



**Universiteit Utrecht**

# **Queer Activism in Contemporary Greece**

**A Reading in the Intersections of Age, Care, Trauma, and COVID-19:**

**the Case Study of “Proud Seniors Greece”**

Martha Miari

6882129

Master of Arts & Culture

Programme: Gender Studies

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. dr. Berteke Waaldijk

Second Reader: Dr. Domitilla Olivieri

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a reading in the intersections of age, care, safer spaces, trauma, and the pandemic of COVID-19 within the lens of queer activism in the context of contemporary Greece. Hence, it aims to contribute to queer theory and the concept of queer aging discourses and to give insights in the following questions: How queer theory helps to understand how struggles against prejudices about the aging queer body have shaped networks of alliance and a strong activist scene and how activism has been embodied and situated within practices of care and mourning in contemporary Greece; In addition, how age and the notion of the healthy able-body is a social construct that has been used as a mean to delimit the worth of people's life. The first chapter aims to give insights on how age was constructed within the heteronormative perspective and to provide theories on queer temporalities. Finally, it introduces my case study, "Proud Seniors Greece", which constitutes the first and only group/organization that is concerned with LGBTQIA+ seniors in Greece. The second chapter intends to show how "Proud Seniors Greece" organized a safer environment so they could exist unapologetically and by extension the importance that safer spaces have in queer communities. Further, it introduces a different approach to the notion of safer spaces, community building, and coalition. The third chapter gives insights into the sociopolitical context of Greece through an analysis of the current pandemic of COVID-19. Furthermore, it discusses how trauma and mourning have played an important role and have formed alliances in the queer activism context. Finally, it attempts a deconstruction of the narrative of able-bodiedness in order to depathologize the false representation of queer identity.

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## **Introduction**

### **Positionality**

On the 6th of December 2008, I was 15 years old, when the news was reporting the murder of the 15-year-old student, Alexis Grigoropoulos<sup>1</sup> by a police officer, in Exarcheia, Athens. This cruel event brought into light a country that was literally burning for at least one month from anarchists, Antifa rioters, outraged students, and citizens. That was my first wake-up call and connection with activism, protests, and rage for a country that kills its own youth and not only.

Participating in one of the protests that happened in my small hometown<sup>2</sup>, I witnessed an incident that has troubling my mind for years. During a clash with the police, being surrounded by teargas and terror, there was a very old lady passing by unable to walk and breathe from the toxic air. That resulted in her bursting out into tears while asking for help, and finally fainting some meters away from me. I could not go to her side while the police forces were close to her, as this would result in my potential arrest and abuse. However, to be completely transparent I do not know if I would have gone as I was scared and shocked, trying to walk away from the teargas myself and find my way to breath. I do not have a clear picture of what happened next, what was my next move, or what was the fate of the old lady who was laying down in the street. I just remember the feelings which this incident grew in me; the stress, and the agony of whether she is okay after all, and the assumptions that my mind was making about how she may have felt at that horrific moment. Was she afraid? confused? helpless? terrified? The only answer I have is that she was alone, and no one helped her immediately, at least that is what I can recall. Later that day I called my grandma and I told her to stay inside.

In 2015, during my bachelor's in Social Anthropology and History, I was doing a seminar called 'Fieldwork and participant observation' in which for my final paper I decided to interview elderly people about lived experiences at the age of late 60s+. I do

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<sup>1</sup> On the 6th of December 2008, after the murder of Alexis Grigoropoulos by the police officer Epameinondas Korkoneas, the demonstrations and riots spread widely all over Greece and lasted approximately one month. Since then, every December 6th, there are marches all over Greece for the memory of Alexis.

<sup>2</sup> Corfu, an Ionian island of Greece.

not know exactly what I wanted to succeed with this paper, I know though that I wanted to give attention and voice to the standpoints<sup>3</sup> of these people on how they experience their anility. Now that I am reflecting on it, it might be a catharsis for me and my guilt about the old lady that I never helped in 2008. I can also recall that my first idea for this paper was about elderly LGBTQI+<sup>4</sup> people but I did not have enough knowledge or connections back then to engage with this topic. I did though research for groups involved with this issue and I found a grassroots organization called ‘Proud seniors Greece’ which had formed earlier that year.

Having limited contact with people of the same sexual orientation while growing up in a small province of Greece, I only had the externalized and mostly problematic visual (internet, television) representations of homosexual performativities. I think that this among the inaccurate effects, somehow also benefitted me as I created an imaginary network that served the early need for elimination of guilt and a sense of belonging.

In Greece, in the last two decades the self-confidence of people under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella has approximately increased. The movement’s activity such as the creation of political LGBTQIA+ groups, visibility, and aggregation of collectives has expanded also in some provincial cities beyond the capital. My first contact with history and issues of gender was during my undergraduate degree where I attended classes related to these topics. My own active involvement with LGBTQIA+ identity, issues, and rights came then with the realization of the concept and the importance of community. So, I define the period of my participation in the LGBTQIA+ community as an individual but also as a member of collectives for the last six years.

Now that I feel confident enough as being part and an active member of the community, I am coming back with this paper to grow, expand, and put into words my idea from 2015 which evolved and changed many forms during my Master on Gender Studies in 2020 which I completed in self-exile during a pandemic and everything this entails.

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<sup>3</sup> Standpoint theory first emerged from the feminist theorist Sara Harding's concept of “strong objectivity” that was intended to give voice to the same marginalized and oppressed people in order to reform universal notions of “objective” truths that have emerged from the status quo.

<sup>4</sup> LGBTQIA+ is an initialism/umbrella term that stands for “Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, plus everything in between and beyond.

Experiencing the pandemic as an individual was strange and horrible, yet exciting. Something was exciting about the dystopian COVID-19 times we were/are living in, yet very sad and horrific to witness so much misery, precarity, and death. My productivity levels fell extremely, and I became very slow in the tasks that I had to carry out. Isolation was not helping, especially spending it in a country<sup>5</sup> that the rhythms, the climate, and the people were very different from what I already knew, meaning that I was far away from whatever I had and knew as familiar so far. During this period, I was trying to repeat to myself that productivity is also a violent concept of capitalism and it is okay to be slow especially when the world around us is shutting down and the realization of how disposable we can become from one moment to the other is the only thought that occupies my mind. So, I kept repeating to myself that “it is okay to not be productive in times of uncertainty”. Though I had to form my thesis idea and to start writing. The pandemic brought many difficulties in this effort but also evolved my idea and my desire to get something out of it.

I came back to 2015 and to this group that I had discovered. I contacted them and they were happy to help me on this journey. Unfortunately, the timing was not good enough for us to make this work, while they had to deal with many important events<sup>6</sup> in Greece related to their community and activism, and also, they were in the process of mourning the loss of one of their members. While the trauma and the workload that they were experiencing made our chance to meet and talk impossible, Giannos, the founder of the organization provided a considerable amount of material that could help me continue with my research and writing.

### **Case Study**

Proud Seniors Greece is a support group for LGBTQI + people aged 50+ based in Athens, Greece. The team was created in 2015 when its founding members experienced the illness and unfortunately the death of a trans elderly member of their community.

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<sup>5</sup> The Netherlands

<sup>6</sup> The Golden dawn’s trial (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/07/golden-dawn-leader-and-ex-mps-found-guilty-in-landmark-trial>)  
The trial for the murder of Zak Kostopoulos (<https://i-base.info/htb/35047>)

They decided then to create this group when they markedly observed the major discrimination and in general the serious problems that LGBTQIA+ older people face in the society- in this case, in the Greek context-.

As they state, it is an organization open and accessible to all individuals regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, nationality, color, or race. It is a collective that supports all vulnerable subjectivities by any means, away from stereotypes, prejudices, and sexist anachronistic standards. Through the partnerships they developed with respective organizations both in Greece and abroad and the participation in European and International Conferences, they draw and transfer to the LGBTQI + community, experience, ideas, and good practices.

They are partners and members of organizations that specialize in the issues of the largest LGBT + people such as: "Roze 50+", "Roze Poort", "ILGA Europe", "Sage America", "TGE" (Transgender Europe) as well as the Greek network of LGBTQI+ organizations.

Their Action revolves around three main functional axes, mediation, entertainment, and political action. In the context of social solidarity, they act as a mediator with a network of health professionals who offer their services to LGBTQI + older people on issues that are raised by their organization.

Their mediation is not limited to health and psychological support but may extend to the promotion of requests to various services, or even to the provision of help at home. Furthermore, by choosing or creating safe spaces of expression and communication, they organize evenings with various relaxation and communication events in order to get to know and strengthen the relationships of the members.

Finally, their political action and goal are to provide information on issues concerning older people, both within the LGBTQI + community and to civil society, creating the necessary visibility of acceptance that they need. Regarding and in the long run, there are requests in which they work diligently either internally as an organization or in collaboration with other LGBTQI + organizations, or alliances from civil society, depending on the objective of the work and the specific need.

In that regard, I would like to explain why I chose to ground this thesis on the issues of LGBTQIA+ elderly people in relation to the rest of the non-LGBTQIA+ individuals. In a conservative context like the one of Greece, since LGBTQIA+ people often experience exclusion from the family, even from their children if they have them, resulting in a lack of necessary support even from their relatives that has, as a result, identified problems such as isolation to be more pronounced with a significantly greater impact. This is an extremely vulnerable group because of the obligation to sometimes conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity in order to be accepted which extends to older and/or wider health care facilities, where they may be provided the basic relevant services. However, this happens without respect, acceptance, visibility, and expression of important aspects of their personality. Thus, even when there is no isolation, any sociability within and outside the community is artificial and dysfunctional. Moreover, it should be noted that a large proportion of LGBTQI+ older people and especially older Trans individuals who, due to their different identities or gender characteristics, are the most vulnerable group in the community and they face significant financial problems, having experience from an early age exclusion from the legal labor market, insurance and subsequently retirement.

### **Overview**

The first chapter will first focus on how the concept of age and aging was built during the years through different sociopolitical theories. Then is intended to selectively focus on what is known about the social context of LGBTQIA+ elderly people through the lenses of the “Proud Seniors Greece” group. For doing so I will first refer to the existing literature related to gerontological studies and studies that are more focused on the aging LGBTQIA+ community. Even though this issue is not limited to a single reality my focus will have a national orientation while the difficulties that I faced doing this research during a pandemic limited my possibilities to expand my idea to a transnational level.

In the second chapter I aim to explore the importance of safer spaces and for doing so I will focus on what “Proud Seniors Greece” stands for as an organization and more specifically on why they chose specific paths in order to succeed in the constructing of their environment as it is today and what led them to it. Then I will focus on how

building up a safer environment within the community starts from a form of collective care which could be read as a form of resistance to the outside effects of society. Finally, I will close the chapter by introducing a different approach to the notion of safer spaces, community building, and coalition.

Finally, in my third and last chapter, I will attempt to contextualize the queer experience in Greece during times of uncertainty such as the current pandemic of COVID-19 and to discuss how unfortunate circumstances have been catalytic for the queer identity and queer activism in Greece and at the same time have shaped strong alliances (e.g., Proud Seniors Greece). Finally, I will try to reconstruct the idea of the queer aging body through an analysis of Robert McRuer's text "Compulsory Able-bodiedness and Queer/Disabled existence".

