

**DAUGHTERS WHO DO NOT SPEAK, MOTHERS WHO DO NOT LISTEN.**

**Erotic Relationships Among Women in Contemporary Greece**

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## ***ABSTRACT***

The present thesis is about shifting narrations of desire, changing stories of family, sexuality, and the self uttered by same-sex desiring women in contemporary Greece. It is chronologically situated from the end of the 1970s –when a feminist and lesbian discourse, mainly Western imported, emerged in Greece- up to the present, and is primarily based in Athens, the capital city, and Eressos, a summer resort on the island of Lesbos.

Narrations of desire should be examined in relation to the specific socio-cultural contexts in which they appear, since they are largely depending on the specificities of each society and shaped by local cultures. In Greece this context is formed by the significance of family, kinship and the importance of motherhood, and the influence of Western imported discourses on lesbianism and same-sex sexualities. From the end of the 70s onwards, a lesbian movement began to emerge in Greece, groups were formed, articles were published, bars were opened and Eressos was established as an international lesbian meeting place. Yet, same-sex desiring women's participation in the so-called 'lesbian scene' is relatively small and they are reluctant to adopt the term 'lesbian' for their self-identification. The reason is that, although recent global and economic forces enabled the diffusion of global identities and the transformation of intimacy beyond the homo/hetero divide, the way such changes are accepted, negated and negotiated in each society is intrinsically related to traditional and more dominant stories on gender and sexuality. In Greece such stories are imbued with the imperatives of marriage and procreation. Therefore new narrations of desire and stories of the self are being uttered, but they do not claim for a lesbian identity nor do they claim for a gender deconstruction, according to the Western example. What they are about is the claim for the recognition of an autonomous desire, a desire which is independent of men or the acquisition of children, the right to be one's self and to be recognized as a whole person. Due to the importance of family and kinship ties these stories are told not in public but in the privacy of homes and usually when parents are absent. But even if daughters feel 'brave' enough to speak about their lives, desires and hopes, there are parents, -especially mothers acting as guardians of domestic order-, who refuse to listen, with the outcome that silence enhances itself as the primary means for sustaining family relations.

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## ***TRANSLITERATION NOTE***

A, α	A, a
Αι, αι	Ai, ai (reads as e)
Αυ, αυ	Av, av
B, β	V, v
Γ, γ	G, g before the vowels a, o and consonants
Γγ, γγ	Ng, ng
Γκ, γκ	G, g initially/ Ng, ng medially
Δ, δ	D, d
E, ε	E, e
Eι, ει	Ei, ei
Ευ, ευ	Ev, ev if pronounced as ef / Eu, eu if pronounced as ev
Z, ζ	Z, z
H, η	I, I
Θ, θ	Th, th
I, ι	I, I
K, κ	K, k
Λ, λ	L, l
M, μ	M, m
N, ν	N, n
Ξ, ξ	X, x
O, ο	O, o
Oι, οι	Oi, oi
Ου, ου	U, u
Π, π	P, p
P, ρ	R, r
Σ, σ	S, s initially / SS, ss medially
T, τ	T, t
Υ, υ	Y, y
Φ, φ	F, f
X, χ	Ch, ch
Ψ, ψ	Ps, ps
Ω, ω	O, o

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# PART

# ONE

## “WHY DID YOU CHOOSE IT?”

### Call for Participation in Research with Subject

*“Female Same-Sex Desires in Contemporary Greece”*

#### The Research

*The topic of my research concerns how female same-sex desires are experienced, negotiated, and contested in Greece in the 90's.*

*Its aim is the emergence of a female same-sex discourse, and examination on how erotic choices are interrelated with other parameters which inform one's subjectivity like family, occupation, friends, place of residence.*

*The methodology I intend to use consists of thorough discussions with women who are erotically involved with other women, observation in places where women meet and gather, and study of printed material on female same-sex desires which was circulated in Greece recently.*

#### The Call for Participation

*The present call is addressed to women who live in Greece and are or were erotically involved with other women regardless of age, occupation, family status, place of residence and is indifferent to whether they adopt a lesbian identity, participate in lesbian organizations, frequent lesbian bars, or not.*

*The only prerequisite is their personal interest in participating in such research.*

*Call for Participation* in my research distributed with the lesbian magazine *Madame Gou* 4, published in *Roz-Mov* pages in the Internet and given out hand by hand.

Every piece of writing has its own story. The story of this thesis can be traced back to the mid 80s where as a student of a Greek university I had the opportunity and the luck to meet and be platonically involved with a number of young women who were engaged in same-sex relationships<sup>1</sup>. Without claiming a lesbian identity, participating in lesbian groups, or holding strong theoretical views on same-sex desires these women formed a network of support quite different from the ones I had so far encountered. Our acquaintance soon evolved into a strong friendship which continued over the years, despite the fact that our lives followed different routes. The story would have stopped here if I had not been attracted to a quotation I read as a second year MA student in the Department of Social Anthropology in the University of the Aegean. It was as follows:

*When we turn to women's alternative forms of sexuality, we find a striking contrast with men. First, while men conceptually, and sometimes in practice, engage in forms of sexual expression other than 'normal' heterosexuality, such alternatives seem to be unacknowledged in concept and unattained in practice among women. Second, many men seem to have their first sexual experience before marriage and outside the household, under the influence of coffee shop norms. Conjugal heterosexuality is a phase that concludes a process of sexual maturation which involves sexual self-expression, a symbolic play with the prospect of homosexuality, and forms of*

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<sup>1</sup> Although a discussion on the origin and use of the terms 'homosexual', 'lesbian', 'gay', will follow in the next chapters, at this point I want to remark that I will refer to women with same-sex practices with the term 'same-sex desiring women', unless they define themselves otherwise, i.e. 'lesbian', 'homosexual', 'gay', 'dyke'.

*heterosexuality that lack the commitment of marriage. Women, on the other hand, at first sight seem to realize their sexualities in the prospect and context of marriage and in the context of households. Their sexual expression appears to be largely framed by the domestic imagery of gender. ... It is as if the linking of female sexuality to fertility is so powerful that there can be no perceived need for women to 'express' sexuality in contexts which cannot lead to procreation (Loizos and Papataxiarchis, 1991b: 228-9).*

In the above quotation it is argued that female same-sex practices have never been recorded by Greek ethnographers due to a particular emphasis on the role of women as wives and mothers. Moreover, such practices are 'unrecognized' and 'culturally unperceived' because of the strong linking of female sexuality to fertility. Even in the few cases they are recognized and recorded, usually by the mass media, they are described as 'unnatural' acts and a sin or, alternatively, as a 'titillating' sexual practice, a mild perversion performed for men's pleasure. However, my own experience informed me otherwise. Although I could not object to the main argument, I was convinced that we would never be able to get a complete picture of female same-sex desires in Greek society, if we were going to solely focus on the existence of lesbian identities. The women I had met did not adopt a lesbian identity. They did not feel the need to declare themselves to be lesbians and did not let these relationships exclusively determine the kind of sexual relationships they would have in future. Nevertheless, their sexual practices were a significant parameter in their lives which influenced in a variety of ways their self-identity. An interest in the silence which surrounds female same-sex practices in Greece and the reasons for this silence would become for me the motive for embarking on a project which would examine how same-sex desiring women perceive themselves, how they discuss their desires, and why female same-sex practices are thought to be unperceived in a Greek context.

As it has already been reported by many ethnographers, Greece is a society largely imbued on marriage and kinship. In a context where kinship plays a crucial role in the

definition of female and male identities, while full adult status for both women and men is obtained through marriage and the acquisition of children, there seems to be little space for the emergence of lesbian identities, or the recognition and acceptance of female same-sex practices. On the other hand, a western imported lesbian discourse which began to appear in Greece towards the end of the 70's seems to have had limited impact on the actual lives of same-sex desiring women due to the significance of the cultural values of family, femininity, and motherhood. However, a significant number of same-sex desiring women try to live their lives in the context of Greek society, negotiate their relations with their families, bring up their children, be successful in their working environments, discuss their desires, and forge out their identities. This thesis is about the changing, shifting, and often contradicting stories of these women. More than this, it is the display of new stories which "re-present and re-make the world" (Duggan 1993: 811), since they examine prevalent topics of Greek society -family, gender, sexuality, and the distribution of space- from another perspective, the perspective of women who are engaged in erotic relationships with each other.

The thesis is divided into three parts. Part One contains the chapter on theory which includes a brief review of the recent literature on female same-sex practices from the perspective of sexual sciences, and more specifically from an anthropological perspective, while the chapter on ethnography presents with a discussion on the Greek cultural values of marriage and motherhood and asks how female same-sex practices could be examined in such context. The last chapter in Part One, the methodology chapter, entails an account of my research, and methodologies I have used paying specific attention to the method of interviewing and presenting narrations. Part Two discusses Western influences on Greek society with reference to the emergence of a Western-imported lesbian movement in Greece during the 70s and 80s, discussed in chapter four, and the establishment of an international lesbian community in Eressos on the Greek island of Lesbos, which is presented in chapter five. The conclusion that a lesbian movement and culture in Greece was unable to flourish due to specificities of Greek society shifts my interest from the discussion on Westernization

in Part Two, to the presentation of prevalent topics of Greek ethnography through the narrations of same-sex desiring women in Part Three. While Chapter Six examines the distinction between public and private space and the significance of the home for encounters among same-sex desiring women, Chapter Seven explores their complex relationships with their families, and discusses why silence about sexual choices seems to be a very common method of negotiation. Lastly, Chapter Eight presents shifting and changing stories on sexuality and desire, and argues that despite the limitations these women face, the dominant cultural values they have to challenge, and despite the silence they have to confront, they try to utter new narrations of desire and construct new stories of the self.

As a form of conclusion, I would like to mention that the question “Why did you choose this topic?” was the most frequent one I encountered during my research. It was addressed to me from the women I met during my fieldwork, and from my own friends and acquaintances alike. Sometimes posed with curiosity, other times with suspicion, and in some cases with genuine interest, the way the question was uttered contained a need for a statement, an explanation, and/or a declaration of my own sexuality. The topic seemed to be very marginal, very isolated, very ‘exotic’, so that only a personal interest could justify its examination. However, it was this very negotiation of differences, distinctions, and dichotomies that I was interested in, how discussion on similarities and differences could be moved beyond the lesbian/straight dichotomy and be related to other parameters which inform one’s subjectivity and relations to others, so that new narrations of desire and subjectivity can become visible.

# Chapter I

## Theory

**“A person cannot ‘just’ study sexuality,  
because it is never separated from a host of  
other social relations”**

*There is no sexual desire outside of a cultural ontology that mediates between bodies and culture, and there is no culture that is disembodied. Individuals negotiate their identities in this dense maze of imbricating sociohistorical, political, and cultural relations and embodied motivations.*

Saskia Wieringa and Evelyn Blackwood in *Female Desires*. (1999: 16)

During the '90s an ever-growing literature on sexuality made its appearance. Books are published, conferences and workshops are held, and research is conducted. However, and despite the widespread tendency, according to which research on sexuality is a rather recent phenomenon, interest on the subject of sex dates back to many decades ago. In a recent article Kath Weston (1998) argues that there exists a forgotten legacy of sexuality within the social sciences, in psychology, sociology, anthropology, which "intimates that the present resurgence of interest in the topic represents something more than an abrupt enlightenment or a newfound 'openness' toward controversial issues" (ibid.: 3). Since sexuality is never a topic per se but is embedded in every aspect of social life and cannot be separated "from history, 'class', 'race', or a host of other relations" (ibid.: 4), the study of social relations, regardless of whether the focus is on kinship, economy, or the ritual, entails a study on sexuality. At the same time the latter cannot be studied on its own because "sexuality as a domain of social interest and concern is produced by society in complex ways. It is a result of diverse social practices that give meaning to human activities, of social definitions and self-definitions, of struggles between those who have the power to define and those who resist. Sexuality is not a given. It is a product of negotiation, struggle and human agency" (Weeks 2000: 129)<sup>1</sup>.

The difference between past and recent research on sexuality lies on the way of examining its subject. While in the past sexuality was considered to be a natural phenomenon "the most basic, the most natural thing about us, the truth at the heart of our being" (Weeks

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<sup>1</sup> The relation of sexuality with other parameters of life and the need to be examined in conjunction with them was expressed by anthropologists as well. For example, Ellen Ross and Rayna Rapp wrote that "Sex cannot be studied as a series of 'acts'; nor should the sexual component in all social relations be ignored. ... Family and kinship systems, communities, and large-scale institutional and informal forces are interdependent contexts for shaping sexuality. The power of each in relation to all others to provide the meaning and control of sexuality shifts with historical time" (1983: 68). In a similar manner Pat Caplan argued that, "Yet while we in the West may have a concept of sexuality as something separate from reproduction, from marriage and so forth, it is really not possible to analyze sexuality without reference to the economic, political, and cultural matrix within which it is embedded" (1987: 24).

2000: 128), recent approaches assume that sexuality is a social and historical construct. They contest the universality of the hetero/homo divide, demonstrate the historical and cultural specificity of terms such as ‘homosexual’, ‘heterosexual’, ‘lesbian’, ‘gay’, and try to link the study of sexuality to various aspects of social life. The result is that nowadays sexuality has begun to be used as a lens to focus on different topics ranging from the definition of gender and identity formation, to an exploration of kinship and family relations, to work arrangements and uses of space. In the present chapter I am interested in the changing approaches on sexuality throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century paying specific attention to research on female same-sex desires. Moreover, I focus on the contribution of anthropology on ongoing debates on gender, sexuality, identity, and desire and present recent anthropological studies of erotic relationships among women.

### ***Research on Sexuality***

According to John Gagnon and Richard Parker in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early years of the present “sexology was the revolutionary attempt of a relatively small number of researchers and activists to bring sexuality under the control of what was then understood as ‘science’ ” (1995: 3). New ideas on the nature of the sexual along with advice on matters of public policy together with advice of a more personal nature were spread throughout the European continent and co-existed with former religious discourses and practices which had constituted the sexual in earlier times. These new views of sexuality were often proposed “as modes of opposition to what was experienced as the repressive practices and doctrines of the Victorian period. Not only was sexuality an exemplary function it was an exemplary mode of social resistance among avant-garde groups” (ibid.: 5). The theoretical roots of a homosexual identity are to be found in that period encapsulated “in the variant efforts of the early sexologists, to capture the essence of that mysterious but all-powerful force of sex by categorizing its diverse manifestations and thus

attempting to make sense of its incessant flux” (Weeks 1987: 35). Between 1864 and 1879 Karl Heinrich Ulrichs published twelve volumes on homosexuality, a term coined by K. M. Kertbeny in 1869 in his effort to devise a more scientific and neutral description of a sexual condition <sup>2</sup>, while shortly after Richard von Krafft-Ebing published his *Psychopathia Sexualis* which went through various ever-expanding editions from 1886 to 1903. His success encouraged many others; between 1898 and 1908 there were over 1000 publications on homosexuality alone. At the heart of the work of these pioneering sexologists was the firm belief that underlying the diversity of individual experiences and social effects was a complex natural process which needed to be understood in all its forms. This endeavor demanded in the first place a major effort in the classification and definition of sexual pathologies. Secondly, this concentration on the ‘perverse’, the ‘abnormal’ cast new light on the ‘normal’. “Just as homosexuality was defined as a sexual condition peculiar to some people but not others in this period, so the concept of heterosexuality was invented to describe ‘normality’, a normality circumscribed by a founding belief in the sharp distinctions between the sexes and the assumption that gender identity (to be a man or a woman) and sexual identity were necessarily linked through the naturalness of heterosexual object choice” (ibid.: 35). In that sense homosexual behaviour had always to be explained as a deviation from a norm of sexual behaviour, while the homosexual came to be perceived as a type of person who held specific characteristics transculturally and transhistorically.

In regard to same-sex desires and practices among women, the latter were to be observed in Europe long before they became a topic of investigation for the sexologists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Martha Vicinus (1993) argues that during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries there were four forms of female same-sex desire to be looked at; transvestites –women who appeared in men’s clothes, thus adopting a temporary, if bold, seizing of opportunity-, women who either appeared ‘mannish’ or continued to cross-dress after the wars were over, ‘free women’ who

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Heinrich Ulrich invented the term ‘uranian’ embracing thus the idea of a third sex with a woman’s

seemed to choose a flagrantly varied sexuality, and last, women who formed ‘romantic friendships’. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century appeared the cross-dressed masculine woman, the ‘mannish lesbian’, whose primary emotional and probably also sexual commitment was to women. Vicinus argues that this woman became the identified deviant ‘invert’ in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century work of such sexologists as Kraft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, and Sigmund Freud, while at the same time both romantic friendships and passing women continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century <sup>3</sup>. “Did the doctors invent or merely describe the ‘mannish lesbian?’” (Newton 1984: 558). It seems that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and before, individual women passed as men by dressing and acting like them for a variety of economic, sexual, and adventure-seeking reasons and that it was only in the last years of the century that cross-dressing was increasingly associated with ‘sexual inversion’ by the medical profession. Sexologists like Richard von Kraft Ebbing and Havelock Ellis did not so much define a lesbian identity as they described and categorized what they saw about them. What they did was to confirm the long-standing representation of women’s social transgression as both the symptom and the cause of their sexual transgression, with the modification that long-familiar descriptions of deviant sexual activity were now labeled innate characteristics, rather than immoral choices. Yet, as Lisa Duggan observes during the same period, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century- beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, women began to feel their erotic desire for other women as a fundamental component of their sense of self, marking them as erotically different from most

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mind in a man’s body (Plummer 1998: 606).

<sup>3</sup> There is a dispute regarding the date of the emergence of the modern lesbian identity. Randolph Trumbach (1994) argues that the modern lesbian role emerged between 1750 and 1840 and that it has been part of the history of the modern western gender system which (with minor local variations) was to be found everywhere in northwestern Europe and North America after 1700. In contrast, Carroll Smith Rosenberg (1975) holds that the lesbian role did not exist in early 19<sup>th</sup> century America, while the development of a lesbian role by the sexologists changed the perception of ‘romantic friendships’ among women between 1870 and 1936. Similarly, Lillian Faderman (1991) argues that the modern lesbian role emerged due to increasing economic opportunities for women in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the redefinition by sexologists of female friendship as sexual perversion between 1896 and 1916.

other women. “ ‘Lesbian’ was just such a bitterly contested identity at the turn of the century, as new stories of lesbian life and experience developed at the changing nexus of gender identity and sexuality. The content of the identities of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ shifted from their Victorian to their modern configurations, and the heterosexual/homosexual polarity emerged as a newly central preoccupation of gendered stories of identity” (1993: 794). The figure of the ‘mannish lesbian’ was a representation used by sexologists and others yet at the same time was “a self-represented historical subject who was attacked for what she embodied: her rejection of the feminine body and the maternal body for herself” (ibid.: 810)<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, in accordance with John D’Emilio (1983a) who compares the finding of ‘identity’ to discovering a map to explore a new country, and Jeffrey Weeks who comments on the paradox of the sexological endeavour –“It not only sought to regulate through naming; it also provided the springboard for self-definition and individual and collective resistance” (1987: 38)-, Lisa Duggan argues that the emerging of new narratives of lesbian identity shaped new ways of living for some women, at the same time as new material possibilities and social positions outside the kin-based family also came into being at the turn of the century.

The assumption that homosexuality is a distinct condition which can be described, analyzed, and explained and that the homosexual is a specific type of person with a fixed identity prevailed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the subsequent question on the causes of

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<sup>4</sup> Esther Newton writes that from about 1900 on, the ‘mannish lesbian’ became the public symbol of the new social/sexual category ‘lesbian’. In her opinion, Radclyffe Hall and other women who belonged to the second generation of New Women like Margaret Sanger, Isadora Duncan, Gertrude Stein, Natalie Barney, “embraced, sometimes with ambivalence, the image of the mannish lesbian and the discourse of the sexologists about inversion primarily because they desperately wanted to break out of the asexual model of romantic friendship” (1984: 560). The term ‘New Woman’ refers to a cohort of middle and upper class American women born between the late 1850s and the early 1900s, who were educated, ambitious, and most frequently single (Smith-Rosenberg 1989).

homosexuality dominated research on sexuality and same-sex desire <sup>5</sup>. Yet, “The really interesting issue is not whether there is a biological or psychological propensity that distinguishes those who are sexually attracted to people of the same gender, from those who are not ... . More fundamental are the meanings these propensities acquire, however or whyever they occur, the social categorizations that attempt to demarcate the boundaries of meanings, and their effect on collective attitudes and individual sense of the self” (Weeks 1998b: 137). Among the first published works in this direction was Mary McIntosh’s article “The Homosexual Role” which appeared in 1968. McIntosh draws our attention to the fact that one should see homosexuals as a social category rather than medical or psychiatric, and underlines “that the homosexual role does not exist in many societies, that it only emerged in England towards the end of the seventeenth century, and that, although the existence of the role in modern America appears to have had some effect on the distribution of homosexual behaviour, such behaviour is far from being monopolized by persons who play the role of the homosexual” (reprinted in 1996: 40). McIntosh’s influential essay marks an essential shift in research on sexuality. “Already within a decade of the McIntosh essay appearing, it was becoming very clear that to understand homosexuality we had to understand the construction of sexuality as a whole –hence the appeal of Foucault’s own introductory essay on *The History of Sexuality* to many of us interested in exploring the history of homosexuality. If the homosexual condition was an invention of history, so too was heterosexuality and ‘sexuality’ itself, constituted in large part from a complexity of relations: between men and women, adults and children, the family and the social, as well as the ‘perverse implantation’. One fact

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<sup>5</sup> An account of research on sexuality throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century lies far beyond the scope of this thesis. Sexology, psychoanalysis and sociology were the disciplines that were mainly involved in this enterprise. Yet, if someone wanted to describe this endeavor succinctly they could refer to Edward Laumann’s and John Gagnon’s remark that the understanding of human sexuality during the scientific era has often been a history of conflicts between different interpretations of the same sets of facts, i.e. between instinct and drive theories which have their roots in either pure biological or mixed bio-social explanations and pure socio-cultural theories of human sexual conduct (1995: 183-189).

was becoming increasingly clear: understanding heterosexuality was the key to understanding homosexuality” (Weeks 1998b: 144). According to John Gagnon and Richard Parker it was by the middle of the 1960s that the sexological paradigm according to which sex was a neutral force embedded in the individual, which existed in opposition to civilization, culture, or society, and which was embedded in the assumption that there are fundamental differences between the sexuality of women and men, was strongly criticized. Within sex research “the first step was the reformulation of the general body of knowledge about sexuality within a constructionist framework that emphasized the similar character of that conduct as well as the culturally and historically specific character of the study of sexual conduct” (Gagnon and Parker 1995: 8).

Carole Vance writes that in opposition to essentialism which argues that human behaviour is ‘natural’, predetermined by genetic, biological, or physiological mechanisms and thus not subject to change “social construction theory in the field of sexuality proposed an extremely outrageous idea. It suggested that one of the last remaining outposts of the ‘natural’ in our thinking was fluid and changeable, the product of human action and history rather than the invariant result of the body, biology, or an innate sex drive” (1989: 13). The social construction theory of sexuality underlined that “although we can name specific physical actions like anal sex, heterosexual intercourse, kissing, fellatio, or masturbation, it is clear that the social and personal meanings attached to each of these acts in terms of sexual identity and sexual community have varied historically” (Vance 1984a: 8), and from culture to culture, while its chief virtue lies not so much in its answers but in its commitment “to asking the questions and to challenging assumptions which impair our ability to even imagine these questions” (Vance 1989: 15). Although the intellectual history of social constructionist theory “is complex and drew on developments in several disciplines: social interactions, labeling theory, and deviance in sociology, social history, labor studies, women’s history and Marxist history, symbolic anthropology, cross-cultural work on sexuality, gender in anthropology”, and “in addition, theorists in many disciplines responded to new questions raised by feminist

and lesbian/gay scholarship concerning gender and identity” (Vance 1991: 876), two things were of particular importance for its emergence and diffusion; the disconnection of sexuality from gender and the disconnection of sexuality from identity.

### ***The Disconnection of Sexuality from Gender and Identity***

In her account on feminist ethnography from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, Kamala Visweswaran holds that anthropology is the discipline that contributed most to the account of gender and the contestation of Victorian notions of sexual difference according to which men and women were characterized by their biology, which in turn determined their social roles. She introduces Elsie Clews Parsons (1906) as a transitional figure who recognized the variety of roles women played throughout history and cultures, but did not come to the conclusion that different sex roles might be enabled by different cultures as did Margaret Mead some years later in 1935. According to Visweswaran, Mead was the first one who used her ethnography to argue that there is a distinction between biological sex and sociologically distinct gender roles; “many, if not all, of the personality traits which we have called masculine or feminine are as lightly linked to sex as are the clothing, the manners, and the form of head-dress that a society at a given period assigns to either sex” (Mead 1935: 280, quoted in Visweswaran 1997: 601). In the years to come, women anthropologists tried to provide us with “a sustained analysis of gender symbols and sexual stereotypes” (Moore 1988: 13), while through their ethnographies they sought to understand the structural symbolic position of women in society and to answer the question as to whether ‘women are universally the second sex or not’ (Strathern 1972, Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974, Ortner 1974, Reiter 1975, Weiner 1976). In an article of 1975 Gayle Rubin coined the term the ‘sex/gender system’, for lack of a more elegant term as she wrote. “As preliminary definition, a ‘sex/gender system’ is the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are

satisfied” (1975: 159) <sup>6</sup>. The differentiation of biological sex from gender allowed feminist anthropologists to emphasize that “biological differences cannot be said to determine gender constructs, and, as a result, there can be no unitary or essential meaning attributable to the category ‘woman’ or the category ‘man’ ” (Moore 1994b: 814). The outcome was that the assumption according to which women shared universally the same experiences on the grounds of their common sex was heavily criticized, while attention was given to the construction of gender in different cultures. In 1984 Gayle Rubin, drawing on the remark that lesbians are not only oppressed in terms of the oppression of women but are also oppressed as “queers and perverts, by the operation of sexual, not gender, stratification”, argued further that “it is essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to reflect more accurately on their separate social existence” 1984: 33) <sup>7</sup>. According to Carole Vance this perspective suggested a novel framework; “sexuality and gender are separate systems which are interwoven at many points. Although members of a culture experience this interweaving as natural, seamless, and organic, the points of connection vary historically and cross-culturally”

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<sup>6</sup> In 1987 Sylvia Yanagisako and Jane Collier went a step further and remarked that both sex and gender (rather than gender alone) are socially constructed, each in relation to the other, and thus contested the argument that “cross-cultural variations in gender categories and inequalities are merely diverse elaborations and extensions of the same natural fact, namely, the universal difference between men and women” (1987b: 14). What they did was to question the supposition that “the biologically given difference in the roles of men and women in sexual reproduction lies at the core of the cultural organization of gender” (ibid.: 48-49). A similar remark was also made by Shelly Errington (1990) who discerned between Sex (upper case), sex (lower case), and gender, defining ‘Sex’ as a particular construct of human bodies prevalent in Euro-America, which influences the way anthropologists understand the sex/gender distinction, while sex means the physical nature of human bodies.

<sup>7</sup> In 1984 Gayle Rubin was criticized for moving away from her former position where she had claimed that female oppression and women’s subordination are to be attributed to the existence of a ‘sex/gender system’. However, in a discussion she had later with Judith Butler she stated that “I wanted to be able to think about oppression based on sexual conduct or illicit desire that was distinct from gender oppression (although not necessarily unrelated or in opposition to it)” (Rubin with Butler 1994: 90), and continues, “I never claimed that sexuality and gender were always unconnected, only that their relationships are situational, not universal, and must be determined in particular situations” (ibid.: 97).

(1991: 876). The differentiation of sexuality from gender and the shift of interest to the articulation between these two concepts enabled the contestation of the idea that gender is expressed through sexuality and that each sex has a specific sexuality. What is of interest is “the articulation between specific features of each system, namely how the configurations of the sexual system bear on the experience of being female and, conversely, how the definitions of gender resonate with and are reflected in sexuality” (Vance 1984: 9) <sup>8</sup>.

Pat Caplan (1987: 2) writes that in modern western society one’s sexual orientation is a very important part of one’s identity, while people are encouraged to see themselves in terms of their sexuality which is interpreted as the core of the self. For the flourishing of a social constructionist approach to sexuality the disconnection of sexuality from identity was of significant importance. This disconnection is to be largely attributed to historians who worked on the examination of male same-sex practices in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and America (Katz 1976 and 1983, Weeks 1977 and 1981), on sociologists who contested the instinct and drive theories (Gagnon and Simon 1967, Simon and Gagnon 1967), on Foucault (1978) who underlined the discursive nature of sexuality, and on anthropologists who spoke of the variant meanings of same-sex practices in other parts of the world (Carrier 1976, Herdt 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1987, Whitehead 1981, Shepherd 1987). These researchers have questioned the application of a homosexual identity cross-culturally and transhistorically, have argued that the term ‘homosexual’ is a rather recent innovation and not a universal term, and have suggested that same sexual practices acquire a different meaning in other cultures and

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<sup>8</sup> In a forthcoming paper David Valentine argues that although the separation of gender from sexuality has been an important theoretical and political innovation, this analytic separation has drawn attention away from how gender and sexuality are closely intertwined. He holds that the term ‘gay’ has come to be developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a concept which means, implicitly, gender-appropriate men or women who have sex with, or desire, other gender-appropriate men and women. The history of the term ‘gay’ is marked by a separation of experiences of sexuality and gender identity in both mainstream cultural, political, and theoretical conceptions, while at the same time is a history which hides other organizations of gender and sexuality and resists a class, race, and cultural analysis.

historical periods. Yet, the use of the term of 'social construction' by constructionist writers obscures the fact that they have used it in different ways. Carole Vance argues that at minimum all construction approaches adopt the view that physically identical sexual acts may have varying social significance and subjective meaning depending on how they are defined and understood in different cultures and historical periods; a step further, even the direction of sexual desire itself, for example, object choice or hetero/homosexuality, is not intrinsic or inherent in the individual but is constructed; last, the most radical one maintains that sexual impulse itself is constructed by culture and history ( 1989: 18-19).

Apart from the work of historians, sociologists, and anthropologists who questioned the existence of a homosexual identity in other times and cultures, an ever growing number of texts, both self-reflective and academic, appeared in Anglo-Saxon countries through the 80's, which contested the existence of a unifying gay and lesbian identity and focused instead on the differences among gay and lesbian people <sup>9</sup> (for example, research on female same-sex desires focused upon the way a lesbian identity is articulated in different social, cultural, and historical contexts Schuyf 1992, Jeness 1992, Newton 1993). The trend of the deconstruction of a lesbian and gay identity reached its peak in the context of 'queer theory' which in the late 1980's offered a meeting point for all who came to criticize identity from many different directions; "those who believe that identity politics mute internal differences within the group along racial, class, gender, or other lines of cleavage; those who believe that subjectivities are always multiple; and those who are simply suspicious of categorization as inherently constraining" (Epstein 1996: 156). Queer theory called into question the possibility of the existence of a homosexual identity and asserted that such an identity does not exist except in

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<sup>9</sup> Steve Epstein (1996: 151) remarks that with the rise, in the early 1980s, of the lesbian and gay movement the academic study of sexuality increasingly became the study on homosexuality. Apart from, this three other interconnected political and intellectual movements linked to the first one, namely sexual revolution, feminism, and civil rights/race-minority action have been both stage setting for and symbiotic with new theory and research on gender, sexuality, and the body (Di Leonardo and Lancaster 1997).

the context of compulsory heterosexual rules<sup>10</sup>. Neither gender, nor sexuality are able to explain the existence of such an identity which is to be attributed to the binary system, the homo-hetero divide which has pervaded Western thought since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. While refusing to adopt a fixed lesbian or gay identity theorists working in this context prefer to use the term 'queer' for their self-identification since 'queer' defines itself by its difference from hegemonic models of gender and sexuality. In this sense they tend to identify themselves along axes of oppression stemming from compulsory sexual norms rather than from gender issues<sup>11</sup>. In their reading of the 'canonical' texts of queer theory, the ones written by Judith Butler (1990), Eve Kosofsky Segwick (1990) and Andrew Parker (1991), Arlene Stein and Ken Plummer (1996) end up seeing the following points as the hallmarks of queer theory: a conceptualization of sexuality in the form of sexual power embodied in different levels of social life, expressed discursively and enforced through boundaries and binary divides; the problematization of sexual and gender categories and of identities in general; a rejection of civil-rights strategies based on identity politics in favor of an anti-assimilationist politics; a willingness to interrogate areas which normally would not be seen as the terrain of sexuality,

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<sup>10</sup> In his critique on social constructionist theory on same-sex desires Steven Seidman argues that "Both essentialist and social constructionist versions of lesbian/gay theory in the 1970s and 1980s have related stories of the coming of age of a collective homosexual subject" (1995: 126). In contrast, "Queer theorists have criticized the view of homosexuality as a property of an individual or group, whether that identity is explained as natural or social in origin. They argue that this perspective leaves in place the heterosexual/homosexual binary as a master framework for constructing the self, sexual knowledge, and social institutions" (ibid.: 126) and propose "an analysis of the hetero/homosexual figure as a power/knowledge regime that shapes the ordering of desires, behaviors, and social institutions, and social relations –in a word, the constitution of self and society" (ibid.: 128).

<sup>11</sup> Women working in the field of queer theory define themselves as members of a group of both women and men who are harassed and excluded primarily because of a sexual orientation found deviant by many in the mainstream, and insist they are distinct from those women who identify primarily along gender lines, that is, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual, celibate -women oppressed and excluded primarily because of being female in a patriarchal culture.

and to conduct queer ‘readings’ of apparently heterosexual or non-sexualized texts <sup>12</sup>. The key notion of queer theory is that it normalizes homosexuality by making heterosexuality deviant.

In relation to female same-sex desires women academics like Eve Kosofsky Segwick (1990), Judith Butler (1990, 1991, 1993), Teresa de Lauretis (1987, 1988, 1994) who operate in the context of queer theory “have each worked against reification of lesbians, toward views of lesbianism as a critical site of gender deconstruction rather than as unitary experience with a singular political meaning” (Phelan 1993: 766). Yet, these theorists have often adopted different approaches to the issue of identity. Eve Kosofsky Segwick hesitates to distinguish between sex and gender or biology and culture and suggests that sexuality more than gender, occupies “the polar position of the relational, the social/symbolic, the constructed, the variable, the relational” (1990: 29). Therefore she explicitly contrasts a ‘coming out’ which leads to the denial of the homo/hetero divide, with the affirmation of lesbian and gay identities based on gender. For Judith Butler (1990, 1991) identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes and it is in that sense that a lesbian identity can serve not only to affirm but also to constrain, legislate, determine, or specify one’s identity in ways that support the categories of homophobic and heterosexist thought. She argues for subverting both gender and sexual identity by destabilizing the categories that make them up. Using performance theory she maintains that this will be done in recognizing that ‘gender’ is a kind of imitation for which there is no original and that sex and gender achieve their supposed ‘naturalness’ through social performance and psychic scripting. “If gender is a drag, and if it is an imitation that regularly produces the ideal it attempts to approximate, that gender is a performance that produces the illusion of an inner sex or essence or psychic gender core”

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Warner gives us a glowing account on what ‘being queer’ means writing that it means to understand one’s stigmatization as connected “with gender, the family, notions of individual freedom, the state, public speech, consumption and desire, nature and culture, maturation, reproductive politics, racial and national fantasy, class identity, truth and trust, censorship, intimate life and social display, terror and violence, health care, and deep cultural norms about the bearing of the body” (1993: xiii) and to struggle against all these issues, all the time.

(1991: 317)<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, Teresa de Lauretis (1988) strives to show how gender should not be considered as the prime focus of difference. She argues that neither race, nor gender, nor homosexual difference constitute an identity by themselves because what cannot be ignored is the crucial significance of the word ‘also’. Henrietta Moore argues that “De Lauretis is concerned with an ‘I’ understood as a complicated field of competing subjectivities and competing identities. This ‘I’ is most certainly a concrete individual and one who is engaged in relations with others. Such a view of subjectivity does not privilege gender over all other forms of difference, but because of its stress on intersubjectivity and social relations it is perfectly compatible with a notion of embodied subjectivity, as well as ideas about performance” (1994a: 26). For de Lauretis “Sexual identity is neither innate nor simply acquired, but dynamically (re)structured by forms of fantasy private and public, conscious and unconscious, which are culturally available and historic specific” (de Lauretis 1994: xix).

Yet, despite its major theoretical contribution, queer theory has been criticized for utopianism since “the reality for many people much of the time is that their sexualities remain remarkably constant and stable over time” (Edwards 1998: 472), and for disregarding the political, social, material, everyday contexts in which people live their lives. Therefore, Steve Epstein comments that “the challenge for queer studies will be to demonstrate the links concretely in the case of sexuality –to identify the precise ways in which sexual meanings, categories, and identities are woven into the fabric of society and help give shape to diverse

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<sup>13</sup> As Henrietta Moore notes, the inversion of the relationship between sex and gender, where gender becomes the discursive origin of sex had been suggested by a number of theorists before Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble* (1990), but when this inversion is referred to in contemporary literature, Butler is most often cited as its point of origin; “gender performativity as a theory is not only concerned with how one enacts a gender within a specific set of regulatory practices, but is particularly focused on the disjunction between the exclusive categories of the sex/gender system and the actuality or ambiguity and multiplicity in the way gender is enacted and subjectivities are formed” (Moore 1999: 155).

institutions, practices, and beliefs” (1996: 157)<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, it was criticized for its lack to incorporate desires, needs, and fears of specific individuals. As Henrietta Moore writes, “The boundary between sex and gender may be unstable, but that does not mean that they can be collapsed into each other. We may be able to enter into multiple constructions of gender and sexuality; we may be able to play with our gender identities and our sexual practices and resist dominant social constructions, but we should not confuse the instability of sexual signifiers with the imminent disappearance of women and men themselves, as we know them physically, symbolically, and socially” (1999: 168-169). The demand expressed by Joan Nestle in 1987 to put the body, its construction, and its desires back into history is being currently reiterated since as Biddy Martin demonstrates “there were/are no questions of desire that are not always questions about race, about familial-racial loyalties or transgression, about class- and race-appropriate femininities, masculinities, erotic positions and roles” (1992, reprinted in 1998: 117).

