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## Transforming grief to social mobilisation: The case of the Association of Tempí Victims 2023

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### Abstract

*This article investigates the politicisation of maternal grief in the aftermath of the 2023 Tempí train disaster in Greece, which resulted in 57 deaths and revealed deep systemic failures in railway safety and state accountability. Focusing on the Association of Tempí Victims 2023, founded predominantly by bereaved parents, the article explores how moral shock and personal loss catalysed the transformation of private grief into collective political agency. Employing qualitative methods including multi-sited digital ethnography, archival research, and critical discourse analysis, the study examines the Association's multifaceted activism: from legal action and petitions to public commemorations and alliances with institutional actors like the European Parliament and Bar Associations. The analysis situates the Association's efforts within the global tradition of maternal activism, highlighting the emotional and symbolic power of maternal loss as a frame for social mobilisation and resistance against state impunity. The findings demonstrate how affective citizenship and emotional resistance can create new communities of solidarity and contest official narratives that reduce systemic failures to "human error." Furthermore, the article underscores the significance of digital platforms and transnational alliances in amplifying grassroots movements. By articulating demands for justice, accountability, and transformative legal reform, the Association challenges dominant state discourses, fosters public engagement, and contributes to broader movements for social transformation. Ultimately, this study offers critical insights into the intersection of grief, citizenship, and activism, illustrating how collective mourning is mobilised as a resource for enduring struggles against impunity and for the pursuit of justice.*

**Keywords:** Maternal movements activism; politicisation of grief; acts of citizenship; social mobilization

## Introduction

What urges a researcher to choose her topic? What motivates us to delve into data, no matter how it may affect us and even challenge our well-being? In my case, the question “what if?” haunted and motivated me simultaneously. It was like my affective attunement drove me to a moral obligation to do something, to contribute, even in this research with the framework of my master thesis in the mater’s Programme in Gender Studies-Intersectionality and Change at Linköping University, to the struggle for justification and social change that parents envisioned following the tragic loss of their relatives, and like all tragedies, catharsis is the only end to a new beginning.

On 28 February 2023, the most catastrophic train accident in modern Greek history occurred when passenger train IC62 (Athens–Thessaloniki), carrying over 350 individuals, collided head-on with freight train 63503 (Thessaloniki–Larissa) on the same track (A brief timeline, 2024). The disaster resulted in at least 57 fatalities, predominantly among individuals aged 18 to 30. Post-accident, state-appointed coroners employed DNA identification protocols, but did not implement comprehensive mass disaster protocols, including tissue and toxicological analyses that could have determined whether victims were alive at the time of the fire (Simits,2024c).

The unprecedented severity of the accident represented a profound rupture in established social norms, precipitating significant moral shock among both the affected families and Greek society at large. In response, Maria Karystianou—a paediatrician bereaved by the loss of her 19-year-old daughter—founded the Association of Tempi Victims 2023 on 3 May 2023. This organisation functions as a collective platform for victims’ relatives to pursue accountability, justice, and the restoration of memory for their lost loved ones.

It is not unfamiliar to mothers to proceed in social fights to justify the memory of their children. In Latin America, plenty examples of maternal activist movements have been noticed, like the Madres de Plaza del Mayo in Argentina, Madres de Soacha in Colombia, and the Madres de Ciudad Juárez in Mexico. Maternal activism has historically mobilised maternal grief as a catalyst for advocacy against state violence and impunity. Such grief possesses substantial emotional resonance, frequently serving as a potent frame for collective action and the formation of resistance communities. While the Association of Tempi Victims draws upon the primary demand of mothering, namely to preserve life (Edmonds,2010,p.61), it is characterised by mixed-gender participation, united in a shared pursuit of justice and accountability for the deceased.

For clarification reasons, there are other initiatives that fight for the justification of the victims, but they are not organised collectively like the Association.

The fatal train accident was widely considered preventable. Privatization of Greece’s railways in 2017, under bailout terms, led to chronic neglect: maintenance funding vanished after 2010, equipment was looted, and essential staff were dismissed or reassigned. Splitting track and train operations closed the unified safety control centre.

Although a 2014 contract aimed to upgrade the signalling system and implement the European Train Control System, it was never

completed. As of January 2025—nearly two years after the Tempi disaster—the system remains inoperative.

In 2021, a whistleblower report from a senior engineer documented contractor violations of the EU-funded signalling contract, endangering safety. The whistleblower resigned in 2022 (Bersi,2023).