In effect, this thesis aims to contribute to queer theory, the concept of Queer aging discourses, and the field of Queer Gerontology by displaying and examining the realities of the people themselves in a south European country: Greece. Hence, this thesis is a reading on queer activism in contemporary Greece and intends to show how queer theory helps to understand how struggles against prejudices about the aging queer body have shaped networks of alliance and a strong activist scene and how activism has been embodied and situated within practices of care and mourning in contemporary Greece: By extension, how age and the notion of the healthy able-body is a social construct and has been used as a mean to delimit the worth of people's life.

## Chapter 1- Age, Gender, Sexuality: The Greek case

### 1.1 Critical Theories about Age as a Construction

This chapter will start with an overview of how the socio-cultural theories constructed the main notions that build up what is meant by “successful aging” according to an analysis that Maxim Topaz, Meredith Troutman-Jordan, and Meredith MacKenzie provided on *Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction: The Roots of Successful Aging Theories*” (2014) where they analyze how age was constructed, deconstructed and finally reconstructed through the past two centuries.

Social gerontology formed as an interdisciplinary scientific field in the USA in the early 1950s after the phenomenon of aging came to the attention of the biomedical sciences and their main focuses were laying in the observation of the aging body and the connection with the decreasing function and abilities as well the pathologies of it. Through this, three main theories emerged related to aging, the disengagement theory, the activity theory, and the continuity theory.

Maxim Topaz, Meredith Troutman-Jordan, and Meredith MacKenzie through an analysis of the book “*Growing Old: The Process of Disengagement (Cumming & Henry, 1961)*” stated that the disengagement theory that formed in 1960 suggested that “*aging is an inevitable, mutual withdrawal or disengagement; resulting in decreasing interaction between the aging person and others in the social systems he belongs to*” (2014: 226-227). This theory was based mainly on the individual rather than on ecological and social factors. The successful transition was defined as a process of social withdrawal and a deduction in relationships and contacts mainly due to withdrawal from the labor market. Society in this theory stops providing useful roles to the elderly and transmits these roles to the next generation.

According to Topaz, Troutman-Jordan, and MacKenzie the main criticism of this theory is that “*it could be applied universally without regard to race, ethnicity, class, or gender*” (227) Additionally, another critic was that follows the chronological and not the real age and results in many older people disconnecting from social events because

they move away from positions of power and influence, and this usually happens without their will. Another strong critic of the disengagement theory is that it is mostly *“focusing on old age as a time spent preparing for death, rather than a life stage with its own growth and development. In common with most theories of this time, its focus was on aging as decay and loss of function.”* (227) That is to say that the focus was laid on aging as a process with the purpose to reach the inevitable death and not as a state of life with its own uniqueness and experience.

The activity theory came as a response to the disengagement theory. As explained by Topaz, Troutman-Jordan, and MacKenzie *“According to the activity theory, old age and the process of aging is a lively and creative experience associated with the development of new functions replacing those of earlier life. Replacement of the lost functions and activities is necessary to achieve psychological and physical well-being in old age”*. (2014: 227) This theory has its roots in the idea *“active aging makes the difference”* that was first promoted in 1999 from the World Health Organization (WHO) during the International Year of Older Persons<sup>7</sup>. In a further explanation, *“According to the activity theory, older adults should maintain a middle-age lifestyle, remaining as active as possible without regard to their chronological age, and society should treat them as middle-aged individuals with similar rights and responsibilities. Activity theory emphasized positive aging, and this can be attributed to the emancipation of old individuals.”* (Topaz, Troutman-Jordan, and MacKenzie: 227). Successful aging here means that a person will find positive and satisfying roles as long as the environment (natural, economic, social) continues to provide them with challenges and this productive state means that they will grow old more successfully and happily with new roles that come to replace the previous ones with the purpose to give them a sense of well-being.

In my interpretation, that provides the idea that the elder individual will be satisfied from their ability to stay active not considering though many factors that can make the person not able to be functional in that way, e.g., disability, loss, retirement, and most importantly their own desire for whether they want to stay active or not.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.who.int/ageing/publications/alc\\_embrace2001\\_en.pdf?ua=1](https://www.who.int/ageing/publications/alc_embrace2001_en.pdf?ua=1)

In 1980 the continuity theory combined the above two theories while it focuses on the processes of adapting the humans' experiences to both external and internal structures of their life. *"According to the continuity theory older adults strive to maintain continuity between their former and current selves; They change and disengage in some ways, but they do so in ways that are shaped by their innate personalities and their life experiences"* (ibid).

Several other theories from different fields have evolved around aging, trying to reconstruct and deconstruct the above notions bringing us to the conclusion that aging is not a universal phenomenon, it is a multifactorial process, and every person ages differently while race, ethnicity, class, or gender are also extremely important factors in that procedure. While it became clearer that age is a social construct, in that era followed the production of the term ageism that was introduced to ground the notion of the colonization of the body<sup>8</sup>. It was first occurred in 1960 by Robert N. Butler who in the book *"Why Survive? Being old in America"* (1975), explains that ageism is the:

"Process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender. Old people are categorized as senile, rigid in thought and manner, old-fashioned in morality and skills... Ageism allows the younger generations to see older people as different from themselves; thus they subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings." (p. 35)

It is wise to state here, that ageism and all the above attempts of definitions and explanation of age and aging are not universal concepts and are very much limited in the Western neo-liberal world while they are very much connected and influenced by capitalism and the need for productivity and "perfection".

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<sup>8</sup> "The theme of colonization, specifically the colonization of old bodies is a frequent theme penetrating postmodern discourse initiated by the philosophers Baudrillard and Lyotard [...] To colonize is to dominate, to make inferior and to deprive of equal voice. The colonization of old bodies is shown by the view of older people as a disposable workforce and by stereotypes that promote the idea of aging as reverting to childhood." (Topaz, Troutman-Jordan, MacKenzie, 2014, p.228) on *"Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction: The Roots of Successful Aging Theories"*.

Later, while transitioning to the 21st century, a reconstruction of the notion of aging was attempted and it is probably the most well-known to the wide public. “Successful aging” was first introduced by Rowe and Kahn in 1998, as they:

[...] defined successful aging as the ability to maintain low risk of disease-related disability, high mental and physical function, and active engagement with life. Rowe and Kahn’s theory is entrenched in a conceptualization of successful aging in which both physical and mental factors enable individuals to continue to function effectively into old age. Absence of disease and disability preserve physical and mental functions and enables active engagement with life. (Topaz, Troutman-Jordan, McKenzie, 2014: 228)

In my view, this theory except for being exclusive in many levels for the individual’s body and needs, it also indicates ableist characteristics while it stigmatizes mental health issues and disability, saying that if the individual has something of the previous is not able to live a good, active and quality life.

As Toni Calasanti and Neal King have successfully put it in “*Firming the Floppy Penis Age, Class, and Gender Relations in the Lives of Old Men*” (2005), “[...] *successful aging essentially implies non-aging and non-existence as an older person while the social constructs about aging do not contain any positive elements.*” (7) Following that Linn Sandberg argues on “*Affirmative old age the aging body and feminist theories on difference*” (2013),” that successful aging “*retains youth and the characteristics of youth as desirable. [...] (and) is generally connoted with terms such as activity, productivity, autonomy*” (13) that is to say, that the persistent preservation of youth is promoted with its characteristics being presented as the only desirable ones. Immediate implications then of successful aging are being active, productive, and autonomous.

According to the results of Sandberg's research, it seems that there is a need to create a non-pathological vocabulary related to age and for this reason, the author proposes the term "affirmative age" as an attempt to alternatively conceptualize age.

The concept of affirmative age that Sandberg introduces in age research goes beyond denial narratives and overemphasizes the possibilities of subjectivity in growing bodies

As she elaborates, *“I have introduced the concept of affirmative old age as a concept which goes beyond dialectics of negation, and which affirms the specificities of aging bodies and highlights the capacities of becoming in aging bodies and subjectivities”* (2013: 33)

Reflecting on the previous notions even though within the years many efforts happened for deconstruction and reconstruction around age and aging, there is a common element to all these attempts, and that is the hetero/normative perspective. All the theories around age are constructed upon normative paradigms and they are lacking intersectionality and inclusivity and by extension, LGBTQIA+ subjectivities are completely excluded in any of these theories. As Vanessa Fabre agrees in *“Gender Transitions in Later Life: A Queer Perspective on Successful Aging”* (2015) *“Most notably, feminist scholars have long raised concerns about the lack of attention paid to structural inequality, gender, race, and class in the successful aging paradigm”* (p. 145)

Societal normality of heteronormativity and the conformity of gender leads to expectations that want the individual to fit in a “natural” state. Many scholars trying to figure out the successful paradigm for aging, ignored the limited effects that heteronormativity, homophobia, and transphobia can have in the life’s of LGBTQI+ elderly people, making clear that the assumptions of a heteronormative orientation and identity are what leads to a successful life. As Fabre very well elaborates, *“Although “success” in later life is not necessarily a heteronormative construct and may be universally desired to some degree, the narrow conceptualization of success in this paradigm ignores the diversity of individual LGBTQI+ experiences and the structural influences of heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia on well-being for members of these groups”* (2015: 145)

In my opinion, it would also be effective to picture “success” as an abstract concept that has a different meaning for every individual. In that sense success is not something that can be reached if someone follows the steps of a manual but on the contrary is a very fluid idea that can have different dimensions, forms, and meanings.

## 1.2 Theories about Queer Temporalities

In “*Gender Transitions in Later Life: A Queer Perspective on Successful Aging*” (2015), Vanessa Fabbre argues that in the case of people outside the heterosexual spectrum the intense heteronormativity in the West has led to the pathology of non-regulatory gender and sexual identities, which is likely to be internalized by older LGBTQI+ people and has negative effects on their self-esteem, mental health and the development of their identity. As she specifically states, “*Pervasive heteronormativity in Western societies has led to the pathologizing of non-normative gender and sexual identities, which can also be internalized by LGBTQ adults and have deleterious effects on self-esteem, mental health, and identity development*” (2015:145). On a similar note, B. Heaphy argues on “*Ageing in a non-heterosexual context. Aging and Society*” (2004), that a dominant view in sociological articles is that “*Older lesbians and gay men have been described as ‘the unseen minority’ of the 20th century*” (p.882) and he agrees that queer theory can be a key tool for deconstructing age stereotypes in the LGBTQI+ community. Queer theorists then can contribute to the understanding of how the mechanism of framing old age with concepts of failure and proximity works. More importantly, I think that their work, in different forms, suggests how other ways of thinking about age can be developed.

Returning to Fabbre’s text, in a critical analysis, she did in “*The Queer Art of Failure*” of J. Jack Halberstam, she points out that:

“Halberstam argues that beyond offering alternative ways of being, failure also offers a form of liberation that is distinctively queer. By embracing the failure to live a “normal” lifestyle, one is liberated to set alternative parameters for one’s existence, however unproductive these may seem from a mainstream perspective. [...] This active resistance to being “normal” is at the heart of queer theory and is applicable to transgender adults who actively embody identities that exist along the periphery of societal norms” (2014:146)

That is to say, that failure offers alternative ways of being and living and also a form of queer release. With the adoption of failure in relation to the imposed "normal" lifestyle,

the individual is now free to set alternative parameters in their existence, no matter how counterproductive they may seem.