### ***Anthropology and the Study of Same-Sex Desires***

From an anthropological perspective, references on same-sex desires in other parts of the world were rare and isolated till the 70s because as Weston notes “before ethnographers could set out to remap the globe along the contours of transgendered practices and same-sex sexuality, homosexuality had to become a legitimate object of anthropological inquiry” (1993a: 341). It was under the impact of the social constructionist school of the 1970s and the influence of the work of John D’ Emilio (1983a), Mary McIntosh (1968), Jeffrey Weeks

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<sup>14</sup> Recent research in queer studies tries to compensate for former omissions. In their account on two lecture series on queer theory which took place in London in the late 90’s Clare Hemmings and Felicity Grace point to the fact that recent research takes into account everyday experiences and practices “that form our, for the most part, mundane queer lives” (1999: 392).

(1981, 1985), as well as the work of Michel Foucault (1978)<sup>15</sup> and their assertions that sexuality is neither natural nor given but is culturally constructed and should be examined each time with regard to its social and cultural context, that same-sex desires motivated anthropological interest. Yet, and despite the fact that anthropologists are supposed to be better equipped than other social scientists to proceed in a critical approach of Western notions of sexuality and to call its natural, biological status into question due to their contact with other cultures, beliefs, and ideas, Carole Vance argues that anthropological approaches to sexuality remained remarkably consistent from 1920 to 1990. She suggests that anthropological endeavors on the subject of sexuality during that period fell into what she calls the ‘cultural influence model’ according to which the role of culture is crucial in shaping sexual behavior and attitudes while at the same time the bedrock of sexuality is assumed to be universal and biologically determined; “the cultural influence model recognizes variations in the occurrence of sexual behavior and in cultural attitudes which encourage or restrict behavior, but not in the meaning of the behavior itself. In addition, anthropologists working within this framework accept without question the existence of universal categories like heterosexual and homosexual, male and female sexuality, and sex drive” (1991: 879). In her review on lesbian/gay studies within anthropology Kath Weston draws on similar conclusions, and remarks that till recently the majority of anthropologists working in the area of sexuality “find themselves engaged in a form of ethnocartography, looking for evidence of same-sex sexuality and gender ambiguity in ‘other’ societies” (1993: 340-341) but never contesting the analytical value of the concepts they use.

By the 1990’s ethnographic analyses of homosexual behavior and identity, ‘gender bending’, lesbian and gay male communities, transgressive sexual practices, and

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<sup>15</sup> Especially, Foucault’s work (1978) was of particular interest. Rosalind Morris argues that Foucault’s version of social constructionist theory found enthusiastic reception in anthropological circles because, “His thesis on the discursive nature of sexuality responds to the problem of relation [between sex and gender] inverting earlier

homosociality were flourishing. Among such kinds of work are to be mentioned homosexual encounters in public places (Humphreys 1970), homosexual behavior among men in Mexico (Carrier 1976), a lesbian community in the USA (Wolf 1979), institutionalized homosexuality in Northern America (Whitehead 1981, Callender and Kochems, 1987, Blackwood 1984, Williams 1986, 1992), male transsexuals *xanith* in Oman (Wilkan 1977, 1982), female impersonators in America (Newton 1972), ritualized homosexuality in Melanesia (Herdt 1981, 1984a, 1984b 1987), work on Chinese sisterhoods –women who refused marriage and formed small groups or sisterhoods, some of which were based on same-sex love relationships (Sankar 1986), ‘mummy-baby’ relations in South Africa, based on a ‘traditional’ practice of effective relations between older and younger women (Gay 1986), a lesbian-feminist community in New Zealand (Dominy 1986), male transvestites *hijras* in India (Nanda 1986, 1990), lesbians in Mombasa, Kenya, who may or may not also be heterosexually married (Shepherd 1987), cross-dressing women performers of the Japanese Takarazuku Review (Robertson 1989, 1992), sexual relations among black working-class women in Suriname (Wekker 1993), male transvestites in Samoa *fa’ afafine* (Mageo 1992), gay men and lesbians in South Africa (Gevisser and Cameron eds. 1995). Despite the ever-growing number of studies, research on same-sex desires within anthropology has been confined to just “hearing homosexual voices” (Weston 1991: 344) for a long period of time<sup>16</sup>, while the question “What is to count as homosexuality, gender, and sexual activity?” (ibid.: 347) has been only lately addressed<sup>17</sup>. During the 90s a number of studies on same-sex

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feminist teleologies in which sex was defined as the ground on which culture elaborates gender and replacing it with a notion of gender as the discursive origin of sex” (1995: 568-569).

<sup>16</sup> In 1986 Evelyn Blackwood commented that even though recent years have seen a burgeoning of studies on homosexuality in the social sciences “it has been one of the failings of anthropology that the field itself has developed no adequate theory regarding the cultural construction of homosexual behavior” (1986, reprinted in 1993: 328).

<sup>17</sup> Evelyn Blackwood, for example, argues that we cannot assume the existence of an essential sexuality, erotics, or identity for ‘lesbian’ women worldwide; “They are no simple answers, particularly when identities of indigenous women who engage in same-sex sexuality or transgendered practices began to reflect a growing

desires has begun to appear which focus on terminology (Parker 1991, Tan 1995, Lang 1999), kinship (Weston 1991), migration and cultural identities (Newton 1993), community formation (Kennedy 1993), commodification (Weston 1993), gender power (Lewin 1993a, Lancaster 1995, de Zalduondo and Bernhard 1995), the relation of gender to sexuality (Kulick 1998), identity (Wekker 1999, Wieringa 1999). These studies deconstruct the notion of homosexuality as a transhistorical and transcultural concept and present with detailed accounts of the interrelationships of same-sex desires with various aspects of social life, i.e. family, kinship, work, migration, consumption, economy, politics.

Kath Weston maintains that, the recent deconstruction of homosexuality as an analytic category had the impact of transforming the branch of gay studies within the domain of anthropology from an area which is conventionally supposed to deal with homosexual practices on a universal level into something which holds many of the characteristics of the so-named queer studies. “Rather than fostering a preoccupation with issues of visibility or patrolling the border between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, the best work in this field [lesbian/gay studies in the domain of anthropology] uses ethnographic material in classic relativist fashion to denaturalize Anglo-European conceptions of gender and sexuality” (1993a: 367). She argues that, it is in this sense that queer studies may provide a better context for the examination of homosexuality on a transcultural level than a more traditional anthropological theoretical one. Yet, according to Henrietta Moore anthropological theory on sex, gender, and sexuality differentiates itself from queer theory to the extent that “it has resolutely refused to confuse sex, sexuality, and gender. In fact, it is in the gaps between these terms that anthropologists work to demonstrate that dominant Western assumptions about the interrelations between these terms are sometimes inappropriate for studying sex/gender

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awareness and acceptance of the Euro-American notion of ‘lesbian’ as a woman who loves women” (1996: 198). The same holds true even for research conducted in Western societies, since as Leila Rupp (1996) comments there is no agreed-upon definition of a ‘lesbian’ and therefore it is difficult to answer the question of ‘who counts and who does not’.

systems cross-culturally” (1999: 158). If anthropological discourse on these issues is to benefit from the theoretical assumptions of queer theory it needs to take into account the relationships between difference and normativity, society and individual, history and its transcendence. Rosalind Morris criticizes queer theory and theories of performativity for ignoring sociocultural contexts and attributing a false resistance to ambiguity. She observes that “The anthropology of gender that is emerging under the influence of performance theory is concerned with the relationships and the dissonance between the exclusive categories of normative sex/gender systems and the actuality of ambiguity, multiplicity, abjection, and resistance within these same systems” (1995: 570). Nevertheless, “The issue of how gendered subjectivity is related to institutional politics has been difficult for the theory of performativity to address. Beyond studies of ritualized homosexuality in age-graded societies, little anthropological literature has explored the connections between sexual practice and political process” (ibid.: 582). Same-sex desire cannot be perceived as a matter of identity but rather as embodiment and subjectivity which should be investigated in its socio-cultural context and with relation to issues of power. Or, as Henrietta Moore notes “The more pressing problem with regard to gender, the body and sexual difference is to work out what bearing social and cultural discourses have on individual experience” (1994a: 16).

In their introduction of the co-edited volume *Female Desires. Same-Sex Relations and Transgender Practices Across Cultures* –a recent collection of essays on transgendered females and same-sex desire among women in Asia, Latin America, Native North America, and Africa- Saskia Wieringa and Evelyn Blackwood (1999) remark that if constructionism has made it possible to see the historicity of the body and sexuality, it is now essential to critically rethink the relationship between the body and the social; “Patterns of desires are always mediated by the specific sociocultural sites in which they appear, but consideration needs to be given to the embodied nature of social structures. Models in which the body and the social are seen as processes engaged in interactions seem to offer the most fruitful way of viewing the link between them” (1999: 17-18). It is under the impact of the preceding

theoretical influences that I aim to present stories of erotic relationships among women in contemporary Greece in the framework of an ethnography that hopes to “reveal the everyday life of sexuality and power relations, including the conditions under which passing and emergence occur” (Herdt 1994: 81). While contesting the existence of a lesbian identity and arguing that same-sex desires and practices in Greece is not a site for critical deconstruction of gender, I am interested in the lived realities of these women and their narrations on bodies, desires and selves in relation to the specific social context in which they appear, namely the context of Greek society in the 90s.

## **Chapter II**

### **Ethnography**

#### **“A Western lesbian identity has not ‘caught on’ in Greece”**

*Everyone seems to overlook the fact that there are many Greek lesbians, they are everywhere, and belong to all social classes. They are housewives, schoolgirls, managers, reporters, artists, working girls, students, etc. They do not have a common dress code, neither a haircut, nor a style to make them recognizable. To be precise, Greek lesbians do not share anything in common apart from their love for their sex and their repression (to various degrees accordingly to class and age); in contrast to the rest of Europe, especially Northern Europe, where homosexual women are organized and have their own distinct culture.*

Eleni Tsaklari “Erotes Gynaikon” -“Women’s love”- in *Colt*, a Greek magazine

Since the beginning of the 80’s a limited number of articles have appeared in mainstream magazines in Greece that explicitly refer to the subject of female same-sex desires. In December 1982 the article “When Women Love Women” was published in the widely circulated women’s magazine *Gynaika* -“Woman”-, written by Anny Chera-Zimaraki. It consisted of three parts; the first was an interview with a group of ten women, aged 16 to 42, all members of the *Aftonomi Omada Omofilofilon Gynaikon* -“Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women”- which existed at that time in Athens. The second included interviews with women with same-sex desires who did not belong to lesbian groups, while the third part cited the opinions of three psychologists on the subject. The overall tone of the reporter’s approach seems to be friendly and positive towards the interviewed women:

*Aged from 16 to 42, pupils, students, and working women, the ten women I spoke with, one evening in November, had nothing to do with frenzied women. They were calm, good-looking, sweet, some of them were beautiful. They did not look different from heterosexual women. Some of them live with their families (the parents of four of them know that they are lesbians and they have accepted it), none has a child, and some of them were heterosexual in the past (p. 29).*

Whereas the subsequent opinions of the psychologists stress that “homosexuality is not a disease, but has a special position among unusual forms of sexual behavior” (p. 32). Another article of that period with the title “O Kindinos na Agapas Gynaika” -“The Danger of Loving a Woman”-, published in the newspaper *Elevtherotypia* -“Freedom of the Press”- on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1983, and written by the journalist Nikos Doukas, included a historical approach to the subject of female homosexuality in the West from Sappho till the present and a brief interview with members of two lesbian groups in Athens, the *Aftonomi Omada Omofilofilon Gynaikon* -“Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women”- and the *Omada*

*Lesviakis Ekfrasis* -“Group of Lesbian Expression”-. The article concludes as follows: “Although society still does not accept lesbians and social morals condemn them, the number of people who are willingly to listen to lesbian voices and are persuaded that sexual choices are not a perversion, ever increases”.

The friendly, although significantly rare, approach to the subject, which was present in articles published in the 80s, and which tried to negotiate a difficult topic in sober earnest, combining a theoretical/historical approach with interviews with same-sex desiring women, persisted in few of the articles published in newspapers and main stream magazines during the decade of the 90s, while the rest of similar publications presented it in the form of either ‘neutral’, non-contextualized life narrations, or exciting, titillating, sexual stories for immediate consumption. During the 90’s, magazines, TV guides, and newspapers, all seemed to be interested in the fashionable new topic <sup>1</sup>. However, one of the most characteristic feature of these articles is that their writers seem to re-discover the topic of female homosexuality over and over again, without ever trying to approach it from a historical /sociological perspective <sup>2</sup>, or to contextualize it in the structures of broader Greek society. During the same period, a limited number of TV shows on lesbianism began to appear on private TV channels <sup>3</sup>. As Eleni Tsaklari notes in her article in *COLT* (1995), after 1989 lesbianism

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<sup>1</sup> In appendix I (p.275) one can find a list of articles on female homosexuality published in mainstream magazines and newspapers during the 90s. Although the list is far from complete, it gives a picture of the way female homosexuality has been recently represented in Greece.

<sup>2</sup> A major exception to this overall tendency is the special edition “Ta Valkania ton ‘Straight’ ” - “Balkans of ‘Straight’ ” (11<sup>th</sup> May 1997) published in the newspaper *Kyriakatiki Elevantrotipia* –“Sunday Freedom of the Press”-. In a six-page article the writers present a comparative approach to homosexual movements, state laws on homosexuality, and specific cases in each of the Balkans; Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey, Bosnia.

<sup>3</sup> In relation to an ever growing number of TV talk shows on lesbians, gay men, transgenders, and bisexuals in the USA Joshua Gamson (1998) argues that talk shows are of political – social significance even if they seem totally deprived of it, because they are part of an ongoing cultural war over public space and public

emerged as a topic which ‘sells’ and therefore a number of journalists and reporters tried to include it in their articles, or TV shows. The overall tendency of this publicity in press and on TV was to reproduce heterosexual stereotypes according to which a woman becomes a lesbian after she has been sexually or psychologically abused by a man, however, the majority of them are supposed not to look female enough to attract a male gaze. The outcome is that female same-sex desires tend to remain nowadays as invisible as ever, since such reports and representations either reproduce mainstream opinions <sup>4</sup>, or interview exclusively four-five women, members of the same homosexual group, with the result that we read about the same people over and over again, often with different pseudonyms, or the whole issue is represented fragmentarily, in the form of personal accounts totally unrelated to a broader context.

In his interview in *Elevtheros Typos* -“Free Press”- (November 1993) the president of *Elliniki Omofilofili Koinotita* -“Hellenic Homosexual Community”- Vangelis Giannelos attributes the invisibility of female same-sex desiring women to the structures of Greek society; “Homosexual women in Greece are encircled by the traditional structures of Greek society which wants women to maintain a passive role. ... Female homosexuality is not recognized by the vast majority of Greek society. Many people think that female sexuality is

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participation. I suggest that the very limited number of TV shows on female same-sex desires in Greece does not allow for the application of such an argument in our case.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, the few ‘scientific’ reports on female same-sex desires reproduce to a great extent these stereotypes. In the interview she gave to the magazine *Paidi kai Neoi Goneis* -“Child and Young Parents”- (1996), the child-psychologist Marianna Lagoumidou argues that in cases where parents raise their children according to the gender roles of the opposite sex, there exists a greater possibility for their offspring to become homosexual. According to her opinion, although male and female hormones play a significant role in the development of sexual choices, the environment in which children grow up is even more important. Therefore, she stresses that children must grow up in a family environment where both father and mother are present, act out their roles successfully, and bring up their children according to their gender roles, boys as boys and girls as girls. In her book *Gay! Giati? Ta Aitia tis Omofilofilias* -“Gay! Why? The Causes of Homosexuality”-, published in 1996, she develops these ideas in full detail.

the natural outcome of a male presence. Therefore, they think of a relationship between two women more like a game than an essential relationship among two people". Anthropologists who have conducted fieldwork in Greece share the same opinion. According to Loizos and Papataxiarchis, the invisibility of female same-sex desires in Greece is to be attributed "to the linking of female sexuality, to a fertility which is so powerful that there can be no perceived need for women to 'express' their sexuality in contexts which cannot lead to procreation" (1991b: 229). James Faubion explains this same invisibility in terms of the prevalence of a traditional dimorphism of the sexual being in Greece. This dimorphism consists of the contrary characteristics which are supposed to be held by active men who penetrate, and passive women (or, in some cases, also men) who are penetrated; "Women are, by traditional definition, phallicly nonactive. Women may perhaps 'play' with one another. But they are without the single, crucial implement that could lend their sexual play genuine political import. Of no political consequence, sexual liaisons between women are traditionally not of any particular categorical consequence either" (1993: 221). It follows that an approach to erotic relationships among women cannot be separated from an examination on how gender, sexuality and the person are constructed in Greek society.

### ***Men and women: segregated, complementary, and ideally equal***

The presentation of Greece as a society where men and women live in segregated, mutually complementary, but ideally equal worlds is to be attributed largely to the first ethnographers studying Greek society in the 60s. "Ethnographers of Greece, pace Friedl (1962) and Campbell (1964), have been, until recently, almost entirely preoccupied with marriage and have analyzed a single idea of maleness and femaleness as expressed in the context of conjugal procreation" (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991a: 3). Because of the significance of marriage and kinship, Peter Loizos and Evthymios Papataxiarchis (1991a) have coined the term the '*domestic model of gender*' to describe a set of ideas about men and women in which married life can be depicted through what married people say about, and

what they do, in marriage. According to this model, kinship plays a crucial role in the definition of female and male identities. By this is meant that womanhood and manhood are expressed in terms of domestic kinship -i.e. women are perceived as ‘mothers’, ‘house-mistresses’, ‘wives’; men are perceived as ‘householders’ or ‘fathers’- and that gender attributes are linked to domestic kinship roles; womanhood means nurturing, cooking, cleaning, and manhood means providing for the household, representing or defending kinship loyalties. According to the same model, sexes are represented as being in a relationship of complementarity, mutual dependence, and ideal equality (ibid.: 7-8), while “full adult status for both men and women requires an indissoluble marriage, blessed with children” (Loizos 1994: 67). It is only within holy matrimony that most mature men and women may legitimately express their sexualities for the purposes of procreation and prolongation of kinship relations.

Jane Cowan (1990) draws our attention to the fact that gender has been an important issue in Greek ethnography, mainly because it is so deeply implicated in the moral values of ‘honor and shame’. It was at the beginning of the 1960’s when a number of British-trained anthropologists, who were conducting fieldwork in the Mediterranean basin, John Peristiany in Cyprus (1966), Pitt-Rivers in Andalusia (1966), John Campbell among the Sarakatsani in Northern Greece (1964, 1966), came to the conclusion that the values of ‘honor and shame’ were of significant importance in this part of the world. In his introduction in the edited volume *Honor and Shame. The Values of Mediterranean Society* (1966) John Peristiany declares that “Honor and shame are the constant preoccupations of individuals in small case, exclusive societies where face to face personal, as opposed to anonymous, relations are of paramount importance and where the social personality of the actor is as significant as his office ... When the individual is encapsulated in a social group an aspersion on his honor is an aspersion on the honor of his group. In this type of situation the behavior of the individual reflects that of his group to such an extent that, in his relations with other groups, the individual is forcibly cast in the role of his group’s protagonist” (ibid.: 11). The ‘honor and

shame' model implies men and women as sexual beings whose appropriate or inappropriate to their sex behavior has major implications for their personal and group's 'honor'. Pitt-Rivers writes that, in Andalusia, ethically valued for men is authority over family where the equivalent for women is sexual purity; "Restraint is the natural basis of sexual purity, just as masculinity is the natural basis of authority and the defense of family honor" (Pitt-Rivers 1966: 45). The connecting link between male virility and female sexual modesty is the stigma that female sexual immodesty can cause to male honor (Argyrou 1996: 158). Although these early pioneers were quite reluctant to argue for the uniformity of the Mediterranean on the grounds of the 'honor and shame' model and preferred to speak of a "Mediterranean world" and a "Mediterranean people" (de Pina-Cabral 1989), the model of 'honor and shame' was taken off by their American colleagues and became the cornerstone of the argument for the cultural unity of the Mediterranean basin on the basis of its relationship to sexuality and gender distinctions <sup>5</sup>. In 1985 David Gilmore argues that, "One specific domain of Mediterranean culture that seems to provide solid analytical analogies, despite some formal diversity, is that of male-female relations. ... Male and female are naturally distinguished in all societies, but in the Mediterranean area, this division is not only complementary, but also oppositional, creating a symbolic dialectic of sex" (ibid.: 1-2). He is one of the strongest supporters of the idea that Mediterranean unity "derives from the primordial values of honor and shame, and that these values are deeply tied up with sexuality and power, with masculinity and gender relations" (1987: 16) and cites as the probably most striking physical characteristic of Mediterranean community life "a rigid spatial and behavioral segregation of the sexes and the subsequent domestic division of labor" (ibid. 14). The idea of a

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<sup>5</sup> Not all anthropologists who argued for the cultural unity of the Mediterranean attribute it to the 'honor and shame' model. Jane Schneider (1971) argues that the cultural unity of the Mediterranean does have cultural unity and "derives from a particular set of ecological forces which have interacted to produce the codes of honor and shame" (ibid.: 2), while John Davis (1977) underlines that this unity is to be explained due to exchange, contact and intermarriage and stresses that it should not be taken for granted but tested through comparison and historical study.

‘Mediterranean culture’ exemplified in the ‘honor and shame’ model has been heavily criticized, because ‘honor and shame’ are complex notions which do not necessarily have the same meaning in all areas of the Mediterranean, while sexuality and gender relations cannot be regarded as the one and only parameter to argue for the unity of such a vast area (Herzfeld 1980, 1987, de Pina-Cabral 1989, Vassos Argyrou 1996).

Ethnographers of Greece working in a ‘honor and shame’ paradigm have demonstrated an excessive interest in kinship, family, marriage and procreation, and promoted a single idea of maleness and femaleness as distinctive and complementary (Campbell 1964, Friedl 1962, du Boulay 1974, 1986, Hirschon 1978, Dubisch 1983, 1986a, 1986b). However, “In the last two decades since the writing of the classic texts on gender in Greece that so deeply influenced scholars’ analytical categories, massive social changes have taken place in Greek society. During the same period, the relevance of theoretical developments in feminism, Marxism, and linguistic and performance theories on gender issues has begun to be recognized” (Cowan 1990: 9)<sup>6</sup>. The outcome of such research was that the model of complementarity has been strongly contested by more recent ethnographers of Greece who have been inspired “by empirical changes in gender practices and by conceptual reformulation being worked through the analytical level” (ibid.: 9). Jane Cowan asks us to discern between the descriptive validity of the term ‘complementarity’ and its face value. She argues that, the fact that many Greeks do seem to think of gender roles and relations in this way and moreover, the idea of complementarity is elaborated within Orthodox theological doctrine should not inhibit anthropologists from taking a critical stance toward such statements<sup>7</sup>. In her view “Any sexual or gender complementarity -like women’s power

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<sup>6</sup> An extensive account of the impact of recent theoretical trends on anthropological work done in Greek society is to be found in the introduction of the edited volume *Tavtotites kai Fylo sti Sygchroni Ellada. Anthropologikes Prosengiseis. -Identities and Gender in Modern Greece. Anthropological Approaches-* (Papataxiarchis 1992a: 11-98).

<sup>7</sup> Seremetakis (1997) denounces the use of the concept of ‘complementarity’ altogether and argues that the binary sets of public/private, rural/urban, male/female, overt/covert which have dominated descriptions of

generally- that may be observed in particular sites and moments must be always seen in the context of a broader asymmetry of male dominance and of the androcentric and patriarchal institutions through which is manifested” (ibid.: 10-11) <sup>8</sup>.

The recognition that Greece is a ‘complex’ society, that is, a society in which some of the functions of kinship are performed by other formal institutions, but also one in which there are contexts other than marriage, diverse models of identity and personhood that cannot be understood within frameworks made for the study of ‘simple’ societies (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991a: 4), led to the conclusion that “ ... not only is there no single sense of masculinity”, and for that purpose also femininity, “in that abstraction called ‘Greek culture’, but that from one local context, institution, domain or discourse to another we can easily find contrasting ways of being masculine” (Loizos 1994: 78). Recent anthropological work in Greece tries to compensate for former omissions and researches the construction of gender in contexts other than the household, in the coffee-shop (Papataxiarchis 1991), in the convent (Iossifides 1991), among football fans (Papageorgiou 1998), in a Mykonian group of exogenous ‘locals’ (Bousiou 1998). However, research on sexuality and particularly female sexuality still remains inextricably related to a discourse on marriage, motherhood and procreation.

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Mediterranean societies are deprived of analytical value. In her ethnography on mourning practices in Inner Mani (1991) she uses predominantly linguistic analysis and explores the discursive network in which words of mourning are inscribed -a network of intersections between ancient Greek, Modern Greek, and Maniat dialect-, to contest the dualistic or dialectic mutual construction of gender identities in the same social entity.

<sup>8</sup> Jane Cowan (1990, 1991) has explored the politics of gender articulated through the body in certain dance events in the Macedonian market town of Sohos, in Northern Greece. Her decision to work there, as opposed to the small and remote villages favored by most ethnographers of Greece, allows her to place social and cultural change at the center of her analysis and to be sensitive to the competing discourses struggling to define gender (Georges 1993).

### ***Good girls, Honorable Daughters, Dutiful Mothers***

In the 'honor and shame' paradigm female sexuality, its restriction and domestication, proves to be of particular importance. Stanley Brandes (1987) argues that Mediterranean communities display particular moral concerns which are closely related to gender; "Mediterranean people are characterized by a particular family organization and that constitutes the major arena within codes of honor and shame are played out" (ibid.: 132). The Mediterranean family is atomistic and isolated, and hence in a highly competitive environment among males, female chastity became a symbolic virtue. "Chaste women were transformed into a resource, which could be exchanged for wealth, power, and prestige" (ibid. 132). In a similar manner Maureen Giovannini (1987) proposes female chastity codes as a key dimension of gender ideology and related practices in the Mediterranean region <sup>9</sup>. The emphasis on female chastity and the need for a restriction of female sexuality is rooted in a dichotomous moral system according to which "men believe themselves to be inherently more virtuous than women" (Brandes 1981: 219). Their sexuality is considered to be 'natural', stronger, and nobler than women's who "are regarded as sensuous and weak and in effect a threat to male reputations" (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991b: 223) <sup>10</sup>.

In his ethnography *Honour, Family, and Patronage* (1964), on Sarakatsani in Northern Greece, and subsequent article "Honour and the Devil" (1966) John Campbell refers explicitly to the different qualities required of men and women in relation to honor. While

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<sup>9</sup> However, it was long ago that Jane Schneider (1971) criticized the tendency to refer to the 'honor and shame syndrome' and its related practices that govern family integrity and the virginity of young girls as the demonstration of the cultural unity of the Mediterranean. She underlined that due to the diffusion of an international youth culture and the impact of women's liberation, Mediterranean families have become less and less preoccupied with the virginity of their daughters and the shame of their wives (ibid.: p.22).

<sup>10</sup> Carol Delaney (1986) attributes the superiority of male over female sexuality to the monogenetic theory of procreation that assimilates men with seed and women with soil. This theory is consonant with the

men must be strong in body and spirit and exhibit their manliness, “the quality required of women in relation to honour is shame, particularly sexual shame. Subjectively the woman’s sexual shame is not simply a fear of external sanctions; it is an instinctive revulsion from sexual activity, an attempt in dress, movement, and attitude, to disguise the fact that she possesses the physical attributes to her sex. ... Female values are referred to the ideal conduct of the Mother of God: modesty, virginal attitudes and selfless love” (1966: 146 -147). Women are penalized to varying degrees for their sexual identity; and they are expected either to conceal it in an attitude of shame and gradually negate it, and/or channel an otherwise stigmatized and supposedly controllable desire toward legitimate procreation. As Jill Dubisch notes, “Women are viewed as polluted because of their bodily functions, and as dangerous by virtue of their sexuality” (1983: 196). In her influential article “Open body/Closed Space: The transformation of Female Sexuality” Renee Hirschon (1978) gives an account of “beliefs regarding the biology of men and women, and attitudes deriving from them which constitute what might be called part of a ‘folk physiology’ ” (ibid.: 52). According to these beliefs, although the need for sexual expression is recognized as being part of the condition of physical maturity in both men and women, the expression of female sexuality is rigidly limited because of concern with the values of family honor. Sexual drive in the adult female is subjected to her control, while that of adult male is physiologically imperative and cannot be controlled. Female sexuality should be only expressed in the context of marriage and lead to procreation and the acquisition of children <sup>11</sup>. “Through childbirth a woman redeems the fallen state of the male-female relationship and thereby also transcends the limitations of her

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monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam which all share the essential belief “that there is only one God who is Creator and who is implicitly and explicitly male” (Delaney 1987: 46).

<sup>11</sup> These assertions are on no account confined to the traditional mode of thinking in Greece. Procreation, fertility and their significant meaning for self- and gender identity have been one of the oldest anthropological concerns. Currently, an anthropological discourse that criticizes the separation of sexuality from life-transmission and re-introduces the significance of procreation in sexuality is emerging. See, for example, Laura Rival’s article on the Huarani Couvade in Ecuadorian Amazon (1998).

own nature” (Hirschon 1978: 53). She removes herself from the archetypal image of Eve to approach the holy image of Mary, the Mother of God, while “the attributes of ideal womanhood, self-sacrifice, love and devotion to the family are patterned on this archetypal figure” (ibid.: 54) <sup>12</sup>. Marriage initiates a process of gradual redemption, a point repetitively stressed by ethnographers; by assuming the role of ‘mistress of the house’ and eventually demonstrating their ability to control household boundaries and transform polluting disorder into domestic order, women mold their own nature and eventually redeem themselves from their symbolic handicaps as daughters of ‘Eve’ (du Boulay 1974, Hirschon 1978, Dubisch 1983, 1986a, Rushton 1992) <sup>13</sup>. In this context the sexual identity of women is subordinated to their kinship roles as mothers and guardians of the domestic order and motherhood is elevated as their prime role which morally protects their sexuality (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991: 223) <sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> In their study on the making of the modern Greek family during the 19<sup>th</sup> century Paul Sant Cassia and Constantina Bada (1992) argue that “national identity construction made heavy use of the metaphor and symbolism of motherhood”, while literacy among urban Greece and increasingly in rural areas “enabled a richer elaboration of the religious symbolism associated with the Divine Motherhood of God” (ibid. : 226 - 227).

<sup>13</sup> The point that women are attributed with qualities which seem to conflict with each other was to be made by John Campbell (1964), who distinguished between a woman’s sexual and social identity. The same point was further illustrated by Juliet du Boulay (1974) when she examines the Greek symbolic classification of male and female nature and argues that women in Greece are perceived according to two archetypal images that of ‘Eve’ and that of ‘Panagia’, the Mother of God -a claim which has been criticized by Michael Herzfeld (1986: 230-232), Jane Cowan (1992: 128-129) and others. In a following article Juliet du Boulay (1986) maintains that these are two different aspects of the concept of feminine nature “which is rooted ultimately in a religious vision of humanity and sees the role of women in terms of two allied but ultimately very different ideas -those of feminine nature and feminine potentiality” (ibid.: 144), a potentiality which is going to be fulfilled in the context of marriage. For a critical approach on Campbell’s and du Boulay’s assertions see Evthymios Papataxiarchis (1992: 47-49).

<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Theodore Paradellis (1999) argues that by exploring the different aspects of procreation in Greece -metaphoric, metonymic, linguistic, or ritual-, we will be able to refer to a wider and more open version of social identity which will not be exclusively linked to household, family, and marriage.

This is not to say that anthropologists in Greece have all described female sexuality according to the same model. Renee Hirschon herself remarks that when women speak of their sexuality they stress more the danger they face and less the ease in which they might be seduced, while, Michael Herzfeld stresses the rhetoric dimension of a discourse based on moral obligations. In his article “Semantic Slippage and Moral Fall: The Rhetoric of Chastity in Rural Greek Society” (1983) he argues that ideal models on sexual behavior provide rather a ‘yardstick’ to make a critical appraisal of this behavior than a description of a real situation<sup>15</sup>. However, references to female sexuality outside wedlock are very rare (Cowan 1990), and till recently, the only reference of female homosexual practices was to be found in Robinette Kennedy’s (1986) work on women’s friendship relations in a rural village on Crete, even if it was only to testify their absence<sup>16</sup>. The model of the a-sexual woman who must either conceal her sexuality or express it exclusively in the context of marriage is not confined to rural Greece. Kostas Giannakopoulos (1998) argues that in contemporary Piraeus, near Athens, the de-sexualization of women occurs through a discourse of sentiment, commitment, and love. Young women’s sexual activities are legitimate only in the context of long-term

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<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in her recent study on procreation and sexuality in mid-century Macedonia Ilka Thiessen (1999) argues that although women were supposed to conceal their sexual desires and channel their strength into their love for their children and family, during the interviews she had with middle-aged women it soon became apparent that they “saw their own sexuality, not only their procreative capacity, as slowly becoming a source of power over their husbands, whom they portrayed as absolutely addicted to their wives” (ibid.: 182).

<sup>16</sup> Robinette Kennedy writes, “The nature of women’s participation in friendship tends to perpetuate dichotomized sexual and psychological needs in the village. While we might expect that women’s emotional ties to their friends and sexual relationships with their husbands and other men would generalize sexually active relationships with women and/or emotional relationships with men, neither adult female homosexuality nor hetero-emotionality were, as far I could determine, evident. However, women’s descriptions of their friendships - including the initiation, course, and content of the relationship- contains elements of courtship; some friendships seem like a second or shadow marriage” (1986: 135-136).

relationships and if their ultimate goal is marriage<sup>17</sup>. A woman who looks for her autonomous sexual satisfaction either in the context of a relationship or, even worse, during occasional sexual contact is considered as ‘abnormal’ to the degree that she adopts a sexual expression which is ‘naturally’ held only by men (ibid.: 19-20).

The rigidity of gender roles which prescribe for daughters to honor their family, help their mothers, prepare themselves for their marriage, and mask their autonomous sexual desires, in short to be ‘good girls’, is quoted by Leah Fygetakis (1997) as the main reason for the invisibility of Greek same-sex desiring women. Even today and despite the fact that many women in Greek urban areas are employed outside the home, “The pursuit of individual goals is viewed as temporary and secondary to fulfilling the proper female role through marriage, maintenance of the household, and the rearing of children” (Myrsiades & Myrsiades, 1992, quoted in Fygetakis 1997: 160). Therefore, those “who choose to move beyond invisibility and give voice to their experience may run the risk of harassment and incarceration” (ibid.: 161). Although Fygetakis refers to Greek women who live in the USA, her remarks are of particular significance for the examination of female same-sex practices in contemporary Greece. The importance of family, the close relationships with parents and especially mothers, the significance of motherhood, and the maintenance of an appearance of honor, form the context in which such practices arise and influence the way they are experienced, presented, and negotiated.

### ***Lesvies, Koritsia, Gynaikes: Lesbians, Girls, Women***

In one of the very rare articles on female same-sex desires in Greece Nina Rapi (1998) argues that “A Western lesbian identity has not ‘caught on’ in Greece. It is seen by

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<sup>17</sup> In the context of a small-scale field research on sexuality among university students in Mytilene, on the island of Lesbos, Karen Kambas (1998) remarked that the vast majority of young women she interviewed intended to get married.

many as restrictive rather than liberating, an import that does not suit the Greek temperament” (ibid.: 171) and asks “Who is a lesbian in Greek terms?” (ibid.: 173).

In the Greek language *Lesvios* and *Lesvia* are respectively the male and female inhabitants of the island of Lesbos. Though, presently not very common, the noun *Lesvia* is still being used on the island of Lesbos as a first name for women. When one refers to *lesviaki pioisi* (lesbian poetry), *lesviaka grammata* (lesbian literature) and *lesviaki koultoura* (lesbian culture) one refers respectively to the poetry, literature and culture of the island of Lesbos<sup>18</sup>. The wide diffusion of the meaning of the word *lesvia*, as a descriptive and self-identificatory term for a homosexual woman, came into being in the late 70’s, early 80’s under the influence of the feminist and lesbian movement which came to Greece from Anglo-Saxon countries, and mainly from the USA. The terms *lesvia*, ‘lesbian’, and *lesviasmos*, ‘lesbianism’, began to appear in a few feminist and homosexual journals in an effort to analyze what it means to be a lesbian and what lesbianism as a movement is about. Discussions about being a lesbian and living as a lesbian took place among the members of lesbian groups and were published in magazines. Some titles are suggestive: “Giati Lesvies?” –“Why Lesbians?” in *amfi* (Autumn-Winter 1979), “I Synendefksi mias Lesvias” -“Interview with a lesbian”- in *I Poli ton Ginaikon* (February 1982), “Lesvies kai Omofilofili” –“Lesbians and Homosexuals” in *Lavris* (Summer 1983). At the same time, Greek mainstream magazines it seems had just discovered that women engaged in same-sex relationships live even in Greece and began to be interested in the subject.

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<sup>18</sup> When a Greek friend of mine visited me during my fieldwork on Lesbos she saw a placate, on one of the main streets of Mytilini, the capital city of Lesbos, announcing a meeting. “Oh! A big international conference on lesbians is going to take place in Mytilini next week! Won’t you participate?”, she asked me. What she actually read was *Lesviaki Sinantisi - Ameriki kai Canadas* that means “Lesbian meeting - America and Canada”. What she thought of as a meeting among and about lesbian women from America and Canada was, as a matter of fact, a meeting of people from the island of Lesbos who had emigrated to America and Canada and visit their homeland every summer.