Two weeks before the Tempi accident, the European Commission referred Greece to the European Court of Justice over the 11-year delay in the signalling contract, highlighting its importance for transparency (Tragedy in Tempe : In the Plenary Session, 2024).

Days before the tragedy, railway staff warned authorities about unsafe conditions and malfunctioning safety systems. Ten days before the crash, the Transport Minister dismissed these warnings as “disgraceful” (Κλώντζα, 2023). He resigned after the accident but was reelected in 2024.

Hours after the accident, the Prime Minister blamed “human error.” Leaked audio between the stationmaster and train driver was later exposed as doctored, falsely shifting blame and reinforcing the official narrative—a fact revealed a year later by investigative journalists (Stamouli, 2024; Λαμπρόπουλος, 2024). Audio tampering was not the only interference. Three days after the crash, officials covertly altered the accident site, removing wreckage and covering it with gravel and asphalt before forensic analysis. This operation came to light a year later (Τέμπη: Ποιοι αποφάσισαν το “μπάζωμα”, 2024).

In November 2023, Parliament formed an Inquiry Committee to investigate the Tempi crash (Tempi: Parliament approves KKE, 2023). Its March 2024 report upheld the human error narrative, blaming the stationmaster and asserting that no evidence was concealed. Authorities described site interventions as routine removals.

An independent fire investigation released in February 2024 was presented to the Inquiry Committee, but its findings were excluded from the official decision. Key points included:

- The accident site was unnecessarily altered and covered with gravel and concrete, severely hindering forensic investigation and evidence collection.
- Evidence, including debris and soil, was inadequately preserved, jeopardizing the investigation.
- Sampling for chemical analysis was flawed and unreliable, likely due to site alterations and delayed collection.
- Sheet metal from freight containers disappeared after the accident, preventing crucial analysis of combustion materials (The Tempi Train Tragedy in Greece: A Case Study, 2024).

Revelations of audio tampering prompted a no-confidence motion against the government in March 2024, but it failed to pass Parliament (Stamouli, 2024).

In July 2024, an expert report confirmed the freight train likely transported hydrocarbons, creating a fireball and extreme temperatures that instantly carbonised many victims. Others died from severe impact injuries (Khan & Eng,2024)

## Methodology

I conducted qualitative research using standpoint methodology, focusing on questions from the daily lives of marginalized groups

(Harding, 1995). Here, the marginalized are the relatives of the lost ones, and the issue is the state's use of the "human error" narrative. My approach combined online ethnography, following Marcus' (1995) multisited imperative, and archival analysis.

#### **Data collection**

For data collection, I used Marcus' multi-sited ethnography approach ("follow": People, Thing, Metaphor, Plot, Life, Conflict), defining my field in cyberspace and conducting online ethnography. Participants use cyberspace to strengthen their identities and social bonds (Coliandro, 2017). I engaged as both an insider and outsider, sharing the same cultural setting as my subjects.

Online ethnography was most suitable for my research, as it applies traditional ethnography to digital environments (Nascimento et al., 2022). This approach helps analyse how culture and technology shape each other online (Hine, 2000; Tunçalp & Lê, 2014), and brings the researcher's embodied perspective into digital spaces (Airoldi, 2018).

Digital ethnography enabled me to study hybrid social contexts (Nascimento et al., 2022). My data collection methods included observation (passive and participant) and document collection. Passive observation, which entails online observation, allowed me to conduct contemporary and retrospective research on the accident timeline, as it involves selective and detailed viewing, monitoring, acquisition, and recording of online phenomena (Dawson, 2020). It involves the systematic observation, acquisition, and analysis of textual and visual online material (Dawson, 2020). To apply it, I followed the cross-platform approach (Nascimento et al., 2022). Initially, I focused my research on news websites, particularly those operating independently, locally, and internationally. I frequently cross-checked information across multiple sites to ensure its accuracy. Then, I turned to the YouTube platform to watch the performances of the engaged actors, namely those who served in the discourse of the victims and the counter-discourse. The visual stimulation in these videos was a means to embed myself further in the field of my research.

I ensured my entrance to the field by becoming a follower of the Association's website<sup>1</sup> and of its Facebook profile, as well as a follower of Maria Karystianou's Facebook profile<sup>2</sup>, following posts of any kind uploaded, whether textual or visual. Both Facebook profiles are public. The question concerned my stance, namely, my level of participation and whether I would reveal or conceal my identity. Initially, I acted as a covert, non-reactive online participant deliberately, as my intention was to immerse myself in the community to expand my knowledge of the topic (Dawson, 2020). At a later stage, having been familiarised with the Association's Facebook online community, I conducted a partly open, unobtrusive participant observation by reacting to posts I could identify with, not only as a researcher but also as a person, using the "like" button and relevant emojis. I restricted myself to Facebook social media only, since I am not active on "X".

For document collection, I adopted a cross-platform approach as described in Nascimento et al. (2022), since documents themselves are valuable ethnographic objects (Riles, 2006) and provide

insights into rights, citizenship, and the social dimensions of organizations (Greenhouse, 2018).

I also conducted archival analysis, collecting data from similar incidents involving state negligence or crime, and examining relevant theoretical concepts (emotions, grief, activism, citizenship, memory, gender, etc.). I used Google Scholar and online libraries for this research.

The research was conducted from April to October 2024.

#### **Data analysis**

I used critical discourse analysis for data analysis, connecting it to theoretical concepts from the field. This approach recognizes multiple, often competing, discourses. In the case of the train accident, there were confrontational discourses between the Association and the state (Boréus & Bergström, 2011). Critical discourse analysis is politically committed to social change and supports oppressed groups by highlighting the struggle to define truth.

#### **Ethics**

Ethics regarding online ethnography presentation of findings in relation to managing data and disclosing or not disclosing the identity of resources, either on websites or social media, has been characterized as a challenging and moving topic. To overcome this and the interconnected issue of consent in publicly uploaded data, I imposed on myself the following questions, as recommended by Nascimento et al. (2022).

- Is the profile public?
- Does it have a professional character?
- Is the data "visible" to any user on the platform?

If the answers to these questions are yes, then the researcher is not obliged to request individual consent (Nascimento et al., 2022). I conducted online research on news websites, YouTube, the Association's, and Maria Karystianou's public Facebook pages. Since the content is public and widely reproduced, there were no concerns about data storage or archiving duration. This approach reflects my commitment to responsible data management.

#### **Positionality**

Regarding my stance on the Tempi train accident, I followed Harding's (1995) strong objectivity, choosing a topic relevant for social and political reasons. I situate myself next to the just cause of the Association and any other initiative from relatives and survivors for transparency and justification, acknowledging the emotional challenges this research poses.

## **Results**

### **Transforming grief to political action**

"I dreamed of the creation of one of the most powerful and fighting associations, because I would certainly not be left without a fight",

These were the words of Maria Karystianou, a mother who lost her 19-year-old daughter in the deadly train accident in Tempi. Driven by the profound moral shock and emotions of grief, outrage, and despair, Maria envisioned the creation of a collective association—one dedicated to honoring the memory of her daughter and the other victims while also seeking accountability. According to Jasper (1998, p.409), "moral shocks" are often the catalyst for recruitment into social movements, occurring when an unexpected event—like the Tempi train tragedy—or new information provokes

<sup>1</sup> <https://tempi2023.gr/>,  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1461818834692574/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/maria.karystianou>

such intense outrage that it motivates political action, regardless of prior connections to activism. In other words, moral shocks can propel individuals toward involvement (Van Ness & Summers-Effler, 2019).

In the aftermath of this calamity, Karystianou transmuted her personal grief into political praxis, convening informal gatherings with fellow bereaved relatives in the intimate setting of her paediatrician's office. At a symposium hosted by LaCASMo (Laboratory of Collective Action and Social Movements) at the University of the Aegean in Mytilene on 31 May 2024, she articulated a visceral compulsion to seek communion with other parents ensnared in the same isolating vortex of pain and loss. This collective yearning for solidarity and mutual recognition precipitated the genesis of the Association. Through the lens of affect theory, Karystianou's initiative represents an attempt to transcend the confines of solitary suffering—since pain, as Ahmed (2004, p.29) contends, necessitates a witness—and to catalyse a public, collective response through the sharing of lived experiences, echoing Ahmed's conceptualisation of affect as inherently relational (Ahmed, 2004, p.24).

In those meetings, apart from sharing their grief, the mourners realised that they had to unite against state corruption, which caused this fatal train accident due to systematic and long-term negligence of railway safety systems. It was the sharing of a similar loss experience, their quest to alleviate the feeling of loneliness that followed the tragic loss of their loved ones, to mitigate the pain, to manage the endless moral outrage, and to share their grief, facilitate the development of an immediate bond (Breen & O'Connor, 2010) that led them to materialised their emotions and despair into political action (AeolosTV, 2024). To put it differently, and as Butler puts it, grief's vulnerability does not necessarily equate to powerlessness or passivity; instead, it can foster a sense of community by being extrapolated to others' experiences, leading to a state of empowerment and healing (Proust, 2024).

These assemblies catalysed a heightened sense of maternal moral obligation: the imperative to safeguard and vindicate a child's memory posthumously—an imperative that assumed a central role in the politicisation of maternal grief through collective praxis. The act of politicising grief constitutes a radical challenge to state-sanctioned emotional orthodoxies, subverting the normative frameworks dictated by institutional authority regarding collective affective expression (Koschut, 2019). Within this paradigm, the mothers' mourning directly contests the reductionist state narrative of "human error," instead transforming private anguish into a potent instrument for social critique and mobilisation (Al'Uqdah & Adomako, 2017, p.4). In defiance of prescribed "feeling and grieving rules," such political mourning reconceptualises grief as a locus of agency and resistance (Koschut, 2019).

Examples of maternal grief materialisation are the maternal activist movements in Latin America, with which the Association bears resemblances. Maternal activism is considered a practice traditionally conceived as drawing on women's maternal roles to make social or political demands (Orozco, 2023, p. 2). Activism builds alternative forms of struggle and sites of resistance in response to structural oppression (Orozco, 2023, p. 6) and maternal grief, and, as such, it can carry a high emotional resonance and thus become a powerful frame used against the state (de Volo, 2006). According to Patricia Hill Collins (1994, in Orozco, 2023, p. 7), it is conceived as a militant struggle against structural

oppression. It constitutes a collective action organised against government impunity, as in the cases of Argentina's Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo (Orozco, 2023, p. 9), Madres de Soacha in Colombia, and Madres de Ciudad Juárez in Mexico. In alignment lies the Association's struggle, one of whose objectives is the fight against state impunity. The Association as a legal entity does not constitute a maternal activism movement in itself. However, it has a pivotal presence in the broader social movement of social justice for victims and survivors, since it lacks the successful institutionalisation of grassroots movements' goals (Capeheart & Milovanovic, 2020).

Thus, maternal grief contributes to the creation of communities of resistance based on the primary demand of mothering (Edmonds, 2010, p. 61), not only at the national level but also through the engagement of institutional entities such as human rights organisations. In the Association case, due to its maternal activism, it has formed allies and ensured support within the country and at the EU level.

### *Practicing ethical citizenship*

Maria Karystianou envisioned founding an association to honour the memory of her daughter and the other lost ones. The foundation of any legal entity, following all the required pathways for its legality, constitutes an act of citizenship. Maria Karystianou and other members of the Association, as claimants of rights and responsibilities, created new sites and scales of struggle, seeking social change (Müller, 2015) with an ethical dimension which produces a "soulful" citizenry that translates the corporeal stirrings of the heart into publicly useful activity (Ambrosini & Artero, 2022), through the implementation of acts of citizenship. Acts of citizenship are defined as those acts that transform the forms and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being political by bringing into being new actors as activist citizens (claimants of rights and responsibilities) through the creation of new sites and scales of struggle (Isin, 2008, p. 39). Acts of citizenship draw attention to the fact that subjectivities like citizenship do not just exist as pre-social, settled identities (Rygiel, 2015), but also create new sites and scales of struggle (Isin, 2018, p. 39) through resistance.

On 3 May 2023, following the 40-day mourning period, which is traditional in the Christian Orthodox religion, the Association of Tempi Victims 2023 (Association as mentioned above) was founded, as one of the most pivotal acts of citizenship of the politicisation of maternal grief. In the press release, it expressed the lifelong moral debt of its members to their loved ones:

"In memory of those we lost, we are lifelong indebted to fight for a new Greek reality, no matter how utopian it may seem today, where elected officials will be truly excellent and incorruptible, far from party labels and ideological obsessions, justice will be "blind" and not "coward", "inept" and manipulative" (Δελτίο Τύπου, 2023).

Its goal has been to achieve justice and social change to fight against the "injustice, impunity, nepotism and viciousness of our country", as they express it in the press release (Δελτίο Τύπου, 2023). The first objective is to develop new legal structures or renew existing ones. Their second objective is to hold accountable those responsible for this criminal act and to request their exemplary punishment. The issue of reparations to the train accident's victims' families and survivors in every way, focusing

on the restoration of the survivors' mental and physical health, is their third objective. Consequently, the moral shock of the accident motivated them to get involved in social mobilization (Van Ness & Summers-Effler, 2019), disputing the state's narrative of "human error". This idea takes the form of a transformative justice request since it seeks to integrate retributive principles responding to all forms of harm and conflict while acknowledging the immediacy of harm, need for redress, resolution, empowerment, recognition, and a necessity for a structural consciousness, and distributive principles that are redistributive in form, addressing needs and capabilities sensitive to diverse participants in conflict situations (Capeheart and Milovanovic, 2020, p.109,113), focusing on the final solution, the justification of the lost ones, based on moral principles.

A pivotal act of activist citizenship by the Association, following its foundation and in line with its scope, was the organisation of an online petition on Change.org entitled "Tragedy-Tempi 2023 against parliamentarians' immunity. Maria Karystianou, in her attempt to find solutions to the issue regarding state agents' liability, addressed many lawyers and law advisers. However, no one was able to provide her with a solution (Aeolos TV, 2024). Thus, she decided to proceed with the Association as a collectivity to launch an online petition. A well-thought-out strategy, since online petitions are considered a powerful tool for the public to make a positive impact on a digitalised society (Elnoshokaty et al., 2016), as this allows a more active participation in politics and active political engagement of the citizens (Böttcher et al., 2017). Additionally, an online petition organises agents interacting with the general public in a participatory means (Liinason, 2023), facilitating the emergence of achievable alternatives of social justice (Wright, 2010, p.16). The uploaded petition requests the activation of the Law on the Responsibility of Ministers, as well as the abolition of parliamentary immunity when criminal liability arises for political figures, in accordance with Article 73 par. 6 of the Hellenic Constitution. More specifically:

"Greek citizens demand from the parliament an initiation of proceedings for the revision of the Constitution and the enactment of the law on the liability of ministers, as well as the abolition of parliamentary immunity when criminal liability arises." It adds that "the impunity of politicians is not consistent with morality or democracy, virtues of which we are proud" (Kokkinidis, 2024).

According to Article 73, upon the signature of 500,000 citizens with the right to vote, law proposals may be tabled in Parliament. People of all ages rushed to support this initiative, as their minor contribution to the Association's just fight.

Another act of activist citizenship under the moral obligation to justify the memory of the loved ones was the use of depoliticised science, by hiring and addressing independent fire experts to investigate the causes of the deadly train accident and the conditions in which their loved ones lost their lives. Iturriaga (2019) refers to depoliticised science as situated objectivity, since its findings are seen as incorruptible and free from political manipulation. In our case, the depoliticised science of the independent fire experts served as a supportive mechanism for the justification of the Association's cause. Those experts consider it their moral obligation to justify the memory of the victims by revealing the truth and avoiding external political pressure through the objectivity of evidence analysis:

"All this is done absolutely selflessly with the ultimate goal of vindicating the memory of the victims and creating those conditions in our country that will be equivalent to the democratically advanced countries of Europe, with independent authorities which will operate based on the law, not influenced by external forces, investigating and take care the wellbeing of its citizens"(Εμπειρογνώμονες Συλλόγου "Τέμπη", 2024).

The last but not least act of citizenship that I examined was the organisation of the concert to honour the memory of the 57 victims of the deadly accident in Tempi on 11 October 2024. The Association organised the concert as an alternative form of act of affective citizenship<sup>3</sup>. The selection of the venue, the Panathenaic Stadium or Kallimarmaro, was not random, as it holds significant symbolic importance as the venue of the first modern Olympic Games in 1896 and of the Olympic Games handover ceremony in 2004, to name only a few. The concert was sold out, and even more than 42.000 of us gathered in the stadium to express our solidarity, support victims' relatives, and unite our voices against cover-up attempts, keeping the struggle active. At that moment, affect operated as a contingent element on our bodies (Steward, 2007 in Gitzen, 2013), becoming members of an affective community, with shared orientation, shared love, shared feelings and shared affect, similar to the case of Gitzen (2013). As a result, we performed affective resistance (term borrowed by Gitzen, 2013), either by singing together, crying together or even through moments of silence due to numbness and fission, an expression of our collective agency against the power over exerted by the state. I have been using the pronoun "us" since I was an attendant. Whoever attended or watched the concert was moved by Maria Karystianou's speech and her dignity. Even at that moment, she performed emotional resistance.

In her affective message of resistance, she stated:

"I really thank you for embracing this event, and a very resounding no, we will never forget. All of us are now one, we all feel the same, we understand the same, we wish the same, we have the same goal, the same wish, the same desire. And how could it be any different when the thing that killed our children, our people, remains free to kill again and again. Well, never again!" (Συναυλία για τα Τέμπη, 2024).

#### *Supportive actors*

The moral shock induced by the fatal train accident, further exacerbated by subsequent efforts at concealment, has engendered a profound sense of public moral outrage. This collective sentiment has mobilized a diverse array of actors—spanning institutional, professional, and civil society spheres—to coordinate their resources and capabilities in conjunction with the Association's political initiatives. Thus, the second dimension of the politicisation of grief—namely, the articulation of personal and collective mourning as a catalyst for national or community-level sociopolitical transformation— has materialized through the formation of strategic alliances within the public domain.

<sup>3</sup> I am employing the term affect following Pedwell (2017), in the sense that affect is a relational term that emergent interactions of human, in this case, actors which are productive of different kinds of sensation and becoming.

The European Parliament (EP) has emerged as a substantive institutional ally to the Association's advocacy efforts. Accordingly, the Association was invited to participate in EP proceedings on two distinct occasions. The first instance transpired on 14 February 2024, approximately two weeks prior to the first anniversary of the incident. Konstantinos Arvanitis, representing the EP's left-wing grouping GUE/NGL, convened an event entitled "Tempe: Derailment of the Rule of Law," designed to apprise parliamentarians of both the catastrophic accident and the protracted delays in judicial redress. Among the principal speakers was Maria Karystianou, whose address—exceeding thirty minutes—exemplified public emotional resilience and performative deep acting (Koefoed, 2017), as she navigated the challenge of expressing profound grief within the constraints of public discourse. Karystianou's decision to deliver her speech while standing was imbued with symbolic significance, underscoring her perceived moral duty, as a mother, to honor the memory of her child and to pursue accountability (AlertTV.gr, 2024). She explicitly foregrounded her maternal identity as the impetus for political engagement, articulating the collective affective demands—anger, grief, and frustration—shared by herself and the Association (Ray, 2018).

"I am a mother from Greece. I am addressing all mothers and parents of the world. Many of you probably know about ancient Greek tragedies, but what happened to us is a real tragedy in which we are not mere spectators. We are actual victims experiencing it...What you are about to hear may seem unbelievable, but it is real. How could it be otherwise when we have been forced to become the voice of our dead children? Through my words, you can hear the voice of my daughter and the other 56 victims of this tragedy...(Tsitsiringos, 2024).

In another part of her speech, she highlighted her understanding of citizenship and her engagement as an active citizen whose grief has led her to political action, for social and political change:

"...I am speaking as a politically engaged citizen who is crying out for the obvious. We want to punish the culprits who killed our children with their corruption and inaction. We seek justice and vindication. We want to live in a country governed by the Rule of Law in which citizens and politicians have the same obligations and the same rights vis-à-vis the law..." (Tsitsiringos, 2024).

On 18 March 2024, Maria Karystianou—accompanied by Pavlos Aslanidis, another Association member and bereaved parent—again appeared before the EP. On this occasion, she addressed the Committee on Petitions (PETI), advocating for the revocation of parliamentary immunity through the activation of Article 73, which pertains to ministerial accountability. Karystianou's intervention was buttressed by the collective support of 1,350,000 signatories to the "Tragedy-Tempi 2023" petition (Μαρία Καρυστιανού: Καταπέλτης στο Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινοβούλιο, 2024). The issue was placed on the agenda under urgent procedure. Consistent with her earlier appearance, Karystianou delivered her remarks while standing, deploying symbolic ritual to commemorate the deceased. Through an overt performance of affective citizenship, she sought to interpellate the EP as both audience and agent, foregrounded the Greek state's shortcomings in safeguarding its populace—particularly through references to institutional cover-up—and invoked the EP's normative role as guarantor of citizens' security.

Notably, she asserted: We trust that you will show a deep sense of responsibility in three areas of major European interest:

- the protection of the Rule of Law,
- the protection of life and physical integrity of EU citizens and,
- the safety of transportation''

(Μαρία Καρυστιανού: Καταπέλτης στο Ευρωπαϊκό Κοινοβούλιο, 2024).

At the end of the debate, the Vice-Chair of the Committee on Petitions, Jana Toom, announced that the petition remains open and the matter is being referred to the Committee on Justice and Freedoms (LIBE) and the Committee on Transport (TRAN) of the European Parliament while requesting from the European Commission an updated written reply (Tragedy in Tempe: In the plenary session, 2024). The committee's decision to keep the report on the railway disaster open was supported by all political groupings of the European Parliament (EP's Com't of Petitions to Keep Report, 2024).

The LIBE committee also expressed its support for the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) investigation into the alleged misuse of EU funds by the Greek authorities, which may have indirectly contributed to the circumstances leading up to the crash. This investigation seeks to determine whether financial mismanagement could have affected the safety measures or infrastructure of the rail network, potentially endangering the EU's financial interests (Simits, 2024b).

Laura Kovesi, the Chief Prosecutor of the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) brought up this issue during the presentation of EPPO's annual report before the LIBE Committee on 9 March 2024, highlighting that the national provision for Article 86 "Prosecution against members of the Government"<sup>4</sup> of the Hellenic Constitution is not in compliance with the European regulation, and thus must change, adding that she has made such a request by sending a letter to the European Commission (Simits, 2024a).

She also underscored the broader implications of corruption, posing the rhetorical question:

"How many tragedies like the one at Tempe need to take place for us to understand that corruption kills?" (Simits, 2024a).

Domestically, the Plenary of Bar Associations has assumed an active role in the legal processes pertaining to the Tempi disaster. In a public interview conducted on 5 June 2024 and entitled "The Claim of 1,500,000 Citizens to Amend the Criminal Liability of Ministers and Parliamentary Immunity," President Dimitris Vervesos affirmed the Bar's institutional participation in the litigation. He stressed that, in accordance with its statutory mandate, the Bar would robustly advocate for the demands of both the victims' relatives and the 1.5 million citizens who have petitioned for reform of the Law on Ministerial Responsibility (Μουστάκα, 2024). Furthermore, the Bar expressed its support for the enactment of requisite executive legislation to operationalize the constitutional provision for popular legislative initiative pursuant to Article 73 (Μουστάκα, 2024). Vervesos characterized

<sup>4</sup> Article 86 of the Hellenic Constitution stipulates that any investigation into political misconduct must pass through the Hellenic Parliament, often leading to a lack of majority support for the inquiry.

this initiative as anticipatory, intended to mitigate the recurrence of impunity that has historically accompanied analogous national calamities (Μουστάκα, 2024).

## Discussion

The establishment of the Association of Tempi Victims in 2023, following the fatal train accident in Tempi on 28 February 2023 that resulted in the loss of 57 lives, serves as an illustrative case of the politicisation of maternal grief in contemporary Greece. The impetus to share the experience of bereavement, address the pervasive sense of isolation engendered by the tragedy, ameliorate the resultant anguish, and navigate persistent moral outrage, compelled Maria Karystianou to channel her grief into a vehicle for political engagement, thereby actualising it in the founding of the Association. Thus, the creation of the Association emerged from profound loss and the ensuing moral shock, exemplifying the transformation of personal bereavement into collective mobilization. This dynamic demonstrates how moments of profound moral significance (Stockdale, 2022) can serve as catalysts for social movement recruitment (Jasper, 1998, p. 409). Simultaneously, it contests the state's narrative of human error, aiming to seek justice for the victims and ensure accountability. The Association's pursuit of social justice operates at the confluence of neoliberal politics of dispossession, grief, state crisis, ethical citizenship, resistance, and gender, paralleling maternal activist movements in Latin America.

The formation of the Association exemplifies the role of maternal activism, which strategically utilizes women's maternal identities to advocate for social and political transformation (Orozco, 2023). The affinities between the Association and maternal activist movements in Latin America, notably the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, highlight the potency of maternal grief as a catalyst for social mobilization. Specifically, akin to these maternal movements, the Association's activism encapsulates the intersection of individual bereavement and collective political engagement. Its members, with Maria Karystianou as the emblematic maternal figure, become agents of change who leverage their grief to confront state violence and impunity, thereby underscoring the transnational dimensions of maternal grief as a form of political resistance. By assuming the role of advocates for the deceased, both parental and non-parental relatives not only honour the memory of the victims but also assert their rights as citizens to demand social justice and effectuate societal change.

The articulation of rights as an expression of citizenship—manifested through performative acts that both commemorate the memory of those lost and ascribe responsibility—constitutes a paradigmatic strategy for politicising grief. The Association's mobilisations have been conducted within the bounds of legality, thereby consolidating its campaign and enhancing its legitimacy both domestically and internationally. Conventional acts of citizenship, such as the formal establishment of the Association as a legal entity and participation in European Parliament (EP) hearings, have facilitated support from legal bodies including EU agencies, EP Committees, the Plenary of the Bar Associations, and independent fire experts. By presenting their case before the EP, the Association elevated public discourse regarding the accident and the systemic shortcomings that precipitated it. Maria Karystianou's public articulation of emotional resistance, notably through poignant speeches, foregrounded the moral imperatives underpinning their quest for justice. Her appeals to EU citizenship rights highlighted the EU's responsibilities to safeguard its

citizens, garnering support from various EP committees. In this context, the role of emotions—particularly emotional resistance—corresponds with contemporary scholarly discussions on the function of affect in political discourse. The public articulation of maternal grief can, notably, disrupt prevailing narratives and challenge sociopolitical orthodoxies.

Another salient strategy adopted by the Association was the deployment of depoliticised scientific inquiry, exemplified by the engagement of independent fire experts to investigate the causes of the accident. This tactic not only augmented the credibility of their claims, but also contested the state narrative that attempts to obfuscate systemic contributors to the tragedy. By anchoring their demands in empirical evidence, the Association seeks to challenge the reduction of the event to mere “human error” and advocates for a more nuanced conceptualization of accountability that encompasses both individual and structural dimensions.

With respect to alternative modalities of citizenship, the strategic utilisation of online platforms—exemplified by the “Tragedy-Tempi 2023” petition on Change.org—demonstrates the capacity of digital tools to augment the visibility and efficacy of grassroots activism. The petition's accumulation of over 1.3 million signatures attests to the potential of online mobilisation as a mechanism for articulating collective demands for social justice. This approach is congruent with contemporary theoretical perspectives that conceptualise activism as inherently hybrid, traversing both physical and digital spheres. Social media and online petitions serve to amplify the voices of marginalised populations, fostering expansive networks of support and solidarity that transcend geographical constraints.

The notion of affective citizenship emerges as a salient analytical framework for interrogating the emotional dimensions of the Association's activism. The concert organised in commemoration of the victims exemplifies the manner in which collective grief can engender a sense of belonging and community. Through shared mourning, participants not only honoured the memories of those lost, but also consolidated their collective identity as advocates for social justice. The orchestration of the concert at Panathenaic Stadium on 11 October 2024 established new arenas of contestation, enabling the broader public to enact “soulful” (Ambrosini & Artero, 2021) activist citizenship, thereby fostering heightened political engagement and affective resistance in the pursuit of social transformation.

The case of the Association elucidates the intricate interplay among maternal grief, collective agency, and state accountability. The metamorphosis of individual bereavement into a potent political movement underscores the capacity of grief to function as a catalyst for social justice. As the Association continues to navigate the complexities of advocacy and the quest for accountability, its trajectory provides critical insights into the role of affect in shaping political dynamics and the centrality of ethical citizenship in the pursuit of justice. The politicisation of maternal grief not only contests dominant state narratives, but also cultivates a sense of solidarity and belonging among those affected, thereby contributing to a broader movement for social transformation. It is arguable that, absent the Association's ongoing efforts to uncover the underlying causes of the tragedy, the official narrative of “human error” might have prevailed unchallenged.

## Conclusions

The Tempi deadly train accident and the profound loss experienced by parents, relatives and friends, as well as the general public, triggered a moral shock that catalysed the transformation of private grief into collective political action. This case exemplifies how emotions can be mobilised as a form of resistance and citizenship, transforming personal pain into collective power and action. Rather than remaining an individual tragedy, this grief became a driving force, prompting those affected to unite and demand accountability, challenging state narratives and creating new forms of community, solidarity, and resistance. Motivated by a sense of moral duty, the bereaved founded the Association of Tempi Victims 2023 as an act of citizenship. This organization became a means to honor their loved ones and to pursue justice and accountability from the state.

Drawing on global examples of maternal activism, the movement used the emotional resonance of maternal loss to frame its demands and resist state impunity. This approach allowed the group to connect their struggle to a broader tradition of maternal resistance. Through collective mourning and public acts—such as concerts and petitions—the movement fostered a broader community of resistance. These activities helped to attract diverse supporters and significantly raise public awareness, both domestically (from Bar Associations) and internationally (from the European Parliament and the European Public Prosecutor's Office), highlighting the wider implications of state corruption and impunity.

More specifically the acts of citizenship that the Association engaged included pursuing legal action, initiating online petitions, organizing public events, and forming alliances with institutional actors such as the European Parliament and Bar Associations. These strategies served to amplify their demands for justice and systemic change.

Importantly, the movement's demands, within the concept of transformative justice, extend beyond seeking punishment for individual culprits. They also call for broader legal and structural reforms to prevent future tragedies, and for justice and recognition for both victims and survivors, a persistent fight against state impunity. Their activism is anchored in the memory and dignity of the victims, and aims to achieve lasting legal, social, and political change.

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