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Thesis Title: *Rethinking Greekness: Imagining the Acropolis anew in three cases of contemporary Greek art*

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Introduction

The title of this research project, namely *Rethinking Greekness: Imagining the Acropolis anew in three cases of contemporary Greek art*, immediately raises two questions: why should we still be discussing the Acropolis and why is such a discussion timely. I have selected the Acropolis as the common thread connecting the three case studies because it is seen as "the ultimate symbol of Greekness" or, put in other words, it carries the symbolic weight of what it means to embody the hegemonic Greek national identity in the 21st century, that is an identity haunted by the construction of Greek antiquity in western imagination.[1] As it will become clear in the following chapters, the foundational mythology not only of the modern Greek nation state, but also of western European identity, is based on the supposed continuity from Greek antiquity to present times on a cultural as well as, to a certain extent, on a racial level.[2] This has led to a constant, unfair comparison between contemporary Greeks and their imagined, glorified ancestors, by Westerners and Greeks alike.[3] The rhetoric that often accompanied such comparisons was exemplified during the financial crisis that Greece faced from 2009 to 2018, as a result of the global financial crisis that broke out in 2007-2008.[4] During this crisis, Greeks were often presented in western media as the lazy blacksheep of the European Union and were deemed unable to live up to their ancestral mythology, a rhetoric that implied that they were unworthy of their heritage.[5] Johanna Hanink has perfectly captured this tension with the term "classical debt", referring to the symbolic debt that the West is thought to owe to Greece for its ancient civilization, a debt that some suggested that it could outweigh Greece's financial debt.[6] In the aftermath of the Greek financial crisis some scholars have noted that the crisis sparked a renewed interest in exploring modern Greece's relationship with its past.[7] Dimitris Papanikolaou, for example, has proposed the term "Archive Trouble" to describe this

[1] Rakić, "World heritage, tourism and national identity", 18 and 86.
[2] See among others Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins*, 253.
[3] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6.
[4] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6.
[5] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6.
[6] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6.
[7] See for example, Papanikolaou, "Archive Trouble" and Tziovas, "Narratives of the Greek Crisis and the Politics of the Past".

increased interest in recasting Greek history, biopolitics and body politics evident in a large part of Greek cultural production throughout the crisis.[8] As it becomes evident throughout this thesis, my three case studies all share to some extent the critical positioning of the "Archive Trouble" and the desire to redefine modern Greece's relationship with its past.

However, the importance of discussing the Acropolis nowadays is not limited to a theoretical and scholarly level. Public discourse about the Acropolis has been reignited very recently. The reason has to do with the questionable actions taken by the current Greek government in regards to the management of the "sacred rock".[9] More specifically, the concreting of part of the Acropolis's ground in October 2020 has been highly criticized by scholars and artists alike.[10] As the situation has been summarized in the Guardian:

> The installation of a new pathway paved in reinforced concrete across much of the hill's open space in the name of facilitating people with disabilities has been met with dismay. So, too, has Korres' proposed plan to overhaul the ancient citadel's majestic gateway, or Propylaia, by reinstating a Roman staircase that would both broaden the entrance, correct previous erroneous interventions and return it to some of its original form. Critics complain that both pander to mass tourism rather than saving the site from the ravages of time.[11]

Apart from the further commercialisation and commodification of the monument, the new alterations that are to come will interfere with the "sense of historic unity and continuity of the landscape and, simultaneously, would cut off access to the important archaeological vestiges surviving in situ".[12] According to Yannis Hamilakis, the interventions on the monument are "[...] clearly an attempt to recreate an imagined fifth century BC Acropolis, a neo-classical colonialist and nationalist dream which converges with the government's agenda for further commercialisation of the site".[13] This statement is relevant to one of the central issues that are explored in this

[8] "Archive Trouble" is a conjunction of Jacques Derrida's "Archive Fever" and Judith Butler's "Gender Trouble". Papanikolaou, 164-165.
[9] Many refer to the Acropolis as "the sacred rock", for example Hamilakis and Yalouri, "Sacralizing the Past": 116.
[10] Bolari, "Επιστήμονες και άνθρωποι του πολιτισμού κατά Μενδώνη για την Ακρόπολη" [Scientists and cultural workers against Mendoni concerning the Acropolis] [translation is mine].
[11] Smith, "Acropolis now: Greeks outraged at concreting of ancient site".
[12] "Η Ακρόπολη σε κίνδυνο - Acropolis in danger".
[13] Smith, "Acropolis now".

thesis, which is precisely the desire of Greeks - ever since the construction of the nation state in the 19th century - to keep projecting their descent from ancient Greeks, particularly from those of the classical period. The concession of the Acropolis among other Greek monuments to the fashion house “Dior” for the purposes of photographing their new collection on June 18, 2021 further exemplifies the commercialisation and commodification of the monument, as Hamilakis suggests.[14] The Dior fashion show took place in another archaeological site on June 17, 2021, namely the Panathenaic Stadium or Kallimarmaro, where “the first modern Olympic Games [took place] in 1896”.[15] The poster for the event is revealing of the character of the whole show and is culturally appropriating a “kitsch”, stereotypical version of Greece and Greekness[16]. As Plantzos argues:

> [...] the artwork made a significant effort at redefining kitsch through patchy pastiche: written in the by now utterly discredited ‘Greek’ font typical of seaside tavernas in the 1970s and the 1980s, and combining an indigo-blue semblance of an islandic seabed with references to folklore costumes and … weaving, the poster manages to appear so unremarkable as to become significant. Same goes for the show’s banner – same script and style, only here Athens appears to be the sum of its sites, from the Parthenon and the Erechtheion to the Agora and a token museum.[17]

The aesthetics of the fashion show from the banner to the clothes with “the occasional ‘Greek-vase’ caricature [plastered] on them” bring forward the extent to which Greek antiquities and culture continue to be fetishized and commodified today, and thus the need for a critical examination of these processes.[18]

With this research project I wish to explore how contemporary Greek artistic production brings forward questions about the state of Greekness in the 21st century, as it is situated in a complex network of sociopolitical forces that intersect with each other. For instance, through "classical debt" the weight of antiquity traced

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[14] Ibid., “Στο Καλλιμάρμαρο η συλλογή του οίκου Ντιόρ για τα 200 χρόνια της Επανάστασης— Αποκλειστικό” [The collection of Dior fashion house for the 200 years since the Revolution at Kallimarmaro - Exclusive] [translation is mine] and “Εγινε η φωτογράφιση του Dior στην Ακρόπολη” [The photography session of Dior has taken place in the Acropolis] [translation is mine].
[15] “Στο Καλλιμάρμαρο η συλλογή του οίκου Ντιόρ για τα 200 χρόνια της Επανάστασης— Αποκλειστικό” [The collection of Dior fashion house for the 200 years since the Revolution at Kallimarmaro - Exclusive] [translation is mine] and “The Panathenaic Stadium (Kallimarmaro)”.
[16] Plantzos, “En croisière”.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

in the notion of Greekness is bridged with the Greek financial crisis, while the commodification of the Acropolis within the crisis, as well as in recent times with its cementing, raises the question to what extent the socioeconomic state of Greece has changed post-crisis. In my attempt to critically examine the forms that Greekness has been taking in the last couple of decades as it becomes evident through the discussions surrounding the Acropolis, the main research question and driving force behind this research project is how the selected case studies reframe the relationship between Greekness and the Acropolis in contemporary times. Through a close reading and comparative analysis of my selected artworks I aim at contributing to the discussions critically reflecting on Greekness, while simultaneously problematizing the hegemonic narratives and cultural management of the Acropolis.

Acropolis (2001), *Parthenon Rising (II)* (2011) and *Acropolis Rocks* (2013) depart from the mythologies surrounding the "sacred rock" and prompt us to reimagine our relationship with the monument in the 21st century. In terms of their medium, the selected artworks all use the moving image: film in the case of *Acropolis* and video in the case of *Parthenon Rising (II)* and *Acropolis Rocks*. The three case studies form a cluster of research objects that illuminate my research question through their similarities and differences. There are commonalities in the way the narratives are constructed in these artworks, the manner in which they engage with the notion of time and their usage of archival material. But they also differ quite a bit in the aesthetic means they utilize, and the implications and effects of their aesthetics. For example, the main artistic tactic that Stefani uses in *Acropolis* is the juxtaposition between the female body and the body of the Acropolis, whereas Balaskas in *Parthenon Rising (II)* uses the rapid succession of illuminated and dark images of the Parthenon to create the video's tempo. On the other hand, Sklavenitis and Yalouri play with digital aesthetics and the artistic tradition of multiple image reproduction in *Acropolis Rocks*. All my case studies are situated in the 21st century but in different periods in Greece's modern history: Another important factor in the selection of the works was my desire to compare how similarly or differently the relationship between the Acropolis, Greekness and the past is negotiated in artworks that precede the financial crisis in Greece (2009-2018) and artworks that were created within the context of the crisis. *Acropolis* was created in a time when Greece was still enjoying some degree of affluence; a radically different time from the

crisis-decade and the difficulties, collective trauma but also critical reflection and resistance that it triggered. Nevertheless, as it will become evident in the following chapters, Stefani's seminal work does not fail to underline the core problematics in hegemonic Greekness almost a decade before the crisis started.

This thesis is organized in four chapters: The first chapter, namely “Framing the Discussion: Greekness, Antiquity and the Acropolis” functions as an introduction to the theories and concepts that comprise the basis for the analyses of the case studies that follow. In this chapter I attempt a definition of the term “Greekness” and explore its relation to the Greek national identity, as well as how the latter is formed based on Greece's complex relationship to its past. I contextualize the Acropolis through an examination of its role in the Greek national imagination. The chapter ends with the presentation of critical approaches to ruins in contemporary times and the establishment of the literary tradition of the destruction of the Acropolis, in which my three case studies are also inscribed. In the second chapter, I focus on a close reading of the film *Acropolis* (2001) by Eva Stefani. The title of this chapter, *Embodying the nation: The Acropolis as female body*, reveals its main focus. Here, I ask what the relationship is between women and nationalisms, what role the archival material - part of which is pornographic - plays in Stefani's work and how the female body relates to the monument. In the third and the fourth chapters the artworks analysed are contextualized within the Greek financial crisis (2009-2018). In the third chapter, “Spectacularising Greekness in Bill Balaskas’s *Parthenon Rising (II)* (2011)”, I analyse the video *Parthenon Rising (II)*) (2011). In this chapter the notion of the “classical debt” as well as the rhetorics developed in western media about modern Greeks' unworthiness of their heritage are investigated in depth.[19] Furthermore, the Acropolis is examined in relation to its spectacularization and commodification processes and parallelisms are drawn between the nationalist narratives, the sacralisation of the monument and tourism. In the fourth chapter, I look closely at Panos Sklavenitis’ and Eleana Yalouri’s video *Acropolis Rocks* (2013). The central axis of analysis in this chapter are the aesthetic means that the video's creators utilize in order to problematize the essentialist perceptions and conceptualizations of Greekness as well as of the Acropolis. Using Papanikolaou's notion of the “Archive

[19] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6 and chap. 6 subsections titles: “CROOKS IN THE EURO FAMILY” and “THE COLONY THAT WASN’T”.

Trouble", the video is contextualized in the Greek financial crisis (2009-2018).[20] The fourth chapter ends with a comparison of the three case studies in which the common tactics of the three works are explored.

[20] See Papanikolaou, "Archive Trouble".

Chapter 1: “Framing the Discussion: Greekness, Antiquity and the Acropolis”

On Greekness and Greek national identity

In this chapter I lay out some of the key concepts that I will be utilizing throughout this thesis, such as “Greekness”, Greek nationalism, “crypto-colonialism”, the “purification” of the Acropolis, as well as the “whitewashing” of antiquity. I also explore how these concepts relate to the “sacred rock” and present some of the critical approaches to the monument in modern Greek literature.

As one of the main questions of this thesis concerns the ways in which contemporary artworks challenge the connection between Greekness and the Athenian Acropolis, I will first investigate the notion of Greekness and its relationship with Greek national identity and Greek antiquity. According to Dimitris Tziovas, the term Greekness has many different connotations: “Greekness can refer to all sorts of things including national character or cultural identity, the hellenocentric orientation of cultural activities, Greek themes or leitmotifs in painting, music and other arts, even when used by non-Greeks, or the overall distinctiveness of Greek culture”.[21] Tziovas, following Stephanos Koumanoudis, notes that the term “Greekness”, "*hellenikoteta*", was “introduced into the Greek language in 1851 by Konstantinos Pop” and first used by Iakovos Polylas in 1860, who argued for the “Greekness” of the works of the poet Dionysios Solomos.[22] Moreover, Tziovas points out that the term “Greekness” has mostly been associated with the artistic “generation of the thirties” in the Greek context.[23] The “‘generation of the thirties’” had a strong impact on modern Greek culture that can still be traced in contemporary times.[24] Archaeologist Dimitris Plantzos also highlights the aforementioned generation's dedication to Greekness or “Hellenicity”, which he defines as “referr[ing] to the intrinsic qualities of the Greek psyche which had survived, often undetected, through antiquity and Byzantium, to the present day”.[25] In Plantzos's definition we not only see a close relationship between Greekness and the Greek past through a

[21] Tziovas, “Reconfiguring the Past”: 287.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid. I am basing the Greek translation of the term "Greekness" to "*hellenikoteta*" on Plantzos, “Archaeology and Hellenic identity, 1896-2004”:18.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

relationship of “continuity”, but also the notion of the “‘Greek spirit’”, a concept introduced by archaeologist Christos Tsountas as something “permeating Greek history from prehistory to the present, in an effort to claim that Greece really was the cradle of European civilization”.[26] Such an approach is admittedly problematic, as it brings forward Greekness as an essentialist category, which remains pure and untouched throughout the centuries.[27]

“Greekness” is thus a notion that commonly relates to national identity, grounded in the Greek past and Greek antiquity. Tziovas suggests that there are four ways in which Greeks relate to their past.[28] The first manner is characterized as “the symbolic or archaeological way” and treats the past as ideal and something to be “revived”.[29] It also creates a “gap between the classical past and the present” by underestimating the importance of the Middle Ages.[30] The second manner is the “holistic or romantic” one, according to which the past lives on in present times, in which “the past represents [...] a way of laying claim to some overall continuity in the Greek people and their culture”.[31] The third one is the “aesthetic or modernist” one, which “represents an extension of the first two in that it assumes the presence of the past not so much as a historical survival but as a kind of aesthetic or stylistic continuation or a metaphorical equivalence”.[32] Tziovas argues that this third take is the one that relates the most to the notion of Greekness.[33] The fourth and last approach that Tziovas traces here is the one that he characterizes as “ironic, critical or postmodernist”.[34] This approach does not treat the past as “a given” but as open to interpretation.[35] Tziovas mainly elaborates on the third approach, which opens up new potentialities for establishing connections with the Greek past through aesthetics and artistic practices.[36] He connects this third approach with the notion of Greekness by arguing that Greekness acts as a mediating concept that enables an open dialogue between past and present without resting on a fixed tradition.[37]

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[26] Ibid.: Plantzos refers to the notion of “continuity” in “Archaeology and Hellenic identity, 1896-2004” on page 19 and on the notion of the “‘Greek spirit’” on page 18.
[27] Plantzos is also critical of this conceptualization of the “‘Greek spirit’” in Ibid., 18.
[28] Tziovas, “Reconfiguring the Past”: 287.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid. 287 and 290.
[32] Ibid., 287-288.
[33] Ibid., 288.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., based on the provided quote and my interpretation of pages 290-292 in general.
[37] Ibid., 292.

Thanks to its abstraction and timelessness, Greekness acts as a connecting tissue between past and present.[38]

Now that it has been established how the notion of Greekness relates to the past, I want to explore the connection between the past and Greek national identity, as Greekness and Greek national identity are intertwined. It has been argued by many scholars, such as the archaeologist Yannis Hammilakis, that the construction of the Greek nation state is interconnected with ancient Greek heritage.[39] In his seminal work *The Nation and Its Ruins* Hamilakis points out that nationalism "needs history and the past to justify its claims of great antiquity or even timelessness".[40] It is therefore crucial for a national narrative to be established to somehow justify the existence of the nation based on its relationship with the past. Hellenic antiquity was "rediscovered" by the citizens of the Greek nation state for different reasons, including ideological ones.[41] As Europeans thought highly of ancient Hellenic antiquity, a reclamation of it by the citizens of the Greek nation state was connected to the desire to participate in European modernism.[42] The reclamation of the ancient past was perhaps an attempt to prove the European-ness of the Greek nation-state by taking part in the narrative of the foundational myth of Europe as having its roots in Greek antiquity.[43] In this process Hamilakis highlights the importance of the materiality of ancient Greek remains and artifacts as tools that constructed the "objective (in both senses of the word) reality of the nation" and therefore as carrying "enormous symbolic power".[44]

The starting point of the Greek national movement and the efforts to get liberated from the Ottoman Empire can be located at the end of the 18th century, although the beginning of the Greek "War of Independence" was in 1821.[45] In the context of the construction of the Greek nation-state "Philhellenism", a western European movement originating in the 15th and 16th century, played an important role.[46] According to Tijana Rakić, Philhellenism had two effects: on the one hand

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins*.
[40] Ibid., 15.
[41] Ibid., 77.
[42] Ibid.
[43] For example Effie-Fotini Athanassopoulos in "An 'Ancient' Landscape" characterizes Greece "as the birthplace of the European spirit and Western civilization" on page 291.
[44] Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins*, 79.
[45] Rakić, "World heritage, tourism and national identity", 37-38.
[46] Ibid., 38-39.

