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## #METOOGREECE

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#METOO #METINSOFIA #WITHSOFIA #EIMASTEOLOIMAZI  
#WEAREALLTOGETHER

**A FEMINIST VIEW ON LANGUAGE, TOGETHERNESS AND THE NATION-STATE** — In late 2020, Greek Olympic medallist Sofia Bekatorou publicly shared her experience of rape by a member of the Hellenic Sailing Federation, leading to a spiral of events that included further public revelations of cases of sexual violence and expressions of public support for victims on social media platforms. Following the accusation, the hashtag #metinsofia (#withsofia) appeared on social media. It gained widespread support and was followed by #eimasteoloimazi (#wearealltogether). However, from the outset, the emergence and development of the #metoo movement in Greece, which occurred later than in other parts of the world, proved deeply problematic in terms of the preparedness of the wider society to support effectively, rather than performatively, the victims and their fight for justice and to criticise patriarchal public discourse. The development of the movement in its first six months also evidenced the state's power and control over emancipatory narratives, actions and grassroots community-building initiatives.

— The absence of a sustained and critical feminist dialogue in response to the public articulation of the Greek #metoo movement led to the radical potential of the movement being quickly defused, as if the moment had passed; as if such systematic and institutional violence could be quickly addressed and resolved; as if going against the very principles of MeToo itself. This localised example of yet another #metoo movement that is part of a much wider, global fight against violence and oppression tended to raise questions rather than lend force to collective action: Who stands together with the victim (#metinsofia i.e #withsofia)? Who is “we” in #eimasteoloimazi (#wearealltogether)? Who is at liberty to declare “me too” when this very language can be appropriated and capitalised by the government on its official website? What are the limitations of collective organising in an age of fast, networked communication that is simultaneously as open to circulation as it is to surveillance and control? How can #metoo, as Athena Athanasiou suggests, resist the “rehabilitation of a non-intersectional universal – or universalizable – female ‘me’ that reproduces the structure of capitalist individualism”? (Efthymiou/Athanasiou 2019: 8)

— Claims of togetherness are foundational to any #metoo movement both globally and locally. Structurally, the movement is based on solidarity and organising, on rallying behind personal experiences of violation. In Greece, the first instance of such testimonies and actions was expressed through the hashtag #metinsofia (#withsofia), which became a public declaration of solidarity with the athlete. The power of the case ultimately led to it being linked with the global #metoo movement and the emergence of the localised #metoogreece movement.

— In each MeToo case, the personal is political, and thus the public's alliance and alignment with Sofia could not be confined to a single narrative: it was already part of a global movement with a new localised form of expression. The case of Sofia gained such momentum partly due to the victim being a widely popular figure, whose public presence was closely entwined with Greek identity and pride; it was associated with the nation-state itself. It is very important that the Greek MeToo movement was activated with the case of a popular figure that is recognised and recognisable from different social groups, even the ones that are conservative and reluctant to normally embrace such a discourse. Nevertheless, we have to consider the details of such an adoption that hide quite problematic tactics and strategies. The website [metoogreece.gr](http://metoogreece.gr) was launched in February 2021 as the state's response to Sofia's case. An Instagram profile with a similar rationale accompanied the official webpage. On the website's landing page we read:

metoogreece.gr is a State website that will collect all necessary information about issues of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence, and their prevention. This page will soon include announcements about initiatives that aim to help all men and women to react against forms of harassment and abuse. It can help you break the silence, starting from today! If you need help, there are people here for you. Get in touch now.

— It is important to consider what it means for the Greek state to obtain the online domain that refers to the rise of the #metoo movement in the country. To provide some additional context, the website is administered by the *General Secretariat for Demographics, Family Policy and Gender Equality*, a department within the Greek Ministry of Labour. It is significant that the government changed the name of this department in early 2021 from the *General Secretariat for Gender Equality* in order to include

and prioritise matters of family policy that were already high on the agenda of the Greek conservative neoliberal government. Equating gender equality policies with demographics and support for the traditional nuclear family is another way of silencing specific voices and promoting patriarchal heteronormativity as the ideal standard. At the same time, the government also voted for new legislation granting mandatory joint custody of children after divorce, which disregards the risk of domestic violence and abuse directed at the mother and/or the children. Joint custody is an important decision and fair in principle. Before taking a decision to make it mandatory though it is essential to ensure structural and legislative safety nets connected to family regulations, councils and specialized supervision informed by feminist claims family law that protects and obviates violations of many kinds. It is contradictory, to say the least, for the state to create an official online platform for abuse victims to “break the silence” and seek help, whilst voting for a bill that clearly protects the abusers.

