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# Democracy and Greece-in-crisis

## Contesting masculinities take center stage

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*Alexandra Halkià\**

Abstract: The economic crisis impoverishes millions of people who live in Greece and favors processes of cultural expropriation, and seems to threaten the concepts of gender and national masculinity. The essay tries to reconstruct these dynamics through analysis of media coverage of two recent stories occurred in Greece, the detainment of dozens of women, alleged foreign prostitutes, who were photographed and forcibly subjected to health measures by the police and, secondly, the murder of rap singer Pavlos Fyssas by a member of the Golden Dawn far-right party.

As people living in Greece are racked by the varied on-going costs of the 2010 bail-out plan, the mass media landscape has riveted popular opinion on several stories that seem to have nothing at all to do with the recession. Yet, some of these news stories have everything to do with the current social and political context, not the least part of which is the recession. Gender, moreover, ostensibly invisible in much of this, is nonetheless omnipresent, in its most sexist forms, and constitutes privileged ground for the expression and management of profound trouble at the level of the national imaginary. The net effect, finally, of critical consideration of these news stories, within the specific geo-political context, is that of a keen sense of disorientation and, increasingly, dispossession.

Here I sketch an analysis of two such stories in order to both document and further develop the argument concerning an integral link between ‘the crisis’ and gender, or, more specifically, contestation in the field of hegemonic masculinities. In so doing, an account is also put forward of the social and cultural processes of dispossession and exclusion that the recession in Greece is accelerating. The one incident I focus analysis on involves the April 2012 detainment of dozens of women, alleged prostitutes, alleged non-nationals, who were photographed and forcibly tested for HIV on police premises. If found positive for HIV, by the snap test performed, their photos were then publicized on the official website of the Greek police and on all evening news channels. The second event considered is

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\*Alexandra Halkià is Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Panteion University, Athens, Greece. [halkiasa@otenet.gr](mailto:halkiasa@otenet.gr). Many thanks to Nikos Kotaridis for comments on aspects of the analysis and to Giannis Gkolfinopoulos for important feedback on the main argument. Also I thank Anna Giulia Della Puppa for the invitation to contribute to this special issue, and for the encouragement to develop a piece specifically relating to my current work on masculinities and crisis.

that of the murder of Pavlos Fyssas, a rap singer, by a man who is a member of the Golden Dawn far-right party. This murder took place a little over one year later, on September 17 2013.

The media coverage concerning each of these two incidents can be seen as discrete “episodes” in a larger series which showcases the current quandary of national prowess. It also seems to provide cultural ground for a working through of an underlying crisis at the site of nationally situated hegemonic masculinities.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, I suggest, it is this crisis that helps to account for social phenomena such as both the steady on-going popularity of the far right party Golden Dawn and the state’s eventual decision to arrest a large number of the party’s delegates in Parliament.<sup>2</sup> It is also these same social phenomena which are conducive to the stark realization of a profound form of cultural dispossession taking place, alongside the material dispossession affecting the lives of the millions of people living in Greece who are witnessing abrupt and severe impoverization.

### The Fyssas murder

Starting with the latter event first, Pavlos Fyssas, 34 years old, was stabbed to death by a member of the Golden Dawn neo-nazi party just a short way from the neighborhood café he and his girlfriend had been sitting in that evening in the working class Keratsini area of the port of Piraeus near Athens. After his murder, the evening news of that day, and for several days after, was saturated with coverage of different aspects of this event. Air time was flooded with audio and visual material: photographs of the scene, though not of the body; interviews with witnesses, with the girlfriend and with the father of the victim; detective-type coverage of the man who killed Fyssas and that person’s ties to the leadership of the Golden Dawn party; later also much attention and photographs of the one female police officer involved in responding to a call from the scene.<sup>3</sup> Almost three

<sup>1</sup> I am drawing from R.W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the concept”, *Gender and Society* 19 (2005): 848. Also important to the analysis I put forward here are specific studies of masculinities in disparate cultural texts and contexts. For some important examples of this strand of work, see Robert Hanke (1992), “Redesigning Me: Hegemonic masculinity in transition”, *Men, Masculinity, and Media*, ed. Steve Craig (Newbury Park, California: Sage): 185-98; Susan Jeffords (1989), *Remasculinization of America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) and David Savran (1998), *Taking it like a man: White masculinity, masochism, and contemporary American culture* (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press): 9.