“Europe was constantly gazing over Greece and its institution as a modern nation-state” and on the other hand it was considered by the Philhellenes that Greece's Oriental elements were not in agreement with the Hellenic ideal.[47] Rakić suggests that it was within the Ottoman millets that Greekness was starting to form “influenced by the western scholarship and Philhellenism and the belief ‘that they were the heirs to a heritage that was universally revered throughout the civilised world’ (Clogg, 2002: 27)”.[48] Once again we see that Greece was claiming the Hellenic heritage in an attempt to achieve recognition by the West under the influence of the West's idealization of antiquity. Archaeology played a crucial role in the construction of “national identities”, “collective memories” and “imagined communities” and in the creation of national narratives, mythologies and histories.[49]

Nationalism and “crypto-colonialism” in the Greek context

Many scholars, such as Tziovas and Plantzos, discuss the element of colonialism or rather “crypto-colonialism” as Michael Herzfeld has put it, in Greece’s relation to Europe.[50] For example, Tziovas argues that “Europe ‘colonized’ Greece not by making it a physical satellite but by intellectually colonizing its classical past (Fleming 1999; 2000: 1221)”.[51] Tziovas here is referring to an indirect form of colonization through intellectualism, which connects to Philhellenism and what Hamilakis conceptualizes as “western Hellenism”, i.e., the processes of idealizing Greek antiquity by the West.[52] Hamilakis proposes that this indirect form of colonialism took place not only “by the ideas of western modernity but also by the processes, apparatuses, and groups instrumental in shaping and propagating this new world order”.[53] Hamilakis adds for instance that both Greeks and Europeans played a role in processes that led to ancient artifacts acquiring “sacred” status and that the first archaeology professor and “the designer of the first archaeological law” were not Greeks but Bavarians, highlighting in this manner the role of Europeans in processes

[47] Ibid., 39.
[48] Ibid., 41.
[49] Athanassopoulos, “An ‘Ancient’ Landscape”: 276.
[50] Plantzos, “Dead Archaeologists, Buried Gods”, 154-155 Tziovas, "Introduction”, 3-4, and also in Tziovas, “Reconfiguring the Past”: 293, Herzfeld, "The Absent Presence”: 899-926.
[51] Tziovas, “Introduction”, 4.
[52] Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins*, 83.
[53] Ibid., 20.

of the formation of the Modern Greek state.[54] Moreover, the adoption of a model that idealizes antiquity, changing the names of different areas - an example that Tziovas gives for this is the renaming of Koulouri to Salamis - and a "civilizing mission" of sorts that took the form of the dismissal of Ottoman elements as barbarous, are all examples of the interconnection between nationalism and an indirect form of colonialism in the case of Greece.[55]

The Acropolis in national and international imagination, its "purification" and the "Parthenon Marbles" discourses[56]

The Acropolis of Athens is a "monumental complex" that is included in the UNESCO "World Heritage List".[57] According to the description found on UNESCO's website, "[t]he Acropolis of Athens and its monuments are universal symbols of the classical spirit and civilization and form the greatest architectural and artistic complex bequeathed by Greek Antiquity to the world."[58] This description of the Acropolis as a symbol of the classical spirit and civilization can be connected with the treatment of Greek antiquity as the foundational myth of Europe. In this statement, the Acropolis, and along with it classical antiquity, become idealized and appropriated by the West, while a sense of continuity is created between Greek antiquity and contemporary times since the "classical spirit" seems to be living on through ancient artifacts and ruins.[59] The Acropolis carries a rich history of cultural values and significations, especially in the context of the construction of the modern Greek nation state. As historian William St Clair characteristically argued, "[i]f there is a shared western identity, the Acropolis of Athens has participated in the debates and crises that have helped to shape it".[60]

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[54] Ibid., 20-21. On pages 67-68 Hamilakis mentions that the first archaeology professor was Ludwig Ross and on page 62 Hamilakis notes that von Maurer "was instrumental in implementing the first Greek archaeological law".
[55] Ibid., 19. and Tziovas, "Reconfiguring the Past": 290. In the same work Tziovas uses the term "barbarous Ottomanism" in Tziovas, "Reconfiguring the Past": 294. Furthermore, Tijana Rakić speaks about the incompatibility of the "Oriental side of modern Greece" with the Hellenic ideal of the Philhellenes in Rakić, "World heritage, tourism and national identity", 39.
[56] For the connection between national and international discourses in regards to the Acropolis I have been influenced by Eleana Yalouri, *The Acropolis* and the discussions about the "national" and the "'universal'" in Rakic, and Chambers, "World Heritage": 145-55.
[57] History.com Editors, "Acropolis" and "Acropolis, Athens".
[58] "Acropolis, Athens".
[59] Ibid.
[60] St Clair, "Looking at the Acropolis of Athens from Modern Times to Antiquity", paragraph 10.

Two contemporary associations with the Acropolis that St Clair is critical of are its framing as a testimony of a continuous relationship between modern Greece and antiquity, as well as its conceptualization as a symbol of Athenian democracy.[61] The scholar debunks the former statement by arguing, on the one hand, that Athens was not actually the "birthplace" of modern democracy as it was neither the first nor the only region that had a democratic polity and, on the other hand, that the imagery of the Parthenon carries no representation of democracy or democratic values but displays mythologically inspired content.[62] Although the Acropolis is widely perceived as a symbol of democracy, these positions showcase the multiplicity of connotations the Acropolis has collected. Apart from its role in the construction of a western European identity and in the mythology of the continuity between ancient and modern Greece, the Acropolis played a (minor) role in the construction of the "Nazi racial theories".[63] According to St Clair, "Knox, a medical anatomist, who assumed that ancient men and women looked like the ancient statues from the Parthenon that he had studied in the British Museum, uncritically reversing from icon to actual, declared that the Ancient Hellenes were a blue-eyed race directly akin to the modern Germans and Scandinavians".[64] The Acropolis therefore can be associated with a variety of national and international values and ideas that vary from democratic ideals and the notion of continuity to deeply problematic racial theories.[65]

What is interesting about the Acropolis is that its contemporary form, which resembles its classical one, is the result of a purification process. This process entailed "the demolition of the Ottoman mosque in 1843 and the Frankish defensive tower in 1874".[66] From 1836 to 1875 a process of removing everything that had been added to the Parthenon in the post-classical era took place.[67] Apart from the Ottoman mosque and the Frankish defensive tower, the remains of the "Renaissance palace" which had been constructed in the area of the Propylaia were also removed.[68] This reformation of the Acropolis reveals that its current form is a

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[61] Ibid., paragraphs 41 and 40.
[62] Ibid., paragraph 40.
[63] Ibid., paragraph 69.
[64] Ibid., paragraph 68.
[65] For the connection between national and international discourses in regards to the Acropolis I have been influenced by Yalouri, *The Acropolis* and the discussions about the "national" and the "'universal'" in Rakic, and Chambers, "World Heritage": 145-155.
[66] Tziovas, "Beyond the Acropolis": 202.
[67] Tziovas, "Reconfiguring the past", 289.
[68] Ibid.

construction of 19th-century archaeology and that this desire of purification can be connected to the attempts to establish that modern Greeks are descendants of ancient Greeks.[69] In regards to the destruction of the Frankish tower, it was done by the Archaeological Society of Athens and was financially endorsed by Schlieman.[70] The supporters of this action used arguments that were based on the notions of the "sanctity of the monument and its need to be 'cleansed'".[71] L. Kaftanzoglou who was a member of the Archaeological Society of Athens, argued in favor of the destruction of the Frankish tower in 1877 saying that "'in such a sacred place [as the Acropolis] we believe that it is impious and improper to maintain the dark relics of the passing waves of barbarity' (cited in Petrakos 1987b, 98)".[72] These kinds of statements and arguments are telling for the perceived "sacred" character of Greek antiquity and the treatment of non-Greek "Others" as "barbarians" that have polluted the purity of the ancient Greek civilization.[73] Clearly, this denial to accept and acknowledge parts of the history of the Acropolis is connected to a very selective process of constructing the modern Greek national identity based on the idealization of Greek antiquity.[74] Hamilakis and Yalouri also mention one more instance of purification of the Acropolis in more recent times, admittedly when the Nazi flag with the swastika was removed from the Acropolis.[75] The removal of the flag was interpreted as "the beginning of the resistance struggle against the occupation forces in Greece".[76] This act is indicative, in my opinion, of the symbolic weight of the Acropolis in the national narrative, since an act of liberating the Acropolis from the flag with the swastika got symbolically related with the liberation of the nation from Nazis.

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[69] Tziovas, "Beyond the Acropolis": 202 and Effie-Fotini Athanassopoulos, "An 'Ancient' Landscape": 274 and 299. Furthermore, Athanassopoulos mentions in regards to Greek nationalism: [...] a nationalism focused upon monuments and history, combined with a European concern for the classical Greek past deriving from ideas of *cultural descent*. These elements were combined into an ideology that emphasizes *diachronic continuity* and *direct kinship* with the past (Shanks 1996:80)." (the italics are mine) in Athanassopoulos, "An 'Ancient' Landscape": 277.

[70] Hamilakis and Yalouri, "Sacralizing the Past": 119.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

[73] For the concept of the sacredness of antiquity see for example pages 115-116 and 122-126 in Hamilakis and Yalouri, "Sacralizing the Past". Effie-Fotini Athanassopoulos refers to the binary of "civilization" and "barbarism" in Effie-Fotini Athanassopoulos, "An 'Ancient' Landscape": 280. See also "An 'Ancient' Landscape": 290 and 295.

[74] My argument is based on Tziovas's suggestion that "[b]y seeking purity and perfection in the aesthetic form while trying to repair damage or restore monuments, nineteenth-century archaeology represented *a rejection of history*" (the italics are mine), in Tziovas "Reconfiguring the Past": 289.

[75] Hamilakis and Yalouri, "Sacralizing the Past": 119 - 120.

[76] Ibid., 120.

Apart from its importance for the construction of the Greek national identity, the Acropolis has an international reputation as a carrier of “universal values” and is therefore, as I have already mentioned, included in UNESCO's “World Heritage List”.[77] In their commentary on the idea of World Heritage Sites as having “‘outstanding universal value’” and as signifying “the ‘common identity of humankind’”, Tijana Rakić and Donna Chambers characterize this conceptualization of World Heritage as “inherently paradoxical”.[78] They also point out that such an approach undermines the relationship between heritage and national identity construction, as in producing “localized” and not global or “universal” identities.[79] Apart from these two points raised by the authors, I also want to suggest that the term “universal values” is highly problematic, since it presupposes the existence of a universal way of being human, which brings to mind the figure of the “Universal Man”, conceptualized as being “masculine, white, urbanized, speaking a standard language, heterosexually inscribed in a reproductive unit and a full citizen of a recognized polity,” which has established a specific way of embodying humanness and has been an oppressive category towards other ways of being human.[80] Rakić and Chambers explore the aforementioned clash between the national and the universal in the case of the Athenian Acropolis, which is “the symbol of the World Heritage idea (UNESCO 2006c)” and “a key symbol of Greekness (Yalouri, 2001)”.[81] The tension between the national and universal character of the monument raises questions of ownership of the Acropolis and brings forward the discussions surrounding the repatriation of the “Parthenon (or “Elgin”) Marbles” that are currently exhibited in the British Museum.[82]

The “Parthenon (or “Elgin”) Marbles” refer to “a group of marble sculptures, statues, and other antiquities that were removed from the Athenian Acropolis between 1801 and 1802 by Thomas Bruce, Seventh Earl of Elgin (known as Lord Elgin) and his associates” and they include “fifteen metopes”, “seventeen pedimental pieces” and one of Erechtheion's caryatids among other artifacts.[83] Similarly to the

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[77] “Acropolis, Athens”, “World Heritage”: 145-146.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 146.
[80] Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 65. I am also influenced by Sylvia Wynter's work here.
[81] Rakić and Chambers, “World Heritage”: 148.
[82] Ibid., especially on pages 149-152. I have written on the discussions surrounding the restitution of the "Parthenon Marbles" before, on the final paper of my pre-master program namely "The restitution of the 'Elgin Marbles' : A decolonial approach", Ibid., 149 and “The Parthenon Sculptures”.
[83] Hamilakis, *The nation and its ruins*, 246.

role that the Acropolis has played in the Greek national imagination, the removal of the "Parthenon Marbles" and their exhibition in the British Museum carry nationalist and racialist connotations for Britain.[84] Hamilakis argues that the marbles "were the material proof of the claim that Britain was the descendant of classical Athens" both on a cultural and a racial level, referring to Robert Knox's claim "that ancient Greeks had a northern Scandinavian or Saxon racial origin" based on "racial, physiognomic studies".[85]

The issue of the repatriation of the "Parthenon Marbles" has become a political one, especially since the political party PASOK came to govern Greece in 1981 and thanks to the efforts of the then Minister of Culture, Melina Merkouri.[86] Some of the arguments that have been used for and against the restitution of the marbles include the following: The British state argued that Greece did not have a "proper museum" to exhibit the marbles and that it would not be safe for them to be shown on the Acropolis site due to the air pollution in Athens.[87] One of the counterarguments to this was the reference to the "'cleaning'" incident that took place in the 1930s, when Lord Duveen, who had financially supported the creation of the Duveen gallery in the British Museum, requested the "'cleaning'" of the marbles so that they would get whitened in accordance to the standards held by some people at the time that the "classical sculptures" were "gleaming white".[88] This "'cleaning'" led to serious damage of the marbles which was used by Greece as a critique on the ability of the British Museum to properly care for the marbles.[89] The theorist, curator and researcher iLiana Fokianaki also connects this process of "'cleaning'" with the notion of whitewashing antiquity: "This whitening and whitewashing—in both a literal and metaphorical sense—can be seen as a great performative act of imposing, reconfiguring, and universalizing Western ideology through art".[90] According to Fokianaki, this "'cleaning'" process is connected to British people's racial

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[84] Ibid., 252-253.
[85] Ibid., 253.
[86] Ibid., 256.
[87] Ibid., 259-260.
[88] Ibid., 260-261.
[89] On the damage of the marbles see Fokianaki, "Redistribution via Appropriation". On the questioning of the British Museum's ability to take care of the marbles see Hamilakis *The nation and its ruins*, especially on page 261.
[90] I am using the term "'cleaning'" following Hamilakis's characterization of this process based on *The nation and its ruins*, 260-261. The reference on the idea of whitewashing antiquity and the quote is from Fokianaki "Redistribution via Appropriation". I have referred to this quote in one of my previous papers, namely "Hybrid bodies against racism: Kara Walker's *Sugar Baby.*"

construction that they were descendants of the very “white”, of “northern Scandinavian or Saxon racial origin”, ancient Greeks.[91]

The argumentation used by the Greek government for the repatriation of the “Parthenon Marbles” has shifted since the early 1990s. It has been focusing less on questions of ownership or the illegality of the acquisition of the marbles by Britain and “more on the argument of proper aesthetic appreciation of the entire monument” and the uniqueness of the situation, as the marbles are “an integral part of the immobile monument, and they have been forcefully removed from it”.[92] Since giving a thorough presentation of the debate for and against the restitution of the “Parthenon Marbles” is beyond the scope of this chapter, I want to conclude this short reference to the debate with a remark by Yannis Hamilakis that connects the restitution with colonial attitudes: “While Greek officials, from time to time, refer to the colonial attitude of the British Museum, a united anti-colonial front is not part of the official Greek position”.[93] In my opinion, this should be the basis of the argumentation for the repatriation of the marbles as they were acquired in a context when the crypto-colonial relationship between Greece and the West had started to take shape and their acquisition was - at least partly - connected with Britain's national and racial imaginings.[94]

Critical Approaches to Ruins

In their introduction to a special journal issue on ruins in modern Greek culture, Maria Boletsi and Ipek A. Celik-Rappas refer to Leontis's main argument that Hellas is a heterotopia because of its ruins but they also propose alternative readings of ruins.[95] Following Ann Laura Stoler, they frame ruins as “sites that need constant reinterpretation”.[96] Apart from symbols relating to the Greek nationalist narrative,

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[91] Fokianaki, “Redistribution via Appropriation” and Hamilakis, *The nation and its ruins*, 253.
[92] Hamilakis, *The nation and its ruins*, 262-263 and 265.
[93] Ibid., 265.
[94] Ibid., 253. Hamilakis is critical of the universal character of museums like the British Museum as he traces connections between “rhetoric of [...] universality” and “neo-colonialism”, in *The nation and its ruins*, 271. He also suggests that the marbles’ "violent, forceful, painful removal" is part of the British Museum's "colonial legacy", in *The nation and its ruins*, 283.
[95] Quotation of Leontis's "Topographies of Hellenism: Mapping the Homeland" in Maria Boletsi and Ipek A. Celik-Rappas, "Introduction: Ruins in Contemporary Greek Literature, Art, Cinema, and Public Space," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 38, no. 2 (2020): x.
[96] Boletsi and Celik-Rappas, “Introduction”: ix.

