

⁸ The Red Pill ideology (umbrella term) refers to white supremacist ideas and diverse masculinist phantasies circulating in social media communities and social networks that constitute men's rights activism. See also: Botto Matteo, Gottzén Lucas. 2023. "Swallowing and spitting out the red pill: young men, vulnerability, and radicalization pathways in the manosphere". *Journal of Gender Studies* <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2023.2260318>

lectuals that situate themselves *against* gender equality and feminist, reproductive, and LGBTQ+ rights.

The constant offensive rhetoric and the attacks on feminist and LGBTQ+ rights come from different political and cultural fields: from representatives of right-wing and far-right parties to right-wing think tanks and conservative political organizations, representatives of the Catholic, and the Orthodox Church and Christian pro-life activists. Anti-gender arguments derive also from the alt-right networks and the men's rights movement and are being widely disseminated among the pick-up artists communities, in Incel forums, and the extended Manosphere (Messner 2013, Corredor 2019). Global anti-feminism and gender conservatism have grown in the past decade in misogynist groups started on 4chan and Reddit forums, expanding into the mainstream social media in a new sort of culture war (DiBranco 2017).

The different actors mentioned above, in a more or less overt configuration, manifest hostility to women and LGBTQ+ people and the promulgation of rape culture. A common ground for legitimizing their misogynist dogma is the recognition of "Gender as Ideology", a term that stems from the Vatican's deliberations in the 1980s and the 1990s and is so far wide extended beyond its religious context (Case 2019, Vaggione 2020). The proposition of gender roles as a social construction has been condemned in different religious contexts that see gender diversity threatening the divinely mandated natural distinction between the two sexes. Pope Francis characterized the term gender as "one of the most dangerous ideological colonizations" (Mares 2023). For the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, gender and sexual freedom, women's rights, trans rights, and generally the rights of LGBTQ+ people are not only excessive, but also destructive – even diabolical. As Butler argues, "It is represented as a demonic force of destruction pitted against God's creative powers. This is one reason that gender is understood as exercising demonic powers – "a diabolical ideology" (Butler 2019, 4). To give only an example in the Christian Orthodox context: two outstanding figures for hate speech, former Bishop of Thessaloniki Anthimos and Archbishop Christodoulos have been declaring from the pulpit homosexuality as a sin (and "flaw"), they were by all means against sex education in schools, and they have been condemning the Pride Parades since decades.

Anti-gender policies are often adopted by local and national governments to maintain and strengthen the social and political hierarchies according to the white heteronormative cis-male norm. As shown in recent surveys on the understanding and countering the transnational anti-gender movement, in most cases, anti-gender actors do not share the same ideological framework (Denkovski et. al. 2021, 10). There are old and new allies, a fusion of right-wing positions, conservative and religious actors, but also social democrats, and some parts of the left capitalize gender status hierarchies and cisgender supremacism. What unites those different actors is "the ability to squeeze different discourses into one big threat and construct the gender/gender ideology as an attack on at least one of the three Ns, which

these actors claim to defend: nature, the nation, or normality” (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018, 11). The affirmation of the three N-narrative is directed against social emancipation and the subject’s relative autonomy, against reproductive health care and sexual freedoms, after all, against fundamental democratic principles. The standard anti-gender arguments can differ among countries and geographical contexts (Western/Eastern perspective). As summarised in the transnational study *Power Over Rights*, the arguments that are mostly brought up by the anti-gender discourse are the following: “Gender equality is already achieved, and women’s rights are already protected. (...) Gender equality has not only been achieved, but it has also gone too far, men are in crisis and under threat from man eating, bra-burning feminists. (...) Gender is a dictatorship of political correctness, the domination of a loud minority over a silent majority (...). Gender/ homosexuality is a Western import and has no relevance and grounding in our society. Gender is something that technocrats in Brussels made up to control and manipulate the EU Member States. Gender is a totalitarian ideology - a Marxist, fascist, or a capitalist plot (depending on the cultural context). Gender is the ideology of a loud minority; we must defend the silent ‘normal’ majority.” (Denkovski et. al. 2021, 39–40).

