

# THE GREEK POST-#METOO ERA'S STAGING OF DIVA CITIZENSHIP IN *MILKY WAY*, BY VASSILIS KEKATOS

## LA ESCENIFICACIÓN DE LA “CIUDADANÍA DIVA” DE LA ERA POST-#METOO GRIEGA EN *MILKY WAY*, DE VASSILIS KEKATOS

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**Abstract:** Vassilis Kekatos's melodrama series *Milky Way* (2023) narrates the life of Maria, a pregnant teenager in a fictional Greek village, whose “Athenian dream” is to join Eurovision singer Eleni Foureira's dance troupe. The figure of Foureira, prevailing in the current post-feminist framework, finally appears as a *deus ex machina* in a vision. Foureira herself developed an Athenian dream, countering a xenophobic context through exceptionality. The present paper explores how female subjectivity is formulated in the series, how Kekatos uses the staging of the diva to address female gendering and alternative futures for teenage pregnancy, and what implications the series has in a post-#MeToo Greek context. Specifically, it encompasses Foureira's staging within the framework of what Lauren Berlant (1997) has called “Diva Citizenship”. The main contribution lies in the analysis of how adolescent role models must be filtered through the complex contradictions and challenges inherent in postfeminist settings.

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**Resumen:** La serie de melodrama *Milky Way* (2023) de Vassilis Kekatos narra la vida de María, una adolescente embarazada en un pueblo griego ficticio, cuyo “sueño ateniense” es unirse al grupo de baile de la cantante eurovisiva Eleni Foureira. La figura de Foureira, relevante en el marco posfeminista actual, finalmente aparece como un *deus ex machina* en una visión. La propia Foureira desarrolló un sueño ateniense, contrarrestando un contexto xenófobo mediante la excepcionalidad. La presente reflexión explora cómo se formula la subjetividad femenina en la serie, cómo Kekatos utiliza la escenificación

de la diva para abordar la identidad de género femenina y futuros alternativos para el embarazo adolescente, y qué implicaciones tiene la serie en un contexto griego post-#MeToo. Específicamente, abarca la puesta en escena de Foureira en el marco de lo que Lauren Berlant (1997) ha llamado “Ciudadanía Diva”. La principal contribución reside en el análisis de cómo los modelos adolescentes se ven filtrados por las complejas contradicciones y desafíos inherentes a los entornos posfeministas.

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## 1. Introduction

Vassilis Kekatos's series *Milky Way* premiered on the Greek TV network Mega in late 2023. The melodrama tells the story of Maria (Korinna Dullaart), a pregnant teenager in a fictional Greek village, shedding light on the processes of subjectivation in contemporary European periphery. The main character grapples with news of her pregnancy as she navigates unsteady relationships with her three best friends, her parents, and her boyfriend, Tassos (Nikolakis Zegkinoglou), an early adult gas station employee, who has never imagined escaping himself.

Alongside, or perhaps despite, the pregnancy, the “Athenian dream” that Maria embodies, which eventually guarantees her exodus to the (less fictional) capital, is key to her subjectivation process. This voyage is accompanied by aspirations of upward mobility, economic and emotional emancipation, liberation from traditional femininity, as well as disdain towards the Greek Province. The use of this Province (in Greek, the Eparchy) is deeply subjectivising in Kekatos's work.

Having grown up in such a setting, in a small village of the island of Cephalonia, the director has stated that he knows the rural setting and its norms too well (ERT, 2025). At the same time, the series stages gender dissidence in a conventional, even intolerant, environment through another key figure, that of Jo (Constantinos Georgopoulos), a queer/nonbinary person who also expresses their own resistance to the traditional family narrative and helps Maria when everybody else seems to abandon her. Notice the use of the names Maria for the protagonist and Jo(seph) for the queer figure of guidance towards abortion.

Ideals of Greek citizenship are negotiated in the series, in a moment of apparent economic stabilisation after a decade of recession, but also cultural backlash. Under the director's gaze, these morals have never even been questioned in the case of the Greek Province, but rather taken for granted (ERT, 2025). The collective trauma that seems to have united the Greeks during the 2010-2019 “multiple crisis period” (if that is a closed time frame and if it can be accepted as legitimate for an analysis of the sort) seems to have shifted to a different kind of malaise after the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2025). It is within this shift that feminist thought and practice have been reshaped, and where the production of this and similar cultural products has thrived –Dimitris Papanikolaou (2021) has notably called this proliferation of productions “the Greek weird wave”.