Despite the relative spread of the new meaning of the word *lesvia*, the adoption of the term on the part of Greek women who had same-sex relations is not self-evident. An older generation of women depended on the dictionary in order to find out what *lesvia* ‘lesbian’ and *lesviasmos* ‘lesbianism’ means. Elli Papandreou recalls the first time she learned what *lesvia* meant.

*As a teenager I had to search in the family medical encyclopaedia to find out what was happening to me. And the encyclopaedia informed me about homosexuality but not about lesbianism. Lesbianism was explained in just one sentence. I read it and I was shocked. Virgin Mary! Save me! I am sick! This was the picture I had! If you are homosexual you are sick! So, this meant that I was sick as well. I was very young at that time. Thirteen, fourteen years old. I had to become twenty to get rid of the idea that I was sick! After seven whole years.*

But even if they did not have to search in the encyclopedia in order to find out the meaning of the word *lesvia*, they lived in environments where the term was usually imbued with negative connotations, as in the case of Vera Palli.

*I remember once we were in our summerhouse and we were watching TV with my father and sister. We were watching a tennis game with Navratilova, and my sister mentioned that Navratilova was lesbian and then my father commented that she was not a woman, she was not 100% woman, but only let's say 70% and therefore she should not be allowed to participate in women's tennis competitions. I felt sick and afraid. Afraid because I feared that they would go after me, if they were to learn about me [my sexual desires].*

According to the experience of many women the word *lesvia* began to be associated with positive connotations after their involvement with the lesbian movement and the

realization that it is a meaningful and important Greek word. Christina Tsantali, in answer to my question whether she uses any term for her self-identification, gave the following answer,

*In the beginning I called myself homosexual. But after I joined AKOE I began to use consciously the word lesbian. The word homosexual began to annoy me. I am lesbian. I am not gay which is a male term that characterizes homosexual men; I am not a dyke, which is a foreign word. When used by lesbians in Greece the word dyke is a homophobic one. It is not the word lesbian which is a Greek word and can be recognized very easily. In contrast, dyke is an American word which conceals the identity of the person who uses it. If you say in Greece 'I am a dyke' no one can understand what you mean unless she/he has been abroad and involved with the homosexual movement. Personally I do not accept this term. 'Lesbian' is a very distinct Greek word which characterizes homosexual women all over the world. I cannot see the reason why I should refuse to use it.*

Speaking of their choice to use or not to use the word *lesvia* a number of women have mentioned the important role context can play –who speaks, to whom, and in which context– as in the story recalled by Vera Palli.

*I prefer the term lesbian. But I remember once I caught myself using the term gay during the opening of a painting exhibition. There were lots of people there ... And then I thought O.K., why did I say gay and not lesbian, and suddenly I realized that I was afraid to use the word lesbian. If I had used it, it would sound very provocative in this environment, like an insult. Gay is a trendy, accepted word while lesbian is not. However, I do prefer the word lesbian.*

Last but not least, quite a large number of women refuse to use any term for their self-description on the grounds that it is very confining to use a single term in order to

describe the whole of their existence. They rather prefer to think of themselves as women who love other women, like Ifigenia Ksenaki,

*I do not use them. I do not say lesbian. I am not interested in these categorizations. I would never sign a text as a lesbian. My sexual choice is just for me. I do not like to hide it, nor to be ashamed of it, but I would never declare it in this way, not through identities and categorizations.*

or, as total human beings, like Elli Papandreou:

*Shall I tell you something? Beyond all these labels, it is the person who counts. Let everyone define herself as she pleases. In the end there is not such a big difference between these terms. It is one and the same, only the name changes. I do not care whether one calls me homosexual or calls me lesbian. I really do not care! I still continue to consider myself a human being!*

The aforementioned examples are on no account unique or confined to Greek women engaged in same-sex relationships. A substantial number of recent works in anthropology and other disciplines has argued that the meaning of the term 'lesbian' is situational, depends on context, and is continually negotiated and re-negotiated in very different situations. However, the Greek example is unique to the extent that Greek women who are engaged in same-sex relations have at their disposal a Greek-originated word they can identify with, which nevertheless gains its full meaning and significance only if applied in an Anglo-Saxon context. The word *lesvia*, in order to achieve its full meaning, has to be connected to a Western tradition which first made up these terms. When applied in a Greek context the term is very often pejorative and can be used as an insult <sup>19</sup>. It is not a coincidence that Greek women in same-sex relationships, when they speak about themselves, usually refer to *koritsia* 'girls', or *Gynaikes* 'women', or *dikes mas* 'our own'. If asked, some of them will adopt the

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<sup>19</sup> The new meaning of the word *lesvia* became so heavily imbued with negative connotations that now even the island of Lesbos is usually referred to as the island of Mytilini, after the name of its capital.

term lesbian for their self-description, but nevertheless, they do not use it among themselves in everyday language. Although the new meaning of the term *lesvia* provided Greek women who have same-sex relationships with a word for their self-identification and mutual recognition, the specific characteristics of Greek society limit heavily the conditions for such an identification. As a conclusion, I quote the words of a 50year old woman whom I have met in Eressos, the summer resort on Lesbos where an ephemeral international lesbian community is to be found and has been found every summer since the 70's. She told me, "Eressos is the only place in Greece where I like to be called *lesvia*". Taking into account the aforementioned remarks on the significance of context for the emergence of positive connotations with the word *lesvia*, her statement is more than the expression of an individual preference.

An examination of female same-sex desires in contemporary Greece cannot omit the influences from the West, which Greek society has been subject to over the last decades, while at the same time cannot exclusively focus on the import of a Western feminist-lesbian discourse and underestimate the specificities of a Greek society which make such a discourse less powerful and influential. Fenella Canell has rightfully observed that "perhaps, the exploration of subjectivity in relation to sexuality is not 'about' female homosexuality so much as it is 'about' the whole gamut of definitional shifts and changes in subjectivity which take place in negotiations with 'modern' (and often globally economically dominant) cultures especially the US" (personal communication). In relation to his research on gay male identities in contemporary Britain, David Forrest wrote that he is interested in "the constantly evolving nature of gay male identities, as well as our shifting interpretations of such phenomena, not in isolation, but as part of developments occurring within the economic, social and political structures and practices of the broader society" (1994: 99). In a similar manner, I suggest that the adoption of lesbian identities, their denial, or their negotiation can only be understood if we consider them not on an individual level but in the broader context of a society which is still imbued with the imperatives of marriage and motherhood while it is

under the strong influence of Western discourses; therefore my interest in female same-sex encounters in contemporary Greece occurs in close relation to Greek-Western ones.

## Chapter III

### Methodology

**“A story is always situated; it has both a teller and an audience”**

*Research on female same-sex desires poses great difficulties for me. The difficulties I face are not only related to women I have met in Eressos, or in Athens but derive also from my own social environment. The balance between my personal life and my research interests is not always easy to maintain. The research itself, as is the case with all research, has its exciting, upsetting and boring moments; it includes more or less interesting interviews, meetings with women with whom I have become friends or simply acquainted, search for printed and archive material, endless hours of reading. However, the true difficulty lies in my effort to reconcile my own sexual choices with my research topic. “Why are you doing it?”, “How do*

*you think you will be able to approach it since you are not sexually involved with women?" are questions which have been addressed to me from the very beginning.*

From my fieldnotes during the end of my research

The majority of anthropologists would agree that "anthropology is grounded in fieldwork: it is what distinguishes our discipline. Its methodology, participant-observation, lends itself well to anthropology's ambiguous status as one of the sciences and also one of the humanities" (Herdt and Stoller 1990: 18)<sup>1</sup>. The original image of fieldwork was given by Bronislaw Malinowski when he described it as "Living in the village with no other business but to follow native life" (1922: 18, quoted in Herdt and Stoller 1990: 19). Later, the positivist and detached character of earliest fieldwork was heavily criticized by anthropologists who questioned the dictums of being involved but staying detached, of observing but not letting one's self be assimilated. The reflexive turn in anthropology (Marcus and Fisher 1986, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Geertz 1988) emphasized that fieldwork is a process which involves both the ethnographer and its informants<sup>2</sup> while various aspects of the researcher's identity play a significant role in the collection of data during fieldwork and representation of

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<sup>1</sup> The methodology of participant observation is no longer confined to the discipline of anthropology which is now shared with other social sciences. In his handbook *Participant Observation. A Methodology for Human Studies* Danny L. Jorgensen argues that the methodology of participant observation is suitable for studies of almost every aspect of human existence, but it is especially appropriate when a) little is known about the phenomenon, b) there are important differences between the views of insiders as opposed to outsiders, c) the phenomenon is somehow obscured from the view of outsiders, d) the phenomenon is hidden from public view (1989: 12-13).

<sup>2</sup> The use of the term 'informant' is ambiguous since it erases "the differences between individual's age, sex, ritual status, social role, personality, context, mood, motivation, and –most important- the precise nature of one's relationship to that person, at that moment" (Herdt and Stoller 1990: 45-46). Instead Herdt and Stoller adopt the term 'interpreter', while other ethnographers, as for example, James Clifford (1997), Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis (1993) prefer the word 'interlocutor'.

the material. The anthropological disciplinary habitus according to which “an ungendered, unraced, sexually inactive subject interacts intensively (on hermeneutic/scientific levels, at the very least) with its interlocutors” (Clifford 1997: 72) began to be slowly replaced by an ever-growing interest in the researcher’s subjectivity and the particular contexts her project takes place<sup>3</sup>. Among other parameters, sexuality was considered to be influential to fieldwork experience and ethnographic writing, and attracted specific attention. In *Taboo* the co-editor Don Kulick argues that the erotic subjectivity of the ethnographer can be epistemologically productive because “Perhaps more than any other type of interaction, sex can urge an exploration of the basis for, the nature of, and the consequences of relationships entered into in the field” (1995: 22).

Lesbian and gay anthropologists could not be indifferent to this shift to an increasingly reflexive stance. On the contrary, as Ellen Lewin and William Leap argue, it was soon recognized that their sexuality had particular relevance to the way in which they “constitute or understand their experiences as fieldworkers and as the producers of ethnographic writing” (1996: 2). However, the experience of gay and lesbian anthropologists exceeds their personal interests and raises a number of significant questions that have bearing on the heart of the anthropological enterprise, namely “the growing need, of straight researchers as well as gay, to specify and understand their motivations, an insistence that

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most significant question in the reflexive and self-reflexive turn in anthropology is “what sort of representation, under what circumstances, involving which participants, and to what ends?” (Moore 1997: 127), while the debate on the politics of representation is closely linked to the query ‘who speaks? from which position?’. Feminist scholars within the discipline of anthropology have been very sensitive in trying to answer questions about positionality and/or location and have contested assumptions, which perceived anthropologists “as unproblematic representatives of their culture of ‘origin’”. Anthropologists like Dorinne Kondo (1986), Lila Abu-Lughod (1988, 1991), Aihwa Ong (1995), Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (1993), have suggested that there is not such a thing as an uncontested, unproblematic, singular fixed, anthropological identity and have draw attention to the multiple identities of the researcher.

anthropologists recognize how positionality affects processes by which they construct understandings of cultural phenomena” (ibid.: 22).

### ***“Are You? Are You Not?”***

Albeit my own interest in the negotiation of sexual choices and subjectivities, and despite a strong theoretical tendency to move beyond the discussion of identities and focus on partial selves, the frequency with which I had to answer the question “Why did you choose this topic?” indicated that research on non-heterosexual relationships from a heterosexual researcher is not a self-evident choice. When I began my research I was in my late twenties, already divorced and with a son who was five years old. Two years before I had moved from my home town in Thessaloniki to the provincial town of Mytilini, on the island of Lesbos, to attend the postgraduate program of Social Anthropology at the University of the Aegean. A female student with a small child and without a husband is quite unusual in this small city that has no more than thirty thousand inhabitants<sup>4</sup>. To the extent I was a stranger, a student, and a single mother, I was considered to be different from other parents, from my co-students, even from my friends who had already completed their studies and had begun to be part of the ‘real world’ and earning money. My decision to study female same-sex desires just complicated the issue even more and put a question mark over my own sexual identity. From the first moment I began to be interested in this topic, the question of my sexual identity “Are you? Are you not?” was hidden under the question “Why are you doing it?”. I remember one night I went to the cinema in Mytilini. A Ph.D. student from the Department of Social Anthropology and friend of mine introduced me to two male undergraduate students of the anthropology department. “This is Venetia. She is doing research on lesbians”, he said. And

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<sup>4</sup> Since 1992 my permanent address has been Mytilini. With the exception of the periods I was in London in order to attend the pre-field and writing-up seminars of the Ph.D. program, and my trips to Athens in the context of my fieldwork, I spend most of my time in Mytilini, where my son goes to school and we socialize with the local community.

added shortly after, “Do not bother to ask. I will tell you. She is not lesbian”. Although this event may be regarded as quite amusing and be attributed to our yearlong friendship it cannot explain why a postgraduate student of anthropology should feel the need to comment on a researcher’s sexual choices. Other scenes were more embarrassing. Like one guy’s effort to explain to me in front of others why he thought I must be lesbian. He said that he came to this conclusion on the grounds that I did not wear a bra, smoked rolled cigarettes, and he had never seen me with my current boyfriend. The half-ironic comments from my social environment in Mytilini –not my friends- indicated that I had assumed a non-legitimate status which put my presence among them under question.

The above reactions are in no case confined to my own experiences. In their introduction of the co-edited volume *Out in the Field* Ellen Lewin and William L. Leap report that “Choosing to study a topic defined as ‘homosexual’ almost means that others will suspect one of being gay and very likely regard one’s work as tainted by personal concerns” (1996: 11). The reason for this is to be partly attributed to the fact that most of the new anthropological work on homosexuality is indeed being undertaken by lesbian and gay scholars, as was the case with feminist research. Another cause would be that homosexuality is considered such a trivial topic and of such minor significance that only personal interest could justify its examination. Last but not least, I would draw on my own experience and comment that especially in societies like Greece where homosexuality is still considered to be a taboo subject there is a strong tendency to draw a demarcation line between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘straight’ and ‘lesbians’. A heterosexual researcher who is interested in non-heterosexual topics enters a forbidden area which separates her from ‘us’ and classifies her with ‘them’ regardless of her sexual practices.

Equally, this choice of mine was not always justifiable in the eyes of women who participated in the project. Claims such as “Perhaps you are also a lesbian but you still don’t know it”, or “How can you understand how I feel since you are not one of us?”, drew on the belief that an authentic lesbian identity exists which cannot be shared except with other

lesbian and gay people. For a number of years the preoccupation with the existence of an essentially gay or lesbian self which needs to be discovered, and then presented to the public, influenced not only the kind of research which was conducted on lesbian and gay topics, but also decisions about who was nominated to conduct such research. Mirroring the first steps in feminist anthropology where women were considered to be better at researching female topics on the grounds of their sex, lesbian and gay people were thought to be the ones who should examine same-sex desires because of a shared identity which made them more sensitive to the topic <sup>5</sup>. This trend was to be put under strong criticism following the criticism on the existence of a unique, all-encompassing lesbian identity which could surpass all differences. The recognition that one's subjectivity is informed by many parameters which are of varying importance according to the context led to the acknowledgment that a shared sexual choice is a significant but not always sufficient variant for the successful outcome of the research. As is the case with other parameters of self-identity, shared sexual desires cannot erase all differences and do not necessarily ensure an uncontested similarity <sup>6</sup>. Ellen Lewin (1996a), for example, reports that during her research on lesbian mothers she realized that being lesbian didn't necessarily mean that lesbian mothers saw her as being like them. Similarly, Sabine Lang (1996) notes that the ethnic background among North American Indians outweighs sexual orientation, meaning that "the part of their identity that is most important to themselves is their ethnic background as Native Americans as opposed to white society, not their sexual orientation" (ibid.: 94). Of course in projects which specifically deal with sexuality the researcher's sexual identity is of significant importance in order for trust and

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<sup>5</sup> The discussion on whether a shared identity between the researcher and her interlocutors was essential for successive research on oppressed groups was not confined to feminist anthropology and gay and lesbian studies but held also a prominent position in critiques of anthropology's tendency to 'objectify' its subjects.

<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, not all researchers share this viewpoint. James Wafer (1996) maintains that a researcher's sexual identity is decisive for the outcome of her ethnography. Therefore he proposes that the term 'lesbian and gay anthropology' should refer not to anthropological studies on homosexuality, but to studies which offer a gay perspective on society and culture in general.

mutual confidence to be established. Elisabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis (1996) report that it was difficult for them to convince narrators who were unfamiliar with them or their work to participate in the project. Therefore they suppose that non lesbian researchers with the same research topic would not have been taken seriously by the same narrators.

Kath Weston describes vividly the overwhelming interest in the researcher's identity when she writes, " 'Are you a lesbian' Are you gay?'. Every other day one of these questions greets my efforts to set up interviews over the telephone. Halfway through my fieldwork, I remark on this concern with the researcher's identity while addressing a course in anthropological field methods. 'Do you think you could have done this study if you weren't a lesbian?' asks a student from the back of the classroom. 'No doubt,' I reply, 'but then again, it wouldn't have been the same study' " (1991: 13). I do not know what kind of study I would have conducted were I to have same-sex relationships. But I have to perfectly agree with Weston that it would be a quite different one. One's sexual identity is related not only to one's perspective of the world but also to the responses one receives. Since I decided from the very beginning to be open about the topic of my research and about my own sexual choices I had to confront women's reactions on my choice to be a heterosexual researcher interested in female same-sex desires. These reactions changed during the course of the research, ranging from indifference to genuine interest, and varied depending on parameters such as age, education, motherhood, common friends, and shared interests. Perhaps one of the most interesting topics of conversation between my interlocutors and me was the negotiation of how, why, and for what reason was I interested in the specific subject. It provided us with the means to discuss differences and similarities, boundaries and their crossings. But above all it was a source of laughter, teasing, and enjoyment. In the end I am under the impression that our different sexual choices had a positive impact on our relationships because it underlined

what this whole thesis is about, meaning the negotiation of subjectivities and the contestation of straightforward differences and similarities<sup>7</sup>.

### *Methodologies*

Participant observation is a methodology which I used for the first time in the summer of 1994 in Eressos, the summer resort on the island of Lesbos that has attracted many lesbian women since the end of the 1970s. I spent four months there—from July to October—conducting small-scale field research for the needs of my MA Thesis at the University of the

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<sup>7</sup> In the preceding section I have focused on the negotiation of our different sexual choices between me and women I encountered during my research, because this was the subject of conversation, interrogation, and sometimes source of suspicion which re-emerged with great frequency. Other parameters like my age, parental status, education, interests had also a significant role to play during these encounters, not to mention the fact that I myself am Greek and share a common language, cultural background, and popular images with women I have spoken to. The discussion on anthropology at home and native anthropology is a complicated one which exceeds the definition of ‘home’ as the place of origin. As Henrietta Moore notes “Anthropology has changed its character, since its practitioners are studying ‘home’ defined as reproductive technologies, gay communities, medical discourses and identity politics, and the even more complex ‘home’ developed by diasporic communities, which are transnational and translocational, where subjectivities are construed through several locales” (1997: 132). In relation to her research on lesbian and gay communities Kath Weston writes that, “If there is anything that creates the Native Ethnographer as a particular sort of hybrid, it is the act of studying a ‘people’ defined as one’s own” (1996: 71). In that sense I was, on the grounds of belonging to the same Greek culture, and was not, since I did not study ‘my own people’ from the perspective of sexual choices, a native anthropologist. In a similar manner, Dimitra Gefou-Madianou (1993) remarks on the contradicting feelings of being both Greek and foreign at the same time, while she conducted fieldwork among the Arvanitic community (a minority group of Albanian origin speaking *Arvanitika* a mixture of Albanian, Slavic, Turkish, and Greek) located between Athens and Piraeus. Alexandra Bakalaki, who did research among hairdressers in Athens and Thessaloniki, mentions that “many ethnographers have found that when overarching categories like nationality are shared, markers like regional background, social class, gender, age, politics, or even personal idiosyncrasies take on an added significance” and notes that in her case “it was on the basis of the very same characteristics that people perceived me either as similar to or different from themselves” (1997: 510).

Aegean. Despite the limited period of fieldwork my first participant observation in Eressos had many of the characteristics it is being attributed with in anthropological literature. Questions on a daily level of how I should act, behave, and respond, moments of excitement and fascination, and instances of tiredness and disappointment were part of my experience. Moreover, because it was conducted on a summer resort, during the summer vacation, the women I encountered were quite mobile and very few of them would stay there for more than one month. In order to find some common patterns I decided to conduct some interviews. From my fieldnotes:

*I woke up in the morning in a light mood. Should I talk to some women? If beyond fieldnotes, could I present some 'life stories', personal opinions and accounts? I leaf through Alexandra's thesis. She includes life stories of nine women. I thought of adding interviews to my methodology as a means of obtaining information which I would not be able to gather otherwise. I decided to meet Tereza Anagnostou. She has been coming to Eressos every summer for the last ten years. She might be interested in discussing with me the development of Eressos as a meeting place for lesbians.*

During my first visit to Eressos back in 1994 I conducted ten informal, semi-structured interviews with Greek same-sex desiring women who had been habitués of the place for many years. These interviews, which were not tape-recorded but were in the form of hand-written notes, helped me to illuminate topics and get a picture of the lesbian community in Eressos back in the 80s. Participant observation, discussions, and interviews was the material on which my MA Thesis was based, and had as its subject the emergence and the rise of the lesbian community in Eressos, the formation of a lesbian identity within this context, and lesbian women's ever changing relations with the inhabitants of the village.

However, the project I had in mind in the context of my Ph.D. thesis was a quite different one, although it partly derived from previous fieldwork in Eressos. The primary

question “How do women who I have met in Eressos live their lives during winter when they return to their home cities, their families, their jobs, their friends?” evolved into a general interest in female same-sex relationships in contemporary Greece. Yet such an interest was too broad as a topic and needed to be more specifically defined. Where would I situate the place of my fieldwork? Which would be the period I would try to cover? Who were the women I was interested in? Finally, how would I approach my subject? Since my interest was in how female same-sex relationships are structured within the specificities of Greek culture and under the impact of a Western imported lesbian discourse I decided that my point of departure should be traced back to 1978 when such a discourse made its first appearance in Greece. The main bulk of my research is located in Athens (from October 1996 to January 1998), the capital city of Greece, because a significant number of same-sex desiring women live there, who would be difficult to locate in other smaller cities, and because this is where the overwhelming majority of lesbian groups and bars are to be found. As for Eressos, while in 1994 I mainly focused on the international character of the lesbian community, during subsequent visits (July-August 1996, August 1997) I was mostly interested in its Greek same-sex desiring women visitors<sup>8</sup>. Participants in my research are women who are or have been engaged in same-sex practices which they consider as an important and inseparable part of their lives without necessarily claiming a lesbian identity, and have been exposed to a lesser or greater degree of social, political, and cultural changes which have taken place in Greece during the last decades. In relation to methodology, interviews formed a significant part of the research during fieldwork in Athens<sup>9</sup> and participant observation was intrinsically related to

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<sup>8</sup> Apart from conducting fieldwork in Eressos and Athens I also made a short trip to Crete, a major Greek island, in September 1996 in order to take part in the *First Greek Lesbian Week*. During short visits to Thessaloniki, the second major city of Greece, I visited members of local homosexual organizations, and obtained printed material.

<sup>9</sup> Since, I encountered the same Greek same-sex desiring women in Eressos also in Athens, I confined my fieldwork in Eressos only to participant observation and informal discussions.

them<sup>10</sup>. They proved themselves to be invaluable not only as sources of data but also because they gave the chance to my interlocutors to decide whether they were interested in talking to me or not. Due to the fact that female same-sex desires are still considered to be a taboo subject, and disclosure of one's sexual choices may have unexpected consequences on one's personal life<sup>11</sup>, a researcher who observes, asks and records, may provoke reservations. However, I did not start to conduct interviews right at the beginning of my research, since according to L. L. Langness they should be left until relatively late in the fieldwork period when the anthropologist is no longer entirely a stranger but has acquired some courtesy status (quoted in du Boulay and Williams 1984: 256). It was only a few months after I had started fieldwork in Athens that I wrote a *Call for Participation* which was distributed as an inset together with the fourth issue of the lesbian magazine of *Madame Gou* (December 1996)<sup>12</sup>, and appeared in the *Roz-Mov Pages*, a web site on lesbian and gay issues in Greece. In the first pages I introduced the subject of my research and explained its aim. In following pages I proposed some topics I would like to discuss with prospective participants, while in the last

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<sup>10</sup> A combination of interviews with participant observation is a rather common methodology used in anthropological research on sexuality. Kath Weston used a similar methodology in her research on the gay and lesbian community in San Francisco which consisted of combining participant observation with in depth interviews (1991: 9-11). In his pioneering research *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Spaces* Laud Humphreys (1975, 1999) combined observations and encounters in public spaces with subsequent interviewing of people he had actually observed engaging in fellatio. During fieldwork among Brazilian travestis in Sao Paolo, Don Kulick (1998) did not confine his research to tape-recorded interviews, but he also tape-recorded travestis' s speech extensively in their houses or even in the streets.

<sup>11</sup> A few years ago a woman was dismissed from her job as a gym teacher because she had appeared on a TV show on female homosexuality and claimed lesbian identity. The excuse for her dismissal was that she posed a threat to other girls.

<sup>12</sup> Each issue of *Madame Gou* distributed approximately 150 copies. In addition, twenty-five to thirty copies of the *Call for Participation* were distributed by hand.

pages, I presented them with specific questions in case anyone was interested in answering by post or e-mail <sup>13</sup>:

When I was writing *The Call for Participation* I thought of it more as a means of introducing myself and my research to women who did not know me and thus facilitate communication and ease the accomplishment of fieldwork <sup>14</sup>. While fieldwork in Eressos consisted of daily contact and involvement with women on the beach, in the cafes, at the camping site, participant observation in Athens was more dispersed. It involved meeting women at their homes and having long discussions with them, going out for a drink, to movies, to exhibitions, or enjoying lesbian parties which were held once a month. In this context the ‘doing’ of interviews was the imaginary thread which excused my presence in Athens and tied together my movements around the city.

Beyond interviews and participant observation, a third body of data consists of published material related to female same-sex relations in contemporary Greece. The first articles on lesbianism made their appearance soon after 1978 when feminists and left political movements began to emerge. During 1978-1987 a number of lesbian texts appeared in feminist magazines and in the gay magazine *amfi* that included mainly short stories, autobiographical accounts, poems, and polemic articles. The only exclusively lesbian magazine at that time was called *Lavris* and distributed three issues between 1981 and 1982. The examination of this material forms part of my research since it belongs to the history of the rise of a lesbian movement in Greece and some of the women I interviewed were the writers of these articles. Recent articles on lesbianism are to be found mainly in *Madame Gou*, a lesbian periodical that distributed five issues between 1995 and 1996. The publications from the three homosexual organizations in Athens and Thessaloniki *EOK (Elliniki Omofilofili Koinotita - Hellenic Homosexual Community-)*, *Symbraxi (Symbraxi Kata tis*

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<sup>13</sup> The whole text is to be found in Appendix II (p. 277).

<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, I received five responses from women I had never met before by e-mail or by post, which is a substantial number considering the secrecy, which surrounds female same-sex desires in Greece.

*Omofilofovias - Cooperation to Fight Homophobia-*), *O.P.O. TH (Omada Protovoulias Omofilofilon Thessalonikis - Homosexual's Initiative of Thessaloniki-*) include sporadic articles related to female same-sex desires<sup>15</sup>. Another source of data collection were the *Roz-Mov -Pink and Lavender-* pages on the Internet, made by a woman who lives in Southern Greece, referring to various subjects of lesbian and gay interest, i.e. groups and organizations, events, surveys, public discussions, recent press clippings<sup>16</sup>. Additionally, I reviewed articles on female same-sex desires circulated in mainstream publications from the beginning of the 1980s onwards, which I obtained from the archives of homosexual organizations. These data are of interest not only because they provide a picture of how female same-sex relations are represented in mainstream magazines but also by reason of the fact that they usually refer to women I met during my research<sup>17</sup>.

### ***Interviewing***

Although they have been a neglected methodological practice in the area of social anthropology and were thought to belong mainly to the territories of psychology and sociology, interviews are lately being used by researchers of anthropology as an essential methodological tool. Especially, in the context of anthropological research on sexualities and same-sex desires, interviews are considered to be the principal methodology<sup>18</sup>. The tendency to use interviewing as part of the research on same-sex sexuality does not only have a practical dimension – since in the case of sexuality participant observation may be of limited

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<sup>15</sup> These groups hold their own pages in the Internet. The pages of *EOK* and *Symbraxi* are to be found at the address: [www.gay.gr](http://www.gay.gr), while *O.P.O.TH*'s address is: [www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Heights/2958/](http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Heights/2958/).

<sup>16</sup> The website of *Roz-Mov* is to be found at the address: [www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/2225/](http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/2225/).

<sup>17</sup> All the quotations from interviews, articles in Greek, or discussions with women were translated into English by me, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis (1993), Gilbert Herdt and Andrew Boxer (1996), and Ellen Lewin (1993a) are to be mentioned among those anthropologists who used interviews as their principle methodological tool in research on same-sex desires.

application-, but is also related to the history of the feminist and homosexual movement. Having as their starting point the statement that ‘The Personal is Political’ (Millett 1969) gay and lesbian activists recognized the importance of sexuality and sexual choices on a political level. Life stories <sup>19</sup>, which were structured around the disclosure of same-sex desires, enhanced themselves as a significant part of lesbian and gay studies. Therefore it was considered that subjects were in a more advantageous position to describe their lives than the anthropologist/researcher. However, it was soon recognized that personal narrations addressed to someone who is writing down or recording them are not more objective than ethnographic records (Lewin 1991) because it is always the outcome of a personal relation between two people and is taking place at a certain moment and under specific circumstances. As Brian Heaphy et al. argue “we are not simply dealing with respondents’ stories, but with narratives that have been shaped and structured by the researcher’s agendas, by the research methods and techniques employed, and by the stories that they themselves tell in turn” (1998: 467).

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<sup>19</sup> Life history is defined as “an extensive record of a person’s life told to and recorded by another, who then edits and writes the life as though it were autobiography” (Langness 1965: 4-5, quoted in Geiger 1986: 336). Moreover, “Life history studies ... emphasize the experiences and requirements of the individual -how the person copes with the society rather than how society copes with the stream of individuals” (Mandelbaum 1973: 177, quoted in Geiger 1986: 336). However, while recognizing the potential utility of life histories, scholars in various disciplines also question their validity and reliability. Critiques tend to address two issues, namely, the representativeness of an individual life and the subjectivity of the sources (Geiger 1986). Trying to deal with the above criticisms Juliet du Boulay and Rory Williams (1984) propose that there is a form of analyzing biographical material which is capable of illuminating the individual biography or case history. This form of analysis, called logical analysis, seeks to analyze the logic of cognitive and moral rules and to draw from them practical inferences about behavior. Moreover, logical analysis should ideally be tested by prospective practical inferences, and hence re-interviewing or observation over time is a desirable feature (ibid.: 251). Annabel Faraday and Kenneth Plummer (1979) refer to the scientific, practical, ethical, and personal problems the conducting of life histories may raise, while Kenneth Plummer (1983) provides a useful guide for doing them.

## Methodology

During my research I conducted thirty in-depth tape-recorded interviews<sup>20</sup>. The least common denominator of women who were interviewed was that same-sex desires and relationships constitute a significant parameter in their lives. Since “the focus on self-identification, in terms of sexuality, is crucially important in terms of methodology and the exploration of the structure and meaning of relationships” (Heaphy et al. 1998: 460) I was interested in including women who are sexually and emotionally involved with other women but do not necessarily identify themselves as lesbians. Beyond this least common characteristic I tried to have access to a broad sample in terms of age (Table I), education (Table II)<sup>21</sup>, occupation (Table III), and participation in the lesbian scene<sup>22</sup>. Therefore, among the women who were interviewed, are to be included Maria Cyberdyke who organizes lesbian parties, Christina Tsantali who edited the lesbian magazine *Madame Gou*, Popi Grammenou who has two grown-up children, and Anthofilli Stefanou who objects to the idea that she could possibly frequent lesbian bars<sup>23</sup>.

Table I. Age

<b>18-25</b>	<b>26-29</b>	<b>30-34</b>	<b>35-39</b>	<b>40-45</b>	<b>46-50</b>
3	5	10	7	3	2

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<sup>20</sup> Beyond these tape-recorded interviews I had in-depth discussions with several other women in various contexts, at their places, at parties, in bars, during excursions, in Eressos.

<sup>21</sup> The high level of education is to be attributed to the overall tendency in Greece to have at least one university degree. Education is considered as the principal means for social and economic ascent and parents spare no pains in order to have their children educated.

<sup>22</sup> Ten out of thirty of women have no involvement with lesbian groups nor do they frequent lesbian bars or visit Eressos.

<sup>23</sup> In Appendix III (p. 282) one can find a brief biographical profile of women who were interviewed, while in appendix IV (p.285) there is a list of all women who appear in the thesis.

Table II. Education

High School	College	Postgraduate Studies
12	15	3

Table III. Occupation

Unemployed	Working in the public sector	Working in the private sector	Running her own business
7	9	5	9 (two of them work in the family business)

If women accepted to be interviewed they usually knew me beforehand and had met me on several occasions before the interview. Although the so-called ‘snow-ball’ technique<sup>24</sup>, facilitated my tracking down several women, in order for them to agree to being interviewed, personal communication and trust relations had to be established. Interviews lasted from two to three hours, were tape-recorded with the permission of the interviewed, and with the exception of three were conducted at women’s places. My degree of familiarity with the women I interviewed varied significantly, while the opportunity to meet these women on several occasions over a period of time and to have many informal discussions with them in a variety of contexts enabled me to get a broader perspective and to contextualize interviews. The topics around which these interviews were structured are related to self-identification, sexual relations, relations with family and partners, degree of involvement with lesbian organizations and lesbian movements abroad, visits to Eressos and/or lesbian bars. In most cases I tried to allow women to decide what they considered most important to speak about and only in cases where some topics had not been covered I tried to elucidate several points. During some interviews I did not have to speak at all, while in others my participation was

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<sup>24</sup> In similar research on same-sex desires, for locating people willing to be interviewed the ‘snow-ball’ technique is the most widely used. See for example Kath Weston (1991: 9-12), Elizabeth Kennedy with Madeline Davis (1996: 179-181), Gillian Dunne (1997: 26-29).

necessary in order to keep discussion alive. However, a researcher's silence and the moments women do not speak at all or refuse to answer are as significant as their answers. Instead of interviews with the conventional use of the term I rather did what Brian Heaphy et al. employed in their own research on non-heterosexual relationships in the UK, "our strategy was to adopt approaches that were flexible and reflexive, and which would enable us to mix 'life history' approaches (Plummer 1983) with interview techniques that were as much concerned with enabling the unfolding of respondents' viewpoints and narratives of experiences, as they were with 'information gathering' and asking the 'right questions' (Anderson and Jack 1991)" (1998: 460).

As a conclusion I would like to underline that interviews cannot represent an individual's totality of life, neither can they be more objective than any ethnographic records because they are narrations in a specific time and place, addressed to a certain person, the ethnographer. They are stories and therefore they bear the characteristics of a story which is "always situated; it has both a teller and an audience. Its perspective is partial (in both senses of the word), and its telling is motivated" (Abu-Lughod 1993: 15). The chapters which follow are based on my observation and on stories women told me about matters that were important for them. The use of extended quotations in the thesis does not claim an uncontested objectivity of women's words, but rather aims to give the opportunity to women to present their stories, stories told to me, and presumably to other same-sex desiring women and to significant others –parents, children, friends-<sup>25</sup>, in specific socio-cultural contexts. In the context of a society heavily imbued with a discourse on the significance of family, kinship,

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<sup>25</sup> A number of women told me that they only accepted to be interviewed because they hoped that the present research would eventually be published in the form of a book, so that their stories, their feelings, their experiences would be made public.

### *Methodology*

and especially the importance of motherhood; in the context of recent, Western imported discourses on lesbianism and same-sex sexualities; in the context of a research on female same-sex desires in contemporary Greece.