— Furthermore, by registering the domain name “metoogreece.gr” the administrators of the website also purchased a large proportion of the internet traffic of #metoogreece. “metoogreece” is a hashtag that localises the MeToo global movement and contextualizes Greek cases of harassment within a global conversation on social media and online platforms, and a search term that directs a percentage of organic traffic to the governmental page. As a result, metoogreece.gr creates a centralised space of knowledge and authorship in the online realm, stealing the symbolic capital of the public hashtags within a discussion that elsewhere has been foundational to a collective networked exchange.

— The main purpose of the government campaign was to *collect* information and stories of harassment or abuse, a process facilitated by sharing a series of support lines, such as the already established SOS number for women suffering domestic violence and the SOS number providing support for children, adolescents and parents, as well as the direct emergency line to the Greek police. While support lines and structures are necessary, the rapid institutionalisation of victims and their testimonies also served as a strategy to remove them from the public sphere, to prevent the addition of further testimonies to the networked dialogue, and to disrupt political alliances and collective protest at the very moment of their formation.

— An examination of the material on the official website of metoogreece.gr with regard to its visual and linguistic character raises important issues. The few images featured on the webpage

and its associated social media accounts mostly depict women as animated characters; on the one hand, these are directly aligned with the stereotypical mandates of normative femininity such as slimness and long hair, and, on the other, they exhibit almost no facial features, thus communicating an image that makes identification almost impossible. Simultaneously, the overall graphic design decisions demonstrate that this is a campaign devoid of personal experience and trauma, as well as any type of confrontation, which are essential characteristics of a feminist discourse and praxis that seeks to challenge the status quo and gendered violence.

— The beginnings of #metoo in Greece were characterised by problematic registers: any question of togetherness was tied to the valorisation of the movement by state forces, whether its grassroots members were aware of it or not. The emancipatory potential felt in the emergence of a new togetherness that seeks justice lacked direction and was not effectively criticised by the prevailing feminist discourse, at least not in a way that could reach and intervene in the mainstream narrative. The mechanics of how this uprising was already controlled by the state were obfuscated by the intensity of sentiments of temporary solidarity and alliance. Subsequently, most reactions proved to be merely performative due to a lack of recognition of the complexity of such networked, political movements that deal with gendered violence, which is itself foundational to a patriarchal system that prospers by being based on the propagation and concealment of such violence.

— Lastly, the communication strategy of the state's campaign is directed by the use of the verbs 'ACT' and 'LEARN', which also comprise the webpage's main section with its three subcategories: 'Rape', 'Domestic violence' and 'Sexual harassment' and their corresponding attempted definitions. The definitions in the 'Learn' section provide basic descriptions of rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment that read like an undergraduate law handbook. These generic descriptions on the website address subjects who can "learn and act" within a heteronormative discourse that excludes the affective involvement, the vulnerability of the victims and their bodies. The simplifying and generalised official language and word selection ultimately provide a problematic genealogy of the now government-sanctioned #metoogreece movement, its practices and goals, clearly communicating the state's desire for MeToo to be contained through accusations that can be managed discreetly, didacticism and information-resource sharing.

— Four months after the launch of the website and the campaign, and despite calls for the support and promotion of initiatives

that would help victims speak out, the website remains idle. During a period in which accusations about harassment and abuse have been constantly shared and discussed in the media, the role of [metoogreece.gr](http://metoogreece.gr) seems to be the marketing and capitalising of an emancipatory movement in order to silence its revolutionary and transformative societal potential. #metoogreece's demands have been hijacked, the government is effectively renouncing the movement's collective register and the fight against sexual violence that is sanctioned by the patriarchy, and the state is once more at a stalemate. Movements such as #metoo have to be aware not only of the historical and political struggles but also of the media spaces and narratives that they can occupy and infiltrate. As Nancy Fraser suggests, we should be especially aware "as we operate on a terrain that is also populated by our uncanny double" (Fraser 2013: 225): the neoliberal side of feminism. Change has yet to come and feminist criticism and resistance can do better.

— The current text was written in June 2021 during the first wave of #metoo in Greece reflecting the circumstances and our concerns of that time. The recent and ongoing developments demonstrate that our initial intentions were valid and that our call for sustained feminist discourse and praxis should only grow louder.

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Centre of New Media and Feminist Public Practices (GNMFPP) was initiated in 2018 by art theorist and curator Elpida Karaba as a research program funded by the Hellenic Foundation for Research

and Innovation (HFRI) and the General Secretariat for Research and Technology (GSRT) under grant agreement No 2284/5758 hosted by the University of Thessaly, Department of Architecture.  
<https://www.centrefeministmedia.arch.uth.gr/people>

// FKW is supported by the Mariann Steegmann Institute and Cultural Critique / Cultural Analysis in the Arts ZHdK

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