The works Kekatos has introduced us to are critical, progressive, edgy, frequently provocative. They do not easily conform, but on the other hand, the sociocultural associations they activate lead to debates

that are hard to reconcile. Some relevant research questions that arise here are: how does the series negotiate female and queer subjectivity, if we take the stark contrast between traditional femininity/motherhood and escape to the big city as a starting point? How does Kekatos address this becoming? And what implications does this cultural product have in a post-Greek #MeToo moment, where a lot of advances in human rights are faced with neo-con resistance?

The present paper wishes to portray the postfeminist framework in which *Milky Way* is inevitably ascribed to, focusing on the controversies surrounding tokenism and woke representations of emancipation, while also delving into the motives that justify the main character's exodus to the big metropolis. For this purpose, after offering context on the Greek #MeToo movement and the need to empowering film narratives, the paper concentrates on a specific scene in which Maria encounters the promise of a different futurity and stages her own diva moment. The choice of this unique scene, which is believed to condense several meanings that deliver the general message of the series, is, therefore, a deliberate attempt to restrict the analysis, since there are wider topics discussed throughout the eight episodes, which would require further discussion. The figure of Eleni Foureira is also subject to exploration, for her participation in the scene connotes a series of issues related to womanhood, nationalism, and representation.

I chose to approach the scene in theoretical, not empirical, terms, as the questions that are posed are also conceptual. However, some filmic references are also provided as resonant to the scene, to substantiate

the negotiation of femininity. These resonances, meaning parallel readings that enable kinships and genealogies unaccounted for (Eastwood, 2014), might be useful tools for constituting a subtle lineage of these emancipatory communicational phenomena in Greek film. Furthermore, the article also tentatively offers information about the broader context, without pretending to be exhaustive, only to assist a better comprehension of the scene.

## 2. Staging the appearance of the diva: Kekatos's use of #MeToo imagery

Vassilis Kekatos has reasons to be considered one of the most promising directors of his era in Greece, as his short film *The Distance Between Us and the Sky* was awarded, in 2019, with the Cannes Film Festival's Short Film Palme d'Or. Following the success of his previous work, his eight-episode miniseries seemed less ambitious, especially since the initial ambition for the work to be broadcast on national television was scrapped (ERT, 2025). The series finally aired on Mega, a private TV channel that had rebooted in 2020, after a year and a half of bankruptcy. In Kekatos, Mega might have found the figure of a progressive creator who could bring it back to national media prominence.

The director has, on several occasions, expressed satisfaction about creating *Milky Way*, especially when openly asked about the portrayal of women's emancipation, abortion rights, queer liberation, ethnic difference, as major narrative tropes. As a communication

strategy, his audio-visual text allegedly despises a simplistic pedagogical or moral tone. However, as Kekatos himself points out (LiFO TV, 2024a), his depiction of the Greek *Province* is heavily influenced by his road trips in the United States (hence the obsession with gasoline stations), by personal experiences of college dropout, rebellion, and experimentation with drugs, as well as by his political views (secularism, anarchism). It is mostly due to that reason that he has been accused, largely, but not exclusively, by reactionary commentary, of tokenism, “foreignism”, and superficiality in his approach to social minorities (LiFO TV, 2024b).

Within this framework, it is interesting to observe the insecurities and ambivalence that a feminist project filmed by a cis straight male creator carries. The series aired from 2 November to 21 December 2023, a moment when public discussion on women’s self-determination and self-regulation was in plain national spotlight. Essentialist feminist readings were indeed reluctant to acknowledge his contribution (LiFO TV, 2024a). But the series not only exonerates and decriminalises adolescent abortion in front of a typically Orthodox audience, but also highlights how Greek society projects double standards onto teenage mothers: sexualisation (before pregnancy) on one hand, and adult accountability (post-partum), on the other. In the wake of domestic cultural production, the series deconstructs a series of attitudes about womanhood, femininity, maternity, sexuality, connecting with the broader public discussion on the matter. The question is whether the narrative manages to convince an increasingly critical and multi-angled Greek feminism.

The Greek #MeToo movement emerged in early 2021, a few years after Alyssa Milano’s tweet, after Olympic athlete Sofia Mpekatorou publicly revealed her sexual abuse as a minor by a senior Hellenic Sailing Federation (HSF) member. The abuse took place during training sessions for the 2000 Olympics. Shortly after, actress Zeta Douka denounced, during a TV interview, that she had been a victim of verbal and emotional abuse with sexual connotations by renowned actor and director George Kimoulis. This live televised event was another important detonator: women similarly impacted now felt legitimised to express their claims, without the previous fears that they would be directly ignored. This eventually, but not necessarily linearly, led to the accusations of both Giorgos Lignadis, prominent director and then head of the National Theatre, of child abuse and sexual scandals involving minors, and Petros Philippidis, also a famous actor and director, of rape and attempted rape. Both men faced trial and, even though social justice has not been done, the final decision in the Philippidis case, reached very recently, was relieving for the victims.

In Greece, traditional media, particularly television, constituted the prominent means of propagating the #MeToo movement (Gill & Orgad, 2018). Nonetheless, their implication has not always been adequate or satisfactory (Orphanides, 2023). A generalised blindness towards collective feminist genealogies has been ostensible (Kissas & Koulaxi, 2024). In exchange for this dissociation from lay and activist organisations, the #MeToo narratives have been intentionally individualised by the media, as a means of pronouncing personalised success and resistance (Tsaliki, 2024). As if they were

indispensable parts of the national liberal feminism and overcoming narratives, the women who managed to open up about traumatic experiences have been framed as case studies, not members of a bigger mobilisation.

There are no remarkable, innovative, or original traits of the Greek #MeToo movement, and this is not to diminish its relevance, but rather to ascribe it to a broader, transnational current of gender justice. Most women representing its ideals in the public sphere have been prominent figures with substantial epistemic authority and social capital (Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). This is not to signal the banality of the involved causes, but to better sketch the ways in which contemporary identity politics and institutional strategies mainly use new platforms for same-old demands (Zarkov & Davis, 2018). What is more, the right-wing shift in national gender identity politics has been a remarkable turning point in this context (Vougiouka *et al.*, 2021). This shift has been subtler than the discourses shaped in the media, although these have had an undeniable role in its materialisation. The COVID-19 pandemic, alongside the public health and socio-epidemiological measures to counter it, intensified already existing social stressors, especially the unresolved side effects of a persistent economic recession (Murray *et al.*, 2023).

Interestingly, the fight for the institutionalisation of the term “femicide” in the Greek justice system, to encompass the massive rise of gender violence, was also a battlefield of cultural wars between progressive and conservative institutional feminists (Vougiouka *et al.*, 2021). Within this tension, we cannot help but acknowledge the concurrent

surge of femonationalism in the face of alt-right women politicians, like Afroditi Latinopoulou, whose discourse is openly anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQI+ rights, and anti-immigration (Samaras, 2025). This false division or “side-picking” between femonationalists and anti-feminist women public figures capitalised on the expulsion of intersectionality from within the #MeToo movement (Giannopoulou, 2025). The activist and organisational parts of national feminism were left with fewer resources and possibilities to raise their voice.

Meanwhile, stories of elderly, younger, migrant, poor, non-standard women (those without children, outside the workforce, or the cisheteronormative and able-bodied norms), and other femininities embodying various intersections and facing higher susceptibility to violence, have been largely ignored by the very apparatuses that supposedly promulgated #MeToo narratives (Kissas & Koulaxi, 2024). Intersectional approaches were historically notoriously lacking in Greek feminism anyway (Vougiouka *et al.*, 2021). In that sense, Eleni Foureira, the pop-feminist idol that Kekatos uses as referential in his liberating narrative, has not been associated with the #MeToo movement: she has not shared a personal story of overcoming patriarchal oppression, nor has she used her musical influence and cultural capital to generate impactful feminist songs (except, perhaps, for her cover of Katy Garbi’s *To Kati*). Part of this lack of participation might be connected to the discussion over her ethnic background.

Here, it is fundamental to situate the two key figures I am interested in, Eurovision singer and performer Eleni Foureira, and director Vassilis Kekatos, in terms

of their relationship with the movement. The former has generally chosen a low-key stance, without associating her name and artistry with feminist ideals. Her songs are generally more self-objectifying and sensual than they are emancipation hymns, and her staging has been reported to resemble that of Beyoncé, or Latin divas (Baker, 2020). However, a recent incident of harassment on stage urged her to manifest overt discomfort, and educate on gender issues in real time: “Well, listen, this is all very nice... but since I... am trying to do my job right now... it’s not very nice... I just got champagne in my eye... I’d have to sing one more song and stop the program here... I’m sorry... I just got soaking wet...” (Kalantzis, 2024). Kekatos, on the other hand, has been viewed, alongside Yorgos Lanthimos, Athina Rachel Tsagari, or Panos H. Koutras, as one of the movie directors thought to make feminist claims visible through his characters and cinematic approaches, although not to be seen as a #MeToo representative per se.

### 3. Who’s the diva?: A shift in feminine subjectivity

In this section, I delve into the scene of Foureira’s heavenly appearance. My aim is to observe how the scene condenses meanings that are distinctive of the Greek #MeToo movement, using Maria as a prototype of a normative-turned-dissident femininity. This is not to focus on this scene as the only representative of the series’ liberating tone, but rather, because I believe it perfectly condenses several important values that the series promulgates. For that purpose, I appeal to Lauren Berlant’s (1997) notion of “Diva Citizenship”, which describes the

public expression of pride that dissident subjects use to reappropriate spaces that they are conventionally deprived of. Moreover, the affect theorist’s depiction of the contemporary US lifestyle in the work that contains this notion serves as a basis for the post-pandemic Greek social framework that I wish to cover.

The scene I am referring to is one of the last ones of the third episode, and its timing is extremely crucial: it is a dream scene (from minutes 00:54:30 to 00:57:30), after which Maria wakes up, and on the school bus, announces to Jo that she has carefully considered their suggestions and is finally determined to abort (00:58:10-00:59:20). The dream first depicts Maria cycling backwards. She is in the middle of a dark meadow, and strong light is thrown onto some important figures of her life, who also happen to be on that meadow: first, her four best friends, who supposedly dance to a pop choreography without her (00:54:45). Then, her father and her boyfriend –who now almost fully assumes fatherhood– work in carpentry while drinking beers (00:55:20). Right afterwards, we see Maria’s grandmother holding a pet (00:55:45). This is followed by an impactful staging of Maria herself as a mom, strolling with a baby carriage, accompanied by her mother –“future” Maria is the only one to maintain eye contact with her in the vision (00:56:00). Suddenly, she stops cycling, and right in front of her, a heavenly light reveals a *deus ex machina*, the goddess Foureira (00:56:30).

An extremely commonplace pattern in ancient Greek drama involves the dissolution of an existential dilemma through the unexpected appearance of a deity that disrupts the regular

order and intervenes in the situation to decisively shift the narrative. This *deus ex machina* is allegorical, evanescent, produced in a state of daydreaming or an intermediate space at the margins between reality and fantasy, disclosure and secrecy, materiality and spirituality, *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich*. The deity is indeed a phantasm, a ghostly, mysterious figure that shocks but also unveils, that imposes their law but also alleviates from the dead-end (Macías Villalobos, 2022). Like the figure of the monster, the *deus ex machina* carries information with it, and *demonstrates*, unearths, or pinpoints aspects that were previously concealed. According to Niki Sorvani (2025), there is something particularly queer in the intersections between the phantasmatic, the monstrous, and the uncanny that impacts our subjectivation processes, making them more dubious, more fluid, and uncertain.

I suggest that in the emergence of the diva, there is a phantasmatic element that is both overwhelming and informative. All the aforementioned conceptualisations operate to mark Maria's experience and aid her decision to perform an abortion. This moment, when the diva that has been mentioned repeatedly finally makes her appearance, albeit relevant to the series' message, is not decisive in terms of advancing the plot. It is, however, a moment of specular identification (Klein, 2023; Sorvani, 2025), when Maria and her idol become the same person—one is the real self and the other the ideal. Berlant comments:

Diva Citizenship does not change the world. It is a moment of emergence that marks unrealized potentials for subaltern political activity. Diva Citizenship occurs when a person stages a dramatic coup in

a public sphere in which she does not have privilege. Flashing up and startling the public, she puts the dominant story into suspended animation; as though recording an estranging voice-over to a film we have all already seen, she renarrates the dominant story as one that the abjected people have once lived sotto voce, but no more; and she challenges her audience to identify with the enormity of the suffering she has narrated and the courage she has had to produce, calling on people to change the social and institutional practices of citizenship to which they currently consent (Berlant, 1997: 223).

Diva Citizenship, following this definition, applies to those who, not being allowed to participate in the public sphere, break with conventions and acquire, for only a brief moment, this opportunity to perform conventionality in a minimally “acceptable” manner. In addition, Berlant speaks about a “dramatic coup”, which disrupts the normal time frames, pauses or paralyses the hegemonic narrative, and makes a subversive statement. In the scene, Eleni Foureira is *anything but* someone who stages an unconventional coup; on the contrary, at that moment, she exercises her full celebrity authority and is completely mystified by Maria. However, this staging may also be read as an insurgency, if we understand Foureira as an excluded subject, a hypothesis I shall discuss at the end of this section. The epiphany that we, as spectators, witness, is one of a resistant body that guides the protagonist towards a direction that the rest of her surroundings, with one sole exception, avoid taking her: the horizon of an abortion, of a non-reproductive or non-nation-saving future (Chalkia, 2004).

Dimitris Papanikolaou (2018, 2021) applies Berlant's notion to a scene in the film *Strella* (2009), by Panos H. Koutras.