# **PART TWO**

# GREEK – WESTERN ENCOUNTERS

*Geographically, Greece lies at the south-eastern periphery of present-day Europe, a 'Southern' member of the European Union, bordered on the north by former 'Eastern Bloc' socialist polities, on the east by the 'Oriental' Turkey and Middle East, on the south by Africa. Historically, Greece remained hostile to the Latin west through the millennium and a half of Byzantine, then Ottoman rule, yet in the eighteenth century it was reclaimed by western intellectuals as the birthplace of western civilization. This appropriation led to the establishment of new political institutions whose peculiar mixture of foreign monarchs and parliamentary government reflected the new nation-state's political subordination to, and englobement within the sphere of influence of, European 'Great Powers' (later replaced by an American influence). Economically, Greece stands as a classic 'semi-peripheral' economy, combining an 'off-shore' commercial and shipping complex with a patriarchal agricultural economy and a weak manufacturing base (Stamiris, 1986: 99). Acknowledging the legacy of underdevelopment,*

*both in precapitalist and capitalist contexts (Mouzelis, 1978) and consequent dependence on foreign aid, subjection to the political, military, economic, and cultural imperialism of the west (especially the USA), a bloated and inefficient state bureaucracy and poor state services, Greeks sometimes ruefully describe their country as 'neither first-world nor third-world but second and a half world'.*

Jane Cowan in "Being a Feminist in Contemporary Greece. Similarity and Difference Reconsidered" (1996: 62-63)

As Michael Herzfeld (1987) notes, Greece presents a unique case for the Western anthropologist. While it has been studied by Western anthropologists as another 'exotic' country, Greece is at the same time "the land to which they [anthropologists] trace their own spiritual ancestry as well as that of European culture in general" (ibid.: 5). The very same opposition constitutes an essential characteristic of Greek identity. "Greek identity is being caught between two extreme poles, each derived from the image of conquering Other. At one end stand law-abiding Europeans, imposing on themselves laws for which they can give objective reasons. On the other are the no less stereotypical Orientals, loosely clad and as loosely organized, lacking in organization and self-control but rejoicing in their natural spontaneity as well as in their ability to fix events according to their needs" (ibid.: 112). Michael Herzfeld's remarks on difference and similarity among Greeks and Europeans rely on his notion of *disemia* –"with two meanings"- according which contemporary Greek identity has two sides a *Hellenic* and a *Romeic* one; the first one emphasizes idealized qualities of the collective self and is related to a European self, while the second one characterizes the ethnically impure qualities of the collective self and is for internal use (Herzfeld 1982). Instead of promoting a wide-ranging theoretical argument like Herzfeld's, other anthropologists studying Greek society focused on specific historical and cultural factors which allow for difference and similarity in various contexts. Alexandra Bakalaki (1994b) argues that "in certain aspects the Greek's views of themselves are not constructed in

opposition to their view of others but is predicated on perceptions of the latter perspective. The Greek's view of themselves is also influenced by their sense that they live in the same world as 'Europeans'. This not only enables them to put themselves in the shoes of 'others' but demands that they do so constantly and in various ways" (ibid.: 77). Her analysis, which draws on notions of womanhood and domesticity shared by a nineteenth-century discourse on women's education and ethnographically documented contemporary gender-related ideas, values, and attitudes, sustains the idea of the internalization of European identity by Greeks. To the same conclusion is led Jane Cowan (1996) when she argues that "Greek selves and subjectivities do not present the Western anthropologist with a form of a radical 'otherness'. ... This is because contemporary Greek selves are fashioned precisely through the exploration of the tensions of *being*, yet at the same time *not being* 'western' or 'European' "(ibid.: 62). This ambiguity is historically and materially grounded if one considers the specific geographic location of Greece and its historical past. Cowan builds her argument on her experience as an American feminist anthropologist doing anthropological research in a small town of Northern Greece during the same period when a Greek feminist movement began to emerge. Through this experience Cowan came to the conclusion that, "Greek women's cultural difference from that of the paradigmatic western (North American or North European) anthropologist is only grasped by acknowledging at the same time certain historically rooted rather than essential or universally posited, cultural similarities between them" (ibid.: 82). Acknowledging similarity does not require the denial of difference to the degree that asymmetrical and hegemonic relations exist between Greece and various western powers and since cultural specificity is routed in a plethora of factors either historical, political, or economic for example.

The discourse on difference and similarity between Greeks and Europeans can be applied to the study of female same-sex relationships in contemporary Greece and explain the apparent contradiction between the perception of Greece as a lesbian/gay paradise for lesbian/gay people around the world, and the silence and invisibility experienced by Greek

lesbians. According to Scott Bravmann (1994) in the tradition of lesbian and gay studies Greece is considered to be their glorious past, even today. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century till now Greek cultural practices have continued to be addressed, claimed and deployed in a whole range of both anti-homophobic and homophobic writings. Especially by the early 1960's both appropriations of and direct references to Greek sexuality had become a widespread trope for homophiles and homophobes alike to render their own particular conceptions and evaluations of homosexuality. For example, lesbian and gay publications from the 1950's and 1960's regularly included articles on ancient Greek society, the name of the first national lesbian organization in the USA was called *Daughter of Billitis*, whereas Billitis is an ancient figure, and titles of certain lesbian pulp novels referred explicitly to Greek past. Moreover, modern Greece became a destination for gay tourists as a 'site' rich with meaning for lesbians and gay men. Yet, the European construction of Greece as the glorious past of homosexuality and the dreamland for lesbians and gays all around the globe is only partly internalized by Greek women engaged in same-sex relationships. The majority of them have to bear the consequences of living in a society which values heterosexuality, marriage and motherhood and makes these women invisible. They feel muted and invisible while in their own country and turn their eyes to the West in an effort to find positive connotations for their sexual choices. They read lesbian Anglo-Saxon periodicals, are informed about lesbian movements and life-styles abroad, travel to Europe, and are eager to meet their Western 'sisters' in Eressos with whom they share similarities and differences.

In their discussion on the production and reception of diverse feminisms around the globe Grewal Inderpal and Caren Kaplan (1994) suggest that we must re-consider the uncritical acceptance of binary divisions such as global/local, center/periphery. "What is lost in an uncritical acceptance of this binary division is precisely the fact that the parameters of the local and global are often indefinable or indistinct –they are permeable constructs. ... What is not clear is what elements of which culture (including goods and services) are deployed where, by whom, and for what reason" (ibid.: 11). Therefore they suggest the term

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‘transnational’ whose linkages influence every level of social existence and argue that “transnational feminist practices require comparative work: to compare multiple, overlapping, and discrete oppressions rather than to construct a theory of hegemonic oppression under a unified category of gender” (ibid.: 17). In the same vein, I suggest that in order to understand the impoverished import of a Western lesbian movement to Greece and its reluctant adoption by Greek women engaged in same-sex relationships one should move beyond straightforward Greece vs. West dichotomies and focus on the specific contexts of its emergence, on the women who participated in it, and discuss at length their relation with their Western ‘sisters’. Part II focuses specifically on the emergence of a Western imported lesbian movement in Greece in the late 70s to 80s and the establishment of an international lesbian community in Eressos on the Greek island of Lesbos in the same period, while discussing the complex relations of such Greek-Western encounters.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Moving With the Times**

#### **The Emergence of a Lesbian Movement in Greece**

*We are women. We are lesbians. We are feminists. We are members of the Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women. We are the women who created with love, enthusiasm, effort, and pain the first issue of the magazine LAVRIS. Meanwhile some women from the old group left, and others came. While producing the first issue we learned a lot, we experienced much, we had good and bad moments, but we were never disappointed, we never said, "We cannot any longer". We learned that anything important and pioneering is produced only through major difficulties, personal or other, material or psychological. We are determined to overcome all these difficulties because*

*LAVRIS must be continued. It is something we all need. Proof of that are the letters we received after the publication of the first issue.*

From the Greek lesbian magazine *Lavris* 2: 2

In contrast to Western countries, which encountered a flourishing of radical political movements during the 1960's, in Greece it was not before the mid 1970's, after the fall of the dictatorship<sup>1</sup>, that such ideas began to enter the scene. Eleni Papagaroufali (1995/96) ascribes the flourishing of leftist, feminist and autonomous movements that characterized the years which followed the fall of the dictatorship to an imported Western discourse on democracy and individualism. The fall of the dictatorship in 1974 and the perspective of Greece's accession into the Common Market (EC)<sup>2</sup> offered the necessary conditions for the emergence of alternative, radical discourses, because Greece was compelled to adopt the equalizing ideology of the West. This ideology is based on the principle of human equality, i.e. all people are equal because they share a common human substance. It follows that everyone has the right to be given the same chances to succeed in all sections of social life while being essentially independent. While in the 70's the concept of equality held control, in the decade of the 1980's equality was further elaborated and was connected with the principal idea of personal freedom. Everyone could be autonomous while at the same time be fighting for democracy: meaning equality for everybody (1995/96: 18-19). Going a step further, Faubion (1993) argues that the excessive rise of autonomous political movements during this period in Greece has to be partly attributed to a focus on personality as the outcome of a sharp contrast with the previous political regime. "The colonels' willingness to intervene, paternalistically or hygienically, in spheres long considered 'one's own business', has been answered, since 1974, with a privatistic backlash that still shows no signs of waning. Their policies of exclusion were answered in the 1975 Constitution with the guarantee of every citizen's

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<sup>1</sup> Greece was under the rule of a military junta from 1967 to 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Greece was accessed into the EC in 1981. However, the necessary preparations and the prerequisite changes in the Constitution and the Law System began much earlier.

specific right to develop his or her personality and to participate in the social, economic, and political life of the country” (1993: 233). It was in this climate that sexual acts and sexual relations themselves were transformed “from a once largely sociocultural to an explicitly sociopolitical matter” (ibid.: 233).

New discourses on feminism, homosexuality, and lesbianism began to enter the scene and the first feminist and homosexual rights movements in Greece made their appearance. At the same time young people who studied abroad, in Europe and in America, and were familiar with the action of foreign feminist and homosexual movements began to act as brokers of new ideas in their own country. The new discourses on radical feminism, gay activism and lesbian-feminism were imported to a country, with its own specifics and characteristics, which was trying to recover from a seven year long dictatorship.

### ***An Imported Theory: Theoretical Trends Abroad***

Radical feminism emerged in the United States in the decade of the 70's as a counter-discourse on the one hand to socialist feminism, which attributes women's subordination to global capitalism and envisions their liberation through a change in their rights and duties on the level of production, and on the other to libertarian feminism which stands for the equality of men and women within the context of social structure. Radical feminism came into being as the outcome of women's recognition that a socialist revolution would not necessarily lead to women's emancipation. Former members of the New Left saw in gender, and not in class, the main reason for their oppression, and attributed to the differentiation of genders itself, which grants women specific characteristics and enhances their role as wives and mothers, the subordinate position women hold all over the world. In the context of radical feminism women are categorized as an inferior class based upon their sex, whereas patriarchy is considered to be responsible for their inferior status. “It is not just capitalism, but the patriarchal family –which precedes capitalism historically and can survive its demise- which

accounts for the oppression and inferior social status of women. [Radical feminists] therefore call not only for the end of capitalism and the legal, educational and occupational inequality of sexes, but for the elimination of the biological family, at least as an economic and childbearing institution; they also demand the elimination of the sexual taboos which operate to preserve the biological family” (Mary Anne Warren 1980: 152, quoted in Kramarae & Treicher 1992: 378). Radical feminists argued that ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are socially constructed rather than biologically determined, and required the abolition of gender as a meaningful category. Therefore, the revolutionary vision of radical feminism was extremely broad and referred to the whole of human society<sup>3</sup>. Structured around the thesis that women’s emancipation could only take place through the deconstruction of gender, the denial to differentiate between maleness and femaleness, and the neglect of natural, born, and pre-given women’s or men’s characteristics (Papataxiarchis 1992a: 17), radical feminism envisioned in the end the emancipation of all people regardless of gender, sexuality, class or race<sup>4</sup>.

The encounter of lesbianism with feminism resulted in ‘Lesbian Feminism’, which, according to a definition given by Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp (1993: 33), “is a variety of beliefs and practices based on the core assumption that a connection exists between an erotic and/or emotional commitment to women and political resistance to patriarchal domination”.

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<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, radical feminists argued that although men would benefit ultimately from the dismantling of male supremacy, they would resist changes that would diminish their power and privilege. On the other hand, most radical feminists were careful to identify the male role rather than maleness as the problem; men were the problem only insofar as they identified with their role (Echols 1983).

<sup>4</sup> The importance of radical feminism for anthropology is very significant to the extent that it led to the transition from an anthropology of women to an anthropology of gender. Among anthropological texts which refer to this transition are, Henrietta Moore “Feminism and Anthropology: The Story of a Relationship” in *Feminism and Anthropology* (1988: 1-11), and Alexandra Bakalaki “Eisagogi apo tin Anthropologia ton Gynaikon stin Anthropologia ton Fylon” –“Introduction: from the Anthropology of Women to Anthropology of Gender”- in *Anthropologia, Gynaikes kai Fylo -Anthropology, Women, and Gender-* (1994a: 13-74).

Arlene Stein (1997b) argues that lesbian feminism could not have emerged without a) the second-wave feminist insight that gender roles are socially constructed, or b) without the gay liberationist application of that insight into sexuality. For Stein “Lesbian feminism emerged out of the most radical sectors of the women’s movement in the early 1970s. Young women who ‘came out through feminism’ as the saying went, attempted to broaden the definition of lesbianism, to transform it from a medical condition or, at best, a sexual preference into a collective identity that transcended rampant individualism and its excesses as well as compulsory gender and sex roles. ... In place of the belief in a lesbian essence or fixed minority identity signified by inversion of gender, long synonymous with the image of lesbianism in the popular imagination, they [lesbian feminists] substituted the universal possibility of ‘woman-identified’ behavior” (1997b: 378-381)<sup>5</sup>.

However revolutionary and broad in their definitions radical feminism and lesbian feminism were in the beginning, they soon began to confine themselves to more restricted and gender-defined assumptions. In early 1975 cultural feminism and lesbian separatism gained power. In contrast to radical feminism which argued that women’s oppression derived from the very construction of gender, cultural feminists maintained that women’s oppression stems from the repression of the female principle. They believed that, if the source of the world’s many problems can be traced to the dominance of the male principle, its very solution can be

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<sup>5</sup> The manifesto “Woman-Identified-Woman” which was circulated by the group of Radicalesbians in America in 1970 gave a new definition of the term ‘lesbian’ in relation to the categories ‘woman’ and ‘male homosexual’. “Lesbianism, like male homosexuality is a category of behavior possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy ... But lesbianism is also different from male homosexuality, and serves a different function in society ... Lesbian, is the word, the label, the condition that holds women in line. When a woman hears this word tossed her way, she knows she is stepping out of line” (Radicalesbians 1970: 241, quoted in Kramarae & Treichler 1992: 494). Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (1983) after referring to the above manifesto’s position that the essence of feminism is the existence of a lesbian identity and lesbianism is women’s rage condensed to the point of explosion, argued that, because of focusing on anger and not on sexuality, the manifesto opened the road for the desexualization of the lesbian identity which was to happen a few years later.

found in the re-assertion of the female principle (Echols 1983). Echols remarks that “Even more troubling than this attachment to traditional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity is the growing tendency among some cultural feminists to invoke biological explanations of gender difference. ... Cultural feminists distinguish between patriarchally conditioned femininity, which they characterize as passive and submissive, and female nature, which they define as nurturing, loving, open, and egalitarian. According to their logic, female passivity is but a conditioned response whereas male violence is a reflection of maleness” (1983: 442-443) <sup>6</sup>. In relation to lesbianism “cultural feminists favored a universalizing definition of lesbianism, one that emphasized the commonalities among all women and the importance of female values. ... Cultural feminism claimed that one did not have to be a member of a formal organization, or even sleep with women, to be a lesbian feminist. Listening to women’s music, reading lesbian fiction, and thinking ‘like’ a lesbian feminist was often enough –for any biological woman, that is” (Stein 1997a: 108-109). Perhaps the most influential and well known article of this theoretical stance is “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” by Audre Lorde (1980), where the author, in her effort to answer the question “Does lesbianism incorporate all support systems and intense interactions among women, or is it a specifically erotic choice?”, differentiates between a ‘Lesbian Existence’ and a ‘Lesbian Continuum’ as the two poles of an un-interrupted continuum. The first term, ‘Lesbian Existence’, can be considered as the equivalent of a lesbian identity, in the meaning of women who are sexual and emotionally independent from men, while the second one, ‘Lesbian

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<sup>6</sup> Alice Echols (1983, 1989) claims that the encounter of lesbianism with feminism is responsible for the establishment of cultural feminism which had the effect of leading to an essentialist and extremely conservative definition of gender. On the contrary, Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp (1993) try to assess the consequences of lesbian feminist culture and communities for feminist activism. As one can imagine the bibliography on these issues is huge and its coverage exceeds the purpose of this thesis. Therefore, I solely confine myself into sketching roughly the theoretical trends and political debates in the domains of feminism and lesbianism which prevailed in the 70’s and at the beginning of the ‘80s mainly in the United States, in order to give a brief account of their transplantation in Greece. For whom it may concern the aforementioned Taylor’s and Rupp’s article (1993) provides an extensive bibliography on these debates.

Continuum', refers to women's shared experiences through their contact with other women, experiences that lead to the refusal of male oppression and patriarchy, to practical and political support, and resistance to marriage. The outcome was the emergence of hundreds of communal households such as women's bookstores, bars, coffee-houses, and non-profit community organizations like women's shelters, printing collectives, artists' cooperatives (Stein 1997a: 109). According to Arlene Stein these women's communities, which typically meant a very specific type of lesbian community, namely, the politicized group of lesbian-feminist women, "gave women the strength and support to claim their desires for one another, and it allowed many to withdraw from difficult and often abusive situations, opening up social space never before available in this country [USA]" (1997a: 110).

The second trend followed by lesbian-feminism was lesbian separatism. For lesbian separatists 'Lesbian Continuum' and 'Women's Communities' were just euphemisms that actually did lesbians more harm than good, while cultural feminism fed lesbian invisibility. Lesbian separatists, following a strategy adopted by other minority groups as for example the black movement, attempting to separate lesbians from straight women and the lesbian community from the heterosexual world <sup>7</sup>. In contrast to cultural feminists who blurred the boundaries between lesbians and straight women, separatists suggested that only biological women who do not sleep with men could claim the lesbian label (Stein 1997a: 116-119). If they shared certain values in common, foremost among them was their willingness to make lives apart from men. (Stein 1997b: 385) <sup>8</sup>. As Marilyn Frye frames it, "Total power is

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<sup>7</sup> However, in her article "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power" (1977) Marilyn Frye argues that separatism is far more than an extreme lesbian practice. Apart from being the basis of all feminism presented to a greater or lesser degree in all feminist practices such as divorce, abortion, or women's bars, separatism is a seizure of power that takes the form of denying to men the access to women that men take for granted as a natural right. Consequently, separatism becomes feminism's most characteristic expression practiced by feminists regardless of sexual preference.

<sup>8</sup> Many years later, in her article "Separatism, Feminism, and the Betrayal of Reform" (1994) Jackie Anderson will argue for separatism as an effort to minimize the potentially dangerous exposure to men. In her

unconditional access; total powerlessness is being unconditionally accessible. The creation and manipulation of power is constituted of the manipulation and control of access. ... The woman-only meeting is a fundamental challenge to the structure of the power” (1977: 95). After the mid 1970’s separatists were able to exert an enormous impact on lesbian political culture and founded a great number of women-only separatist communities.

In a comparative assessment of cultural feminism and lesbian separatism Arlene Stein concludes that, “Despite their ideological differences, cultural feminism and separatism often overlapped. Members of both groups collapsed sexuality, politics and identity relegating desire to a secondary position. And in the end the effect of these strategies was much the same: they transformed lesbianism into a totalizing identity that required exclusive commitments and they carefully controlled entry into and exit from the lesbian world” (1997a: 121). The outcome was that by the end of the 70’s lesbian-feminism began to be heavily criticized for essentialism, for asserting the same principle of coherence which is prevalent in dominant heterosexual ideology, i.e. the assumption that there exists a natural linking between sex, gender roles, gender identity, and erotic choice (Ponse 1978)<sup>9</sup>. Sexuality and race were the two domains where lesbian-feminism received its most heavy criticism. For many lesbians –especially the ones who came out before the rise of feminism- the equation of a lesbian identity with a political choice against patriarchy denied lesbianism its erotic potential. Joan Nestle (1987) wonders whether they, lesbians who came out in the 50’s, made a big mistake at the beginning of the 70’s, when they allowed feminists, who did not share

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view, the intimate relationship between male violence, sexual harassment, and ‘choice’ -in the form of reproductive freedom- must be constantly kept in the forefront of interests and politics.

<sup>9</sup> Among the harsher critics of lesbian-feminism is to be listed Monique Wittig (1981) who disagrees with the belief that the basis of women’s oppression is biological as well as historical. In her view, women are culturally imagined and not born, while, lesbians, because of heterosexuality’s rigid two-gender system, are not women. Nevertheless, despite the different definition of the term ‘lesbian’ proposed by Adrienne Rich and Monique Wittig respectively, Marilyn Farwell tries to combine the two approaches, arguing that “lesbian as a metaphor is crucial to the redefinition of female autonomy and creativity” (1988:101).

their lesbian culture, to redefine their own lives. On the other hand, lesbians of color argued that a preoccupation with a distinctive, unified identity which unites all lesbians and transcends all differences echoes the interests of white, middle class, well-educated, Western women. For them their identity was equally shaped by other parameters such as class, race, color, language (Moraga and Anzaldua 1981). By the mid 80's the principles and beliefs of lesbian feminism were under critical consideration. At that time the ideas of radical feminism and lesbian feminism began to enter the Greek scene.

### ***Chronicle of the Emergence of a Lesbian Movement***

#### **The Formation of Feminist Groups**

Although the 60's was a period where Greece started to enjoy a political and cultural unfolding, the rise of the dictatorship in April 1967 terminated this progressive tide <sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, Evthychia Leontidou (1992) refers to a group of young women, students in their majority, who tried to establish a women's group during the years of the junta. Heavily influenced by the radical feminist movement which flourished in Europe and especially in USA at that time, members of this group gathered in each other's places discussing the major topics which preoccupied the feminist movement in Anglo-Saxon countries and made an effort to bring about political action. The group, which never gained a name, acted for two years (1971-1973) and, according to Evthychia Leontidou, it can be considered as a stepping-

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<sup>10</sup> On an account of the feminist movement in Greece before that period, from the end of 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century two books are to be mentioned. The first one is written by Eleni Varika (1987) *I Eksegersi ton Kirion. I Genisi mias Feministikis Sineidisis stin Ellada 1833-1907 -Ladies' Uprising. The Birth of a Feminist Consciousness in Greece 1833-1907-*, while the second one is an anthology of texts co-edited by Efi Avdela and Aggelika Psara (1985) *O Feminismos stin Ellada tou Mesopolemou -Feminism in Greece Between the World Wars-*. However, according to Dimitra Samiou (1992), 1956, the year when Greek women were given a full right to vote, marks the end of an era. The women who took part in the new feminist movement, which emerged during the 70's, were convinced that they had to start from scratch, re-defining their goals and their means of action.

stone joining the questioning of the 60's with the radical feminist movement which emerged in Greece after the political changeover in 1974.

After the fall of the dictatorship the first feminist movement which made its appearance was the *Kinisi Dimokratikon Ginaikon* (acronym *KΔΓ*) -the *Movement of Democratic Women*-. It was created in 1974 by women who participated in various political organizations and wanted to fight for equality and democracy. Later, in 1976, this group of women was separated into three parts. Out of this separation three different feminist groups emerged, each of which leaned towards a different political party. The *Enosi Ginaikon Ellados* (acronym *EΓΕ*) -*Women's Union of Greece*- leaned towards the socialist party of Greece the *Panellinio Sosialistiko Kinima* (acronym *PASOK*) -*Pan Hellenic Socialist Movement*-, while the *Omospondia Ginaikon Ellados* (acronym *OΓΕ*) -*Women's Federation of Greece*- was affiliated with the *Kommunistiko Komma Ellados* (acronym *KΚΕ*) -*Communist Party of Greece*-. From the members who remained in the *Movement of Democratic Women* the majority of them had an ideological alliance with the *Kommounistiko Komma Ellados Esoterikou* (acronym *KΚΕes*) -*Communist Party of Greece Interior*- which is anti-Soviet in orientation and stands for a more Europe-oriented expression of communism (Michopoulou 1995/96:33-34). The main interest of these women's organizations was politics. Due to the prospective change of the Family Law these organizations emphasized the necessity for equality among women and men and worked towards this principle. The Family Law, which endured till its reform in 1983, assigned to the man the role of the 'leader of the household' and the 'head of the family' who would 'decide on everything connected with marital life' (article 1387) while it reserved for the woman the task of 'caring and managing the home' (article 1389). Women's right to enter into agreements with third persons on family affairs could be rescinded by the 'head of the family' (article 1348) and fathers alone had the exclusive right and obligation to decide on all serious matters relating to the child's life until she/he reached 21 years of age (quoted in Papagaroufali 1990:50-51). A demand for the reform of this anachronistic Family Law and a claim for equal rights and opportunities among

women and men were to be included among the main priorities of the aforementioned women's organizations.

At the same time, at the end of the 70's, there began to emerge small feminist groups, mostly in Athens but also in some other major cities such as Thessaloniki, which instead of focusing on the need for equality stressed the oppression and the exploitation women suffered from men not only in the terrain of production but also and foremost in the domains of sexuality and reproduction <sup>11</sup>. In 1975, in Athens, two of these groups formed the *Kinisi gia tin Apelevtherosi ton Ginaikon* (acronym *KAI*) -*Movement for Women's Liberation*- (Michopoulou 1995-96: 31-33). The members of this group declared that they would fight against their exploitation in production, against their oppression in the family, and against the invisibility and the distortion of their sexuality <sup>12</sup>. Eleni Varika (1992: 68) mentions that some of its members had been active in women's movements abroad and this was the main argument against them. They were accused of importing foreign ideas that were unrelated to Greek society. After 1978 the *Movement for the Women's Liberation* began to dissolve and was replaced by a number of smaller groups in Athens and in other major cities. The main characteristics of these groups were that they were autonomous and had as their main goal women's emancipation from men's oppression. The first autonomous groups emerged from the University Schools and organized discussions on women's issues, and were to be followed shortly after by groups which were formed from residents in the same

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<sup>11</sup> Yet, there is not a single line which divides women's organizations affiliated to a political party from the autonomous groups of women. Things are far more complicated to the extent that even in the context of the same group or organization there can be traced ideological differences. For example, Eleni Papagaroufali in her dissertation *Greek Women in Politics. Gender Ideology and Practice in Neighborhood Groups and the Family* (1990) examines the difference in notions of and political choices about autonomy from male power and authority among two groups of women who constituted neighborhood branches of the same organization of the *Movement of Democratic Women*.

<sup>12</sup> The declaration was published in the second issue of the movement's newspaper *Gia tin Apelevtherosi ton Ginaikon -For the Liberation of Women-* (June 1978), p.p. 9-11.

neighborhood. Finally, some groups were created as editorial groups in order to publish material on women's issues. Among them are to be mentioned the editorial group of the magazine *Skoupa –Broom-* or the *Ekdotiki Omada Ginaikon -Editorial Group of Women-* whose aim was the translation and publication of books significant for women<sup>13</sup>. The aforementioned groups functioned not only as consciousness raising groups<sup>14</sup>, as groups for theory and discussion, but also as action groups organizing parades and demonstrations against rape, or for abortion and reproductive rights. Perhaps the ideology of these groups can be best exemplified in a placade held by women during the Women's Day parade, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 1980. On the placade was pictured the drawing of a woman shouting loudly: *I am not my FATHER'S. I am not my HUSBAND'S. I want to be MYSELF.*

Another characteristic feature of these autonomous groups of women is their preoccupation with publishing. The large number of publications in the form of leaflets, brochures, periodicals, and magazines, is not accidental but underscores the firm belief of feminists that theories and ideas must be circulated in order to raise consciousness. According

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<sup>13</sup> In the first and sole issue of the feminist magazine *Sfiga –Sphinx-* published in July 1980, one can read an extensive article on the autonomous groups of women that existed in Athens in that period. The editors asked the groups to give a brief account of their goals and the work they had done so far. Among the groups who responded to this call are to be mentioned *Omada Ginaikon Piraia -Women's Group of Piraeus-*, *Omada Fitoitriou Iatrikis -Student's Group of the Medical School-*, *Epanastatiki Pali Ginaikon -Women's Revolutionary Struggle-*, *Ginaikeia Omada -Women's Group-*, *Omada Ginaikon Filosofikis -Women's Groups of the Philosophy School-*, *Omada Ginaikon Nomikis -Women's Group of the Law School-*, *Omada Fitoitriou Viologikou -Student's Group of the Biology School-*, *Omada Protovoulas Ginaikon Peiraia -Women's Initiative in Piraeus-*, *Skoupa –Broom-*, *Ekdotiki Omada Ginaikon -Women's Editorial Group-*, *Omada Ginaikon Emporikis -Women's Group of the Commercial School-*, and the *Avtonomi Omada Omofilofilon Ginaikon -Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women-*. However, it is far beyond my intention to give an account of the feminist movement in Greece after the fall of the dictatorship. My only effort is to sketch roughly the context in which the first lesbian groups made their appearance.

to Eleni Varika (1992), between 1978 and 1985, apart from other numerous pamphlets and leaflets, the following magazines have been published: *Gia tin Apelevtherosi ton Ginaikon - For the Liberation of Women-*, a periodical published by the feminist group *Kinisi gia tin Apelevtherosi ton Ginaikon -Movement for the Liberation of Women-* which distributed three issues in 1978. *Skoupa -Broom-*, was published by an editorial group and circulated five issues, three in 1979, one in 1980, and the last one in 1981. *Sfiga -Sphinx-*, circulated only one issue in 1980, while *Gaia -Earth-*, a magazine published by the *Spiti Ginaikon -House of Women-* in Thessaloniki-, numbered two issues, one in 1983 and the second one in 1985. The periodical *I Poli ton Gynaikon -Women's City-* began to be published in 1981 and circulated in the following four years seventeen issues in total <sup>15</sup>.

Apart from organizing demonstrations and editing periodicals the main focus of these women's groups was placed on discussions, personal confessions, and the establishing of intimate bonding among women. Regardless of how small in number and short-lived these groups were, the women who participated were full of enthusiasm and energy and valued personal relations. A vivid picture of the prevailing atmosphere is given through the accounts of two women, Dimitra Elevation and Maria Fotiadi, who joined one of these women's groups for four years, from 1980 to 1984:

*We started this group in 1980. Till 1984. We came very close to each other though it was not a group which was able to go very deep into women's issues. But it did not matter. What was important was that we were able to*

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<sup>14</sup> As Sue Scott and Stevi Jackson (1996) note consciousness-raising was not, then, a self-indulgent collective act of introspection. On the contrary, the goal was to use the narrations on personal experiences as the basis of political analysis and action.

<sup>15</sup> The feminist magazines *Dini -Swirl-* and *Katina* began their circulation afterwards. *Dini*, which is an annual publication, distributed its first issue in 1986 and continues to be published, while *Katina* which was edited by the *Avtonomi Omada Ginaikon Thessalonikis -Autonomous Group of Women in Thessaloniki-* numbered six issues starting from 1987.

*feel certain things. There was love there. I still love these women and they love me. ... In our group we were interested in personal relations, personal choices. We spoke of very personal things. And this might be the reason why the group fell apart. Because some women could not stand it. (Dimitra Elevtheriou)*

*Twenty. Every time they were twenty but as you know, each time there might be different women around. Yet, there was a stable core. You would always find me there and seven-eight other women. These are the ones with whom I still keep contact even if we do not work together on politics any more. Many women dropped by. It was a very lively group ... After '83 the group wore itself out, came full circle. The group has produced ideology and theory, has functioned as a support group, many women came; we had even made an advisory group etc. These things came to an end and we moved forward in other directions (Maria Fotiadi)*

Not all the feminist groups placed the same interest on personal confessions, neither did they share a common feminist discourse. Some of them were more for action while others stressed the need for theoretical discussions and the importance of clarifying theoretical issues. The gap between action and theory was one of the main causes of conflict among the autonomous women's groups. Michopoulou (1995/96: 64) argues that the majority of the groups who belonged to the autonomous Women's Movement were very cautious towards theory because they thought of it as part of an androcentric discourse. There was a reluctance towards the elaboration of a feminist theory and each group preferred instead to discuss matters of feminist interest among its own members. The absence of a common language shared by all groups which would lead to a common action combined with the refusal of theory was according to Eleni Varika (1992) one of the main reasons for the marginalization of the autonomous feminist movement and its inability to act as a vehicle for social reform. The gap which was left by the autonomous feminist groups was very soon filled by the

political parties and their respective women's organizations. The process of incorporation and neutralization of the feminist movement in the interest of the modernization of Greek society reached its peak during 1981-1985, when PASOK was in power. From an 'indecent' word which caused trouble to right- and left-wing parties 'feminism' was nominated as the official ideology which marked the legal equality between genders introduced by the socialist government through the new Family Law in 1983 (ibid.: 73-75) <sup>16</sup>.

### **A Homosexual Movement Comes Out**

At the same time that the first feminist groups were appearing the first homosexual organization in Greece emerged. AKOE, an acronym for *Apelefterotiko Kinima Omofilofilon Elladas -Hellenic Homosexual Liberation Movement-* was founded in Athens in 1977 and continued to operate till 1989 <sup>17</sup>. Apart from keeping an SOS line, organizing conferences, and intervening with the press, AKOE began to publish in 1978 the magazine *amfi* (translates as bi or dual) which was to become one of the best and most influential gay magazines ever published in Greece <sup>18</sup>.

*Amfi is published by a small group of homosexuals with limited resources. Its main goal –as can be detected from the majority of its articles- is for the*

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<sup>16</sup> The new Family Law, passed in 1983, "has incorporated the principle of equality of the two sexes in its articles, following both the 1975 Constitutional Article 4, (par.2) in which 'Greek men and women have equal rights and obligations' and the EEC Orders –supposedly valid for all Community members" (Koumantos and Papachristou 1983, quoted in Papagaroufali 1990: 53).

<sup>17</sup> In Thessaloniki the homosexual movement, which was established in 1980, was called *Avtonomo Metopo Omofilofilon Thessalonikis -Autonomous Front of Homosexuals in Thessaloniki-* and had the acronym AMOΘ.

<sup>18</sup> During an interview –which was published in the first issue of *amfi-* members of AKOE mention that there was a strong tendency towards the establishment of a homosexual movement in Greece, especially among homosexuals who had studied abroad and were familiar with homosexual groups and organizations. However, the excuse was given when a bill on venereal diseases was proposed to the Parliament in the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 1977. According to this bill the mere act of walking in the streets, in squares, and in public places trying openly to attract other men was considered an offence that could result in one year of imprisonment.

*discourse of Greek homosexuals talking as homosexuals about homosexuality to be heard. An undertaking which is very difficult in a society like the Greek one where hidden homosexual desires play a significant role on every level of patriarchal structure (issue 1, page 1).*

James Faubion argues that AKOE did not always promote a ‘politics of identity’. “AKOE’ s interpretative politics has sometimes assumed the form of a ‘politics of identity’. But not always: especially in recent years, its politics has left behind the inevitable generality of a politics of an identity for a more particularistic and more strictly nominalistic politics of *prosopikotita idhieterotita* (‘idiosyncrasy’). It has taken its political turns with the contingencies of the moment. But like other Greek movements, it has owed its prevailing directions above all to the agenda and the sensibilities of its chiefs of significant staff” (1993:235). The change in attitude can be traced to the change of the subtitle of *amfi*. At the beginning the journal was dedicated to the *Apelevtherosi ton Omofilofilon -to The Liberation of Homosexuals-*. Later, beginning with the second volume, the journal was rededicated to the struggle *Gia tin Apelevtherosi tis Omofilofilis Epithimias -For the Liberation of Homosexual Desire-*. “Still concerned with the ‘subject of desire’, it would nevertheless seek to speak to a broader constituency, to ‘homosexuals’ but also to ‘all those who have homosexual desires in parallel with their heterosexual identity’” (ibid.: 236-37).

### **Lesbian Groups Arise Next to Feminist and Homosexual Ones**

In the context of the rise and fall of many autonomous feminist groups of women and the existence of a rather strong homosexual movement the first lesbian groups made their appearance. Between 1978 and the end of the 80’s, a few, small in number and short-lived, lesbian groups emerged which shared quarters with a feminist or homosexual group despite their ideological differences<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> All the subsequent material refers to Athens, the capital city. In Thessaloniki, the second major city of Greece, the one lesbian group which existed shared quarters with the feminist groups in the *House of Women* from

The first lesbian group was formed in Athens in 1978 by a number of women who took part in the *Movement for Women's Liberation* together with lesbian women who participated in AKOE. The lesbian group, formed by women members of AKOE and women from the *Movement for Women's Liberation*, was called the *Avtonomi Omada Omofilofilon Ginaikon –Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women-*. At the first meeting there were ten women. They met once a week in the lodgings of AKOE, discussed several issues and published texts in *amfi*<sup>20</sup>. Because of conflicts which emerged with the male members of AKOE and because these women felt that they shared more in common with the feminists than with homosexual men the *Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women* moved in the Autumn of 1980 to the *House of Women* in Romanou Street which was established and shared by many autonomous feminist groups (Pseudonymou 1992a). One of the women who joined the *Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women* was Elli Papandreou, who became a few years later the editor of *amfi*:

*I entered the lesbian scene in 1982. I first went to a women's group in '82 where there was this lesbian group in the House of Women. By that time I was twenty years old. Like a fish out of water. I had never joined a group before; I had had nothing to do with all this. Nothing ... Everything I had done till then I had done on my own. I was taken there. I did not go by myself. They had told me that such a group existed. I was taken. However, I already knew about the existence of AKOE. And this is what I did. I passed by its*

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1981 to 1987. They distributed many leaflets; some of them refer explicitly to female homosexuality. References to lesbianism can be found also in the magazine *Gaia*, published by the *House of Women* in Thessaloniki. Evidence on the existence of lesbian groups in other cities during this period is relatively rare.

<sup>20</sup> In the issue of *amfi* 3/4 (autumn 1979) the first article on female homosexuality was published. It was the article "Giati Lesvies?" - "Why Lesbians?" - written by Sue Cartledge and Susan Hemmings and was reprinted and translated from the English journal *Spare Rib*. A few months later, in spring 1980, a second article was published in *amfi*. Reprinted from the French journal *Masques* and written by Suzette Triton under the title "Se Anazitisi Tavtotitas" - "Searching for Identity" -.

