

# KNOWLEDGE FROM BELOW:

A ROUNDTABLE CONVERSATION WITH THE  
CO-DIRECTORS OF THE FEMINIST AUTONOMOUS  
CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN ATHENS

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*with* MYRTO TSILIMPOUNIDI  
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The Feminist Autonomous Centre for Research (FAC Research) in Athens, Greece is a self-described “space for learning, reflection, collaboration, support, exchange, knowledge production, political interventions, and trouble-making.”<sup>i</sup> Emerging from an open discussion among a group of academics, activists, and artists, the project materialized into a physical space in the fall of 2019. Its rooms now occupy the ground-floor apartment of a neoclassical building on a quiet side street off the Church of Saint Panteleimon, the largest church in Greece and namesake of the surrounding neighborhood, whose overbearing presence is forcefully asserted by the sound of its droning bells—a sound that also punctured the following conversation.

This roundtable conversation with four of the five co-directors of

FAC Research—Anna Carastathis, Aila Spathopoulou, Penny Travlou, and Myrto Tsilimpoundi—unfolded against a complex assemblage of events and emergencies, many of which remain urgent at the time of publication of this issue of *Barricade*.<sup>ii</sup> In the early days of March, when we gathered at the center to speak about the stakes of feminist and queer politics in Athens, feminists were mobilizing against the violent escalations playing out at the Greek–Turkish border, a new iteration of the so-called refugee crisis for which Greece has long been the European epicenter. Our conversation concluded when it was time for everyone involved to make their way to Syntagma Square for a “Feminism against fascism” protest and performance. The sense of solidarity and anger that brought several hundred protesters to the streets that evening

i. FAC Research, “Our CV,” <https://feministresearch.org/our-cv/>.

ii. The fifth co-director, Carmen Zografou, was unable to join the conversation due to a work deadline but took part in the process of collaborative editing that the text underwent.

also carried over into the third Athenian International Women's Day celebration at the end of that same week, an event centered around expressions of solidarity with migrant and refugee struggles and demands against gendered violence. Shortly after the March 8 protest, prompted by the rapidly escalating global coronavirus pandemic, Greece, like other European countries, entered into a period of institutional lockdown, completely shifting the terrain and conditions of political activism.

In this space of disruption, FAC Research, along with other institutions and collectives in Athens, has been recalibrating its work and presence in the city along a feminist politics of care: opening up space to collectively think through the political implications raised by the state of government-mandated quarantine, rehearsing forms of protest beyond physical proximity, and building new networks of social solidarity based on mutual aid.

In a statement from March 16, they offer: "Solidarity with our friends with compromised immune systems. Solidarity with all people who don't have a home in which to 'stay home,' or for whom 'home' is not a safe place. Solidarity with people trying to survive in camps, detention centers, and prisons. Solidarity with people all over the world whose lives are seen as disposable."

Weaving together several registers of critique—of academic institutions, regimes of knowledge production, leftist activism, borders—and forms of embodied practice—feminist pedagogies, performative repertoires of protest, modes of appropriating urban space, approaches to translation—this conversation speaks to crises both current and historical, local and transnational, discursive and material, tracing the contours of a feminist project grounded in knowledge from below and aimed at "unleashing our collective ca-

pacities for creativity, resistance, and care”—a project that is all the more urgent in the contemporary state of emergency.<sup>iii</sup>

The following has been edited for length and clarity.

*Julia Tulke*

*Athens, Greece, April 2020*

iii. FAC Research, “What the FAC?” <https://feministresearch.org/what-the-fac/>.

JUDITH BUTLER AT THE ASSEMBLY:  
 FEMINIST AUTONOMOUS RESEARCH AND THE  
 DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE  
 PRODUCTION

JULIA TULKE: How did the Feminist Autonomous Centre for Research come about, both as an idea and as a space, and what does “feminist autonomous research” mean to you, both as a collective and with regard to your individual academic trajectories?