Boletsi and Celik-Rappas stress that ruins have also stood for “the *rift* between the classical ideal and modern Greek reality” referring to the key role of the concepts of “discontinuity” and “revival” in the production of Greek national identity after the constitution of the modern Greek state.[97] According to Boletsi and Celik-Rappas, this “*rift* between the classical ideal and modern Greek reality” became prominent during the Greek financial crisis and in this context “classical ruins were used as visual metaphors for Greece’s financial collapse and the ruination that the crisis brought about (Hamilakis 2016, 238)”.[98] All in all, Boletsi and Celik-Rappas argue that:

> Ruins have often been framed through the tropes of trauma and melancholia or enveloped in a sense of escapism, defeat, and disillusionment with failed nationalist and modernist visions, but recent cultural production has also engaged in a radical rethinking of the past and of the functions of ruins in the present.[99]

In the following three chapters of this thesis I wish to explore precisely the "radical rethinking of the past" and contemporary functions of ancient Greek ruins by focusing on one of the most symbolically charged sites of ruins in Greece, that of the Acropolis.[100] Before delving into my first case study, however, I want to provide a short overview of recent critical approaches to the Acropolis in literature.

Drawing on previous scholarship, Athina Markopoulou offers such an overview of critical approaches to the Acropolis in her recent article “Explosive Literature: Christos Chrissopoulos's *The Parthenon Bomber* as an Act of Resistance to Monumentalization”.[101] The destruction of the Parthenon is one of the central ideas in Chrissopoulos's work, which “scandalizes” due to the role of the Acropolis in the construction of the Greek national identity.[102] The idea of destroying the Parthenon is already embedded in the monument as the “purification” process that I discussed earlier is connected to the destruction of the post-classical elements of the Acropolis.[103] Apart from Chrissopoulos's work, Markopoulou refers to a few more

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[97] Ibid., x. Boletsi and Celik-Rappas refer here to Hamilakis's and Leontis's work among other authors. They also base this and the following argument on Antonis Liakos, “Hellenism and the Making of Modern Greece: Time, Language, Space”, in *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, ed. Katerina Zacharia, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).
[98] Ibid., xii.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Markopoulou, “Explosive Literature”: 321-349.
[102] Ibid., 322-323.
[103] Ibid., 325.

cases of Greek authors who have contributed to what she refers to as “Explosive Literature”, that is, literature that, challenging canonical texts, opposed the “monumentalization” of the Acropolis.[104] Such works include the satiric work of 19th-century poet George Souris, the novel “The Archaeologist” by Andreas Karkavitsas, the poetry of Nicolas Kalas who “inaugurated the destructive tradition against the Acropolis” and lastly the “radical” work of Yorgos Makris.[105]

One of the scholars that Markopoulou’s article draws on is Vassilis Lambropoulos, who has reflected on the usage of Acropolis in modern Greek literature. Lambropoulos investigates why in Modern Greek literature the references to the Acropolis are not that frequent and usually consist of “attack(s) rather than admiration(s)”.[106] The explanation he offers “is that the ‘technology’ of travel writing on Greece has disciplined them [i.e. the “Greeks”] into oblivion”.[107] The technologies that Lambropoulos speaks about here refer to the construction of Hellenism by Europeans and the regulation over who was permitted to the Acropolis.[108] Travel literature functions as a disciplinary technology due to the lack of representation of Greeks on the Acropolis or their dominant representation as "inferior" or "irrelevant".[109] One example that Lambropoulos gives based on Leontis' work is the lack of "recognition upon and around the Acropolis of a local population", even though the Acropolis was being used as a "'fortress'" in the 19th-century.[110] As Lambropoulos argues, “[i]n nearly all travel literature, Greeks do not speak about the hill, usually because they are not found there”.[111] He notices that modern Greek literary production about the Acropolis in the twentieth century is “destructive”.[112]

The destruction of the Acropolis and the critical stance that some authors have taken towards its symbolic value will function as a point of departure for the following chapters of this thesis, where I will investigate how the Acropolis has been re-imagined in three cases of contemporary Greek art from the early 2000s and in the years of the Greek financial crisis in the early 2010s.[113] Throughout this chapter

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[104] Ibid., 328.
[105] Ibid., 328-330.
[106] Lambropoulos, “Unbuilding the Acropolis in Greek Literature”, 182.
[107] Ibid., 182-183.
[108] Ibid., 183.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 185.
[113] Ibid.

the general framework of this thesis has been established by highlighting the importance that the Acropolis carries not only for the construction of the modern Greek national imagination but also for western European identity, which as many scholars have argued, has used Greek antiquity as part of its foundational mythology.[114] An example of the tension between the nationalist and "universal" character of the Acropolis is, as we have seen, the ongoing discussions on the repatriation of the "Parthenon (or "Elgin" marbles)".[115] This tension between the national and the "universal" will be further explored in Chapter 3 where the relationship between nationalism, tourism and heritage will be investigated.[116] Another term that has been explored here and that will be crucial for the analysis that follows in the next chapters is "Greekness" in its relationship with the modern Greek national identity. The artworks I turn to show ways in which one can rethink this concept that is closely related to an idealized version of the past and the idea that modern Greeks are descendants of ancient Greeks.[117] Lastly, in the following chapters I critically reflect on the role of ruins, particularly the Acropolis as a ruin, in the contemporary Greek context, taking my cue from the work of Boletsi and Celik-Rappas.[118]

[114] Such a scholar is Effie-Fotini Athanassopoulos. See, for example Athanassopoulos, "An 'Ancient' Landscape": 279 .
[115] Rakić and Chambers, "World Heritage".
[116] The basis of this framing is Rakić, "World heritage, tourism and national identity".
[117] For the conceptualization of "Greekness" I am basing my analysis on Tziovas, "Reconfiguring the Past". Many scholars have discussed the idea that modern Greeks are descendants of ancient Greeks, for example Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins*.
[118] Boletsi and Celik-Rappas, "Introduction".

Chapter 2: “Embodying the nation: The Acropolis as female body”[119]

A pivotal work for the discussions surrounding Greekness and the Acropolis is the film *Acropolis* (2001, 46', 25') created by documentary film-maker and visual artist Eva Stefani.[120] In this chapter I analyse of the 25' version of the film, which I recently had the opportunity to see in the context of the online exhibition organized by artistic and curatorial duo Fyta named “200 Years of Suffocation”, an exhibition that offered a critical perspective on the hegemonic narratives surrounding the 200 year anniversary since the beginning of the Greek War of Independence in 1821.[121] *Acropolis* has been shown both in Greek independent exhibitions like “ASFA BBQ 2018” and the international blockbuster exhibition *documenta 14* in 2017, proving its relevance almost twenty years after its first conceptualization.[122] The film is structured around the autodiegetic narrative of the Acropolis spoken by a female voice, which belongs to the top of the hierarchy of voices of the film. This prevalent voice becomes disrupted by other voices taken from archival material. These voices have been added to the archival material used in the film and do not always coincide with the imagery presented in it, thus creating an interesting juxtaposition between what we hear and what we see. This highlights the constructed nature of the histories surrounding the Acropolis, while simultaneously the non-coherent narrative that is shaped creates the effect of the deconstruction of the Acropolis and of the mythologies that surround it. Another important strategy that Stefani is following in this film is the juxtaposition of the Acropolis monument and the female body. Stefani “follows a procedure that is the reverse of observation, putting together existing Super 8 footage with porn and archival material, and by identifying the Parthenon with the female body, she negotiates anew our received notions about Greekness and femininity”.[123] The three main connections between the female body and the

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[119] I have seen the Acropolis conceptualised as a body in Lambropoulos, “Unbuilding the Acropolis in Greek Literature”, 196 and in Sklavenitis, “Πάνος Σκλαβενίτης.you: wtf r u - stranger: a cat Η τέχνη ως αδιαφανές μέσο κατασκευής, ρύθμισης και περιφρούρησης του ανθρώπινου.” [Panos Sklavenitis.you: wtf r u - stranger: a cat Art as a transparent medium for the construction, configuration and safekeeping of the humane] [translation is mine] as well as in Sklavenitis and Yalouri, “Acropolis Rocks”.

[120] The artistic and curatorial duo Fyta have characterized this work as “seminal” in “ASFA BBQ 2018 The Garden of Dystopian Pleasures curated by FYTA & The Ministry of Post-Truth: Eva Stefani”. “Bio”.

[121] “200XroniaAsfyksia”.

[122] Tselou, “Eva Stefani”.

[123] Tselou, “Eva Stefani”.

monument in a nationalist context are its presentation as a maternal body, an oversexualized body and a virgin body. Among these three conceptualizations of the female body the one that is the most prevalent in the film is its depiction as a fetishized body subjected to the oversexualisation of the male gaze. By focusing on the relationship between the monument and the female body, in this chapter I examine the role of women in the conceptualization of the nation-state, in order to unravel Stefani's mode of relating the Acropolis to the female body and particularly the function of pornographic material in her film. Through this analysis, I investigate how *Acropolis* negotiates Greekness.

Women in nationalism

Watching the parallelism between the female body and the Acropolis monument unravel in Stefani's film, one of the first observations someone can make is that they relate to each other on the level of nationalist discourse. By this I mean the ways in which both the Acropolis and the role of women are constructed in relation to the development of nationalism. As theorists like Ann McClintock have noted, there is a strong interconnection between gender and nation, as "gender *difference*" and inequality between women and men are part of the construction of nation-states, "despite nationalisms' ideological investment in the idea of popular *unity*".[124] There appears to be a strong connection between women and nationalism, as "it is women [...] who reproduce nations, biologically, culturally and symbolically".[125]

For my analysis in this section I will mostly focus on the idea of women as reproductive forces of the nation and the role of the family in relation to the nation. In patriarchal as well as nationalist discourses the "'natural' role of women" seems to be "to bear children".[126] This imposed role of women in society is connected to an idea deemed crucial for the construction of national identity, that is "the myth (or reality) of 'common origin'" which is often secured "by being born into [such a collectivity]".[127] Apart from an originary mythology, a nation needs continual renewal of offsprings not only to secure its continuation in the future, but also because it requires humans,

[124] McClintock, "Family Feuds": 61.
[125] Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, 2.
[126] Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, 26.
[127] Ibid.

especially men, “for a variety of nationalist purposes, civil and military”.[128] Child benefits provided by some governments or the establishment of anti-abortion laws are examples of how the nation-states try to encourage their perpetuation.[129] As far as the Greek context is concerned, political philosopher Athena Athanasiou, in her discussion of forms of “demographic crisis” in 2006, points out that such discourses focused on “the terror of demographic implosion” which had been dominant in Greece already for two decades at the time her article was written.[130] An example of the biopolitical control exercised over women's bodies and the Greek state's position pro the nation's reproduction is “[t]he 1986 parliamentary debate about the decriminalization of abortion [...] [where] [a] deputy from the centrist DHANA suggested [that] '[t]he Greek society, all the institutions, and the Church, ought to *persuade* [people] about the sacred duty of the pregnant woman to accomplish her mission”, while “[a] deputy from right-wing New Democracy linked non-procreation to ‘sexual permissiveness’”.[131] In contemporary times, the perpetuation of the nation still seems to be part of the national anxiety for procreation, as the New Democracy's chairman - and currently Prime Minister of Greece - Kyriakos Mitsotakis had spoken in 2019 about Greece's demographic problem and proposed that the parents receive financial support of 2.000 € for each child that is born.[132] What these examples showcase is the intensified biopolitical control exercised on women's bodies in nationalist societies.[133] The formation of familial cords is also central in the formation of nation-states.[134] The etymology of the word nation which comes from the Latin “‘natio’: to be born” highlights the close relationship between birth giving and the nation, which in patriarchal discourses is usually expected to take place in a heteronormative familial context.[135] Another example of the role of “familial and

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[128] Athanasiou discusses the importance of reproduction in the quest of securing the future of the nation in “Bloodlines”: 229. The quote in the main text is from Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, 29. McClintock also highlights the importance of continuity for the nation state in McClintock, “Family Feuds”: 66

[129] Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, 29-30.

[130] Athanasiou, “Bloodlines”: 230.

[131] Ibid., 243.

[132] Bokas, “Μητσοτάκης: €2.000 ευρώ για κάθε παιδί που γεννιέται - Τσίπρας: Είναι σοβαρή πρόταση” [Mitsotakis: 2000 euros for each child that is born - Tsipras: [It] is a serious proposition] [translation is mine].

[133] Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, chapter 2 in general. For instance Davis notes that "[a]s Roza Tsagarousianou (1995) argues, banning abortions (as well as controlling other reproductive rights of women) signals *the treatment of women as state property*" [italics are mine] in Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, 37.

[134] McClintock, “Family Feuds”, in general.

[135] Ibid., 63.

domestic space" when imagining the national community is referring to nation states as "'homelands'", "'motherlands' and 'fatherlands'".[136]

Apart from what Davis calls the "biological reproduction of the nation" there are also forms of "cultural reproduction" that can be traced in nationalist discourses and are linked to gender.[137] Women, at times through their figuration as mothers, are connected with the notion of "collectivity", as it becomes evident with phrases like "Mother Russia" and "'Mother Earth'".[138] Simultaneously, "womanhood has a property of 'otherness'", in the sense that women are "often excluded from the collective 'we' of the body politic", they become objectified and are expected to conform to certain rules that dictate the appropriate ways of being woman.[139]

Turning our attention to Stefani's *Acropolis*, the first 30" are indicative of the content of the film. In the opening scene we see a woman getting undressed and we hear a male voice, "borrowed" from archival material, forewording the film: "What you are about to hear and see is the glory of Greece".[140] The removal of her clothes by the woman signifies the uncovering of Acropolis's multiple histories, while the nakedness of her body hints to the fact that we are going to hear and see the "naked truth". The scene is interrupted by footage that shows the Acropolis hill and a voice-over of someone introducing the Acropolis and the Parthenon to the audience. What we hear and what we see is therefore a woman stripping, while listening to a voice-over talking about the Acropolis, and the monument itself, both representing the "glory of Greece".[141] The parallelism between the two becomes evident throughout the whole film, but what I argue here is that one of the meeting points of the two is the framework of nationalism. On the one hand, we see the epitome of Greekness, a monument without which modern Greek national identity is unthinkable.[142] On the other hand, the plurality of the female bodies shown both from pornographic and archival material in the film hints at the role of women in the construction of the modern Greek nation state. The most prominent way in which the

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[136] Ibid.
[137] Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, 1 and 39.
[138] Ibid., 45.
[139] Ibid., 47.
[140] Excerpt from Eva Stefani, *Acropolis*, Super-8 and 16-mm-Film, (Eva Stefani and Greek Film Centre, 2001), 25', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vv-VLnYFMI8
[141] Eva Stefani, *Acropolis*.
[142] Boletsi has described the destruction of the Parthenon as "unthinkable" and "unimaginable" in Boletsi and Celik-Rappas, "Introduction": xiii and Markopoulou, "Explosive Literature": 332 accordingly.

two correlate in the work is through the reproductive role that women carry in the context of the nation-states. More specifically in the pornographic material shown in the film women are represented as sexualized objects and some scenes of people having intercourse are shown. Taking into account that the nation needs its offsprings to ensure its perpetuation, the sexual scenes in the film could be hinting both to the emphasis on the pleasure of heterosexual cis-males in a patriarchal context and the heteronormative and Orthodox belief that sex is an act that should be leading to procreation. Apart from the sexual scenes, there is also a clear reference to motherhood, or 'motherland', because a woman is shown holding a baby close to her chest. Moreover, a young girl is shown carrying a doll which can be interpreted as a reference to the imposition of motherly roles on girls from a young age as part of their socialization as women. Interestingly enough, the Acropolis is metonymically undertaking the role of a mother in the film, as a female breast is shown in the film while there is a voice over saying "the top of a hill" referring to the Acropolis.[143] Therefore in this narrative, the Acropolis, which is at the top of the Acropolis hill, could be compared to the nipple, the "top" part of the breast. As a female voice explains in the voice-over, Akropolis derives from the words "akron and polis", "'Akron' means at the extremity, the highest spot and 'polis' is the city but the fortified one".[144] Similarly to a mother's nipple, the Acropolis is "breastfeeding" the nation's offsprings, raising them to become part of the modern Greek nation state.

Another point relevant to the discussion is the footage in *Acropolis* showing what to my understanding is a heart surgery. If we interpret the body shown in the film as a symbol of the Greek national body, then what appears to be the heart of the body, functioning perhaps as a metaphor for the core of the nation and shown slightly covered in blood, could be connected with what Athanasiou describes as "*demographic hemorrhage*".[145] The blood of the heart shown in the film can be related to the national body of Greece bleeding, threatening the "life" and continuity of the Greek nation state with "national death".[146] Therefore the footage of the heart surgery can be interpreted as a reference to the cultural anxiety of the continuation

[143] Eva Stefani, *Acropolis*.
[144] Excerpt from Eva Stefani, *Acropolis*.
[145] Athanasiou, "Bloodlines": 230. Hamilakis discusses the relationship between antiquities and the "national body" in Hamilakis, *The nation and its ruins*, especially in chapter 7, namely "Nostalgia for the Whole: the Parthenon (or Elgin) Marbles".
[146] Ibid.

of the Greek nation.[147] At the same time, the materiality and the vulnerability of the heart, brought forward in what appears to be an open heart surgery, are contrasted to the supposed invincible, eternal character of the monument.