*quarters several times but I never entered. The other group ... was different ... maybe because it was a women's group and I knew that I was going to be with women ... maybe because I was taken there personally and this helped me. Aaah, things were good there. I went inside and I met women, women, many women who appeared to me as if they were very conscious, they knew what they wanted, why they wanted it. They could talk. I had no idea about all this. Well, yes, I knew something, but I needed time to begin to express my own ideas. But they knew. They had the answers ready. There were at least fifteen people. At some point a bar was opened, as well, where women could gather. There were many groups in this House. There were the feminists, the group of foreign women, the group against rape, other groups. But there was not a happy ending. At some point this House ended badly because there was a quarrel in the bar which we kept, in order to pay our way, pay our share of the rent, and the other groups showed us the door. There was fuss. Even the owner intervened, the neighbours. And we were kicked out.*

In the summer of '83 the lesbian group decided to leave the *House of Women in Romanou Melodou* due to conflicts with the feminist groups. At the same time some lesbian women continued to join *AKOE* and formed the female branch of the group. Christina Tsantali, the future editor of *Madame Gou*, remembers:

*I was fifteen or maybe sixteen years old when I read this interview in 'Pantheon' which referred to the House [of Women] in Romanou Melodou Street. But it did not mention that it was in Romanou Melodou. And I had torn the pages off, you know, I kept them hidden somewhere –I also liked one of the women in the photos, who were models of course, they were not lesbians- and I kept wondering where I could find these women. Shall I walk around the streets? Of course I was embarrassed to call the magazine ['Pantheon']. There was no address. How should I find it? Finally, I met*

*Alexander who told me 'I am going to AKOE'. This frightened me a bit. I was around eighteen, nineteen ... Yes, I was nineteen when I went to AKOE but it took me two-three years to realize what was going on, who I was. At the beginning, I thought of it as a party, as if it concerned other people, not me. We gathered there, we had fun, some answered the phones, there was an editorial group. [...] Later I began to participate actively and to represent the group to the outside world. It was very good for me that I was there. It has empowered me very much. I believe that I was helped a lot and that I personally helped other people and there was a great atmosphere. Especially, since I began to realize that our social environment did not accept my friends and me. And this is how I become to realize that I should make an effort. At this period there were only four women in AKOE. I stayed there till it closed in 1989 and I still believe that this was the golden age of the homosexual movement. I do not think that anything can be better than this. Because AKOE was a unifying group. It was not just a gathering place. It might have been a gathering place as well but it also organized conferences, intervened with the press, had published a magazine since 1978. Very important things. They also had an SOS line which functioned until AKOE was shut down. It helped many people ... young people called who were crying, they were terrified. Young people came in who had been turned out of their houses ... it is amazing the job that was done in AKOE.*

The rest of the lesbians from the *House of Women* joined some feminist groups or started to gather in *Kafeneia Gynaikon (Women's Coffeeshouses)* <sup>21</sup>. The latter were not

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<sup>21</sup> The decision to name women's meeting places *kafeneia*, - coffee shops -, constitutes in itself a feminist revolutionary act. In Greek tradition, coffee shops have served for many years as meeting places addressed exclusively to men. Women were excluded from these shops unless they worked there as mothers, wives, or daughters of the coffee-shop owner. For the function of coffee shops in Greece see Evthymios

exclusively lesbian places. The majority of the habitués were heterosexual women whereas men were not allowed unless they were accompanied by women. These places acted as meeting places offering tea, coffee, alcohol, and a chance for discussion and making new friendships. But more than places for socializing, and having a good time, Women's Coffeeshouses acted as places for resistance, reversal, and transformation. This was gained by the mere act of becoming "culturally visible the way they 'wished' " (Papagaroufali 1992: 66), as women who found pleasure in each other's company, drank ouzo and wine, chatted, and sometimes flirted among themselves. Referring to the Women's Coffeeshouse established by the *Movement of Democratic Women* Eleni Papagaroufali (1990) remarks that, "The Women's Coffeeshouse was also seen as a new way of doing politics by means of bringing women of all ages and socio-economic categories together to give them a chance to talk daily about personal problems and make them believe that this 'public place of their own' might become another laboratory for a women's cultural revolution" (1990: 97).

In 1985 a new *House of Women* was created, this time in Koukaki. The lesbian group there shared lodgings with another feminist group. The lesbian group did not have a fixed name and changed many times. It was called *Lesviaki Omada -Lesbian Group-*, *Avtonomes Lesvies Feministries -Autonomous Lesbian Feminists-*, acronym ΑΛΕΦ, *Omada Ginaikon Koukaki - Women's Group in Koukaki-*. Charoula Pseudonymou (1992) writes, "In '86-'87 a bar in Koukaki was opened. Step by step the group's interests became focused on bar activities and discussions became rare. Times had changed and political action became boring, even for people who used to be for it. The emphasis was placed on personal expression and how each woman would survive in her personal life. The decay was inevitable

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Papataxiarchis (1992b) "O Kosmos tou Kafeneiou. Tavtotita kai Antallagi ston Andriko Simposiasmo" –"The World of Coffee-Shop. Identity and Exchange in Male Commensality" and Papataxiarchis (1991) "Friends of the Heart: Male Commensal Solidarity, Gender, and Kinship in Aegean Greece". Additionally, the policy to forbid men to trespass these women's coffee shops unless they are accompanied by a woman resembles a reversal of the 'normal' order.

and in '88 the *House of Women* was shut down". According to the words of Eleni Christakou who became a habitué of this new place:

*In these Houses the discussions were not on an ideological level, at least in the beginning. In the beginning it was more personal, who you were, what you were doing ... But then things changed. We began to discuss certain issues. We shared the House of Women in Koukaki with members of the Movement of Democratic Women, because we could not afford it economically. They had one room. We had the other. We tried to open a Kafeneion ... we also tried to write a manifesto, who we were, what we wanted. Feminism came first. Homosexuality came after that. We did not proceed much. The manifesto was never written. Nothing was distributed outside the group. The most we achieved was the creation of another group of women, and the fact that we kept a meeting place for women. Then I left, I do not know whether they published anything afterwards. The women who came, the stable ones, were aged 20-25. ... There was a fighting spirit because we tried to do something, to clear things up. This is what we believed, I believed. In the context of this group in Athens there was the willingness to explain what we stood for, what we wanted. That we were not ... ,o.k. there is a differentiation according to our sexuality but there are common things among 'us' and 'them'. And we tried to negotiate this while being in Eressos as well ... We had discussions with some people there who were mostly men from Eressos, because women did not approach us. But always all the discussions ended up with the question "How do you do it?"*

In 1989 lesbian women started to gather at *Women's Bookstore* which served as a place for meetings and discussions. The *Women's Bookstore* was opened in October 1983 by two students. One year later the function of the bookstore was undertaken by a group of young women, thirteen in total. Although it had four rooms, only one of them was designed

for selling books. The other two functioned as gathering places, places to meet, discuss, organize seminars, self-defense lessons, exhibitions or even parties. In the fourth room was kept the archive of the bookstore. One of the main preoccupations of the women who kept the bookstore was to collect clippings from the Greek and foreign press on women's issues. Everyone who was interested in these issues or wanted to do research could use this material (Toulatou 1992). One of the women's groups who met at the bookstore was also the lesbian group. The group met every Thursday. Among their activities are to be mentioned the distribution of a questionnaire on female sexuality, and their contact with lesbians groups abroad. However, the group was very small in number -there were ten women at the beginning and remained only three in the end-. Christina Tsantali says,

*When we first went there we were ten women. But afterwards the number lessened. Three of us remained. We went there every Thursday. But we were disappointed. We said, O.K. let's stay in case someone shows up ... even if it is to happen only once a month.*

The bookstore closed down in November 1990 because of financial problems but also due to disagreements among the women who were in charge of it <sup>22</sup>. In her article "To Vivliopoleio ton Ginaikon i to Mikro Einai Politimo" -"The Bookstore of Women, or How a Small Thing can be Precious"- Dimitra Toulatou (1992) writes, "The belief that the bookstore was a start for other things, a place of resistance, creativity, self-expression, and collectivity has been lost. Times have changed and what was previously small but precious has faded".

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<sup>22</sup> After the closing down of the bookstore the archive has been moved to the lodgings of the *Omada Ginaikon Kaisarianis -Women's Group in Kaisariani-*. This is where I went in February 1997 when I wanted to find material on lesbianism from the Greek press. The archive which is called *Archeio Ginaikon 'Delfis' -Women's Archive 'Delfis'*, is kept by three women. Apart from a number of books on women's issues the archive includes almost the whole of the published material on feminist and homosexual issues which has been distributed in Greece after 1978. This makes the archive very important since it is material that is very difficult to obtain from other sources.

The closing of the bookstore in 1990 seems to mark the end of an era. Regardless of how small or short-lived these lesbian groups were, they continued to be formed throughout the '80s. They made an effort for the articulation of a lesbian-feminist discourse and the spread of new ideas. There was an interest in establishing discussion groups, conscious-raising groups, distributing pamphlets. Perhaps the most significant effort for the articulation of a lesbian discourse was the editing of the lesbian magazine *Lavris. A Lesbian Discourse*, which was until quite recently the only exclusively lesbian magazine ever to appear in Greece.

### ***A Sight From Inside: Principles and Ideas, Hostilities and Alliances as Being Reflected Through the Texts of 'Lavris'***

#### **A Lesbian Magazine Appears in the Kiosks**

To the best of my knowledge, very few texts on female homosexuality had been published in homosexual and feminist magazines till the edition of *Lavris* in March 1982 (Kantsa 1995/96)<sup>23</sup>. In July 1980 *The Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women* –the same group who was about to publish *Lavris* a couple of years later-, presented themselves through the pages of the autonomous feminist magazine *Sfiga*. The members of the group referred to the mechanisms adopted by contemporary Greek society in order to restrict the free expression of female sexuality and restrain female homosexuality. Such mechanisms were the state, the family, the school, the church, and the mass media. While they firmly believed that through individual and collective struggle they would be able to express themselves freely, they wanted their struggle to have a strong alliance with feminist and broader revolutionary

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<sup>23</sup> Apart from the two translated articles on female homosexuality published in *amfi* in Autumn 1979 and Spring 1980, feminist magazines were quite reluctant to refer to the issue of female homosexuality or homosexuality in general. As an exception, the feminist newspaper *For the Liberation of Women* mentioned the existence of *amfi* (issue 2, page 19) and referred to the disputed Bill on sexual diseases (issue 4, pages 18-19), while the magazine *Skoupa* (issue 3, page 119) condemned the confiscation of *amfi* because of a poem which had been published in its pages and was considered to offend common decency.

movements. “Because lesbians are first and foremost women with all the specific problems such an identification includes, and because the problem of norms worries every woman who denies the exertion of power on herself, the Lesbian Movement is part of the Feminist Movement. It differentiates itself from the Feminist Movement on the basis of a different sexuality which justifies the need for a separate Lesbian Movement. Nevertheless, these goals can only be realized in the context of a different society. Lesbians belong to the forces who fight for an egalitarian society” (Sfiga, issue 1, p. 29-30).

Despite their alliance with the feminist movement, members of the *Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women* thought of sexuality as a strong differentiating factor which required a separate movement and the articulation of an autonomous lesbian discourse. In March 1982 a lesbian magazine appeared in the kiosks of Athens. Its title was *Lavris*, which is the two-headed axe, the symbol of female power and one of the most influential symbols of the contemporary lesbian movement, and its subtitle was *Women’s Discourse and Counter-Discourse*. Two more issues of *Lavris* which had the subtitle *Lesbian Discourse* were to be circulated, one in autumn 1982 and the other in summer 1983<sup>24</sup>. The aim and the goals of the new magazine are clearly stated by its editors in page 4 of the first issue:

*We are women.*

*We are lesbians.*

*We are feminists.*

*We are members of the Autonomous Group of Women. We want to edit a magazine because we believe that such an effort is essential for the diffusion of feminism, lesbian feminism in particular, in our country. Every effort we make as a group is necessary and creative because it makes known our existence, our ideas, namely our experiences translated in theory. ... The*

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<sup>24</sup> The first issue contains 48 pages, while the second and the third have 64 pages each.

*creation of a magazine is one of the most important things a group can do because such a circular can diffuse effectively everything we need to say. Every movement started with one or two pamphlets a few people wrote in order to publicize their ideas. Till now, lesbian discourse has not been heard in our country and this constitutes a vacuum which nowadays in 1982 is not acceptable. Moreover, what troubles us is not only the absence of a lesbian discourse but also the absence of the very analysis of feminism from a lesbian perspective. We want to fill up this space because we strongly believe that we can not only initiate a dialogue between us and other Greek lesbians –but also with every woman who does not refuse to listen to us-, a dialogue which will sort out our opinions as lesbian feminists, will refute myths which we still have about ourselves, will announce our existence, and will help us to contact each other, to come closer, to find ourselves.*

### **The Editorial Board**

Three women, Panagiota Asimaki, Polikseni Roussou, and Sofia Anagnostaki, were chiefly in charge of the edition of *Lavris*. Panagiota Asimaki, a woman who spent a long period of time in the United States was responsible for the theoretical profile of the magazine. Being aware of the lesbian-feminist movement which flourished in America at that period of time, she tried to circulate these ideas among people in her country and make them known to a wider audience through the publication of *Lavris*. After all, the publication of printed material was a significant part of the feminist and homosexual movement that emerged in Greece. According to the second woman who was responsible for the editing of *Lavris*, Polikseni Roussou, they wanted to produce nothing less than a ‘female *amfi*’. Though the three women were similar in age, around thirty, they came from different backgrounds. Whereas Panagiota Asimaki had spent many years in the United States, Polikseni Roussou, who was born in Athens, entered the feminist movement in 1978 as a member of the *Movement for the Liberation of Women*. Shortly after, she joined *AKOE* and began to work

for *amfi* where she continued to work and publish texts using her first name for many years. Her involvement with the group of lesbian women in the *House of Women in Romanou Melodou* did not last long. After the publication of the first issue of *Lavris* she disagreed with the other two women because she firmly believed that the group had to remain confined and work on a personal style instead of being open to new ideas and include many different texts and opinions. The outcome was that she resigned from the editorial group of *Lavris* and returned to *amfi*. Finally, Sofia's Anagnostaki history is quite different. Having been born and raised in Thessaloniki, she came to Athens in 1975 to study. Her involvement with the feminist movement began shortly after, in 1976, when she joined the *Movement for Women's Liberation*. An active member of various feminist and lesbian groups she refused to join AKOE or any similar homosexual movement because she firmly believed in lesbian separatism.

*Coming from a city like Thessaloniki, which has many gays, and having a lot of friends who were gays I professed my theory. The gay friend will always act as he pleases, after all a Greek mother has raised him as well. What have I to do with these boys who are against women? They are misogynists and it is only our homosexuality that unites us. I did not want to cooperate with male groups in amfi. I knew that some did ... some women from the lesbian group joined the female group of AKOE. But I snub them... I never entertained the idea of joining.*

Although the magazine was open to new ideas and different opinions and hosted articles, poems, drawings from various women, although the very members of the editorial group did not share a common theoretical stance, although the main goal was dialogue and the exchange of ideas, there were some basic principles which provided the theoretical profile

for the magazine <sup>25</sup>. These principles were structured around sexuality, lesbian sexuality specifically, which according to the editorial group of the magazine differentiated between the lesbian movement and the feminist and the male homosexual movement alike.

### **Lesbian Sexuality as a Political Choice or ‘The Future is Female’**

A number of articles published in *Lavris* refer to the issue of sexuality in order to question the ‘naturalness’ of heterosexuality and condemn it as a mechanism of exploitation imposed by men on women. In the article “Ginaikeia Seksoualikotita: Poso Emfiti einai I Eterofilofilia?” -“Female Sexuality: Is heterosexuality inherent?”- (issue 2, pages 22-29, signed by Charoula) the logic of this exploitative system is presented:

*A woman must offer her body, her work, and her children to man. She will give them voluntarily if she is persuaded that her own sexuality does not exist, that her body exists only to fulfil man’s needs, or that her own sexual desires are exclusively satisfied by a man.*

*If she has doubts and is reluctant to offer herself voluntarily, she will be obliged to comply through the use of violence, physical or psychological. The*

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<sup>25</sup> The different theoretical opinions which were to be found in *Lavris* are best illustrated through the reference to two articles which both examine the term lesbian in relation to the terms woman and feminist. In the first one, entitled “Lesvia Feministria – Ideologiki Sighisi I Epanastatiki Sinthesi” -“Lesbian feminist –Ideological Confusion or Revolutionary Combination?” (issue 1, pages 5-8, signed by Charoula), the author argues that the refusal to choose a man as an erotic partner constitutes in itself a revolutionary act against patriarchy. Therefore, lesbianism is the feminist act par excellence. On the contrary, the author of the article “Einai oi Lesvies Gynaikes (I Pera apo ton Andra kai ti Gynaika)” -“Are Lesbians Women? (or, Beyond Man and Woman)” (issue 2, pages 10-15, signed by Christina) claims that the relation between lesbian and feminists is profoundly incompatible, because women are defined through their relations with men, while lesbians refuse to define themselves referring to the term ‘man’. To this effect a lesbian is not a woman, while the relation between lesbian and feminists can never be very close because of their unbridgeable differences. An interesting feature that emerges is the degree to which both articles had been influenced by theoretical debates that took place abroad. While the first one seems to be

*entire history of mankind is nothing less than the history of women who were coerced, persuaded to become exclusively heterosexual, and serviced men after having denied their own erotic desires, creative expressions, and the need for psychological well-being (page 24).*

It follows that lesbian sexuality is the royal road for the resistance to patriarchy and the denial of women's exploitation by men. This principle was clearly stated in the announcement the *Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women* made in the context of the conference *Sexuality and Politics* that was organized by *amfi* in the lodgings of Panteion University in Athens on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> November 1982 <sup>26</sup>. According to their declaration published in *amfi* (1983, issue 14/15) under the title "Liges Skepseis pano sto Emfito tis Ginaikeias Seksoualikititas" –"Some Thoughts on the Intrinsic Nature of Female Sexuality",

*Lesbian sexuality is not just the choice of another woman as an erotic partner, but also a political choice. It is the genuine female sexuality when a woman chooses, when she has the capability of choosing. Lesbian sexuality gives a woman back her lost eroticism, her sentimental fulfilment, her psychological well being. [...]A lesbian, because she places a woman at the heart of her world, liberates herself. She is free to find her true self, to discover the world which surrounds her, to create it from scratch. [...] [She is free] to create another world equal, liberal, without any social, class, race, or whatever, discriminations, a world which will enable female feelings to*

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strongly influenced by the principles of cultural feminism, the second one echoes the viewpoints of Monique Wittig.

<sup>26</sup> A considerable number of activists and academics, Greek and foreigner alike participated in the conference. Among them are Dimosthenis Agrafiotis, Konstantinos Tsoukalas, Anastasios-Ioannis Metaxas, Tasia Chatzi, Maria Drakopoulou, Roger Kempf, Thanasis Tzavaras, Marios Markidis, Mathaios Iossafat, Andreas Velissaropoulos, Giannis Tsegos, Spiros Kouris, Elissavet Komninou, Rena Chatzidaki, Giorgos Veltsos, and Felix Guattari. The *Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women* participated as a group and not as individuals. The records of the conference were published in a special issue of *amfi* (issue 14-15, Spring-Summer 1983).

*express themselves freely, because, put simply, THE FUTURE IS FEMALE*

27.

On the grounds of their contest of compulsory heterosexuality and after having declared lesbian sexuality as a revolutionary and liberating act against women's oppression, the group of *Lavris* structured their relations around feminists and male homosexuals alike. Many articles in the second and third issue of *Lavris* asked, "Why do feminists insist on ignoring lesbians?", "Why do they not contest the compulsory character of heterosexuality?", "Why do they perceive lesbians as innately different?". They argued that to the extent feminists perceived lesbian sexuality as nothing more than a sexual choice, lesbians and feminists could act jointly in certain manifestations, as for example in demonstrations against rape or for abortions, but they could never form true alliances. On the other hand, although the collaboration with male homosexuals seemed to be strategically essential for the removal of restrictions on sexual behavior, the cooperation between lesbians and male homosexuals could not exceed this point. Men who chose men as their sexual partners contested patriarchy

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<sup>27</sup> The viewpoints of the *Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women* reflect largely discussions on female sexuality which took place in the U.S. a few years before and led to a debate between feminists. According to Alice Echols (1984), radical feminists were the ones to subordinate sexuality in politics, located the source of women's oppression in the nuclear family, and urged women to renounce their sexuality as it was then. Nevertheless, cultural feminists went a step further, and defined male and female sexuality as though they were polar opposites. "[According to cultural feminists] Male sexuality is driven, irresponsible, genitally oriented, and potentially lethal. Female sexuality is muted, diffused, interpersonally oriented, and benign. Men crave power and orgasm, while women seek reciprocity and intimacy" (ibid.: 59). The outcome was that by the mid 1970s many feminists have begun to emphasize the violence and danger of heterosexual institutions like pornography and condemn all sexual practices which could lead to a perpetuation of male dominance (Ferguson 1984). Almost simultaneously, other feminists feared that the movement had confused sexuality and violence, or at least heterosexuality and violence, and that it played into the traditional antisexual attitudes of the American culture. The anti-pornography and 'anti-anti-pornography' forces soon engaged not in dialogue but in polarized debate which reached its peak during the Barnard Conference in 1982 (Freedman and Thorne 1984). About the sex-wars see also Carole Vance and Ann Bar Snitow (1984), Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby (1984).

only insofar as they disputed the socially inscribed role for man, whereas they did not question the gender role of woman. Moreover, they are oppressed only because of their sexuality, while lesbians are doubly oppressed as women and as homosexuals. It follows, that the group of *Lavris* did not deny a collaboration with feminists and male homosexuals but only for strategic reasons, considering a total overlapping of views and positions as inherently impossible because of their different stance on lesbian sexuality.

### ***‘Lesviasmos’ is the Greek Translation for ‘Lesbianism’***

*Lavris* put out only three issues. Due to economic problems and disagreements between the members of the group the publication of a magazine which can be characterized as the most complete and articulated effort to utter a Greek lesbian-feminist discourse did not continue. Afterwards, lesbian texts appeared mainly in *amfi*, while a few were published in feminist magazines. Nevertheless, their content refers mostly to personal accounts and does not bear the strong theoretical background which was present in the texts of *Lavris*. A similar trend is to be observed in the lesbian groups as well. Gradually they showed a greater interest in personal discussions and consciousness-raising, neglecting political action and pure theory. By 1985 the whole effort for the articulation of an autonomous lesbian-feminist movement seemed to wane irreversibly. The term ‘lesviasmos’, the Greek translation of the Anglo-Saxon word ‘lesbianism’, which appeared in the texts of *Lavris* and in some lesbian articles at the same period, was about to disappear. It is a term unknown to the Greek language which was coined to signify the political aspect of lesbian sexuality and faded together with the lesbian-feminist movement. Still, the questions persist; did the movement under the name ‘Lesviasmos’ have any relevance to the realities of Greek society? Did it have any impact on women who were engaged in same-gender sexual relations?

Already, in 1980, Eleni (the name she signs herself), questioned in the article “Skepseis enos Melous tis *Avtonomis Omadas Omofilofilon Ginaikon*” –“Thoughts from a

Member of the *Autonomous Group of Women*”, published in *amfi*, the degree to which Anglo-Saxon ideas could be applied in a Greek context:

*How useful could an American article on class and race differences among lesbians, written in 1972 by radical lesbians be for us [Greek lesbians]? Here, in Greece in the 1980s, lesbians have not yet come out, while in other countries they started to question more specific issues eight years ago. The particularity of Greek lesbianism finds itself in the position that it is completely ignored by Greek society, in strong opposition to male homosexuality. Additionally, this ignorance is further supported by the fact that not one Greek woman –not one famous Greek woman- has ever declared: I am a lesbian! On the contrary, as soon as something is whispered about them, they get into a panic and rush to get married and become mothers (volume B, issue 5, page 52).*

Eleni calls on lesbian women in Greece to stop hiding and to come out in order to make their lives better. She points to the fact that no Messiah will appear to rescue them, no one is going to do them a favor, unless they decide to fight for their rights in the workplace, in the family, among their own friends. A few years later, in 1984, during an interview with *amfi*, “Sizitisi- Sinendefksi me mia Lesvia tou A.K.O.E” – “Discussion-Interview with a Lesbian, member of A.K.O.E.”, she gives a critical appraisal of the Greek lesbian movement and states that its mistake was the fact that it has adopted foreign slogans on global sisterhood and female solidarity without having provided for the necessary conditions for their absorption:

*In America and in Western Europe the popular slogans of lesbians were not the result of a divine inspiration. They were the outcome of a time-consuming, tiring, and persistent job done by small groups who worked on documents and materials, who recorded, investigated, analyzed.*

*Unfortunately, in our case, the slogans came first and we adopted them unquestionably without having worked out our experiences as Greek lesbians, without having shaped our own theory which would correspond to our needs. Perhaps this is the destiny of all social movements. Slogans are being misunderstood by the ones who listen to them and they get terrified. On the other hand, we ourselves become confused, as to whether slogans are descriptions of reality or just requests. I now believe that lesbians who place women at the centre of their worlds is a request, not the norm. It is what we try to experience as lesbians. But there are only just a few of us who are politicized and self-conscious. We would like all Greek lesbians to act the same. [...] There exist dozens, hundreds of lesbians who do differ from the rest -heterosexual, non-politicized, non-self-conscious women- only to the extent that they share their sexual life with another woman, in silence and in guilt. Sometimes they are even married and have children. I have met dozens, hundreds of them. None can convince me that they fight for women. I do not contest that it could be a potentially revolutionary way of living –since they have made a kind of revolution necessitated out of personal needs-, but first and foremost they experience the suffering of their double oppression without contesting openly the given order. For that reason, I firmly believe that we must sensitize these women instead of shouting impressive slogans (volume B, issue 16-17, pages 69-70).*

Eleni speaks the truth when she remarks that the majority of lesbians in Greece were too afraid, too silent, to accept the slogans of the lesbian-feminist movement and participate in it. Living in a society where the prescribed roles for her are the ones of wife and mother, and being deprived of a lesbian culture, lesbian literature or lesbian places, it was quite difficult for the Greek lesbian to enter the lesbian-feminist movement which was emerging at that time. Eleni Christakou's account, aged 22 by then, is illuminative:

*From a kiosk I bought the first issue of Lavris. And I read it, I literally swallowed the whole of it, from the first to the last page. But, I did not dare to go and buy the second issue. I thought that I might be stigmatized because of this. The whole issue began to get serious ... I thought "I am a lesbian, what I am doing will determine the rest of my life, I am different from other people". This is why I was frightened to buy the second issue. A friend of mine went and brought me the magazine "Here, take the second issue, you idiot!". And then with my girlfriend we decided to go to the House of Women. We sat outside "to enter, not to enter, to enter, not to enter". We never did.*

Apart from a small number of women, Sofia Anagnostaki, Elli Papandreou, Panagiota Asimaki, Polikseni Roussou and others, who were convinced of the necessity and viability of a Greek lesbian-feminist movement, the majority of women engaged in same-gender sexual relations preferred to live more private lives. The wish expressed by women members of the *Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women* during an interview, under the title "Otan oi Gynaikes Agapoun Gynaikes" –"When Women Love Women"-, with the main stream women's magazine *Gynaika* in 1982, was never to be fulfilled:

*Let us wish that next time we can give away our real names.[...] At the present we try to make the term lesbian familiar to a wider public. To make people recognize that we are ordinary people like anyone else. This is why we publish our magazine Lavris. We want the lesbian discourse to be heard in Greece as it does in the rest of the world, and we want to slowly create a strong movement. Only than will we be able to move around freely (pages 29-30)*

Although the very existence of a small number of women who willingly came out and politically acted as lesbians, marked a turning point to the effect that they made known to Greek society the movement which was known as *lesviasmos* (lesbianism), -for example,

main stream magazines like *Gynaika*, or newspapers like *Elevtherotypia* published interviews with members of the *Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women* and the *Group of Lesbian Expression*-, one cannot avoid the conclusion that an indigenous lesbian movement in Greece was of limited impact. Due to the specificities of Greek culture and the significance of family, marriage, and motherhood, same-sex desiring women were quite reluctant to claim a lesbian identity, come out as lesbians, or participate in the nascent lesbian scene. At the same time, a Western lesbian-feminist discourse was imported into Greece more in the form of slogans and citations, without the necessary recording, investigation, and analysis of documents, materials, and reports related to female same-sex experiences in the context of Greek society. That was a time when it was thought that the principles of lesbian-feminism could be applied on an international level, that these were relevant and significant to the lives of all same-sex desiring women regardless of nationality, ethnicity, social and economic background, age. Although by the mid of '80s the unifying character of lesbian feminism had already been under heavy criticism, the echoes of this criticism did not arrive in Greece, where lesbianism was imported as a movement with international application and significance. The outcome was that issues on location, context, and the specificities of Greek culture were not taken into consideration, therefore the influence of *lesviasmós* was quite limited.

Yet, the scene in Greece had already begun to change. New discourses on sexuality, gender and identity emerged, articles were published, places for meetings and encounters were formed, while Greek same-sex desiring women had the chance to meet their Western 'sisters' in the international lesbian community which was established in the village of Eressos on the Greek island of Lesbos. If nothing else, these encounters have opened up the road for imagination and the possibility for dreaming new, alternative life-styles and identities or, as Appadurai argues, "the new power of the imagination in the fabrication of social lives is inescapably tied up with images, ideas, and opportunities that come from elsewhere, often moved around by the vehicles of mass media." (1996: 54).

## **Chapter V**

### **Eressos, Lesbos**

#### **An International Lesbian Community on a Greek Island**

*Everyday we lie on the beach, a row of lesbians stretching 200 meters along the shore. Women writing, women painting, women weaving. Many women are tanning, swimming, slumbering in the deliciously consuming heat. It is Lesbos. Skala Eressos in July. The lesbian oasis. Women have travelled from all over the world –Sweden, England, America, Kenya, Canada, Holland, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Athens –to pay homage to one of the few remaining bastions saluting the facts, legends and symbols of lesbian history.*

Tanya Dewhurst, “Getting Back on Our Roots on a Lesbian Oasis” In *The Pink Paper*

(1990: 12-13).

Eressos is a village in the western part of Lesvos, an island in northeastern Greece. It is situated about 90 kilometers from Mytilini, the capital city of Lesvos, and has almost 1.500 permanent inhabitants. Its history dates back to 11<sup>th</sup> century BC when Aeolians invaded the island of Lesvos and built their own cities. They built Eressos near the seaside on a location today called Vigla. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century AD the town of Eressos was moved four kilometers from the sea up to the hills due to the fear of pirates. It was part of the Ottoman Empire till 1912<sup>1</sup>. Although Eressos has been a wealthy place the emigration wave of the 50's, mostly to Canada and America, reduced its population drastically. Nowadays, the majority of its inhabitants are engaged in agriculture and tourism.

At present an asphalt road leads from the village of Eressos to Skala Eressos, the seaport. In contrast to the village with its traditional way of life, the old stoned houses, the cobbled roads, and the two restaurants in the central square, Skala Eressos is a tourist place. There are many restaurants, taverns, bars and cafes, car rental offices, travel agencies, rooms for rent and small hotels. Due to its sandy beach which stretches for three kilometers and the clear blue water (honored by the EEC's 'Blue Flag') Skala Eressos is one of the most frequently visited tourist places on the island. The hill called Vigla is situated to the left of the beach. This is the location of ancient Eressos. At the foot of the hill is located a chapel devoted to the Christian Orthodox Religion underneath which, according to tradition, is supposed to be found an ancient temple devoted to Athena, the Greek Goddess of wisdom. Opposite the chapel is the small port of Eressos, crowded mainly by small fishing boats. The main characteristic of Skala Eressos is the numerous cafes and restaurants which are located directly on the beach just a few meters away from the water. The long chain of bars, cafes, and taverns painted in different colors –red, blue, green, lavender- is interrupted by Skala's

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<sup>1</sup> The book of Ignatios Papazoglou *Istoria tis Eressou -History of Eressos-* (1981) gives a thorough account of the history of the place. Other sources of information are pamphlets distributed by the municipality of Eressos which also provide data of tourist interest and the Web Site with the address:

[www.lesvos.compulink.gr/lesvos\\_gr/Map/places/Eressos/eresos.htm](http://www.lesvos.compulink.gr/lesvos_gr/Map/places/Eressos/eresos.htm)

main square only to continue shortly after. At the end of this long chain one can find the water sports pavilion that offers a variety of water sports: windsurfing, canoeing, cycling. Numerous deck chairs in red, blue and yellow and parasols complete the scene. Shortly after the small river Psaropotamos the picture changes. Deck chairs and parasols give place to colorful towels and loincloths stretched on the sand. Instead of families of villagers, small children, and tourist couples the majority of people lying on the beach are women. The camping site is situated near Psaropotamos and shortly after there is to be found the newly built hotel Aeolian Village. At the end of this long beach on the right is a rock, which according to legend has the profile of Sappho. During winter, Skala Eressos is a desolate place. Four to five years ago the only people who stayed there in winter were the owner of a grocery store and his family. Even today most of the inhabitants have gone up to the village by the end of October and just return in May in order to redecorate their shops and make the necessary preparations for summer<sup>2</sup>.

From the end of the 1970's till now a significant number of same-sex desiring women, from the United States, Greece, France, Italy, Germany and other parts of the world, have visited Eressos every summer in order to see the place where Sappho, the ancient Greek poetess was born, to meet other lesbian women, to have vacations in a relaxed atmosphere, to see friends, and fall in love. The actual history of this seasonal lesbian community<sup>3</sup> can be

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<sup>2</sup> At the end of the present chapter in pages 146, 147, and 148 respectively one can find a map, two aerial photos, and some pictures of Skala Eressos.

<sup>3</sup> There is not a single meaning of the term community in a lesbian and gay context. It can refer to the historical appearance of gay institutions, the totality of self-defined lesbians and gay men, or unity and harmony predicated upon a common sexual choice (Kath Weston 1991: 122). At the same time academics do not seem to agree upon the criteria they should use for the term's definition. In a review of recent social science literature on lesbian identity and community Susan Krieger uses a deliberately broad definition of community. "It refers to the range of social groups in which the lesbian individual may feel a sense of support, shared understanding, shared vision, shared sense of self 'as a lesbian' vis-à-vis the outside world. Some lesbian communities are geographically specific; some exist within institutions; some exist only in spirit; some are ideological; some primarily social. All are groups in which an individual may share her distinctively lesbian way of being with other lesbians. There are

traced back to the end of the 70's when the first women came to the place, but its imaginary roots go back as far as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, the date of Sappho's birth.

### ***Eressos, Sappho, and Female Homosexuality***

According to the prevailing evidence Sappho was born in Eressos into a prominent family of Lesbos where she stayed during her childhood. Souda, a Byzantine lexicon compiled in 1000 AD mentions her as "a Lesbian from Eressos", dating her birth back to the 42nd Olympic Games, between 612 and 609 BC. She is considered to be contemporary with Alcaeos, Stesichore, and Pittacos (Takari 1995:15). Skamandronymus is said to have been her father, who died young, and Kleis, her mother. According to the evidence, she was married to some rich man from Andros, called Cercylas and had a daughter by him, who was named after her grandmother. The political turmoil in Lesbos made Sappho go into exile in Sicily from where she was to return in 586-585 BC in order to settle down in Mytilini, having already become a widow. There she formed a circle of friends and disciples, many of whom came from the Ionian Asia Minor (Giebel 1990: 11). She died circa 560 BC at an old age by those days' standards. Plato extolled her in an epigram as the tenth muse, while the scholars in Alexandria included her in the Canon of the nine major lyrical poets. During the Hellenistic times a great number of poetesses appeared who were considered as her successors - Korinna from Tanagra, Praxilla from Sikyon, Anyte from Tegea, Erinna. However, since the end of the first and the beginning of the second millennium our knowledge regarding Sappho has

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many differences among lesbian communities and these are extremely important" (1982: 92). On the other hand Denyse Lockard (1986) limits the meaning of the lesbian community suggesting four characteristic features for its definition: a) the community consists of social networks of lesbians who have a 'history of continuing interaction' based on the assumption or knowledge of a shared sexual preference, b) the interaction of lesbians in these networks leads to a shared group identity, c) within these social networks lesbians share values and norms of the lesbian subculture, d) the fourth feature of the lesbian community is its institutional base, the gay-defined places and organizations. For the purposes of this essay I adopt the broad definition of the term lesbian community suggested by Krieger.

been based on indirect tradition - i.e. Soudas' lexicon which dates back to that age and collects all the biographical data known till that time - and mainly on the two odes i.e. 1 and 2, which are included among the Berlin parchments that were published in 1902. Extracts from Sappho's poems were found at the discovery of the Oxyrynthos' papyruses in Egypt in 1898.

From the age of the Attic comedy (3rd century AD) till the end of the 18th century, Sappho's name was connected with 'suspicious' sexual habits <sup>4</sup>. In the 19th century a revived interest in Sappho emerged. At the same time that her translators started to agree on the use of the feminine pronoun 'her' instead of the masculine 'his' when there is a reference to the beloved person, and while the classicists disputed over the true facts and the legends relating to her life <sup>5</sup>, the doctors adopted terms such as 'sapphism' and 'lesbianism' <sup>6</sup> to describe

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<sup>4</sup> The way that homosexuality was treated in ancient Greece is an issue that many researchers have been engaged in. Characteristically I mention Kenneth Dover's work *Homosexuality in Ancient Greece* (1978) and Bernard Sergent's work *Homosexuality in Greek Mythology* (1984). The four-volume work *Love in Ancient Greece* (1997) by Andreas Lendakis, refers to the theme of homosexuality without dealing exclusively with it. Regarding Sappho, the homosexual practices and the social framework in which they are included, of particular interest are: Judith P. Hallet's article "Sappho and Her Social Context: Sense and Sensuality" (1979) and Andre Lardinois' article "Lesbian Sappho and Sappho of Lesbos" (1989). In a more recent text "Sappho, Foucault and Women's Erotics" (1996) Ellen Greene expresses the opinion that the analysis of Sappho's poems is indispensable to the study of sexuality in ancient Greece in particular, but also of sexuality in general, while, she blames Foucault for omitting it.

<sup>5</sup> Among philologists and historians who wanted to exculpate Sappho from the charge of homosexuality and present her not only as a distinguished poetess but also a great mother and wife, are Friedrich Gottlieb Welcker *Sappho von einem Herrscheuden Vorurteil Befreit* (Göttingen 1816), and later Th. Remach *Pour mieux connaitre Sappho* (Paris 1911) and Ulrich Wilamowitz *Sappho und Simonides* (Berlin 1930) (Takari 1995:189-190).

<sup>6</sup> The terms *sapphism* and *sapphic* officially appeared in the English language only in the last decade of the 19th century by British medical authorities who labeled with these terms what they judged as a psychopathological behavior. The term *sapphism* first appears in Billing's *National Medical Dictionary* of 1890 in order to denote same-sex relations between women. The terms *lesbian* and *lesbianism* have a different history.

same-sex practices between women. The use of the above mentioned terms by the medical establishment was feasible after admitting the fact that Sappho was related to female same-sex desires, a relation which was ascribed to the Paris circle called *fin de siècle*, who were known for their sexual experiments (Hallett 1979: 451)<sup>7</sup>.