<sup>2</sup> In thus suggesting, I follow the case made by Nagel (1998:243) that “If nations and states are indeed gendered institutions as much recent scholarship asserts, then to limit the examination of gender in politics to an investigation of women only, misses a major, perhaps the major way in which gender shapes politics – through men and their interests, their notions of manliness, and masculine micro and macro cultures”.

<sup>3</sup> An article headed by a picture of a young woman and titled “Police officer with the Dias Special Force: This is the beautiful Angeliki who handcuffed the murderer of Pavlos Fyssas” did the rounds of internet news media outlets (see *Imerisia*, September 23 2013, <http://www.imerisia.gr/article.asp?catid=27734&subid=2&pubid=113116453> ) The police officer is described as follows: “Born in 1989 in Nikaia, the neighborhood of P. Fyssas. She is young and modern, like all the girls of her age. However, when other women are doing “shopping” at the stores, Angeliki patrols the streets of Athens”.

years into the ECB-IMF-EC bail-out plan for Greece, the Fyssas murder coverage was a major spike on the screen of daily coverage of “austerity measures as usual.”

A rap singer known as “Killah P,” Fyssas wrote lyrics that chastised the establishment for throwing talented youth to the wayside of Greek society. His lyrics specifically avoided many of the nationalist phrases or symbols popular in Greek rap. Indeed, in some instances, the lyrics Fyssas wrote openly take issue with nationalist positions that are also popular with Golden Dawn members and supporters.<sup>4</sup> He was not a member of any political organization, whether left or anarchist, but he was outspoken against nationalism and the far right neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn. The man who killed him, Yiorgos Roupakias, is a member of the Golden Dawn party and news reports subsequently revealed that he had received ‘approval’ to commit this murder from leadership of Golden Dawn, including the head of the party and other members of parliament.

Even now, just over a year later, it is striking how unreal these developments are. No doubt, to certain enclaves of Greek society, and to people living almost anywhere else, a development such as the Fyssas murder is not that surprising, despite stereotypes of Greece as “the cradle of democracy.” While Greece’s history of resistance towards the Nazi occupation, and, subsequently, towards several far right dictatorial regimes, is fairly well known, international media coverage of Greece in recent years has largely followed a theme of the country as a hotbed of more unruly unrest. This can be seen as originating with the riots following the December 2008 police murder of 16 yr. old Alex Grigoropoulos in the anarchist area of Exarchia, well before May 2010 when the bail-out plan was signed and a series of other protests took place. For some, thus, a certain vantage point of distance, social, economic or geographic, might make the Fyssas murder seem more intelligible within this context. In general, dominant narratives shaping the coverage of the Greek financial crisis in global media such as the New York Times, Washington Post, London Times and CNN work to portray Greece as a nation in a way that largely positions the country as the juvenile delinquent of the European Community “family”. On good days, the country is portrayed as a teenager that is nonetheless contrite and worthy of patience as it is trying its best to make amends.

That a few months after the Fyssas murder, two more men were murdered, this time two low-ranking members of Golden Dawn, and that they were shot at short range by two unidentified men who arrived in front of the Nikaia area Athenian offices of the party by motorcycle, with these murders being claimed eventually as retaliatory actions of an organization called something like Combatitive Popular Revolutionary Forces, is yet another turn, I suggest, in the realm of the heretofore impossible.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, in one song he wrote “The world has become a big prison and I am looking for a way to break the chains.” In another “I saw pimps peddling my dreams,” or “I saw my country being flooded by lackeys”. Perhaps most simply he wrote and sang “My name is Pavlos Fyssas from Peiraus. [I am a] Greek with everything that entails – not a flag, not a blackshirted offspring of Achilles and Karaiskaki...”. For a description of his work, see <http://roarmag.org/2013/09/pavlos-fyssas-killah-p-lyrics/>

### African prostitutes vs. “the Greek family”

The earlier incident, preceding the Fyssas murder, involving the women detained and tested positive for HIV on police premises (“oi orothetikes” as they were called), might have signaled something serious was happening at the level of political culture. Perhaps the police operation to locate, detain and forcibly test for HIV, along with the subsequent state-sponsored public “shaming” program, officially justified as mandatory in the name of “the protection of public health”, via the overnight national broadcast of headshots of the women who tested positive, might have signaled a certain danger. Indeed it did for some of us; for some analysts, academic and/or activist. However, it seems most took no notice. One important exception was the firm, if limited, resistance put forward by a loose coalition of feminists; mostly leftist, with some anti-authoritarian and anarchist women, called Initiative for Solidarity for the Prosecuted HIV Positive Women.<sup>5</sup> Yet, for this coalition too, concern was mainly articulated specifically in terms of the violation of the rights of these women. This was also the focus of a press release later issued by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality.<sup>6</sup>

Before the events involving the Fyssas murder, and then the subsequent double murder of the two Golden Dawn members, there had been other important spikes in what the media in Greece covered and how. Of these, the ‘HIV positive women’ story stands out. The “orothetikes” story in effect began to unfold in late 2011 and culminates with the police operation in April 2012, shortly before the national elections of May 6 2012.

In December of 2011 the Minister of Health, Andreas Loverdos, announced the presence of a “public health bomb” in the center of Athens – immigrant prostitutes who are HIV-positive.<sup>7</sup> Having just cut the capacity of public hospitals by a third, the Minister made a startling announcement. He unabashedly stated that undeclared prostitution is one of the biggest risks “to the Greek family” because of its relation to “the transmission of AIDS”(sic). As protagonists of this prostitution, he singled out “the juvenile African girls who work as prostitutes and are HIV positive”. The Minister’s comments concluded quite simply; he stated that “all women carriers should be deported”. The Minister explained during the press conference that transmission occurs “from the illegal female migrant to the Greek client, and on to the Greek family”. The problem, in this context, is quite clearly “the illegal female migrant,” by definition here a prostitute. That something might be deeply wrong with “the Greek family” and/or “the Greek client,” who, by definition, apparently

<sup>5</sup> The coalition formed a website to inform the public of developments concerning the women arrested. <https://diokomenesorothetikes.wordpress.com/2012/10/page/2/>

<sup>6</sup> For the text of the press release by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality, see <https://diokomenesorothetikes.wordpress.com/2012/10/17/%CE%B4%CE%B5%CE%BB%CF%84%CE%AF%CE%BF-%CF%84%CF%8D%CF%80%CE%BF%CF%85-%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%82-%CE%B3%CE%B5%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AE%CF%82-%CE%B3%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%BC%CE%BC%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%B1%CF%82/>

<sup>7</sup> See Hadzigeorgiou, Aris and Vergou, Dani, “Deport prostitute carriers of AIDS,” *Eleftherotypia*, December 16, 2011.

is both married and a father, or with the nationalist heteronormative matrix producing these subjects, is clearly beyond the scope of this frame.

The subsequent April 2012 round-up and detention of over 100 women assumed to be prostitutes resulted in the eventual arrest of 26 who tested positive for HIV on police premises, without always granting their consent, and certainly having received no counseling or any other form of information relevant to the testing process for HIV.<sup>8</sup> At least some, apparently, were not informed that the blood was being taken for HIV testing. The arrests resulted in the eventual imprisonment of the 26 women and, perhaps most remarkable, the national publication of face shots of a total of 29 women found to be positive for the HIV virus.<sup>9</sup> Most of these women, as it turned out, were drug users and Greek nationals.