As mentioned through Fabbre's and Halberstam's analyses, the management of a heterosexual person's life can be very different from the time related choices of an LGBTQI+ person. Many times, LGBTQI+ people act or decide in a way that is not understood by heterosexuals and can be perceived potentially as a waste of time and resources. In queer culture, the development of time and space is often used in contrast to the institutions of the family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. According to Halberstam in *"In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Live"*, *"regularity is maintained and strengthened by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality"* (2005: 10), therefore, through queer temporalities it is possible to redefine concepts of "normal" and good aging.

Additionally, in the field of queer temporalities, Elizabeth Freeman introduces in *"Time Binds, Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories"*, the concept of "chrononormativity" in order to describe how power mechanisms engage individuals in the same linear time narrative based on productivity. Alongside, she introduces the concept of "Erotohistoriography" *"as a means of resisting the chronopolitics of growth and productivity"*. (2010: 59) Using the concept of "Erotohistoriography" as an analytical tool we can better understand how queer relationships go beyond the present. The author explains that *"through queer social practices forms of consciousness of time or even historical consciousness are produced that intervene in the dominant logic of development"* (2010: 59)

To conclude, in my interpretation, in the realm of age the denial of "successful aging" narratives can be characterized also as resistance to these mechanisms and consequently as resistance to the "normality" that heteronormativity so strongly represents.

### 1.3 LGBTQIA+ Seniors: the Greek Case

In contemporary Greece, older people already experience exclusion and violations of their rights to healthcare, socialization, and participation in social life in general. For the LGBTQIA+ community though especially, all these distinctions are even more far away as a possibility.

Most LGBTQIA+ seniors in Greece are often an "invisible" population. To a large extent they are still not "out" in terms of their sexual orientations and identity, and we are talking here for a respectable number of people that together with the rest of the community they make up a significant number of the general population. Growing up in Greece during the 40s, 50's, 60's, etc. being "out" was the same as being "crazy". There are many records of people who got married in order to oppress their sexuality or to trick the public eye. Trans activist Nana Hatzi in a documentary of her life called "Nana"(2015) made by Lara Christen, narrates:

"I got married twice, to a German and to a Greek woman [...] the German got pregnant and had twins, two boys[...] My second wife got pregnant too, and we had a son[...]she got pregnant again and had a baby girl this time[...] A couple of years after I got divorced, I'd take my kids every Sunday and we'd go out[...] and in the evening I'd return them to their mother. Two years later their mother remembered... that I would cause them psychological problems... and I should not see them anymore. She brought the police and the prosecutor to my home[...] She brought me papers to sign that I wouldn't see my kids anymore[...] So this is why I stopped seeing my kids...and haven't seen them since."

The documentary is a portrait of Nana's past and present life and as Christen indicates in the description "*The combination of narrative, observation, and archival footage creates an image of her chequered past, as well as the hard everyday life a trans person faces in Greek reality.*"<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://vimeo.com/124447562>

Another very important difficulty faced by this category of seniors is the social stigma that they are facing, and while for heterosexual seniors acceptance and support from the biological family are self-evident -in the majority- and they enjoy the benefits set by the law and care services, LGBTQI+ seniors do not have the same treatment, acceptance, and protection from both their biological family and society as a whole.

For the analysis of this part and the better understanding of the LGBTQI+ senior experience in Greece I am using material that I collected through online research, and testimonies and interviews that were provided to me by “Proud Seniors Greece”.

Proud Seniors Greece is the first and only community support group in the country for LGBTQIA+ seniors. In the summer of 2015, the aforementioned Nana Hatzi, a well-known trans person and activist of the LGBTQI+ community-based in Thessaloniki, gave the biggest battle of her life, fighting cancer. The mobilization of community members was very large, who spontaneously offered both psychological and financial support. Nana did not win that fight with cancer in the end, but the community got a first taste of what it can mean to be old and invisible as an LGBTQI+ person. This combination led to the creation of "Proud Seniors Greece". Giannos, the founder of the group, in an interview that gave for the newspaper “Documento” (2019)<sup>10</sup> that can be found in the article with the title "*No LGBTQ+ person should grow old alone*" explains:

“For the most part, LGBTQI + seniors are suffering mentally from unbearable anxiety of survival, loneliness, marginalization, darkness. They live behind a closed door. This loneliness is enough to create irreversible problems, which in the long run end in death. When we embark on such a journey, we need money, a partner, help, love, and dignity. Our goal is for no LGBTQI+ person to grow old being alone.”

From 2015 until today, Proud Seniors are operating on three axes: the psychological support of LGBTQI + people over 50 years, their entertainment through the organization of various events in safe places of expression and communication, and

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.documentonews.gr/article/kanena-loatki-atomo-na-mh-gerasei-mono-toy>

information about their rights. A good number of seniors have already joined the group. The oldest member of the group was Nikos Diamantidis, over 80 years old, who even participated in the first Pride of New York in 1970 and unfortunately passed away recently leaving the members devastated. Furthermore, I do not have a clear indication of the number of people that have joined the group to date, but according to an interview that Giannos gave back in 2018 to Marilena Gatsiou for their dissertation with the title *“Age and time in homoeroticism”*, *“Now the main members, [...] had reached 12, whose age range is estimated to be from 52 to about 70 years. Daring a gender divide, most of the members are gay men. Then there are a few trans women and finally just two cis women.”* (p. 27)

Within the group, members are given the opportunity to safely make their own coming out. Giannos states:

“Unfortunately, many older LGBTQI+ people are" locked in the closet" and come to the meetings with great caution. Some people started a family because the standards of the old days did not allow them to do otherwise, others have no support network, and many have not talked to anyone about their sexual orientation or gender identity. Our important guideline is the substantial empowerment of our members so that they can live a good life and derive pleasure from what they do, at any age.” (Documento, 2019)

Being surrounded by homophobia and stigma, it is difficult for them to be open about their sexual orientation and gender identity to health care institutions and staff. There is a lack of trust that makes them dis-honest about their needs, which of course makes difficult the level of treatment and rehabilitation.

Also, in the case of not concluding a cohabitation agreement<sup>11</sup>, individuals are automatically excluded from contact with relationships that are important to them, such as the presence of their partner in the hospital or in the nursing home.

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<sup>11</sup> A cohabitation agreement is the agreement of two adults by which they regulate their cohabitation through legal procedures. In Greece, same sex marriage is not legal. “In 2015, civil unions (Greek: σύμφωνο συμβίωσης; cohabitation agreement) were legalized for same-sex couples, making households headed by same-sex couples eligible for many, but not all, of the legal protections and

In addition, there is evidence that sometimes both medical and nursing staff maintain a homophobic attitude towards LGBTQI+ people, thus turning the hospitality environment into an inhospitable place and leading to a loss of trust with the elderly. As Giannos explains, "*We are particularly concerned about the part of free home care and palliative care for the elderly LGBT people + people with chronic diseases and end-stage diseases by nurses who are properly trained*".

Furthermore, according to an article with the title "*The "invisible" LGBTQI people of the third age claim their rights*"<sup>12</sup> -that revolves around information that Proud Seniors Greece provided- there are also many testimonies and records that show the prejudice of the medical and nursing staff against these individuals. Behaviours such as the prevention of the caregivers to even touch the elder LGBTQI+ individual is a common example. In some cases, there is verbal and physical abuse and often curiosity that violates the personal life and safety of the person. According to the article, transgender people are facing extra difficulty in that regard due to their gender identity, the chances of finding medical staff who will treat them with respect is even more difficult.

Proud Seniors Greece are fighting for the provision of legal and social support in claiming the rights of LGBTQI + elderly people, the operation of nursing homes as safe spaces for LGBTQI + elderly people, the organization of training activities and health awareness of health professionals, and immediate retirement and insurance for older LGBTQI+ people who may not have a livelihood due to exclusion from work experienced due to gender or sexual orientation. Due to extreme levels of homophobia, it is very common in Greece<sup>13</sup> for people to not hire LGBTQI+ people and this phenomenon is even more intense for transgender people who are completely excluded

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rights available to married opposite-sex couples".  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT\\_rights\\_in\\_Greece](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_in_Greece)

<sup>12</sup> Can be found on viewtag.gr  
<https://www.viewtag.gr/aorati-loatki-tritis-ilikias-diekdikoun-ta-dikeomata-tous/>

<sup>13</sup> Due to "Racist Violence Incident Recording Network - Annual Report 2019", 44 were the recorded victims who were targeted either as members or as supporters of the LGBTQI+ community. (Data provided by UNHCR-Greece: [https://www.unhcr.org/gr/15313-rvrn\\_etisia\\_ekthesi\\_2019.html](https://www.unhcr.org/gr/15313-rvrn_etisia_ekthesi_2019.html))

from the labor sector and society. As Nana Hatzi states in the documentary “Nana” (2015):

“In Greece being a trans woman is the same as being a whore, you have to be in the streets. You cannot have another profession, you cannot work in a shop or a factory or everywhere else... to have your own job, etc... Our life may be... may seem to be fancy, colorful, with sequins, glitter, and all of those things but in reality, it is nothing like that... First of all, you are alone[.]”

Concluding, while Proud Seniors represent the voices of the elderly queer individuals in the Greek context and they are trying to restore the idea of the aging queer body and to claim constitutional revisions so that LGBTQI+ seniors have the same rights as the rest of the population, Giannos states:

“What we want is to have the same rights as other citizens, because growing up we all have the same needs. The practical difficulties in a conservative society with an equally conservative state mechanism are a huge problem, making it difficult for us to stand by the people who need us... Our only hope is that at the end of life there will be two, never one person alone [...]” (Documento, 2019)

## **Chapter 2 –Practices of Combining Activism and Care**

The second chapter starts with a description of what “Proud Seniors Greece” stands for as an organization and more specifically it will focus on why they chose specific paths in order to succeed in constructing their environment as it is today and how it led them to do so. Then I will focus on how building up a safer environment within the community starts from a form of collective care which could be read as a form of resistance to the outside effects of society. Finally, I will close the chapter by introducing a different approach to the notion of safer spaces, community building, and coalition.

### **2.1 Care as Creation/ Safe(r) Spaces**

Proud Seniors Greece as I already mentioned, started their journey- in 2015 in Athens- as a collective/organization through a very unfortunate event, the death of their friend and trans activist Nana Hatzi, when during her fight with cancer many people from the community came together and collectively started a funding to cover her medical expenses and her needs and of course with the aim to support her physically and mentally. To me, it is very impressive when in times of need and struggle, despite all the difficulties the community is coming together and collectively works and fights and at the end, something like Proud Seniors Greece comes out of the ashes to bring some light to the struggle.

