



# Queer Responses to Austerity: Insights from the Greece of Crisis

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## Abstract

During the last years, Greece has implemented an unprecedented number of austerity measures affecting every domain of social, economic and political aspects of the population's life. Together with several social movements acting during this time against austerity, queer groups found a fertile ground to explore their discourses and practices by adopting an enlarged agenda of claims, attacking simultaneously gender hierarchizations and the rise of neo-Nazism, both accentuated after austerity measures. This article focuses on 'sexual politics of austerity' seen from the side of queer anti-authoritarian groups in the country's biggest cities. Based upon an empirical exploration of queer groups' discursive production, this article shows how these groups attempt to create their own, autonomous space as a response to the politics of austerity and how this queer discourse adapts to new reconfigurations of the austerity-driven Nation based upon a Marxian reading of 'totality thinking'.

## Keywords

austerity, queer, Golden Dawn, anti-fascism, nationalism, totality thinking

## Introduction

On October 11<sup>th</sup> 2012, the premiere of the play *Corpus Christi* at Chytrion Theatre in Athens was about to take place. However, following protests from the far right party Golden Dawn and religious groups, the premiere was postponed.



Media reported police indifference towards the protesters, some of them being Golden Dawn's MPs who openly threatened the play's actors and director by extrapolating homophobic and racist insults. Journalists were exposed to physical violence.<sup>2</sup> The show was postponed for the following week. It took place under police protection and the attendance of a couple of left-wing MP's. Protestors framed their action as a reaction to blasphemy which the play was supposedly provoking. QV (Queericulum Vitae), an Athenian queer group, responded to these reactionary demonstrations by producing a poster highlighting its position against these demonstrations, and signing with the logo: 'Yes, we are faggots. With pride, the shame of the nation'.

What does this 'shame of the nation' signify for social movements in austerity-driven Greece? How does it connect to queer politics? During the last five years, the Eurozone crisis has particularly affected Greece. The country's GDP dropped by 25%<sup>3</sup> and unemployment has increased to 27.3%<sup>4</sup> (youth unemployment surpassing 50%)<sup>5</sup> (Eurostat, 2014). Cuts in welfare, education and public health are being made effective after the austerity measures imposed by the 'troika', composed by the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission. These unprecedented austerity measures were equally combined with a violent repressive deployment of police forces against socially marginalized groups (immigrants, sex workers etc.)<sup>6</sup>, a spectacular rise of the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn in the 2012 parliamentary elections (6.92% of votes compared to 0.1% in 2009), and its rise to the third position during the 2014 European elections (9.4% of votes). Against this turbulent context, various social movements in the biggest Greek cities organized mobilizations as a response to the austerity measures imposed in the lower and middle-class strands of the population (Sergi and Vogiatzoglou, 2013). Trade unions followed by various contentious movements, such as the Greek Indignados ('Αγανακτισμένοι'), and solidarity-based groups and neighborhood assemblies formed the scenery of political and social activism, which developed in the country during the last five years.

Together with these broad mobilizations, queer groups found the opportunity to push forward their own agenda, and promote their distinct repertoire of rhetorical style. Queer groups in Greece present specificity to the extent that they have been formed within the squatting and anti-authoritarian scenes of their local contexts. Therefore their development does not trace back to the anti-HIV politics, as it is the case with other countries, such as Spain (Calvo and Trujillo, 2011) or

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfre/2012/oct/12/greece-fascists-beating-people-police?newsfeed=true#start-of-comments>

<sup>3</sup><http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tec00114>

<sup>4</sup> [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une\\_rt\\_a&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=une_rt_a&lang=en)

<sup>5</sup><http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&language=en&pcode=teilm020&tableSelection=1&plugin=1>

<sup>6</sup> See the sex workers' arrest scandal in Athens (April 2012),

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/03/greece-prostitutes-hiv-arrests\\_n\\_1473864.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/03/greece-prostitutes-hiv-arrests_n_1473864.html)

the US (Gamson, 1995; Shepard, 2012). Queer groups during this austerity period were exposed to two main dilemmas. First, how can a queer discourse critically assess the dismantlement of the welfare regime without falling into the trap of a strictly materialist-based analysis, which remains the dominant paradigm in the anti-authoritarian scenes in which they participate? Second, how can a queer political practice challenge the identity-oriented LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) movement, which has gradually obtained more systematic access to the Greek public sphere?

This article focuses on the first question, in order to link with the rest of the articles of this special issue, and thus shifts the attention *to the attempt of queer groups to construct an autonomous discursive space as a response to austerity*. In that sense, a discourse analysis is the most appropriate methodological tool in order to trace this building process. When it comes to the second question, however, it becomes clear that this is subject to different methodological challenges. In order to describe and analyze in-depth queer political *practices*, an ethnographic-oriented analysis is indispensable. I bracket this question for the moment precisely because of the abovementioned methodological constraints, although from time to time I point to the tactics of these queer groups on the ground throughout the article. The question of queer discursive constructions during austerity times is explored through an analysis of the material produced by a specific number of queer groups, which act in Athens and Thessaloniki, the main Greek urban centers. In this article, queer is seen as distinct from the LGBT movement. I conform therefore to Gavin Brown's definition of queer activism as 'distinct from lesbian and gay activism as a result of its celebration of difference and challenge to normative social relations.' (2015, 73<sup>7</sup>).

By analyzing these discourses, I bring forward the 'queer responses' -as I call them- to austerity-driven Greece. These queer responses have developed during the last five years. For my analysis, however, I place a greater emphasis on the first years of crisis' deployment (2009-2012) that saw the most radical implementation of austerity policies ever for a country during peace time.<sup>8</sup> Focusing on the two principal urban areas of the country, Athens and Thessaloniki, I explore the way queer groups attempt to create their own, autonomous, discursive space as a response to the politics of austerity. It will become obvious through the analysis that queer groups have understood austerity as a process which has been producing effects not only at the economic, but also at the social-cultural, level. Their interpretation of austerity therefore escapes from the strictly materialist analyses of the majority of other anti-authoritarian movements. This escape from the materialist frame allows them to take into consideration the new sexual and

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<sup>7</sup> See also Joshua Gamson's definition in section 3

<sup>8</sup> As former Finance Minister, Yannis Stournaras, declared upon the opening ceremony of the Greek Presidency of the European Council in January 2014: 'No one country during peace time has achieved as much as Greece has achieved' (Lynch, 2014).

gender configurations of the Nation as they are shaped by far-right's establishment in the official political scene of the country.

The article starts with an overview of the historical and political context in which autonomous queer groups develop in Greece, that is the broader anti-authoritarian/autonomous movement. I then proceed to the description of the scope of this article. The discourses that queer groups produce and the arguments they advance coincide with the understanding of austerity, and thus neoliberalism, not as a monolithic process affecting only people's economic status. It is rather understood through the prism of a process which by unfolding in this specific context –the Greek one—produces distinct effects at the political, social and cultural levels. This connection with the Marxist idea of totality can illuminate the process by which contemporary regimes of capital accumulation impact on queer social life (Floyd, 2009) and subsequently the way social actors nowadays understand and interpret this process.

I move then to the main empirical analysis, in which I unfold the way queer groups have been attempting to build their distinct discursive space during the first years of austerity. I advance here the idea that queer groups' discourses in Greece are constrained drastically by the broader political and economic transformations, brought by the implementation of austerity measures. Their discursive frames reveal a complex process of thinking social relations that take into consideration the way austerity has impacted on their lives. Therefore, I advance a three-fold framework to explore these discourses and thus to trace the formation of an autonomous queer discursive space: (a) their imagination of the Nation as an exclusionary mechanism; (b) their distance vis-à-vis traditional Marxism, and; (c) their struggle against the commodification of LGBT politics. I conclude by assessing that this emerging autonomous discursive space relates very closely to what queer Marxism calls today 'totality thinking'.

Totality thinking, that is a conceptual framework of apprehending capital accumulation and its subsequent crisis regimes, as a process which impacts all aspects of social life, becomes therefore a crucial tool for an analysis of social movements' discourses in austerity Greece. Moreover, 'totality thinking' can be used as an analytic tool for the analysis of social movements that act in other austerity-driven countries and whose discourse draws upon the intersections of capitalism with gender, race and sexuality.

The argument of this article is based upon a systematic collection and analysis of queer groups' written and visual documentation. It is thus part of a broader field of scholarship focusing on the discursive level of social movements (Johnston, 1995; Zamponi, 2012). This article does not attempt to provide an exhaustive ethnographically driven research of the field at stake, but rather makes use of material published and displayed through queer groups' websites or other independent platforms in which they are hosted. These groups are: *QV*,

*Massqueeraid* and *Mov Kafenio*. The study is based upon a representative sample of queer political activity in Athens and Thessaloniki during the period 2010-2013.

The collection of this documentation is the result of my own political and scholarly interest in queer mobilization in general (Eleftheriadis, 2015), and in Greece in particular (Eleftheriadis, 2013). Regarding Greece, I became intellectually and politically mobilized after the financial crisis of 2010 and the emergence of a series of new political actors who struggled against austerity. This interest took a more transnational turn when I got invited to participate in Gavin Brown's and Cesare di Feliciantonio's panel on 'sexual politics of austerity' at the European sexual geographies conference in 2013. Together with other scholars from Southern European countries, we started to reflect upon the impact of austerity measures on different aspects of social life, sexuality included. Beyond the commonalities that Southern European cases present, we realized in this conference that each country had its own particularities, due to different social, economic, spatial and institutional arrangements, which required a geographically-sensitive approach. Greece is one of these cases. My analysis of Greece highlights, among other things, the limits of conceptualizing 'sexual politics of austerity' as a process which homogenously affects southern European countries.

### Queering sexual politics of austerity

[We should] do more sacrifices for the sake of the country, work more for less [money], go back to the family nucleus to survive, watch indifferently the fascist pogroms and the homophobic attacks, believe in the propaganda of development through [migrants'] arrests in the centers of the cities and squats' evacuations. Moreover, [we should] control more our bodies, repress our queer desires, perform more faithfully our gender roles. [Poster *Mov Kafenio* and *Massqueeraid*]<sup>9</sup>

This joint poster from *Mov Kafenio* and *Massqueeraid* was made as a solidarity call against the government policy to close down all the squats in the country on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2013. It has as title: 'We give birth to a world with our conditions inside the squats and out of them'. The last national elections of June 2012 that brought the right-wing—in collaboration with the social-democrats—into power, have seen a drastic implementation of a 'zero-tolerance' policy as a *securitization* balance to austerity measures (Souliotis and Kandylis, 2013). This policy translates into closing down left-wing squats, reinforcing migration controls in town and across the borders, increasing undocumented migrants' deportations, controlling sex-work, and criminalizing HIV-positive people. Queer groups see this policy as an attack on their own autonomy and against their existence. The 'zero tolerance' policy against the squats, combined with the high unemployment rate of young people and the subsequent 'return to family' solution, give the opportunity

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<sup>9</sup><http://massqueerraid.wordpress.com/2013/01/29/σε-τι-κόσμο-θα-φέροουμε-τα-παιδιά-μας/katalipseis-003/>

to queers to bring into discussion the older idea of autonomy from family, and its links with the way austerity reinforces gender binaries and heteronormative domination in all aspects of social life.

The poster is a significant illustration of how queer groups crystallized their discourses during this austerity era. Their discursive strategy consists of combining multiple issues with the way austerity implementation affects every possible aspect of life: from gender performativity to family ideology reinforcement, and from sexual autonomy to LGBT commodification and exploitation by supposedly progressive mayors. According to queer groups' discourses, the way the crisis affected Greece is not only to be found in purely economic facts. In fact, although salaries and pensions have dropped by 25% in the last 5 years, and one out of four Greeks nowadays lives under poverty, institutional politics has been significantly reshaped too. The radical left party, Syriza, won the parliamentary elections of January 2015, putting the traditional social-democratic party PASOK to the seventh position. This victory had been pre-announced when Syriza managed to arrive first in the European elections of May 2014 with a score of 26.58%. On the other hand, the neo-Nazi party, Golden Dawn, minoritarian until 2011, achieved the fourth position in the parliamentary elections of 2012, gathering almost 7% of the electorate votes, scored third in the European elections of 2014, with 9.4% of the total votes, and succeeded the third position in the parliamentary elections of 2015 with 6.28%. Its presence in the national Parliament has provided Golden Dawn's deputies with broad access to the media, while their members' rhetoric legitimizes within the public sphere xenophobia, racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia. At the national level, as shown above, the conservative government of New Democracy (center-right wing party) promoted during its government a 'zero tolerance' policy against crime, partially adopting Golden Dawn's agenda. This policy translated into increasing police violence, organizing undocumented migrants' detentions and repatriations, imposing a stricter surveillance against 'terrorism' and demonstrations, and closing down traditional leftist squats in big urban centers.