The scene of what appears to be an open heart surgery is also interrelated to the ideas of vulnerability and mortality that are prevalent in the film. The sense of vulnerability of the body that is conveyed by this scene is contrasted with the supposedly invincible, eternal element that is characteristic of the mythology surrounding the Acropolis. Like the Greek nation has supposedly survived since ancient times, so does its symbol, the Acropolis, survive despite the adversities that it has been through. The elements of vulnerability and mortality are also fortified in *Acropolis* by a scene that shows footage from a Christian cemetery. While the camera focuses on the graves and the characteristic crosses that some of them carry, the main narrator, the Acropolis, says "I see all being born and die", creating an antithesis between the solidity of the Acropolis's marbles and the softness of living bodies.[148] Lastly, I want to draw a parallelism between the porous surface of the marbles - as seen in the Acropolis for example - and the pores of a body, or a national body in this case. The porousness of the marbles is reflected on the artwork through the materiality of the film itself and more specifically the visual effects that its deterioration creates. Athanasiou refers to the national body as being “porous” and therefore “vulnerable to contamination” and stresses that “demographic anxiety is intimately associated with a cultural fear of absorption by neighboring nation-states of larger scale and/ or by threateningly growing enclaves of resident aliens”.[149] Therefore the materiality of the marbles that constitute the “body” of the Acropolis and the body of the modern Greek nation state are related to the fears of contamination by “Others” rendering the nation as “impure” and challenging the national imagination that is largely constituted based on the idea of “sameness”.[150]

Pornographying the Acropolis

[147] Athanasiou used the term "cultural anxiety" in the abstract of Athanasiou, “Bloodlines”: 229. I have previously referred to this in the paper “Intersecting Crises in the notion of ‘greekness’.”
[148] Excerpt from Eva Stefani, *Acropolis*.
[149] Athanasiou, “Bloodlines”: 239.
[150] Davis discusses the notion of “homogeneity” in Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, especially on page 16. Athanasiou refers to the correlation of purity, pollution and the female body in Athanasiou, “Bloodlines” especially on page 237.

One of the key elements of Stefani's film is the usage of pornographic material. This is an issue worth exploring here in order to understand how the male gaze and processes of fetishizing the female body relate to the body of the Acropolis. I will be referring to a heteronormative conceptualization of pornographic material, as I believe that this is the approach that is evident in the film. In “traditional Hollywood film” and “narrative cinema” the male spectator of the movie identifies himself with the male hero of the movie, who treats the woman of the film “as the object of his desire, [...] This gaze causes the woman to be fetishised as a passive object to be looked at, while the man is the active subject who looks at the woman”.[151] I trace this process in *Acropolis* too: in the instances when archival pornographic footage of women getting undressed or having intercourse is shown, they are presented as sexual objects of male fantasies (Fig. 1). Their sexuality becomes fetishized through the pleasure-seeking male gaze. Similarly to the women in the excerpts of pornographic material, the Acropolis is also undergoing processes of fetishization. The fetishisation of the Acropolis lies in the multiple shots of the “sacred hill” that are reproduced in Stefani's film from different angles, from above, in black and white as well as in colorful shots. In these shots the Acropolis becomes an object of admiration, next to which its visitors become photographed. The commodification of the Acropolis and its spectacularization through photography will be further explored in the following chapter, but it is already thematized in the archival shots featured in Stefani's film.

[151] Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya, Emily Abd Rahman, and Zainor Izat Zainal. “Male Gaze, Pornography and the Fetishised Female.”: 26.

Fig. 1. Eva Stefani, *Acropolis*, Super-8 and 16-mm-Film, 2001, installation view, Palais Bellevue, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Daniel Wimmer, documenta14.de, last accessed July 14, 2021. https://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/13490/eva-stefani

The juxtaposition of the naked female body and the Acropolis is not new in the modern Greek artistic canon. Stefani's approach is in dialogue with the work of the Greek photographer Elli Souyioultzoglou-Seraïdari with the pseudonym Nelly.[152] Nelly famously followed the aforementioned strategy more than 70 years ago, photographing two naked female dancers on the Acropolis in 1925 and 1929. Her photographs were not positively perceived by journalists and archaeologists, as "[t]he 'frivolous' or even 'polluting' connotations of the naked body were perceived as a threat to the sanctity of the most important national monument".[153] However Nelly's photographs gained popularity with "[her] photographs of Nickolska (1925-1929) at the Parthenon [being] possibly the best known example of Greek photography internationally".[154] Nevertheless, there is a main difference between Stefani's and Nelly's approaches. Whereas Stefani turns to pornographic material and the female body to offer a critical perspective on the fetishisation of the Acropolis and the hegemonic narratives surrounding it, Nelly glorified the Acropolis treating it as a "magnificent backdrop" and a symbol of the glorious Hellas promoting a "romantic

[152] Damaskos, "The uses of Antiquity in photographs by Nelly": 321
[153] Hamilakis and Yalouri, "Sacralizing the Past": 118-119.
[154] Panayotopoulos, "On Greek Photography": 191.

ancestor worship" (Fig. 2).[155] In Nelly's work the continuity between ancient and modern Greek is not only cultural but also racial, as in some of her photographs she compares the facial characteristics of contemporary Greeks with works of Minoan and ancient Greek art, suggesting that they are similar and promoting the "ideology concerning the purity of the Greek race through the centuries", a popular ideology in inter-war Europe.[156] Both Damaskos and Panayotopoulos highlight the fact that Nelly is reproducing a western, modernist gaze.[157] Similarly to the gaze of the European travelers towards Greece, and their seeking of the glorious ancient Greece that they had been imagining, Nelly's photographs tell a fragmented tale about modern Greece that does not reflect its complex reality.[158] Even though Stefani's work is critical of the hegemonic conceptualizations of Greekness, as I argue in a later section of this essay, it fails to criticize the connection of modern Greece with whiteness and the narrative of racial continuity, as the bodies featured in the film are white. Consequently, a parallelism between the whiteness of the body and the whiteness of the Acropolis is drawn in the film that carries racial connotations. Apart from the racial connotations, the whiteness of the marbles and the whiteness of the female bodies shown in Stefani's film signify the archetype of the woman as a virgin. This representation of women - and of Acropolis - as pure, innocent and vulnerable from a heteronormative patriarchal point of view supposedly calls for the protection of women in ethnopatriarchy - and of the monument - by men.

[155] Damaskos, “The uses of Antiquity in photographs by Nelly”: 324, 325 and 327.
[156] Ibid.: 328. Panayotopoulos also stresses the construction of racial continuity in Nelly's work and the fact that "[t]he quest for Hellenic forms frequently tends to be a subconscious quest for 'Aryan' features" in Panayotopoulos, “On Greek Photography”: 194.
[157] Damaskos “The uses of Antiquity in photographs by Nelly”: 325 and 327, and Panayotopoulos “On Greek Photography”: 191-192 and 194.
[158] Athanassopoulos, “An ‘Ancient’ Landscape”: especially 279-285 and Leontis, *Topographies of Hellenism*, especially on pages 45-56.

Fig. 2. Nelly (Elli Seraidari), “Nikolska dancing at the Parthenon, silver bromide print, 1929, © Benaki Museum, photographic archive, Athens (N 2101), in *On Greek Photography*, by Nikos Panayotopoulos, page 184, *Third Text* 23, no. 2 (2009).

Another element that contributes to the fetishisation and glorification of the monument in the film, are some of the voice-overs that are featured in it. The voice-overs I am referring to here seem to be excerpts from guided tours of visitors in the Acropolis. In the voice-overs we hear for example: “When you see this monument you don't call it the Acropolis, it's the Parthenon. It means the temple of the virgin, parthenos naos (παρθένος ναός) Parthenon. Parthenos is virgin”.[159] The Acropolis is therefore the passive recipient not only of the visitors' gaze but also of the comments and the stories that surround the monument. The main narrator in the film however, who has a feminine voice and explicitly identifies themselves with the Acropolis - “I am Acropolis”, they say - is trying to regain their agency by taking charge of the Acropolis's narrative: “Every five minutes, they tell my story… claiming that it is mine” and later the narrator adds “History. If I finish it, I'll be peaceful”.[160] The decision of the film-maker to present the Acropolis in first-person narrative mode

[159] Excerpt from Eva Stefani, *Acropolis*.
[160] Excerpt from Eva Stefani, *Acropolis*.

could therefore be interpreted as a gesture that gives Acropolis back its lost agency. Another instance when agency is given back to the Acropolis is when we see a woman's face gazing straight into the camera. In this case, the woman - and therefore perhaps also the Acropolis as it is parallelised with the female body in the film - turns from a fetshised object to a subject that returns the gaze directly to the spectator, thus confronting them with her gaze. This reclaiming of agency may also be at stake in the desire that the Acropolis expresses in the film, through the film's voice-over, to reach the sea and the river and be able to travel throughout the city and break free from the shackles of being stuck in the "sacred rock" of Athens. The narrator says: "I think that I travel. I reach the sea, through the river mouth", while simultaneously we see footage of sea water.[161] This desire to travel throughout the city by joining water sources is fortified in the film not only by the sound of running and sea water that the audience listens to at some points in the film but also by images of people at the seashore, and by the visual effects that excerpts of corrupted film create. More specifically, the corrupted excerpts from old films from the archival material used in *Acropolis* create at times a visual effect that appears almost liquified. This liquid element functions not only as a means of destruction of the archival material, as some liquids can harm the sensitive film, but it also symbolically threatens the solidity of the national archive by highlighting that it is constructed based on hegemonic narratives about the Greek nation state. The liquidification of the archival material suggests also a form of cultural anxiety connected to the destruction of the tradition surrounding the conceptualization of Greekness. I perceive Acropolis's desire to break free from the Acropolis's hill as a means for the Acropolis to escape the destiny that has been imposed on it by hegemonic historical narratives and the endless number of visitors that it receives daily and turn into something else, something free and transformative like a body of water. This anxiety of the liquidification of the archive becomes here a desire to tamper with the hegemonic narratives surrounding Greekness and the Acropolis.

Bodies of marbles: Embodying the nation

[161] Ibid.

In regards to the relationship between the “Parthenon Marbles” and living bodies, Hamilakis has discussed the attribution of anthropomorphic characteristics to the marbles, a notion that is not solely to be found in the case of the “Parthenon Marbles” “but also [in] the whole relationship between national imagination and antiquities”.[162] He stresses that “pre-nation state narratives and folk tales attribute animate properties and human-like characteristics to the sculptures, partly due to the representational and iconographic themes which include many human figures”, processes that are also followed in nationalism.[163] In national imagination the conceptualization of a “national body” takes place, where “each individual (human or other) [is seen] as a miniature image of the national body, as an autonomous national entity”.[164] In the case of the “Parthenon Marbles” the processes of fragmenting some of the monuments found in the Acropolis by removing some of their parts are connected with ideas of fragmenting and exercising violence on the national body as well as on the actual monuments.[165] According to Hamilakis this is creating a form of anxiety for the nation which exceeds ancient artifacts and is conceptualized as “*the nostalgia for the whole*”.[166] Both in nationalism and modernity bodies of people but also of objects, like the "marbles", or of concepts, like the nation, are imagined “as complete, indivisible, [and] bounded”.[167] In the context of the Acropolis and its “Parthenon Marbles” this “*nostalgia for the whole*” acts as an interpretative framework for understanding how the “reunification” of the “Parthenon Marbles” is imbued with nationalist undertones.[168]

The framework that Hamilakis develops here can be useful for the analysis of Stefani's *Acropolis*, since at the core of Stefani's film lies the anthropomorphization of the Acropolis and its relationship with the female body. This tactic becomes evident in the first-person narrative format that the artist has chosen for this work, where the Acropolis narrates its story. The narration in first-person creates an intimate, confessional atmosphere in the film, which one could compare to an autobiographical novel or a memoir. It also results in the coming together of the personal and the object one looks at from a distance. The Acropolis thereby

[162] Hamilakis, *The nation and its ruins*, 277.
[163] Ibid., 278.
[164] Ibid., 282.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid.

becomes a subject instead of an object. The desire for the wholeness of the nation is challenged not only by the structure of the film but also by the multiple shots of the Acropolis, from different historical periods, in which we can perceive its monuments as fragmented or in ruins. When referring to the structure of the film, I mean the interruption, and thus symbolically also fragmentation, of the main narrative of the film, which is the first-person autobiographical tale of the Acropolis, accompanied by archival and pornographic material. Lastly, even though I have not located a direct reference to the discussions surrounding the repatriation of the “Parthenon Marbles” in the film, the Caryatids of the Erechtheion are shown in *Acropolis*. This gesture can be interpreted as a hint to the aforementioned issue, since one of the Caryatids was taken away by Lord Elgin, while it also reinforces the anthropomorphization of the Acropolis's “marbles”, as the Caryatids are sometimes described “as sisters, with one of them exiled in London”. [169]

Acropolis and Greekness

In Stefani's film the interrelation between Greekness and the Acropolis is highlighted through the usage of the archival material that the film-maker has assembled in her film. Through the archival material a narrative of continuity is constructed between ancient and modern Greece. The former becomes glorified: “The hill where all do gather. You are on the very spot where Athenians of old would flock to hear the most beautiful tongue of this earth spoken to the greatest people of the world”.[170] In this excerpt that somebody narrates in English, a view of ancient Greece as the birth of civilization and of the “greatest people of the world” is perpetuated.[171] The greatness of these people lies of course in western as well as Greek beliefs that Athenians of the classical period gave birth to democracy and are the cultural as well as racial ancestors of contemporary Greeks and Westerners.[172] Another example of the interrelation between Acropolis, Greekness and antiquity is an excerpt shown in Stefani's film, where a short of parade is shown with people dressed like “ancient warriors”, accompanied by a float where the famous phrase “ΜΟΛΩΝ ΛΑΒΕ”

[169] Ibid., 279-280.
[170] Excerpt from Eva Stefani, *Acropolis*.
[171] Eva Stefani, *Acropolis*.
[172] Hamilakis, *The nation and its ruins*.

(roughly translated as "come and get them") is written.[173] This phrase was supposedly said by the Spartan king Leonidas to the Persian king Xerxes I in the context of the “"Battle of the Thermopylae” (480 BCE), when the latter requested from king Leonidas “to surrender his arms”.[174] As Greeks were by far outnumbered by the Persians they lost the battle.[175] It is noted that “[t]oday the Battle of Thermopylae is celebrated as an example of heroic persistence against seemingly impossible odds. [...] In 1955 a statue of Leonidas was erected by King Paul of Greece in commemoration of his and his troops’ bravery.”[176] What the aforementioned statue of Leonidas and the phrase “ΜΟΛΩΝ ΛΑΒΕ” on the float point at is the cultural importance of the “Battle of the Thermopylae” for modern Greek national imagination, where we can locate the identification of (some) modern Greeks with the supposedly heroic stand of king Leonidas and therefore their desire to be seen as descendants of ancient Greeks. Furthermore, the camera focuses on the top of this float, where we can see a Phoenix spreading its wings, symbolizing the resurrection of the modern Greek nation state from the “ashes” of Greek antiquity.[177]

There are more instances in *Acropolis* where the importance of Greek antiquity for the modern Greek national imagination is highlighted but the question I want to pose here is how the film responds to this relationship. In my opinion, the film offers a critical gaze to the relationship between the Acropolis and Greekness. That is primarily highlighted by the film-maker's decision to have Acropolis narrate its story from its own perspective in first-person narrative mode. Its critical stance also emerges from the fragmented structure of the film which plays with the idea of disrupting the narrative of continuity in modern Greek history from ancient to modern Greece. Another visual element that works to metaphorically disrupt the Greek nationalist narrative is the use of excerpts of corrupted film from the archival material in *Acropolis*. The corrupted film creates an effect of distortion of the material shown leading to the material being no longer discernible by the audience. As a result, history becomes “opaque” and open to being rewritten.[178]

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[173] Eva Stefani, *Acropolis*.
[174] Lohnes, “Battle of Thermopylae.”
[175] Chase. “The Meaning Behind *Molon Labe*, a Favored Gun Rights Slogan of Oregon Sheriff John Hanlin”.
[176] Lohnes, “Battle of Thermopylae.”
[177] Liakos, “Hellenism and the Making of Modern Greece”, 204.
[178] I am influenced here by Glissant's conceptualization of "opacity" in Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*.

In conclusion, Stefani's *Acropolis* proposes a reevaluation of the relationship between Greekness and the Acropolis. By incorporating archival material, the film shows how the monument has been appropriated through the years not only in the context of nationalist rhetorics but also through its commodification as a tourist attraction. The materiality of the film becomes interconnected with the materiality of the monument. *Acropolis* does not construct a seamless narrative surrounding the monumentalization of the Acropolis hill and the nationalist narratives related to the hegemonic conceptualizations of Greekness, but it brings forward the fact that these narratives are constructed based on specific interpretations of the archival material, which in the film is presented not as a carrier of universal truth but as a fragmented and subjective tale. The fact that we can see the corrupted excerpts of the archival material assembled in the film highlight the constructedness of the film itself, while its corrupted materiality presents the body of the Acropolis as a site corrupted not only in its materiality - by natural forces for example - but as a monument vulnerable to the power of national imaginings. The insightful decision of Stefani to structure the film around a first-person narrator that describes the experiences of the Acropolis embodies as a woman, offers a shift in the perspective of the historical narratives surrounding “the sacred rock” from a supposedly objective history to a subjective, personal confession. The viewer can then empathize with an inanimate object like the Acropolis, whose symbolic value along with the anthropomorphization processes of some of its statues transform it into a living subject. This narrative mode also functions as a form of resistance on behalf of the Acropolis, as the monument appears in the film to be taking charge of its own history. The association of the Acropolis with bodies is connected to the “national body” of Greece and the desire for its “wholeness” in the context of nationalist discourses. The body of the Acropolis appears to be a fragmented body, much like the ruins and the half-destroyed sculptures that constitute its monuments. It is a body where nationalist imagination and male patriarchal desire are inscribed, much like the bodies of women and femininities navigating modern Greek society. Through the usage of pornographic material featuring mostly women the film-maker highlights the fetishization processes that both women and the Acropolis have been undergoing. Lastly, through Acropolis's identification with the female body, the film deals with the role of women in nationalism and the control over women's bodies and reproduction that is directly

or indirectly exercised in nationalist contexts, motivated by the nation-state's desire to secure its future through the perpetuation of its population.

Chapter 3: "Spectacularising Greekness in Bill Balaskas's *Parthenon Rising (II)* (2011)"

"Classical Debt": Parthenon Rising (II) in Times of Crisis[179]

Another contemporary Greek artist whose work reflects on the symbolic value of the Acropolis is Bill Balaskas, "an artist, theorist and educator working across different media and dissemination platforms".[180] Balaskas has created two videos, *Parthenon Rising* in 2010 and *Parthenon Rising (II)* in 2011, where he utilizes footage taken on the day that people can visit the Acropolis at night, an event that takes place once a year.[181] To my knowledge, the main difference between the two videos is that the first one is longer than the second one and whereas *Parthenon Rising* is silent, in *Parthenon Rising (II)* a distinctive, pompous music is utilized.[182] *Parthenon Rising (II)* has been exhibited among other places in "Art Basel Miami Beach" in 2013, in "Rencontres du Film d'Art" in 2015 and more recently at "State of Concept Athens" in 2019-2020.[183] It was in the aforementioned exhibition that I first encountered *Parthenon Rising (II)* and I was immediately drawn to the video by its pompous music and by the familiar image of the Athenian Parthenon. Similarly to *Parthenon Rising*, in this under 3 minutes video, the audience sees footage from the Parthenon as it becomes visible in the night by the flash photographs of the Acropolis's visitors (Fig. 3).[184] In an escalating manner that follows the rhythm of the sound that accompanies the visual imagery of the video, the Parthenon appears and disappears from the viewer's eyes transitioning from non-existence to a fully illuminated form that offers a new visual composition of the classical monument.[185] The work functions as a move "from total darkness and 'perplexity' to total light and 'clarity.'"[186] The significations of this aesthetic play between darkness and light will be further

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[179] I am using the term "classical debt" based on Johanna Hanink, *The Classical Debt*.
[180] "Bio".
[181] Balaskas, "Living in a Global 'Society of the Spectacle'" and Balaskas, "Parthenon Rising by Bill Balaskas".
[182] Based on the description on Bill Balaskas's website under "Parthenon Rising" and the artist's vimeo under "Parthenon Rising (II)".
[183] From kalfayangalleries.com:"Bill Balaskas", "Art Basel Miami Beach", "Bill Balaskas" and "A.O. – B.C. AN AUDIOVISUAL DIARY" from stateofconcept.org.
[184] Balaskas, "Living in a Global 'Society of the Spectacle'" and Balaskas, "Parthenon Rising by Bill Balaskas".
[185] Ibid.
[186] Balaskas, "Parthenon Rising by Bill Balaskas".

explored in this chapter, as will the ways in which Balaskas's work reflects on, and challenges, the notion of Greekness. In my analysis, I expand on the notion of "spectacularisation" of the Acropolis and critically reflect on the exploitation of the monument for the purposes of tourism.[187] Through this analysis, I trace interconnections between tourism, sacralisation and nationalism and examine how these notions relate to Balaskas's video. *Parthenon Rising (II)* was created in the first few years of the financial crisis in Greece (2009-2018), and is thus marked by this context. It can therefore be associated with the rhetoric by European politicians and the media during this period, in which the sell-out of Greek antiquities was half-seriously proposed as a way for Greece to repay its debt.[188]

Fig. 3. Bill Balaskas, *Parthenon Rising (II)*, video, 2011, courtesy of the artist and Kalfayan Galleries Athens - Thessaloniki, stateofconcept.org, last accessed July 14, 2021. https://stateofconcept.org/event/videozoomgreece-on-%CF%80ause/

[187] For the analysis of the Acropolis and the artwork as a spectacle, I am following Balaskas's own framing of the work *Parthenon Rising* (2010) in third text and Greek foundation.
[188] This rhetoric is further explored in Johanna Hanink's study *The Classical Debt: Greek Antiquity in an Era of Austerity*, in Hanink, *The Classical Debt*. Ibid.: Bill Balaskas mentions the context of Greece's financial crisis but the artist clarifies that he did not initially conceive his work as a response to the crisis: “At the height of the economic crisis, European politicians and media suggested that Greece should, perhaps, sell some of its most famous islands, or even, the Parthenon in order to pay back its debts; thus, making obvious that the depth and the nature of the economic crisis have come to question – even just nominally – fundamental elements of the Western world’s cultural identity. *However, the specter of a whole country’s bankruptcy was not my main preoccupation when I first conceived Parthenon Rising*” [italics are mine] and Hanink, *The Classical Debt”*, chap. 6, subsection title: “GREECE IS RUINED”. I have referred to the notion of classical debt before, namely in the papers “Intersecting Crises in the notion of ‘greekness’.” and “Lying to the Mermaid: *When things go wrong with ‘greekness’.”*

What Hanink characterizes as “classical debt” has its roots in the idea that there is a “symbolic debt” to be repaid to Greece by Westerners and Europeans due to Greece having “clear[ed] the path for European civilization”.[189] This is connected to the idea that I have already explored in the first chapter, namely that Europe's cultural origins are located in ancient Greece.[190] For some, like the British, as Hamilakis has argued, ancient Greece did not signify only the cultural, but also the racial origins of British people, as, supposedly, “ancient Greeks had a northern Scandinavian or Saxon racial origin”.[191] According to the popular argument that Hanink scrutinizes, namely that Greeks had “clear[ed] the path for European civilization”, Greeks had supposedly also been “gatekeeping” Western culture from barbarous, Oriental others, thus protecting the “superior” Western civilization from non-western influences.[192] During the financial crisis that Greece experienced in the decade of the 2010s (2009-2018) Western media propagated the idea that “Greece’s creditors seem to be suggesting that the abstract debt to Greece is no longer valid”.[193] Reflecting both the Greek perspective and the Western European public opinion here, Hamilakis brings forward the following question: “Could it be, then, that by reversing the asymmetry of debt / credit, the debt of Western creditors to Greece can now be cancelled out”.[194] In the crisis-years, however, the dominant narrative in European media emphasized the discrepancy between contemporary Greeks and ancient Greeks and “underscore[d] how far the Greeks have fallen since ancient times”, in a manner similar to European travelers in Greece in the 19th century.[195] This rift between the glorious Greek past and the “lack of contemporary relevance or achievement” of modern Greece is one of the rhetorical strategies that were employed during the Greek crisis in western European public rhetoric not only to present contemporary Greeks as “lazy” and “corrupted”, but also to argue that they are unworthy of being members of the European Union and therefore potentially also unworthy of Europe's financial “support” - in the form of further loans and austerity

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[189] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6, subsection title: “THE COLONY THAT WASN’T”.
[190] For example Athanassopoulos in “An ‘Ancient’ Landscape”, characterizes Greece “as the birthplace of the European spirit and Western civilization” on page 291.
[191] Hamilakis *The nation and its ruins*, 253 and Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6.
[192] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6, subsection title: “GREECE IS RUINED”.
[193] Ibid., chap. 6.
[194] Ibid.. Hamilakis’s question is quoted by Hanink from Yannis Hamilakis, “Some Debts Can Never Be Repaid”: 239. Hanink stresses that the challenging of the idea of the "classical debt" had already been occurring since 1990.
[195] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6.

measures.[196] Apart from Greeks' unworthiness of their past, it had also been argued in the German magazine *Focus* (2010) "that they [the Greeks] had deceitfully co-opted antiquity as a pillar of their national identity" leading to the conclusion that "Greeks today have no real claim to the true legacy of classical Athens: Europe and European civilization".[197] The element of "deceit" in the argument made by *Focus* lies in the supposed lack of "contemporary relevance or achievement" of modern Greeks and functions as a way to blame Greeks for appropriating ancient Greek culture in their efforts to construct a modern Greek national identity, a heritage that modern Greeks were supposedly unworthy of.[198] What strikes me in both statements is that Europe and the West refuse to recognize their role in the construction of the modern Greek nation state as a state that claims its rootedness and continuity in ancient Greece through the influence of western Hellenism and Philhellenism.[199] This relates to the complex relationship between Greece and the West that is characterized by a form of crypto-colonialism, with the West having indirectly and intellectually colonized Greece.[200] After all, the importance that is attributed to ancient Greek civilization by the West is a construct that emerged from Europe's need to construct its own foundational mythology, as well as cultural and racial rootedness, in ancient Greece.[201] George Zarkadakis also reflects on the relationship between Greece and the West "pillor[ing] Europe more generally for having attempted, right from the birth of the Greek nation, to fashion the country in an ancient image designed by Europe for the purpose of its own vanity" while characterizing Greece as "a failed German project".[202] According to Hanink, Zarkadakis was among other voices who have argued for a disconnection between modern and ancient Greece since modern

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[196] Ibid., Hanink uses the term "corrupted" in chap. 6. She uses the terms "lazy" and "corrupt" in chap. 6, subsection title: "GREECE IS RUINED" and the term "lazy" is repeated in chap. 6, subsection title: "SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW". She also "characterized modern Greeks as [...] 'masters of corruption'", in chap. 6 and subsection title: "CROOKS IN THE EURO FAMILY". Hanink also notes that "Angela Merkel admitted that Europe might have made a mistake by admitting Greece in the Eurozone" in chap. 6 and subsection title: "CROOKS IN THE EURO FAMILY". In regards to further loaning procedures and austerity measures Hanink notes that "In October 2010, Eurozone leaders reached an agreement on a loan package of 100 billion euros for Greece, coupled with a debt write-off of 50 percent. The terms of the agreement required still-deeper austerity." in Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6 and subsection title: "CROOKS IN THE EURO FAMILY".

[197] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6 and subsection title: "CROOKS IN THE EURO FAMILY".

[198] Ibid., in chap. 6 and chap. 6 and subsection title: "CROOKS IN THE EURO FAMILY".

[199] On "western Hellenism" see Hamilakis *The nation and its ruins* and on "Philhellenism" see Rakić "World heritage, tourism and national identity", especially pages 38-43.

[200] Hanink also comments on the crypto-colonial relationship between Greece and the West especially in chap. 6, subsection title: "THE COLONY THAT WASN'T" in Hanink, *The Classical Debt*.

[201] See among others Hamilakis *The nation and its ruins*, 253.

[202] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6 and subsection title: "CROOKS IN THE EURO FAMILY".

Greeks “unlike their dead, buried, and impossibly idealized ancestors, are flesh-and-blood people with very real and modern problems”, thus highlighting the unfairness of holding Greeks accountable for failing to live up to the standards of ancient Greek civilization.[203]

Where does the Acropolis stand in the discussions about “classical debt”? Being the ultimate symbol not only of Greekness but also of the roots of European civilization, and embodying ideals like “democracy”, it comes as no surprise that the Acropolis was utilized in the rhetoric of western media throughout the Greek financial crisis to prove yet again the gap that exists between the glorious classical past and contemporary Greece.[204] Hanink gives several examples in which the Acropolis has been used in the media to criticize the financial crisis in Greece, because the audience could identify the Acropolis “as the symbolic heart of Greece”.[205] The symbolic weight of the Acropolis was therefore used against modern Greeks as to underline the extent to which they deviate from their ancestors' achievements.

As Balaskas's *Parthenon Rising (II)* was created in the sociopolitical context of the Greek financial crisis it can be connected to the imagery produced by western media portraying “the Acropolis with a ‘for sale’ sign” and highlighting the Modern Greeks' unworthiness of their heritage.[206] Balaskas's work can be interpreted as an attempt to reclaim the visual imagery of the Parthenon from its reproduction in western media as a means to satirize the Greek condition throughout the Greek financial crisis by challenging its form and usual representation as illuminated by the Greek sun through the angle we see the Parthenon in the video and the rapid sequence between a lit or dark Parthenon. Taking into account that the Parthenon becomes lit by the flashes of cameras as it is being photographed by locals as well as foreigners, we can interpret the act of taking photographs as a symbolic gesture of trying to capture the “essence” of the Parthenon and along with it the cultural weight that it carries. Through this act we can see a form of antagonistic relationship being shaped between locals and tourists trying to capture and therefore appropriate

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[203] Ibid.
[204] Hamilakis characterizes the Acropolis as "the most important signifier of modern Greek national identity" in Hamilakis, *The nation and its ruins*, 79. For the correlation between Acropolis and democracy see, among others, St Clair, “Looking at the Acropolis of Athens from Modern Times to Antiquity”, paragraph 40.
[205] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6, subsection title: “GREECE IS RUINED”.
[206] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6, subsection title: “GREECE IS RUINED” and chapter 6 in general.

the Parthenon.[207] It is a gesture that brings to mind the tension between the national and "universal" character of the Acropolis, which can be connected with the "classical debt": that is, the Acropolis embodies the idealized perception of classical antiquity both by Greece and the West, a heritage that the West "owes" to Greece while simultaneously contemporary Greece seems to be unworthy of.[208]

The Acropolis as Spectacle

Based on Bill Balaskas's framing of his own work and utilizing Guy Debord's "spectacle" I will now explore the relationship between the Acropolis and *Parthenon Rising (II)* by bringing Debord's conceptualization of the "spectacle" to bear on this work.[209] Following James Trier's reference to Jappe's concise definition of the Debord's "spectacle":

> Debord's analysis is based on the everyday experience of the impoverishment of life, its fragmentation into more and more widely separated spheres, and the disappearance of any unitary aspect from society. The spectacle consists in the reunification of separate aspects at the level of the image. Everything life lacks is to be found within the spectacle, conceived of as an ensemble of independent representations. 'Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle' [25], and individuals, separated from one another, can rediscover unity only within the spectacle, 'where images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream' [2]. Individuals are reunited solely 'in [their] separateness' [29], for the spectacle monopolized all communication to its own advantage and makes it one way only. The spectacle speaks, 'social atoms' listen. And the message is One: an incessant justification of the existing society, which is to say the spectacle itself, or the mode of production that has given rise to it. For this purpose the spectacle has no need of sophisticated arguments; all it needs is to be the only voice, and shew of no

[207] This antagonistic relationship is not visible in the artwork itself but is departing from Balaskas's remark that both locals and tourists gather at the Acropolis when it is open for the public at night. In Balaskas, "Living in a Global 'Society of the Spectacle'" and Balaskas, "Parthenon Rising by Bill Balaskas".
[208] For a discussion on the national and "universal" character of the Acropolis see Rakić and Chambers, "World Heritage".
[209] Balaskas, "Living in a Global 'Society of the Spectacle'" and Balaskas, "Parthenon Rising by Bill Balaskas".

> response whatsoever. Its first prerequisite, therefore, and at the same time its chief product, is the passivity of a contemplative attitude. Only an individual 'isolated' amidst the 'atomized masses' [221] could feel any need for the spectacle, and consequently the spectacle must bend every effort to reinforce the individual's isolation. (pp. 6-7).[210]

This definition of the spectacle seems recognizable in the case of an archaeological site that carries the symbolic weight that the Acropolis does. Firstly, I want to point out that as a Foucauldian heterotopia, the Acropolis represents a sort of "separate sphere" in society, a place where the visitor can experience a supposed connection with the ancient Greek past. Perhaps the Acropolis is a place separated from everyday life as a space charged with a certain "holiness", which due to its symbolic weight is not experienced as part of contemporary life but as reminiscent of ancient glory. Moreover, the idea that "the spectacle consists in the reunification of separate aspects at the level of the image" is particularly true for the Acropolis, as it brings together individual experiences under the umbrella of a collective national history and imagination.[211] Lastly, the thesis that "everything life lacks is to be found within the spectacle" brings to mind the discourses circulating throughout the Greek financial crisis, where through a constant comparison with ancient Greece and through highlighting the gap between contemporary and ancient Greece western media Greece undermined modern Greece as unworthy of its heritage. In this context the Acropolis symbolized what was "lacking" from contemporary Greece, admittedly its ancient glory and perceived sociopolitical and economic success.

Turning our attention to *Parthenon Rising (II)* I want to briefly discuss how the artist himself makes a case for the interrelation between Debord's aforementioned concept, the Greek financial crisis and the work *Parthenon Rising* (2010), which, as I have already mentioned, is similar to *Parthenon Rising (II)* (2011).[212] Balaskas connects the Acropolis to the notion of spectacle through time. For Balaskas time functions as a commodity "in a globalized Society of the Spectacle".[213] Therefore, history, culture and things we do in our spare time, such as tourism in this case, all

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[210] Trier, "Guy Debord's 'The Society of the Spectacle'.": 69.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Balaskas, "Living in a Global 'Society of the Spectacle'" and Balaskas, "Parthenon Rising by Bill Balaskas".
[213] Balaskas, "Living in a Global 'Society of the Spectacle'".

connect to commodities, capital and “commodified spectacles”.[214] In an argument that helps us interconnect the concept of the “spectacle” with religion and the Greek crisis, Balaskas follows Debord's saying that “spectacle is the material reconstruction of religious illusion (20)”. The artist asks in the article “Living in a Global ‘Society of the Spectacle’” “what this religion could be” in times of financial crisis.[215] One could answer: capitalism. A “religion” where monetary acquisition is glorified to the extent it becomes God-like.

The Parthenon carries religious connotations not only because it used to function as a temple, but also because much like other ancient artifacts it has become sacralised. According to Hamilakis and Yalouri, ancient artifacts and heritage sites have been characterized as "sacred" in modern Greece, with the Acropolis being often referred to as "the sacred rock".[216] Following other theorists, such as Anderson and Hobsbawm, Hamilakis and Yalouri stress the interconnection between nationalism and “religious ideology”.[217] In the case of Greece, they argue that “ideological and cultural elements” of Orthodoxy were adopted by Greek nationalism.[218] In order for the modern Greek nation state to be established, antiquities became part of the worshipping and the rituals of Hellenism.[219] For Hamilakis and Yalouri, Greek nationalism, Orthodoxy and the sacralisation of ancient artifacts are interrelated.[220] In the case of the Acropolis, Debord's reference to spectacle as “religious illusion (20)” acquires both nationalist and religious undertones.[221] The Athenian Acropolis embodies the religious elements of modern Greek nationalism as the ultimate symbol of the supposed continuity between ancient and modern Greece. The element of the "sacralisation" of the Parthenon is also evident in Balaskas's work. The pompous music and the dark background create a feeling of devoutness. At the same time, the interchange between light and darkness brings to mind their connotations in the Orthodox context: the light is often associated with something divine, good, the presence of God or of the Holy Spirit. Darkness on the other hand, can be associated with evil, danger or the presence of the devil.

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[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Hamilakis and Yalouri, “Sacralizing the Past”: 116.
[217] Ibid., 122.
[218] Ibid., 122-123.
[219] Ibid., 126-127.
[220] Ibid., 128.
[221] Balaskas, “Living in a Global ‘Society of the Spectacle’”.

What strikes me in *Parthenon Rising (II)* is the fact that a double spectacularisation process seems to be taking place. On the one hand, there are the visitors of the Acropolis that participate in a process of spectacularising the Acropolis by "trying to capture [...] its myth" or the glory of the monument.[222] In this case the Acropolis is turned into a commodity to be consumed. The attempts to capture the Acropolis through photography reveal its popularity and symbolic value on a national as well as on an international level. Its "symbolic capital" is connected to the actual commodification of the monument that becomes part of the participatory event of experiencing its supposed glory in a rare setting, during the night.[223] The staged character of the ritual of capturing the Acropolis's essence on a night visit enhances its quality as "spectacle", a "term [that] generally signifies a dazzling staged show that is perceived to be watched and consumed passively by certain audiences (Kaplan 2012, 471)" and "is characterized by theatricality, the power to form shared identities and the capacity to pacify its recipients (King and Yeoh 1997; Tomlinson and Young 2006)".[224] The element of "passive consum(ption)" is in my opinion present in the attempts to capture the Acropolis at night as they fetishize and idealize the monument. On the other hand, one could argue that the artist participates in the "spectacularisation" process of the monument. However, I believe that in *Parthenon Rising (II)* there is a reversal of the "spectacularisation" process of the monument, as the video brings this process to the audience's attention and, through the montage and imposing music that is part of the video, Balaskas offers a critical take on the consumption of the monument. This critical approach is also evident in the aesthetic choices in the artwork. Due to the constant switching between the illuminated and the dark imagery of the Parthenon, a fragmented version of the monument is created. Thus the audience is unable to consume the monument as a whole, as a commodified product, as the Parthenon keeps slipping away, disappearing and reappearing in front of the audience. Here lies also the idea that in order for a (cultural) product to be commodified and widely consumed it needs to be easily graspable. In the case of *Parthenon Rising (II)* this "graspability" of the monument is challenged by the rapid swapping of illuminated and dark imagery.

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[222] Balaskas, "Living in a Global 'Society of the Spectacle'" and Balaskas, "Parthenon Rising by Bill Balaskas".
[223] Yannis Hamilakis and Eleana Yalouri mention that "antiquity in modern Greece operates as 'symbolic capital'" in Hamilakis and Yalouri, "Sacralizing the Past": 116, a concept based on Bourdieu's work (Bourdieu 1977, 1990).
[224] Fouseki and Dragouni, "Heritage Spectacles": 744.

Tourism, nationalism and sacralisation

The monument's perception as “sacred” is enhanced by the ritual of visiting it: tourism “in modern societies”, as we know, often functions as “pilgrimage”.[225] National imagination and tourism in the face of cultural heritage are connected with the element of “sacredness” and the construction of an “authentic” experience.[226] Since the sacralisation of ancient artifacts in Greece relates to the construction of modern Greek nationalism and tourism also carries a “sacred” element, I now want to examine the interrelations between tourism and nationalism.[227] This is relevant to *Parthenon Rising (II)* because the video essentially captures the interaction of tourists as well as locals with the Parthenon through photography.[228] Tourism and national identity are connected because tourism presents “selected symbols of identity” as a form of collective heritage.[229] Much like nation-states, heritage, which has its roots in the 18th and 19th century, “is a modern construct and as such is strongly linked with the project of nation building”.[230] In regards to the Acropolis, “[it] is *the* best known and *the* most visited Athenian cultural heritage site, with half of the tourists in Athens in 1977 having visited the Acropolis (1.2 million) and only 25% its best known museum (Asprogerakas, 2007)” and it is one of the most visited heritage sites nationally as well as globally.[231] The Athenian Acropolis therefore constitutes a good example of the intersections between tourism, nationalism and sacralisation due to the symbolic value it carries both on a national and an international level and its characterization as a “sacred rock”.[232]

Returning to *Parthenon Rising (II)*, I now want to examine how it relates to the notion of Greekness. The first clue comes from the title of the artwork and specifically the term “rising”. While it refers to the Parthenon whose glory is highlighted in Balaskas's video, it also brings to mind a symbolic image that has been used in the context of the emergence of the modern Greek nation state, that of

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[225] Hamilakis and Yalouri, “Sacralizing the Past”: 135, on note 2 they refer to Horne, 1984.
[226] Hollinshead, “Tourism as Public Culture”: 270.
[227] See Hamilakis and Yalouri, “Sacralizing the Past”, in general and Hollinshead, “Tourism as Public Culture”, in general.
[228] Balaskas, “Living in a Global ‘Society of the Spectacle’” and Balaskas, “Parthenon Rising by Bill Balaskas”.
[229] Palmer, "Tourism and the Symbols of Identity.": 314-315.
[230] Rakić, “World heritage, tourism and national identity”, 48.
[231] Ibid., 71-72.
[232] Many refer to the Acropolis as “the sacred rock”. For example, Hamilakis and Yalouri, “Sacralizing the Past”: 116.

the rising Phoenix.[233] This symbolism was used in Greek Revivalism to signify "that Greece resurrected itself, like the mythical Phoenix, after having been under the subjugation of the Macedonians, the Romans, the Byzantines, and the Turks".[234] As a symbol, the rising Phoenix served the appropriation of ancient Greek antiquity by the modern Greek nation state and its assimilation in the construction of the Greek national narrative.[235] The image of the rising Phoenix is also relevant to the relationship between Greek nationalism and Orthodoxy, as it "can be subconsciously connected with the image of the resurrected Jesus".[236] In the case of *Parthenon Rising (II)* the term "rising" could therefore be interpreted as signifying the essential relationship between modern and ancient Greece that is embedded in hegemonic understandings of Greekness.[237] Moving our attention to the artworks aesthetics, one prevailing element is the quick succession of lit and dark imagery of the Parthenon. This constant transition from illuminated to dark imagery creates an effect of disruption and discontinuity in the artwork. As the idea of continuity from ancient to contemporary times has been crucial in the foundational mythology of the modern Greek nation state, the aesthetic effect of disruption becomes an artistic means to challenge this idea of national continuity.

The photographing the Parthenon is also important in this respect.[238] Lambropoulos remarks on the relationship between the usage of photography and the ancient monument: "Ironically, [...] the monument is being destroyed not by being reduced to pieces but by being photographically restored. As the most legendary ruin is reconstructed daily by all the means of mechanical reproduction, it turns into a popular modern commodity; it becomes a slogan, a sign, a spectacle".[239] Departing from Nicholas Calas's poem "'Acropolis'", where Calas connects the destruction of the Parthenon during its 1687 bombardment with different forms of "bombardment" which also include photography, Lambropoulos argues that photography (even if it appears to be reconstructing the monument) is essentially another form of destroying

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[233] The image of the rising Phoenix is mentioned both in Hamilakis and Yalouri, "Sacralizing the Past": 128 and in Antonis Liakos, "Hellenism and the Making of Modern Greece", 204 and 206.
[234] Liakos, "Hellenism and the Making of Modern Greece", 204. In Tziovas, "Reconfiguring the past:Antiquity and Greekness", in general, Tziovas discusses the relationship between the "'revivalst', approach to the past" and Greekness (quote from p. 290).
[235] Liakos, "Hellenism and the Making of Modern Greece", 204-205.
[236] Hamilakis and Yalouri, "Sacralizing the Past": 128.
[237] See Tziovas, "Reconfiguring the past:Antiquity and Greekness", in general.
[238] Balaskas, "Living in a Global 'Society of the Spectacle'" and Balaskas, "Parthenon Rising by Bill Balaskas".
[239] Lambropoulos, "Unbuilding the Acropolis in Greek Literature", 186.

it.[240] Indeed, in *Parthenon Rising (II)* too, the visitors, by attempting to capture the essence of the monument, participate in the ritual of its spectacularisation and commodification: in this process of constant photographic reproduction, the Parthenon, and the Acropolis as a whole, are being symbolically destroyed, in the sense that they become fragmented. At the same time, this photographic "bombardment" of the Acropolis, inscribes Balaskas's work to the tradition of the "destructive" or "explosive" artistic production I referred to earlier.[241] By preventing the audience from consuming the Parthenon in its "wholeness" through the quick switch from lit to dark imagery, Balaskas is in a sense "destroying" or disrupting the commodification processes of the Acropolis in our times. This "destructive" element in *Parthenon Rising (II)* also relates to the sociopolitical context of the Greek crisis as "the Parthenon [...] [was] metaphorically destroyed anew by the crisis - in the European media".[242] The destruction of the Parthenon in art and media representations can be interpreted as a critique on the supposed supportive role that Europe played throughout Greece's financial crisis.[243] When the Parthenon as a metonymy for Greek civilization falls apart, it shakes both the foundational mythology of Greece and the West. In *Parthenon Rising (II)* the "destruction" of the Parthenon does not only take place through its photographic destruction, but is also evident in the artwork through the constant appearance and disappearance of the Parthenon as the video moves from light to dark imagery. What does the disappearance of the Parthenon mean in this case? As Maria Boletsi has pointed out in relation to Daphne Heretakis's documentary, "*Αρχιπέλαγα, γυμνοί γρανίτες* (*Archipelagos, Naked Granites*, 2014)", in which the Acropolis appears collapsing on the screen, a reality where the Acropolis has been destroyed is almost inconceivable. Boletsi describes this scene of the film as "an apocalyptic image through which viewers are compelled to imagine the present without this most sacred of ruins that epitomizes the dependency of modern Greece on the classical past".[244] Similarly, the momentary disappearance of the Parthenon in Balaskas's work can cause a form of collective

[240] Ibid., 185-186.
[241] See Lambropoulos, "Unbuilding the Acropolis in Greek Literature" and Markopoulou, "Explosive Literature".
[242] Markopoulou, "Explosive Literature": 332.
[243] Ibid.
[244] Boletsi and Celik-Rappas, "Introduction": xiii.

anxiety in response to the potential destruction of a monument that signifies the "essence" of what it means to be Greek in collective imagination.[245]

To conclude, Balaskas's *Parthenon Rising (II)* offers a critical stance towards hegemonic conceptualizations of Greekness. The simple aesthetic means of the artwork that include the rapid interchange between illuminated and dark imagery and the pompous music that frames the art work's visual imagery challenge prevailing notions of Greekness on multiple levels. The momentary disappearance of the Parthenon in the darkness brings forward Greece's collective fear of losing the epitome and the foundations not only of its civilization but more importantly of its national imagination through its supposed continuation from ancient to modern times.[246] Simultaneously, the photographic "bombardment" of the Acropolis signifies the Acropolis's destruction by rendering its monuments commodified and fragmented to thousands of pieces, as many as the pictures taken. The notion of Greekness is not only challenged by the symbolic destruction of one of its pillars, namely the monument that carries both national and "universal" weight, but also through the effect of discontinuity and disruption through the rapid succession of illuminated and dark imagery. This disruption functions as a symbolic attack towards Greece's narrative of continuity from ancient to modern times. Furthermore, the pompous music and the opposition between light and darkness, signifying accordingly divinity and evil in the Orthodox tradition, reflect the sacralised character of the monument, an element that is key in the construction of modern Greek nationalism through the sacralisation of antiquity. Simultaneously, Balaskas is critical of the commodification and "spectacularisation" processes that the Parthenon has undergone, an element that is reflected on *Parthenon Rising (II)* through the audience's ungraspability of the monument due to the rapid change between lit and dark imagery. Lastly, the work opens up a dialogue with the representation of the Greek financial crisis in western media as unworthy of its ancient heritage and constitutes a reclamation of the portrayal of the Acropolis.

[245] Boletsi also discusses "the deep-rooted self-conceptualization of modern Greeks through the classical past" in Boletsi and Celik-Rappas, “Introduction”: xiii.
[246] In the film *Archipelagos, Naked Granites*, 2014 some interviewed people say that the destruction of the Acropolis would signify "the loss of our civilization" in Boletsi Celik-Rappas, “Introduction”: xiii.

Chapter 4: "*Acropolis Rocks*: An anti-essentialist remediation of the 'sacred hill'"

Acropolis Rocks (2013) is the title of the 6'59" video created by the artist Panos Sklavenitis and scholar Eleana Yalouri. The latter has contributed to the discussions surrounding the Acropolis with - among other works - the seminal book *The Acropolis: Global Fame, Local Claim*.[247] The video has been presented in Athens Biennale 2013, AGORA.[248] *Acropolis Rocks* is an assemblage of archival material, interviews with visitors of the Acropolis, pixelized images of the "sacred hill" and satire. The interviews are interrupted by two elements: the clips showing different statues being demolished and other clips where the Acropolis is conceptualised as an interface. The satirical tone is evident in the video's title: it is a wordplay referring both to Acropolis's rocky ground and the suggestion that Acropolis "rocks", as in it being a very cool attraction or a "hot" topic for discussion. In the beginning of the video we hear a voice-over featured over a black background that sets the tone of the video and poses its central questions:

> To what extent is the aura of the Acropolis undermined if it is renamed into 'PJ802TH24' or if its image is disintegrated into digital pixels? Can we possibly reach its core if we analyse it into the primary elements that constitute it? How are all these elements reunited into an explosive collage of images and sounds creating a gigantified body that expands beyond the ancient hill, and is spread out through mental, narrative and material reproductions and transformations? We perceive the Acropolis not as fixed in time and space, but as a mobile body consisting of several parts, with different microhistories and multiply situated; as a field of sensorial interactions and as a meshwork of memories and narrations; as the object of power and control practices of preservation, beautification and corrective aesthetic, but also as a subject accumulating the potential energy of the past, the present and the future. The Acropolis sums up biographical events, memories and materials which 'prepare' her later forms, while at the same time 'recapitulating' all its previous ones. The Acropolis appears, thus, asacheiropoiete [sic], that is, not made by any human hand, but with an autonomous personality and agency which make her the

[247] Yalouri, *The Acropolis: Global Fame, Local Claim*.
[248] "Acropolis Rocks".

> protagonist in the art process and of secondary importance the artist who created her.[249]

Departing from the issues raised in this prelude to the video, I explore in this chapter how *Acropolis Rocks* challenges essentialist conceptualizations of Greekness and Greek national identity through the aesthetic means of repetition and pixelization as well as by renaming the monument and framing it as an interface. In my close analysis of the artwork, I also compare *Acropolis*, *Parthenon Rising* and *Acropolis Rocks* in order to trace shared motifs that problematize the hegemonic narratives surrounding the Acropolis. I then investigate how the Acropolis is remediated in the video and how this relates to modern Greek cultural memory. Lastly, I elaborate on the potentialities that *Acropolis Rocks* opens up for a renegotiation of contemporary Greekness.

Acropolis Rocks: An anti-essentialist approach

Nationalism and essentialism are closely related. The essentialist characteristics evident in some nationalisms are traceable in the “ethnicist beliefs about nationhood as defined by some physical essence, such as genes or blood, or arising out of connection with the soil of the motherland” as well as in culture “[...] especially if a given nation's culture is seen as monolithic and unchanging”.[250] Essentialism in nationalism can therefore lie in the belief of racial homogeneity that can be “proved” through processes like DNA testing or cultural continuity and homogeneity. In both cases the imagined and constructed character of nation states as well as national identities is dismissed and the national identity is conceptualized as based on objective “truths” such as racial continuity and purity. In the modern Greek nationalist context an essentialist understanding of national identity assumes cultural but also biological, racial dimensions, when it is coupled with the desire to prove that modern Greeks are the descendants of ancient Greeks. This desire has not only been

[249] Excerpt from Panos Sklavenitis, and Eleana Yalouri, *Acropolis Rocks*, video, 2013, 6’59”, archanthart.wixsite.com, last accessed July 26, 2021. https://archanthart.wixsite.com/archanthart/sklavenitis-yalouri

[250] Siromahov, Buhrmester, and McKay, "Beliefs in National Continuity Are Related to Essentialist Thinking and to Perceptions of the Nation as a Family.": 846.

evident during the construction of the nation in the 19th century but also continues today.[251]

Being “the ultimate symbol of Greekness”, one could argue that the Acropolis is a monument that has been conceptualized as “proof” of cultural homogeneity and continuity since antiquity and is thus central to modern Greek cultural essentialism.[252] *Acropolis Rocks* brings forward the issue of cultural essentialism in relation to the Acropolis by following three main strategies: changing the name of the “sacred rock”, pixelizing footage of it and creating motives with the repetition of images. Renaming the monument as “PJ802TH24” is a gesture against its glorification. The monument acquires what appears to be the name of a file. By doing so the “ultimate symbol of Greekness” becomes reduced to a random file in someone's device. This gesture functions as an experiment that calls us to reimagine the Acropolis differently: what it would mean if there was no Acropolis, at least not in the way it has been established in Greek and western cultural imagination. By doing so, to some extent the Acropolis is “set free” of all the histories, narratives and mythologies that surround it. By changing the name, the “essence” of the Acropolis becomes unsettled, along with its significations. The pixelization of a variety of footage that potentially depicts the Acropolis or its surroundings is another anti-essentialist tactic of the video. The fact that the viewers can not really tell what image is “hidden” behind the pixels stops the gaze from “discovering” what the pixels conceal (possibly the Acropolis itself). The viewers are thereby prevented from “consuming” the monument as a commodity and as a spectacle that keeps getting photographed, as was the case in the artwork discussed in the previous chapter. By not being able to see the monument it becomes impossible for the viewers to grasp its “essence”, which is deconstructed and divided into multiple pixels. Once again, the visual deconstruction and concealment of the Acropolis speaks to the collective anxiety of its disappearance and carries the potential of the deconstruction of modern Greek national imagination.

The creation of a sort of visual collage by reproducing the same image sixteen times (or more in some shots) makes us further question the existence of an

[251] While working on this chapter I saw the following article being published, which implies the genetic continuity between ancient and contemporary Greeks by mentioning that “Contemporary Greeks are genetically similar to populations of Northern Aegean Sea of 2.000 BC”: “Αρχαίο DNA «μίλησε»: Οι σημερινοί Έλληνες όμοιοι γενετικά με πληθυσμούς Β. Αιγαίου του 2.000 π.Χ” [Ancient DNA “has spoken”: Contemporary Greeks are genetically similar to populations of Northern Aegean Sea of 2.000 BC] [translation is mine].

[252] Rakić, “World heritage, tourism and national identity”, 18 and 86.

“essence” of the Acropolis. In the video many images that include the Acropolis, its surroundings and interviews with its visitors are repeated in multiple frames (Fig. 4). This artistic decision reflects the fact that the Acropolis has been reproduced countless times in photographs and video footage. The Acropolis therefore loses its uniqueness, or even holiness, and becomes something that can be endlessly reproduced, a commodity to be consumed by Greeks and foreigners alike. Its multiple reproduction challenges the idea that the Acropolis carries an essence calling attention to the fact that the Acropolis has always been multiply reproduced: in souvenirs, postcards, personal photographs, art institutions or in the news (excerpts from footage of BBC news are also shown in the video where the issue of the reunification of the “Parthenon Marbles” seems to be discussed).

Fig. 4. Panos Sklavenitis and Eleana Yalouri, *Acropolis Rocks*, video, 2013, panossklavenitis.com, last accessed July 14, 2021. http://panossklavenitis.com/index.php/item/acropolis-rocks-2

The technique of reproducing an image in multiples inevitably brings to mind Andy Warhol's artworks, such as *Marilyn Diptych* (1962) or *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962). Similarly to Warhol's works that challenge the dichotomy between "original" and "copy", the multiple reproduction of the Acropolis and its surrounding areas

problematizes the glorification of the monument as a unique masterpiece, as it has been reproduced countless times in different media.[253] As Sklavenitis and Yalouri underline in the video's prelude: “The Acropolis appears, thus, asacheiropoiete [sic], that is, not made by any human hand, but with an autonomous personality and agency which make her the protagonist in the art process and of secondary importance the artist who created her.”[254] The fact that the Acropolis can be seen as “autonomous” and the artists who created the monument as being of “secondary importance” can be connected to Warhol's challenge to the conceptualization of the artist as a genius in western art history: in a society of increased consumerism the artist can create highly commodified art, art that does not necessarily depart from the genius of the artist but reflects modes of mass production.[255] As Bauch argues: “The final violation of the model of artistic agency posed by Warhol's silkscreening process is that painted representation is divorced from a motivated touch, from the embodied subjectivity of the artist and the historical repertoire of traditions and skills that it conveys. [...] Warhol's ‘brushstroke’ mimics the simple automated movements of an industrial press or the repetitive action of an assembly-line worker”.[256] Just like Warhol's works reflect and problematize “art's irreversible fall from the realm of history and aesthetics into the system of market exchange”, Sklavenitis’ and Yalouri’s video highlights the fact that the way Acropolis is experienced nowadays is not in its original religious context and function, but has become a commodity to be consumed by its visitors, charged with the mythologies of democracy, Greekness and Europeanness.[257] In that sense the Acropolis can be seen as a Baudrillardean simulacrum: the monument in its current form simulates an imagined glory of classical Greece that is not real and diverts from the Acropolis's original function as a temple.[258]

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[253] Baum refers to the dichotomy of "original" and "copy" as "original/reproduced" on page 32 and "real and copy" on page 33 in Baum, “The Mirror of Consumption”.
[254] Excerpt from Panos Sklavenitis, and Eleana Yalouri, *Acropolis Rocks*.
[255] Excerpt from Panos Sklavenitis, and Eleana Yalouri, *Acropolis Rocks*. and Baum, “The Mirror of Consumption”, 33.
[256] I am influenced here by Baum in general. For example on page 32 in Baum, “The Mirror of Consumption”, Baum says: "By fusing the materials, processes, and formats of mechanical, mass-produced photography and crafted, unique paintings, Warhol is read as also dissolving the boundary between aesthetic reception and commodity consumption".
[257] Ibid., 29.
[258] Baum highlights the connection between Warhol's and Baudrillard's work and refers to the "simulacra" on pages 33-35 in Baum, “The Mirror of Consumption”.

Recurring motifs

Similarly to Eva Stefani's *Acropolis*, where the Acropolis's "body" is parallelised to the female body, Sklavenitis and Yalouri also conceptualize the Acropolis as a body. Whereas Stefani's work focuses on the materiality of the body and the monument, in *Acropolis Rocks* the body of the Acropolis is constructed through the narratives that surround it: the body of the Acropolis in *Acropolis Rocks* is an "assemblage", following Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's understanding of this notion:

> Assemblage theory is an approach to systems analysis that emphasizes fluidity, exchangeability, and multiple functionalities. Assemblages appear to be functioning as a whole, but are actually coherent bits of a system whose components can be 'yanked' out of one system, 'plugged' into another, and still work. As such, assemblages characteristically have functional capacities but do not have a function—that is, they are not designed to only do one thing.[259]

As an assemblage, the body of the Acropolis functions here as a metaphorical body characterized by fluidity and in a state of constant transformation or "becoming", "whose components can be 'yanked' out of one system, 'plugged' into another, and still work", meaning that its organs can be part of multiple bodies and are not strictly contained in a closed, autonomous body.[260] As mentioned in the beginning of *Acropolis Rocks*, the body of the Acropolis is "a gigantified body that expands beyond the ancient hill, and is spread out through mental, narrative and material reproductions and transformations".[261] The body of the Acropolis is therefore conceptualized as an ever-expanding assemblage of material and immaterial responses and lived experiences of the monument. In this sense, the bodies of the visitors who share their perceptions and positionings in relation to the Acropolis in the video belong to Acropolis's body too. As parts of an "assemblage", the bodies of the visitors become part of a relational system that creates "the gigantified body" of the monument.[262] This assemblage of the Acropolis in the video emerges as an open

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[259] "Assemblage Theory". Furthermore, Buchanan stresses that "bodies and bodies without organs are both examples of what Deleuze and Guattari call assemblages" in Buchanan, "The Problem of the Body in Deleuze and Guattari, Or, What Can a Body Do?": 73.
[260] "Assemblage Theory".
[261] Excerpt from Panos Sklavenitis, and Eleana Yalouri, *Acropolis Rocks*.
[262] Panos Sklavenitis, and Eleana Yalouri, *Acropolis Rocks*.

archive of images that suggest how the monument is being experienced and reproduced through time.

Dimitris Papanikolaou notes that there has been an increased artistic interest in the notion of the archive in the times of the Greek financial crisis (2009-2018).[263] Papanikolaou traces a strong artistic preoccupation during the crisis not only with revisiting and radically re-examining Greek history, but also with body politics and biopolitics.[264] He connects these two preoccupations in the term "archive trouble" that conjoins Jacques Derrida's "Archive Fever" and Judith Butler's "Gender Trouble".[265] According to Papanikolaou, "**Archive Trouble** is precisely this moment when the aesthetic reframes historical and political understanding and alerts us to the modalities of a history in the present" [bold in the original].[266] *Acropolis Rocks*, which was created in 2013, just a few years after the Greek financial crisis started, partakes in this "archive trouble", as it calls its viewers to reflect on modern Greek history and to question the hegemonic narratives surrounding "the ultimate symbol of Greekness", the Acropolis.[267] By treating the Acropolis both as an assemblage and as an open archive of histories and lived experiences, Sklavenitis and Yalouri call us to reflect on our collective and personal relationship to the monument. In the mode of "Archive Trouble", the work makes the viewers aware of the "modalities of a history in the present", since they are confronted with a distorted, pixelized and multiply reproduced imagery of a monument that has lost symbolic weight by being renamed into "PJ802TH24".

Another element that is evident in *Acropolis Rocks* is the desire to demolish some of the myths around the Acropolis. This desire to reimagine the Acropolis has been traced in the previous two chapters, in the film *Acropolis* through the liquidification of the monument and in *Parthenon Rising (II)* through the momentary disappearance of the monument into darkness. In *Acropolis Rocks* the desire to deessentialize the Acropolis does not only lie in its deconstruction in digital pixels but is also implied through the juxtaposition of many successive images that show statues being demolished. This series of images is repeated twice in the video at a very fast pace and is the imagery with which the video closes. The images that I

[263] Papanikolaou, "Archive Trouble", 163-164.
[264] Papanikolaou, 164-165. See also Tziovas, "Narratives of the Greek Crisis and the Politics of the Past".
[265] Ibid., 165.
[266] Ibid., 167.
[267] Rakić, "World heritage, tourism and national identity", 18 and 86.

could recognize were those of the demolition and decapitation of Joseph Stalin's state in Budapest in 1956 and the removal of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad in 2003. Stalin's statue, which "not only demonstrated Stalin's power, but the power of the Hungarian Working People's Party as well" and constituted "[t]he ultimate symbol of Stalinist dictatorship in Hungary", was destroyed in the context of the "Hungarian Uprising" in 1956.[268] Some argue that Hussein's statue demolition was initiated by the U.S. and was executed with the collaboration of Iraqis and the U.S. Marines.[269] In regards to the coverage of the demolition of Hussein's statue in western media, Lesa Hatley Major and David D. Perlmutter write:

> The picture became famous but also was denoted by journalistic and political elites as emblematic of the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime. "The dealing with a statue: a deeply symbolic act," ABC's Peter Jennings said (Bianco, 2003). The Boston Globe proclaimed, "It was liberation day in Baghdad" Rampton & Stauber, 2003), and NBC's Tom Brokaw compared the event to "all the statues of Lenin [that] came down all across the Soviet Union" (Rampton & Stauber). Donald Rumsfeld, U.S. defense secretary, announced that "Saddam [...] Hussein is now taking his rightful place alongside Hitler, Stalin, Lenin, and Ceausescu in the pantheon of failed brutal dictators, and the Iraqi people are well on their way to freedom" (Miga & Guarino, 2003, News p. 002).[270]

Therefore, in western narratives it seems as though both the toppling of Stalin's and Hussein's statues signifies the people's liberation from the aforementioned dictators and their oppressive regimes. Following this logic, what seems to me to be suggested in *Acropolis Rocks* is that the deconstruction of the monument would be a liberating act, freeing Greeks from hegemonic conceptualizations of Greekness and the reliance on narratives of racial and cultural continuity. Moreover, today, eight years after the creation of *Acropolis Rocks* the demolition images of the statues shown in the video are inevitably associated with the contemporary wave of statues' destruction that has been taking place since the protests against George Floyd's

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[268] The first and third quotes are taken from "A disembodied statue of Joseph Stalin's head on the streets of Budapest during the Hungarian Revolution, 1956" and the second one is from "Destruction of the Stalin Statue, Budapest, 1956".
[269] Major, and Perlmutter, "The Fall of a Pseudo-Icon: The Toppling of Saddam Hussein's Statue as Image Management.": 40-41.
[270] Ibid., 39-40.

murder and in support of the Black Lives Matter movement began.[271] These statues' destructions have been taking place globally and are targeting historical figures that have been associated with racism, colonialism and the slave trade.[272] The destruction of numerous statues is in this case associated with the struggles against the colonial heritage and its systems of oppression and discrimination that are still very much present in contemporary societies. Looking at "Acropolis Rocks" from our vantage point in the present, in 2021, and taking these recent events into account in our viewing, we can interpret the suggested destruction of the "sacred rock" through a decolonial lens. The monument is connected to processes of racialization, as it has been shown in the first chapter, due to its association with whiteness. The whiteness of the monument is interconnected with the whitewashing of antiquity and the desire to establish that ancient Greeks were "white" and that they are the ancestors of white Westerners. As it has already been noted, the monument has been purified and stripped from its history in order to perpetuate the traits associated with classical Athens in the Western imagination.[273] However, as Hamilakis notes, the monument is currently not representative of its classical state, as it is white and not colorful, as it was in that context.[274] What the current interventions on the monument reveal is the following: "What is reconstructed is an Acropolis of whiteness, of the euro-centric, western imagination, [a]n Acropolis as it was constructed by philologists, architects and archaeologists in the 18th and 19th centuries, an Acropolis of colonial-national modernity and romantic ethnicism" [translation is mine].[275] Furthermore, the supposed whiteness of the monument can be related to the way Greece has been indirectly colonized by the West, since whiteness has been imposed by the West as an ideal. Thereby the association of the destruction of the Acropolis with the wave of demolitions of colonial figures globally calls us to rethink how the "sacred rock" could be decolonized too.

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[271] Taylor, "The Statues Brought Down Since the George Floyd Protests Began".

[272] "How Statues Are Falling Around the World" and Preciado, "When Statues Fall".
[273] See for exampleHamilakis and Yalouri, "Sacralizing the Past": in general.
[274] Hamilakis, "Για την Ακρόπολη του 21ου αιώνα" ["For the "Acropolis of the 21st century"] [translation is mine].
[275] Ibid.. See the original: "Αυτό που ανακατασκευάζεται είναι μια Ακρόπολη της λευκότητας, της ευρω-κεντρικής, δυτικής φαντασίωσης, Μια ακρόπολη όπως την κατασκεύασαν φιλόλογοι, αρχιτέκτονες και αρχαιολόγοι τον 18ο και τον 19ο αιώνα, μια Ακρόπολη της αποικιοκρατικής - εθνικής νεωτερικότητας και του ρομαντικού εθνικισμού."

