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Ephemeral Lives Versus Colonial Afterlives: Building Decolonial Urbanisms Through Two African Culture Festivals in Athens

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how African migrantised and diasporic communities in Athens contest the city's dominant colonial imaginary through cultural festival practice. We argue that Athens has been constructed as a racialised chronotope: a frozen, whitened tableau anchored in classical antiquity that renders contemporary racialised presences peripheral, temporary, and illegible. Drawing on three years of Decolonial, Ethnographic, Participatory Arts-Based Research (DEPABR), including the co-organisation of two Afroathenian festivals in 2023 and 2024, we analyse how these ephemeral events functioned as methodological and political sites where questions of recognition, legitimacy, and belonging were actively negotiated. We show how debates over permits, venue selection, representation, and voice crystallised deeper chronopolitical tensions between present-oriented strategies of institutional recognition and longer horizons of autonomous, commoning-based claim-making. Rather than resolving these tensions, we treat them as analytically generative, revealing the uneven distribution of risk, audibility, and temporal orientation that structures Black urban life in Europe's southern cities. We conclude that festival ephemerality, far from undermining political force, operates as a decolonising method: temporarily suspending the city's imposed stillness and opening space for plural histories, solidarities, and futures. The paper contributes to debates on urban chronotopes, citizenship, and decolonial urbanism.

1 | Introduction

Modern Athens is a dream within a dream. First comes Greece as a dream nation (Gourgouris 2021): the symbolic centre, colonialist Europe's 'universal alibi'. Second, within this dream nation lies a 'dream capital': Athens, the cradle of Western civilisation, imagined as enduring since antiquity. Both this universalist centring and continuity are constructs. The modern Greek state only emerged in the 1830s, when Athens was merely a village beneath the Acropolis. This is what makes Athens

fascinating in studying modernity and belonging because our interlocutors from the African diaspora seek recognition and belonging in a city whose own modernity is produced through exclusion, idealisation and colonial fantasy. Archaeological narratives function as acts of 'whitening', that is, purification processes explicitly erasing non-white communities from national heritage (Greenberg and Hamilakis 2022). Our intervention aims to forge alliances with subjugated communities, and so we examine two Afroathenian festivals we co-organised as sites unsettling the city's racialised and temporal imaginaries. Our

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ethnographic research explored everyday spatial and cultural practices challenging Athens' colonial stillness, re-inscribing it as a living urban space. Situated within the Decolonising the City (DtC) project, the paper argues that Afroathenian presences disrupt the city's dominant chronotope as Western civilisation's static cradle, revealing instead a city in motion, marked by contested temporalities, plural histories and ongoing struggles for urban belonging.

Athens helps us examine processes of exclusion of those attempting to settle in a city that itself was invited to settle and become legible within colonial imaginaries. Athens is imagined as a birthplace with no life-course; the colonial gaze permits no evolution, no future, since progress is reserved for places at modernity's core. The city is accepted into the Western imaginary only as a still vignette; a faded, lifeless memory to be invoked from a safe historical distance, never meant to be brought up to speed. Greenberg and Hamilakis (2022) highlight how nineteenth-century Western philhellenes were deeply unsettled by contemporary Athens' reality: a dusty, Ottoman-influenced village inhabited by poor, uneducated peasants dressed in what they saw as Oriental garb. These observers were not seeking a living city but an unbroken link to an idealised past. In their travel narratives, paintings and archaeological accounts, they would erase the presence of living Greeks, along with their animals grazing on the Pnyx and Acropolis, replacing them with empty ruins and idealised landscapes. What actually existed did not fit Hellenic purity's script, and so it was written out. Modern Athens was forced into a people-less stillness; not merely as a nostalgic echo of classical civilisation, but as a sanitised, lifeless tableau acceptable to Western taste and racial ordering.

This erasure creates a profound gap in the city's historical continuity and collective memory, reducing it to a transplanted image of an antiquity that never was. The Acropolis, white today, was once vibrantly painted in bold colours. Like the monument, the city built beneath its hill was retrospectively recoded as pure white marble, narratively purified, with non-white presences rendered peripheral, temporary or invisible. Absolute whiteness is a modern construction: total, recent and ideological.

Just as philhellenic imaginaries refused to recognise post-Ottoman Athenians as antiquity's legitimate inheritors, so too are today's racialised residents seen as temporary, out of place, tolerated at the margins of public life and denied belonging. The classical city is once again conjured as a purified ideal, now sustained by nationalist discourse, urban development policies and tourism regimes that recast it as a timeless space of heritage, order and civilisational pride. Therefore, Athens's modernity is imagined as colonial, one that continues to render the city's transformations illegible and its racialised inhabitants disposable. Against this backdrop, our Afroathenian festivals emerge as ruptures in the city's carefully curated stillness: small reminders and affirmations that Athens is alive, and that its future is being made in real time by those that official narratives refuse to see.

The paper proceeds in four parts. Section 2 outlines the conceptual terrain of urban chronotopes and the decolonisation of public space and how migration, racialisation and membership without citizenship complicate dominant understandings

of public belonging, offering Athens as a particularly charged site to analyse these dynamics. Section 3 discusses our methodological approach, based on 3 years of engagement with Afroathenian communities, and our Decolonial, Ethnographic, Participatory, Arts-Based Research (DEPABR). Section 4 empirically examines how Afroathenian communities contest dominant urban imaginaries. We conclude by reflecting on what these practices mean for rethinking public space and citizenship.

2 | Urban Chronotopes, Counterspaces and Belonging in the Decolonial City

We begin this section with a short note on the uncomfortable and thorny politics of naming while attempting to avoid othering already marginalised communities. We use diaspora to describe the collective, translocal formations through which racialised communities make social life, cultural practice and political claims across different legal statuses and generations. We prioritise collaborators' self-identifications (e.g., Afrogreeks) and use Afroathenian to foreground a specifically urban form of belonging among people of African descent in Athens; while related labels such as Afrogreek are already in wider public circulation, Afroathenian helps us emphasise rootedness in the city. Finally, we avoid using 'migrant' as a neutral label for people and use 'migrantised' to foreground how the figure of the migrant is made through bordering practices, eligibility regimes and everyday racialisation in ways that exceed border crossing. This helps us analyse state categorisation without reproducing it as our own descriptive shorthand. In this section, we argue that urban public space in Athens should be understood as a contested chronotope in which racialised and migrantised subjects actively seek to unsettle the whitened temporal and spatial order of the city through practices of public presence, cultural production and collective claim-making.

2.1 | Urban Chronotopes and Decolonising Public Space

The concept of *chronotopes*, developed by Bakhtin (1981) and later adapted in geography, illuminates how time and space co-produce meaning, identity and power (Folch-Serra 1990; Blommaert and De Fina 2017), capturing how specific time-space configurations shape narratives and social subjectivities. Urban scholars have adopted the chronotope to theorise how everyday life in cities is organised through distinctive spatiotemporal rhythms: from daily routines to long-standing urban infrastructures (Muliček et al. 2015; Kanellopoulou and Ntounis 2023). The city is a rhythmic ensemble, where differentiated tempos and durationalities govern mobility, presence and encounter. This framework is enriched by the integration of Lefebvrian rhythm analysis, leading to concepts like urban chronotopes and chronopoles, temporally linked but spatially dislocated zones that reflect and shape contemporary urbanity's fragmented nature (Muliček et al. 2015). Postcolonial scholars highlight that these chronotopic structures, and consequently public space, are shaped by colonialism's afterlives, inscribing inequalities into contemporary cities' rhythms (Loong et al. 2023; Shackleton and Gwedla 2021; Stoler 2016).

Nowhere are these dynamics more vividly enacted than public space. Seminal urban theorists from Jacobs (1961) to Sennett (1970, 1994), have championed public space's role as a site of open-ended encounters and democratic potential: an 'organised complexity' (Jacobs 1961, 432), where a certain degree of planned disorder made social heterogeneity and communal resilience possible. Yet in practice, public space has become increasingly splintered (Graham and Marvin 2001), privatised (Minton 2009), gentrified (Clark 2005) and surveilled, narrowing its inclusivity and reconfiguring it as a space of control. These transformations signal as much a spatial erosion as a temporal one: certain urban rhythms, those of consumption, security and circulation, are privileged, while others, those of lingering, assembly or dissent, are marginalised and even criminalised. This has produced what Garrett (2015) terms pseudo-public space: seemingly open but heavily regulated areas where strangers are expected to conform or stay away (Amin 2012), and where the poorest are treated as threats to order (Wacquant 2007). The temporal regimes of these spaces, predictable, instrumental and exclusionary, undermine the possibility of genuine urban encounter. The city's spatial form becomes deeply entangled with chronotopical hierarchies, where who is allowed to be where is tied to when and for how long.

Public space is best understood as a contested chronotope: a spatiotemporal formation shaped by overlapping histories, structural inequalities and situated practices of resistance and care. Decolonising it means recovering access and visibility but also unmaking and remaking the rhythms and narratives that structure belonging. It is to recognise that public space is not fixed, but forged through everyday acts, insurgent imaginaries and plural temporalities, often led by those at the margins. Struggles over urban rhythms, access and visibility become especially acute when viewed through migration and racialisation, where questions of who may appear in public, under what terms and for how long are deeply entangled with colonial citizenship regimes.

2.2 | Membership Without Citizenship

Recent research on the geographies of containment (Papoutsi 2021; Tazzioli 2020; Vradis et al. 2018) highlights how urban public space becomes the site where migrantised people are rendered governable through dispersal, policing, encampment, waiting and selective (in)visibility. Far from peripheral or transient nodes along migration routes, cities are pivotal sites materialising Europe's racial order and its afterlives: who can appear, linger, assemble, perform and be recognised as a legitimate 'public', and who is rendered out-of-place and out-of-time. These dynamics are inseparable from the coloniality of migration, a conceptual lens foregrounding the rootedness of contemporary border and citizenship regimes in the afterlives of empire (El-Enany 2020). Categories of legality, sovereignty and citizenship are historical products of colonial encounters and logics that inherit racialised distinctions between those imagined as belonging and those cast as provisional, removable or permanently suspect (Mayblin and Turner 2020). Thereby, citizenship is a racialised disposit if that allocates public legitimacy, futurity and the right to claim space and history alike.

Understanding the coloniality of migration requires situating contemporary bordering within the longer racial histories of the Mediterranean and here, the work of the Black Mediterranean Collective (2021) becomes particularly important. They show how the Mediterranean is produced through the violence of the colour line and the uneven distribution of mobility, grief and recognition, while also being continually remade through Black presence, refusal and political creativity. Hawthorne (2022) positions struggles over belonging in the Mediterranean as struggles over the racial boundaries of Europe itself. In this way, public legitimacy is racialised: some subjects may be denied formal citizenship, but perhaps most importantly, they are also cast as unintelligible or excessive in relation to the public, the nation and the city's authorised histories.

In Athens, struggles over visibility and public presence are also shaped by a dominant chronotope of whitened classical continuity, privileging particular bodies, histories, and cultural forms as properly urban, Greek and European. Within this spatiotemporal order, racialised presence can be tolerated, celebrated or instrumentalised, but only conditionally: as culture rather than politics, as diversity rather than claim-making and as temporary contribution rather than constitutive presence. Bringing the Black Mediterranean into conversation with urban citizenship scholarship therefore helps us specify what is at stake in Athens: under what racialised and historical conditions can excluded groups become legible as part of the city's public?

These debates sharpen Papoutsi and Sigona's notion of 'membership without citizenship' (2024). We use here their concept to describe forms of urban participation and presence that go beyond legal status while insisting that such membership is not an urban supplement to national citizenship. To the contrary, it is a historically racialised struggle over the terms of publicness itself: over legitimacy, recognisability, voice and the right to inhabit the city's space and time. Work on decolonising citizenship reinforces this point by showing that citizenship is both a global inequality machine and a colonial inheritance that continues to organise mobility and rights through hierarchies of worth, origin, and imagined loyalty (Benson and Boatcă 2023). Our intervention aims to bring this insight into the study of public space and show how racialised subjects remake the city through relational, creative and subaltern practices that unsettle dominant terms of urban belonging. In doing so, they contribute to reshaping modernity itself from its supposed margins.

From a Black geographies perspective, this requires close attention to how racialised life and knowledge production are patterned by extractive citational norms and by the systemic devaluation of Black spatial practices; McKittrick (2021) reminds us that method and citation are central terrains where racial orders are reproduced or refused. This matters for our analysis because the festivals we co-organised were not simply ethnographic events but sites where voice, legitimacy and representation were negotiated in real time through conflict, tactical compromise and collective experimentation. As we will see in the next section, the festivals become methodological openings into how political subjectivity is assembled: who speaks for whom, what counts as legitimate speech and how 'public voice' is either enabled or constrained by infrastructures, institutions and cultural economies and collaborations.

We explore these dynamics unfolding in public space, asking how diasporic and migrantised Athenians actively participate in the city's decolonisation. We foreground public space as a terrain where colonial legacies are both inscribed and contested, through infrastructures of exclusion, but also through counter-practices of solidarity, cohabitation and care. We therefore approach public space as a contested terrain where colonial inheritances are reproduced and unsettled, and where diasporic and migrantised Athenians actively remake the terms of urban belonging, public voice and postcolonial futurity.

2.3 | Athens as a Heightened Site of Migrant Publicness

Few cities illustrate the convergence of urban chronotopes, migration and membership as sharply as Athens after two decades of crises. The city has been marked by intensified public space struggles, where grassroots initiatives encounter increasingly proceduralised and securitised urban governance regimes: work on temporary grassroots urbanism demonstrates how austerity-era interventions occupy interstitial sites while navigating municipal authorisation, infrastructural neglect and precarity (Kapsali 2025); research on solidarity initiatives foregrounds counter-austerity infrastructures negotiating their presence within and against institutional urban regimes (Arampatzi 2017). Research on the governance of dissent foregrounds how public assemblies and collective presences are managed through policing, spatial containment and legal-bureaucratic controls (Karaliotas 2017). This scholarship renders public space a selectively regulated terrain where collective visibility is made conditionally legitimate.

Meanwhile, ethnographies of solidarity practices in Greece show how the presence of migrantised people is mediated through bureaucratic categorisation, conditional hospitality and differentiated access (Rozakou 2012, 2017). Analyses of humanitarian-security governance further demonstrate how new subjectivities are organised through flexible, emergency and 'pop-up' infrastructures that blur care and control (Papada et al. 2019; Tazzioli 2020). Research on urban restructuring shows how municipal regulation, neighbourhood politics and informal tolerance shape the everyday negotiation of visibility in public space (Arampatzi 2017; Lafazani 2021). Together, this scholarship frames Athenian public space as a migration management infrastructure, where collective presence is never simply expressive, but entangled in classificatory, legal and temporal governance regimes.

These regulated conditions of presence are actively contested by diasporic communities through cultural and political forms of public claim-making. Recent relevant work demonstrates how cultural production, performance and grassroots organising operate as key modalities of urban belonging and political articulation (Zaphiriou-Zarifi 2022; Döcumatism 2015). Research on racialised citizenship and second-generation claims in Greece shows how Afrogreeks negotiate recognition within a national imaginary that continues to conflate Greekness with whiteness (Gousis and Gill 2023). Collective interventions including those associated with Decolonise Hellas challenge Athens' dominant historiographies and insist on plural temporalities of memory and futurity.

Read together, this burgeoning scholarship frames public cultural events as embodied claims to space, history and political presence; the terrain within which our festivals were already embedded. What makes Athens especially significant is that these struggles over publicness unfold in a city whose dominant self-image remains anchored in a whitened and classicised narrative of historical continuity, rendering racialised presence particularly legible as a disruption in return.

3 | Context and Methods: Documenting and Co-Organising a Festival as Ethnography

We draw on three years of participatory ethnographic work with African diaspora communities in Athens as part of the Decolonising the City (DtC) project (2021–2024). Our research is rooted in Participatory Arts-Based Research (PABR), at the intersection of decolonial critique, community co-creation and creative resistance. PABR serves as a means to explore marginalised experiences through alternative epistemologies, including those of migrant women (Doucet et al. 2022), Indigenous women (Nunn 2022) and youth (O'Neill 2011), as a disruption of dominant, extractive modes of knowledge production. Such approaches challenge racialised knowledge hierarchies (Bagley and Castro-Salazar 2019), affirm the legitimacy of vernacular and embodied knowledges (Lenette 2019), and promote epistemic justice (Budig et al. 2018). Within migration and urban studies, this orientation facilitates co-researching everyday practices of dwelling, resistance and urban inhabitation (Jeffery et al. 2019; Kindon et al. 2024; McLean and de Leeuw 2020), while unsettling state-centric and Eurocentric conceptions of citizenship and belonging.

Building on this, DtC foregrounded community-led knowledge production and ownership, and reframed public space as a generative terrain for decolonial urbanisms shaped through migrations. Our resulting DEPABR (Decolonial, Ethnographic, Participatory Arts-Based Research) offers the potential to document and enact social transformation: its emphasis on cultural production, collective reflection and embodied narrative enables communities to articulate new forms of urban belonging (Nunn 2022) and cultural citizenship (Lenette 2019), especially in cities shaped by colonialism, racial capitalism and exclusion. Operationalising these principles meant refusing the extractive logics that conventional methodologies often reproduce and we departed from conventional ethnographic methodologies, including interviews and participant observation. Our goal was to co-create knowledge through embedded, long-term engagement, underpinned by sustained and deliberate fieldwork. Over these three years, we each spent approximately four–six months per year in Athens, during which time we conducted regular field visits, typically at least two full days every two weeks. Across this period, we engaged with over 45 individuals and nine community groups, meeting many of them on multiple occasions. Even though we are employed abroad, we have lived in Athens for the best part of the last two decades, and are embedded in the city's everyday social, political and cultural rhythms.

3.1 | DEPABR: A Festival-Based Methodology

In DtC, festival co-organisation became our primary research method. Rather than serving as impact or dissemination, the

festivals co-created with racialised and migrantised communities functioned as living spaces of collective inquiry and creativity. In collaboration with artists, grassroots groups and cultural organisations, these festivals brought together racialised communities to express and negotiate identities, urban belonging and cultural citizenship. Through music, performance, storytelling and spatial interventions, participants generated and shared knowledge beyond the verbal or textual, engaging alternative ways of knowing that reflect the fluidity, complexity and creativity of everyday diasporic Athenian life.

This methodological approach emerged from a desire to ethically and politically respond to deeply uneven dynamics of conventional research encounters, particularly interview fatigue: many of our collaborators had already participated in numerous research and media projects, often recounting personal or painful experiences without witnessing any lasting impact or material change. Asking participants to devote their time, typically without compensation, is not a neutral request but is shaped by precarity, overexposure and the cumulative exhaustion of being repeatedly asked to tell one's story, often in reductive ways. Requesting yet another interview, survey or testimony risked reproducing precisely the forms of epistemic extractivism we sought to resist. In this context, co-organising festivals was a response to the question: 'How can our research be useful to you and your community?'. It allowed contributing something tangible and joyful, shaped by participants' own visions, while creating space for reflection on their own terms. Crucially, this approach also re-centred the labour of analysis, interpretation and meaning-making where it belongs: with us, the researchers. Rather than demanding coherence and narrativity from our community partners, we embraced the idea that producing knowledge about the process, the politics and the frictions involved is our responsibility. The festivals therefore became a way to honour time, care and agency, while grounding research in reciprocity, collective authorship and epistemic humility.

The core team consisted of three university researchers and 2–3 key community partners, to carry the work of each festival: shaping the concept, negotiating what was possible and desirable, coordinating tasks and timelines, and making decisions about programmes, participation, documentation and public-facing politics. While responsibilities shifted across phases, community partners held primary authority over artistic and political direction and community engagement, while the researchers carried institutional obligations (ethics/consent, safeguarding, budget administration/reporting) alongside organisational labour. The festivals were co-created through two key collaborations: (a) in *I Have A Dream: Second Generation* United (Athens, May 2023) we worked with second-generation communities, in particular with Anasa Cultural Centre, articulating their urban imaginaries through music, theatre and visual arts. Anasa is a long-standing Athens-based cultural organisation with a recognised public profile and some access to institutions, venues and cultural funding. We initiated contact to explore a potential collaboration around our shared concern with racialised exclusion in Athens and the need to support community-led cultural spaces. The resulting festival adopted an explicit politics of visibility and recognition. Anasa's work centres on promoting African art and culture while supporting the inclusion and empowerment of people born or raised in Greece. Their framing

of 'second generation' names a political and affective position formed through growing up in the country while being persistently denied full recognition. The cultural work they curate (across music, theatre, dance, visual arts and storytelling) stakes a simultaneously aesthetic and civic claim to presence; a way of insisting that AfroGreek life is constitutive of, not external to the national narrative. This is a politics of self-definition: articulating an urban imaginary in which being African and Greek are co-present identities that can be lived, named and publicly affirmed. Anasa is embedded in Athens' wider progressive/left cultural milieu, where anti-racism and anti-fascism often circulate both through cultural production and politics. This positioning mattered for the festival: it shaped what institutional interfaces were possible (e.g., venues, collaborations, visibility in the cultural field), while also foregrounding consolidating recognition, claiming legitimacy, audience and cultural authority in a city where racialised communities remain underrepresented.

(b) The *Djoko: Urban Sounds of Africa* festival (Athens, September 2024) was co-organised with Youmame Africa, KAYY Music Collaboration and Kelenya. Djoko, meaning 'encounter' or 'sharing' in Wolof, brought together African diaspora street musicians, filmmakers, cultural workers and community organisers to explore identity, belonging and decolonial urban life. Our collaboration was anchored in a loose collective of street musicians, young men from different, mostly Francophone West and Central African countries, who had arrived in Athens in the past decade. Most spoke rudimentary Greek (or none at all), and many were living with acute legal insecurity: some without stable residence status, and a few without papers altogether. They were not an established organisation with a formal structure, funding streams or institutional recognition but operated as a flexible, relational network centred on everyday street performance. Their politics were forged through making music in public: occupying pavements and squares, negotiating presence with police, residents, shopkeepers and passers-by, and insisting on their visibility. In this sense, the street was a workplace, but also a political infrastructure shaping how they understood urban belonging, recognition and claim-making. Importantly, they initiated this collaboration: after participating in our earlier festival, they approached us with a desire to create a festival that would not feature them as performers, but would be theirs; a space they could shape and host, reflecting their own aesthetic and political priorities, and making legible the forms of community, care and urban presence they had already been enacting daily in Athenian streets.

Field visits included: (a) attending other relevant festivals and cultural events to build contextual understanding and map the wider field of diasporic cultural production: who was organising what, where, with which publics and through which institutional interfaces. This scene-mapping helped identify key groups and infrastructures (venues, informal networks, organisers, funders, municipal actors), and the uneven conditions of visibility and recognition that shaped collaboration, what kinds of public presence were possible, which aesthetics travelled and where friction or exclusion routinely emerged; (b) extensive conversations with diasporic artists, performers and cultural workers, before and after rehearsals, during set-up, at street performance sites and in the social spaces surrounding events; these helped map relationships, trace the circulation of resources and

opportunities, and understand how artists navigated visibility, racialisation and institutional access in everyday urban life; (c) organising and delivering the festivals, including joint meetings to agree aims, themes and political framing; building the programme (curation, invitations, and sequencing); securing and negotiating venues and permissions; coordinating rehearsals and technical run-throughs; arranging equipment, transport and materials; producing publicity and outreach; and managing the logistics making public culture possible (timelines, task division, last-minute changes, conflict mediation and care for participants). It also involved continuous negotiation over forms of participation and visibility, for example, who would appear publicly and how, what could be documented, how consent would be handled in crowded settings and how safety and reputational risk would be managed given uneven legal and social vulnerabilities. Finally, the work extended beyond the event to post-festival debriefs and reflections with core collaborators, where we collectively reviewed what each festival enabled or foreclosed, and how power, labour and recognition were distributed.

Both festivals were financed through small seed-funding providing modest but crucial resources. This funding enabled infrastructure, covering basic production costs (including venue hire, technical support, equipment, materials, documentation, limited travel/food support) and modest fees/honoraria. Budget decisions were taken by the core team and aligned with partners' priorities, while remaining constrained by institutional procurement rules and the grants' timescale. In this way, the financial arrangements were part of the method: they determined visibility, whose labour could be supported and how these community-led festivals could avoid reproducing unpaid extractivism.

3.2 | Positionality

The research team was made up of one early career academic, identifying as a cis-woman, on a temporary contract, and two mid-career academics, one identifying as a cis-woman and one as a cis-man, both on permanent contracts. Its small size still encapsulated two key inequalities based in the sector (and employment overall) today: gender and seniority. All three of us brought considerable experience in managing and working on externally funded research projects. Crucially, however, institutional workload recognition is often lacking in impact and community-focused projects of this kind. The community partners were diverse in their background, role and positionality, though most of our closest collaborators were Black cis-men. Due to DtC's nature, working with differently positioned partners, we examine our positionality both in terms of how we were perceived by and how we navigated our relationships with the community partners. As three white Greek citizens employed by UK institutions, we occupied a position of relative institutional, racial and legal privilege in the Athenian context. In contrast, many of our collaborators were Black Athenians, often descendants of migrants from Africa, some without full citizenship rights, or recent migrants navigating precarious legal, labour, economic and social conditions. These differences mattered; they were structurally produced and deeply felt.

We use 'co-creation' to describe DtC's design and implementation, and how outcomes and public interventions were produced.

We did this through iterative collaborative work, meetings, workshops, programme-making, decisions and real time assessments concerning risk, visibility and audience. We use 'shared authorship' in a narrower sense indicating that festival outputs (programme, texts, performances, interventions and political tone) were produced collectively. However, this paper's argument, selection of literature and responsibility for interpretation are ours alone. Our collaborators are not absent from meaning-making and have shaped our analysis in substantive ways. Their interpretations, critiques and disagreements around the festivals are the paper's analytical anchors. While writing, we treated our debriefs, follow-ups and contested decisions as empirical material, not context; we read our tensions as data. These dynamics did not always dissolve neatly. However, attending to how our collaborators articulated their temporal and political orientations, and how they challenged our assumptions, helped us refine both our conceptual framing and the limits of our claims. We remain accountable to asymmetries by naming them, staying with their discomfort.

4 | Afroathenian Chronotopes and the Festivals Politics

The idea of organising a festival emerged organically from our conversations with African communities in Athens in late 2022. Far from being introduced by us as an impact or outreach activity, it was envisioned by community members as a response to their exclusion from the city's cultural and civic life. It stemmed from a collective aspiration to assert presence, visibility and cultural agency in a city where racialised communities are routinely marginalised. Community members articulated the need for autonomous, self-organised cultural events celebrating diasporic heritage and claiming public space as a site of belonging, gathering and political expression. The festivals were seen as strategic interventions: spatial and symbolic reappropriation acts rooted in practices of self-representation, resistance and decolonial urban politics. In response, we placed the festivals' co-organisation at DtC's core: they became the primary framework through which research was carried out with, rather than on, communities. This centred relationality, co-creation and shared authorship in the research design. Below we explore some key themes that emerged in organising both festivals.

4.1 | The Right to Public Space and Obtaining a Permit

Initial discussions on both our festivals centred on practicalities including location, timing and content. A key debate was whether to seek state/municipal permission. Positions differed sharply, shaped by participants' political commitments, lived experiences, including prior encounters with police and bureaucracy, and broader positionality in relation to the state. For many community organisers, securing a permit was not so much an administrative step but part of a broader recognition struggle: the ability to occupy public space openly and legitimately carried symbolic and material weight in a city where Black presence is routinely treated as conditional, peripheral or suspect. In their view, the permit functioned as a claim to *civic audibility*, a way of insisting that Black cultural life belongs in the city's

authorised public sphere rather than confined to the margins (Hawthorne 2022; Black Mediterranean Collective 2021). But it also had instrumental value: having a track record of collaboration with institutions was seen by many as validation and credibility in the eyes of the authorities and wider public. This could later be leveraged in negotiations with cultural gatekeepers and funders (Kostourou and Bingham-Hall 2022).

In the post-crisis Greek context, the question of permission is never quite a box ticking exercise. It condenses and reflects a struggle over who legitimately appears as and in public, under what procedural conditions or agreements. Recent literature on urban commons in Athens show how collective spatial practices were repeatedly forced into negotiation with state attempts to regulate, discipline or even delegitimise them (Apostolopoulou and Kotsila 2022). Community gardening at Athens' Hellinikon site, for example, frames spatial autogestion as resistance against neoliberal urbanism, precisely because it reworks both the material use of space and the authority to decide how it is governed in the first place. State power is exercised not only through outright eviction or policing, but also the routine production of 'authorised' and 'unauthorised' collectivities, and selectively tolerating some forms of public presence over others. This sharply contrasts with earlier prominence of Bakhtinian 'public squares' (Chatzidakis 2019) where communal spaces were organised more informally, hosting anti-consumption practices.

This is why others within the core team, particularly those grounded in the anarchist political tradition, raised concerns about the implications of seeking a permit. From this perspective, requesting permission to use public space risked reinforcing the very structures of power and exclusion the festival sought to challenge. Public space should not require authorisation for marginalised communities to gather or express themselves. Asking for legitimacy was seen as conceding ground, acknowledging state authority and, most worryingly, setting a negative precedent for marginalised communities. There was also discomfort with the bureaucratic conditions and surveillance accompanying official approval. For these organisers, occupying space without permission was itself a political act, an assertion of presence that refused the state's mediation and the normalisation of the idea that legality defines belonging.

These two positions can also be understood as different strategies for navigating austerity urbanism's contradictions. On the one hand, seeking permission can be a negotiating tactic, a way of reducing risk for those most exposed to policing and converting visibility into recognition, however fragile. On the other hand, refusing permission may function as a claim to urban commons, a refusal of the premise that collective life requires state authorisation. Recent work on grassroots, temporary urbanism clarifies the stakes of this split. Kapsali's study (2025) of a self-organised park in Thessaloniki shows how temporary, self-organised interventions can challenge the 'city of austerity' by producing collective infrastructures of use and care that exceed formal planning logics. Meanwhile, temporariness is politically ambivalent: it can be an autonomy and experimentation tactic, but it can also be imposed from above, where grassroots life is tolerated only as provisional. Our permit debate was therefore also about temporality and chronopolitics. Should we be trying to secure a more durable foothold in public space through

present institutional recognition, or should we insist on a future where legitimacy of presence does not depend on bureaucratic time frames, official schedules or revocable authorisations?

As we discuss in Section 5, the question of permission is ultimately chronopolitical because public space regulation operates through spatiotemporal ordering. A permit does not simply allow occupying a square; it allocates time, duration and acceptable rhythms of assembly. It pre-emptively decides how long a collective can remain visible, what gathering forms are legible as 'culture' rather than 'politics', and which bodies are permitted to linger. In a city governed by dominant chronotopes of heritage, order and controlled circulation, the permit is how state and municipal authorities manage the rhythm of publicness. This is precisely why the organising collective experienced permits as both a possible shield and a trap: offering conditional safety, they also reproduced a framework in which belonging is administered through revocable authorisation.

4.2 | The Festivals' Time and Space

The first festival, *I Have A Dream: Second Generation United*, took place across a series of private and semi-public cultural venues in Kypseli, one of Athens' most densely populated and multicultural neighbourhoods. This geography matters. The festival was embedded in an area long shaped by migration, diversity and everyday coexistence. Rather than an isolated cultural happening, it was part of a genealogy of organising: as the festival programme states, it 'picked up the thread' 8 years after the first *I Have A Dream* festival. This points to the event as a renewed articulation of ongoing struggles over citizenship, recognition and Afro-diasporic presence. Even though the festival was ephemeral, it condensed pre-existing networks, memories and political aspirations, while creating new occasions for visibility, collaboration and intergenerational dialogue. The programme included book presentations, film screenings, concerts, visual arts exhibitions and public discussions on the struggles, aspirations and everyday experiences of the city's African diaspora. Hosted in bounded venues within Kypseli rather than open public spaces, the festival performed a more protected spatial politics: one that enabled gathering, expression and exchange while offering a degree of shelter from surveillance, policing and hypervisibility risks. Thereby, the first festival occupied a space that was neither fully private nor fully public, but semi-public: accessible and outward-facing, yet still curated, enclosed and mediated through existing cultural infrastructures. The decision to avoid public space was shaped by the desire to sidestep the politically fraught question of whether to seek official authorisation.

By contrast, the later *Djoko* festival moved from this neighbourhood-based and semi-protected spatial format and took place across two different locations: the first day in Plateia Protomagias, a public square, and the second day at Zoetrope, an independent artists' space in Kipseli. This shift mattered politically. The use of the square inserted Afrodiasporic cultural presence into a visibly public urban setting and transformed the site, however ephemerally, into a space of gathering, performance and claim-making. Meanwhile, the return indoors on the second day suggests that public visibility needed to be accompanied by a more protected space for discussion, reflection and

exchange. The festival therefore moved across, instead of juxtaposing public and semi-public space. This hybrid spatial politics made possible both staging a visible reassertion of belonging and retaining forms of intimacy and relative autonomy unavailable in the square. That this was done with formal authorisation, and in a festival explicitly framed around decolonising dominant perceptions of identity and belonging, underscores how access to public space remained negotiated rather than given. If the first festival worked through intimacy, enclosure and relative autonomy, the second one worked through exposure, visibility and direct inscription into the city's public and symbolic spaces.

These two formats reveal the unequal geographies through which racialised communities navigate Athens. The city's public space is neither neutral nor equally accessible, but regulated through permissions, policing, normative ideas of who belongs and long-standing imaginaries of Athens as white, classical and timeless. To occupy a square through music, performance, food and collective gathering was therefore an intervention in the racialised ordering of urban visibility. Yet this visibility came at a cost. Securing municipal authorisation required negotiation and compromise, not only with institutions but also with the terms on which difference could appear publicly and legibly. It also relied, at least partly, on privileges attached to the participation of white Greek academics, whose institutional legitimacy helped mediate access to official procedures. The earlier use of private venues avoided some of these exposures, but at the price of remaining less public. Read together, the two festivals illuminate the tactical spectrum between protection and exposure, autonomy and recognition, through which marginalised groups make space in a city structured by racialised and colonial hierarchies of presence.

The festivals also mattered as a temporal form. Unlike slower and more open-ended forms of collaboration, festival organisation condenses time into an intensified period of sociality and labour. It creates moments of urgency: deadlines must be met, permits secured, programmes finalised and resources assembled. This time compression enabled encounters that may not have otherwise been possible. But it also exposed deeply unequal relations to time itself. Collaboration had to be organised across countries, professional contexts and highly uneven labour conditions. Within the academic team, this meant scheduling around teaching, research and other institutional obligations, rather than in conjunction with them, reflecting a wider academic model that rhetorically celebrates social-facing and impact work while rarely making time for it. These pressures were themselves unevenly distributed, shaped by differences in contract securities. And yet obviously when contrasted to the work status of our festival collaborators, our own qualms pale in comparison: for colleagues on the ground this small academic project provided a considerable source of income; and yet one that meanwhile competed against other demands for their time, whether by looking for or working on other jobs, or jumping through bureaucratic hoops. Looking back at the timespace of the festival, this evidently became a field upon which some key contradictions and tensions of the late capitalist workplace and its generational and racial hierarchies laid bare. And all of this is to say that, despite our enthusiasm and determination, finding the time or the space to organise the festival was not easy. We never expected it to be, not least because our already diverse

timings and trajectories would also contrast bureaucratic timings: our second festival had to be postponed (from spring to early autumn 2024), due to the local authority's excruciatingly sluggish decision-making, barring us from securing a permit on time. This festival took place, in other words, against and despite time.

4.3 | Representation and Gatekeeping: Who Speaks?

When organising the first festival we approached cultural organisations we knew for their consistent work in Athens. We needed community representatives to be already visible to approach them: if we cannot see them, how can we get in touch? But on the other hand, this raises key questions around visibility, representation and the positive feedback loop, wherein the more community organisers are known, the more they get to act as nodes for outsiders, making them more known in return. This made us ask: what value is there in supporting organisations already collaborating with more established cultural actors? Mindful of our limited resources, we very carefully decided how these would go the longest way, helping foreground particularly under-represented community voices. Our second festival built on this, collaborating with street musicians previously unexposed to such cultural and academic funding landscapes. Throughout this twofold experience, we learned that the lingua franca is not necessarily English—or Greek—but the institutionalised language of legibility demanded by the large funding organisations increasingly dominating Athens' cultural landscape: the terminologies of impact, inclusion and cultural participation that structure what can be said, and what must be left silent, in order to access resources. This same pressure operates laterally, towards other established urban communities, such as arts institutions, civil society organisations, political networks, whose recognition confers legitimacy on emerging voices. As Spivak noted already in 1988, the subaltern who wishes to be heard must speak the most beneficial language of the day, a demand that shapes not only what is said but who is positioned to say it.

Despite our collective commitment to feminist, antiracist and decolonial principles, the organisational process itself was not immune to the reproduction of unequal dynamics of race, gender and voice, both within our core group and in broader collaborations. These inequalities often manifested in subtle, accumulative ways: how decisions were made; whose contributions were foregrounded; who was repeatedly asked to speak, perform or lead. It was strikingly easy to slip, often unconsciously, into familiar patterns, such as assembling all-male panels or concert line-ups dominated by male performers, or relying disproportionately on white 'ally' voices to carry the message. While these voices were often well-meaning and politically aligned, their visibility could inadvertently eclipse those experiencing marginalisation more directly. This raised difficult but necessary questions: Who is allowed to speak in public? Who is listened to? And what does it mean to claim space if this still centres the already-visible?

The pressure to deliver polished, high-profile events sometimes meant falling back on recognisable names, institutional

actors or charismatic figures; choices that, while pragmatic, risked reinforcing the very hierarchies we sought to challenge. It also revealed how the structural dynamics of race and gender cut across activist and community spaces just as much as institutional ones. Feminist scholars have long warned of performative inclusion and tokenism, and our experience echoed this. Allowing the subaltern to speak, as Spivak (1988) provocatively asked, cannot be reduced to providing a microphone. It demands slower, more difficult work. Listening, stepping back, making space, rethinking authority horizontally. These tensions impacted not only who took the stage, but how trust was built, how labour was distributed and how genuinely collective the process could become. They also underscored that practising solidarity across difference requires not just shared ideals, but ongoing reflexivity, structural awareness and a willingness to be unsettled.

5 | Discussion: Decolonising Citizenship and Modernity

Our small project opened some rather large questions that made us look inwards (to ourselves as researchers), back (into colonialism and modernity's remnants) and outwards, beyond our academic confines and our most obvious collaborators. It made us question the strategy and value in choosing certain types of alliances over others. How the project was made thereby intersects and blurs into what we found. Our key result is that festivals are methodological and political sites where questions of recognition, legitimacy and power are worked through in real time. As shown, the decision to use festival co-organisation as a research method was grounded in an ethical and political imperative: to move away from potentially extractive fieldwork and towards collaborative practices that can materially contribute to the aspirations of the communities involved. In this context, the festival format created space for public presence, expression and claim-making. Yet, as the project unfolded, it became clear that these collaborative spaces were fraught with contradictions and tensions reflecting wider urban politics. Decisions over where to hold the event, who to involve, and whether to seek official permits revealed divergent resistance strategies shaped by distinct politics, positionalities and lived experiences. While some viewed public visibility and state recognition as crucial for belonging or legitimacy, others emphasised the need to maintain autonomy from institutions of surveillance and control. These tensions helped us understand the competing logics and temporalities of survival, resistance and recognition that structure urban life for racialised communities. Our role was not to resolve, but rather to hold space, to let them inform the research process and outcomes.

Seen from the vantage point of the Black Mediterranean, these tensions are condensed expressions of a wider political problem rather than incidental frictions of event-planning: how Black presence becomes governable through regimes of visibility, recognition and 'civic culture' even when it appears as celebration (Black Mediterranean Collective 2021; Hawthorne 2022). The choice to seek a permit, collaborate with institutions or remain autonomous does not map neatly onto a binary of co-optation versus resistance; rather, it indexes the uneven distribution of risk and audibility that shapes Black life and political claim-making,

particularly in Europe's southern cities. Following Stierl and Tazzioli's (2025) call to attend to the Mediterranean's multiple (post)colonial legacies and to avoid analytic closure, we treat the festival as a situated site where imperial afterlives, municipal governance, cultural gatekeeping and movement praxis intersect, and where the terms of legitimate publicness are actively contested.

In this sense, our festivals offered a unique lens through which to interrogate the temporal politics of citizenship and urban belonging. As time-bound, ephemeral events they sit in tension with state-centric logics that privilege permanence, continuity and formal recognition as the hallmarks of legitimate political subjectivity. Drawing on Bakhtin's chronotope, we understand the festivals as spatiotemporal configurations temporarily suspending and rearranging dominant scripts of urban legality, race and belonging. Their ephemerality was not the opposite of endurance, but one way through which such endurance was organised under precarity, limited resources and uneven institutional support access. Both festivals emerged from longer trajectories of community formation, artistic practice and political struggle: *I Have A Dream* revived an earlier festival 8 years later, indicating a longer genealogy of second-generation and Afro-diasporic organising around citizenship, visibility and recognition in Athens. *Djoko* similarly articulated identity and belonging through African diasporic culture and for building the coalitions necessary to pluralise and decolonise the city's cultural landscape. In this sense, the festivals condensed already existing networks, aspirations and claims, while making them publicly perceptible in intensified form.

Yet this insurgent temporality was contested: the debates around seeking permits crystallised a chronopolitical tension between recognition in the present and longer temporal horizons that refuse recognition on the state's terms and aspire to longer term commoning. For some organisers, permits were a pragmatic and desirable route to being rendered legible as a 'proper' public event, securing institutional recognition and protecting the festival from appearing publicly without being dismissed as illicit, disorderly or out of place. This was a present-oriented politics of authorisation: not simply compliance, but a claim to visibility and public standing within the city's existing and present regimes of legitimacy. For others however, permit-seeking threatened tethering the festival's meaning and future to the very infrastructures historically producing exclusion. Opposition was grounded in longer temporalities of racialised policing and bordering, and in futures imagined as autonomous, relational and not contingent on state validation. From this standpoint, being 'recognised' today through permits risked converting an insurgent chronotope into a state-sanctioned one, where participation and belonging hinged on permission, paperwork and bureaucratic time. Crucially, this disagreement also raised the question of who could credibly claim these pasts, speak in the name of the present and authorise particular futures, and how unequal positionalities within the organising collective shaped whose temporal orientation carried weight. In this sense, the permit debate became a struggle over the terms and timelines of belonging: whether citizenship is enacted in the moment through collective presence, or deferred into futures made conditional on recognition.

This chronopolitics is inseparable from the spatial politics of urban public space. The tension between holding the festival in officially sanctioned public squares versus privately negotiated venues reflects broader dynamics of surveillance, risk and political visibility. As critical urban theorists have shown (Low and Smith 2006; Hou and Knierbein 2017), public space is increasingly managed through logics of security, commodification and exclusion, producing pseudo-public space (Amin 2012; Garrett 2015), where encounters are choreographed, and difference is either assimilated or expelled. From this perspective, public space use by racialised communities is a contested, politicised act: an attempt to reassert presence in landscapes they are materially and symbolically excluded from. The festivals served as counter-uses of the city: staging culture, but most importantly reshaping the meaning and function of *publicness* itself. They reanimated public space as a site of encounter, care, refusal and cohabitation, what Lefebvre (1996) called the 'right to the city', but also what we can understand as acts of homemaking and relational urban citizenship (Boccagni and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2023). Yet even within these moments of reclaiming space, our experience revealed how power still circulates: who gets to perform, who speaks the dominant language, who is trusted by institutions and who remains peripheral. Decolonising urban public space is thereby primarily about reconfiguring the relations that define it; whose histories shape it, whose futures it makes possible and whose bodies it makes welcome.

These struggles over public space were simultaneously struggles over voice: who speaks on the stage, but also how voice is materially organised, mediated and made audible in the city. As Kostourou and Bingham-Hall (2022) argue, 'voice' is infrastructural; it depends on organisational channels, languages, contacts, permits, venues, technologies and institutional interfaces that unevenly distribute who can be heard and on what terms. The festival rendered this infrastructure visible. It showed how claims to belonging often travel through legibility as demanded by public authorities, while other forms of speech, vernacular, embodied, multilingual, improvisational, risk being treated as noise, nuisance or disorder. Considering Black geographies' insistence that method, citation and knowledge-production are themselves political terrains (McKittrick 2021), we read these dynamics as part of what our own research reveals: the city's public sphere is a racialised filter, and the work of decolonising citizenship includes transforming the infrastructures through which audibility and legitimacy are allocated.