In the Greek context we can observe the influences of the more Western discourse of “Gender as Ideology”, the connection to the English-speaking manosphere (see antifeminist narratives, incel-communities, redpillers) and the ongoing right-wing agitation in favor of heteropatriarchy, that is portrayed through different actors (politicians, clerics, social media profiles, etc.). Here, it should be mentioned that due to its Christian Orthodox concept of heteropatriarchy and nationalism, Greece retains a vast resentment against non-conforming gender identities (Giannakopoulos 2006, Halkias 2004). The anti-gender arguments of the Western Catholic church fusions with the long-established hostility against women’s emancipation and LGBTQ+ rights within the Christian Orthodox framework. In the following pages, I will present some cases as part of my paper, that mainly use situated research methods.

Anti-gender dynamics in Greece

The anti-gender campaigns, mainly led by conservatives, right-wing populists, and the far-right, have different forms of impact in autocratic or authoritarian states and more liberal states, as they push for legal and constitutional amendments for restricting the rights of women and LGBTQ+ persons. This paper, more than being proscriptive, diagnostic, or even normative, is meant to provide one perspective of the current reactionary dynamics and the anti-gender rhetoric within the Greek context. The framework of the analysis points out the embracement of ethno-nationalist narratives and the ongoing problematic regarding gender relations in Greece. With 53.4 out of 100 points, Greece ranks last in the EU on the Gender Equality Index (EIGE

data 2022) and has been stagnating since 2010, despite slight improvements in the sub-domain of care and social activities. The latest Human Rights Report (2022) sheds light on domestic/partner violence, crimes involving violence targeting members of national/racial/ethnic minority groups, and crimes involving violence or threats of violence towards LGBTQ+ persons. Greece displays many of the contradictions of both Western liberal values applied to a semi-peripheral European economy and the cultural conservatism related to the orthodox religion and the historical patriarchal structures in the society. This is to say, that we need a nuanced understanding of the varied cultural and political ideologies that legitimize the many facets of gender inequality and patriarchal heteronormativity as part of the dominant national narrative.

White male supremacist arguments that undermine women's and LGBTQ+ rights, are well represented within the discourse of the Greek far right and the moderate New Right. Research observations concerning the imports of right wings and alt-right networks in Greece refer to the spread of the alt-right aesthetics in social media (i.e. popular memes like Pepe the frog and KEK, incel memes, etc.) and the updated attitude of some right-wing Greek politicians appropriating Trampism and fake news, and white-supremacy rhetoric (Afouxenidis and Petridis 2021). The strategic imports of white-supremacist ideology are translated into the belief in the superiority of the Greek heritage (the antique past as the cradle of European cultural supremacy) and into claims of a homogeneous people. Moreover, the implementation of alt-right tactics such as disinformation, reversed identity politics, historical revisionism, fake news, fosters the amalgamation of ethno-patriarchy, misogyny, ableism, homophobic and transphobic violence in the Greek context. As reported in recent research on the dominant far-right tendencies in Greece, central elements that constitute the alt-right discourse, such as xenophobia, racism, islamophobia, misogyny, and a hostile attitude towards LGBTQ+ communities, have been widely disseminated in the public realm and in everyday expressions⁹. Over a long period of time, big parts of the public discourse in Greece seem to have been clearly shifting to the right. This happened regardless of the rise and fall of Golden Dawn and the reveal of its violent practices, and its racist and anti-democratic rhetoric – most notably after the imprisonment of the Golden Dawn leaders and other members in 2020. There has been an implementation of far-right ideology and alt-right (media) tactics in several far right-wing parties¹⁰ that popped up after the dismantling of Golden Dawn, but also in the neo-liberal, authoritarian agenda of Nea Dimokra-

⁹ Far Right Tendencies in Greece Research Survey 2022, Signal for Researching and Confronting the Far Right (ΣΗΜΕΙΟ), <https://simeio.org.gr/drasi/ereunes/ereuna-tou-simio-pou-vriskomaste-to-2022>

¹⁰ Far-right and New-Right parties (examples): Greeks for the Fatherland by E. Kasidiaris, National Popular Consiousness (ELASYN) by Lagos, Spartiates by V. Stigkas, National Creation (Liberals, patriots, reformers) by F. Kranidiotis and T. Tzimeros, Patriotic Force for Change (PATRIDA) by K. Bogdanos, Christian Democratic Party of Greece, et al.

tia. Currently, we are facing the *normalization of the far-right discourse* in terms of social trends, both as a reaction to the global economic crisis and austerity policies (Vasilaki and Souvlis 2021) and as a counteraction towards democratic efforts that seek to consolidate social and political rights of the unvoiced and silenced, of the excluded and racialized people and/or marginalized communities.

In the aftermath of the normalization of the far-right discourse in Greece, the attack on reproductive and sexual freedoms and the antagonism regarding gender hierarchies are both characterized by the reinforcement of ideas of a homogeneous nation, biological sex dualism¹¹, and gender normativity. The core narrative of the local anti-gender actors is very well based on the belief in the triad Nation, Nature, and Normality, which reads as complementary to the well-known “Homeland-Religion-Family”. In other words, intact heterosexual families constitute the necessary bedrock for a stable nation polity. For example, based on the romantic myth of a homogeneous Greek nation, the slogan “we come strong for our future, our country, and our children”¹² introduced by A. Latinopoulou and the newly formed right-wing party PATRIDA (Fatherland) promotes the natural reproductive duties of Greek women. Furthermore, the party turns against the so-called leftist political correctness and embraces the alt-right discourse against migration, people of color, Islam, LGBTQ+ and women’s rights. Its party of origin, also named PATRI.D.A (Patriotic Force of Change), was formed by the neoliberal alt-right edge lord K. Bogdanos, who formulated the motto *Homeland, Religion, Family and Economic Freedom* as its core political thesis. Golden Dawn women’s organization hold nearly the same position when it comes to women’s role. As the latter claims, feminism should not aim at equality, as this is against the laws of nature¹³. In that view, women’s liberation would lead to a departure from their true nature and their highest role, which is motherhood. Recently the Golden Dawn attacked the offices of the Colour Youth queer organization in Athens (after internet threads following an announcement of a financial aid party) (Colour Youth 2024) reaffirming the ongoing homophobic and transphobic hate of its members. Last but not least, the newest Democratic Patriotic Movement – Victory (NIKE) represents ultranationalist family values and has a clear agenda against women’s and LGBTQ+ rights. The anti-gender, far-right Christian party entered the parliament in the elections of June 2023. The NIKE party receives funds from Sportime newspaper, owned by the media group of shipowner Victor Restis (Maragkoudaki 2023) and is associated to Christian Orthodox brotherhoods. As in

¹¹ Meaning the recognition of the biological sex assigned at birth that fosters trans-exclusionary discourse and binary perspectives.

¹² The TOC Team, 2023. “Αφροδίτη Λατινοπούλου: Το κόμμα ΠΑΤΡΙΔΑ που θυμίζει Μπογδάνο, οι απειλές για μηνύσεις και το “πρόγραμμα” του νέου φορέα”, THE TOC, March 24. <https://www.thetoc.gr/politiki/best-of-internet/afroditi-latinopoulou-to-komma-patrída-pou-thumizei-mpogdano-oi-apeiles-gia-minuseis-kai-to-programma-tou-neou-forea/>

¹³ <http://whitewomenfront.blogspot.gr/>

other European countries, anti-gender activism, especially the anti-abortion campaigns, is funded by influential organizations and businesspeople that co-organize fundraising and donations. Far from being supported by individual donations, the anti-abortion movement in Europe relies mainly on wealthy conservative foundations, business leaders, and right-wing networks (Norris 2023).

Another significant aspect of the anti-gender movement is the attack on the idea of *wokeness*. The idea of getting (and staying) “woke” is associated with left-wing politics, feminism, LGBTQ+ activism, race equity culture issues, and social injustice. In the local anti-gender rhetoric, the so-called woke culture has evolved as a synonym for cancel culture and de-platforming, both seen as practices of censorship practiced by a so-called left-wing McCarthyism¹⁴. Once again, the theoretical deconstruction of the concepts of gender, race, and nation (as developed and refined by gender and critical studies) is being seen as a totalitarian threat to the hegemonic canon of the Western/Greek culture.

The anti-gender actors in Greece openly embrace heteronormative and patriarchal family models and have been of great influence in the recent governmental backsliding policies that undermine gender equality. In June 2023, the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (established in 1985 and perceived as a victory of the feminist movement), has been abolished. In the new government’s presidential decree, the Secretariat is renamed General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights and the word “Gender” is removed from its title. As next, the General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights has been transferred to the newly established Ministry of Family and Social Cohesion. These crucial institutional changes set the tone of how the right-wing government perceives the contemporary social status of women in Greece. Following anachronist concepts of gender roles, women of Greek origin are encouraged to embrace mothering as their national duty¹⁵. A different role is ascribed though for same-sex couples and queer kinships (Chalkidis 2023). Same-sex couples have been excluded from the right to marriage and adoption till January 2024, when the Greek parliament approved the Act of Equality in same-sex Marriage and Adoption. This historical decision makes Greece the first Orthodox Christian country to legalize same-sex civil marriage. Nevertheless, the highly-anticipated bill still perpetuates multiple forms of discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons. The current bill leaves significant gaps

¹⁴ The collective book *Woke: The universal deconstruction: Nation – Gender – Race* (ed. by G. Karampelias, 2023, in Greek) contains several texts based on identitarian-nationalist narratives while using left-wing arguments against globalization and neoliberalism. In this context, wokeness is described pejoratively as a hysterical tendency of Western societies, whereas “gender ideology” is accused of the destabilization of national identity and the crisis of the traditional family model, and the diversification of gender identity beyond the binary framework.

¹⁵ For the historical concept of the Greek family in the service of the nation-state see i.e.: Halkias, Alexandra. 2004. *The Empty Cradle of Democracy: Sex, Abortion, and Nationalism in Modern Greece*. Durham: Duke University Press. ibd. 19-34.

concerning i.e. the legislation on the “presumption of paternity”, civil partnerships and medically assisted reproduction for LGBTQI+ parents¹⁶. At the same time, the fuelled public debates and opinion polls reveal the widening schism between so-called progressive social forces and conservative politicians and church leaders. Archbishop Ieronymos, the head of the Orthodox Church of Greece, condemned the law as a “new reality that seeks only to corrupt the homeland’s social cohesion.”

Further proofs of the anti-gender trends in Greece are the undermining of the #metoo movement shortly after its appearance and the role of institutional justice in cases of gender-based violence, and the anti-abortion or pro-life movement. The pro-life movement in Greece planned the *1st Panhellenic Conference on Fertility and Reproductive Autonomy* (Ioannina 2021), organized by the Orthodox Church and conservative state representatives. The conference was cancelled several months after due to the effective feminist outcry and wider social critiques. Upon the public appearance of the conference’s sexist advertising spot, feminist organizations and activists have been vocal on social media and in public discussions. This mobilization raised concern about the predomination of male conservative actors as speakers (doctors, clerics, etc.), the evident restriction of women’s rights on their bodies, and the anachronist approach to reproduction rights. The broader outcry even led to the cancelation of the participation of the Greek President of Democracy, who was also invited as a speaker. A further attempt to promote the abortion ban followed in September 2023, when the Holy Synod provided an Encyclical for the *ecclesiastical sermon* in the schools entitled, “On the protection of human life and the ban of abortion”. This action also faced harsh critiques and disapproval by the feminist movement.

Another terrain for the anti-gender actors arose with the Co-Parenting Law, which is a manifestation of male supremacy lobbying at the expense of women. The new bill contravenes the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, which requires states to take steps for the rights and safety of domestic violence survivors¹⁷. As noticed by many feminist networks such as *Diktymo gia tin Ypoxreotiki Synepimeleia* and feminist organizations (i.e. Diotima, 8th March, Mov), in many cases the recent Law 4800/2021 forces women to share custody of their children with their abusers and traps women/children in abusive environments for a long period of time. In response to the antagonism that emerged through the discussions on the Co-Parenting Law, the reactionary networks of Active Dads continue to target women, feminists, scientists, judges, and journalists who deal with the gender-based law regulations that affect survivors of domestic violence (Louka 2022).

¹⁶ See: Key Comments of the ORLANDO LGBT+ Organization on the much-anticipated bill. <https://orlandolgbt.gr/vasika-scholia-toy-orlando-lgbt-sti-dimosia-diavo/>

¹⁷ The Bill violates: The Istanbul Convention (Law 4531/2018) - Directive 2012/29/EU on the Rights of Victims (Law 4478/2017), The International Convention on the Rights of the Child (Law 4478/2017), and The International Convention on the Rights of the Child (Law 4531/2018) 2101/1992).

The anti-gender discourse in Greece is also very present in the cyberspace, where hate speech and gender-based cyberviolence spread out in social media and the Greek manosphere. Recently the public reveal of the doxing telegram portal used by heterosexual men for exchanging images of women and young girls points out the extent of gender-based cyberviolence (doxing, sextortion, revenge porn etc.) and its social parameters. An important hint towards the radicalization of cyber misogyny and its impact on young people has been the recent rally in support of Andrew Tate (Das Shanti 2022), the misogynist influencer who is accused of rape and trafficking. In January 2023, a few dozen young men, organized through social media by a local Greek YouTuber and entrepreneur, marched on Ermou street under the motto “Free Andrew”. It’s remarkable how the concept of freedom is used in this context. By reversing the roles between violators and gender-based violence survivors, the slogan expresses solidarity for the abuser. “Free Andrew” is meant to devalue both the justice system that supposedly harmed Tate and the vocal position of violence survivors and feminists who dare to speak up against his persona. This incident exhibits anti-gender activism and the misogynist rage in Greece, expressed in the amalgamation of alt-right, heteropatriarchal and neoliberal mainstreaming, and it can be related to the Incel hit-and-run practices worldwide.

Another significant aspect of the anti-gender dynamics in Greece is tech-facilitated gender-based violence (i.e. personal defamation and gendered disinformation) against intersectional feminists and queers. In the conjunction of anti-gender and far-right actors over the past years, we faced the targeting of Gender Studies scholars and university teachers¹⁸, and feminist educators in public schools. Through gender biases to undermine their civic, political, and educational agenda, queer-feminist scholars and educators are being targeted for getting threatened and possibly silenced. As experienced in many countries where women and LGBTQ+ persons are vocal about gender equality issues, hate campaigns and cyber-attacks follow similar patterns. For example, women politicians who fight to protect essential rights and democratic values represent a threat to authoritarians and conservative actors. Recent surveys prove that women in politics are mainly targeted in social media through hate campaigns and gendered disinformation¹⁹. Hate speech, and gendered and sexualized disinformation campaigns build on sexist stereotypes and very often have a thrilling effect on the persons targeted (Judson et.al. 2020). Anti-gender actors seek

¹⁸ The Press Project, 2021. “Το ακροδεξιό μέτωπο «ανησυχεί» για τις σπουδές Φύλου και στοχοποιεί διδάσκουσες – και όχι μόνο” (The right-wing front worries about Gender studies and targets female academics), The Press Project, March 15. <https://thepressproject.gr/to-akrodexio-metopo-anisychei-gia-tis-spoudes-fylou-kai-stochopoiiei-didaskouses-kai-ochi-mono/>

¹⁹ See i.e. the cases of public defamation of Agnes Kuhnalmi (Hungary), Valeria Fedeli (Italy), Bochra Belhaj Hmida (Tunisia), Manuela d’Ávila (Brasil). Cf. Lucina Di Meo, 2023. Cf. Report: ShePersisted - Monetize Misogyny: Gendered Disinformation and the Undermining of Women’s Rights and Democracy Globally. <https://she-persisted.org/>

to weaponize harassment on social media and create a hostile atmosphere against vocal queer-feminist advocates. What is called “flaming” is an aggressive, hostile, profanity-laced online abusive communication (O’Sullivan and Flanagin 2003), which is always characterized by intimidating and/or insulting language, negative affect, and “typographic energy” such as capital letters, and exclamation marks. The hostile affect is produced by the visualization of a *loud shouting keyboard* as if an aggressive person would shout in your face.

One last comment, since we face the volatility of the anti-gender movement in many European countries: We need to stress, that besides the societal progress in different aspects of gender equality (i.e. Istanbul convention) and the achievements of the LGBTQ+ and feminist organizations regarding institutional policies of diversity and inclusivity, many progressive countries and human rights advocates spent considerable time without taking seriously the reflexes and institutional resonance of the anti-gender actors. Most importantly, believing in the liberal progress of human rights, democratic politicians and other social actors have not reacted adequately against institutionalized misogyny, male supremacy, and transnational anti-gender movements. This resulted, for example, in the loss of pivotal rights such as the complete ban on abortion in Poland (2020), the adoption of an abominable transphobic legislation in Russia (2023), the overturning of the historic *Roe v. Wade* decision by the US Supreme Court (2022). In recent years, transgender rights are facing a wave of attacks in the States – see the anti-trans bills passed in many Republican-controlled legislatures between 2021–2023. Finally, as in the case of Greece and elsewhere, neofascist, right-wing and conservative anti-gender actors not only perform their opposition to the “woke left” but they play a prominent role in creating and promoting bills related to state-funded social services, education and healthcare, causing severe institutional changes that increase economic and structural discrimination, vulnerability and precariousness.