The last major recurring theme is connected to tourism and the commodification of the Acropolis. There are many instances in *Acropolis Rocks* where the presence of visitors is shown or implied. For example, one visitor says: “Okay, well I am here at PJ802TH24 in Athens and I just had the most wonderful time, it's a great place to visit, it's just some incredible stonework”, while showing glimpses of Acropolis's ruins with the camera facing the blue sky.[276] Other visitors’ statements include the following: “this is the greatest architectural thing in the world”, “I'm visiting PJ802TH24 by accident actually because I found a cheap flight and I thought that I would visit this big symbol because the name is known all over the world and ehm as we learned about it in school we had to see it” and “Indeed this is the first time that I'm seeing these centuries of beauty that is the classic ehm ehm architecture of the Acropolis, don't change the name. The Acropolis is is [sic] the most magnificent cultural heritage of the universe, you have no business modifying it to something meaningless”.[277] This visitor appears to be opposing the idea of changing the name of the Acropolis to “PJ802TH24”, fearing perhaps that along with the name the glory of the Acropolis will be lost and interpreting this gesture as sacrilegious. Such comments, exemplify the essentialist ideas associated with the Acropolis, which the creators of *Acropolis Rocks* seem to be questioning. However, most visitors seem to be embracing the new name, as the repetition of the name “PJ802TH24” in their testimonies - which are in all probability staged interviews - suggests. In many of them the Acropolis is glorified as a universal symbol and an architectural masterpiece that is worth visiting from people all around the world. The fact that these testimonies appear to be staged interviews adds a humorous, ironic tone, which enhances the video’s critique of the commodification and fetishisation of the monument. Simultaneously, the fact that the visitors repeat some of the stereotypical, hegemonic narratives that surround the Acropolis, even though the name of the monument has turned into a generic computerized one, creates a tension that reveals the difficulty of creating an actual change in the ways that the “sacred rock” is perceived. This functions as a point of critical reflection: to what extent can artistic interventions such as *Acropolis Rocks* challenge the monument’s mythologies?

[276] Excerpt from Panos Sklavenitis, and Eleana Yalouri, *Acropolis Rocks*.
[277] Excerpts from Panos Sklavenitis, and Eleana Yalouri, *Acropolis Rocks*.

Remediating the past in Acropolis Rocks

Sklavenitis' and Yalouri's video foregrounds the role of the filmic medium itself in the production of cultural memory in the case of the Acropolis. In their conceptualization of remediation as "'the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms'", David Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin trace the "'double logic of remediation', it's oscillation between immediacy and hypermediacy, transparency and opacity".[278] Immediacy is connected to the "'experience of the real'", while hypermediacy refers to the viewers' increased awareness of the presence of the media themselves and "generates 'an experience of the medium'"[279]. Remediation is an important concept when discussing the formation of cultural memory, because it is through the different media, like "spoken language" and "films" that experience and memory are shaped. As Erll and Rigney argue "[j]ust like there is no cultural memory prior to mediation there is no mediation without remediation".[280] Immediacy and hypermediacy also relate to cultural memory: "[w]hile 'immediacy' creates the experience of the presence of the past, 'hypermediacy', which reminds the viewer of the medium, points to the potential self-reflexivity of all memorial media".[281]

In the case of *Acropolis Rocks*, an artwork where the Acropolis is remediated, "immediacy" and "hypermediacy" are both at work. In the video we can see footage of the "sacred rock" as well as watch and hear the visitors' mostly positive responses to the monument. This creates an effect of "immediacy" because it feels as if the viewers are taking a virtual tour to the Acropolis and its surroundings and are given the opportunity to engage in conversations with other visitors. However, the artwork's critique towards the hegemonic narratives that surround the Acropolis, lies in my opinion in its "hypermediacy". The renaming of the monument into "PJ802TH24", a name that evokes that of a digital file, the digitalization of the Acropolis and its surroundings as well as the multiple reproduction of footage from the Acropolis and its surroundings draw attention to the fact that this is a constructed visual narrative of the monument and its cultural importance: the filmic medium's role in the construction of the monument becomes apparent to the viewer and the self-evidence with which the (ideological) myth of the Acropolis is accepted as truth becomes

[278] Erll and Rigney, "Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics", 3.
[279] Ibid., 3-4.
[280] Ibid., 1 and 4.
[281] Ibid., 4.

challenged. Along with the constructed nature of the filmic medium itself, it becomes apparent that the narratives surrounding the monument and the role it plays in the collective imagination of Greeks as well as Westerners are also a product of sociopolitical forces and not a universal truth that should be adopted without questioning.

Acropolis as interface

Acropolis Rocks manages to problematize hegemonic conceptualizations of Greekness by comparing the monument to an interface, a concept that can be defined in the following manner as “a device or a system that unrelated entities use to interact”. [282] In the video the main narrative is interrupted by clips showing media representations of the Acropolis and some photos of the Acropolis, which are accompanied by the word “interface” and are shown while we hear an electronic sound. This sound is reminiscent of the sounds that computers used to make when connecting to the internet mainly in the 90s. The influence of internet aesthetics is exemplified by the usage of emojis of the sun, the rainbow and a smiley face that have been added to a picture of the Acropolis, stressing in this manner some of the stereotypes attributed to Greece: the sun and the nice weather as well as Greek “kefi”, a word used to describe the “cheerfulness” of Greeks. As an interface, Acropolis's this artwork functions as a channel of communication between contemporary Greeks and the nationalist mythologies that surround the monument. Similarly to an interface that is man-made, the man-made nature and constructedness of the mythologies of the Acropolis is highlighted, preventing us from accepting them uncritically as facts.

However, the critical stance of the video towards hegemonic narratives of Greekness does not stop at the conceptualisation of the Acropolis as an interface. The viewers are called to reimagine contemporary Greece and Greekness without the symbolic weight that the Acropolis carries, as it is now renamed into “PJ802TH24”, though at the same time they might fail to do so, as the repetition of glorifying reviews of the Acropolis by the visitors suggests. Through its digitalisation and multiple reproduction the artwork promotes an anti-essentialist position towards

[282] “What is an Interface?”.

the monument and also towards Greekness: the “essence” of the “sacred rock” is deconstructed to multiple pieces challenging the idea that there is an innate, unchanging character to the Acropolis. Similarly to Stefani's *Acropolis* and Balaskas's *Parthenon Rising*, *Acropolis Rocks* follows a non-linear, disrupted narrative mode that reflects a critical positioning towards the idea of national continuity. More specifically, as already mentioned, the main narrative of the video, which consists of the visitors’ commentaries, gets interrupted by footage showing the toppling of different statues and images where the Acropolis is presented as an interface.

All in all, Panos Sklavenitis’ and Eleana Yalouri’s *Acropolis Rocks* functions as a point of reflection for the conceptualization of hegemonic Greekness. The video's creators call us to imagine a modern Greek reality where the umbilical cord with Greek antiquity is cut. In this alternative reality the ultimate symbol of Greekness is renamed into a random file, namely “PJ802TH24”. This gesture lifts from Greeks the “weight” of antiquity, which is often perceived as a burden, triggering a painful comparison between modern and ancient Greece.[283] The act of renaming the Acropolis is a strategy meant to liberate contemporary Greeks from being constantly compared with their supposed ancestors and the accompanying suggestion that they are unworthy of their heritage - a notion that reached its peak during the Greek financial crisis (2009-2018) through Greece’s representations in the foreign press.[284] Furthermore, the video's “hypermediacy” by highlighting the fact that Acropolis is an assemblage of representations in the media, of actual footage of the “sacred rock”, as well as of personal, potentially staged, testimonies about the monument, highlights the constructedness of the Acropolis and problematizes the mythologies through which it is cast. The role that the Acropolis plays in Greece's cultural imagination is further challenged through the video's satirical take on the glorification of the Acropolis, as it becomes evident in the hyperbolically positive testimonies concerning the internationally recognized importance of the monument. *Acropolis Rocks* offers a critical take on the essentialist conceptualizations of Greekness and modern Greek national identity, by utilizing the aesthetic means of pixelization and

[283] Nikos Dimou is quoted in *The Classical Debt* characterizing antiquity as a “burden” for modern Greece, in Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6, subsection title: “SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW”.
[284] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6 and in chap. 6, subsection titles: “CROOKS IN THE EURO FAMILY” and “THE COLONY THAT WASN’T”.

multiple image reproduction. By doing so, the “sacred hill” is deconstructed and its “essence” becomes fragmented. *Acropolis Rocks* shares with *Acropolis* and *Parthenon Rising (II)* this anti-essentialist approach. As in the case of Stefani's film the notion of the body plays a role in the conceptualization of the Acropolis in the video. However, this time the reference to the notion of the body is not done through its materiality: it is a symbolic body, an assemblage of the different narratives and experiences associated with the Acropolis. By doing so, the viewer becomes aware of their role as an active agent in regards to the mythologies that surround the monument. Moreover, in *Parthenon Rising (II)* the presence of the visitors in the monument and their role in its commodification is implied through the practice of taking photographs. In *Acropolis Rocks* the role of the visitors in the perpetuation of hegemonic narratives is explicitly problematized, as they actively reproduce stereotypes about the beauty and importance of the Acropolis.

Conclusion

As I have shown hegemonic conceptualizations of Greekness as a characteristic promised on the idea of continuity between ancient and contemporary Greece becomes challenged through the works *Acropolis*, *Parthenon Rising (II)* and *Acropolis Rocks*. Departing from common terms of the relationship of modern Greeks with "the ultimate symbol of Greekness", the film and the videos question the ways modern Greeks and Westerners relate to, and narrate, Acropolis.[285] Through a comparative analysis of the three case studies, I have concluded that some of the tactics employed to achieve the aforementioned goal are similar in all three works of art. For instance, the three works adopt an anti-essentialist position towards the monument: Stefani's film achieves this by assembling different narratives and archival material about the Acropolis, showing the multiplicity of the narratives that it embodies. Balaskas's video highlights the failure in the process of capturing the “essence” of the monument by constantly juxtaposing illuminated and dark imagery of the Parthenon. Sklavenitis’ and Yalouri’s video dessentilizes the Acropolis by changing the name of the monument, while pixelizing and reproducing multiple images of it. Another similarity between *Acropolis* and *Acropolis Rocks* is the usage of archival material to showcase the different histories of the Acropolis, parallelise it with the female body and problematize how it has been reproduced by different media. The desire to destroy the monument, evident to some extent in all three cases, reveals the weight of antiquity on the shoulders of contemporary Greeks, while the supposed continuity between ancient and contemporary Greece is questioned through the non-linear narratives' construction in the three works. Lastly, in all three cases the body of the Acropolis is presented as commodifiable, an object to be consumed through the gaze of the visitors.

However, these are distinct artworks that employ different aesthetic strategies to activate different counter-narratives. In the case of *Acropolis*, the emphasis is placed on the relationship between the female body and the monument. The work thereby raises questions about the sexualization and objectification of women and calls for a feminist reading of Greek history. *Parthenon Rising (II)* centralizes questions concerning the spectacularization and commodification of the monument.

[285] Rakić, “World heritage, tourism and national identity”, 18 and 86.

By engaging with critical readings of the capitalist condition, the work also manages to problematize the notion of the “classical debt” and the obsessive comparison between antiquity and contemporary Greece by Western media during the Greek financial crisis.[286] At the same time, staged interviews during which glorifying comments about the monument are reproduced highlight the difficulty, if not impossibility, of critical approaches to the “sacred rock” to radically change the perceptions of the Acropolis by the public at large.

By offering critical perspectives on Greeks' relationship with the Acropolis a larger issue is addressed, namely how can we reimagine Greekness in the 21st century? Greekness is admittedly still entangled with nationalist narratives that promote the imagined continuity between ancient and contemporary Greeks. Greekness is also embedded in colonial epistemologies and ontologies, as Greece's indirect processes of colonization demonstrate. These issues become increasingly addressed in the context of Modern Greek Studies and Greek society at large with seminal works like Stathis Gourgouris's *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (1996) and the recently formed initiative “Decolonize Hellas”.[287] A decolonial framework or one that deals with the contested notions of whiteness and race in Greece has been lacking from the three case studies analysed in this thesis and this is a point worth highlighting. Without engaging with white supremacist ideology in Greece and the whitewashing of Greek antiquity we can not fully understand and thereby deconstruct modern Greek national identity. Nevertheless, it is worth reflecting at this point on the alternative modes of Greekness that *Acropolis*, *Parthenon Rising (II)* and *Acropolis Rocks* actuate us to ponder on. Departing from Eva Stefani's *Acropolis* this reframing goes hand in hand with women's liberation movements in Greece - as well as globally. Women in nationalism and ethnopatriarchal formations are treated as sexualised objects without their own sexual agency, whose main purpose in society is to secure the future of the nation through reproduction in heteronormative familial settings. Women's liberation from ethnopatriarchal and colonial systems should of course function in an intersectional manner, standing in solidarity with LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC movements in Greece and beyond. By conceptualizing the body of the

[286] Hanink, *The Classical Debt*, chap. 6, in general.
[287] Gourgouris, *Dream Nation*. You can find out more about “Decolonize Hellas” on their website: decolonizehellas.org.

Acropolis as a female body that is highly sexualized, Stefani manages to raise awareness on the objectification and exploitation of both women and the monument in contemporary Greek society. On the other hand, *Parthenon Rising (II)* and *Acropolis Rocks* offer a critique that engages with the realities of late capitalism, commodification and the Greek financial crisis (2009-2018). By bringing attention to the aforementioned processes, the videos offer a glimpse into the intersection between capitalism and hegemonic Greekness, as it was particularly exemplified through the bio- and necro-politics of the financial crisis. Therefore the notion of Greekness that the latter two artworks call us to reimagine is a form of Greekness that opposes the powers of late capitalism and is critical not only of the injustices that arose within the context of the crisis but also of the notion of the crisis itself. Furthermore, they urge us to reflect on the manners capitalism becomes implicated in the art world and how capitalizing on archaeological findings not only perpetuates the narratives about the ancient origins of modern Greece but also benefits the established power structures of cultural institutions.

The attempts to redefine Greekness through reimagining the Acropolis in contemporary times do not stop here. The recent interventions in the Acropolis have brought with them a renewed interest in the future of the monument and have inspired new artistic responses to it. For example, the artistic group “Sinodi Papu”, roughly translated into English as “Grandpa's Companions”, in which Panos Sklavenitis, co-creator of *Acropolis Rocks*, is a member, have created a series of videos uploaded on YouTube that respond satirically to the current discussions about the Acropolis. The project is named “Lake Acropolis”, which is possibly an ironic and humorous reference to the flooding that occurred in the Acropolis last December, as a possible side effect of the cementing of the “sacred rock”: thanks to the newly imposed measures the old Acropolis has now become a lake.[288] “Sinodi Papu” state in an interview that they were inspired - among others - by Nicolas Kalas and Yorgos Makris, two Greek writers, who - as mentioned in the first chapter - belong to the literary tradition of the destruction of the Acropolis.[289] As “Sinodi Papu” argue, their work is about “the one thousand reasons for which [the Acropolis] is suffocating us

[288] See for example: “**Ακρόπολη /** Οι ειδικοί προειδοποιούσαν εδώ και 40 μέρες για πλημμύρες εξαιτίας του τσιμέντου” [**Acropolis /** Specialists have been warning about floodings due to cementing since 40 days ago] [translation is mine] and “Η πλημμύρα στην Ακρόπολη και η απάντηση της Υπουργού” [The flooding in the Acropolis and the response of the Minister] [translation is mine].
[289] “Λίμνη Ακρόπολη, ένα διαδικτυακό project από την καλλιτεχνική ομάδα SinodiPapu” [Lake Acropolis, an online project from the artistic group SinodiPapu] [translation is mine].

and we will therefore be happy to see it drowning".[290] Some of the videos created for the project "Lake Acropolis" can be dialogically examined in relation to the case studies presented on this thesis so far. Apart from the desire to destroy the monument, which is to some extent evident in all three case studies, one of the videos from the project "Lake Acropolis" conceptualizes the monument as an interface, something that we have also seen in *Acropolis Rocks*, while another video features pornographic material, as was the case in Stefani's *Acropolis*. Another very recent artistic project that was created in response to the current discussions about the Acropolis is the video "Διαγαλαξιακή Εκπομπή ΠΑΡΘΕ-ΝΟΤΑ: Εξωγήινοι από τον πλανήτη Τα-μπετά στον ιερό βράχο της Ακρόπολης" [Intergalactic Show PARTHE-NOTA: Aliens from the planet The-concretes on the sacred rock of the Acropolis] co-created by Marianna Devetzi, Soteres Loukas, Pavlina Marvin, Wichi Chatzi and Christos Christopoulos.[291] In this short video three aliens from the planet "The-concretes" visit the Acropolis and comment on its cementing. The blue and white colors on their faces, which are also the colors of the Greek flag, suggest that they are of Greek descent, possibly hinting to the foundational mythologies of Europe and Greece alike as being rooted in ancient Greece. Apart from its literal reference to the interventions on the Acropolis, cementing here also functions as a metaphor for the efforts of contemporary Greeks to rebuild the Greek nation after the Greek financial crisis. What the aforementioned two examples suggest, is that the discussions surrounding the Acropolis are ongoing and the examination of present-day artistic responses to the monument deserve to be further researched, in order for us to understand how the notion of Greekness alters with time and in different sociopolitical contexts. This research project has the potential to be further developed by incorporating more recent artworks that critically reflect on the Acropolis and renegotiate the future of Greekness in a post-crisis context.

[290] Originally: "τους χίλιους λόγους για τους οποίους μας πνίγει και για αυτό θα χαρούμε να την δούμε να πνίγεται" in Spyrou, "Monday Report".
[291] Παυλίνα Μάρβιν, "Διαγαλαξιακή Εκπομπή ΠΑΡΘΕ-ΝΟΤΑ: Εξωγήινοι από τον πλανήτη Τα-μπετά στον ιερό βράχο της Ακρόπολης" [[Intergalactic Show PARTHE-NOTA: Aliens from the planet The-concretes on the sacred rock of the Acropolis] [translation is mine].

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