The economic and institutional reconfigurations in Greece cannot be understood only as part of a uniquely nationally driven process. It is usually accepted that:

the history of capitalism cannot be understood without accounting for broad and recurrent corporate and governmental efforts to forestall accumulation crisis, strategies that have punctuated capital's history, which indeed have had to be as persistent as the threat of crisis itself. (Floyd, 2009, 33)

Capital therefore needs to produce fictitious crises in order to continue exercising its domination across the globe. These crises take certainly different forms in the contexts in which they develop. The Argentinian crisis of 2001 is different from the Eurozone crisis of late 2010, and certainly different from the oil crisis of the 70s.

There is however a common characteristic in most of these cases: the implementation of austerity measures as a way to ‘overcome the crisis’. In his analysis of ‘Austerity urbanism’, Peck explains that:

the refurbished rationale for austerity measures is that the imposition of strict fiscal discipline and government spending cuts is the (only) way to restore budgetary integrity—thereby securing the confidence of the investor class, appeasing the jittery markets and paving the way to growth. (2012, 626)

This approach of austerity as the only means to manage crises is based upon regulation theory, which denies that:

the capitalist mode of production is comprehensible in terms of a single set of laws that remain unchanged from its inception until its eventual supersession. [Regulationists] see the history of capitalism, rather, as a succession of phases, each distinguished by certain historically developed, socio-institutionally defined structural forms that give rise, so long as they are maintained, to distinctive economic trends and patterns. (Brenner and Glick, 1993, 46)

Regulation theory becomes pertinent to the extent that it allows us to theorize the development of sexual politics by taking into account the local context in which it develops. This idea aligns with the ongoing discussions on queer Marxism, as it is developing in the works of Kevin Floyd (2009), Alan Sears (2005) and Rosemary Hennessy (1993). The common ground on which these studies rely is their belief that:

The dynamics of class, gender, race and sexuality are internally related yet not reducible to one another [...] An adequate understanding of class formation must therefore be based on a rich analysis of the ways class relations are gendered, racialized and sexualized, just as an examination of sexualities must attend to the ways that sexual and intimate relations are classed, gendered and racialized. (Sears, 2005, 94).

Concerning specifically sexual politics, thus, regulation theory allows for a more nuanced understanding of how certain forms of capitalist implementation produce different effects in different contexts. For instance, crisis and austerity seemed to destabilize abortion in Spain and not in Greece, whereas gay rights appear (for the moment) strong enough in Spain, and not at all in Greece.

Moreover, the concept of ‘totality’ and its queer appropriation of ‘totality thinking’ will be of particular interest when it comes to analyzing queer responses to austerity-driven Greece. The Marxian term ‘totality’ has often been accused of giving primacy to an autonomous, objectified factor, be it economy (or for others even technology) (Llobera, 1979). This deterministic approach is revealed in Marx’ *Grundrisse*:

This organic system, as a totality, has its presuppositions, and its development to its totality consists precisely in subordinating all elements of society to itself, or in creating out of it the organs which it still lacks. This is historically how it becomes a totality. The process of becoming this totality forms a moment of its process, of its development (1973, 278).

Although other theorists have challenged the deterministic idea of totality, drawing often upon the lack of its conceptual clarity (Llobera, 1979), I introduce here Floyd's emerging idea of *totality thinking* as a tool which helps us understand the complexity and interconnectedness of sexuality with other social processes:

queer elaborations of heteronormativity's varied social demands have also consistently maintained that *any representation of sexuality in isolation from these other dimensions of the social, any representation of sexuality as always already localized, particularized, or privatized, is a misrepresentation of the social as well as the sexual.* (Floyd, 2009, 8; italics mine)

Following this line of thought, totality thinking can be considered a significant, if not necessary, way to think about capital and its subsequent crises. Queer responses to austerity seem to have largely incorporated this idea of 'totality thinking' for their own analyses on the development of social relations under austerity. Although never explicitly used as such, the incorporation of this idea becomes particularly obvious in the discussion of queer criticisms against Orthodox Marxism, and the struggle of queer politics in Greece to provide a new refreshing reading of Marxism. For that, we need first to locate the emergence of the queer movement in Greece which, contrary to other western countries in which the queer movement took shape during the HIV-crisis, in Greece has its roots in the anti-authoritarian movement of the country's big urban centers.

### **The broader anti-authoritarian movement in Greece- Queer politics in context**

The rebellion of Polytechnic School's students in 1973 against the dictatorship of Colonels can be considered an emblematic year for the emergence of a plethora of social, political, and subcultural groups of the Left. These groups gathered in the Polytechnic's district, Exarhia, in the center of Athens. Since then, Exarhia has become the "territory for the formation of counter-publics" (Vatikiotis, 2011: 170). Various actors, from different social, political and cultural backgrounds created gradually a space of interactions, contributing to the creation of a massive production of countercultural discourses diffused through independent media (like Indymedia), other social networks (such as Facebook), and visibilized through posters hung around the neighborhood and beyond.

These counter-public movements, which have gradually been constructed spatially around Exarhia, and discursively articulated through their countercultural



production, share some principles, despite their multitude and heterogeneity. These principles are reflected mainly through horizontality and consensus-decision making processes. It is argued that these principles were a heritage of the organization of the anti-dictatorial struggle and helped guarantee the unity of the movement (Dafermos, 1992). Part of this ‘autonomous’ movement, as it is described by Karabelias (1986), stands away from “both a static ideological framework...and the extremism of a violent rebellion” (Vatikiotis, 2011: 172). The Exarhia-based autonomous movement passed through ups and downs during the ‘80s and the ‘90s, and rejuvenated after the ‘00s with the anti-globalization and anti-war events, and the December 2008 riots<sup>10</sup>. (Karamihas, 2009: 292).

Although Athens is arguably the center of autonomous/anti-authoritarian activism, other cities have also developed their own leftist scenes<sup>11</sup>. Thessaloniki, the second biggest city in Greece, shares a history of anti-authoritarian/autonomous activism, spatialized mainly inside the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the largest Greek university, and several squats, both residential and cultural. The city’s largest squat, (*Fabrika*) *Yfanet*, is one of the most famous in Greece. It is a factory built in 1901, closed down in 1967, and since then abandoned. Since 20 March 2004, a large number of anti-authoritarian, anarchist, and autonomous movement organizations have regrouped there.<sup>12</sup>

When it comes to sexual mobilizations, it could be argued that they started developing immediately after the end of the military dictatorship in 1974. During the ‘70s and the ‘80s, small organizations, inspired by the European Gay liberation movements of that time, emerged. Groups such as the Liberation Movement of Homosexuals of Greece (Athens), the Autonomous Front of Homosexuals of Thessaloniki, and the Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women (Athens) created their own history inside the broader anti-authoritarian and the under-developed LGBT movements of that period. Subcultural discourses found their own paths through periodicals and zines circulating in the centre of Athens, the most prominent of them being *Kraximo* (Outing), edited by famous transgender activist Paola.

With the establishment of successive social-democrat governments in Greece (1981-2004, with a small exception during 1989-1993), more marginalized forms of sexual politics lost their intensity and diffused within the broader anti-authoritarian movement and its subcultural production. It was after 2004 and the reactivation of the anti-authoritarian movement that a fraction of explicitly

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<sup>10</sup> Between December 2008 and the beginning of 2009, riots in the main urban centers of the country took place after the killing of 16-year old Alexis Grigoropoulos by a policeman (Psimitis, 2011: 192). The ‘December riots’ as they are called constitute a landmark on the protest cycle of Greece, forming a large-scale reaction to police brutality and leading towards new forms of countercultural production and political mobilization.

<sup>11</sup> A ‘scene’ is ‘a network of people who share a common identity and a common set of subcultural or countercultural beliefs, values, norms and convictions as well as a network of physical spaces where members of that group are known to congregate. (Leach and Haunss, 2009: 259)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.yfanet.net/lang/en>

identified queer groups started to obtain a more solid form. Similar to other groups abroad, these could take the name of “loose but distinguishable set of political movements and mobilizations” which operate “through the decentralized, local and often [rhetorically] anti-organizational cultural activism of street postering, parodic and non-conformist self-presentation, and underground alternative magazines (‘zines’)” (Gamson, 1995: 393).

The group *QV* (*QueericulumVitae*) can be considered the pioneer of such queer politics in Greece. *QV* is a group formed in Athens in 2004, within the context of the broader anti-authoritarian movement of the city. The group, apart from publishing a zine, called *QVzine*, has been organizing collective actions in the streets of Athens, in collaboration with other feminist movements such as *Gender asphyxia* and *Migada*, and have also been participating in the publication of books. *QV*'s framing is mainly composed of a queer critique of society and of the anti-authoritarian scene. During *QV*'s ten years of political presence, its members have been attempting to bring into discussion several issues, such as work, race, immigration, and other intersecting struggles. *QV* has until nowadays been the oldest queer group in Greece. *QV* was also one of the main organizers of the QueerFest of Athens in 2010<sup>13</sup>. They also have links with other queer groups around Europe, mainly from the Balkans.

Several other queer feminist political groups have been formed in the last decade, reaching a peak before and after the December 2008 riots in Athens. The best-known of these is *QueerTrans*, which, together with smaller groups such as *Riot Girls* and *Stin Priza*, was created in March 2009. Finally, explicitly queer groups, such as *Nosotras*, made their appearance on the anti-authoritarian scene of Athens after the December 2008 riots (Eleftheriadis, 2013).

Thessaloniki also presents a smaller-scale but equally important mobilization of queer and queer-oriented feminist political groups. *Mov Cafenio* (*Purple Café*) is a feminist collective. Having formed in March 2009, it is more recent than *QV*, and is based mainly in the Yfanet squat. Although it does not identify explicitly as queer, the collective adopts several premises from the socially constructed orientation of queer theory:

[*Mov Cafenio*] works on issues of oppression and power which emerge from gender relations within a patriarchal and capitalist condition. [...] We are moving against the normative models of gender, against violence, which is produced by gender hierarchy,

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<sup>13</sup> QFest, the first queer festival of Athens, in 2010, crystalized the Greek queer space and the groups that might belong to it. In the last day of the festival, queer groups from Athens and Thessaloniki organized a discussion on the perspectives of the radical queer movement in Greece. The groups participating, *QV* and *Purple café* included, described the rationale of this discussion in the following terms: [We will discuss] how we do politics on gender and sexuality and how we do politics in general, about our analytical tools, strategies and practices. We will reflect upon the above contexts, alliances and the importance of auto-education and unfold the many different ways we have to organize communities and movements that can claim and resist. (QFest, 2010)

sexism, homophobia, transphobia. We are creating the ground for the emergence of sexualities, which challenge the limits of heteronormativity. We insist in queer encounters, forbidden caresses, pervert sensitivities.<sup>14</sup>

During the summer 2011, *Massqueeraid* formed in Thessaloniki, as an explicitly queer group. The group acts within the squat Terra Incognita, in the city center. Their English-formulated slogan is: Maybe squats aren't queer but it seems that squats are where the queer are.<sup>15</sup> *Massqueeraid* and *Mov Kafenio* tend to organize joint actions, such as film projections, discussions, and book presentations. They also publish joint posters, which they hang around the city.

### ***'The shame of the nation': Building queerness against the Nation***

Returning to the *Mov Kafenio's* and *Massqueeraid's* poster, I believe it can be a relevant departure point for an analysis of the building of queer groups' autonomous discursive space. This space takes into account the latest developments of political life in Greece by attempting to think social relations *in totality* as they are actually reconfigured under the austerity regime in Greece. Hence, one big part of queer discourse today is addressed against fascism and the rise of neo-Nazism in the country.<sup>16</sup>

In one leaflet distributed during a *Massqueeraid's* party in September 2012, we read through a comic version, that:

The process of fascization overpasses a political part and its percentages...It materializes in the public sphere what used to take place in the past invisibly, diffused violence on our bodies.

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<sup>14</sup> Poster. Retrieved in <http://mwvkafeneio.squat.gr/> [In Greek-Translation mine]

<sup>15</sup> Poster. Retrieved in <http://massqueerraid.wordpress.com/>

<sup>16</sup> At this point, it is interesting to note the similarities found in other Balkan contexts in which, similarly to Greece, homosexual rights do not profit from any serious institutional protection. The Serbian queer group *Queer Beograd*, for instance, has been particularly attentive to construct a discourse against skinheads and Neo-nazis. See for instance the section dedicated to anti-nationalism, on their website <http://www.queerbeograd.org/index.php/itaonica-mainmenu-64/anti-nacionalizam-mainmenu-35> (in Serbian)



In one of the gags, a man wonders “how it is possible that some homosexuals have voted or reproduced their fascist rhetoric on immigrants, public health and country’s security.” And a woman replies: “Maybe their precarious position as homosexuals, makes them grab from any other possible privileges they have (man, white, abled, wealthy, greek<sup>17</sup>) and leads them to turn around them.”

<sup>17</sup> Most of the times, queer activists spell greek/greece with small letters. In my opinion, this is a way to underestimate and delegitimize the notion of Greek-ness.



The antifascist framing of queer discourses is visible in Athens as well. In October 2012, a crowd of Orthodox and fascists demonstrated against the theatre play ‘Corpus Christi’, considering it as blasphemous. The intensity of these counterdemonstrations caused the actors to cancel the performance. During these intensely mediatized days, a couple of homophobic attacks were also confirmed. *QV* activists published a poster in which we read:

On Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> October in the square of the Gazi metro station<sup>18</sup>, the night that (Christian-) fascists attacked the performance *Corpus Christi* at the Chytirion theatre, four macho bastards hit A. and his friend P. in front of people who were sitting at the square, after

<sup>18</sup> Gazi used to present a relatively large concentration of gay bars and shops.

asking them ‘are you faggots?’ The question ‘hey, are you faggots?’ is one of these racist questions that confidently homophobic Greeks address *more and more* often to different social groups. ‘Are you Pakistani?’ ‘Where are you from?’ ‘Are you taking it [from behind]?’: the racist crowds of the large family of the greek nation wonder. (emphasis added)

And they reply in the end of the poster:

Because even if we reply or not [to the question ‘are you faggots?’], greek society has exercised and still exercises violence upon our bodies...And because...against fear we have one another [in female form], we reply: Hey, Yes, we are faggots. With pride, the shame of the nation.

The expression ‘more and more’ used in *QV*’s text is very relevant to the discussions on sexual politics of austerity. *QV* activists link temporally the ‘fascization’ of society with the implementation of austerity measures. I remind that the text is produced in a very crucial moment: the right-wing government, supported by the social-democrats, counts four months in power, Golden Dawn’s members act unpunished in Athens, and the second bail-out package accompanied with a package of austerity measures is already ongoing. Queer groups link all these processes to the idea of national identity, which seems to be reconfigured according to the new austerity processes.

The same slogan ‘Shame of the Nation’ was also reproduced by Thessaloniki’s queer groups, as seen in the photograph below.



The poster, showing two men kissing, is entitled ‘With Pride, The shame of the Nation’. It is undersigned by *Massqueerraid*, and the street name (blue sign in the right), indicates the poster is on Zefxidos street. Zefxidos street is a small, central street in Thessaloniki, which gathers a vibrant nightlife with small alternative gay-friendly bars. It is located below the famous byzantine church of Saint Sophia.

A range of other visual interventions in the city’s public space are accessible on the *Massqueerraid*’s website<sup>19</sup>. Posters attacking fascism and homophobia, claiming a radical anti-assimilationist queer identity, are on the first line: “No tolerance of fascists and homophobes. Smash them!”<sup>20</sup>. Reference to fascism is also made explicit through posters that were hung across different parts of the city center in 2012. Posters by *Massqueerraid* included the slogans: “Fascist crap, faggots are coming!” (in Greek), “These faggots kill fascists” (in English), “For every fascist and homophobe, there is a place in Thermaikos [the bay of Thessaloniki]”. Posters by *She-Excommunicated*, showcased the sayings: “Smash Fascism, it’s hot” (in English), “Fascists and homophobes, your son is a faggot” (in Greek), “Antifascism, because you deserve it” (in Greek), “Fascists and Homophobes to the bottom of the well. Freedom to the world faggio-tariat” (in Greek).

This anti-nationalist/anti-fascist critique aligns with the idea of ‘sexual nationalism’. Sexual nationalism as an analytical category draws on foregoing analysis relating sexual norms and national identities (Mosse 1985), and focuses on how political discourses and practices link sexuality and citizenship in a diachronic and in a synchronic way (Puar, 2007). But what we often link theoretically to sexual nationalism is the process of associating a nation with gender equality and sexual freedoms in order to deem the ‘others’, specifically Muslim migrants, as gender oppressive and sexually repressive. This dichotomization tends to become part of a nationalist imaginary and self-narration (Bilge, 2012).

What happens in the Greek case is a kind of inverse strategy. Greek queers’ tactic is to underline the discursive processes of interpellation which performatively construct immigrants (‘Are you Pakistani?’) and homosexuals (‘Are you Faggots?’) as the outsiders of the national body. Therefore, with the rise of Golden Dawn as an institutional political force and the ‘fascization’ of the society, homosexuals tend to return to their position as the ‘others’ in a more violent and visible way than before. Non-heteronormative subjects become the ‘shame’ of the nation, as they are discursively excluded from it. A similar discursive strategy is equally observed in Israeli and French queer political groups. The members of the queer collective Black Laundry in Israel have deliberately situated themselves outside the boundaries of the national discursive community, thereby challenging

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<sup>19</sup> <https://massqueerraid.wordpress.com/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://massqueerraid.wordpress.com/page/4/#jp-carousel-52>

the very location of those boundaries and contesting the status of the terrain beyond the pale as a locus from which it is impossible to issue political speech. (Ziv, 2010, 545)

In the same vein, the Parisian queer collective Pink Bloc, connecting itself with post-colonial struggles, excludes itself from the French national narrative.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, according to queer discourse, homosexuality in these contexts is not becoming part of the nationalist narrative, as is increasingly the case in other western countries in which ‘homonationalism’ has been theorized. This term is used as a tool to understand “the complexities of how ‘acceptance’ and ‘tolerance’ for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated” (Puar, 2013: 336). As useful as it sounds as an analytical tool to comprehend the complexities of some western nation-states regarding their assumed openness towards homosexual subjects, ‘homonationalism’ meets its limits when it comes to other contexts in which ‘tolerance for gay and lesbian subjects’ is used as a negative ‘barometer’ for national sovereignty to be evaluated, such as we have seen in Greece and Italy.

As I have demonstrated, queer critique in these contexts is not addressed to the state as ‘protector of sexual minorities’, but rather as a categorical refusal of its inherent structure. The Nation-state is seen as accomplice to the perpetuation of hierarchies based on gender and sexuality. As such, queer discourse is partially traced against the Nation-State.

### ***Queering the anti-authoritarian movement: Orthodox Marxism and heterosexism***

One of the most prominent, if not the most prominent, verification of the idea that contemporary queer politics build their discursive space by thinking social relations in a totality framework is the criticism they develop against orthodox Marxist ideas. Usually criticized as compartmentalizing the struggle (or the revolution), gender and sexual struggles within or around the movements have often been regarded with suspicion, if not with hatred.

Austerity measures have been particularly effective in dismantling social welfare affecting the everyday lives of the majority of the population. Queer political discourse is adapting to these macrosocial forms of capital’s regulation by suggesting an exploration of its effects to the “microsocial forms of normativity and discipline” (Floyd, 2009: 35). The discursive space queer groups negotiate aligns thus with the idea that “neoliberalism is not just an economic theory” (Brown, 2012: 1066), but also a form of governmentality that “produces and validates subjects with marketized understandings of the relations between public and private” (Weiss, 2011: 18). This approach seems to offer an alternative

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Fières d’être la honte de la nation’ (Proud to be the Shame of the Nation)  
<http://www.facebook.com/pink.bloc.paris>



economic understanding within the broader movement in which queer groups participate, which, according to them, is dominated by a traditional Marxist approach on class struggle as the primordial and ultimate objective of the movement.

In their intervention in the festival *Communismos* of Thessaloniki's Yfanet squat, in 2011, *QV* presented a paper called 'Who are the communists? Aren't we [she-]communists?', making a queer critique of the simplistic Marxist approach of class prevailing over every other form of domination. It reads:

Marx himself met his limits, when hinting about the moral and cultural elements that define what reproduction means for different workers; *as every reading limited to the purpose of analysis of class relations*. [Gayle] Rubin revealed that for the understanding of these relations, *class analysis is not sufficient*. The kinship systems determine the gender system, the gender system sets up the class. (QVzine, 2011: emphasis added. n.p.)

Critiques against capitalism are integral to *QV's* discourse. According to them, class, gender and sexuality should not be seen as hierarchical but intersected<sup>22</sup>:

The class difference cannot be fixed as the main or primary difference. Not only because this is not supported empirically and analytically - i.e. there is no "principal or primary" difference out of specific social contexts, but also because, even more, this signifies as symbolism, a non-confrontational approach against the existing, a rather reactive confrontational direction, which does not threaten enough neither the capital nor, generally, the order of things, as they are arranged within the framework of liberal capitalist democracy. (QVzine, 2011, n.p.)

Aligning themselves with the multi-evoked slogan in the *Indignados* movements of 2011 'Revolution will be feminist or won't be'<sup>23</sup>, *QV* propose the following:

We estimate that the ideological hegemony of some movements' discourses has excluded other possibilities for identities to be visible, therefore for relationships and struggling communities, which are submitted stereotypically and suffocate in dominant patterns, which are continuously defined by the others, as discourse fields. Those who are installed by the same discursive fields in a more privileged position should be more conscious in how the discourses and the power fields produce them in relation to others to whom they have projected their fears of losing control of their

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22 This approach is not original, but it makes already part of the wider discourses of third-wave feminism, according to which, one form of domination cannot prevail over another (like class over gender, for example).

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.domusweb.it/en/op-ed/15m-and-yes-we-camp-controversy-as-urbanism/>

privileged position. The power is imaginary, it does not exist before the results generated by our internalized institutions. Its effects clearly exist, which are systematically trying to convince us that exist before and outside of us, as long as we have the illusion that we just need to win in order to eliminate these violent effects, without freeing ourselves from these tales of conquest and control (QVzine, 2011).

In other terms, *QV* calls for a radical change of the modes of production, which is a basic Marxist principle. However, they also bring into discussion aspects of identities which are usually disregarded from discourses of the local anti-authoritarian movement, which tends to portray economic issues' importance over other spheres of inequalities, such as gender or sexuality.

*Mov Kafenio* has equally been building upon a totality-thinking critique of capitalism. During the same festival, this feminist group participated with an intervention on the ways gender and sexuality could contribute to the idea of the 'commons' (Fabrika Yfanet, 2011). In their intervention, *Mov Kafenio* tried to link 'enclosures' (borderlines) with capitalism, in order to show the similarities in the processes of fencing a property, whether this is an immaterial good, or a gendered body. Their objective was to:

proceed in formulating a criticism that seeks to illuminate the gendered dimension of fencing, but also issues of gender exclusions from the 'commons'. Inside and near the capitalist enclosures, we recognize processes, mechanisms and reasons, which reinforce the gendered separations. (Fabrika Yfanet, 2011: 204, emphasis added).

Similarly to *QV's* intervention, *Mov Kafenio* activists moved beyond the traditional Marxist critique of the economic prevailing over any other form of oppression:

We do not address the gendered fences *only on economic terms*; therefore, we stand critically against the suggested struggles for housework salary or against the need for women to take the leading role in the collectivization of reproductive labor, in an attempt to retrieve or create the 'commons'. (Fabrika Yfanet, 2011: 210-emphasis added).

The idea that gender relations are not isolated from the development of capitalism in the West is a recurrent issue of analysis for autonomous Marxist feminists who focus on the process of social reproduction as a maintaining force of gendered division of labor, which intersects with racial and class-based dimensions (see Strauss, 2013, for the different conceptualizations of the term). Silvia Federici (2011) has been stressing the idea that "as the primary subjects of reproductive work, historically and in our time, women have depended on access to communal

natural resources more than men and have been most penalized by their privatization and most committed to their defense” (n.p.<sup>24</sup>).

The common ground of *Mov Kafenio* and *QV*'s analysis brings into discussion the abovementioned feminist critiques within Marxism, which in its pure form tends to put economic relations in the very center of each political struggle. Therefore, these distinct perspectives of gender and economy, which bring new insights into the intense socio-political transformations that Greece is facing at the moment, become part of queer groups' attempt to trace their discursive space, by offering an alternative to sexual politics of austerity.

I believe that queer groups' discursive space makes an effort to rejuvenate the Marxian concept of totality which prioritizes class issues by subordinating 'cultural' issues, sexuality and gender included. By advancing such a reflection, queer groups therefore build their discursive space upon a materialist approach which takes into account all kind of hierarchizations that intersect:

Totality thinking is a rigorously negative practice, a practice opposed to the kind of positive imposition of totality of which Marxism has long been accused— an imposition referring, from a Marxian perspective, not to thinking at all but to the objective, enforced social atomization that is capital itself. (Floyd, 2009, 6)

Queer discursive space provides thus a way of imagining a realistic convergence between Marxian and queer accounts of the social - a critique which also takes place during institutional attempts to claim rights, as is the case with Gay Pride.

### ***Institutional support and austerity: the case of Thessaloniki Prides***

During the first gay Pride of Thessaloniki in 2012, a joint statement from two collectives, *Massqueeraids*, and *Sidrofisses* (She-Companions) was distributed in the demonstration. The statement read:

Thessaloniki is another conservative city in which nationalism and racist attacks, as well as masculine, homophobic cultures bloom. Media reproduce and define the patriarchal hierarchies, by reproducing, for example, the model of 'strong male' and 'weak female'. Socially legitimate Anthem-I [the city's Archbishop; they use the plural form in order to stress the numerical diversity of hate speeches] erupt into hate speech. Government agencies are trying to make a buck by selling 'alternativism' and tolerance to diversity, hiding the violent past and present of the city. Public space, occupied by heteronormativity, under the threat of wry glances being able to reach physical violence, limits us in shops whose

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<sup>24</sup><http://www.commoner.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/federici-feminism-and-the-politics-of-commons.pdf>

commercial and cultural character makes them only partially accessible<sup>25</sup>. (Massqueeraid and Sydrofisses [She-companions], 2012, n.p.)

We have already seen that the queer discursive space is built against neoliberalism and its immediate effects on all aspects of social life. Among other aspects, *space* as such becomes a tool of analysis during the austerity years for queer groups. Queer groups imagine a space in which they can “perform an alternative to the commodified gay scene” (Brown, 2007: 2692). According to this idea, neoliberalism makes gay spaces accessible only to those who can afford them. At the same time, some public institutions might try to profit from this ongoing commodification by presenting a gay-friendly profile of the city, thus attracting more “pink dollars” (Jeppesen, 2010: 470).

According to the discourses of local queer groups, Thessaloniki Pride is just another characteristic illustration of how sexual politics are inextricably linked to capitalist transformations, and how sexuality can be used as a commercialized tool by public institutions to help overcome austerity. A closer look at the official videos produced by the organization of Thessaloniki Prides in 2012 and 2013 confirm the above argument. In both videos, we can see that the political discourse of the left is always present, even if it is blended with more mainstream or normative narratives. The video of 2012<sup>26</sup> is a vertiginous editing of several still snap-shots from pride. In a rapidly interweaved slide-show, we watch anarchist-like militants holding the rainbow flag, transsexual and transgender people occupying the city centre, oxygen masks (perhaps in protection from the possibility of tear-gas) coexisting with fancy clothes made of satin. The main slogan is ‘Agápame, íne doreán’ (‘Love me; it is for free’) quite an eloquently humorous allusion to the manifold financial cuts due to the economic crisis. At another instance, we can also read the phrase ‘Mia agápe chília chrómata’ (‘One love a thousand of colours’). The social-democrat mayor Yannis Boutaris appears in several photos, together with the support of other Balkan gay prides such as that in Sofia. In a funny way, the whole city is painted in the rainbow colours, and this is also the case of the city's more emblematic monument, the so-called “White Tower”, which was a prison and locus of torture in the recent Ottoman past, consequently called “Red Tower” or “Tower of the Blood”. In the video, this stereotypic touristic attraction becomes temporarily painted in the rainbow colours, while at the end, it is supernaturally decomposed into four pieces, giving us the impression of an opening.

At the same time, this sort of commercialization of Prides opens space for queer activists to produce and reinvent their discourses by taking into serious consideration this austerity turn and touristic performativity of a supposedly

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<sup>25</sup> Flyer distributed during the 2012 Thessaloniki Pride  
<sup>26</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ae3EeUDN4\\_Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ae3EeUDN4_Y)

politicized demonstration. This is clearly evident in a flyer in which local authorities are portrayed as contributors for the promotion of a creative, multicultural image of Thessaloniki, far away from its historic past. This criticism is mainly addressed to Thessaloniki's mayor Boutaris, whose own support has contributed to the establishment of the Pride festival in town. In two tracts distributed during the Thessaloniki Pride of 2012, we read that "Boutaris, your gay [economic] growth smells homophobia" (Massqueeraid, 2012) and 'We don't want growth of gay economy. We want suppression of homophobia' (Massqueeraid, 2012)<sup>27, 28</sup>. The abovementioned extracts should be read as moving against the idea of state authority and other public institutions, such as local administrations, as the watchdogs of LGBT rights.

In another part of the statement, *Massqueeraid* activists say:

We recognize that an organization for the promotion of homosexuality in a city that does not tolerate it is always important. At the same time, however, it seems at least contradictory to us that one [Gay] Pride asks for institutional support and protection from the forces of repression [police]. We choose to build community relations, self-organized, anti-commercial spaces with anti-hierarchical structures where social antagonisms fight alongside. (Massqueeraid, 2012)

This statement indicates that the influence of austerity can also be found in the institutionally supported Gay Pride. The identity-oriented LGBT movement is thus accused of cooperating with state authorities in order to promote its 'gay rights' agenda. This is not a new critique from queer groups to the LGBT movement. In the very first texts of the *QV* zine, back in 2004, Athenian queer activists had presented themselves very clearly: "We started talking about gender and sexuality in a political way. [...] We decided to talk about things which concern us directly. And not about *marriages, adoptions, and gay Pride carnivals*" (*QVzine*, 2004, 1 - emphasis added)<sup>29</sup>.

Hence, Athenian queer discourse has a foundational discursive and tactical disagreement with the mainstream LGBT movement. It seems that queer groups take distances from the traditional claims of the gay movement (gay marriage, adoption), which are usually addressed inside gay Prides. The 'queer' objection should be located in the Prides' focus on the celebration of 'gay identity', and the lack of politicization of the construction of this identity<sup>30</sup>. Thus, both *QV* and *Massqueeraid* address the traditional, by now, queer critiques against the identity-

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<sup>27</sup> <https://massqueerraid.wordpress.com/2012/06/>

<sup>28</sup> This critique reminds us of the critiques on 'pink dollar' strategies of neoliberal policies steeping gay spaces in commerce (Jeppesen, 2010: 470).

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.qvzine.net/images/eikones/diafora/volume1.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> The 'europeanized' Athens Pride started in 2005. There had been, however, gay Prides before with a less national, international visibility and recognition.

oriented character of the Prides, seen as part of the establishment of normalized political claims.

Queer groups' discourses openly address issues of austerity by linking neoliberal ideology with public space and LGBT rights. By illustrating the case of Thessaloniki's Gay Pride, I demonstrated how queer groups see this political mobilization as an attempt of the local administration to build a multicultural image of the city, hiding its ambition of attracting 'pink dollars', and thus suggesting an alternative understanding to sexual politics of austerity.

Queer groups take a critical stance against the way a political struggle, as it should be according to them, takes the characteristics of a commercialized fiesta. Gay Prides in Thessaloniki seems to have been adopted by the local authorities in order to portray Thessaloniki as a multicultural, creative city. Its significance however is not denied. Perceiving austerity implementation as a way for heteronormativity to perpetuate gender and sexual hierarchies, emerging from the crisis more reinforced, encourages queer groups to diffuse their criticisms within Gay Prides, and not just out of them. The attempt to trace an autonomous queer discursive space stands critically against the admittedly precarious LGBT movement in Greece.

## Conclusion

During the empirical unfolding of this article, it became clear that queer groups do not see austerity implementation as a one-dimensional process affecting uniquely the economic status of sexual dissidents. They rather present an understanding of austerity as an enlarged process affecting multiple spheres of social existence with localized characteristics. Without being deterministic, but rather open to neoliberalism's 'exception', seen as the "logic of governing that migrates and is selectively taken up in diverse political contexts" (Ong, 2007, 3), 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.

By locating austerity's effects on different aspects of social and cultural life, queer groups attach to a "totality thinking" (Floyd, 2009). The rise of the far-right and the use of its rhetoric in the public sphere are for instance two effects of austerity implementation in Greece after 2010 according to the activists. Moreover, the implementation of Gay Prides as safeguards of an identity-politics paradigm is also seen as part of the whole neo-liberalization process of rights-attribution to specific minorities, aligning with Duggan's idea of "the sexual politics of neoliberalism" (2002). The analysis drew upon material published and posted by the main queer collectives acting inside the anti-authoritarian scenes of Athens and Thessaloniki, while some indications of their actions on ground, such as Gay Prides and central neighborhoods, were also provided.

The queer autonomous discourse is built in relation to different and multiple fronts. Critical of the heterosexism within broader anti-authoritarian movements

and the left, queer groups produce a discourse which differentiates them from institutional LGBT politics, as they are usually expressed through Gay Prides. Moreover, antifascism is increasingly turning into a crucial component of queer discourse, especially after the institutionalization of Golden Dawn. They differentiate, however, fascism and homophobia, by extending the scope of the latter beyond the limits of Golden Dawn. Spatially, queers become visible within urban spaces through posters, and banners. Moreover, a certain trend to distribute written statements in the streets and within Gay Prides can be also observed, increasing the potential for queer discourse to intervene in these spaces.

It becomes clear that these queer discursive spaces stay away from the mainstream 'public sphere'. They are rather part of counterpublic discourses, which repoliticize sexual and gender identities through an 'in-your-face' tactic. Celebration of their marginality is part of their playful repertoire (Shepard, 2010). By bringing queer visibility within both the anti-authoritarian movement and the mainstream public life, they claim an autonomous space in which they do not compromise with any state or other institutional support; thus, "social and political alternatives become thinkable again" (Brown, 2007: 2696). Aligning with a 'totality thinking', queer groups develop a criticism which views sexuality as intersecting with, not isolated from, other social processes. Embedded in their anti-authoritarian scenes, queer discourses seem to be aware of the interconnections between capital's crisis, austerity implementation and the establishment of Golden Dawn in public life. Beyond the autonomous discourse they attempt to trace, queer activists in Greece are equally present in public spaces. With their interventions, they attempt to repoliticize, giving a new flavor to the ravaged from the crisis urban space.

Returning to the questions posed in the beginning, can queer critique address the dismantlement of the welfare? In other words, have queer groups in austerity Greece managed to build an autonomous discourse, crystal clear and coherent? It is too early to say. What becomes obvious, however, is that queer groups adapt very quickly to the new configurations of the political, social and cultural landscapes as they are reshaped by the implementation of austerity measures and become visible through its effects. Their success might be located in the fact that they develop a multi-dimensional critique against several fronts: traditional Marxism, identity-politics, and neoliberalism, while with their practices, they challenge the heteronormativity of public space by advancing confrontational repertoires of style. At the same time, this multi-dimensional discourse has its limits. In their attempt to link a multitude of intersecting issues, queer discourse can create counter-narratives which do not adequately address the pressing social reality of marginalized groups, thus leaving aside the material needs other populations face. Thus, the counter-practices of queer groups must be aware of the potential to compromise their larger goals by inducing a reactionary backlash within the LGBT and anti-authoritarian scenes.

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