MYRTO TSILIMPOUNIDI: In terms of the Feminist Autonomous Centre for Research, I think the abbreviation—FAC Research—is really important for us. We all come from institutions and, speaking for myself, I came from the neoliberal paradigm of UK institutions, where it was extremely difficult to be an early career scholar and at the same time have any other aspect of your life there. At some point it became pretty obvious that this was not the kind of knowledge, or production of knowledge, I wanted to contribute to. So this is, for me, the idea of “autonomy.” In Greece, autonomy from the state is really important. I always say this, and every time it hurts to say it: The Ministry of Education is here called the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, which gives a different meaning to what autonomy from the state should imply. Curricula, in universities at least, are in many ways checked by the church. Gender Studies, in the two universities where they exist, are, what

is the appropriate word . . . misogynist, I would say. Feminist Studies, where they exist, are more or less connected to a second wave feminism, and Queer Studies are almost nowhere to be seen. Feminism, for me, has a longer story, because, when I returned here from a decade in the UK, I realized that there were many feminist collectives and groups that were doing amazing theoretical work. They were reading Judith Butler at their assemblies! For me that was incredible, that level of engagement with theory, and how that theory was shaping and shaped in turn by the experience of their activism. The understanding of “feminist,” in terms of the research center, goes back to questions of knowledge: What counts as “research,” who has the right to produce it, reproduce it, and so on. So we kept on thinking: What would it mean if this kind of knowledge that is produced on the level of groups and collectives were treated as legitimate?

AILA SPATHOPOULOU: As Myrto was saying, FAC Research began as a discussion between some of us almost three years ago. It’s something that we have been talking about for a long time, and for all the reasons Myrto was mentioning: frustration, disappointment, not feeling a sense of belonging. I’ve approached it more from my involvement in refugee and migration studies, so I think, for me, that’s a really important aspect of our research and how we formulate this research within such a context of borders and migration. And, for me personally, the feminist aspect came only recently, just in the last year, from spending a lot of

1. Zak Kostopoulos, also known by his stage name Zackie Ohl, was “a queer activist and drag performer committed to raising awareness about HIV.” On September 21, 2018, Zak was brutally beaten to death by a jewelry shop owner and a mob of civilians and policemen. The incident happened in broad daylight, on a busy street in the center of Athens. At present, Zak’s murderers remain free, with criminal charges pending. The case of Zak has galvanized queer and feminist activists in Greece and beyond, and become the focus of a number of high-profile campaigns, most notably the Justice for Zak movement, supported by Amnesty International, and an investigation by Forensic Architecture. See Athena Athanasiou, Vassiliki Kolocotroni, and Dimitris Papanikolaou, “On the politics of queer resistance and survival: Athena Athanasiou in conversation with Vassiliki Kolocotroni and Dimitris Papanikolaou,” *Journal*

time with Anna and Myrto, but also from reflecting on experiences in my PhD research. I think a crucial moment was the murder of Zak.<sup>1</sup> We were all kind of hesitant when to start the Centre, how to start it, what kind of form it would take, and then suddenly an urgency appeared to organize and get it started. The crisis played a big role also, how we were both experiencing it and challenging the idea of who and what is actually in crisis, whose crisis it was.<sup>2</sup>

PENNY TRAVLOU: For me, the idea of discussing the Feminist Autonomous Centre came at the moment that I was personally questioning my academic life. Working full-time in a British university, I felt very isolated in terms of what I was doing in my school and my department, which is the department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of Edinburgh, where just now, only last month, we started talking internally about issues of diversity and gender, we being the usual suspects of course—women—and then as a labor of care. So when we were discussing the formation of the center as such, it came at a very good moment for me to reconsider ideas I had concerning where

I was in the academic context and what was missing in terms of education and pedagogies. Feminist approaches to pedagogy were quite interesting to me. And, with reference to Greece, our discussion about setting up the center came at the moment of many different layers of crisis—crisis in quotation marks of course, because this can be seen as constructed. Here we have a society that is very misogynist, anti-feminist, anti anything that is different, basically. Schooling is very specific in Greece, in the way that it constructs specific identities, such that if you don't fit within these, then you cannot find where you are. And obviously Zak, although I didn't have a personal connection, definitely stuck with me, regarding how things are coming to a state of emergency and that this place [FAC Research] needs to happen. And lastly, there's the issue that within the leftist movement, which is largely misogynist, feminist voices and LGBTQI+ voices have been very much alienated and isolated, even marginalized. Obviously now things happen in a different way, but even three years ago this was very evident, very visible. So, for me, these aspects really got me interested, as well as knowing some colleagues on a

*of Greek Media & Culture*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2018): 270-71; Amnesty International, "Demand Justice for Zak Kostopoulos," <https://www.amnesty.org/en/get-involved/take-action/greece-justice-for-zak/>; Forensic Architecture, "The Killing of Zak Kostopoulos," <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-killing-of-zak-kostopoulos>.

2. While after 2008, Greece became the epicenter of the "economic crisis," in 2015 the so-called "refugee crisis" was declared, turning Greece into the "hotspot of Europe." More recently, in October 2019, the current Greek government began speaking of a "migration crisis" threatening Greece, arguing that those who are arriving at Greece's borders are "economic migrants" and not "real refugees." For us at FAC, it is important to challenge categories that become reified as identities through the discourse of "crisis." See also Anna Carastathis, Aila Spathopoulou, and Myrto Tsilimpounidi,

"Crisis, What Crisis? Immigrants, Refugees and Invisible Struggles," *Refuge* 34, vol. 1 (2018): 29-38.

personal level, having discussions, and getting to know the others.

ANNA CARASTATHIS: I'll just add that the idea of an autonomous center that validates, as was previously mentioned, knowledge from below, and attempts to bridge a rather deliberately crafted gap, not only in Greek institutions but internationally, between what are seen as academic forms of knowledge and practices that are in some ways instrumentalized or incorporated in those knowledges, but having first divorced the academic from the political on a very practical level, or even on a bodily level, was a huge concern for us, one that I think those of us who had worked in neoliberal institutions elsewhere had already experienced, and those of us who studied in Greek universities experienced in a different way here. The aim was to create a space where such a gap would not only be bridged but that a new model for producing and circulating knowledge would be created. In that sense, we saw the idea of opening a space as very important, because all these movement knowledges that were mentioned earlier were, from my perspective, generally small self-organized

groups that occasionally would come together but generally worked in isolation from each other, and they had real difficulty maintaining their everyday organizing given the absence of space, and given their marginalization in various movement spaces that were male-dominated and, even if anti-nationalist, hegemonically Greek. The other, I think, important aim, which relates to the multiply discursively constructed crises, is the question of people's exclusion from academic institutions, from education generally, and the ways in which those exclusions track broader inequalities and oppressions and exploitations in the society. We were concerned and we're still trying to figure out ways in which we can first identify those barriers and then mitigate them, while at the same time, and on a much smaller scale, offering some kind of alternative for pedagogies that are not represented in institutions locally, and that are minoritized in institutions worldwide, pedagogies which put at their center the experiences that oppressed groups have and take this as the basis, or as the foundation for generating knowledge, theory, research agendas, and so on. We want to try to give real, practical solutions to people's experiences of exclusion. There is massive talk about a brain drain in Greece, which of course coincides with a silence about the people newly arriving in Greece and the huge difficulty they face in having their education and qualifications recognized and in continuing on with their education if it's been interrupted due to displacement. Our hope is that through a center such as this, we could run educational programs, and also

research projects, that would give people who have a desire to continue their research or continue their studies a place in which to do this, a place which is deliberately anti-racist, deliberately LGBTQI+ affirmative, feminist, and conscious of the ways in which class divisions shape our participation in various social institutions. So, yes: “feminist,” “autonomous,” “research,” these are really significant keywords that appear in the name of the center, but “center” was also very important, in the sense of providing a physical space and also a kind of hub for connecting groups that, for legitimate reasons, are divided amongst themselves, but that still, given the urgencies of the time, need to come into conversation and into collaborative relations with each other.

“WE ARE THE GRANDDAUGHTERS OF THE WITCHES THAT YOU DIDN’T MANAGE TO BURN”: GENEALOGIES AND HISTORIES OF FEMINIST PRACTICE AND THEORY

JULIA: How does the approach to feminism promoted at FAC Research—which, according to your website, is defined as “queer, trans, intersectional, anti-racist, anti-authoritarian, always in plural, reflexive, and internally contested”—build upon historical models and genealogies of feminist practice and theory, both with regard to what has been canonized as the international feminist movement and the perhaps less well-known Greek histories of feminist and queer organizing and thinking?

AILA: For me, personally, I'm not so familiar [with these histories]; but through FAC Research, I want to learn more, FAC Research is a space for me to become aware of these histories. Precisely for that reason, I think that FAC Research should be a space that should be approachable to people who don't have this awareness, for whatever reason. And I would like to share this experience of becoming aware with other people as well. I think everyone should feel comfortable, it should be inclusive, and maybe translation comes into that, in the sense that some things become unapproachable because of language, or because of a certain academic level. This is something that we are trying to work on.

PENNY: Looking at our statement about our feminisms, it contains a lot of things, but to be "plural, reflexive, and internally contested" means that it's always in process, that's how I see it. We don't try to arrive at any fixed terminologies. We are, rather, trying to break barriers, and, specifically within the second wave, there are many issues with boundaries, such as the issue of transphobia, for example, and other forms of exclusion. So we are trying to be inclusive but at the same time self-reflexive, to keep coming back to questioning our positions and our positionality within the Greek context and within the wider context, including dealing with race, in the sense that we are in Greece and have a Greek understanding, but now we see all these flows of new people coming and have to ask, what are their feminisms? For me, this is how I envision FAC Research responding and

being a plural space for working on this, rather than saying that we have everything fixed. We are in a constant learning process, and maybe that's part of what we are doing working as an autonomous center, ideologically speaking as well.

ANNA: Building on that, I think that very often in political organizing, and this is not particular to feminism, the basis of collaboration or the basis of unity is sameness, the convergence of ideology or particular identities or experiences that are seen as crucial for political action. The idea seems to be that, in order for us to act together as a group, we have to share certain things in common, be they identity categories or political ideologies or lived and historical experiences. And one can understand why this takes place and why this is prioritized, but, on the other hand, this question of sameness always harbors the danger of exclusion, the danger of a false unity around sameness, the presupposition of which is the suppression of existing differences, even within a nominally unified group. When we were discussing what we had in mind to do here, we wanted our starting point to reflect the differences among us and the differences of the imagined community that we are part of, and not to see these differences as an impediment or as a barrier to coming together and to collaboration—which, admittedly, is easier to say than to actually do, because in practice that means a particular relationship to conflict that we are still very much struggling to come to terms with. But that's the idea. And I think the notion of research gives us

an opening that might not be there for groups that have a more narrowly defined political agenda. Research is about an openness to challenging perceived ideologies, even ones that we ourselves subscribe to, and to understanding the world through a multiplicity of perspectives and our positionality within this world through processes of reflexivity and exchange and debate and dissensus. This is something that the feminist movement, and feminist movements globally, have tarried with since the outset. One could write a history of feminist movements—even those that are characterized as belonging to first wave or second wave, which are homogenized as identitarian and intolerant to difference—or of feminist thought, which sees the subject of feminism as always under question and always under erasure. And we take on that trajectory in speaking about feminisms as always in plural and internally contested, which is of course easier said than done, and a process that is often painful and exhausting.

JULIA: I do want to get back to the issue of history for a moment, because I know that you recently ran a community course which produced a lot of research seeking to excavate histories of Greek, and perhaps specifically Athenian, feminist and queer organizing and life. I'd love to hear more about what it means to work towards making visible such histories, in a context where feminist and queer politics and theory are perceived by many to be newly emergent phenomena.

3. FAC Research, "Community Courses," <https://feministresearch.org/community-courses/>.

ANNA: The community course was called "Let's Talk About 'Sex,' Baby: Histories and Theories of Gender and Sexuality," and there were multiple inspirations for it.<sup>3</sup> The proposal to do this course on this topic came from one of the people who co-taught it, Bessy Polykarpou. She had just completed her master's thesis research talking with activists who were active in the post-dictatorship period and trying to map what we would now call LGBT activism through their narratives, through semi-structured interviews. I had done, for my master's thesis, research with activists in LGBTQI+ organizations and collectives from 2010 onward, tracing the discourses that they were using, with a particular emphasis on how the notion of intersectionality manifested in their activism. And we made an attempt to link a theoretical discussion about sex, gender, and sexuality to a more historical retrieval through the method of oral history in the post-dictatorship period until 2010, applying an inquiry-based teaching method. The participants in the course each did an oral history with someone who was a participant in feminist or lesbian or queer movements, or who had

some lived experiences of homophobia, transphobia, sexism within that same historical period. What came out of it was this quite interesting interconnected story, incomplete and fragmented, that, to my knowledge at least, doesn't exist anywhere else, and that we're trying to now look at more systematically and on a grander scale, to start an oral history project focused on this period, and ideally earlier periods as well, but the difficulty is, of course, that this generation of narrators is either very elderly or have passed on. Out of this came a conference, and also a publication that we're going to put out hopefully in the next month, comprising the narratives as well as commentary by the researchers who elicited them.

MYRTO: For me, this question of history was always a big issue. I belong to the generation who left, who went outside Greece and discovered queer politics and was all too happy to engage in the struggle, and then came back to realize: Oh, but we're not queer here. So again, this is an issue of translation: how "queer" got or didn't get translated into the Greek activist context, outside of its theoretical significance. So, for me, this recent oral history project was really important in order to connect and learn the stories, in really oppressive times, of feminist struggles that existed here, even during the military dictatorship, even during the civil war. Connected with that kind of knowledge—I don't want to use the word history, because it has a certain aura, it is a

heavy word—there is this really beautiful slogan in Greece: *Είμαστε οι εγγονές των μαγισσών που δεν κάψατε.*

ANNA: “We are the granddaughters of the witches that you didn’t manage to burn.”

MYRTO: So there is this connection and this realization: “You existed. Sorry, we didn’t know about you. We thought there was nothing here.” I am speaking for myself here, but I think many people in my generation felt like they had to leave in order to explore their sexuality, or explore other aspects of their identity that were really being oppressed here, even inside Gender Studies.

PENNY: I fully agree. And if we’re talking about an older generation—I am a little bit older—this was something that was not visible. I’m of the generation that was the first to get into sociology, that’s a relatively recent field here. And geography didn’t exist, so I left Greece in order to study geography for my PhD, which tells you something about the state of social science and academia in general, where there was no space for anything, let alone Gender Studies. So the history, for me, is almost missing. I know fractions of the feminist movement that was very institutionalized. We had the feminist movement recognized by the social government in 1981, and then there were smaller groups, which were more in the periphery but still contributing to a very particular way of being and defining feminism in Greece. Everything

that is emerging now in terms of queer feminism is very recent, I can even name the people that were part of, not even the LGBTQI+ but the gay movement, who opened up the conversation about gay men being recognized by legislation. So these things are very recent in our history, it's post-dictatorship and even post-80s. Talking about tracing the history of feminism at FAC Research is very specific, as you see with the community course and the attempt to recognize and read these stories that had really been hidden in various cracks in modern Greek history.

MYRTO: I recently did the oral history project about queer organizing. I can tell you that the first queer collective started in 2004.

PENNY: Yes, so it's super, super recent. And I remember very well how it was taken by those of the wider anti-authoritarian movement: *What is this now?*—not taking it seriously, essentially. It was very marginal.

MYRTO: This basically explains why people in the movements were reading theory a lot. Because with everyone we talked to, there was nothing there, so we had to read books in English to basically engage in some act of translation and, in that way, bring some issues to this context.

THE QUESTION OF INCLUSIVITY THROUGH  
LANGUAGE: NON-EQUIVALENCIES ACROSS  
BOUNDARIES OF LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE

JULIA: The work you do at FAC Research is very much concerned with pushing against borders and boundaries. You run an annual Feminist No Borders summer school, you strategically challenge the boundaries between practice and theory, the boundaries between different disciplines, and borders as a colonial, nationalist, heteropatriarchal concept. How have boundaries of language played out in the context of the work you do here, and how do you generally negotiate those issues and make them part of the reflexive conversations you are having?

PENNY: Well, on the one hand, we are in Greece and we speak Greek, but, at the same time, we try to reach a wider number of people for whom Greek is not the first language, either immigrants or people who come from abroad. So we are now kind of bilingual. Our website [<https://feministresearch.org/>] is in English, but we plan, in the very near future, to translate parts of the website into Greek and to work with both languages. This is also an issue with respect to how we deal with the idea of language and the terms that we use, how these are discussed and described between the two languages, and how we position ourselves in the context of Athens, a city that is changing dramatically and very fast. Language plays a major role here: How do you communi-

cate across and around the city? And there is criticism from various points of view. Some people argue that you have to have everything in Greek, because this is the main language here, but that brings up the question of inclusivity through language. And, of course, translation fits within this discussion as well: How do you go across and around those two languages? This is something we reflect on and try to deal with, and we are very open to suggestions and to criticism, to see how we can best work through language issues, making whatever we do accessible. It is also a matter of to whom we address what we do, which adds another layer of translation. How do you bring a certain kind of language from the academic to the activist? It has been a big effort to bridge this distance.

AILA: I think we also had this idea to add translation as a point of entry into research. But we're also aware that recently, because of the so-called refugee crisis and the economy it has generated, there is an appropriation of this idea of mediation and translation, creating bridges between newcomers and people already here, capitalizing on the quite precarious labor of already established migrant populations that are here. So I think it's also important to speak with people and try to understand what is going on there.

ANNA: Yes, as if there were fixed and already constituted groups with different cultures that have to be mediated by some kind of intermediary that has a foot in each.

AILA: Yes, and it is exactly about keeping them separate, not uniting them, at the level of discourse.

MYRTO: I think another issue of translation, precisely because we are in Greece and some of us have been educated and trained in hegemonic institutions, is: To what kind of knowledge do we have access? It is, for example, very important to have access to the feminism that has been produced in Turkey, or by the Kurdish movement, but that hasn't necessarily been translated into English. One of the things that FAC Research wants to do is to engage with translators that could give us access to this kind of knowledge. Not to mention issues of daily translation: Greek is a gendered language, so how do you go around being gender neutral? This is a great challenge, and sometimes we fail epically, but other times we find ways.

PENNY: We invent new words and new word-endings.

MYRTO: It's a daily struggle.

PENNY: It is an important point you are making. We are obviously positioned within Europe, but, at the same time, we challenge this hierarchical way of seeing and producing feminisms, so we're looking as well from a decolonizing view, thinking what else can we see from the periphery.

JULIA: Does that also include for you a decentering of English, and of US- and Eurocentric forms of knowledge, from the center of feminist theory?

MYRTO: There's a keyword that Penny uses all the time: We need to "unlearn."

PENNY: Yes. It's a question, because one thing that happens, especially when you talk about theory, is that most of these texts come from English-speaking scholars, and then: How do you translate them into Greek? Quite often I find it really impossible to understand the Greek translations, they don't speak to me, because maybe I don't get how certain terms get translated into a possible Greek equivalent word.

JULIA: Continuing to talk about translation, both in the conceptual and literal sense, of feminist modes of inquiry and practice: I know that a lot of work done at FAC Research is invested in "intersectionality," which has also been a prominent issue in broader academic and activist conversations in Athens. Could you speak a little more about how the term intersectionality has circulated and taken on meaning in the Greek context, and how you have approached its translation, in both a linguistic and in a conceptual sense?

ANNA: It's interesting how this relates to the previous question. We might say that intersectionality is a concept that emerges from black feminist movements in the

United States, and none of the foundational texts that elaborate it have been translated into Greek. So when we're talking about "hegemonic knowledges" and "US-centric knowledges," it's significant to notice that there are multiple levels of hegemony and counter-hegemony functioning, even within the national scale of the US. You have a kind of counter-hegemonic knowledge—intersectionality—which then becomes absorbed within hegemonic institutions and becomes itself a kind of currency, at least within the field of Gender Studies, and becomes detached from black feminist politics to a great extent, although there's then a wave to reclaim and reposition it within that history and political genealogy. But none of these debates have been translated in Greece, precisely because the work that has been translated is that of white feminism. One thing that I think is important to consider, in thinking about what kinds of constructions of intersectionality have circulated here, is that, from my perspective, it's not primarily through academic translation that intersectionality has traveled to Greece; it's through NGOs and, to a lesser extent, through more diffuse movement-based knowledges, primarily through the LGBTQI+ movement. In fact, I'm not aware of any publication in Greek that discusses intersectionality as a concept, even though there might be some that reference multiple oppressions or multiple discriminations in legal theory. And this, in itself, is a problem. One of the first things that we did, even before we got the space, was to teach a community course on intersectionality, with the aim of producing a

corpus of writing in Greek that discusses the concept, after having engaged certain foundational texts in that concept's articulation in English. That, in itself, was an act of translation, and not in the merely linguistic sense, but in the richer sense that you were mentioning: asking, how can this concept have meaning in the context of its articulation here? In this sense, I think there are a lot of misuses and displacements happening through the appeal to this concept. I think the way in which this concept gets operationalized is to refer to multiple discrete oppressions that then become embodied in a super-unfortunate group that experiences them all simultaneously. This, of course, is one meaning of intersectionality, but it is a pretty superficial approach to this literature that has developed around the concept; and—certainly with respect to the anti-subordination and emancipatory origins of the term—it's pretty toothless. So what is perhaps needed is a deeper engagement that is grounded in the particular realities of interlocking systems here and, which is also something that we discussed a lot, how these realities get obfuscated through an assumption that discourses on race, on gender, on nation even, can just simply be transferred across contexts. To give a more concrete example: the idea that the notion of whiteness can just be translated on a one-to-one level from how it plays out in the US context, and in the Anglo-American and Western European contexts more generally, and that this can just be transplanted onto the reality in Greece. This is a huge discussion, and one that came up a lot in the context of this community course, and

in the context of writing texts about intersectionality that derive from the particular histories of colonial nationalist racial formation in the Eastern Mediterranean and in what is called “Greece” in particular.

MYRTO: To add something small, I think the term “intersectionality” had a similar trajectory as the term “queer” in Greece. These were things that were really valid outside, originating in specific movements, which then became academic concepts and traveled as academic theory. For me, it was interesting to see what would happen if we tried, through the community course, to ask: Can we actually ground this? Can we use it? Is there another word we can use? Is it meaningful? Looking back at that community course, that was the powerful element of what happened. And I couldn’t stop thinking, what would have happened if, in 2004, there would have been a community course or a different kind of model to introduce people to the term queer and to queer theory.

ANNA: The translation that has prevailed for the English word “intersectionality” translates back into Greek as “interissue-ality” [διαθεματικότητα], so: “the intersection of issues.” This is promising, but also problematic. Promising in the sense that one of the things that a lot of people have criticized about the mainstreaming and the travel of the concept of intersectionality is precisely the way it has become depoliticized into this more general framework

for identities and for how identity categories converge in different embodied experiences—a multi-axial theory of oppression, basically. And the term “interissue-ality” has the potential of saying that the problem is not identity categories but political struggles, and showing how political struggles have in fact created these normative, identitarian subjects who marginalize, even as they nominally include, groups that face multiple political struggles at once but are kept separated into different silos. On the other hand, in Greece, there is the frequent use of what in English has thankfully become a really antiquated and even offensive turn of speech: the idea of “the woman question,” or “the Jewish question”—I even cringe as I repeat it—which comes out of nineteenth-century thinking about how so-called “other questions” get involved in the central political struggle. In Greek, however, you still have this turn of phrase, and it’s used constantly. People speak about “the refugee issue,” “the gender issue,” “the woman issue” to some extent. In this context, the issue-ality focus of this transliterated word is problematic, because it reproduces this idea that these are distinct issues which then have to be melded together. In the course, we talked a lot about alternative translations that come out of our various diverse lived experiences, and one particularly evocative proposal was to look at Omonoia Square, which is a traffic circle in the center of Athens, and to think of intersectionality as the interweaving of various roads that meet in a kind of circle [διακομβικότητα]. So, even the translation of the term is a huge question,

concerning what kind of practical embodied meaning it might have in this context.

“IF YOU EVER BURY ME, BURY ME IN GLITTER”:  
ACTIVISM, AESTHETICS, AND THE RECLAIMING  
OF URBAN SPACE

JULIA: To consider more practice-based modes of translation, recently the feminist performance “El violador eres tú,” also known as “Un violador en tu camino,” devised by Chilean feminist collective Las Tesis, has been adapted in Athens. Can you talk more about how this choreography was adapted into the Greek context?

PENNY: When the Chilean feminist performance “El violador eres tú” went viral on social media, I was intrigued by its powerful words and choreography. I spoke with a Chilean friend who lives in Athens and wanted to find other women to organize a similar performance here. I told her to contact feminist groups such as Καμιά Ανοχή [No Tolerance] and our center to find out whether there was an interest in doing the performance in Athens. During that time, I was in Edinburgh teaching, so I couldn’t participate in the rehearsals and meetings about the organization of the performance. Interestingly enough, during the meetings it appeared that there were some different opinions about the translation of the lyrics into Greek. In the end, two different versions (translations) of the lyrics came up, and thus two different

performances were organized on December 15 and 22, if I remember correctly. I participated in the second one. It was one of the most powerful things I have ever done, in a collective and public manner. Being there, in front of the Greek parliament, together with friends, comrades, and sisters, singing and dancing hand-in-hand was extremely moving. I felt the lyrics deep in my skin. We sung “El violador eres tú” in both Spanish and Greek. Then, holding hands, we shouted the names of recent victims of femicide in Greece. It was moving. I felt connected with all these other women there. It was almost like creating an affective space of sisterhood.

JULIA: As you know, I’ve approached this conversation through my own research on the emergence of feminist and queer graffiti and street art in Athens throughout the past five years, which I understand as part of a broader project of appearance, a carving out of space for feminist and queer demands, lives, thought, imaginaries, forms of visibility. In the context of this ongoing project of appearance, where do you see the state of feminist and queer politics in Greece now: What are the concerns, what are the contradictions moving it forward, where are things going, and where do you hope to see things going?

[Church bell rings.]

ANNA: I think the question of appearance, and visibility itself, cannot be presumed to be the register of political

action. The fact that we might diagnose, that we might identify what you describe as a spatial claim, or as a political claim, is itself historically and sociopolitically contingent. I am struck by what we were talking about earlier in terms of visibility, in terms of registers of language or vocabularies of identity. We're supposedly living in a post-crisis moment, although this is constantly being refuted on an everyday level. And, for a long time in the context of crisis, the questions that were being raised by LGBTQI+ and feminist movements were seen as secondary and of less significance, certainly not of the kind of life-and-death significance that supposedly economic questions were raising. And the issues that LGBTQI+ movements, and to a lesser extent women's movements, were bringing forth were being constructed as having to do with the category of human rights and therefore as non-economic in nature, as not having anything to do with the national problem that was the Greek sovereign debt crisis. I think that discourse has shifted. From my perspective, the main emphasis of feminist movements and queer activism has to do with gendered violence in all its manifestations, and how that violence is endemic, systemic, institutional, and interpersonal. There are a number of collectives and groups that focus on tracking the eruptions of violence that happen in terms of femicides, in terms of transphobic and homophobic attacks, and there's also a discussion concerning the question of justice in relation to such eruptions of violence, given the institutional underpinnings of violence as an atmospheric condition in this society and

globally as well. As we see the rise of the far right, as we see an attempt to repress social movements through militarization and through legal means as well—with the recent revision of the penal code, which expanded police powers and juridical powers in relation to terrorism charges—what I think is opening up as a space of contestation is the question of justice and what it means to ask for justice, in the context of such violence, from the very institutions that frame, perpetuate, and empower it, distributing the exercise of violence to socially empowered citizens while also monopolizing it in state institutions. That's one area that we're very interested in promoting.

MYRTO: Going back to the graffiti and street art, and what's projected out there in relation to movements: Athens is a saturated city, and it's one of those global meccas where artists come and add their work. And there's also a rich tradition of tactics of resistance, but this was mainly based in the anarchist and the leftist movements, and those two movements were very macho. They still are, but there are some improvements. In a way, the tactics were macho as well: There's the idea of this heroic figure that goes to the streets and fights cops and is such a good and powerful man. And, similarly, this was happening on the walls, too: Who is going to go higher, who is going to go bigger, who is going to go everywhere? Recently, in the last decade, there were some huge efforts to change that and to find other tactics of resistance, which was difficult. Let's say some queer

feminists were making a poster, adding a little bit of pink; people responded, saying: Here, we're black and red. And this has shifted a lot, and for me a key moment was a moment of translation. In Greek slang, βυζί [vizi] means breast. And there was a moment where you could find a lot of posters all over Exarcheia [a neighborhood in Athens], so you would find many different breasts on the walls and the tag “-bility” underneath—βυζί-bility [vizi-bility]. It lasted for three days. And Exarcheia is an area where many pieces of street art remain for several years.

ANNA: You mean the posters were destroyed, or removed, or covered up?

MYRTO: Destroyed. Because that very liberal scene, that was very open towards political street art and graffiti, couldn't come to terms with the fact that there were breasts all around the neighborhood. Also, in 2006 or 2007, there were DIY posters for the first queer party, of course at the *στέκι* [a social center] in Exarcheia, and the posters didn't even last the night. They were completely removed. This says a lot about what was happening at the time in the movement, queer voices were removed. The turning point was Zak's murder. This made it clear that they don't like us in the city, we don't exist in the city, we can be killed in broad daylight. So that brought many different people together, also people who were queer feminist, who were practicing wall writing or graffiti in different contexts. It's quite recent, this

uniting with such force. In that sense, it's a good moment, queer voices are more and more visible in the streets. For me, the most powerful and omnipresent urban appropriation that I've seen in Athens is this: From the very night that we learned of Zak's murder, until about six months on, Athens was a glitter city. Everywhere we went, there was glitter on the streets, there was glitter on the walls, everywhere in the city center. So this collective act, without one individual signing, drastically altered the aesthetics of the city. Even newspapers were writing about it: "We have glitter in our houses. We walk on the streets and we walk in our houses and it sticks everywhere." There was this slogan—and obviously Zak loved glitter—it was one of his quotes as Zackie Oh!: "If you ever bury me, bury me in glitter." That's where it started. And there was not one protagonist, there were many people, united by, basically, anger. It gave me a weird sense of protection. When I saw people with glitter, wearing glitter on their clothes, I would think: "We exist in this city."

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