According to Papanikolaou, Strella's (from *Stella* and *trella*, star and craziness) staging of an exodus from a rich Athenian hotel on a Christmas night, after having been poorly treated and ridiculed, is not only an act of subversion, but also of occupying public space for purposes other than the normative ones. Her trans body (and metonymically, that of lead Mina Orfanou) parading on the streets of the centre of Athens, in a time and space where the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn has started to terrify neighbours and passers-by, is a declaration of an emerging femininity previously oppressed.

Another movie highly influenced by Kakogiannis's *Stella* (1955), with clear parallels between the main female character and Melina Mercouri both in role and in flesh, is Alexis Bisticas's *To Harama* [The Dawn] (1994). Perhaps Vasso (Katerina Kouka), the main character, performs an earlier spatial and agential emancipation act than Strella, both chronologically and symbolically, as breaking from hetero-patriarchal bonds, liberating herself financially and emotionally, comes, in a way, *before* the rupture from the cis imaginary. In one of the last scenes of the film, Vasso triumphantly descends a street of Kesariani, a migrant and working-class neighbourhood of the Eastern suburbs, to the sounds of the original song "S'agapousa" ("I used to love you"), sung by lead Katerina Kouka herself. Through three songs "Kainourgia zoi" ("New life") and "Ta eukola ta dyskola" ("The easy and the hard things"), which all speak about disillusionment and disentanglement from her abuse by Nikos (Stavros Zalmas).

None of the described scenes is parodic, but might rather be viewed as such by

a certain audience, which understands those outspoken and cathartic acts as a threat to their order. Moreover, albeit extricating, these moments simultaneously conceal the corresponding directors' admiration and idealisation of female figures: Alexis Bisticas stated he projected authenticity and folk sentiment onto Kouka, Koutras admired Orfanou and wanted to bring her to the limelight to question traditional morals, while Kekatos also expressed regard to Foureira and mentioned he used her guest appearance in the series as a means to deflate anti-immigrant sentiment (LiFO TV, 2024b). This is thus not to suggest that Foureira herself performs an act of Diva Citizenship at that point, even though her "nonfictional" presence seems to suggest it. In this reading, Foureira is no other than the phantasmatic transfiguration of Maria herself, a projection of her own idealisations and identifications. On the other hand, were we to apply a more literal meaning to the scene, then again, we face the possibility of speaking of an otherwise or hitherto oppressed or mystified figure that now snappily dominates the public space. Berlant wishes to highlight the intertwining between the individual and the collective in this unforeseen praxis as follows:

The centrality of publicity to Diva Citizenship cannot be underestimated, for it tends to emerge in moments of such extraordinary political paralysis that acts of language can feel like explosives that shake the ground of collective existence. Yet in remaking the scene of public life into a spectacle of subjectivity, it can lead to a confusion of willful and memorable rhetorical performance with sustained social change itself (Berlant, 1997: 223).



In the scene, Foureira interprets herself and carries a pledge, but also an enigma (circumscribing the confusion that Berlant speaks about). Her message to Maria is, “No matter how lonely you feel right now, you are not Laika on Sputnik Two. Your own spaceship has not been launched yet. It is waiting for you, don’t miss it! There are... so many beautiful galaxies out there, faraway from yours!”.<sup>1</sup> It is a concise urge that comes at a moment in Maria’s life when she is facing severe doubts as to whether to abandon her attempts to abort. The message has no action verb: despite Kekatos’s fixation with *ergativity* (for an analysis, see Podaropoulos, 2022), the phrase simply announces the existence of other places in which the heroine can thrive, without the need to feel indebted to others around her. However, or maybe for that same reason, the instruction is also obscure: the space metaphors, which connect with the series’ title, make it feel hypothetical, ethereal, unreal.

It might be sustained that, in the scene, Foureira does not necessarily portray herself, but rather a generic female deity that, according to Maria’s fantasies, is personified through the image of Foureira for identification purposes. Foureira tells Kekatos, in their shared interview in 2024 (LiFO TV, 2024b): “I wouldn’t mind if you told me to be a UFO, a deity, whatever else you’d need, I would do it anyway”. On the other hand, the association with Virgin Mary through an X hashtag, #PanagiaFoureira, by some fans after the projection of the scene, enraged ultra-Orthodox adversaries of Kekatos, who

1. “Όση μοναξιά κι αν νιώσεις τώρα, δεν είναι η Λάικα στο Σπούτνικ δύο. Το δικό σου διαστημόπλοιο δεν έχει εκτοξευτεί ακόμα. Σε περιμένει, μην το χάσεις! Υπάρχουν... τόσοι ωραίοι γαλαξίες εκεί έξω, μακριά απ’ το δικό σου!”.

rushed to consider his work even more deplorable, degenerate, and perverse.

Meanwhile, there is also “future Maria”, the double that looks at the protagonist in the eye from the future. This *doppelganger*, considered by Naomi Klein (2023) a point of contact with the spectral world, is also a relevant figure. Doppelgangers are uncanny versions of ourselves that live parallel lives to ours, shaping our subjectivity through exclusion: not only do they personify the dreadful, most personal images that we despise, like Dorian Gray, but they also reflect the evil twin’s or abject self’s opposite choices that lead them to this unwanted mirroring. If it’s not for following the Athenian dream, Maria’s destiny is to stroll around town with her mother and the baby.

#### 4. Postfeminism, young adulthood, and the eternal question of who to trust as an emancipatory icon

Maria, as a teenager who suddenly faces an adult dilemma, suffers from similar religious scorn in the series, replicating the same attitudes that the series seems to have faced in real life. This topic seems rather banal nowadays, in the sense that the issue of teenage pregnancy should not demoralise with its novelty or rawness. However, the resurgence of traditional values in the frame of neo-con propaganda (Klein, 2023), with the accompanying reactionary shift towards reproductive futurity, especially in the post-COVID period, makes Maria’s personal drama “divisive”. Patterns of national reproduction, invested with fears of collective extinction and external

invasion, which have already been examined as constitutive of demographic paranoia in Greek society (Chalkia, 2004) have now been resurrected in novel terms: in the last five years, epidemiological and geopolitical tensions have brought the issues of procreation, abortion, contraception, and gendered nationalism back to the surface. In this section, I will further inquire into how gender violence, reproductive rights and gender subjectivation in young adulthood are communicated through icons that are rendered controversial.

Postfeminism is the framework that understands feminism as a given and uses this precept to propagate cultural messages about its proliferation, and in cases, even its repudiation (Munford & Waters, 2014). Intersectionality is curiously a fundamental principle in postfeminist thought, at least for some parts of it (Gill, 2016). Postfeminist sensibility, in concrete, dialogues with choice and consumer identity, and despite being slightly different from popular feminism and neoliberal feminism, its neoliberal underpinnings are central to its cultural manifestations (Banet-Weiser *et al.*, 2019). Younger generations of feminists, especially those who have grown up in, and with, social media, tend to view their identities as mediated, contingent, and fragmented, at least in comparison with second-wave conceptions. Briefly, the postfeminist take has proven both liberating and problematic, as it encompasses and reappropriates severe contradictions (Argyriou, 2019).

Within this postfeminist framework, the idealisation of (mostly white, cis, straight, high-class) women is a common pattern that seems already antiquated.

The promise of an idealised future, one where women will not have to think about the triviality of motherhood or the adversities of everyday discrimination, has also been described by Lauren Berlant (2011) as a sign of *cruel optimism*. This postponement of happiness to the future relies on postcapitalist, platform-mediated, globalised ethics and aesthetics, where the paradigm of so many women icons stands out as exceptionalist but simultaneously attainable. On the other hand, it is worth stressing that postfeminism encompasses and forecloses feminism almost simultaneously –it is a double movement of acceptance and denial (Argyriou, 2019). This kind of paradox, much like cruel optimism, is useful for the analysis presented in this section.

If I am referring to young adulthood for the case of Maria, it is not to downgrade her actual age as a character –after all, she is still 17, which is a very careful age choice on the plot's part, as it represents the maximum limbo before legal adulthood. Instead, this choice helps me assemble both the postfeminist rally for choice and the tensions that arise between the public and the private/intimate. Maria's girlhood is directly denied since the series' first episode, when she is called to renounce her childhood to assume the maternal role. Role modelling in the post-#MeToo era has also blurred the strict modernist divisions between adolescence and young adulthood, proving that legal age is a moral convention and a subjectivising technology, rather than a developmental stage (Aronson, 2008).

*Giving an account of oneself* as non-reproductive (following Butler, 2004, and Papanikolaou, 2021) is a public act. It requires announcing a decision, and, most

importantly, facing a judgement. Yet there is something about queenly insurrection that is private –after all, it is part of a dream, and is followed by the sharing of a secret only to one person–. It will take a few more episodes for the protagonist to transform her intimate decision into a public claim. Jennifer Musial (2019) brings *Diva Citizenship* to the realm of reproductive justice, employing it as a tool for young university students to manage their own narratives of reproduction and denounce harms in intimate contexts, holding the perpetrators accountable. She highlights how this staging helps exonerate the decision of either having a child or not. In any case, according to Berlant (1997: 242),

Yet these queenly gestures and impulses toward freedom, with their fabulous and parodistic irrelevance to anything remotely transgressive, remind us that the horizon of political national possibility [does not lie] in a technological solution –orchestrating mass culture and mass nationality through the intimate forms of celebrity. [...] These media forms, like the diva form itself, reproduces the utter privacy that constitutes the conservative imaginary of citizenship in contemporary national life: privacy, a sacred zone where democracy's intimate failures are constantly performed, played out, and minimized, made so miniaturized and banal as to seem “obviously” not of the public interest. But what *is* the public interest in a nation where optimism about collective life can only seem to be sustained by sanitized images of intimacy?

There are several points in this quotation that require attention: first, the parodic or campy element is also present in this attempt to frame a serious decision. Second, the sanitised image of intimacy is indeed a strategy that seems to preoccupy

conservative conceptions of citizenship, a moral code through which to cover their own hypocrisy –this may be the reason why the scene with Foureira scandalised many–. And third, the use of this generally depoliticised singer by Kekatos is strategic, bridging the public and the intimate/private.

Throughout the episodes, the pop icon is depicted as both unreachable and extremely ordinary. She is present even in her absence, almost constantly. Part of Maria's dream is to join her dance troupe. She is tagged in random social media moments of the four main heroines. Maria even stumbles upon her, during a visit to Athens. The idol's car stops at a red light, which is when she looks Maria in the eye, and they wave at each other. She disappears quickly, Maria takes a vague picture of her with her phone, and then starts screaming, but when she tells her friends about the encounter –they are drunk and do not pay attention– they dismiss her incredulously. Even Jo, normally willing to follow Maria's viewpoint, is unconvinced.

Eleni Foureira exemplifies the migrant-body-turned-national in a way that few other contemporary public figures do in the Greek context –perhaps aside from the Antetokounmpo brothers, or singer Christos Mastoras. She is undoubtedly a representative of an “Athenian dream”. Her parents brought her to Greece when she was ten, and she had to hide behind exceptionalist narratives to belong and debunk xenophobia. Foureira began her career with the girl band *Mystique*, which rose to fame in 2007. By the time of her first solo single, in 2010, speculation about her ethnic origins, mostly due to a non-Greek-sounding surname, urged her to

state that she had Mexican roots (Katsi, 2024). When journalist Giorgos Sompoulos confronted this statement as false, revealing her parents' names and her actual Albanian name, she denied the allegation, insisting on her paternal Mexican heritage (Efstathiou, 2014). Eventually, and by the time she represented Cyprus at the Eurovision Song Contest, she was already out as being of Albanian origin, but feeling proudly Greek. Later, she would explain that she initially hid her ethnicity because it was a taboo topic for the discography companies when she and fellow Mystique members pursued fame (LiFO TV, 2024b). A subsequent process of "adulthood" (becoming adult), through the experience of motherhood in 2023, seems to have shifted public opinion towards a more "serious" portrayal of her artistry. Until 2025, the singer has participated in various conferences and public speeches as a member of the Albanian diaspora in Greece.

Foureira's story has been portrayed as one of resilience and exemplarity, her career boom almost fully coinciding with the national recession and decay. It is also a story of relentless shaming and scapegoating, which proves that, even decades after the completion of the Albanian integration, the Greeks have kept holding signs of prejudice and negative stereotypes against their neighbouring country. Foureira's rise to fame was effected, at least partly, as an atonement, whereby she achieved a reputation *despite* her "actual" "origins" (Baker, 2020). Her runner-up position in Eurovision 2018 intensified the hypocrisy, making it seem as if she had "proven herself Greek" (even though she did not represent Greece that year, but had instead been turned down by national broadcasters) (Carniel, 2025).

Foureira herself acknowledges, in her shared interview with Kekatos, that there was a shift in her narrative from ethnic *stealth* to fully embracing her heritage and openly claiming it: "Unfortunately, it's hard to get this demon who is trapped within yourself out of you as a child, and this thing gets bigger and bigger, and you don't understand why it gets bigger, and you can't just open your mouth and ask 'why do you have a problem?' Why do I keep listening, wherever I go, 'the Albanian is bad, the Albanian is a robber, screw the Albanian'? All of this fed a demon in me and I felt like I was constantly carrying anxiety. [...] That's why, when I got accepted, [...] I felt a huge liberation" (LiFO TV, 2024b). She even correlates her experience with that of a proper gay coming-out, while also bringing her experience as the mother of a boy into the conversation, stating that she would not mind him not being cisstraight: "In order to fit in, everyone will say 'let's let everyone be who they are' and then, behind closed doors, they say 'if my son becomes gay, I'll lose it, I don't want him to be gay, I don't mind but he better not be'. [...] I was shocked by [the homophobic incident in Thessaloniki]. And I wasn't afraid whether my son would be a victim of bullying, I was afraid whether he's gonna become a perpetrator" (LiFO TV, 2024b). These declarations operate in the sphere of the phantasmagorical: just like the ghost that appears between the living and the dead, between the material and the immaterial, the *Heimlich* and the *Unheimlich* (Sorvani, 2025), Foureira seems to have long stood in this intermediate place of doubt, whereby her alleged "true national identity" or cultural heritage could be inferred, but not secured in the Greek public imaginary (Carniel, 2025).

## 5. Discussion

The main contribution of this paper lies in how, in the post-#MeToo Greek context, adolescent role models are currently filtered and communicated through the complex contradictions and challenges inherent in postfeminist settings. First, I have performed a reading of the particularities of the Greek #MeToo movement and the ways in which they have been addressed –or left unaddressed–. Here, the media have played a significant role in isolating women's experiences (Tsaliki, 2024), making concomitant or even genealogical resonances hard to flourish. I have proceeded to contextualise the emancipation of different women within different time frames, different cultural products, and from different oppressive factors. The trope that has been chosen for inspection is the staging of an exodus, and I have drawn on Strella's exercise of Diva Citizenship, as framed by Dimitris Papanikolaou (2018) in Panos H. Koutras's movie, and an exodus in Alexis Bisticas's *To Harama*, to better encompass the *deus ex machina* scene in Vassilis Kekatos's *Milky Way*, in the third episode.

This association did not pretend to be exhaustive, nor did I wish to conceal other important acts of insurgence as depicted in Greek filmography. Instead, it is an approximation of how adolescence and young adulthood, replete with existential fears, are depicted in film, and how the trope of diva staging and Diva Citizenship allows for excluded femininities to reshape the boundaries between the public and the private. Apart from advancing alternative futures that are not tied to nationalist reproductive ideals

of citizenship (Berlant, 2011; Chalkia, 2004), representations of young women who are strong enough to go against societal expectations and face structural violence are important audiovisual foundations for women's emancipation movements. Though the appearance of a god-like figure distinguishes the scene in *Milky Way* from the ones in the two films, and the experiences of the three women belong to different times and contexts, their common denominator is the liberation walk (or exodus) that they carry out.

Furthermore, *Milky Way*, alongside other late-Greek weird wave productions, has not yet received the academic attention it deserves from gender studies scholars. My main argument throughout the article has been that Foureira's appearance is symptomatic of an alternative futurity for Maria, to the point that the boundaries between the two figures in the dream become completely blurred and one becomes the idealised version of the other, free from the burden of pregnancy. This scene, but also the work itself, mirrors attempts to depict the subjectivation processes of young women in postfeminist contexts, especially journeys to metropolitan futurity. In these digitally mediated and fluid realms, pop icons can be simultaneously emancipatory and problematic, both overtly and covertly feminist, both consistent and inconsistent, but this contradiction does not appear to denigrate their cultural value. This is consistent with how postfeminism is described to embrace contradictions (Banet-Weiser *et al.*, 2019; Gill & Orgad, 2018). In communication terms, this allowance for a double message enriches the debate on postmodern (postpandemic, postfilmic) subjectivity,

opening it to intersectional readings and scopes. Additionally, it proves that in this post-#MeToo phase, there are no moral obligations to prove oneself feminist, while violence acquires different meanings (Giannopoulou, 2025; Munfond & Waters, 2014; Tsaliki, 2024). Maria has not experienced a rape resulting in her pregnancy, but is still a victim of the patriarchal structure she lives in, as she is being coerced into keeping a baby she is not sure she wants.

There are several limitations in this paper: firstly, it does not cover all possible filmic references that can be described through the lens of Diva Citizenship and analysed in the realm of the phantasmagoric. There are more resonances that can be explored as indicative of liberating genealogy. Second, Berlant created Diva Citizenship as a conceptual tool for different purposes, namely the US cultural context pre-9/11, which might be viewed as a forced reading. To this concern, I expostulate the intention to perform *resonant* interpretations (Eastwood, 2014) –precisely conjugating with allegorical, phantasmatic, and uneasy notions like those employed (Sorvani, 2025). Third, there is a back-and-forth between real-life events and filmic representations, to the point that it might seem as if I were equating the two. I do not consider the two worlds to be interchangeable, but I do claim that both can have a suggestive impact on each other.

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