A little later, at the beginning of the 20th century, and for the first time, women's literary potential was combined with the existence of lesbian relations. Women intellectuals who lived in Paris, not only French but also English, American, authors and poetesses, considered Sappho as their distant ancestor, an ancestor who encouraged them to take part in linguistic experiments. For the poetesses who believed that they did not have sufficient education, for the lesbian poetesses who looked for a lesbian tradition in vain, Sappho was a very special ancestor. "The fantastic collaborations Renee Vivien [pseudonym of the American poetess Pauline Tarn] and H.D. enact through their reinventions of Sappho's verse are not unrelated to the eroticized female relationships that quite literally empowered them to write" (Gubar 1984: 47). Vivien, H.D., Amy Lowell, Marguerite Yourcenar put into practice what Virginia Woolf considered as lost for good: artistic predecessors, participation in a group where art is discussed and practiced freely, freedom of action and experience (ibid.: 62). Sappho was acclaimed a distant ancestor, mother and sister, while, the island of Lesbos, the island that gave Sappho the opportunity to express herself and create poetry, was related to the vision and the illusion of a society which would allow women to express themselves,

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Their roots are in the Attic comedy of the 5th century BC when the verb 'lesbi[a]zein' (to act like one from Lesbos) was used to denote *fellatio* performed by females. It was only in 1890 when the term lesbian was endowed with a medical sense and related to same-sex relations between women (Hallett 1979: 451-2). According to Andre Lardinois the use of the noun lesbianism to suggest women's homosexuality dates back to 1870. The British were late in adopting the term, compared to the French who had already been using it since 1842 and the Dutch who started making use of the term soon after 1847 (1989: 15, 31).

<sup>7</sup> Catherine van Casselaer's work *Lot's Wife. Lesbian Paris, 1890-1914* (1986) refers to the *fin de siècle* circle. The book explores the social components of women's homosexuality in the French capital at the end of the 19th century and during Belle Époque.

enjoy love, live without their existence being defined by men, a society which would guarantee the possibility of free expression of women's potential. In 1900 Renee Vivien visited Mytilini for the first time with her partner Natalie Barney<sup>8</sup>, and these summer visits would constantly continue for the next eight years<sup>9</sup>. In two of her poems “While landing at Mytilene” and “Towards Lesvos” Renee Vivien compares the discovery of Sappho’s poems to the discovery of a distant but discernible women's country. The trip to Greece equals death and rebirth in a new life, while, the Greek island is marked as a place of women’s sexual fantasy (ibid.: 47-53).

### ***An International Lesbian Community***

We would not be far from reality if we assumed that in the years which followed, women from Europe and America traveled to the island of Lesvos, on the one hand in order to pay tribute to Sappho and on the other looking for this mythical place where women may live independently in an atmosphere of love and freedom. Eressos’ inhabitants remember the place being visited by women alone or in couples long before the ‘70s<sup>10</sup>, who stayed for a few days in the village. There was nothing strange in their behavior or appearance apart from the fact of travelling alone, villagers recall. Even later when the number of ‘unaccompanied’ visiting

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<sup>8</sup> The atmosphere of the so-called Parisian Lesvos can be partly recomposed through the recent edition of the letters written by Eva Palmer Sikelianou to her friend Natalie Barney, in the book *Grammata tis Evas Palmer Sikelianou sti Natalie Clifford Barney*, edited by Lia Papadakis (1996).

<sup>9</sup> Thanasis Paraskevaidis’s article “ I Renee Vivien kai i Mytilini” –“Renee Vivien and Mytilini”- (1972) refers to the poetess’s stay on the island. Through detailed descriptions and by quoting extracts from her poems the writer recomposes Renee Vivien’s everyday life in the house she was letting in Akleidiou, Mytilini.

<sup>10</sup> The images referring to the years before 1994 - when my on the spot research in Eressos took place- are based on interviews of women who had already been going to Eressos since 1981 and evidence given by the inhabitants of Eressos. This information has been crosschecked with evidence given by other visitors. For the time being the only published written text concerning the lesbian community of Eressos is Pseudonymou’s article “Eressos Lesvou. Enas Topos me Gynaikeia Energeia” -“Eressos, Lesvos. A Place with Female Energy”- (1992).

women increased the people of Eressos did not notice anything ‘suspicious’. According to the owner of a coffee-shop in the village:

*The first women came in 1968-1969. At this time people did not even know what lesbian meant. Quite a few came ... in the summer. Most of them were English, German. Their ages were from 23 to 35, young women. More came after 1975. The problems started afterwards. From 1976 to 1980 they behaved really badly. They flirted openly in the presence of other people in taverns in Skala ... They were also too many ...*

Oral tradition in Eressos has it that these first visitors came with the vision and the illusion that they had found the ideal place. A place where Sappho lived and created her masterpieces, a place with tradition in homosexuality, a place where, as they believed, men and women belonged to separate and mutually-exclusive spheres of action. The phenomenon of a massive arrival of women in Eressos, apart from being related to the development of a strong tourism current in Greece, especially from the European countries <sup>11</sup>, is directly linked to the boom of the lesbian-feminist movement in the Anglo-Saxon countries. As we have seen in the previous chapter, by the end of the 70’s, lesbian feminism was established as the principal theory in the context of the lesbian movement, while lesbian communities emerged one after the other. Although social networks of lesbian friends and acquaintances had existed in Anglo-Saxon countries long before, since the 1920s and 1930s, the rise and greater visibility of lesbian meeting places and organizations are later developments. It was after the Women’s and the Gay Liberation Movements in the late 1960’s that gay bars and

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<sup>11</sup> The establishment of Eressos as a lesbian meeting place has to be examined comparatively with journeys conducted by Westerners to other places searching for the glorious past of Greece. An article that was published in the first issue of *Lavris* in 1982 comments: “Some years ago homosexual women Greek and foreigners alike began to come during the summer to Lesbos, Mytilini, as if going on a pilgrimage. They had a romantic perception, like other travelers who through the centuries came to Greece to sense the glory of the Golden Century” (issue 1, page 17).

organizations increased in numbers and provided in the 70's a wide variety of functions for lesbians which included "women's centers and bookstores, self-help groups, information and referral hotlines, concert production groups and musicians, theater groups and plays, record companies, feminist presses and writers, political organizations, and newspapers, and journals" (Lockard 1986: 83-84). According to Deborah Wolf<sup>12</sup>, "During this period [shortly after 1970] many activist women who had experienced the small-group processes dedicated themselves to developing projects within the context of lesbian-feminism, such as courses in women's studies, self-defense classes, health-care projects, women's coffeehouses, women's printing presses, and aspects of feminist and lesbian culture such as poetry, music, and films, as well as building social networks. Through this process a lesbian-feminist community developed" (1979: 70)<sup>13</sup>. By the mid 1970s the lesbian-feminist movement had already taken two routes (see also p.p.: 84-89). The first one was cultural feminism which was devoted to creating new definitions and new knowledge for women, asking for a return to a natural world free of cultural 'pollutants', and invoked a separatist myth of a time when men would be irrelevant (Dominy 1986). In the context of cultural feminism, mythical figures such as

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<sup>12</sup> She is to be listed among the first ones who have conducted research on lesbian-feminist communities. Her study was conducted between 1972-1974 in San Francisco and is about a community of liberated lesbian-feminists and the influence of their ideology on their lives. Researchers on lesbian communities working from a sociological/anthropological perspective include Barbara Ponse (1978) who has worked with lesbian-feminists in a northwestern USA city, Susan Krieger (1983) whose study focused upon a group of 60 lesbian feminists in a small Midwestern USA town, Michelle Dominy (1986) who has conducted research between 1979-1980 among lesbian-separatists in Christchurch, New Zealand, and Denyse Lockard (1986) who studied a lesbian community during the early 1980s in a small USA city. A few years later Sarah Green (1997) focused her research upon lesbian feminists who lived in London in the 90's.

<sup>13</sup> During 1970 to 1972 Jill Johnston wrote *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution*, which was published in 1973. According to Sally Munt, Johnston's book encapsulated the idea of the Lesbian Nation developed from the lesbian feminists formed in the USA during the 1970s which is the idea of a utopic community and a fantasy of autonomy. Lesbian Nation offered a kind of heroic narrative for the lesbian feminists of the 1970s and provided "the sense of a bounded, shared identity of resistance which was conceptualized in relation to other political protest movements of the 1960s" (1998: 132-133).

Mother-Goddess and Amazons, and concepts like matriarchy, female energy, and womanhood had an explicit political value. The second route, known as separatism, defended the establishment of women-only separate lesbian communities, which would forbid access to men. “This control of space, they believed, was essential, because it would give women the freedom to articulate a lesbian feminist identity, to create new ways of living and to work out new ways of relating to the environment” (Valentine 1997: 111). Yet, many of these lesbian separatist communities also had a spiritual dimension and celebrated nature, full moon, the power of earth. This lesbian-feminist spirituality had a political as well as a mystical base and “Their idealized models were those of ancient cultures, whether in myth or reality, in which women held secular power along with religious power” (Faderman 1991: 227). In the context of a need to search for archetypal figures like, Sappho and Mother-Goddess and found isolated spaces, Eressos seemed to have all the prerequisites for becoming the ideal place for the establishment of a seasonal lesbian separatist community<sup>14</sup>.

### **A Lesbian Community back in the 80’s**

The first Greek same-sex desiring women who visited Eressos at the beginning of the 80’s<sup>15</sup> had heard about the place from friends who studied abroad or from women’s coffee-

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<sup>14</sup> Deborah G. Wolf mentions that for many of her contemporary lesbian informants their collective social history is roughly divided into several epochs which cover: a) the Golden Age which not only includes symbols of the strength of the female principle such as the Mother Goddess and the Amazons, but also the historical figure of Sappho, b) the period 1300-1700 in Europe which is looked upon as a time of martyrdom for women healers c) the early part of this century in which a particular group of women identified themselves as lesbians and lived colorful and creative lives and finally, d) more recent years during which most lesbians experienced oppression followed by the emergence of the lesbian movement (1978: 25). As one can see, periods a, c, and d are related to the history of the lesbian community in Eressos.

<sup>15</sup> While I am trying to give a brief account of the ever changing history of this international seasonal lesbian community I am paying specific attention to Greek same-sex desiring women who visit the place and participate in the community, since it is their relation with the place and other Western same-sex desiring women that I am interested in.

shops in Athens. Sofia Anagnostaki, one of the women who published *Lavris*, first came to Eressos in 1981:

*I went for the first time with my friend Maria from Thessaloniki, who knew about the place from her Italian friends. Maria studied in Italy for ten years and she came back in ..., in 1980 she was already back in Greece. She told me that we would go to a place where we would meet her friends from Italy. These Italians knew the place already and had been there two-three years before. We went there and I met all the women who I know now. Just from the very first year. Urania, and Vaso, who is now in Holland, we were a whole group of women from Athens. Around twenty. The rest were Italians, Americans, and French. The latter ignored us shortly after. They were bored and never returned to Eressos. During the first years you could see women from many different countries. A Japanese, some Australians. They do not frequent Eressos any more. Recently we have seen mostly Germans.*

Sofia kept on visiting Eressos every year without interruption. She was not the only one. Eleni Christakou, the woman who was reluctant to buy the second issue of *Lavris* because she was afraid of stigmatization, came to Eressos in 1983 and continued to be one of the most frequent patrons of the place till a few years ago. She had heard about the place from friends in Athens and remembers her first visit as a very pleasant experience:

*It was a very nice experience. We were not so many women. Let's say 20-30. And we slept on the beach. We made small huts out of reeds and we spent the whole day on the beach. And that was not the only thing ... What I really enjoyed was the fact that there were not just Greek women. There were women from all around the world. Not just Europe, but from all around the world. Australia, New Zealand, countries you would never dream of. And there were also many women from America and Europe - from England,*

*Germany, Holland. You could describe the whole situation as feminist-lesbian and it was like a village. We all slept on the beach, on the sand. We spent our whole day outside in the open air. It was very nice. It was like ... an occupation of the beach.*

All the stories I have heard referring to those times have a common motif. Women not only from Europe and America but also from other parts of the world had begun to come to Eressos from the end of the 70's to the beginning of the 80's, and form their own community on the beach. On the right-hand side of the beach, just before the rock that is supposed to have the profile of Sappho, they put up huts on the sand made out of reeds which they collected from the riverside of Psaropotamos. On this specific spot of the beach, men were not allowed to approach and trespassers were in danger of being bitten by dogs. In this way women set the territorial limits of their own community inside which they were eating, enjoying themselves, talking, flirting. In the very few, at that time, coffee shops of Skala they went only for food. Besides, they were not particularly welcome in these places, since their relations with the inhabitants of Eressos were marked with tension and disagreement that went as far as open conflict. According to Joanna Harris, an English woman who used to come to Eressos from the very establishment of the lesbian community,

*When we denied access to men things became difficult. One morning many men came escorted by policemen who asked us to leave the place. Of course we did not move. These were tough times. Women were beaten on the street, they were threatened. If you had a motorbike you had to sleep with it ... otherwise you would have found it smashed up next morning,*

When in 1986 the municipal authorities decided to forbid free camping, women had to abandon their huts and move to the camping site a little bit further in the direction of Skala. The camping functioned until 1996 as a kind of descendant of the original huts, i.e. a place where lesbian women lived, met, slept, flirted, came to know each other. However, native

villagers continued to be hostile towards lesbian women and in 1986 –1988 the latter saw graffiti on the toilet-walls of the camping site with the message ‘LESBIANS GO HOME’.

Eleni Christakou remembers:

*We had many confrontations. It was not like nowadays ... at that time it was ... at that time we went to the village, and usually there were lots of us and trouble occurred. Someone said something, another added something else, Greek women replied because foreigners could not understand the language, and ... we had trouble, beatings. Sometimes they came from Mytilini just to beat up the lesbians, they threw stones, but they did not dare to come near because the women were so many. And they came on purpose, to beat up women. The whole situation was really heavy. You fell asleep and you didn't know what would happen. They thrashed many women. Just because they were lesbians. Many bad things happened for a period of 3-4 years. Beatings, fighting. There were some women who had to respond to anything they had heard. The majority of them were Greeks, because foreigners did not understand very well. Strangely, foreigners were beaten up the most. I do not know how this happened. Perhaps because they considered the place as a lesbian one and they acted openly as lesbians, maybe this is why they got a sound beating.*

Danger aside, women have nice memories from this period. They recollect the friendly atmosphere, the intimate bonding between women, long discussions on feminist issues. Every night they gathered around fires on the beach, singing and playing music till early morning. It was a place for meeting old friends, Greeks and foreign alike, having fun and enjoying oneself. In her article “Eressos Lesbos, a place with female energy” (1992) Charoula Pseudonymou who used to be a habitué of Eressos writes:

*In Eressos we spent our best days throughout the year. It is vacation time and we are having female vacation. We exchange experiences, we are supporting each other, having fun and living together. Lifelong friendships are being formed as well as turbulent love stories. We know each other, come closer, play and laugh. We go for walking tours or rides with rented mopeds. The most courageous walk is Eressos-Sigri through footpaths. If you decide to try this walk make sure that you have enough water with you. It takes five to six hours. We go altogether to the taverns and bars of the village and we make up fires on the beach at night. Fires on the beach are made upon several occasions such as birthdays, a farewell party, on the full moon, or without reason at all. Several ethnic, zodiac, or befriended groups present a show. Almost always women play the guitar and sing. At these fires we know each other better, the 'newcomers' become members of the community, our respective energies come closer, we are together, we are having fun and we enjoy ourselves.*

Foreign women were more interested in feminism, more politicized. For Greek women who visited it, Eressos was a place with specific significance since they had the chance to meet other women from other parts of the world, England, Germany, Holland, to flirt and fall in love, had the opportunity to be informed about lesbian cultures in other countries, broaden their horizons, make new friends and visit them abroad. Urania Komninou, a woman who went for the first time to Eressos in 1981 remembers,

*The following September I went Inter-railing with two women from Germany who I had met the year before in Eressos. They spent a few days in my apartment in Athens ... they had come with a small van, a Volkswagen, stuffed with material on lesbianism. I joined them, went to Germany, and then I travelled alone. I went to Holland. Firstly I went with them to Munich, Berlin, and afterwards I took the train to Holland. I enjoyed it very much. I*

*travelled for two months visiting people whom I already knew, whom I had put up in my place, with whom we had exchanged addresses.*

Urania Komninou travelled to Holland, to England, to Germany many times afterwards, visiting friends she had met in Eressos during the previous years. And she was not the only one. Some Greek women even decided to move abroad following their relationships. Eleni Christakou stayed in Germany for eight years because she fell in love with a German woman, while Tereza Anagnostou lives permanently in Holland. Even today Eressos is significant as a place for making contacts and finding new partners.

### **A Lesbian Community in the 90's**

Nowadays more than 1.000 lesbian women visit Eressos every summer. The density in numbers varies according to the month. Though by the end of June, beginning of July there are, usually on a daily basis, just 30 women, during the high season i.e. mid July to the end of August there are approximately 150 women. The majority of them are Germans, English, Italians and Greeks. However, women from other countries also visit Eressos. When I was there I met women from Norway, two women from Australia, one Indian who lived in Italy, and a few from America. Not only the density but also numbers of specific national groups vary according to the month. In the beginning of July the majority of women frequenting Eressos consist mainly of Germans and English while August is considered to be the month when Greeks and Italians come.

The age of women visitors to Eressos varies from 18 to 50, with the majority of them ranging between 23-38. In relation to age a slight change has occurred lately. Joanna Harris says,

*In the last two years I have observed an increase in the number of young women. Nowadays women come to Eressos who are 20-25 years old, whereas in the past, the average age was 25-45. These older women continue to come. I have many friends of this age who come to Eressos but do not go out at*

*night, do not participate in evening life, do not frequent Marianna's. They sleep in rented rooms and they go to bed early. I think that the 'coming-out' story has begun to influence younger generations as well,*

Though I would agree that quite recently younger women, 18-21 years of age have started to gather in Eressos, I would argue that women who used to come, -from the very beginning of Eressos establishment as a lesbian meeting point-, seem to have lessened their visits. Joanna Harris herself did not come to Eressos the following year although she had been one of the first women who contributed to the formation of the community and had come every summer there after. From the very beginning of the community's establishment there was a core of women consisting of Italian, Greek, German, and English -not very large in number, 15 to 20- who used to come to Eressos every year. These women, nowadays aged 35 to 50, have followed the evolution of the community in Eressos and were among the ones who stayed in the huts on the beach, joined the feminist discussions, and took part in the fights with the villagers. One of them, the Italian Marina Francesco, has even bought a house in the village and has spent a few winters there while two others, an English and a Greek, have rented houses. Although some of them continue to visit Eressos they do not do it as consistently as they used to and they comment on the gap which separates them from younger generations and the fact that they share with these girls neither memories nor expectations.

For lesbian women who come to Eressos, the camping site, which is situated on the seaside near Psaropotamos, just a few meters away from Skala, used to be a place of special significance. Although it is not an exclusively lesbian camping site it functioned for many years as the main option for staying after the huts had been knocked down in 1986. However the term 'camping' is used rather euphemistically. It is a non-fenced place near the beach where the only facilities that are at one's disposal are running water and toilets. Shade is provided through short pine-trees. Living in the camping area gives one the opportunity to share a place with many other lesbian women, wake up with them, be with them during the whole day, flirt and express freely erotic feelings. Apart from purely economic reasons the

decision about staying in the camping is often determined by other factors, as for example, the desire to be a more active member of the community and being in a place where decisions about several activities are taken, e.g. to set up a fire, or to organize a football competition. Nevertheless, not all women decide to stay in the camping area. Many prefer to rent rooms in Skala either because they can afford it economically, wish to have a certain autonomy and independence, or just because they do not want to be woken up early in the morning by policemen asking them to leave. Troubles between police and lesbian women have never really stopped entirely and every year there are one or two incidents concerning policemen who went to the camping area asking women to leave. As an excuse for these constant vexations the municipality's intention to renovate the camping area is mentioned, to turn it into a 'proper' one. Although a continual threat of not allowing women to stay in the camping every year existed, in the summer of 1997 the threat was realized. At least until August, when demand for rented rooms was greater than their availability, presence at the camping site was forbidden by the police. This prohibition stopped many lesbian women, particularly Greek, coming to Eressos for economic reasons. However, the symbolic significance of the camping as a lesbian gathering place was partly undertaken by a small hotel in Skala Eressos, not very far from the sea, which was run by two lesbian women. A German and a Greek woman, undertook the management of a small hotel and turned it into a meeting place for Greek and foreign lesbian women.

Just in front of the camping site lies part of the beach which is preferred by lesbian women. Although the borders of different parts of the long sandy beach are not that strictly marked, as they used to be some years ago, even today one can discern and recognize this part of the beach as 'lesbian'- characterized by the density of naked female bodies. Though not forbidden, men's presence in this part is usually unwanted and I witnessed some occasions when men were openly told to leave the place. Swimming, sunbathing, playing volley ball on the beach in the afternoon, chatting, flirting, and having a drink in the open-air canteen are some of the activities which take place. Apart from the camping site and the sandy beach

there are other places in Skala itself where lesbian women gather. The daily program includes getting up at the camping or in a rented room, having breakfast either at *Marianna's* or in *Tenth Muse* usually till late midday, going to the beach till sunset, taking a shower and returning to Skala for dinner and a drink. *Marianna's* is located just opposite the central square of Eressos and opened in 1985. It is owned by a villager of Eressos and his wife. The arrival at *Marianna's* takes place at 9.00-10.00 in the morning. The day starts with breakfast, coffee and continues a bit later with salads, toasted sandwiches and beers. Late midday, early afternoon the number of women decreases slightly only to increase again in the evening after nine. *Marianna's* functions as a meeting place, i.e. a place at which to form new friendships, meet other women, discuss, flirt, arrange meetings, and have fun. An interesting feature is that tables and chairs never remain in the same position. Women move continually from one table to another and consequently the synthesis of the groups steadily changes. New women come, others leave, others go to another table. More than being a meeting place *Marianna's* is a place where certain events take place i.e. a 'fashion show', a 'backgammon contest', or the awarding of prizes in swimming games. The second place where many lesbian women gather is called *Tenth Muse*. It is located in the central square of Skala and was recently opened by two women who run café-bars in Athens, which though they are not identified, by their owners, as lesbian places, attract lesbian women. Leaflets for the bar in Eressos were distributed at lesbian parties in Athens during the winter. *Tenth Muse* is in several aspects different to *Marianna's*. Because of its location, situated in the main square just opposite the stand of the *Commercial Bank* in Skala, and its more elaborate and sophisticated style, it is frequented not only by lesbian women but by other tourists as well. Homemade breakfasts, which are named after the names of the nine Muses, are served, while the music of Bregovits<sup>16</sup> is played on the tape-recorder instead of Greek pop music. Just like *Marianna's*, *Tenth*

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<sup>16</sup> He is a composer from former Yugoslavia who is well known in Greece. He has written the music for Coustoritsa's movies.

*Muse* is a meeting place for lesbians who go there to meet friends, drink till late in the morning, dance, and have parties <sup>17</sup>.

Apart from everyday tourist activities which include prolonged breakfasts in *Marianna's* and *Tenth Muse*, swimming and sunbathing, playing volleyball in the afternoon, eating out and drinking in bars, buying souvenirs and going to the movies, there are some special events around which 'the community' is articulated. One of these events are fires set on the beach just in front of the camping. This is a recurrent event that dates back to the period of the huts <sup>18</sup>. The most famous fire is the one lit at full moon in August. These fires are usually organized by a company of friends or more frequently by an ethnic group. So there are fires lit by Greek women, fires set by Italians. 'Outsiders' in general and men in particular are rarely allowed to attend these fires. Organizing a fire means finding firewood and taking care of music. Drinks are usually brought to these fires individually and only rarely are they bought by the organizing group. Till a few years ago, wood for these fires was collected beforehand from the riverside bank. Today women usually buy firewood from a local horse owner. Women sit in a circle around the fire drinking and talking. Usually they sing, sometimes they dance. A successful fire consists of drinking, dancing, laughing, and flirting. In many cases women who remain till very late bring their sleeping bags and sleep beside the fire. The first fire I attended was in July 1994 organized by English women. It was too early for Greek and Italian women to be in Eressos so the majority of the thirty women who sat round the fire were English and German. Every woman had brought her own drinks. When we arrived the women sang mainly, English songs. One of the women, who were there, an English one, gave the beat. After a while every national group had to sing its own song, in its own language. Firewood was scarce and women had to go to the riverbank with a torch to select whatever tinder they could find. The party ended when there was no firewood left. A

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<sup>17</sup> On page 149 one can find a sketch of the Central Square of Skala.

<sup>18</sup> Since the establishment of the lesbian community in Eressos the most well known fire is the one lit on the full moon in August.

very successful one was organized by Italian women in August. Apart from taking care of firewood and music they looked after the aesthetic effect as well. They had made an oval shape out of candles placed in plastic bottles and the fire was placed in its middle. Many women from different ethnicities attended this fire that lasted till early in the morning and included, apart from dancing, also jumping over flames, and a night swim. Not all fires are always that successful. For example, the one that I attended recently which was organized by Greek women. Around the fire sat 15-20 Greek women who knew each other from Athens - with the exception of two Germans and an English woman-. The company was not that cheerful and they spent a lot of time commenting on the fact that every year things get worse. They commented that last year they had a watermelon filled with cognac and vodka while this year they just shared a bottle of whisky and a bottle of water, drinking from plastic cups.

Other activities that are acted out collectively are sport games. Swimming, beach volley, football, canoe racing. Such activities either can happen spontaneously or are the product of previous arrangement. When previously arranged these games are usually organized by Italians and are sources of fun, laughing, and competition. News about conducting sport games is circulated either orally or a placard is hung on the wall at *Marianna's*, informing about specific dates and places. One of the games I witnessed was canoe racing. Two days before a board hung on *Marianna's* wall announcing that a canoe race was going to take place on the beach where the sports pavilion stands. The four lesbian teams consisted of the German group, the English, the U.S. and the Greek one. Each group numbered four women. At the pre-scheduled date at 6.30 in the afternoon 50 women approximately gathered at the seaside. The Italian organizer of the games gave the signal and canoes set off. Women on the beach screamed and shouted in their effort to encourage athletes while at the same time they bet on who was going to win. Later the same evening, prizes were awarded to the participants at *Marianna's*. The Italian organizer gave out the prizes, which were boats of clay painted by hand for winners and plates of clay for the rest. Not all games are so elaborate. Nevertheless their common characteristics are an emphasis on

physical activity while ‘having fun’ and the formation of competing groups according to nationality.

Another ‘collective’ activity is going out together. Apart from informal ‘happenings’, which take place at *Marianna’s* or *Tenth Muse* on the occasion of someone’s birthday, ‘welcoming’, and ‘good-byes’, women often go altogether to the disco club in Skala or up to the village and have dinner at Maria’s restaurant <sup>19</sup>. Dinner at Maria’s restaurant has turned out to be part of the lesbian scene in Eressos. Two or three times every month 30-40 lesbian women -their nationality varies but they are mostly Italians and Greek- gather at Maria’s restaurant sitting around tables, eating, drinking, singing and dancing. Very often a villager from Eressos plays an *outi*, a stringed instrument, accompanying women in their songs. Lesbian women help Maria and her daughters to set the tables by bringing chairs, plates and glasses. No quarrels between women and people from Eressos have ever been recorded during these dinners and complaints on the part of other villagers even if they exist, have never been really strong. Nevertheless Marina Francesco’s, the Italian woman who owns a house in the village, age-long presence in Eressos is frequently mentioned as one of the factors which has led to this change of behavior and the acceptance of lesbian women by the people of Eressos. Marina Francesco used to invite friends from Italy even in the winter to spend some days in Eressos and they used to go to Maria’s for breakfast, and dinner. The image of lesbian women eating in the restaurants, or strolling around the streets of the village is not supposed to shock villagers any more <sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Maria is one of Eressos’ villagers. She has two married daughters and three grandchildren. She and her husband are very friendly towards lesbian women and usually stand up for them on given occasions. Maria once said to me, “I see them [lesbians] as if there were my daughters”.

<sup>20</sup> The sketch in page 150 aims to give a picture of the transformations in the use of space in Skala Eressos by same-sex desiring women during the last decades. In late 70s and beginning of the 80s women used to sleep and socialize with each other on the side of the beach after Psaropotamos. After they have been urged to leave their huts and move to the camping by the mid 80s part of their socializing took place in Skala. Nowadays

This change in attitudes is attributed mainly to economic reasons. In an article in the *Pink Paper*, published in autumn 1996, the reporter, a lesbian herself and former visitor of Eressos, criticizes the tourist exploitation of the place. Commenting on a photograph that pictured two women who were erotically embracing each other in the main square of Skala just in the front of the stand of the *Commercial Bank*, she argued that everything has changed in Eressos. Using a metaphor she claimed that the Greek God of money Hermes has superseded ‘foremother’ Sappho. Villagers are only interested in easy profit and same-sex desiring women consent to their exploitation. The discourse on profit, commercialization, and tourism pervades the lives of villagers and women alike. Villagers who are engaged in tourism activities are to be divided into those who want to see Eressos become the ‘lesbian Mykonos’<sup>21</sup> of Greece and those who would preferably serve ‘good tourism’ best exemplified by German families with small children<sup>22</sup>. The former are thinking of contacting foreign travel agencies in order to bring to Eressos as many lesbian women as possible. They are dreaming of building a museum dedicated to Sappho, and are considering providing further attractions and activities. The latter maintain that people of Eressos should focus on trying to attract the kind of tourism that is to be found on other Greek islands, namely families,

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the majority of them stay in rented rooms or hotels in Skala where they spend their time in cafes, bars, and restaurants.

<sup>21</sup> Mykonos is the island in the Aegean that has attracted many gay people from around the world since the 60’s. In their article on Europeanization John Borneman and Nick Fowler comment on the fact that in the context of Europe some locations have been isolated “where certain kinds of sexual practices are actually legal and constitute an essential economic industry. We call these places ‘Eurogenous zones’. They are marked by functional specialization, with cities such as Hamburg (kinky hetero sex) and Amsterdam (safer, regulated hetero sex and a large homosexual culture) within northwestern Europe, Krakow in Eastern Europe (which features Europe’s only lesbian sauna), and Seyches and Mykonos in southern Europe (large gay male resorts). Moreover, the zones are well-known tourist sites, with both customers and ‘suppliers’ often coming from elsewhere to be someone else” (1997: 506).

<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Matias Duyves (1995) argues that the meaning of Amsterdam as a gay hub is not only dependent on the self-perception and self-expression of the local gay community, but equally on responses of the whole city that are half-hearted and unbalanced.

couples, tourists with high budgets<sup>23</sup>. The same opposition is to be found among same-sex desiring women as well. There are women who accept the tourist character of the place and even invest in Eressos either as bar owners, hotel managers, or are thinking of buying land and founding a private camping site for lesbians<sup>24</sup>. On the other hand, there is a discourse on change and decline<sup>25</sup>. According to this aspect, the collective, supportive, unitary spirit of the past has been substituted by an interest in individualism, profit, and a ‘just having a good time’ attitude. In their narration, women recall a past that is differentiated from the present. Mina Kostopoulou complains that,

*I do not like it any more here. In former days during the whole of winter I just kept thinking of my return to Eressos. This thought alone kept me alive. Nowadays I cannot find anything that I like. Neither a friendly and relaxed atmosphere nor political discussions ... nothing... just how to have a good time. Now they come only to flirt. The women of my age believed in something, we had a vision.*

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<sup>23</sup> There are villagers who still think that the connection of Eressos to female homosexuality and the welcoming of lesbian women constitutes an insult to them, their principles, and their place. However this opinion is mainly to be found among people who do not spend their winter in Athens, are landowners who are not engaged in tourist activities in Skala.

<sup>24</sup> Since my research in 1997 an ever growing number of same-sex desiring women, mostly Western, but also Greek, have become managers of hotels and bars, and owners of small shops in Skala Eressos.

<sup>25</sup> The discussion on the commodification of same-sex desires is not confined among the habitués of Eressos. In an article on the power of the so called ‘pink pound’ Tim Edwards disagrees with those who argue that spending the pink pound is a political act in itself, supportive of lesbian and gay business and a visible symbol to the rest of the society, and holds that the expansion of the gay consumer culture is an example of new lifestyle markets developed during the 1980s and not a testimony to the power of pink politics (1998: 479). Holding a slightly different position Jon Binnie remarks that, “Pink business after all do operate as business, rather than charities. However, some business do contribute more to their customers than others, and some bars clearly perform an important function for non-commercial social and political groups” (1995a: 187).

In a text which appears on the Web, Maria Cyberdyke, raises strong objections on the way lesbian life in Eressos is being articulated nowadays<sup>26</sup>:

*Now in Eressos the way that the village people put pressure on the lesbians has become more 'progressive'. Rich lesbians are the easiest source of getting money for the village people, than the freak dykes who, anyway, haven't got a lot of money to spend and also, for their taste, they are 'ugly'. This summer, the mayor and the village people closed the camping-site and more and more rooms to let were taken. The reaction from the lesbians was not great and this has to do with the fact that the kind of lesbians who now come to Eressos has changed. [...] The fact that the camping is closed this year has also resulted in these alternative dykes, who used to come here, no longer doing so. Political dykes are slowly being replaced by more 'modern' non-political lesbians who are not in the mood to defend anything!*

Another woman, Christina Tsantali, former member of AKOE and the editor of the lesbian periodical *Madame Gou*, began to visit Eressos in 1989. She observes the change that occurred in Eressos quite recently but cannot decide whether she likes it or not:

*It has changed, yes. I do not know whether it is good or bad. But the whole movement has changed, the whole society has changed, Eressos could not remain as it was. I cannot say I like it when I go there and I see all these women divided into small tiny groups. We do not really communicate with each other any more. We have also been affected by nationalism. Nowadays Greeks are with Greeks, English with English, Germans with Germans. Nothing resembles the collective atmosphere which prevailed few years ago. Feminism is out-of-date nowadays with all its virtues. [...] On the other hand I like it. I went there, I like that I can meet so many women, I saw friends who*

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<sup>26</sup> The original text is written in English. I made just minor changes in grammar without altering its style.

*I cannot meet anywhere else. However, I was not on the beach everyday, we also went elsewhere to other beaches, I did not go out every night.*

Yet, even when a unitary and collective spirit prevailed in the lesbian community in Eressos there were certain differences among its members. Differences in nationality, in age, in sexual orientation -homosexual or bisexual-. Participation in the community was not necessarily followed by the adoption of a single, unitary lesbian identity. Susan Krieger was among the first who wanted to “redirect attention from the issue of ‘lesbian identity’ to the issue of ‘individual identity’ in the lesbian setting” (1982: 92). She argues that lesbian communities “vary across class and racial lines, from city to city, over time, and according to type”, while at the same time “lesbians stand in very different relations to such communities: some are highly involved, others alienated” (ibid.: 196) <sup>27</sup>. In other words, “the collective identities of many of these separatist groups were not always stable but rather fluid, as women contested and (re)negotiated their mutuality and consequently the boundaries of their ‘communities’ ” (Valentine 1997: 115). Nevertheless, the critique on the unifying character of community does not lead to the abolition of the concept altogether. Detached from its coalition with identity the concept of community remains significant for an examination of the ways lesbian and gay people organize their lives, choose the places they frequent, form relationships among them. Iris Marion Young argues that community as an ideal “exhibits a totalizing impulse and denies difference in two primary ways. First, it denies the difference within and between subjects. Second, in privileging face-to-face relations it seeks a model of social relations that are not mediated by space and time distancing” (1990: 303). What is instead needed is a politics of difference, which will give political representation to group

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<sup>27</sup> According to Kath Weston, from the very beginning gay activists pressed the community concept into the service of an identity politics that cast gays in the part of an ethnic minority or subculture. Following the same path, social scientists who explored lesbian and gay communities during the 70’s assumed “an amazingly uncomplicated relationship between claiming an identity and feeling a sense of belonging or community” (1991: 123).

interests and celebrate the distinctive cultures and characteristics of different groups (ibid.: 319).

### ***Three women, three stories, three different ages***

Moving away from the ideal of community as a timeless entity it is important to pay attention to relations among same-sex desiring women mediated by space and time. Referring to the lesbian bars and beaches they used to frequent in the '60s, Joan Nestle comments on the significance of specific places for the development of a 'lesbian' self and the formation of close relationships with other women, "... I think there is something deeper calling out from these places, the dark and red-lit bars, the liberated zones of sea and sand. It was here that women transformed themselves, right under the fist of the state. It was here, on continuously shifting ground, that we created the semblance of communal permanence. It was here that we found a way to be real in places that were never our own, by deed or laws of property. Whether it was the bar or the beach, we claimed these places by the courage of our often-wounded bodies and the persistence of our need. We created moments, afternoons, nights of liberation out of the mortar of surveillance" (1997: 67). To the same effect the presence of Greek women who are engaged in same-gender sexual relations in Eressos nowadays is potentially crucial for their lives regardless of whether they miss the former collective spirit and muse over past times, or are willingly to give in to the more commercialized character of the place. Instead of wondering about the unity of the community it is perhaps more interesting to listen to these women's accounts of their experiences in Eressos, and the ways their lives have been influenced due to these visits.

Sofia Anagnostaki, was born in 1949 in one of the big cities of Greece. Soon after she had completed school she went to Athens for her studies where she became involved with the lesbian-feminist movement and ended up as one of the major editors of *Lavris*. She went to Eressos for the first time in 1981. She had already heard about it before 1981 from some of

her classmates who went there at the end of the 70's. When she visited the place in 1981 she met many women, foreigners in their majority, but also Greek ones with whom she continues to be acquainted. Sofia has gone to Eressos each summer ever since, without any interruption, and during the last years she has rented a house in the village. Even when the confrontations between locals and lesbian women had reached their peak in 1986, 1987 she did not stop visiting the place. In 1987 when some locals had beaten up two foreign women she ended up as the translator in the trial against the locals which followed. When I remind her that I have heard her many times saying that she will not come again she answers:

*Yes ... every time something bad happens I get angry and I promise myself that I won't return. But when I reconsider it, I long for the place and I want to come back and see ... is there anything left of what I saw so many years ago? How are the women now? Despite not going out very often now, I still want to meet people. How do women look now?*

Her desire to meet old acquaintances and to follow the way Eressos changes is mentioned by Sofia as the two main reasons why she continues to visit the place although it does not bear for her the same significance it used to. Yet, her whole life is related to her presence in Eressos from the friends and company she has in Athens during winter, who are mostly women she meets in Eressos, to her future plans to open a small bookstore in Skala.

Evanthia Totti is a very recent visitor to Eressos. Born in 1966 Evanthia visited the place in the summer of 1994. She learned about Eressos, while being in the United States for studying, from an English travel guide for women, and from Rafaela Stamatiou, a representative from *EOK*, The Greek Homosexual Organization, when the latter went to New York to present a paper to the group of Greek-American Gay and Lesbians. The event took place to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stonewall. After the presentation someone of the audience asked where homosexual people could go for vacations in Greece. The answer was "To Eressos". Next time she was in Greece for vacations Evanthia made plans to spend five

days in this unknown, exotic place which had the name 'Eressos'. While she was travelling alone on the ship to Lesbos she met an American-French woman and two women from Athens with whom she hung around the whole time she was in Eressos. The first impression was decisive:

*I went there in July '94. I stepped off the bus and I was shocked! There were many foreign women walking down the street holding hands and no one said anything. And I asked myself "what is going on here?" We went to the Blue Bar, then to Marianna's, on the beach, in front of the camping; the women there were naked ... it was something like ... I began to breath freely again, I felt free, I mean this was the real thing ... It was a shock, but it was a shock out of surprise because I did not expect that people there would be so open ... at least I thought they were. And I felt perfectly comfortable. I mean I was walking down the street and I did not care whether I appeared like a lesbian or not. I did not have a problem sitting in Marianna's or going to the Blue Bar, to the camping, to the beach either. I felt so relaxed.*

In her own words, her encounter with Eressos was 'love at first sight'. Afterwards Evanthia spent many months in Eressos where she continues to go for long periods of time. It is a place where she relaxes, meets women, flirts, and can act out more freely than in Athens.

The third woman, Anna Kalivioti, was very young when she first went to Eressos, just 16 years old. Born in 1973 Anna went to Eressos at the end of the '80s, and the beginning of the 90's. According to her account, her own grandmother encouraged her to go there in order to meet people and have a good time. When I met Anna in the summer of 1994 she had been going to Eressos without interruption for all these years. Nevertheless, one year later she decided to refrain from going to Eressos and the lesbian bars in Athens which she used to frequent, and return to her hometown, a small city of Greece, in order to follow a peaceful life

with her partner. The following abstract is from a text in diary form she wrote about Eressos when she was still visiting the place:

*... I know that I will soon reach my destiny and this thought makes me anxious. Will there be women from last year, or will I be alone? Who I am going to meet? What is going to happen? Who knows? Fascinating questions. For me at least. For the moment I go to the camping. I look around searching for familiar faces. I observe the people. I can only see families with small children who are screaming. I would be shocked if it was the first time I had visited the place. But it is not. I know that sooner or later, (more probably) the first one), I would see female couples strolling around the streets, gathering on the beach, appearing through the tents. Someone calls me. Just as I had thought. I will not be alone. Women I already knew approach me and we begin to chat. The only thing I want is to leave my things and go for a swim. "We will see you at the café", they tell me. "OK I will come soon". I take my bag and go to this beautiful beach. The coast stretches for kilometres and the blue water calls for a swim. During July and August you can see many women swimming, playing, knowing each other. I lay my towel, take off my clothes and go to have a swim. I have to confess that swimming is not my favourite activity. Back to the beach observing people who surround me. I want to meet new women. Not for a sexual encounter. It always fascinates me the contact with people from foreign countries because they have different lifestyles, activities, opinions, they can share with you news on lesbianism from all over the world. ... Sometimes men come to this part of the beach to look at the lesbians. They even have the impudence to offend us. However, it does not prove to be such a good idea, since German women are adequately*

*qualified to impose order again. Whoever has the guts may approach!*<sup>28</sup> ...  
*My friends are sitting in a cafe near the beach. According to the 'schedule'*  
*we must now participate in a marathon of drinking ouzo under the hot sun.*  
*"Every year things get worse", comments Lena and we all agree with her.*  
*Village people think that tourism means dozens of fat Germans who come to*  
*Eressos with their families and give their last Pfennig to the villagers. They*  
*do not like all these women who come from all over the world as if on a*  
*pilgrimage to a sacred place. But this is a wrong way of thinking. What are*  
*they afraid of? That they will fall into disrepute?*

Eressos gave Anna Kalivioti the opportunity to meet women from abroad, make friendships, find new lovers till the moment she decided to withdraw from the 'lesbian scene' of the place and follow a more isolated way of life.

Three women, three different ages, three different stories. Without doubt each woman who frequents Eressos has her own story to tell. Stories about friendships and love-stories, stories about the landscape and the specific characteristics of the place, the sea, and the people. Stories of expectation and excitement, and stories of disillusion and disappointment. Eressos is for same-sex desiring women who visit it, a place with multiple meanings. It is the honoured birthplace of Sappho, it is an international meeting place, it is also a tourist place. The experience of being in Eressos is not shared by all women, neither to the same extent, nor in the same way<sup>29</sup>. Anna Kalivioti told me once that while for foreign lesbians visiting

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<sup>28</sup> One afternoon in the summer of 1994 we were on this specific part of the beach, six-seven women who participated in a seminar called "Sappho and women's literature". A man approached us since he was befriended by one of the women. He sat on the sand and began to speak with the women although it was more than obvious that he was unwanted. When the majority of women dived into the water one of the German women who participated in the seminar asked the woman who knew him whether he was a close friend of hers. After she had received a "no" as an answer she asked him to leave.

<sup>29</sup> As Rob Shields remarks, "The meaning of particular places is a compendium of intersubjective and the cultural interpretations over time. Thus, a place might go from being considered a resort to being an industrial

Eressos is compared to Mecca, “they have to come at least once”, as if they were going on a pilgrimage, for Greek women Eressos is primarily identified with lesbian bars and consequently with entertainment, consumption, and the search for a partner. Because of its identification with lesbian bars and to a ‘coming-out’ process the number of Greek same-sex desiring women who frequent Eressos is relatively small. They hesitate to frequent a place marked as ‘lesbian’, although it would provide them with the opportunity to meet women from abroad, have interesting discussions, enjoy themselves, find new lovers. Greek women’s reluctance to visit Eressos cannot be fully understood without a discussion on spaces where same-sex desiring women gather, meet, forge their identities, and portray themselves in the context of contemporary Greek society, without a discussion on the specificities of this society, since as Jeffrey Weeks argues, “The global and the particular feed one another, changing what it means to be sexual” (2000: 241).

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center” (1990: 25). This view, apart from introducing the parameter of change, lays particular emphasis on verbal representations. A place is never a mere site, it is always a place for someone or something.

**Greece, Lesvos, Skala Eressos -Maps**



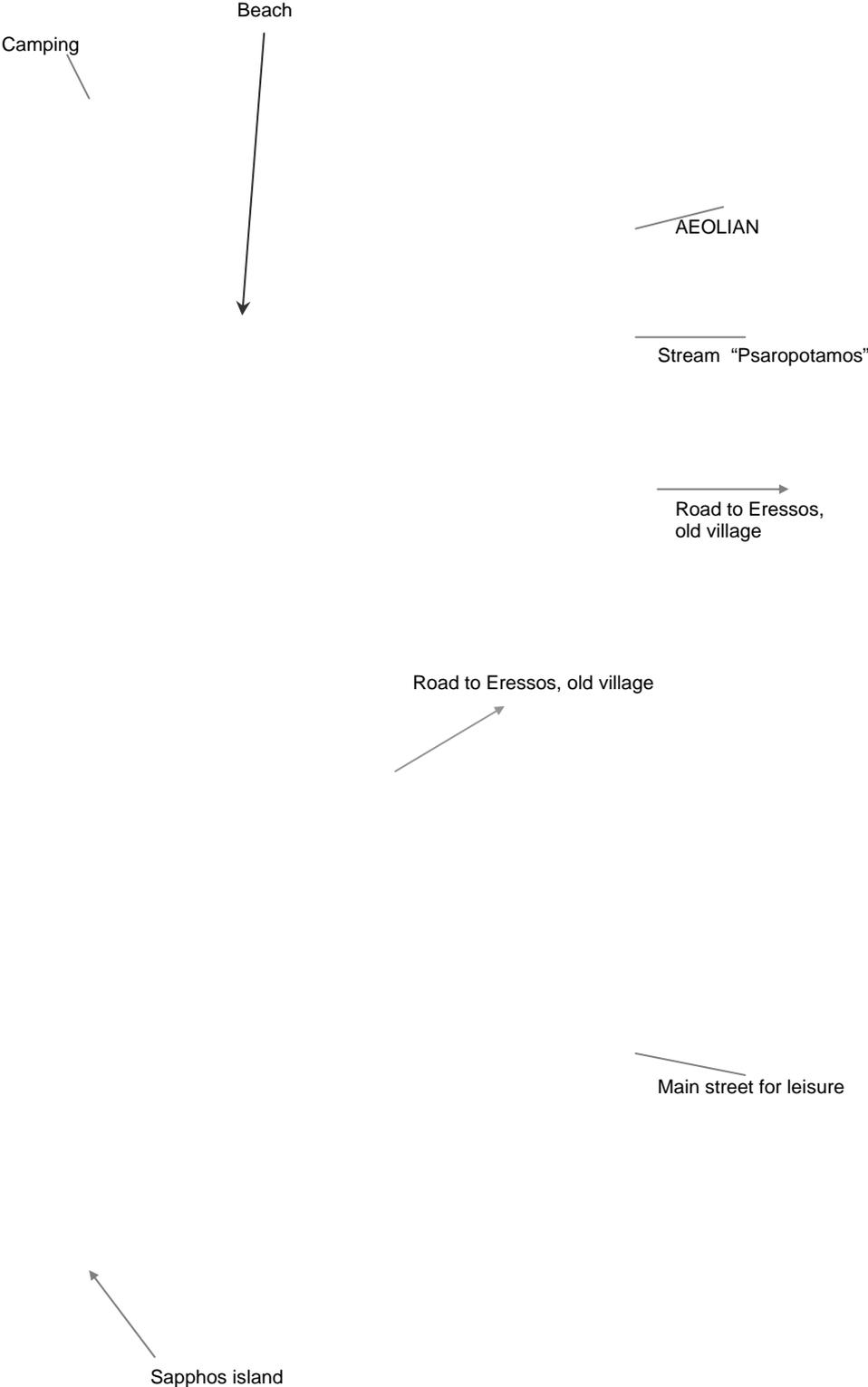
*LESVOS*

VIGLA

**SKALA ERESSOS**



Skala Eressos –Aerial Photos



**Skala Eressos -Pictures**

View from the main street

Wooden terrasses

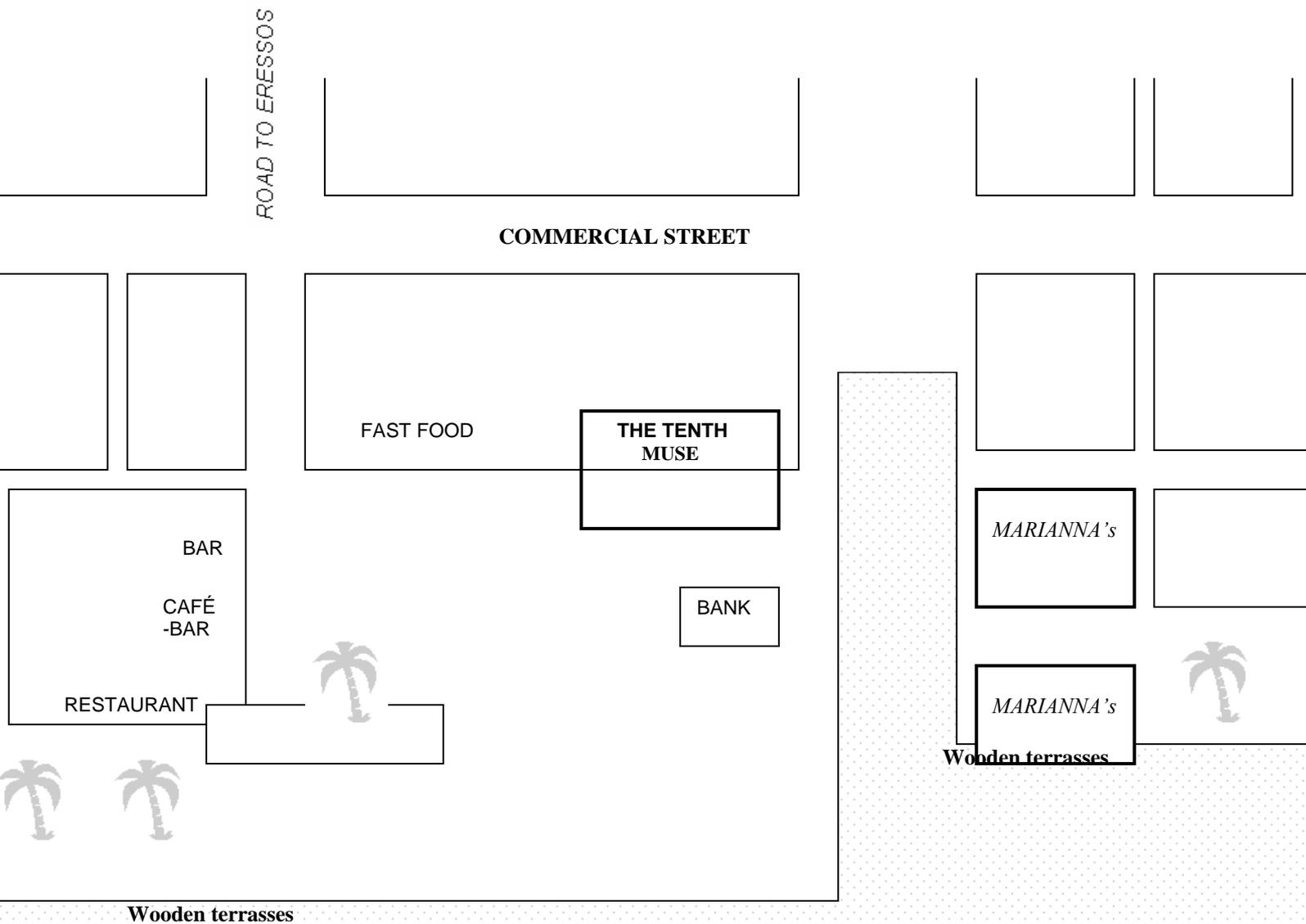
Mariannas cafe

Central square

Hotel Sappho

Beach

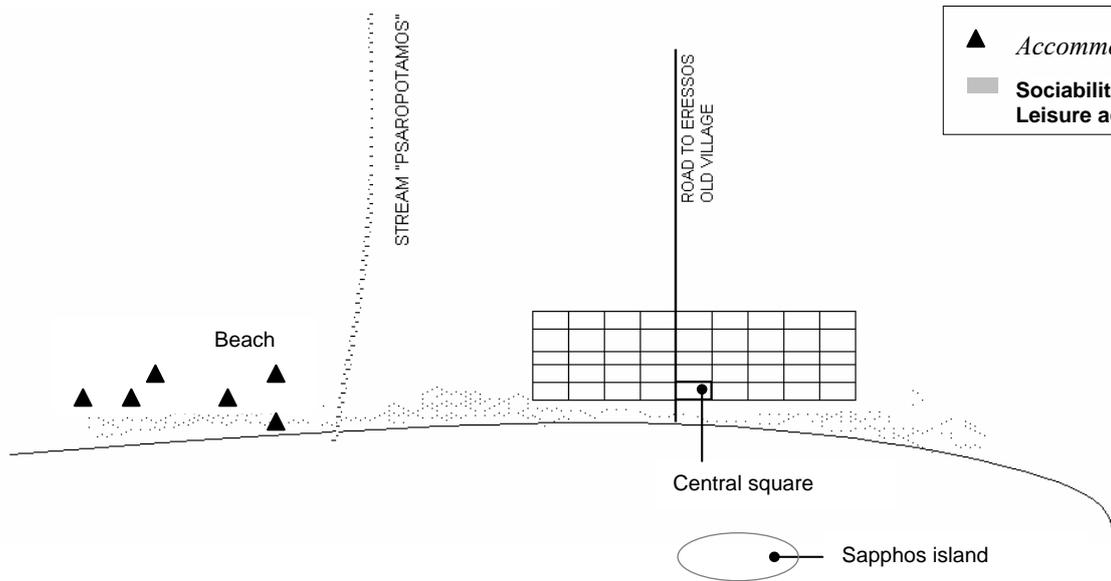
The Central Square of Skala Eressos



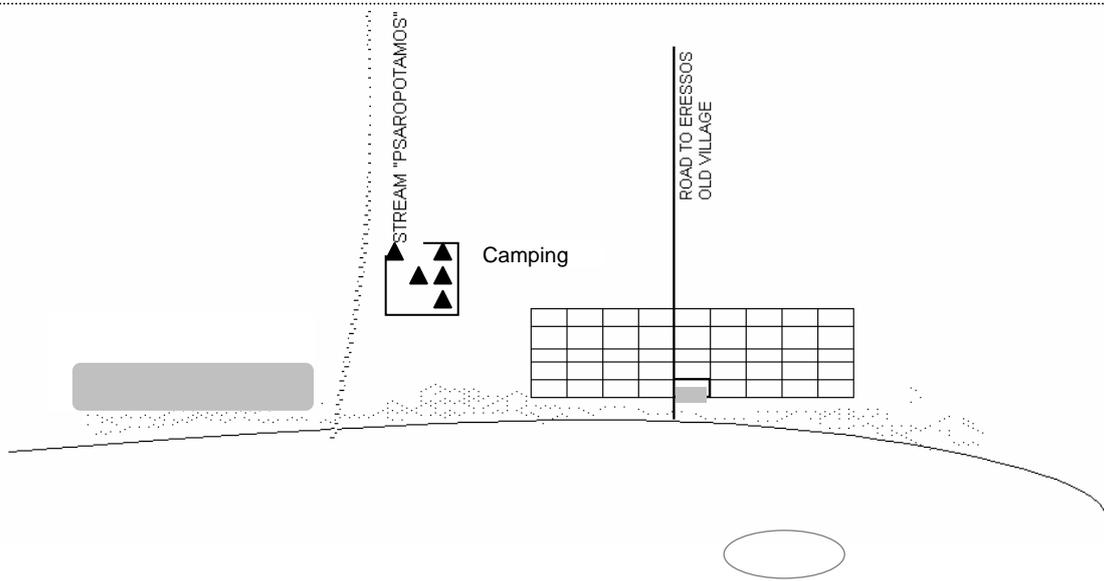
# Transformations in the Use of Space

*Lesvos*

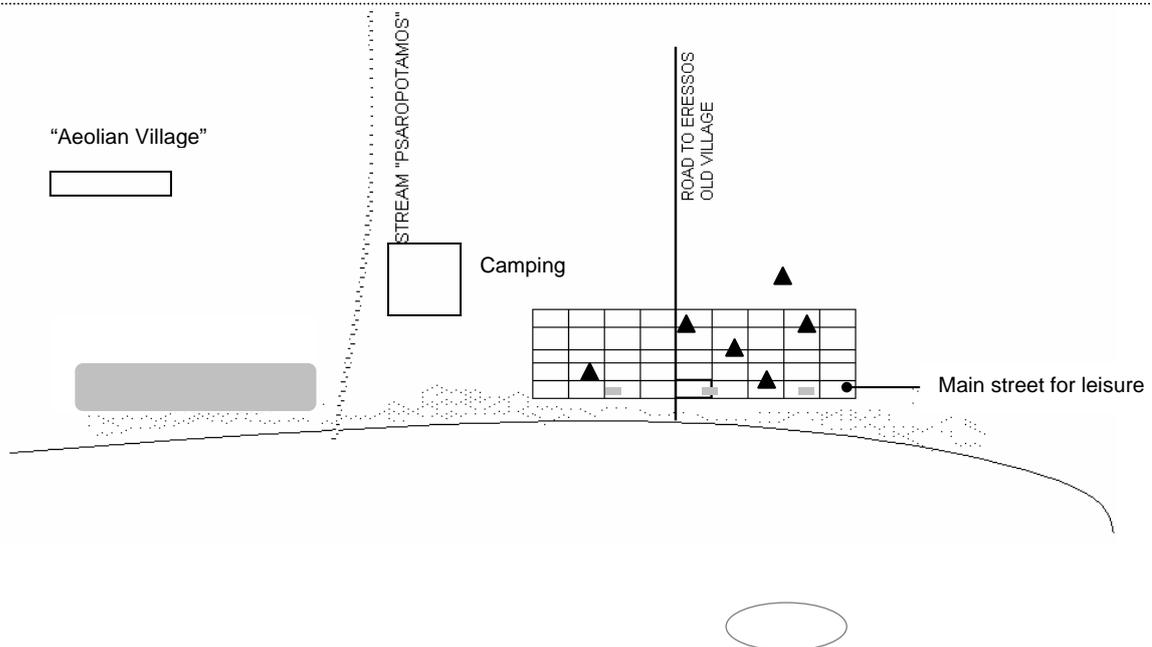
▲	Accommodatio
■	Sociability, Leisure activities



Late 70s



Late 80s



Late 90s

# **PART THREE**

## **SAME - SEX ENCOUNTERS**

*Contemporary social movements, and the individual and collective identities they give rise to and are forged by, emerge as points of resistance and projects for social transformation in dialogue and dialectic with globalizing tendencies, in unpredictable, culturally specific ways. The lesbian and gay politics of the past thirty years vividly illustrate this. On the one hand the internationalizing of experience has been profound. The American influence post-Stonewall has swept the world, giving rise to a hegemonic notion of what the modern homosexual is, or should be. Yet at the same time, we see the proliferation of differentiated identities, along the lines of gender, 'race' and ethnicity, sexual taste; and the settlement of a new sense of place as rundown parts of most western cities are reinvented as geographical sexual communities. A diasporic identity, transcending traditional cultural boundaries, marked by remarkably similar social facilities, organizations, styles, even domestic patterns, and more or less equally scarred by the threat of illness and death through the AIDS epidemic, co-exists with an ever growing diversification of specific identities, shaped by local cultures, social opportunities, legal systems, political choices and the like.*

Jeffrey Weeks in *Making Sexual History* (2000: 241)

In Part II the emergence of a lesbian movement and the establishment of an international lesbian community on the Greek island of Lesbos were examined in relation to the actual participation of women with same-sex sexualities in lesbian groups, their engagement with the 'lesbian scene', or the degree of their involvement with the lesbian community of Eressos. My conclusion was that same-sex desiring women's reluctance to be more public about their sexual choices cannot be solely explained due to shortcomings of lesbian groups or to the absence of a strong lesbian culture. It seems that despite major changes which have taken place in Greek society during recent decades due to the import of Western discourses, the country's prospective membership to the EEC, and the constitution of the new Family Law, new discourses on intimacy, relationships, and sexuality are being strongly contested by traditional ones.

In a review of the literature on patterns of non-heterosexual relationships Jeffrey Weeks, Catherine Donovan, and Brian Heaphy (1996) argue that significant changes have taken place in non-heterosexual relationships since the 60's. An interest in sexuality and identity has been replaced by an ever-growing awareness of topics such as relationships, intimacy, family. According to the authors, the explanation for such a shift in interests cannot be solely attributed to internal changes in the non-heterosexual world, but is equally related to a broader change in intimate relationships at large, a transformation which has been recorded and analyzed by Anthony Giddens in his book *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992). Giddens argues that the ideal of romantic love is being replaced by confluent love which is "active, contingent love, and therefore jars with the 'for-ever', and 'one-and-only' qualities of the romantic love complex" (ibid.: 61). 'Confluent love' is based on the 'pure relationship', "a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived from it, by each person, from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it" (ibid.: 58). In contrast to 'romantic love', 'confluent love' has no specific

connection to heterosexuality. Drawing on Giddens' work Weeks et al. conclude that "the transformations of intimacy, themselves the product of the breakdown of traditional narratives and legitimizing discourses under the impact of global economic and social forces, are making possible diverse ways of life which cut across the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy, and which are producing a pluralization of domestic patterns and relationships" (1996: 5). The transformation of intimacy is related to the process of globalization –and its results of detraditionalization, individualization, and identity creation- with the result that, "we are here in a world where the imperatives of history, nature and science are being displaced by the norm of sexual choice, and where a master narrative is being displaced by a multiplication of new narratives, each claiming its own truth" (Weeks 2000: 238). Moreover, these new stories about the self, about sexuality and gender, make the claim for a new form of belonging which "reflects the remaking of the self and the multiplicity and diversity of possible identities that characterize the late, or post-modern world" (Weeks 1998a: 35) and therefore provide "the context for the emergence of the sexual citizen" (ibid.: 47). The concept of 'sexual citizenship' draws heavily on Kenneth Plummer's notion of 'intimate citizenship', who defines it as a new field of life politics, "a new set of claims around the body, the relationship and sexuality" (1996: 45). But where Plummer sees in the emergence of new narratives about intimacy, sexuality, relationships, and family, and in the uttering of new stories about self and identity the "potential for a radical transformation of the social order" (ibid.: 45), Weeks et al. are more reluctant to adopt such an optimistic view. They comment that "those who welcome the diversity of contemporary society, and the consequent need to redefine the concept of citizenship to include different ways of life, have recently been confronted by evidence which points to the remarkable stability of everyday life, despite apparent changes in form and ideology" (1996: 3). In accordance with the latter I would argue that, if we are to understand new, individualized narrations on female same-sex desires these have to be presented in relation to dominant narrations of Greek society on family, motherhood, sexuality.

In Part III I focus on the emergence of such new narratives on self, family, intimacy, sexuality, gender as they are uttered by same-sex desiring women in contemporary Greece. At the beginning of this section I am interested in spaces where new narrations on sexuality and subjectivity can emerge, since space is a necessary prerequisite for the construction of relationships and the subsequent outburst of new models for living. In subsequent chapters I am concerned with the emergence of new stories on family relationships, friendships, motherhood, sexual desires, subjectivities. While these stories are interesting in their own right, it is only through their comparison with more traditional ones on family, motherhood, kinship, and female sexuality that they gain their full significance. Located in the dominant discourses on family, gender, and self-identity they display not only the oppositions, contrasts, discrepancies, but also the similarities and the resemblance between new and traditional sexual stories.

## Chapter VI

### Spaces for Encounters

#### Beyond the ‘Public/Private’ Dichotomy

*I want to take the hand of my beloved one –whenever she appears- and stroll with her light-hearted in the centre of Athens, go with her on a journey to my favourite Galaksidi. And I want our mothers to know that we are there together, and be happy for us, because we deserve it. I am fed up with the DOORS, WINDOWS, and BASEMENTS, where I luckily have not become a habitué yet, but everything seems to urge me to do so. I do not want my life to become an ODYSSEY where I will go just to have sex over and over again. My life did not start like that; I do not want it to end up just like that <sup>1</sup>.*

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<sup>1</sup> The writer of the letter plays with the words *Porta* –door- and *Odyssey* –Odyssey- that are the names of two well-known lesbian bars in Athens.

“Anaplathontas tin Kathimerinotita” –“Reforming Daily Routine”- In  
*MadameGou* (1997, 5: 20)

Not only geography, but other disciplines as well such as anthropology, ecology, archeology, architecture are preoccupied with the category of space <sup>2</sup>. The organization of space, its significance, its practical uses, and its symbolic meanings attract researchers' interests, not least because “we all live our lives through actions performed in structured space and time. The material world that surrounds us is one in which we use our living bodies to give substance to the social distinctions and differences that underpin social relations, symbolic systems, forms of labor and quotidian intimacies” (Moore 1994a: 71). Not only is space socially constructed but the social is spatially constructed too, with the result that “[because] it is conceptualized as created out of social relations, space is by its very nature full of power and symbolism, a complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and co-operation” (Massey 1993: 156).

As socially constructed, space is both gendered and sexed while at the same time gender, sex, and sexuality are all spaced <sup>3</sup>. But as Elsbeth Probyn notes “the conditions of the production of the space as gendered or as sexed are historically, materially, and strategically different. ... Space is a pressing matter and it matters which bodies, where and how, press up against it. Most important of all is who these bodies are with: in what historical and actual

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<sup>2</sup> Amos Rapaport points out that “Space is not a self-evident concept. It is far more than the relatively simple notion of physical space that is implicit in many discussions, i.e. the three-dimensional extension of the world; the intervals, separations and distances among people, between people and things, and among things” (1994: 478). He discerns space in human and non-human space, in designed and non-designed space, in social, symbolic, and behavioral space, while, sub-categories may include experiential, psychological, and cognized space, subjective, cultural, and imaginative space, electronic space.

<sup>3</sup> The title of the edited volume *Sexuality & Space*, which was published in 1992 and sprang from a symposium with same title held in Princeton University, is suggestive of recent interest in the relations between these two concepts. The symposium was organized by Beatriz Colomina, Assistant Professor of Architecture, who was also the editor of the book.

spatial configuration they find and define themselves” (1995: 81). Recent research mainly in the domain of geography has demonstrated that there exists a mutually constitutive relationship between space and sexual identities<sup>4</sup>. “It has been shown that sexual identity impacts on the use and reading of space, and that the socially and culturally encoded character of space has bearing on the assuming and acting out of sexual identities” (Bell et al. 1994), or as Jon Binnie would epigrammatically phrase it “space and place do matter to the construction of sexualities” (1997a: 245). Especially for same-sex desiring people, space has been of significant importance. From Carol Warren’s remark “Space and time are the concrete boundaries of a community, in a not quite metaphorical sense. A community that is secret and stigmatized must quite literally have walls: places and times set apart from other places and times in which the community can celebrate itself” (1974, reprinted in 1998: 183), to Joseph Bristow’s aphorism “It is possible to be gay [only] in specific places and spaces” (1989: 74) space has always been of great significance for the establishment of lesbian and gay communities and the formation of sexual identities<sup>5</sup>. While at the beginning extensive work has been done on the impact that gay communities have on the urban fabric at a neighbourhood level mostly in the US (Castells 1983, Knopp 1987, 1992, 1995, Adler and Brenner 1992), soon another thread of research appeared which explored the hegemony of heterosexual social relations in everyday environments, from housing and workplaces to

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<sup>4</sup> The following account refers mainly to research done on sexuality and space in the area of geography since this is the domain where the majority of such research has been conducted. From an anthropological perspective published work, which refers explicitly to the subject, includes Laud Humphrey’s ethnography *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Spaces* (1975), Kath Weston’s article “Get Thee to a Big City. Sexual Imaginary and the Great Gay Migration” (1995, reprinted in 1998 in *longslowburn. sexuality and social sciences*), and William Leap’s “Sex in ‘Private’ Places: Gender, Erotics and Detachment in Two Urban Locales” (1999).

<sup>5</sup> As the editors of *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (1997) Brenda Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter state, “Queer space enables people with marginalized (homo)sexualities and identities to survive and to gradually expand their influence and opportunities to live fully. In the fragments of queer-friendly public spaces available today, a basis for survival, contact communality, and sometimes even community has begun” (1997: 3).

shopping centers and the street. “In the early 1990s geographical work, particularly in the UK, has turned away from an obsession with defining and locating gay residential and institutional communities towards a concern with identity politics. ... A whole body of work is emerging in geography that explores the performance of sexual identities and the way that they are inscribed on the body and the landscape. This work has overturned all the old binaries: heterosexual-homosexual; public-private and so on. There is now greater recognition of the multiplicity of sexualities and the fluid and contextual nature of sexual identities” (Bell and Valentine 1995: 9). It was in this context that a whole array of research has emerged, i.e. on sexualized culture and consumption (Binnie 1995a, b), lesbian and gay tourism (Binnie 1995a, Duyves 1995), lesbian informal networks and institutions (Valentine 1993), the rural/urban opposition (Valentine 1997), sexual citizenship (Bell 1995). Such research contested the heterosexual-homosexual and public-private binaries on which former examination of sexuality and space was related upon and displayed their arbitrary character. Drawing on the belief that “heterosexuality is clearly the dominant sexuality in most everyday environments, not just private spaces, with all interactions taking place between sexed actors”, they concluded that “to be lesbian or gay is both to perceive and to experience the heterosexuality of the majority of environments” (Valentine 1993: 396). Therefore the dichotomy between ‘public’ and ‘private’ is being eradicated to the extent that sexuality is far more than a private act performed behind closed doors. It is evident on the street, in the office, in the parental home, in the bar and is being contested and negotiated in many different environments <sup>6</sup>. In like manner, public expressions of non-heterosexual sexuality “are not only transgressive, in that they trespass on territory that is taken for granted as heterosexual, but also transformative, in that they publicly articulate sexualities that are assumed to be ‘private’ (and in the case of lesbians also invisible) and thus change the way we understand

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Gill Valentine’s article “(Hetero)sexing space: lesbians perceptions and experiences of everyday spaces” (1993) provides a detailed analysis of all these spaces –the house, the workplace, social spaces, service and commercial environments, public open spaces- whereas heterosexuality is taken for as a granted process.

space by exposing its performative nature and the artifice of the public/private dichotomy” (Valentine 1996: 154). Even more importantly, such research demonstrated the specific circumstances and contexts in which different sexualities appear. As Jon Binnie and Gill Valentine comment in their review of recent publications on space and sexuality “work on geographies of sexualities has to date been characterized by an emphasis on both the material and the everyday –how sexualities are lived out in particular places and spaces. ... It is a strength of the more contextualized geographies of sexuality that sexual politics must not be treated in isolation and that wider political economic forces and considerations are at play in the production of sexualized spaces” (1999: 183) <sup>7</sup>.

The hegemony of the ‘public/private’ dichotomy was even more evident in the case of research on same-sex desiring women since the latter had been approached as gendered individuals and were ascribed to the domestic sphere of home. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the development of capitalist societies a number of sharp separations emerged which divided the world of work from the world of family life, and separated the public sphere outside the home from the private sphere inside the home. The private realm, where ‘natural’ functions like sex and reproduction took place and the affective content of relationships was primary, was associated with women, while the public realm of work, money, production and efficiency was ascribed to men (Martin 1987, reprinted in 1996: 15-16) <sup>8</sup>. Even today and despite the

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<sup>7</sup> Another review of recent research on sexuality and space is Jon Binnie’s article “Coming out of Geography: towards a queer epistemology?” (1997b). The author focuses on various theoretical approaches to the subject and discusses different methodological and epistemological frameworks.

<sup>8</sup> Following Levi-Strauss (1949) who argued that the opposition between ‘private’ and ‘public’ is one expression of the distinction between nature and culture, a number of anthropologists explained the supposedly universal subordination of women on the basis of their identification with the private sphere as a result of their role as mothers and bearers of children. An earlier expression of this thesis belongs to Michelle Rosaldo (1974) who argued that “The ‘domestic’/‘public’ opposition, like that of nature/culture, is ultimately derived from woman’s role as mother and bearer of children. The categories ‘domestic’ and ‘public’ stand in a hierarchical relationship to each other” (Moore 1988: 21-22). Sherry Ortner on the other hand linked the supposedly universal character of women’s subordination to their linking with nature. According to Ortner, “woman is being identified with –or, if

criticisms the 'domestic' versus 'public' model has received, partly as a result of the critique against "the 'naturalness', of mothers and motherhood and the dependent concepts of family and the domestic" (Moore 1988: 24), it "none the less remains a salient feature of many different types of analysis, and is frequently used as a way of ordering ethnographic data, and of marking out a clear domain for women within the material presented" (ibid. : 21)<sup>9</sup>. Lesbian spaces have been examined as gendered spaces inhabited by women and have been interpreted and explained through the 'domestic' versus 'public' model. Manuel Castells (1983), for example, attributes the absence of visible lesbian urban neighborhoods to gender characteristics, and argues that, "In relationship to space, gay men and lesbians behave first and foremost as men and women. Men seek to dominate space, while women attach more importance to networks and relationships, rarely having territorial aspirations" (quoted in Adler and Brenner 1992: 24). Nowadays this approach is being contested and researchers try to go beyond it<sup>10</sup>. Linda Peake's (1993) study of lesbian neighborhoods in Grand Rapids, Michigan and Gill Valentine's (1995) work on a town in the UK provides further evidence that lesbian spaces are there if you know what you are looking for. "There are no lesbian bars, stores or businesses in these neighborhoods, neither are there countercultural institutions such

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you will, seems a symbol of- something that every culture defines as being of a lower order of existence than itself. Now it seems that there is only one thing that would fit that description, and that is 'nature' in the most generalized sense" (1974, reprinted in 1996: 25). For a reconsideration of this thesis see Sherry Ortner (1996) "So, *Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?*" in *Making Gender. The Politics and Erotics of Culture*.

<sup>9</sup> The supposedly universal character of the 'public'/ 'private' opposition and women's subordination was heavily criticized. The results of this critique are evident in the articles of the edited collection *Women and Space. Ground Rules and Social Maps*, published in 1981. Drawing on ethnographic examples from various parts of the world (Greece, England, Iran, Soviet Union, Nigeria, South Africa) the writers of this book try to describe and explain women's relation to space not only in its restrictive practices but also in its positive and liberatory aspects.

<sup>10</sup> John D'Emilio (1983a) was among the first to argue that lesbians were rarer presences in the 'male space' of streets, parks and bars not because of their supposed innate female characteristics and caring nature which kept them at home, but due to their economic oppression and continued financial dependence on men.

as alternative bookstores and co-operative stores. ... Rather there are clusters of lesbian households amongst heterosexual homes, recognized only by those in the know” (Bell and Valentine 1995: 6). What is at stake is not an all-encompassing theory which can explain once and for all lesbians’ relation to space, but as Elsie Jay argues, attention must be paid to other places as well as bearing meaning and significance instead of focusing only on the more ‘public’ aspects of lesbian life. “The micropolitics which exist outside identifiable public gay spaces are rendered insignificant, ignored, or even condemned, while those of the rally, the ghetto, the parade, the beat, and the commercial strip are elevated” (1997: 165). Drawing on recent research which focus on invisible activities and the politics of commonality along with an appreciation of the possibilities and complexities of change at micro scales (ibid.: 165) my intention in this chapter is to examine spaces where same-sex desiring women in contemporary Greece gather, meet, flirt, and interact with each other, without confining my interest in the examination of public visible lesbian spaces such as bars, groups or organizations<sup>11</sup>. No less, since women’s association with the home has been a recurrent topic of Greek ethnography and an account of same-sex desiring women’s relation to space would be incomplete without reference to their relation to it.

The ‘public/private’ dichotomy has been till recently used as an analytical category for understanding gender relations in Greece. According to the hegemonic ideology of gender, women are associated with domesticity and men with economic responsibility<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> As Judith Schuyf and Jeanne Cortiel (1999) remark space in general and lesbian space in particular can be divided in three different dimensions: geographical space (concrete spaces of inclusion and exclusion, of sociability and intimacy, of economic and leisurely use, of diffusion and exclusiveness), textual spaces of language, narrative and meaning, and performative spaces (spaces of identity, representation, desire). In this chapter I am concerned with the geographical dimension of spaces for encounters among same-sex desiring women in Greece which enable the creation of textual and performative ones.

<sup>12</sup> For the relation of women to home see Juliet du Boulay (1974) *Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village* the chapter on the house, Jill Dubisch (1986b) “Culture Enters through the Kitchen: Women, Food, and Social Boundaries in Rural Greece”, S. D. Salamone and J. B. Stanton (1986) “Introducing the *Nikokyra*: Ideality and

Women are mainly perceived as wives, mothers and mistresses of the house, and are “charged with transforming natural products into edible food, with controlling pollution, with maintaining the boundaries between home and the outside; furthermore, they function as the ‘glue’ that binds social units together” (Bakalaki 1994b: 92-93) <sup>13</sup>. As Jane Cowan notes women are the ones who are considered to be responsible for virtually all domestic work, regardless of whether they work outside the home or not, and are expected to keep family relationships harmonious; “the fact of working, in itself, does not undermine the association of females with the domestic sphere. Rather, [...] the wide and varied participation of girls and women in the public world of work continues to coexist with, rather than to challenge, powerful assumptions about a woman’s proper place, the nature of her contributions, and her position as dependent on men” (Cowan 1990: 54). Although the analytic validity of the ‘public/private’ dichotomy has been contested (see Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991) <sup>14</sup>, the symbolic identification of women with domesticity continues to be a cultural value and it is still a high compliment for a woman to be considered *tou spitiou* ‘of the house’, meaning that her time and attention are devoted to her home and family. On the contrary, “women who have lost their reputation and who are considered irremediably immoral are called *tou dromou*

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Reality in Social Process”, Muriel Dimen (1986) “Servants and Sentries: Women, Power, and Social Reproduction in Kriovrisi”, Eleftherios Pavlides and Jana Hesser (1986) “Women’s Roles and House Form and Decoration in Eressos, Greece”, and Renee Hirschon (1989) *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe. The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus*, especially the chapters on the house as continuity and adaption, and house as symbolic and social entity.

<sup>13</sup> In her article “Gender-Related Discourses and Representations of Cultural Specificity in Nineteenth-Century and Twentieth-Century Greece” Alexandra Bakalaki (1994b) argues that the gender-related ideas documented by ethnographers, and usually considered as fundamental features of local communities or of Greek culture generally, are strikingly similar to a nineteenth-century discourse on women’s education in Greece which appealed to European examples and promoted Greece’s westernization.

<sup>14</sup> As noted before, the ‘public/private’ dichotomy has been contested on a cross-cultural level and not just in the context of Greek culture. As Lidia Schiama writes, “privacy can be seen as a continuum, and it may be very difficult indeed for the anthropologist, faced with the complexities of human interaction, to say at just what point the private turns into its opposite, the public” (1981: 93).

‘of the road’ ” (Hirschon 1978: 80) <sup>15</sup>. In this context the existence of public spaces for encounters among same-sex desiring women seems to be inconceivable due to women’s association with the private sphere of home. Questions arise. Where do same-sex desiring women in Greece meet? Are there any openly lesbian public places? What is their relation to their homes? What is the relation between public places for encounters and the private sphere of the home? Is the latter characterized only by discontinuities or are there also continuities?

### ***Public Spaces: Spaces for Entertainment***

Studies on female same-sex desires have demonstrated that bars <sup>16</sup> and public house parties are central to twentieth-century lesbian self-identification, community formation, and resistance. In her research on the history of lesbian bars and their development in the United States Maxine Wolfe argues that the history of lesbian bars dates back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century soon after the emergence of homosexuality as a separate, identifiable sexual inclination. “The evidence points to the use of bars by lesbians as early as the late 1800s, but it was in the 1920s that they emerged as coherent sociophysical settings and took on many of the characteristics they still have today” (1997: 312). Lesbian bars went through a declining period during the decade of the 30’s only to be revived again in the 40’s and continued to increase during the 1950s and 1960s. “Although not all lesbians used them, until the late 1960s they were the only ‘publicly’ identifiable places for lesbian life” (ibid.: 312). For many years the very existence of the lesbian community was linked to bar life, a point which

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<sup>15</sup> In Lesbos there is a proverb for describing the desirable bride. She is described as *einai apo spiti* (from a house), *me spiti* (with a house), *kai gia spiti* (and for a house), implying that she is from a good family, having a dowry, and being a virtuous and competent housewife.

<sup>16</sup> The term ‘bar’ is derived from an English word, which referred to a barrier, used in the form of a high table in a drinking establishment where the barman serves drinks to the public. Although the bar was introduced toward the end of the 1800s, the bar achieved widespread popularity in the 1930s, where it came to be defined as a place where one could consume different alcoholic drinks or a variety of other beverages either standing at the bar or sitting on bar stools (Ginelli 1997: 14-15).

was firstly made by Nancy Achilles in her pioneering study on lesbian and gay bars, “The goals and services provided by the bar are well adapted to the needs of the homosexual community. Its most important service is the provision of a setting in which social interaction may occur; without such a place to congregate, the group would cease to be a group” (1967 reprinted in 1998: 175), and was repeated among others by Kath Weston when she wrote that, “On the secular side, community has been symbolically linked to bars, saloons and neighbourhood in the United States since the massive urban immigrations of the late nineteenth century ... Although lesbians and gay men are now as likely to ‘find community’ through a softball team, a coming-out support group, or the Gay Pride Parade as through a bar, bars remain a central symbol of identity, and almost everyone has a story about a first visit to a gay club” (1991: 126). However, bar life was not only important for the sustaining of the community and the formation of a lesbian identity. Bars, apart from being places where someone could meet and interact with people ‘like me’, they were also places of resistance. In their study on the lesbian community in Buffalo, New York, Kennedy and Davis point out the significance of bars for twentieth-century lesbian resistance. “By finding ways to socialise together, individuals ended the crushing isolation of lesbian oppression and created the possibility for group consciousness and activity. In addition, by forming community in a public setting outside the protected and restricted boundaries of their own living rooms, lesbians also began the struggle for public recognition and acceptance” (Kennedy and Davis 1993:29). Although nowadays lesbians have at their disposal other places to interact and socialise besides bars <sup>17</sup>, and the latter may no longer have the symbolic significance they used to have in the decade of the 50’s as described by Nestle (1997), bars still play an important role in lesbian lives and bar culture is crucial in shaping lesbian communities. The question I am interested in, in this section, is to what extent are bars and bar culture

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<sup>17</sup> After the rise of the lesbian-feminist movement in the 70’s a whole array of spaces –which included bookstores, shops, festivals, open air cinemas, exhibitions, music events, women’s camps- were created by and for lesbians in the big cities of Anglo-Saxon countries.

significant spaces for the lives of women who are engaged in same-sex relationships in contemporary Greece.

Bars are, for Greek society, a rather recent innovation<sup>18</sup>. Before that people used to socialize in coffee shops, pastry shops, and clubs where live music was played, Greek or foreign. A bar as a meeting and entertainment place where people would go just to have a few drinks and listen to music played from a record player, to socialize and to make new encounters, began to appear during the last decades. Some of these bars began to attract mostly, although not exclusively, homosexual people, while lesbian women used to frequent the same bars gay men went to. By the end of the 70's beginning of the 80's, a substantial part of entertainment and socializing among lesbian women was undertaken by the lesbian groups which were hosted in *Spitia Ginaikon -Women's Houses-*<sup>19</sup>. Exclusively lesbian places were rather uncommon although some women remember places which attracted lesbian women. Sofia Anagnostaki recalls,

*I came to Athens in 1975. At that time there were no bars in Athens. The first one to be opened was Don Kihotis in Thessaloniki, I think in 1978, and shortly afterwards bars began to open in Athens. As for lesbian bars ... these would be delayed. Here in Athens I discovered the place of N. Z.<sup>20</sup> We went there very often with my girlfriend. N. was fond of my girlfriend so we frequently sat with them at their table. Lots of women gathered there. I had to*

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<sup>18</sup> In this section I will refer only to bars in Athens since I have a better knowledge of them. However, I estimate that similar remarks and conclusions can be drawn from other big cities in Greece as well. For example, in Thessaloniki during the period of my research the most well known gay bar was *Ahududu* that once a week had a women's only night. Men were allowed to enter after two o'clock in the evening. Bars that attracted lesbian women were *Taboo* and *Molos*, both closed down at the moment.

<sup>19</sup> Our knowledge of gathering places for women engaged in same-sex relationships before the 70's is very limited. A historical research which would focus especially on the expression of female homosexuality in big cities before the 70's would be of great interest.

<sup>20</sup> She is a well-known singer who had her own club in Athens for many years.

*smile and I thought, “Oh no, I do not have to become like them”. I was around thirty at that time and they were older and looked butch. And I said no, I do not have to resemble them. Then came the rise of the feminist movement and I soon found myself having long hair and being dressed in those ‘feminist’ skirts, the cotton ones from India*

During the 80’s the number of bars in Greece increased and they became an indispensable part of everyday entertainment. Following this trend the number of gay places grew respectively and they became a characteristic of lesbian and gay life in big cities. Exclusively lesbian places began to make their appearance and perhaps the most famous among them is a lesbian bar in Athens called *Lizard’s*, former *Taksidi –Journey-*. Placed in the center of Athens on the second floor of a neoclassical house *Lizard’s* was opened at the beginning of the 80’s and has been a landmark of lesbian life in the capital city for many years. During the 80’s, early 90’s this was the place where most lesbian women gathered, flirted, had fun, and met their new partners. Love affairs, quarrels, drinking, dancing, and one-night stands were part of the daily schedule at *Lizard’s* which fell into decline some years ago

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A few years later some lesbian clubs made their appearance under the guise of *Ellinadika*. The term *Ellinadika* refers to dance places where Greek popular music is played on a record player. The majority of *Ellinadika* is addressed to straight people and sustains a new form of entertainment that is very popular, especially among younger people. The identification of lesbian clubs with *Ellinadika* is intentionally made on the grounds of the music being played and more importantly on their owners refusal to be publicly identified as

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<sup>21</sup> At the time of my research mid-end of the 90’s *Lizard’s* was taken over by two other women to do the managing, while *EOK’s (Hellenic Homosexual Community)* offices were moved into the same building just above *Lizard’s* and the place acted every Wednesday evening as a meeting point for *EOK’s* members and their friends. Every Friday evening a Greek music night was held, whereas Sunday was the day that *Lizard’s* attracted most of its clientele since for many years Sunday used to be the day that people went to *Lizard’s*.

'lesbian places' <sup>22</sup>. The first one was *Odyssey*, to be followed by *Mexico*, and then *Porta*. These places are owned by women and act as lesbian spaces for socializing, meeting other women, and having a good time. Besides this, bars are places where sexuality plays a significant role and there are many stories of sexual encounters and one night stands. Even if they may not usually frequent these bars a number of women visits them once in a while in order to meet other women. Maria's Fotiadi account is revealing on this matter:

*Usually I do not like to meet other people only to discuss irrelevant matters. I am more interested in political action, political discussions. But sometimes I wish to meet other women, I want to see other women. And one day in a moment of loneliness I went to Odyssey. I just wanted to see other people. I had a drink, I danced, and then I left.*

However, women's opinions on lesbian bars are ambivalent partly because such places are accused of promiscuity, excessive drinking, and smashing of plates <sup>23</sup>. Eleni Christakou is absolute in her mind when she says that,

*I have the feeling that people who go to these bars do not ... think! People with whom I have something to say usually do not go to such places. It is very important for me to find women with whom I have something to share, to say, to exchange. But I cannot find them there. Not in the bars.*

A viewpoint which is not completely shared by Evanthia Totti, a woman who began to join lesbian bar life quite recently:

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<sup>22</sup> Subsequently, in *Athenorama*, which is the city guide of Athens, one can find these lesbian places classified under *Ellinadika* and not under *gay bars*.

<sup>23</sup> The smashing of plates on the dancing floor is a popular way of demonstrating high spirits. However, this act which is usually performed by males is culturally devalued as vulgar.

*Elli [Papandreou] used to warn me that I must be careful in bars, people who gather there are not very good. And she was right. But I did not really mind. I liked the whole thing, that I went to Mexico after one o' clock and there were so many women. That you could watch women from different classes, upper and lower, entertaining themselves together and smashing plates. I liked to watch it, I was interested, I liked to participate.*

*Ellinadika* are not the only places that women engaged in same-sex relationships have at their disposal for self-amusement and entertainment. Other bars which are usually owned by women but attract lesbian, gay, and straight people as well seem to be favored by women who do not like to listen to Greek music, or hesitate to be identified with places which are characterized as 'lesbians bars'. Additionally, a few years ago a group of women decided to present the lesbian population of Athens with another form of partying.

In 1995 a group of women disappointed with the situation of the lesbian scene in Athens decided to create another form of entertainment where other kinds of music could be listened to and not just the pop Greek songs which were to be found in lesbian bars. It was at that time that Maria Cyberdyke, who was involved with the lesbian scene of Athens from a very early age <sup>24</sup>, made a trip to Berlin where she was deeply impressed by the number of lesbian bars which existed and the various sorts of music one could hear. As soon as she

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<sup>24</sup> Born in 1970 in Athens Maria was involved with the lesbian movement from a very early age. At the age of 15 and a half she visited for the first time the offices of *AKOE* in Athens. From 1986 onwards she started to be befriended with women from *Women's House in Koukaki* and to frequent lesbian bars. However, because the political action in the feminist and lesbian circles had begun to fade by that time Irene began to get involved with other political organizations, mainly Marxist ones. She visited *Eressos* for the first time at the age of 16, where she continued to go for four succeeding years until 1990, when she made a short interval for four years before starting going again in 1994. Irene differs from other women who frequent lesbian places to the extent that apart from being very active in Athens she is deeply interested in what is happening abroad in Germany, Holland, England. She planned to organize a lesbian film festival and she participated as a lesbian photographer in the Lesbian Photo Exhibition during the Olympic Gay Games in Amsterdam in July 1998.

returned to Greece she decided to organize, with a group of three other friends, a party with alternative music. The first party was held in the bar *Berlin* and the group of the four friends who organised it were named META<sup>25</sup> after the initials of their names. According to Maria Cyberdyke this party which was held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1995 was a big success and more than 200 women joined in. When the time came for organising the second one the name of the group had changed from *META* to *Cyberdykes* after the immediate inspiration of a member of the group. The place of the parties changed and from *Berlin* they were moved to *Booze*, a popular straight bar, and then to *Odyssey*, to return again to *Booze*. In *Booze* the parties became more regular and started to take place every Sunday. But very soon the number of women who joined in became unsatisfactory in terms of profit and Irene decided to move the parties to the well-known *Lizard's* after its owner had proposed a collaboration. The following extract dates from that period and is to be found in *Roz-Mov* pages:

*Cyberdykes are the gang that is currently making noise in the lesbian club scene, organising another round of parties, in Lizard's club, starting on Saturday March the 9<sup>th</sup>. Their press release, calls for women only nights, with women DJs spinning alternative/Indie/gabby/happy hardcore, the dress code favouring leather, military outfits and drag kings! Now the date for a "Cyberdykes" party is set for each and every Saturday night at Lizard's.*

After a while the collaboration with *Lizard's* ended and the *Cyberdykes Women's Only Parties* returned to *Booze* once more. It was already June 1996. The big party organised for the Gay Pride Day was a big success and it was followed by other parties on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November 1996, the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1997, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1997. Afterwards and for a period

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<sup>25</sup> Although according to the writer of the *Roz-Mov* pages *META* is an acronym for "Must Eternity Tough Alternative".

of time the parties were held every Friday and Saturday night <sup>26</sup>. The success of *Cyberdykes* was possibly due to the fact that they attracted many women to their parties apart from those who were traditionally used to participating in the lesbian scene. Young women who liked clubbing, who were aware of lifestyle trends abroad, started to frequent these parties. The flyers which were created by Maria Cyberdyke and distributed all over the centre of Athens introduced a new aesthetic and trendy clothes made by a group of women were sold during the parties. *Cyberdykes* proposed an alternative form of amusement where music, dance, and outfit take over identity, and this kind of entertainment attracted not only many young women who were lesbians but also a few straight ones as well <sup>27</sup>.

Although bars are significant for community formation and self-identification, women engaged in same-sex relationships in contemporary Greece are quite reluctant to frequent lesbian bars and have an ambivalent attitude towards them. Their reluctance is being explained on the grounds that lesbian bars do not meet their needs, nor interact with the rest of their lives. Often women describe them as isolated places where one goes just to drink and

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<sup>26</sup> On Friday night men were also allowed to join provided that women accompanied them, whereas on Saturdays the entrance to men was forbidden. The latter decision often caused disagreements and quarrels among women and the organizers of the parties.

<sup>27</sup> Deborah Amory (1996) researched a lesbian club, Club Q, in San Francisco, which was at its peak at the end of the 80's, and bears many similarities with the parties organized by the *Cyberdykes*. Club Q was not a typical club. It was held once a month at first, and after becoming more popular every Friday evening, only to disappear two years later. It attracted women who were lesbians in their majority with some bisexuals and a few straight women. These women were predominantly young, in their 20s, but also included women in their 30s and 40s. They were not only working class but also middle and upper class, and among the clientele was included a substantial number of women of color. Trying to answer what made Club Q such a success for a period of time Amory suggests that "Club Q represents a particular moment in lesbian history, a moment belonging to the hot young urban woman: a younger (in her twenties) member of the lesbian community, marked most conspicuously by a celebration of sexuality, style and attitude, and a relative position of privilege in terms of money and education" (ibid.: 47). In terms of identity the "lesbian identity being forged at Club Q revolved around an open

flirt and relate them to sleepless nights, excessive drinking, and promiscuous sexuality. On the other hand, the participation in *Cyberdykes'* parties is heavily limited in terms of age and lifestyle. Such parties are not attended by women who are of a certain age, listen to different kinds of music, or prefer other forms of entertainment. Alternative lesbian spaces where women can socialise and entertain themselves are very rare and this is something women complain about. For example, Chrisanthi Mantaka, one of the editors of *Madame Gou*, the lesbian periodical says that,

*I would very much like it if other places would exist besides Odyssey and Porta. Places where someone can have a good time, where creative things would be done, happenings, shows, displays. Where I as a lesbian, but also you, and others could get things. Places which should provide lesbians with the strength and courage to go on with their lives. What can I say? Here nothing is being done.*

However, although the majority of women I have talked to complain that places where they could talk, get to know each other better, take part in political action, or work together on projects such as organising a film festival or a photo exhibition, are virtually absent, the few efforts to establish public spaces for politicised action do not find sufficient participants.

### ***Public Spaces Once More: Spaces of Political Action***

If we were to focus exclusively on contemporary public aspects of lesbian life in Greece the data we would collect would be scant. The numbers of women who participate in the three major homosexual organisations, which exist nowadays in Greece, are very limited, while the autonomous lesbian groups are practically non-existent. After the closing down of

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celebration of sexuality, expressed through dance and cruising, built around the power of the lesbian gaze" (ibid. :149).

*Women's Bookstore* in Athens its lesbian group <sup>28</sup> moved to the lodgings of *Hellenic Homosexual Community (Elliniki Omofilofili Koinotita* acronym *EOK*) <sup>29</sup> which had been formed in the meantime. After 12 years of uninterrupted presence *AKOE* closed in 1989 <sup>30</sup> and its struggle for freedom and emancipation was undertaken by a new organisation *EOK* that was formed in 1988 by former members of *AKOE*. *EOK*, which is an official member of *ILGA (International Lesbian and Gay Association)* <sup>31</sup>, is still very active today distributing the magazine *deon*, broadcasting an hourly radio show, having its own pages on the internet, while members of *EOK* frequently appear on TV shows and radio programs presenting homosexuality to a wider public. Its offices are to be found in the centre of Athens just above *Lizard's*, the famous lesbian bar, and function primarily as a gathering and meeting place for discussion, making acquaintances, getting informed, and spending time. Equipped with fax and computer the offices have also a small library. Ten thick boxes made out of cardboard and five to six thinner folders contain “the whole history of the homosexual movement in Greece”, as Voula Nikiforiadi, a member of *EOK* and at the time of my research *EOK's* secretary, told me. And she added, “We managed to save them from two fires. Someone has to write this story”. The question is whose story it would be. The number of women who actively participate in *EOK* is very limited. In an article published in *ILGA's Lesbian Bulletin* in February 1990 Elli Papandreou, one of *EOK's* founders and still active member, gives her own explanation for the this:

*The main problem of lesbians in Greece is the lack of visibility. Lesbians are not really activists, because, in Greece, being a lesbian is not considered as a*

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<sup>28</sup> See end of chapter IV.

<sup>29</sup> It is worth mentioning that the acronym *EOK* for *Elliniki Omofilofili Koinotita* is the same one used for declaring the European Economic Community *Europaiki Oikonomiki Koinotita*.

<sup>30</sup> *AKOE* was re-established in 1992 and started to publish *amfi* again in June 1994 but only for a short period of time.

<sup>31</sup> In December 1989 *EOK* organized the annual European Conference of *ILGA* which took place in Athens with the participation of representatives from fourteen countries.

*political act but only as a sexual orientation. So, being ignored means avoiding problems and lesbians in this country prefer to remain 'non-existent'. It is very revealing that there is no mass media representative. All these points are due to the fact that lesbians have always preferred to be part of a feminist group feeling that they are suppressed primarily as women and secondary as gay persons). The number of women lesbians working in gay groups is very small. Yet the only active lesbians feel that companionship and unity between gay people is the only thing that can bring solutions –at least in Greece.<sup>32</sup>*

The situation is similar in the other two major homosexual organisations that are located in Thessaloniki. The first one *O.P.O.T.H.*, acronym for *Omada Protovoulias Omofilofilon Thessalonikis -Homosexual's Initiative of Thessaloniki-* was formed in November 1988 and started to broadcast a two-hour radio show in March 1989, an activity which was continued till February 1996. Meanwhile the group published the magazine *Pothos – Desire-* in 1990 that had produced eight issues by 1994. These days *O.P.O.T.H.* publishes a monthly newspaper distributed freely in bars and shops, and among its activities are to be mentioned the organisation of meetings and forums on homosexuality and the planning of Gay Pride Parties. Since the group does not have its own offices these meetings take place once a week in the lodgings of the university. Panos Sotiropoulos and Agis Kalligiorgis are the two core members of *O.P.O.T.H.* whereas the total number of its members varies significantly from period to period. At the time of its establishment *O.P.O.T.H.* numbered ten people, though only three of them were women. In 1992 the number of its members was reduced from twenty to five as a result of an internal crisis, and while in 1995 five women participated in *O.P.O.T.H.*, at the time of my research the group contained only one female member.

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<sup>32</sup> The article which is originally written in English is reprinted in *Roz-Mov* pages in the Internet.

The second major group which is to be found in Thessaloniki is called *Simbraxi kata tis Omofilofovias -Cooperation to Fight Homophobia-*, or just *Simbraxi –Cooperation-*. It was founded in October 1995, by former members of *O.P.O.T.H.* and belongs to the *Topiki Epitropi Thessalonikis Kata tou Ratsismou, tis Ksenofovias, tou Antisimitismou, kai tis mi Anohis -Local Committee of Thessaloniki Against Racism, Xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Non-Tolerance-*. Among its activities are to be mentioned the organising of one-day conferences, as for example the meeting on the subject “All Different – All Equal. 26<sup>th</sup> of June, The Day of Homosexuality” which took place in Thessaloniki on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June 1995, and the conference on “Homosexual Marriage” on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 1996. *Symbraxis* supports an SOS line, has its own pages in the Internet, and publishes the monthly newsletter *Vitamin O*, which is freely distributed in the bars and cafes of Thessaloniki. Its offices act as a gathering and meeting place, but also as a study room and lending library since *Symbraxis* owns more than 100 titles of books on homosexual issues. Although *Symbraxis* is as *EOK* and *O.P.O.T.H.*, primarily male-dominated, the group is now staffed with a female member Rena Tata, a sociologist, who had recently returned from her studies abroad and began to participate actively in the organisation. She has appeared in discussions on homosexuality on TV and in 1998 was a candidate in the elections for the European Council. However, not many women seem to have followed her example.

*One night I saw an advertisement for a discussion with university professors on the legal situation of homosexuals at present organised by Symbraxis. I went to their offices in February and I became a member in March. [Are you the only female member?] Just before me another woman used to frequent it, but who was very young and had to prepare herself in order to take exams to enter the university. As a result she studied and did not come very often. Two weeks ago another woman became a member, which means that we have increased in numbers. The rest of the members are men and I do not know them all because they do not always come to our premises.*

An exception to the overall tendency to avoid politicized action comes from a group of women in Crete who organized the *First Greek Lesbian Week* in September 1996. The idea belongs to Katerina Dimitriou, a woman in her early thirties who owns a travel agency in Crete. For many years she dreamed of organizing a Lesbian Week where she would gather women from all over Greece. She discussed her idea with Maria Petrou and Anna Simou, two women in their late 20's, who also live in Crete and agreed to do it together. Maria Petrou is a journalist whose hobbies include designing pages in the web. Her idea was to create the *Roz-Mov -Pink and Lavender-* pages in the Internet, which are the first lesbian pages concerning Greece ever to appear in the web<sup>33</sup>. Anna Simou works sporadically in the tourist business. These three women together with Katerina's friend Olga Sapountzi, who also works in the travel agency decided out of personal interest to organize a week for Greek lesbians and lesbians from abroad, and to combine their vacations with discussions on lesbian and feminist issues. Maria Petrou advertised the whole event in the *Roz-Mov* pages, and they contacted the homosexual organizations in Athens and in Thessaloniki, the women who published *Madame Gou*, and the editors of *amfi*.

Despite their wish to gather women from all over Greece, the actual participation of women was relatively small. There were no delegates from the homosexual organizations that exist in Athens and Thessaloniki, no representatives from *Madame Gou*, the lesbian periodical, no members from *Cyberdykes*. The total number of women who attended the Week, apart from the organizers, was four. Among them were Popi Grammenou and Melina Takaki, two women in their early 40's who work together in an owned business and were former members of *Katina*<sup>34</sup>, the feminist magazine of Thessaloniki. They decided to come to this Lesbian Week with the hope that they were going to meet other lesbian couples with

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<sup>33</sup> Nowadays the majority of homosexual organizations *EOK*, *Symbraxi*, *O.P.O.T.H.*, have their own pages in the Internet, while Maria Cyberdyke is responsible for the creation of the site [www.lesbian.gr](http://www.lesbian.gr).

children. Popi Grammenou has two children, a 20year old boy who lives with his mother and her partner Melina Takaki and a 16year old daughter who will live with her father until her coming of age. The third participant was Marilena Nikou, a young girl who had learned about the Lesbian Week while studying in England and decided to participate in the Week in order to meet other lesbian women in Greece. Marilena had her first homosexual relation while being in England and now that she was thinking of returning back to her hometown she was interested in meeting other lesbians. Finally, the last participant was I, the anthropologist, who had come to know about the Lesbian Week from a friend and from the *Roz-Mov* pages in the Internet. Two more women, an American couple joined us the following day. They had learned about the event from the Internet and were eager to combine their vacations on Crete with the meeting of Greek lesbian women. Nevertheless, because of the barrier of language and a decreased interest on the part of Greek women we did not interact with them for long.

Because of the limited participation, prolonged discussions on theoretical issues and pre-scheduled seminars did not take place. Instead during the Week we had many informal talks on various issues combined with excursions to nearby places. A report on this *First Greek Lesbian Week* appeared on the Internet in *Roz-Mov* on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1996:

*The First Greek Lesbian Week took place in Rethymnon, Crete, September 7<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> 1996. The Week was organized by the recently set-up 'Group of Women in Crete' with the collaboration of a tourist office in Rethymnon which undertook the entire packaging. The main objective of the event was to bring together women from Greece in order to meet each other and be informed on subjects of interest. Homosexual groups in Greece and Groups of Women had been asked to participate in this First Lesbian Week, which was also open to homosexual groups and periodicals from abroad.*

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<sup>34</sup> If we were to translate *Katina* it would mean 'beach' or 'gossip woman'. *Katina* and *Skoupa* -the feminist academic magazine whose title could be translated as 'broom'- use as their titles a pejorative adjective for

*Though in the beginning there seemed to be great interest the actual participation ended up being very small while at the same time there was a total absence of women members of homosexual organizations. Because of the small number of women who took part the tourist office was compelled to cancel the renting of a special cluster of studios. Consequently, the projection of videotapes and the exhibition of homosexual and feminist material – offered not only by groups but also from individual people from Greece and abroad-, which was scheduled to be presented in the common room of the studios, was also cancelled.*

*As a result the Week was confined to a tourist-recreational-joyful event. Three all-day excursions took place with a specially designed mini-bus offered by the tourist office. The tours were not limited to Crete's major sites but included meals with Cretan cuisine and the nightlife of Rethymnon. Because of its small size they acted as a group and discussions were encouraged. The first issue was raised soon after the arrival of the four participants from Thessaloniki. "Where are the women?" This remark had as result a long discussion on women and homosexual organizations in Greece - their organisation or better non-organisation, comparison with the past, and comparison between Greeks and other homosexual and feminist groups abroad, drawing on the experiences of two American women who took part in the Week. Among other things being discussed the issue of organizing another Second Week was raised. Many opinions were heard on how this week should be organized so that more women would participate. The start was made with the First Week. This should be followed by a Second Week with the final goal that this Lesbian Week should be established on an annual basis.*

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women or on object which is supposed to be identified with women in a mocking and therefore subversive mode.

The most prevalent questions during the Week were, “And now what? What is going to be done next?”, “Why did so few women come?”, “What must be done next time in order to attract more women?”. Among the answers we gave, trying to confront the above questions, distance, timing, and lack of sufficient organization were the most common ones. Distance was perhaps a parameter that prevented many women from coming, therefore, Athens or even Eressos could possibly be better places for such meetings. A second parameter could be the timing of the event. September is a month when most women have already had their vacation and they are out of money. Moreover, schools are about to begin a factor which must be taken into consideration since a great number of women who would go to such an event, work in secondary education. It was suggested that next time it should take place from the middle to the end of August. A third parameter, which was discussed, was the content of the event. Popi Grammenou stressed the fact that from her own experiences in similar organizations in Germany it is very important for many people to combine information with vacation. It is not enough to invite women to discuss topics or to listen to presentations, you have to offer them music, dance, art, and other performances. Last but not least, it was acknowledged as an important parameter, how the organization of this meeting was carried out, and those women responsible for this, realized that now effort should be put into contacting as many women as possible. The First Lesbian Week ended with the commitment to organize a successful Second one the following year. Despite the great plans and the optimism which prevailed during our discussion two nights before our departure, to the best of my knowledge the Second Lesbian Week never materialized either the following year or the years to come <sup>35</sup>.

Yet, excuses such as time, money, and distance are not satisfactory in interpreting women’s refusal to interact in public lesbian spaces. It seems that such spaces in Greece

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<sup>35</sup> The following year (summer 1997) a Greek woman who lived in Italy planned to organize in Eressos a four-week program of courses under the title “Summer Cultural Lesbian Holidays”. However, the whole program was cancelled at the last minute due to organizational problems.

rarely meet women's needs. Homosexual organizations attract almost exclusively gay men, while lesbian bars are few in numbers, short-lived, and attract women who enjoy a particular way of life. Others who do not want to stay out in the evening, do not drink, do not listen to pop music, or because of age do not like such places, encounter difficulties in socializing, relaxing, coming to know other women. Popi Grammenou and Melina Takaki, the two women I met during the Lesbian Week in Crete, told me once how lonely and isolated they sometimes feel because they do not want to socialize in bars and hence they have limited chances of meeting other women. Yet, instead of solely focusing on the shortcomings of groups and bars in order to find an explanation as to why same-sex desiring women in Greece do not join them, one should rather contextualize these places in wider Greek society. The identification of female sexuality with heterosexual relationships practised at home preferably in the context of marriage does not allow the flourishing of public visible lesbian spaces. Elli Papandreou in her effort to explain women's reluctance to join bars and organisations gives the following explanation:

*I think it has to do more with the fact that Greek society does not take female sexuality seriously enough. Greece is a phallocrat society, without having a phallus there is nothing you can do. People think: "You are going through a transitory period. Sexual relations among women are primarily platonic, you can have real ones only with a man". From the moment you have to confront such opinions, and you must confront males who think of themselves as your rescuers, even if you have never asked them to save you, it is a natural outcome that you become invisible, completely transparent, as if you have been sprayed with AJAX, you go completely out of sight. This is one thing. From the other side we are to be blamed as well. What have we done in order not to be invisible? We are waiting to see who is going to pull the chestnuts from the fire. No one takes the initiative for drastic action. [...]On the contrary the male homosexual, no matter how distanced he is [from*

*homosexual movements], he is more conscious and society feels threatened due to his existence. On the other hand, society does not feel so much endangered because of the existence of homosexual women and this is why it pretends that it does not see anything. "Do my girl whatever you like, it's your problem". We as society are indifferent to what two women do together in bed, while we are deeply interested in what two men do in bed. Perhaps this is another reason. If no one is interested in my existence why should I be bothered to prove it?*

However, spaces for encounters among same-sex desiring women do exist but not in the form of visible, easily identifiable places<sup>36</sup>. On the contrary, part of their function is undertaken by same-sex desiring women's houses which act as gathering and meeting places, places where contacts are made, women are introduced to each other, and nets of friendships are formed. Not only as spaces for fun and entertainment but also as spaces for political activity, spaces where lesbian identities are being forged, discussed and sustained, private homes play a significant role in the socialising of women with same-sex sexuality thus problematizing the definition of 'public' and demonstrating 'how private may become public'.

### ***Private spaces: "Good Girls Should Stay at Home"***

Geographers Lynda Johnston and Gill Valentine have observed that "The home, particularly for those who are very wary about the personal and employment consequences of being 'outed', can therefore take on a vital role as a lesbian social venue and meeting place.

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<sup>36</sup> In her article on African-American lesbian nightlife in Detroit between the 40's and the 70's, Rochella Thorpe (1996) argues that bars are not the only places for lesbian social activity and shows the ways African-American lesbians created semi-public spaces to fulfil their social needs. Instead of socialising in bars middle-class lesbians in particular favoured private parties that were hosted after-hours at home and were advertised through flyers and via word of mouth.

Indeed, in many provincial towns and rural areas, informal networks of private homes fill the entertainment gap created by a complete absence of lesbian institutional spaces. And, in other places, homes become alternative focal points for groups of women alienated from gay bars and institutional spaces because of political or personality clashes” (1995: 108). In the context of a society like Greece where a limited number of women identify themselves as lesbian in the family or at the workplace (see Table IV)<sup>37</sup> the home becomes of significant importance not only as a place of interaction, where meetings, gatherings and parties happen, but also as a place of political action, where discussions are held and periodicals are being edited, no less since the majority of women live alone (see Table V).

*Table IV. Open in the Family and at Workplace*

<b>Claiming a Lesbian Identity in the Family</b>		<b>Claiming a Lesbian Identity in the Workplace</b>	
<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
12	18	2	28

*Table V. Living Arrangements*

<b>Alone</b>	<b>With Partner</b>	<b>Sharing a Flat</b>	<b>With Parents</b>
16	5	2	7

Although there seems to be a discontinuity between ‘home’ as a place identified with privacy, reproduction, childbearing marriage, and compulsory heterosexuality and the notion

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<sup>37</sup> Women I have talked to have not come out in their working environment, either because they work in the very sensitive sector of education, or because they do not want to risk losing their clients, or jeopardizing their position when working in the public sector.

of a 'lesbian space', homes are full of meaning for same-sex desiring women and become semi-public places. The vignettes, which follow, aim to contest the 'heterosexual/homosexual' and 'public/private' dichotomy.

### **An Open Birthday Party**

The night before the party, I met Maria Cyberdyke in a bar in Athens and she invited me to her party to celebrate her 27<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her birthday party took place at Despina's Kontaksi house. Despina lives in an old two-storey building in the centre of Athens that belonged to her grandmother and her parents who bequeathed it to Despina. On the first floor there is the living room, the kitchen, and the bathroom, while on the second there are two bedrooms with a small attic above them. Sandwiches with salmon, cheese and ham, rice with vegetables, salad with tuna, potatoes and peanuts were the preparations for the party, made by Irene and her girlfriend, with a little help from Meni Davarinou, Despina's girlfriend. Lots of women whom I already knew from the bars in Athens and from Eressos, as for example Katerina Rozakou, