

DROWNING DEMOCRACY

Myrto Damaskou

May 11, 2015

Dear Mr. Nikolas Michaloliakos,

The recent migrations to Greece from Syria and countries bordering the Mediterranean give rise to the horrors that immigrants and political refugees go through as they strive to save their own and their families' lives. Greece's geographical position makes our country into a 'port'—a place where, inevitably, many refugees and immigrants will pass during their journey towards a better future. But how do we react to the intermingling of immigrants with Greeks in our society?

The trial of your political party, Golden Dawn, that will occur the upcoming few weeks, illuminates our mentality as a nation. You are one of the people accused of discriminatory behavior and criminal acts, especially in regards to immigrants. In light of your upcoming trial, we must first ask ourselves: how did your party gather so many votes and ultimately gain a seat next to the country's leading political parties in the Greek Parliament? How is it possible that—in the country that gave birth to democracy, the infrangible values of freedom of speech and equality—a neo-Nazi party has gained a legitimate place in the arena of our politics? What does this demonstrate about us, as a society?

It is understandable that, in the midst of the severe financial crisis tormenting our country the past few years, many people have stood up and said: "we have had enough." And of course, they have legitimate reasons for saying so. The rates of unemployment are beyond imagination, the taxes unbearable, and the discussions between our government and the European Union do not foreshadow a more promising future for the Greeks. We all remember the demonstrations of the so-called *Aganaktismenous*—"the Resentful"—in our capital's main square in 2011; we remember the people's voices thundering throughout the center of Athens, and we certainly remember the city

burning from the belligerent acts of hooded individuals who disrupted the peaceful demonstrations. I remember days when the clash between the police and these hooded individuals escalated to the level that tear gas was used. The acts of violence that broke out were so severe that the center of Athens was paralyzed and no one could move safely. I, also, could not leave my house. What we did not know at the time was that many of these individuals were linked to your political party. And hence, we might ask why, after the revelation of such information, did so many people vote for you?

It is at the moment of great desperation and frustration when people turn towards the extremes. Consider an example. During the 1930s the economy of a Republic collapses after a severe financial crisis; the unemployment rates rise tremendously, people are desperate and, above all, frustrated with their representatives. This is the moment when a politician stands up, and offers a solution. At that point, this politician's promises and his pinpointing of an enemy will prove to be the 'remedy' his people were searching for. Decades later, this man will be left in history. Hitler's rise in the midst of the Weimar Republic's economic crisis cannot but remind us of the rise of the Golden Dawn in Greece these past few years.

We may say that the severity of the situation in Greece cannot be compared to that of the Nazis. And, of course, you will deny such a parallelism. The acts of Golden Dawn cannot be equated with the horrors the Nazi party brought. Yet this depends on how we view things. In Weimar Germany, the Jews were the common enemy; in Greece, from your perspective, the common 'enemy' is the immigrant population. You accuse immigrants of causing the problems that torment our country; you preach that they are the cause of rising unemployment, stating in recent publications that "illegal immigrants are intruders who form a badly organized army that decompose our social structure and alienate our national identity" ("Μακρονήσια"; translation mine). You assert that we must send them to remote deserted islands until they are relocated, as they do not deserve the "luxuries" of shelters when Greeks struggle to find jobs and pay taxes ("Μακρονήσια").

Why, might we ask, do these people deserve to be treated this way? Why has your party been connected with so many violent attacks towards immigrants that you are now facing a trial? The murder of the Greek anti-racist musician Pavlos Fissas by Giorgos Roupakias, a member of your party,

illuminates the severity of the situation (“Οτ 7”; translation mine). We live in a democracy. One of the most pivotal rights that we have as citizens is the freedom of expression; by murdering Fissas, who publicly expressed views of equality and justice, you have demonstrated your deviance from democratic values and your drift towards fascist ideologies.

It is an embarrassment that so many are not shocked by the attacks on immigrants by members of Golden Dawn, believing such treatment is deserved because immigrants do not have a rightful place among Greeks. It is a shame that people support a party whose members killed a Pakistani immigrant for no apparent reason other than for his passionate nationalistic beliefs (“Οτ 7”; translation mine). It is mortifying to listen to a member of your party state that immigrants should be put in ovens and made into *soap* for cars and sidewalks (“Πα”; translation mine). It is frightening that so many Greeks support a party that is so deeply involved in criminal acts, especially when these acts echo the Nazi party’s atrocities in Greece during World War II.

Of course, I understand the desperateness and the frustration of the Greeks who voted for and have supported your party. Indeed, when one demands a change, one may drift towards extremes. But is the solution to harass, threaten and kill immigrants and people who express opposing beliefs? Is the solution to shift the blame for our country’s crisis to immigrants? Instead of looking for scapegoats, it would be best to concentrate on expressing our worries to the current government, demanding that our voices be heard. In the midst of the horrendous drownings of numerous immigrants from neighboring countries, we cannot but ask ourselves: how have we faced the issue of immigration?

Inadequately and ineffectively is the answer. The state has insufficiently dealt with this issue. It either gives immigrants temporary documents and releases them from confinement after entering the country, or arrests many and keeps them in ‘dungeons’ (Tsimas; translation mine). The problem of immigration is a complex, politically dangerous, socially sensitive and problematic issue. The two aforementioned ways for dealing with the problem of immigration are not solutions. Neither is harassing and assaulting immigrants, nor threatening them in order to leave the country a solution. The immigration issue should not be confined to Greece’s borders, as this is not

a matter that can be solved domestically; we cannot 'close the borders' at the Aegean Sea and we cannot prevent people of other nationalities from living legally in our country.

In light of your upcoming trial, may you reconsider your stance.

Sincerely,
Myrto Damaskou

WORKS CITED

- “Μακρονήσια για μετανάστες και στρατιωτική θητεία για τις γυναίκες ονειρεύεται η Χρυσή Αυγή.” *News 247*. 18 Jan. 2015. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.
- “«Θα κάνουμε τους μετανάστες σαπούνια» λέει υποψήφιος βουλευτής της Χρυσής Αυγής-βίντεο.” *Kouti Pandoras*. 6 Mar. 2013. Web. 25 Apr. 2015.
- “Οι 7 κρίσιμες υποθέσεις που κρίνουν την έκβαση της δίκης της Χρυσής Αυγής.” *Huffington Post Greece*. 19 Apr. 2015. Web. 21 Apr. 2015.
- Tsimas, Pavlos. “Παζαρεύοντας μετανάστες . . .” *Huffington Post Greece*. 15 Apr. 2015. Web. 20 Apr. 2015.