Queer-feminist struggles in Greece

(...) a performative re-taking of sides, which derives its political power from taking up those prior, assigned registers of subjectivation in new and im-proper, potentially critical and agonistic ways. (Athanasίου 2021, 160)

(...) the fear of the Other arguably relates to a fear of losing the ‘glorious ancient’ national identity, as well as the Orthodox one (no matter how contradictory the two are) due to migration and subcultural and countercultural formations, especially ones taken to be influenced by foreign cultural leanings (such as same-gender, interracial and interfaith marriages, multiculturalism, spaces of worship for non-Greek Orthodox believers). (Anna T. 2021, 163)

Power relationships regarding race, gender, class, and sexuality are asymmetrical and still, following Athanasίου, for unsettling those power configurations, we are (re)taking sides. As we take sides, we are performing

dissent, we are deviating from assigned lines of demarcation, we are making turns, we are standing in stasis vis-à-vis the present order (Athanasios 2021). Struggling with (mis)conceptions of gender identities, surviving gender-based violence (domestic abuse, rape and sexual assault, child abuse), facing institutionalised racism and internalised misogyny (Koulouris 2018), transphobia and homophobia (Carastathis 2018, Papadaku 2022), are embodied experiences of exposure and vulnerability. As counteracts, the queer performances of the Greek drag scene render toxic Greekness and re-encode vulnerability (Anna T. 2021). Drag performers alienate in the most bizarre way the national-orthodox archetype to upset gender roles and to re-work on collective traumatization and stigmatization.

The continuum of gender-based violence is persistent in the lives of women and LGBTQ+ persons related to their social status, age, origin, race, and economic condition. In Greece, the dominant approach to social norms serves stereotypes that fit into a traditional gender binary, whereas sexual harassment, gender cyber violence, rapes, and other forms of abuse and discrimination remain vastly secret and unrecorded – from harassment and discrimination at work/education/sports, etc. to domestic violence and physical/psychological abuses during displacement, flight, and encampment. A significant rise in domestic violence and femicides has been reported in the recent years, more thoroughly during COVID times (Papagianopoulou 2022, Kambouri 2020). Greece is counting 31 femicides in 2021 and 21 in 2022. However, there is no official apparatus responsible for the central collection of femicide data and the analysis of the social characteristics of femicide. Some data is collected sporadically by the Observatory of the Secretariat for Family Policies and Gender Equality and the Greek police²⁰. Lawyers and activists demand the introduction of the term *femicide* as a separate criminal offence in the country's Criminal Code²¹ and seek to contest the culture of (institutional) impunity around violence against women, that allows reduced sentences for the abusers/perpetrators (Gousetis 2021).

Still, hundreds of women and LGBTQ+ people are coming forward, raising dissident voices against the deeply misogynistic male-dominated (Greek) culture, and most importantly, the activities of the queer-feminist movement have gained a new momentum in the last decade. The massiveness of the LGBTQ+ and feminist movement has steadily increased from 2016 onwards if we consider the wide mobilizations organized on November 25th (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women), the feminist strike on 8th March and the Pride Parades in many cities. More thoroughly, two incidents, Zac Kostopoulos's murder in September 2018 and Eleni Topaloudi's

²⁰ A quantitative analysis is attempted by the Greek team of the European Observatory on Femicide and the platform femicide.gr.

²¹ See i.e. Anna Michalakeli (DIOTIMA), Paper at Conference "Femicide: Findings, Questions and Questions", organized by the Centre for Gender Studies of the Department of Social Policy of Panteion University (14.03.2019), <https://diotima.org.gr/i-gynaikoktonia-sto-dimosio-logo/>

femicide in December 2018, set in motion numerous campaigns and protests, that increased the strength and visibility of the queer-feminist movement throughout the previous years.

The ongoing mobilization and the discourse against gender-based violence and police violence in the case of the HIV activist and Drag queen Zak Kostopoulos/ZackieOh²² are indicative as forms of political action that are persistent. Queer resistance is an ongoing form of persistence that challenges gender normativity, and its modes of reproduction and reaffirmation within societal identifications of the given Natural, the National, the Normal. In that sense, the loss of ZackieOh upsets the certain and brutal truths of normality and opens different ways of producing embodied knowledges within vulnerability (Tzelepi 2020) and precariousness. Besides, the numerous political and cultural events followed Kostopoulos murder displayed the ongoing hostile sentiment of the Greek society against gays, lesbians, intersexuals, transgender and queers, and the discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS, and most notably the police hostility in Greece. The most manifold case of Zak/ZackieOh shed light on the intersection of HIV+ stigmatization, homophobia, and social and class background. The loss of ZackieOh marks a new era for the queer movement in Greece: the protests organized by Justice for Zak/ZackieOh and other queer-feminist alliance groups disrupted the normative perception of gender identities and challenged the trajectories of gender violence against LGBTQ+ people. Athanasiou writes on the challenges of social regulations of gender normativity and the possible ground for crafting queer resistance: "(...) the means through which gender normativity is established are also the condition of possibility for the emergence of gender resistance. Gender and queer resistance refer to forms of dissonantly relating to norms – the norms upon which our gendered and sexualized subjectivity, in all its pleasures and pains, critically depends" (Athanasiou 2012, 206). Justice for Zak/ZackieOh, as a movement in progress, turned up into a political action signifying the reclamation of public space via dissident bodies and claims.

Another significant period for the feminist movement started in January 2021, when the sailing champion Sofia Bekatorou shared her story of abuse in public and opened the dialogue on sexual harassment and gender-based violence in sports. Bekatorou's words initiated the Greek #metoo and set in motion other female voices to report rapes and many types of gendered abuse beyond sports. In the same year, the social outcry against the former director of the Greek National Theater Dimitris Lignadis – convicted for serial abuse and sexual harassment of minors, teenagers, and adults, made a strong case of the #metoo movement, and led to a vast number of protests within the cultural field and beyond. Besides, there have been numerous struggles against sexual violence, femicides, trafficking and police

²² The initiative *ZackieOh Justice Watch* has been set up to monitor and record the trial which is still in progress (2024).

gender-based violence. Only in recent years (2022/2023) has the feminist movement followed quite many cases, which gained pregnant visibility. I can only mention a few examples. The prominent case of 24-year-old Georgia Bika, raped at a hotel party organized by high-profile figures in Thessaloniki, caused public outrage and led to mass feminist demonstrations in January 2022. Bika appealed to the European Court of Justice after the decision of the prosecutor of the Greek Supreme Court to file her appeal against the verdict of the Thessaloniki Plenary Council that acquitted the 27-year-old man of rape. She is determined to confront the lack of justice and the systemic omissions of the Greek authorities that failed to examine/report the rape in the first instance. Other significant cases are Caroline's femicide at Glyka Nera, who was murdered by her husband in front of her 11-month-old child, and the case of the 19-year-old woman at Ilioupoli, who was captured, tortured, serially raped, and exploited by a police officer who was her procurer. Finally, the most recent case of the 12-years-old girl at Kolonos, who was trapped in the trafficking network linked to the Greek Police Mafia network (Polychroniades 2022), shows the complexity of gender-based violence and the institutional support of trafficking and sexual abuse of women*, young girls/boys, and children. Feminist solidarity networks (Open Feminist Assembly) for the young woman at Ilioupoli initiated the campaign "If you need help, come to me", and also took responsibility for covering the initial costs of the proceedings²³ and the immediate living expenses of the 12-year-old survivor and her family at Kolonos. The solidarity network around the case of the girl at Kolonos proved to be of crucial importance within the last year and during the trial of the child abuser. It's worth mentioning that the state prosecution's recommendation suggested setting the sexual abuser free of charges concerning offenses of repeated rape, pimping, and human trafficking and blamed even the 12-year-old survivor and her mother. This outrageous juridical support of the abuser and his trafficking networks provoked the vocal parts of the society and led to a vast march on March 14th in Athens (News 247 2024). Lastly, on the day of the court's decision, the gathering of solidarity networks on site increased the demands for justice for the young girl and her detained mother.

Overall, we can observe that despite the broader scope of the public debates on #metoo and the media publicity of femicides and other incidents of gender-based violence, a significant part of Greek society seems to legitimize

²³ As reported during the press conference on July 10th 2023: "The Greek state does not apply its legal obligations under the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and specifically Article 34 on sexual abuse and exploitation of children, as ratified by Law 2101/1992. The Greek state does not comply with its obligations under the Lanzarote Convention of the Council of Europe for the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse of 2007, as ratified by Law 3727/2008. It does not implement international protective practices for minor victims and has not yet developed a national protocol for the management in response to incidents of sexual abuse and exploitation of minors." <https://www.facebook.com/allileggyisti12xroni/> ; <https://omniatv.com/853484916/synenteyksi-typoy-12xroni-kolonos/>

the various types of sexual harassment and gender discrimination within a normative framework²⁴. On the one hand, gender-based violence is being discussed in mainstream (social) media, in working places, cultural spaces, among friends, etc. On the other, the dominant discussions leave aside the continuum of gender-based violence and the questioning of patriarchal genealogy in the intersection of gender, ability, race, and class issues. The public discussions and media coverage, with less exceptions, lack discretion and deontology principles and cause moral panic (Michalakea 2021). Instead of strengthening emancipatory practices and the initiatives for gender equality the dominant media reports contribute to the spread of gendered and racialized representations (i. e. stereotypical representations of the abusers and victims) and the re-traumatization of the survivors (victim blaming and slut-shaming). As seen in various media coverages in TV and online journalism, the survivors of gender-based violence are being harmfully exposed, and their experiences are denied or devaluated.

Our bodies, our gender identities, our existence are part of a contested arena (Bempeza and Manesi 2021) – and this has been the case for different feminist generations and movements. In her poem *Heroines* (1981) Adrienne Rich refers to the early feminists who spoke out against injustice in the 19th century and the astonishing continuity of women's imagination of survival and persisting through collective resistance against male (white) supremacy. Feminist history, especially the history of women of color and queers, is charged with meaning and knowledge practices, and this is the history/ies in all its respectable differences and divergences that we keep writing ourselves. As for the feminist and queer histories in Greece, characterized by decentralized perspectives and sides, non-linearity, and missing links, we should acknowledge the grass-rooted work that has been made so far to create awareness and craft empowerment concerning gender equality, sexual and reproductive freedoms, and racial justice. Throughout many decades (intersectional) local struggles keep up challenging the patriarchal discourse to confront violence and gender discrimination seeking to transform systemic oppression into an agonistic response.

Self-organized queer/feminist groups and cultural initiatives such as Lesvies sta Prothyra, AMOQA, Beaver Collective, FAC, MiQ, Kiouri@, Kamia Anohi, March 8th assembly, Sabbath, Witches of the South, Fyliky Ataxia, Medouses, Kilotina, Toxines, Tsouxtres are active in Athens, Thessaloniki and many other cities. To provide an extensive view of their practices surpasses the capacities of this paper. Without intending to do less justice to all different activist/cultural practices, I wish to place an overall emphasis on the rich political activities and the strategies of reclaiming visibility in the streets, within public institutions and in the (social) media discourse, whereby the re-imag-

²⁴ See i.e. the report on gender-based violence of the EQUAL_GEN Project (2023-2024), in the framework of the Active citizens Fund, implemented by Diotima Centre, with Emanates and Anasa Cultural Center as partners. <https://diotima.org.gr/ekthesi-gia-tin-prolip-si-tis-emfylis-via/>

ining gender positionalities (i.e. FAC, Lesvies sta Prothyra, AMOQA) and forcing new subjectivations (i.e. the post-migrant queer collective MiQ in Athens) also go beyond the historical identifications of gender and sexuality in Greece. In the last decade a lot of communal work is being made to establish solidarity networks, provide support for LGBTQ+ migrants/refugees (i.e. Emantes) and address migrant/refugee women issues and racialized violence (i.e. United African Women Organization, Melissa, Anasa). Also, a lot of collective work is being made against gender-based violence and for demanding trans/intersex rights and sex workers' rights (i.e. Diotima, Positive Voice/Thetiki Phone, Intersex Greece, Orlando LGBTQ+, Red Umbrella). In that sense, I place an emphasis on acknowledging those continuous efforts and political struggles that seek to preserve communities of care and solidarity – communities that confirm different types of traumatic experiences and vulnerabilities in their gender, ethnic, and racial configurations.

To laugh compulsively, even violently, at the reasoning of Law, to gender as reason, is to expose its violence. It is also to risk being heard as the origin of the violence exposed. However the women's laughter is heard, it becomes contagious for those women in the courtroom who "get it." Their laughter becomes a feminist lead. They leave the courtroom.

Even if they are asked to leave, they walk out willingly, laughing with and to each other. (Ahmed 2014, 156)

I wish to conclude with a noisy statement by Ahmed that reminds me that willfulness can be performed not only to persist as an individual, but also to express one's very loyalty to a culture whose existence is deemed as a threat. It also reminds me that *speaking out*, *speaking nearby* and *speaking from* a situated perspective are necessary steps for dissident responses, for challenging the normative view of the world and, most importantly, for achieving mutual understanding, empathy, and political action.

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