Their work on issues around the senior community is intersectional and covers needs on different levels. Their action revolves around three main functional axes. The first is the mediation, in which they act as a mediator with a network of health professionals who should be trained to serve the needs of LGBTQIA+ elders on issues that the same organization is raising when is necessary. Except for the health care and psychological support that they offer to their members their mediation can also be extended to the promotion of requests to various services and even provision of resident assistance. That means if a member or someone who is under the LGBTQIA+ senior umbrella

comes in contact<sup>14</sup> with them with a specific request they do their best to meet their needs even if that means domestic help. As the members of the organization state in an interview they gave in October 2020 to the journalist Meropi Kokkini for the “LIFO magazine”<sup>15</sup>:

“As proud seniors, we strive to create care units for the elderly that will be safe places for all people. For places that will be run by qualified staff and will provide the self-evident and inalienable right to all LGBTQI + seniors to be visible in the way they wish, without discrimination and exclusive behaviors. In addition, proper and complete training of the staff working in the above fields is required, so that there are no phenomena of abuse (verbal or other) due to sexual orientation, identity, or gender, but to create safe environments of creation and expression.”

In addition, in March of 2020, during the first lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they opened a helpline, in collaboration with psychologists and the organization's social workers, providing psychological support or other mediation to LGBTQI + seniors in need.

The second axis concerns the entertainment of the individuals. By creating safe environments of expression and communication (safe spaces), relaxation and communication nights and other events are organized for all the members to come together and to strengthen their relationships. On this note, in October 2020 there was the launching of the “*Colorful Book Club*”. Giannos, in his interview on “LIFO magazine” states:

"It is a creation of the members of our collective and aims, through regular meetings and suggested book readings, to give our members the opportunity to get to know each other better, strengthening their relationships and communication of

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<sup>14</sup> There is a contact telephone line to which they respond and mediate according to the need of the request.

<sup>15</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lifo\\_\(magazine\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lifo_(magazine))

all age groups, as it is open to any age, especially those of our older LGBTQI+ fellow human beings”.

He adds, *“The Colorful Book Club is open to all people, regardless of sexual orientation, identity or gender, religion, nationality, color or race. It is friendly to all vulnerable people, away from stereotypes, prejudices and sexist anachronistic standards, offering a safe environment for expression”.*

The third level of their work is political action. The aim is to provide information on issues affecting people aged 50+ in both the LGBTQI community and civil society, creating the necessary visibility and acceptance that they need. As Giannos elaborates in his interview in LIFO magazine:

“In 2018, our team submitted a report to the Alzheimer's Diseases and Related Disorders Society of Athens, in order to include the LGBTQIA + community (aged 50+) in the very important National Action Plan for Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease. The aim is to increase the visibility and respect of LGBT people aged 50+ in health issues (public mental health but also in the general provision of health and physical care services), integrating them with visibility of sexual orientation and identity or gender characteristics in the general ages of the population.”

The third axis deals with the political part and the public picture of the community. That is the writing of texts, participation in events of the LGBTQIA+ community, and not only. He continues:

“In June of the same year, we had a meeting with representatives of the National Center for Social Solidarity (EKKA). Particular emphasis was placed on the immediate need to create a hosting space for LGBTQI + seniors and especially trans people, who are the most vulnerable group in our community, who need care due to their exclusion from choosing legal work for young people due to different identities or gender characteristics, resulting in a lack of insurance and difficult daily life. "We stressed the urgent need to train people working in hospitality structures so that LGBT + older people are not forced to experience abusive or

stigmatized behaviors but enjoy a safe environment that encourages expression and calm,".

Moreover, there is a desire among the key members of the collective to open in the future the subject of sexuality, desire, and body that is considered taboo to the Greek conservative society but even among the members of PSG. In an interview that Giannos gave for the useful dissertation of Marilena Gatsiou with the title "Age and time in homoeroticism" (2017-18) that is an ethnographic research on Proud Seniors Greece and focuses mostly on the sexuality of the aging queer body, he states:

"I look forward to opening this thing this year. I can't wait for people to start talking about fucking. For sex, for the need, for the expression. It exists in people who want to have sex because there are also people who do not want to have sex. At older ages, it is not so much to fuck but to feel that you are alive. That you are still active[...] And another issue I want to open is the body. The wrinkle. The fallen tits, the ones without tits. The testicles" (Gatsiou, 2017-18: 29-30)

At this point, I would like to take a step back and think what the common ground is and one of the most important features to succeed in all the above efforts. In my view, and through my research journey for this thesis I found a main characteristic which I would like to focus on and give extra attention to; the importance of safe(r) spaces. In order to succeed creations as the one of "Proud Seniors Greece", creating safe spaces is a necessity and I will dare to say that it is also inevitable. What marginalized groups seek in order to feel more welcomed, included, and free to express themselves is safer spaces. From the discussions that PSG does around specific topics like the freedoms of sex and body that was mentioned above, it is clear for me that in order to ensure and achieve an openness to a discussion with these characteristics, you first need to build a safe environment for your members so they can feel more comfortable, secure, and ready to trust and explore themselves.

Therefore, I would like to analyze here the meaning of the term "safer space". With this term, I am referring to places that have been created from marginalized and subordinated people e.g., women, LGBTQIA+ people, people of racial minorities, etc., who create solidarity networks through which they can communicate regarding their

experiences, practice self-care, and even take action/resist against the dominant powers that marginalize them. As Tilke Wouters, a queer slam<sup>16</sup> poet has very well elaborated in their ‘Manifesto Safe(r) Space’, “*A safe (r) space is a supportive, non-threatening environment that encourages openness, respect, a willingness to learn from others, as well as physical and mental safety. It is a space that criticizes the power structures that affect our daily lives*”. It is then a space that every person who attends it has the responsibility to respect and maintain the needs and the values that have been set in order to create such an environment.

Though, “safe space” is a term that is quite generalized and abstract in terms of meaning while people perceive safety in different ways depending on their background and experiences and sometimes these spaces might not meet the expectations of all of their members and mistakes, or discomfort may occur. For this reason, the word “safe” becomes “safer” in order to be inclusive and valid for every individual’s experience.

Following again Tilke Wouters' interpretation, “*In general, safe (r) spaces are inviting, fascinating and supportive. Establishing guidelines for circumstances that are not acceptable in a room, and action plan (s) for what someone will do if those circumstances occur is part of being proactive to create a safer room*” (Manifesto Safe(r) Space). Safer Spaces are environments that are practicing care within the community, and most importantly consent. Behaviours that undermine the members are usually reprehensible and are treated accordingly. As Wouters highlights:

“Issues such as offensive language and behaviour (both within the space itself and in patterns that fall outside the activities of the space), violence, touching people without their permission, intolerance to one's religious beliefs or lack thereof, racist, ageistic, sexist, heterophobic, homophobic, transphobic, most skilled, classic or other behaviours or language that can perpetuate oppression are addressed with a safer policy”. (Manifesto Safe(r) Space)

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<sup>16</sup> “**Slam poetry** is a form of performance poetry that combines the elements of performance, writing, competition, and audience participation. It is performed at events called poetry slams, or simply slams. The name *slam* came from how the audience has the power to praise or, sometimes, destroy a poem and from the high-energy performance style of the poets” (<https://www.britannica.com/art/slam-poetry>)

It is common for such behaviors to occur as prejudices and biases are deeply ingrained even within the community and many times people may lack awareness and do not realize that their behavior can harm others. For that reason, as “Proud Seniors Greece” also indicates through their work and action, it is important to constantly strive to educate ourselves and be aware of our privileges<sup>17</sup> in order to maintain safety for each other in such spaces. From my own personal experience as a queer person being a member in “safer spaces” and having felt multiple times unsafe in them, I believe that different forms of discrimination, victimization, and harassment that people may experience in spaces like these can be even more disappointing and traumatic; when something happens in the context of the society in general, we are hurt but we are at least more aware of it.

## 2.2. Care as Resistance

*“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”*

*-Audre Lorde*

(A Burst of Light:  
Essays, 1988)

In my interpretation, the effort to create safer spaces shows the need to finally belong in a space that empowers, offers protection and collective agency, and to maintain these spaces caring for each other is the main element. I would like to explore here a different imaginary, the potentials of thinking of care as a form of resistance, and the understanding of activism allows us to expand in that regard. Taking as an example the history of Proud Seniors Greece that formed under unfortunate circumstances as mentioned before, it seems to me that their activism was born out of the need for love

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<sup>17</sup> **Privilege** “A privileged position of a person or group. For example, the white privilege: referring to the social privileges of the majority group (white community) compared to the lesser privileges (at social, political or economic level) that minority groups experience” (Manifesto Safe(r) Space) (<https://tilkewouters.be/safer-spaces-manifesto/>)

and care. They experienced what is it like to lose your loved ones and your comrades under dehumanizing conditions and they wanted to fight to reduce this phenomenon. They imagined themselves in this position when older, and they have been trying to prevent this from happening to others and to themselves ever since. Their activism then formed through the need for care and one of the roots of activism in general is to care for the care that the system that we live in does not provide. In my view then a good way to start fighting this system is to come together and create a community that gives space and values each other's body, mind, and emotions. Growing and building a purpose together is activism, care for each other when no one else cares for us is a political act. The question that arises here to me is if we<sup>18</sup> can interpret care as resistance to people's exploitation? We live in a capitalistic world where bodies are exploited as productive machines and while people have to deal with all the pressure of labor, success, and competition, they forget to take care of themselves. As I mentioned in the introduction(p.3), I experienced this feeling through the pandemic of COVID-19. The guilt of not being productive even in times of uncertainty is a very difficult feeling to erase while it is very deep-rooted in our daily life. The work of care then is contradictory to productive work and delegitimizes the importance of any kind of production that capitalism profits from. As Johanna Hedva states in a very empowering way in her Sick Woman Theory essay:

“The most anti-capitalist protest is to care for another and to care for yourself. To take on the historically feminized and therefore invisible practice of nursing, nurturing, caring. To take seriously each other's vulnerability and fragility and precarity, and to support it, honor it, empower it. To protect each other, to enact and practice community. A radical kinship, an interdependent sociality, a politics of care. Because, once we are all ill and confined to the bed, sharing our stories of therapies and comforts, forming support groups, bearing witness to each other's tales of trauma, prioritizing the care and love of our sick, pained, expensive, sensitive, fantastic bodies, and there is no one left to go to work, perhaps then, finally, capitalism will screech to its much-needed, longoverdue, and motherfucking glorious halt.” (Hedva, 2016).

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<sup>18</sup> Queer activists in Greece

Hedva, in her text writes about the invisible population, the excluded ones, the disabled, the ill, the elders, the gays, the transgenders, the lesbians, the non-binaries, the racial minorities, the refugees, and all the others who do not comply to the normality of the heteronormative, patriarchal, capitalistic, white dominant system and are forced to live in the margins. Taking a step away from Hedva's text, I will take the opportunity here to clarify that the struggles of the prementioned may be very different but what unites them is that they share the same need for survival and decency and as Audre Lorde stated in the book 'A Burst of Light: Essays' which was first published in 1988, "*No one will free us but ourselves, here nor there. So our survivals are not separate, even though the terms under which we struggle differ*". Going back to Hedva's text to conclude, we see that Hedva gives attention to all the bodies that their activism is private because they cannot physically attend public spaces. She focuses on the importance of self-care and collective care as a limitation to the continuous exploitation. Therefore, care here is the element to resist this endless oppression that we experience for all of our lives and has become our normality.

In a speech that Angela Davis gave for the Pacific University in 2014, where she talks about the differences of activism of the 60s-70s, and the present she stated that "*Self-care has to be incorporated in all of our efforts. [...] This holistic approach to organizing is, I think, what is going to eventually move us along the trajectory that may lead to some victories*"<sup>19</sup>. Davis here recognizes that self-care is taking again space in the discourse of the 21st century activists and she agrees that to first take care of ourselves, might be the way to lead the resistance. From my experience, fighting our oppressors and the system can be extremely draining, our activism then can only bring us results if we give space to ourselves to heal, recover, and process our limits and emotions.

As Audre Lorde states in her 'A Burst of Light: Essays', "*I respect the time I spend each day treating my body, and I consider it part of my political work. It is possible to have some conscious input into our physical processes—not expecting the impossible, but allowing for the unexpected—a kind of training in self-love and physical resistance.*" Lorde talks from a position of 'sickness' while she experiences life with

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<sup>19</sup> <https://vimeo.com/94879430>

cancer and in that process, she explores the limits of her body, giving space to them. She interprets self-love and care for herself as a physical resistance to the system that does not provide any care for her, which was also explained in Hedva's text, living under conditions that make you "dysfunctional" -in the terms of how the system wants you to function in order to provide to it, -the body automatically has no more value.

Concluding, I strongly believe that care plays a crucial role in our lives and politics. Forming practices of self-care and collective care can be the starting point to expand our imagination in terms of what resistance means against a system that does not provide any form of care to whatever does not comply with the "normal" order.

### **2.3 "There are no safe spaces"**

While I was analyzing how care forms practices of resistance, I could not escape from the realization that my writing reinforces characteristics of separatism (see 2.2). I want to challenge myself and my reader at this point to explore a different approach beyond the categorical thinking of "us against them" that many times gets us stuck in blaming and pointing fingers without leading us in substantial results. For doing so, I started my exploration to this different approach from Gloria Anzaldúas' and AnaLouise Keating' book "*This Bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*"(2002) which consists of a re-writing of the ground breaking book "*This Bridge Called My Back*" that was first published in 1981 and had a significant impact on feminist theorists' discourse while suggests new practices and forms of community building and extends the discussion around classism, racism, homophobia, and identity politics.

This "*Bridge We Call Home*" is an invitation to reshape and extend our knowledge and practices regarding the existing categories of our feminist approaches, communities, and collective or individual identities. As AnaLouise Keating explains in "*Transformation now!: Toward a post-oppositional politics of change*" (2012), "*This Bridge Called My Back*" is an invitation of inclusivity, an invitation "*to move through the intersections, to reach beyond intersectionality and into a metaphysics of interconnectedness*" (30). She calls that state: "*politics of interconnectivity*", "*This*

*politics, which moves from interconnectivity to inter-relationality, offers a radically inclusionary approach*” (30). Inclusivity here is extremely important while the goal is to challenge the notion of the term as we know it, take it a step further, breaking the rules of existing theories, and try in that way to reach a beyond state where inclusivity has a more tangible meaning.

Anzaldua on the preface “*(Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces*” of the book ‘*This Bridge We Call Home*’ introduces to the reader what is the allegorical meaning of the word “bridge” and why it is so important here. As she explains,

“Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call nepantla<sup>20</sup>, a Náhuatl word meaning tierra entre medio. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries.” (Preface 1)

Anzaldua agrees that those who are inhabiting the state of nepantla are living within a limitation where they are “*in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling*” that has “*become sort of “home”*” (preface 1). This sort of home that we might feel like a safer space in comparison to the threatening other side of the bridge can possibly create more harm to our communities than we think while it limits our realities, knowledge, and activism. Anzaldua then suggests that “*no bridge last forever*” and if we want radical change, we should move further, free ourselves from the labels that we reinforce to our communities, and cross that bridge with openness to discover new forms of alliances. As Keating agrees “*This relational bridge method facilitates new forms of antiracist, multicultural alliances*” (Keating, 2012: 34). That

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<sup>20</sup> “I use the word nepantla to theorize liminality and to talk about those who facilitate passages between worlds, whom I’ve named nepantleras. I associate nepantla with states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another.” (Anzaldua, preface 1)

means, to move beyond the victimhood and the blaming of what society did/does and to also see what we do to each other. Furthermore, we should try to expand our collective identities and focus as well on the differences within us in order to better understand one another.

It is important at this point to explain how we tend to separate ourselves and why that can be harmful to our communities. Even though our resistance is opposed to the binaries that have been forced on us from the status quo, and we try to run away from them, we tend to create new binaries and use them to separate ourselves from what oppresses us. As Anzaldua explains, “*In our efforts to rethink the borders of race, gender, and identity, we must guard against creating new binaries.*” (preface 3). It is very important to focus on our efforts and struggles with clarity and not to repeat the same practices that we wanted to abolish in the first place. Anzaldua asserts that:

“Our goal is not to use differences to separate us from others, but neither is it to gloss over them. Many of us identify with groups and social positions not limited to our ethnic, racial, religious, class, gender, or national classifications. Though most people self-define by what they exclude, we define who we are by what we include—what I call the new tribalism” (preface 3)

I dare to say that I am very familiar with what Anzaldua opposes above. During my experience and involvement with activism and community building, I found myself many times trapped in binaries and practices of separatism. There was a strong feeling of belonging with my communities when we were collectively sharing what brings us together and these discussions were mostly focusing on the different forms of exclusion and oppression we experience-it was us against them-. This shared experience was a ground for the feeling that we inhabit collectively in a safer space where we can exchange our common struggles. Anzaldua very revolutionary states that:

“There are no safe spaces. “Home” can be unsafe and dangerous because it bears the likelihood of intimacy and thus thinner boundaries. Staying “home” and not venturing out from our own group comes from woundedness and stagnates our growth. To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others” (Preface 3)

Recalling my younger self and experiences, that was exactly what we were missing, to loosen our borders and to stop reproducing what had wounded us. It is this intimacy that traps us in the state of nepantla and even though we believe that we are doing something revolutionary in the end the only feeling that prevails is hopelessness. Keating gives a further explanation to this state of separatism that we often tend to embrace without realizing the bad effects that has on our politics. She explains:

“This “urgent need” to stereotype and label is extremely widespread and deeply internalized. No matter how sophisticated our theoretical analyses might be, and no matter how we identify—whether as “of color,” or “white,” as “female” or “male” or “trans,” as “lesbian” or “straight” or “bisexual” or “queer”—those of us raised and/or educated in western systems of thought have been trained to read and evaluate ourselves and others according to status-quo stories. We have been indoctrinated into a supremacist worldview—an overreliance on rational thought, scientific empiricism, and hierarchical binary thinking that creates a restrictive framework that labels, divides, and segregates based on socially defined difference and sameness” (Keating, 2012: 36)

This tendency of stereotyping the “other” side or whatever is different -which is also a pattern that we meet in many feminist and queer scholarly work-, is putting us in a state of isolation and does not allow us to engage in-depth with each other and the world beyond us. For Keating, “*Status-quo stories both rely on and reinforce a separatist framework and a metaphysics of negative difference. Status-quo stories are divisive, teaching us to break the world into parts and label each piece. These labels solidify, and we read them as natural descriptions about reality*” (35) and I couldn’t agree more with this phrase. This mentality and these boundaries that we put to ourselves are the same that keep us far away from a radical change that we should work for collectively. For Anzaldua “*To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded. Effective bridging comes from knowing when to close ranks to those outside our home, group, community, nation, and when to keep the gates open*” (preface 3). We must see the importance of a different conception of difference in order for healing to actually be able to take place as well as finding new ways to take care of each other and abolish from our acts the

ways that are actually very much learned by the white supremacist patriarchal system we live in. Blocking our vision and our possibilities erase our collective and individual love, care, and responsibility. We should move then beyond our existing ways and find new forms of alliances and coalitions that are radically inclusive and open to possibilities that will create a togetherness where we will drastically teach and learn from each other.

Finally, I would like to try a connection that occurred to me while I was reading- during my thesis process- Anzaldua's preface and the importance of "bridging" with Maria Lugones' chapter "*Playfulness, "World"-Traveling, and Loving Perception*" from her book "*Pilgrimages/peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against multiple oppressions*" (2003).

Maria Lugones suggests a new path for crossing the bridges and succeeding the coalitions and interconnectedness that Gloria Anzaldua talked about. Lugones very inspiring elaborates that:

"The coalition or interconnecting coalitions need to be conceptualized against the grain of these odds. To a significant extent that is the point of this book. Audre Lorde is attentive to the problem of homogenization in coalition formation when she tells us to explore our relations in terms of "non-dominant differences." This epistemological shift to nondominant differences is crucial to our possibilities. To the extent that we are "created different" by the logic of domination, the techniques of producing difference include divide and conquer, segregation, fragmentation, instilling mistrust toward each other for having been pitted against each other by economies of domination, instilling in us the distinction between the real and the fake"

What Lugones does here is a call for exploration on what relates us outside of the common struggles that first brought us together. She invites us to explore our togetherness in ways that we will start to embrace each other than feel pity for what "they" have done to us by erasing our identities. She explains that in order to reach that state of interconnectedness we should think of the possibility to travel to each other worlds, "*We can see and understand these animations of the dominant imaginary, but we are not sufficiently familiar with each other's "worlds" of resistance to either cross,*

*or travel to them, nor to avoid what keeps us from seeing the need to travel, the enriching of our possibilities through “world”-travel.”* For Lugones the “world” has a literal and a figurative meaning, but also something in between and beyond:

“A “world” in my sense may be an actual society, given its dominant culture’s description and construction of life, including a construction of the relationships of production, of gender, race, etc. But a “world” can also be such a society given a nondominant, a resistant construction, or it can be such a society or a society given an idiosyncratic construction. As we will see, it is problematic to say that these are all constructions of the same society. But they are different “worlds.”

She describes that a world can be whole but also incomplete. It can carry domination, but it can also carry a negative identity that has been constructed by the dominant worlds. The world for Lugones seems fluid at its possibilities. In other words, she introduces all the different realities of micro-worlds that are inhabiting within the world. She explains that *“One can travel between these “worlds” and one can inhabit more than one of these “worlds” at the same time. [...] It seems to me that inhabiting more than one “world” at the same time and traveling between “worlds” is part and parcel of our experience and our situation.”*

Traveling in many worlds at the same time furthers our possibilities of openness. One can adopt different ways to explore other worlds and inhabits them without devalidating the experience and importance of their own world and that difference that occurs to oneself when we travel to another world -even if it not conscious- is what she calls traveling. For being at ease in some other's world she suggests that we should know at all levels the place that we are traveling to. She very bluntly recognizes that some of these worlds might also bring us at risk and into a place of discomfort:

“There are “worlds” we enter at our own risk, “worlds” that have agon, conquest, and arrogance as the main ingredients in their ethos. These are “worlds” that we enter out of necessity and that would be foolish to enter playfully in either the agonistic sense or in my sense. In such “worlds,” we are not playful. To be in those “worlds” in resistance to their construction of ourselves as passive, servile, and

inferior is to inhabit those selves ambiguously, through our first-person memories of lively subjectivity”

These worlds are the same ones that in my interpretation we are trying so hard to escape from but sometimes traveling to them might be inevitable. On the other hand, there are:

[..] “worlds” that we can travel to lovingly, and traveling to them is part of loving at least some of their inhabitants. The reason I think that traveling to someone’s “world” is a way of identifying with them is that by traveling to their “world” we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. Only when we have traveled to each other’s “worlds” are we fully subjects to each other”

In order to build communities, coalitions, safer spaces, and embrace practices of care as our resistance, it is very important to have a loving approach -in Lugones terms- to our acts and politics. Having the will to cross the bridges that Anzaldua displayed and travel to each other's worlds is what will really bring us together. To succeeding in this, we should trust more and love each other's entities purely. We must overcome the biases and stereotypes we have inherited from the system we are trying to run away from and make radical changes. We need to open our horizons and learn to read our differences better; not only what makes us fit together. We should keep educating ourselves, take our intersectionality further, break the binaries and abolish the labels because “*Without knowing the other’s “world,” one does not know the other, and without knowing the other, one is really alone in the other’s presence because the other is only dimly present to one.*” (Lugones, 2003) and that for me cannot allow any creation of safer spaces nor applies to pure practices of care. And without care, we have no resistance.

### Chapter 3- COVID-19 & the Collective Queer Trauma

In this last chapter, I will give a picture of Greece' contemporary sociopolitical context, exploring how this has and is evolving in circumstances of uncertainty, most recently the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, consequently, how the general queer activist scene in Greece and particularly Proud Seniors Greece shapes alliances and shares an agonist sentiment for radical change within these circumstances. The first part aims to give insights into the current pandemic of COVID-19 through my own lens and to indicate the effects that occurred in Greek society and by extent to the queer activist scene. Secondly, I will explain how our sexual identities and queer-feminist politics have been born and formed in the first place through conditions of uncertainty that have caused an inherited trauma that we collectively share. Finally, I will try to explore a different imaginary of the heterosexual-able body in relation to the queer-disabled body and the limitations that the above terms may or not carry. My goal here is to expose the notion of the able body that has been abusive against different identities and constitutes a prominent reason that contribute to the oppression and erasure that people who carry these identities share. Moreover, I will explore how activism has been embodied and situated within practices of mourning in contemporary Greece. Then, by extension, how age and the notion of the healthy able-body is a social construct and has been used as a means to delimit the worth of people's life. Additionally, I wish to clarify my use of "we" in the following chapter. For that, I quote Judith Butler from the book "Precarious Life: the powers of mourning and violence" (2004) where she very well elaborates a phrase I identify with; *"I can still address a "we," or include myself within its terms, I am speaking to those of us who are living in certain ways beside ourselves, whether in sexual passion, or emotional grief, or political rage."* (24)

Additionally, for the analysis of this chapter, I chose to continue with authors that selectively write about the Greek context -as Anna Carastathis, Aila Spathopoulou, Myrto Tsilimpounidi, Soula Marinoudi, Athena Athanasiou- and their writings have stimulated my interest as they combine theory and politics, and ones that write for different contexts and/or globally-as Paul Perciado, Crimp Douglas- and have been an inspiration to my imaginary.

### 3.1 The Pandemic

*“The real pandemic here is capitalism”*  
-Astra Taylor

Despite the efforts of many in the West to ignore the news coming from East Asia about a contagious virus spreading among the population, March 2020 arrived with the announcement of the first lockdown in Europe. The virus had reached the West making clear that this is a global pandemic, bringing into light a Europe and a US filled with racist speech and extreme xenophobic reactions. I recall a week before the first lockdown was announced in the Netherlands, I was talking to a friend from China who admitted how scared she was for her physical integrity<sup>21</sup>. Things evolved quickly and from one moment to the other Europe experienced a new reality, unfamiliar with the standards of the West.

Europe was divided in two: there were countries (e.g. Netherlands) that at first were practicing semi-lockdowns, reproducing speech such as "herd immunity", "trust to the people", "individual responsibility". On the other hand, there were countries (e.g. Greece) that were practicing full lockdowns and curfews from the very beginning as they did not have the means, the infrastructures, or the workforce to deal with this virus. Poverty and homelessness rapidly increased especially in South Europe where the economy has faced multiple crises for over 10 years now. For Greece, this pandemic is the third crisis that the country has faced in the past decade. First, was the outbreak of the economic crisis or alternatively the Greek government-debt crisis<sup>22</sup> of 2009 that worsened dramatically in 2011. Then in 2015 the well-known refugee crisis began, and now the current pandemic of COVID-19. In combination with the extremely corrupted governing body, the country and its civil society has suffered 12 years and counting. As Anna Carastathis, Aila Spathopoulou, and Myrto Tsilimpounidi argue in a collective

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<sup>21</sup><https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide>

<sup>22</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek\\_government-debt\\_crisis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_government-debt_crisis)

editorial, titled: “*Covid-19 discloses unequal geographies*” that discusses the inequalities that Covid-19 brought in societies:

“The latest crisis to arrive on the scene is the global Covid-19 pandemic that has exacerbated the negative effects of the previous declared crises. A chronically underfunded medical system subject to austerity cuts is collapsing. The warehousing of asylum seekers in camps has primed the conditions for the rapid and deadly transmission of the virus. Yet, it has also had – at least discursively – redemptive effects on the construction of Greece as a crisis-ridden country, politically or culturally responsible for the mismanagement of the previous two crises; the coronavirus pandemic is a global crisis, and it is naturalized as a medical phenomenon. As Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis proclaimed, “The consolation ... is that today we are no longer a 'special case'. We are not the 'black sheep' of Europe” (2020, 9)

In the last phrase of the right-wing minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, we see once again a neoliberal rhetoric of audacity and anesthesia. The prime minister seems to be more concerned about the status of the country -which has been collapsing for over 10 years due to the mismanagement from its own governments- than the actual people that inhabiting this country. The pandemic has not yet come, that will make us forget the violent policies of the Greek state, the corruption, the misery, the death, the precarity, and the repression that we have been experiencing all these years. As Anna Carastathis, Aila Spathopoulou, and Myrto Tsilimpounidi again very well elaborated:

“Medical metaphors are among the favorite rhetorical schemas in the construction of crisis narratives: “Europe will keep giving medicine to Greece”, “crisis is a disease that needs to be quarantined and contained”. Etymologically, 'crisis' suggests the necessary climax to a natural process, like the turning point in a disease. Medical metaphors treat crises as natural processes; as something inevitable that was meant to happen. Such naturalizing, leaves no room for questioning the structures, decisions, and value systems that brought us to this state of (really) late capitalism, of profits over human lives, corruption, and mismanagement” (2020, 9)

The issue the writers raise here is that there is a normalization around the idea of “crisis” as a natural effect that we cannot avoid. This naturalization tries to rinse the responsibility of the creators of these crises. Apart from the Greek case, the editorial “*Covid-19 discloses unequal geographies*” discusses how Covid-19 affected and highlighted the crises that different marginalized groups in different geopolitical contexts – in that case, Brazil, California/US, Finland, Portugal/Italy, and the UK- are facing, which proves that the pre-mentioned rhetoric is not convincing. The scholars argue that these very different geographical contexts are facing very different crises, but the common element is that all these crises are man-made from neo/liberal and imperialist regimes and are all targeting the unprivileged and vulnerable populations.

So, we are at the point where the pandemic breaks out and this crisis is handled entirely by a corrupted system making decisions for our lives in accordance with its own interests, aiming to create a world on its own image and while we were locked in our homes, watching the news from the TV that sometimes reassured us and sometimes terrorized us, “*what emerged in the coronavirus crisis was a renewed apartheid system whereby quarantine’s intertwined biopolitical and necropolitical logic came into harsh relief.*” (Carastathis, Spathopoulou, Tsilimpounidi: 2020, 9). In the midst of all this new reality, a propaganda that some saw as sedative and for others was shocking was evolving, which conveyed that those at risk of the virus are the most vulnerable groups e.g., elderly people. When the virus started spreading, we saw that this may have been the norm but there were many exceptions. As Naomi Klein stated in an online teach-in that aimed to “*offer strategies of resistance and collective action in times of social distancing*”, “*Now people who have been blind to that are turning on their TV watching Fox News saying ‘maybe we should sacrifice your grandparents,’<sup>23</sup> and they’re going, what?*” (Nunez,2020). Klein talked about the so-called “Go back to normal” phrase that was globally spreading and was heard often while experiencing this pandemic. Normal was never a reality for the majority, that is the blindness that Klein talks about. Biopolitical and necropolitical operations from the dominant powers have been performing over sexual, racial, and other minorities for countless years now. As Paul

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/24/older-people-would-rather-die-than-let-covid-19-lockdown-harm-us-economy-texas-official-dan-patrick>

Perciado agrees in his article "*Learning from the virus*" that was published during the first lockdown, "*In the domain of the individual body, different sicknesses materialize the obsessions that dominate bio- and necro-politics in a given period*" (2020). In my view, "the sacrifice of our grandparents" would be very convenient for the Greek government's economy and I guess many other governments. It would be a huge relief if the Greek state did not have to offer any more the already reduced pensions of +/- 400 euros to people who no longer offer their services in the country's workforce so they can get paid +/- 500 euros for their hard work if they are lucky enough to have a job. I hope that the tragic irony in the pre-mentioned is clear for my reader. As Naomi Klein relevantly states:

"We can see the grotesque economic divisions widening further. We are trying to deal with the impacts of this pandemic within the fallout, within the rubble of the austerity policies of the foreclosure crisis, and the decimation of labor standards that grew out of the last crisis. How hard it is for southern Europe. We cannot forget that southern Europe was ground zero for the 2008 financial crisis. Is it any surprise that those hospitals, despite having public healthcare, that those hospitals are ill-equipped? (Nunez, 2020)

The economic crisis caused by people who "*pushed money out the door to their shareholders and enriched themselves and poor people have just become more vulnerable*" (Nunez, 2020), left Greece lacking medical staff, equipment, and intensive care units. Consequently, it was obvious enough that the country could not handle a pandemic that is uncontrollably spreading. A full lockdown then was the "best-case" scenario. Now<sup>24</sup> Greece is experiencing the second full lockdown and it leaves me with the question; What about those who do not have families? Those who do not have someone to care for or take care of them? Those who are unemployed, those who deal with mental health issues, those who live in toxic and abusive environments and all the minorities who have already been suffering from the unbearable situation that prevailed long before the virus? One relevant example of this is the "Proud Seniors Greece" and the community it represents, since as we saw on the first chapter (p.14-18) LGBTQI+

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<sup>24</sup> December 2020

elders are already experiencing many difficulties in daily life, and even more during a pandemic.

In “*Learning from the virus*”, Perciado refers to these minorities within the eyes of the state as the “unproductive zones” that in a necropolitical system, such as the one we live in, these lives are disposable. He elaborates:

“These are zones or population groups that had already been left on the other side of the biopolitical frontier but that today appear twice as vulnerable: the elderly, in particular those who are institutionalized within the death industries known as nursing homes, [...]; people considered handicapped, in particular those institutionalized within the death industries known as homes for the disabled; criminalized and incarcerated people within the death industries known as prisons and detention centers,[...]. Homeless bodies [...] are considered criminal by the very fact of eluding confinement and are secluded in detention centers that promise more contagion than cure” (2020)

Recalling the hideous statement of Texas governor Dan Patrick that suggested the sacrifice of the grandparents for the economy to be saved, is not only in many levels inappropriate but in-depth it also had a purpose to create a sense of togetherness as in “together” we can work to save the economy and the country. We heard many times this rhetoric of “togetherness” overplaying in the news. Just to give an example, in an informative speech given by the prime minister in the Greek parliament about the virus, he said "Altogether to improve the situation in the fight against the coronavirus". Subsequently, all these rhetorical slogans were trying to encourage the idea that “We are all in this together”. However, a pandemic could not operate as an equalizer to the privileged and unprivileged lives that are experiencing it. As Rosi Braidotti suggests in her text “*We” Are In This Together, But We Are Not One and the Same*”:

“A pandemic on the scale of COVID-19, brings home to the Western world an ancient truth: that “we” are all in this planetary condition together, whether we are humans or others [...] Yes, we are connected, that is to say ecologically interlinked through the multiple interconnections we share within the nature-culture continuum of our terrestrial milieu. But we differ tremendously in terms

of our respective locations and access to social and legal entitlements, technologies, safety, prosperity, and good health services.” (2020, 467)

The social and political inequalities that emerged through this pandemic are not affecting everyone in the same way. Not everyone is exposed to the virus in the same way, nor is experiencing this pandemic in the same way or with the same means so consequently we are not in this together.

To conclude, I will go back to my case study, Proud Seniors Greece. As mentioned in the previous chapters, because of the pandemic, Proud Seniors were forced to stop their physical meetings/gatherings and to replace them with online ones. In addition, according to data<sup>25</sup> that I collected through T-Zine, -which is an online magazine mainly concerned with transgender issues- in March of 2020, during the first lockdown, PSG opened a helpline, in collaboration with psychologists and the organization's social workers, providing psychological support or other mediation to LGBTQI+ seniors in need. Their general action was transferred mainly online through the group's Facebook page that operated informatively and supportively for their members. It was natural that this new virtual reality would increase the levels of loneliness and the need for socialization and care. For that reason, Proud Seniors except the hotline they were/are also offering domestic help to people in need.

I will conclude this with a post that Giannos, the founder of the organization wrote in his personal Facebook account which in my opinion gives a taste for some effects that occurred due to Covid-19. He states:

“I missed my friends. The gatherings of our team, The dog of (name of a friend). The laughter of (name of a friend). My dear people. I missed our Fridays with our gatherings and our parties. My friends from Amsterdam. We even mourned our dead with masks. I miss my life. I miss you, my lovely friends, and even the ones we usually fight. Emotions without covers and protection.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> <https://t-zine.gr/proud-seniors-greece-ypostirixi-loatki-prosopon-50/>

<sup>26</sup> 28/11/2020

### 3.2 Trauma & Mourning & Activism

This section aims to describe how our sexual identities and queer-feminist politics have been born and formed from the very beginning through conditions of uncertainty that have caused an inherited trauma that the queer movement collectively shares. By extension, I aim to display how activism has been embodied and situated within practices of mourning in contemporary Greece.

Greece is a state attached to the West yet with Eastern heritage. The main values of my country are three: “Nation-religion-family”, deep-rooted ethical values for the Greek population. In other words, contemporary Greece is a country of structural violence which is demonstrated within its political instability, conservatism, nationalism, homophobia, working-class' financial exploitation, femicides, rapes, sexism, ableism, ageism, anti-migrant policies and ideologies, police violence, and the erasure of the lives of the most vulnerable ones. Being Greek itself as a queer subject contributes to the creation of our public trauma.

The queer political agenda in Greece emerged in the early 2000s in Athens within a state of de-subjectification, mutation, and erasure of their sexual identities not only from the prementioned factors which constitute the majority of the Greek society but also from the same anti-authoritarian far-left movement and the country's vibrant anarchist culture that unfortunately yet not impressively carries a lot of sexism and homophobia. There was and still is a strong gendered regime within the anarchist scene that queer and mostly male cis-hetero subjects were sharing. This aspect for the devaluation of their queer identities and the discomfort of being in a space that you do not exist but at the same time, you exist as you share the same agonistic sentiment for radical change, resulted also in unsafe and abusive behaviors towards queer subjectivities. As Soula Marinoudi explains in the article “*Queer subjectivities within political scenes: Traumatic relations, exposed vulnerabilities*”, “*The traumatic aspect of these power relations within leftist and anarchist groups is what an interlocutor has named ‘the originary myth’ of the contemporary queer political scene in Greece, by*

*which he meant that the break with these political scenes gave rise to the emergence of the queers' own history.” (2018, 157)*

While the deconstruction of this gendered regime was in a sense impossible and at the same time painful, queers claimed their own identities and their own spaces within the public sphere, trying to build safer environments, rinse the mainstream idea around the LGBTQIA+ identity and give visibility to their queer feminist politics. As I referred to in the second chapter (p.23-24), safer spaces are difficult to build and maintain especially when they are in a renaissance stage and inappropriate incidents can also occur and can be even more hurtful. Marinoudi raises this issue in a discussion with one of her interlocutors who experienced an unspecified but unfortunate incident in the space she was politically organizing and, in the question, “*What was the difference between this incident and the one she experienced in the leftist group*”, she replied, “*The great difference is that after making this accusation in the left I had somewhere to go. After making the accusation among queers, I had nowhere else to go. ‘You would never leave the queer scene, would you?’ I asked. I try, but every time I have nowhere else to go. ‘You are trapped in yourself’, I said and we both laughed.*” (Marinoudi, 2028: 159).

Beyond these personal difficulties in our political coalitions that are leaving queer subjects exposed to traumas and “*the vulnerability of being affected by the other*” (Marinoudi, 159) and by your comrades, I would like to go a bit further and address here how queer subjects in the context of their political struggle have also been affected from politically crucial events that have taken place in the past two decades and have left the whole Greek movement in a state of trauma and rage. To name some of these events, I will refer selectively to those that have created the greater political tension; the murder of the 15 year old student Alexis Grigoropoulos by a police officer(2008), the economic crisis and the deadly riots that followed(2010), the arrival of the neo-Nazi criminal organization Golden Dawn as an elected party in the Greek Parliament (2012)<sup>27</sup>, the murder of the migrant Shehzad Luqman by a member of the

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<sup>27</sup> “*In May 2009, Golden Dawn took part in the European elections and received 23,564 votes, 0.5% of the total votes. In 2010 it won 5.3% of the vote in Athens. In that election, the party won its first municipal council seat and entered parliament for the first time in 2012. In the Greek parliamentary elections of*

neo-Nazi criminal organization Golden Dawn(2013), the murder of the musician Pavlos Fyssas by members of the neo-Nazi criminal organization Golden Dawn (2013), the torture and murder of Vaggelis Giakoumakis(2015), the rape and the murder of Eleni Topaloudi (2018), the public lynching and murder of the LGBTQ+ activist Zak Kostopoulos/ Zackie oh (2018), the election of the current right-wing prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis (2019), the brutal policies and mismanagement of the current pandemic of COVID-19(2020), and of course the uncountable hate crimes against refugees and migrants both from the state and society (2015-present). One can imagine that the above are just some of the incidents that constitute Greek society and by extent our collective struggles, pain, and traumas. My political and intellectual growth is bound with stories of violation and death like the one of Zackie's. We have now inherited trauma both on our individual identities and our political coalitions.

Zak/Zackie's brutal murder was a turning point for the queer scene, while it left the community in a state of sorrow, despair, and agonistic mourning. What emerged then through this incident was a different form of grievability<sup>28</sup> (in Judith Butlers' terms) and togetherness. As Athena Athanasiou shared in "*On the politics of queer resistance and survival: Athena Athanasiou in conversation with Vassiliki Kolocotroni and Dimitris Papanikolaou*":

“In sharing my grief and sense of despair about Zak's death with a friend earlier today, I used a phrase which in Greek implies something like how do we go on living or surviving, or, perhaps more accurately, on what conditions do we live on. My friend replied: 'together'. Indeed, this performativity of embodied relational agency offers the possibility of politicizing the conditions of survival and what counts as life amidst ongoing loss through figuring a break with the present order(ing) of things and giving a sense of what a 'different life' might consist of.” (2018, 217)

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*May 2012, the party received 6.97% of the popular vote. In the rerun of the elections in June 2012, their share of the vote was 6.92%. This made them the third largest group from Greece to the European Parliament (the largest was Syriza's alliance)* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden\\_Dawn\\_\(Greece\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_Dawn_(Greece))))

<sup>28</sup> See Butler (2004)

The aftermath of Zak's death left us all in a deeply painful state of mourning, searching our positionalities and possibilities through new complexities of belonging and at the same time in a state of militant emancipation of our identities and agonist actions for justice. At that moment, our togetherness was all we had left, and we came together through our grief to claim political freedom and social justice and "[...] *what became dominant in the context of the queer community, was that losing, failing, living in pain or in pride, as underprivileged was what gave some people the right to exist* (Marinoudi, 2018: 161)

On a similar note, I am going once again back to my case study, "Proud seniors Greece" that came together and formed their group through the unfortunate death of their friend and comrade Nana Hatzi. Their activism stems from the position of individual and collective trauma. Therefore, what they succeeded was to convert their mourning process into action. Besides of Nana, they have experienced many other losses of friends and members, one was Zak's death who was also a close friend of Giannos. One year after the murder he stated in a post on Facebook "*When the tear dries, anger has a say! When the tear dries, JUSTICE should speak*" (22/09/2019). PSG is one of the groups that played an important role in the struggle for the justice of Zackie's death. Their presence was and is vibrant on social media, the streets, the court, the parliament, and every other place which is connected with this fight for justice that is still unsolved. Among others, in 2019, PSG participated in a panel held in memory of Zak with the topic "How safe the LGBTQIA+ people feel in Athens"<sup>29</sup>. In 2020 through their Facebook page, they made an open call<sup>30</sup>-in collaboration with other groups and organizations- to individuals and collectives of the LGBTQIA+, the feminist, and the anti-fascist movement with the aim to invite them to an open assembly in order to discuss and organize together actions that will contribute to the fight for Zak's justice.