This brings us to the question of membership, and the extent to which the festivals illuminated both the potential and limits of political belonging in the absence of legal recognition. Drawing on Papoutsis and Sigona's (2024) formulation, we saw how participants exercised urban membership through organising, creating, performing or simply being present, defying state categories (e.g., citizen/migrant, documented/undocumented). These practices were neither exceptional nor marginal; they were ordinary, everyday and deeply political. In this way, the festivals highlighted what Holston (2009) calls insurgent citizenship: a mode of political life that emerges not through formal institutions but through bottom-up, collective action. Importantly, this mode of belonging was also relational and shaped by gendered, racialised and classed experiences that often reproduced exclusions within the organising process itself. The ease with which we fell

into familiar hierarchies, over-relying on white or male allies, defaulting to English, foregrounding the already-visible, underscored the difficulty of practising decolonisation from within colonial recognition structures. The challenge, then, is to ask under what conditions certain voices are heard, legitimated or dismissed.

Decolonising citizenship in the city then means going beyond inclusion into existing frameworks: it requires disrupting the temporal, spatial and epistemic orders defining who belongs. The festivals, in all their imperfections and contradictions, offered a glimpse into how such disruption might be staged. Their afterlives are therefore not best measured through permanence (e.g., in fixed institutions, continuous funding or stable space access). Rather, they persist through more fragile and dispersed effects: the consolidation of collaborations, the strengthening of community networks, the production of shared memory, the expansion of public recognition and the creation of new possibilities for future organising. What remained was not always a durable or material infrastructure, but an often altered sense of possibility: a demonstration that Afro-diasporic and second-generation communities could gather, perform, speak and claim space in ways that unsettled their routine marginalisation within urban life. If dominant imaginaries cast Athens as white, still and timeless, the festivals briefly interrupted that fiction by making other presences, histories and rhythms publicly palpable. Their ephemerality then was part of their political force: a tactical breaking of the city's apparent spatial and temporal fixity, however provisional, under conditions in which sustained access to resources, venues and institutional legitimacy remained difficult to secure. Not through utopian rupture, then, but through grounded, negotiated and relational acts of collective world-making.

6 | Conclusion

We have argued that Athens, a city long mythologised as the eternal cradle of Western civilisation, has been held captive by a colonial imaginary that insists on its stillness, whiteness and timelessness. The denial of historical continuity, the erasure of Ottoman and contemporary presences, and the fetishisation of a purified classical past have produced a spatial and temporal order that is both exclusionary and violently static. Yet against this backdrop of arrested modernity, our ethnographic engagement with Afroathenian communities reveals a different Athens that is messy, plural, and in motion. Through everyday acts of presence, these communities challenge the city's colonial chronotope. They do not merely claim space, they reconfigure it; they do not simply interrupt the city's stillness, they expose its constructedness and open it up to alternative ways of being, belonging and imagining the urban.

By foregrounding ephemerality as a decolonising method and analytic, we have shown how seemingly fleeting events, such as cultural festivals, performances, informal gatherings, can produce powerful and enduring transformations. These ruptures contest the city's imposed temporality, creating openings for new solidarities, aesthetics and futures. They illuminate what it means to enact urban citizenship beyond the bounds of legal recognition, and to reimagine the city not as a monument to

Western civilisation's past, but as a living archive of struggle, care, refusal and reinvention. Importantly, these interventions also expose the fault lines within the progressive projects that claim to support them, including our own. As we reflected, the gendered and racialised dynamics of labour, leadership and recognition are reproduced even within well-meaning academic and activist settings. To decolonise the city, then, is to confront the uneven terrain on which these voices speak, and to interrogate our own roles within it.

Our findings carry broader implications for urban geography and its engagement with decolonial urbanism. Scholarship on decolonial city-making has tended to centre northern European and postcolonial metropolises with long histories of empire and settlement, where the terms of Black and diasporic belonging have been more extensively theorised. Athens unsettles this geography. As a city positioned simultaneously as Western civilisation's symbolic origin, a frontline node of the European border regime and a site of ongoing austerity, it reveals how colonialism's afterlives are also about the ongoing production of spatial and temporal orders that render certain presences illegible. Our analysis of urban chronotopes contributes to geographical debates by demonstrating that the racialisation of public space operates not only through exclusion from territory, but also through the manipulation of time: who may appear, linger and remain and for how long; whose histories are recognised as constitutive of the city; and whose futures are permitted to take shape within it. In this sense, chronopolitics is a geographical issue, one that requires situating cities within their specific colonial genealogies rather than assuming a common template of urban belonging.

This has also some methodological implications for the discipline of geography. Our DEPABR framework, and specifically festival co-organisation as a research method, can offer geographers a way of studying contested urban space that refuses the extractive logics of conventional fieldwork. By treating the festival as both a site and an instrument of inquiry, we were able to document what communities claim but also how those claims are materially assembled and contested, insights that classic ethnographic methods would be unlikely to yield in the same form. More broadly, the paper contributes to a geographical literature increasingly attentive to the politics of method, citation and knowledge production, arguing that how we conduct research on urban space is inseparable from what we find there. For a discipline grappling with its own colonial inheritances, southern European cities like Athens—peripheral to northern theoretical canons yet central to Europe's racial ordering—offer genuine provocations to rethink where urban geographical knowledge comes from and whose urban experiences anchor it.

Athens today is a diverse city that is being made and remade through different forms of migration. The term Afroathenian is itself a geographical claim: by insisting on Athens as a site of Black diasporic life, cultural production and urban belonging, it refuses the spatial grammar that positions African and diasporic communities as perpetually elsewhere, as migrants passing through rather than residents making place. To name oneself Afroathenian is to locate Blackness firmly within the city, its histories and its futures, and to refuse the colonial

chronotope that renders such presence peripheral or temporary. The presence of Africans, Afrogreeks or Black Greeks and other racialised communities re-inscribes the city with histories, futures and meanings that the dominant narrative has tried to exclude or erase. Their spatial and cultural practices do not offer a neat inclusion into an already-defined urban modernity. Rather, they force us to rethink modernity itself, provincialising its Eurocentric temporality, unsettling its colonial inheritance and inviting us to imagine a city where memory is plural, belonging is negotiated and the future is radically open. In this sense, what we have documented is a re-worlding of Athens from its supposed margins. And it is in these margins, fleeting and forceful, that the possibility of a truly decolonial urban future begins to take shape.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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