Along with the immediate publicity of photographs of their faces – on the main evening news reports, in the press and on the official website of the Greek Police – the Ministry of Health, Loverdos, and the Ministry for the Protection of the Citizen, Chrysochoidis, issued a public announcement inviting all men who thought they might have used these women’s services to call a specific phone number and arrange for free, fully confidential, HIV testing. That part of the evening news coverage of the police operation conducted under the auspices of the two Ministries, Health and Public Order, included the national broadcast of the face-shots of several of the women arrested is an important part of this story. The photos were publicized in the name of protecting “public health”, in full opposition to both international and national guidelines concerning HIV testing, on the basis of an article of Greek law that had been re-activated just a few months before and with the stated objective of alerting clients who may have used their services as prostitutes that their health is at risk. This use of the photographs of the women detained stands in stark counterpoint to the public invitation issued to possible clients, via the evening news, asking them to come forward for complimentary HIV testing that is promised to be fully confidential.

This story of bad black girls and good white men, who are their “clients,” and who dutifully “go home” to the sacrosanct realms of “the Greek family,” and are being politely asked by the state to come forward for a testing process that is quite different from that which the women detained underwent, marks and offers up a good scapegoat to a “native” population suffering from the psychological, financial (and sexual?) effects of circumscribed sovereignty and debilitating “austerity measures.” What is perhaps most interesting here, along with the obvious sexist

<sup>8</sup> See *The Lancet*, for a formal account of the basic facts of this police operation Volume 382, Issue 9887, pg. 102, July 13 2013. <http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736%2813%2961546-9/fulltext?rss=yes>

<sup>9</sup> The national publication of the pictures of the women who tested positive for HIV was one part of a process of detainment and testing that was flagrantly in opposition to all national and international guidelines. For more on what transpired, see the account of the doctor of the Initiative, July 9 2012, <http://www.matrix24.gr/2012/07/%CE%BA%CE%B9%CE%BD%CE%B4%CF%85%CE%BD%CE%B5%CF%85%CE%B5%CE%B9-%CE%B7-%CF%85%CE%B3%CE%B5%CE%B9%CE%B1-%CF%84%CF%89%CE%BD-%CF%86%CF%85%CE%BB%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%B9%CF%83%CE%BC%CE%B5%CE%BD%CF%89%CE%BD-%CE%BF/>

discrimination at play in how the right to confidentiality for medical information is protected, is the way with which the discursive terrain involving a longstanding pronouncedly racist inscription of migrants in general is being redeployed here in the service of new national anxieties – those related to the unfolding demise of one version of the paternalistic nation-state, all-knowing and powerful, and the tandem fears and desires provoked by a fraught nation-building project of “change for salvation”. The usefulness of concerns regarding “public health” to this new political terrain is made clear by the fact of the second reinstatement, in July of 2013 now, of the specific article of law that Loverdos had himself reinstated shortly before mounting the police operation against “HIV positive women (prostitutes)” in April of 2012.<sup>10</sup> The article was rescinded shortly after its use for this operation in response to criticism from international agencies including the Helsinki Monitor and Doctors without Borders. Yet, one year later, the new Minister of Health, Georgiadis, saw to its reinstatement yet again.

That the prime austerity measures Minister of Health Loverdos pronounced adolescent migrant women working as prostitutes “the main enemy” of the Greek family, even as he proceeded to shut down clinics and slash the budget of many hospitals, and, also, that the Police promptly published and released to the media photographs of the faces of HIV-positive women working as prostitutes in 2012, even if most of them inconveniently ended up being Greek, all demonstrate the desperate tenacity of identities that are, to all effects in the Greece of three years into the bail-out program, quite dead. Migrant female bodies emerge as fertile territory for a struggle to regain supremacy on the part of largely extinct versions of Greekness, and of hegemonic masculinity. While financial and political disaster clearly opens up space for new gender-race formations, and alliances, both the Fyssa murder and the “HIV positive women” events show quite starkly that these developments easily move in directions reproducing the very conditions that breed such disasters in the first place.

### **Golden Dawn as contender**

In fact, a few months later, another previously unimaginable event occurred demonstrating just this. The neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn won 6.92% of votes in the repeat national elections of 17 June 2012 and thus entered parliament. Even then, with numerous violent incidents involving the stabbings of migrants by GD members beginning to get national media coverage, and with blatant media greed

<sup>10</sup> According to the Greek news outlet *ENET* (July 8 2013) the new Minister of Health, Adonis Georgiadis promptly yet again reinstated the article of law on which was based the police operation of detainment and forced HIV testing of women allegedly working as prostitutes <http://www.enet.gr/?i=issue.el.home&date=08/07/2013&id=373554>. The article had been rescinded after various international agencies announced it was in violation of basic human rights protected by international treaties. See for example *Amnesty International* July 19 2013 <http://www.amnesty.org.gr/11061>. The article in effect authorizes law enforcement officers to detain individuals suspected of being HIV-positive. For more analysis of the effects of the law, see [http://www.edgeonthenet.com/health\\_fitness/hiv\\_aids/148066/greek\\_health\\_minister\\_institutes\\_mandatory\\_hiv\\_testing](http://www.edgeonthenet.com/health_fitness/hiv_aids/148066/greek_health_minister_institutes_mandatory_hiv_testing)

in covering the spectacle of the macho masculinity GD party members exhibited even when sitting in parliament, complete with black sunglasses worn indoors and pronounced cursing and gesticulating, the possibility that a Greek could be killed by GD because of his or her anti-nationalist positions was largely not conceivable. While the Golden Dawn election result itself was deemed remarkable and shockingly surprising by most mainstream media commentaries on the national elections, the possibility of the murder of Fyssas, or someone like him, remained nowhere on the horizon as short a while ago as June 2012.

Golden Dawn, founded in the early 80s, became increasingly visible, and active, during the last three years of Greece's entry into the bail-out plan. As the middle class crumbles rapidly under the pressure of a battery of neo-liberal measures amply portrayed in local mainstream coverage as a form of obligatory sacrifice on the part of Greeks towards the nation's creditors, as pensioners who have paid for their pensions face a series of drastic cuts in their monthly checks and as one of the two political parties representing this segment of Greek society during the last decade, the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), abruptly lost almost all ground, the reemergence of a pre-existing deep racism, and nationalism, made tangible in the waving flags of the purportedly democratic resistance of the national 'squares' movement (aka aspects of the Occupy Wall Street move), along with a pronounced delegitimatization of the established regime of normality, resulted in the consolidation of a fully nationalist and racist political force. Indeed, after a quick fall in support, after the murder of Fyssas, polls showed that support for GD remained steady. A week before the murder, a poll by Public Issue reported 6,5% in favor of Golden Dawn. At present, despite the fact that almost all delegates of the Golden Dawn party have since been arrested and found guilty of charges of participating in a criminal organization, polls give a steady 6% of support.<sup>11</sup>

A few years earlier, the uprising of December 2008 racked not only Athens but Greece, also gaining ample air time in the international mass media. One interpretation of how Golden Dawn gained footing is that the state backed its development as an answer to the December 2008 political crisis. Charged coverage of Golden Dawn activities work as a way to both disorient, and rein in, a tangible source of resistance to the pre austerity-measures crisis slowly showing its teeth. As this crisis progressed, along with the neo-liberal technological bundle of "austerity measures" brought in once the bail-out was granted, in the unstable ground of not enough jobs, not enough subsidized daycare positions, sharply constricted public health services, indeed of more and more nationals not having enough to eat, Golden Dawn took a stand that offers clarity, easy scapegoats, and a version of stability. For a while, this platform was one the government and the state apparatus appeared happy to accommodate.

In various ways, both state and mainstream media backed up this GD activity. That this was done, I argue, can be accounted for by two elements – one) a certain underlying ideological kinship between the 'moderately right' New Democracy

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<sup>11</sup> On December 10 2014 the financial newspaper *Naftemporiki* published the results of a recent poll by the reputable poll company ALCO. Syriza is at 31% and New Democracy at 25,7%, Golden Dawn appears as having 6%.

government and the openly far-right Golden Dawn party and two) the efficiency with which GD seemed to narrow the focus of the energies and attention of a more broadly anti-establishment movement of resistance, which had coagulated with the December 2008 events. Wide-scale publicity of Golden Dawn activities, rhetoric and mere presence, in effect works as a way of managing the left and far left threat that had in fact first showed its face in the riots after the murder of 15 yr. old Alexandros Grigoropoulos by the police in the neighborhood of Exarhia. Thus, for example, the pogrom of migrants by 1000 individuals walking the streets of the downtown Athens area of Ioulianou in May 2011 won a significant slice of mainstream news coverage.

Overall, the primary domain of GD visibility in the mass media consists of the random and targeted stabbings of migrants. Little mainstream coverage was granted to several disparately violent homophobic incidents which occurred in different areas of Athens.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, in the months following their election into parliament, the national evening news also gave disproportionately ample air time to visuals and video material of the demonstrative presence of the 17 male and one female Golden Dawn delegates within parliament. The presence displayed in this footage is usually laced with verbal explosions and physical displays of contempt. Yet, throughout all this, the possibility that a Greek national who is not gay would become a target of direct violence seems to have remained firmly beyond the realm of the intelligible. In part, I suggest, this is due to the pervasiveness of a certain ethnocentric nationalist presupposition across the political spectrum. In part, too, I argue, due to the usefulness of Golden Dawn as a distraction to left, and far left, forces of resistance that had made their growing strength known starting with December 2008.

### **The New Democracy state mechanism trumps Golden Dawn**

But when massive protest marches took place in several cities in Greece, especially by the far left and anarchist movements, expressing full opposition to any and all forces responsible for the death of Fyssas, in September 2013, and, when, about the same time, polls for the GD candidate for mayor, Kasidiaris, showed that his popularity was formidable, the state took pause. After a couple of days of silence and uneven coverage on the evening news, a new story broke out: in a remarkably professional police operation, reported on with great detail, 22 members, leaders or followers of Golden Dawn were arrested.<sup>13</sup> Overnight, the state did an about-face. Government and law enforcement changed tactics and flipped from complacency or complicity to a remarkably efficient and surprisingly polished performance of combating fascism and “protecting democracy.”

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<sup>12</sup> For example, at the theater Hitiri, in the Gazi area of downtown Athens, where the play *Corpus Christi* shows the character of Christ as having homoerotic relationships, GD members staged vocal protests and harassed people arriving to see the play to the point that the theater decided to stop performances.

<sup>13</sup> A detailed chronological report of these arrests is presented in the newspaper *To Vema*, 28 September 2013, <http://www.tovima.gr/politics/article/?aid=532327>

The sudden attack on Golden Dawn, now formally deemed a “criminal organization,” was presented replete with visuals of the Leader of the Party and parliamentary delegate Nikos Michaloliakos, a short stout man, being escorted to prison with his hands in handcuffs poorly camouflaged by a posture of carrying a briefcase in front of his crotch, and his daughter by his side. Tall and muscular hooded anti-terrorist officers bustled him into the Police Headquarters building. Stern public announcements from the Minister of Public Order and Protection of the Citizen Nikos Dendias were broadcast on all channels.<sup>14</sup> While pressure from creditor nations such as Germany, with its own ghosts to battle with, may or may not have played a role in this development, the fact remains that the national imaginary suddenly acquired new subject matter and news media initiated a full-blown narrative concerning the efficacy of the state, otherwise stumbling, in combating the far right neo-Nazi party actually in Parliament; all apparently as a result of GD implication in the murder of Fyssas. Any sense of the government’s implication in creating the conditions within which the Fyssas murder became possible was quickly and effectively eradicated. So too, in one fell swoop, any possibility of Golden Dawn gaining more ground as a real, and formidable, contender for political power.

### **Trouble ahead**

In this piece I sketch moments in recent Greek news coverage that put together work to signal something I suggest is an exceptionally worrying development in the political culture of which the media are quite firmly a part in Greece. This development in effect produces a category of subjects that partially match the criteria of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the sense that, while they are not physically dislocated from their homes, the political culture in which they live is changing in dramatic and violent ways.<sup>15</sup> While gender does not purport to be a part of all this at all, I argue that in fact it constitutes a key element in the explosive mixture that is brewing in this specific geo-political context. Put simply, the recession in Greece, along with the severe austerity measures portrayed as rational and understandable expectations of the nation’s creditors, are being converted into fertile ground for the working through, or at least the playing out, of another serious social conflict, – that of combating versions of masculinity. A Europeanized ‘modern’ masculinity gone away by virtue of the abrupt disappearance of its key props, such as employment, adequate pay, and ‘belonging’

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<sup>14</sup> As published on the site of the Ministry this statement reads “The rule of law has enforces legality towards all. The state rose to the occasion and performed its democratic duty in full. I assure Greek society that the investigation does not stop here. By order of the Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, it will continue in every direction and it will be completed.” This, and much of what follows, was broadcast live by the main evening news broadcasts on September 28, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> In a powerful exposition of how this category of dispossessed people are understudied, Selshadri, notes that “the category of the IDP is not descriptive in some simple sense, but is constitutive of an identity that serves mainly to reinforce sovereignty’s capacity to depoliticize”. Kalpana Rahita Selshadri, “When Home is a Camp. Global Sovereignty, Biopolitics and Internally Displaced Persons” in *Social Text*, vol. 26, 2006, 1, p. 33

to a state that enjoys national sovereignty vs. a newer masculinity, that simultaneously grants an older one space for gaining a certain form of revenge, and which seeks to resurrect former, more blatantly racist, versions of nationhood as a way to fill the void created by the masculinity-weakening effects of the recession. On this stage, the state emerges as a key player, striving to craft a masculinity that trumps both the GD version, and the December 2008 formidable assemblage, while developing mastery in the performatively rational, “civilized” and yet more modernized masculinity rewarded by creditor nations. Indeed, the specific performative display of the police operations leading up to, and including, the arrest of the Golden Dawn parliamentary delegates, and other members of the party, replete with ample mention of a sophisticated blend of technological policing and genetic forensics methods, does the cultural work of fundamentally slighting both GD versions of a more primitive, proto-nationalist masculinity, and the far left and anarchist collectively mobilized grassroots, and firmly co-ed we must note, resistant counter-hegemonic masculinities.

While there are many signs on the horizon that this struggle is not over; signs that signal something dangerous is taking place, the ‘HIV positive women’ police operation and the Fyssas murder are perhaps the two pieces in an unfolding mosaic that are most direct. Part of what is stunning is the speed with which the cultural and political ground of a geo-political entity called “nation” can change. The other part is the content of the change: a marked and pronounced increase in explicitly political violence. That one of the women found to be HIV positive in the spring of 2012, and whose picture was publicized, chose to commit suicide in December 2014 underlines this.

Even just a few years ago, the possibility that the main television news channels’ prime evening news shows would be playing stories such as the two considered above was not conceivable. Analysis of these two events provides ground for examining how an on-going larger story concerning Greece-in-crisis, and a form of national prowess which is lost and needs to be regained, is being fueled by potentially explosive contestation in the minefield of hegemonic masculinity at the present historical moment. Dominant, fossilized, formations of human subjectivity and of the nation-state are presently undergoing a serious crisis in Greece, as elsewhere certainly, and the preceding suggests that part of what we are witnessing is their tenacious effort to reassert themselves. The radical transformation of political culture taking place results in a marked feeling of dispossession in terms of what was heretofore considered beyond the pale for a liberal democracy, even if already recognized as only partially functional, and what is rapidly being normalized as a part of everyday social and political life. Indeed, the current developments in national politics, in which the country appears to be heading for national elections yet again, and now the left-wing party Syriza is the main contender for the power to rule, should not serve to assuage concern on this score.