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<sup>29</sup> <https://t-zine.gr/vradia-mnimis-gia-ton-zakzackie-oh/>

<sup>30</sup> August 2020 (<https://www.facebook.com/giannos.kanellopoulos/posts/10158573455961866>)

As Giannos stated in the related post “*As we do these two years that passed with pain, anger, and struggle, so now, we want to walk on these two critical dates (meaning the dates of the assembly) in terms of collective claim for the memory of our friend, for the administration of justice, for the daily battle against fascism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia.*”

Our political and sexual identities have been built and shattered many times within the specific socio-political context of Greece. Surprisingly-from my standpoint-the experience of loss almost always reverses our pain and grief into action. Maybe it is because we see ourselves in our dead, maybe it is because we are tired of being violated and trying constantly to regain our freedom, or because our vulnerability and grief is now part of our political embodiment, maybe we are desperately looking for protection and justice, maybe none of the above and all together. Douglas Crimp on ‘*Mourning and Militancy*’ even though he writes about a very different context, the AIDS crisis in the United States (the 1980s), he revolves around the procedure of mourning within queer movements, and he very inspiring writes:

“There is no question but that we must fight the unspeakable violence we incur from the society in which we find ourselves. But if we understand that violence is able to reap its horrible rewards through the very psychic mechanisms that make us part of this society, then we may also be able to recognize -along with our rage-our terror, our guilt, and our profound sadness. Militancy, of course, then, but mourning too: mourning and militancy” (1989, 18)

To conclude, - as we also encountered through the journey of PSG- our sexual identities and political struggles coexist in a complexity, a desire for survival, for lines of alliance, and the necessity to rebuild our present-in order to gain our future- which was constructed through conditions of pain, trauma, and rage that at the same time constitute our political agitation. Mourning and militancy then are what constitute our wholeness.

### 3.3 Queering Health and the Able Body

To close this chapter, while Proud Seniors Greece for me indicates a form of activism that is aimed to challenge the “compulsory able-bodiedness”, I would like to go back to where I began and reflect on the aging queer body/subject through Robert McRuer’s text “*Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence*” (2006), in an attempt to explore the reasons that contribute to its marginalization and with the aim to question the dominant notions around the healthy-able-body.

In “*Compulsory Able-Bodiedness and Queer/Disabled Existence*”, Robert McRuer analyzes and connects his theorizing with Adrienne Rich’s famous critique of “compulsory heterosexuality”. As McRuer suggests “*Compulsory heterosexuality’s casting of some identities as alternatives ironically buttresses the ideological notion that dominant identities are not really alternatives but rather the natural order of things.*” (89) There is a legitimization around the dominant identities (e.g., cis, heterosexual, white) that does not give any space for these identities to be questioned while for the general public constitutes the “natural” order. This “normality” automatically creates an opposition between the heterosexual and homosexual identity. As McRuer further explains:

“[...] the ongoing subordination of homosexuality (and bisexuality) to heterosexuality allows heterosexuality to be institutionalized as “the normal relations of the sexes,” while the institutionalization of heterosexuality as the “normal relations of the sexes” allows homosexuality (and bisexuality) to be subordinated. And, as queer theory continues to demonstrate, it is precisely the introduction of normalcy into the system that introduces compulsion” (2006: 90)

This “normalcy” targets and stigmatizes the different identities and at the same time “abnormality” comes as an oppositional term to replace and ground the notion of homosexuality, leaving in that way the subjects in a constant struggle to de-pathologize their identity. Therefore “*Compulsion is here produced and covered over, with the appearance of choice (sexual preference) mystifying a system in which there actually is no choice*” (McRuer, 90). McRuer uses the “*understanding of “compulsory heterosexuality” as a key concept*” (89) to extend the discussion on disability studies,

as a critique around “normalcy” has been similarly common to that discourses and thus he introduces to the theory what he calls “compulsory able-bodiedness”. He agrees that:

“able-bodied identity is at this juncture even more naturalized than heterosexual identity. At the very least, many people not sympathetic to queer theory will concede that ways of being heterosexual are culturally produced and culturally variable, even if and even as they understand heterosexual identity itself to be entirely natural. The same cannot be said, on the whole, for able-bodied identity.”  
(91)

Hence, he agrees that the validity of the able-body identity comes as a consequence of its productivity and whether it can be exploited for the interest of the system of labor. Indeed, as he also mentions, in the Oxford English Dictionary, able-bodiedness is defined as “*The state or condition of being able-bodied; ability to work; robustness; freedom from physical disability*”<sup>31</sup>. Inevitably, another antithesis occurs that brings the able-body in opposition with the disabled one. In that regard, McRuer further explains that:

“[...] able-bodied identity and the Oxford English Dictionary betray their origins in the nineteenth century and the rise of industrial capitalism. It is here as well that we can begin to understand the compulsory nature of able-bodiedness: in the emergent industrial capitalist system, free to sell one's labor but not free to do anything else effectively meant free to have an able body but not particularly free to have anything else” (91-92)

According to that, the notion of the able-body emerged through a condition of exploitation that dominates our societies to this day and is in fact in its most advanced form. In a similar approach, Johanna Hedva in “*Sick Woman Theory*” suggests that “*“Sickness” as we speak of it today is a capitalist construct, as is it perceives binary opposite, “wellness”. The “well” person is the person well enough to go to work. The “sick” person is the one who can’t.*” The person who cannot offer their services in the

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.lexico.com/definition/able-bodiedness>

capitalist system is automatically classified as unproductive, incompetent and by extension is located below the umbrella of disability.

Analyzing the above, it is inevitable to me not to make the connection with the queer aging body. The queer aging body is a perfect example of what McRuer suggests as it fits in both categories since it is both queer and disabled due to that narrative. The withdrawal from the labor market and their sexual identity are the reasons that place queer elderly people in these categories which are key reasons for their stigmatization and marginalization. For these reasons, Proud Seniors Greece took the initiative to create a space that advocates and represents the voices of the elderly queer individuals in the Greek context, trying to restore the idea of the aging queer body and in the political context to claim constitutional revisions so that LGBTQI+ seniors to have the same rights that the rest of the population has.

While he suggests that compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness are interwoven, McRuer attempts to deconstruct the above notions paraphrasing Judith Butler words from “*Gender Trouble*” by switching the focus from Butler’s gendered perspective to his disabled one, he suggests that:

[Able-bodiedness] offers normative . . . positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and the persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals [able-bodiedness] itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy. Indeed, I would offer this insight into [able-bodied identity] as both a compulsory system and an intrinsic comedy, a constant parody of itself, as an alternative [disabled] perspective”. (93-94)

According to Butler “*the project of heterosexual identity is propelled into an endless repetition of itself*” (McRuer: 93), and these repetitions are bound to fail. In the same way for McRuer, able-bodied repetitive performances have even higher chances to fail since “*the ideal able-bodied identity can never, once and for all, be achieved*”. (93) Again, by appropriating Butler’s theories, he suggests that “*Everyone is virtually disabled, both in the sense that able-bodied norms are "intrinsically impossible to embody" fully, and in the sense that able-bodied status is always temporary, disability*

*being the one identity category that all people will embody if they live long enough.”*  
(95-96)

Indeed, the attainment of such an identity must be constantly confirmed by repetition. In my view trying to obtain a healthy, vital body will always be a parody, as the ability and independence of the body are misleading representations and the body always depends on technological infrastructures. A similar claim we see in Paul Perciado’s book *“Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in The Pharmacopornographic Era”* where he very inspiring states:

“I now need only to convince you, all of you, that you are like me, and not the opposite. I am not going to claim that I’m like you, your equal, or ask you to allow me to participate in your laws or to admit me as a part of your social normality. My ambition is to convince you that you are like me. Tempted by the same chemical abuse. You have it in you: you think that you’re cis-females, but you take the Pill; or you think you’re cis-males, but you take Viagra; you’re normal, and you take Prozac or Paxil in the hope that something will free you from your problems of decreased vitality, and you’ve shot cortisone and cocaine, taken alcohol and Ritalin and codeine . . . You, you as well, you are the monster that testosterone is awakening in me” (2013, 398).

To conclude with that, Perciado here suggests that the healthy-heterosexual-able-body can reach its “normalcy” only through performative repetitions of modifications and drug usage. Therefore, the “ideal” body is on an ontological level unachievable, since if chemicals are technology, technologization of life is not the exception of the rule but the actual condition that we exist in.

## Conclusion

This thesis tried to provide insights regarding the queer activist scene in the sociopolitical context of contemporary Greece. I chose this exploration to be achieved through the example of the aging queer body, and for doing so I decided my case study to be “Proud Seniors Greece”, the first and only group that is concerned with issues regarding LGBTQIA+ seniors in Greece. Because queerness is multidimensional so is my thesis as I chose to explore my topic within the intersections of age, sexuality, gender, care, the pandemic, trauma, and finally able-bodiedness. Hence, this thesis intended to give answers to the following questions; How queer theory helps to understand how struggles against prejudices about the aging queer body have shaped networks of alliance and a strong activist scene and how activism has been embodied and situated within practices of care and mourning in contemporary Greece. Moreover, how age and the notion of the healthy able- body is a social construct and has been used as a means to delimit the worth of people’s life.

For my first Chapter, I focused on how the concept of age and aging has been constructed through different sociopolitical theories that were all had the same element; the heteronormative perspective. Following that, I provided some critical feminist queer theories around time and the aging queer subject and finally, I introduced my case study. I intended to selectively focus on what is known about the social context of the LGBTQIA+ elderly people in Greece and I did that through the lenses of the “Proud Seniors Greece” group.

In the second chapter, I described further what ‘Proud Seniors Greece’ stands for as an organization and more specifically I focused on the reasons that they chose specific paths in order to succeed the construction of a safer environment where they can exist unapologetically. Following that, I further opened the discussion on how building up a safer space within the community starts from a form of collective care which subsequently we could read as a form of resistance to the outside effects of society. Finally, I closed the chapter by introducing a different approach to the notion of safer spaces, community building, and coalition.

For the third and final chapter, I tried to give some insights for a better understanding of contemporary Greece's sociopolitical context and how that is evolving through the uncertain times of COVID-19. Consequently, I explored how the queer activist movement in general and in particular "Proud Seniors Greece" have shaped alliances and share an agonist sentiment for radical change within unfortunate circumstances in general. Furthermore, I explained how our sexual identities and queer-feminist politics have been born and formed in the first place through conditions of uncertainty that have caused a trauma that we collectively and individually have inherited and share. I explored then, how activism has been embodied and situated within practices of mourning. Last, I attempted an analysis of Robert McRuer's text "*Compulsory able-bodiedness and Queer/Disabled existence*" with the aim to expose the notion of the "able-body" that has been abusive against queer subjectivities and constitutes one of the main reasons for their erasure and oppression that I demonstrated on my thesis.

The motivation for this thesis came from a personal need to give further insights and a better understanding of the southeast Mediterranean sociopolitical reality and the effects that this has on the queer activist scene in Contemporary Greece, -a reality that might be not so familiar to the intellectual circles of the Global North-.

I chose to do this through feminist and queer theories while feminism and queerness - in different geographical contexts- carries a history that is attached to moments and stories of resistance, gender violence, and oppression from the patriarchal order. Since my politics, gender, and sexuality are attached to the Greek reality, this thesis could not avoid including in my writing my positionality as a queer Greek activist.

Concerning age/aging, since I share sentimental and agonistic bonds with my case study "Proud Seniors Greece" as we share the same cultural background, similar labels, and ideologies, I tried to demonstrate how age functions outside the normative way of living and thinking in order to start a discussion and exploration for others and myself -as potential aging queer subjects- and to bring queer aging voices to the forefront.

Last, this thesis demonstrated how the survival as a queer subject in a country that has been a graveyard to countless bodies reinforced queer cultures of resistance and emancipatory discourses that constitute a heritage for our past and future.

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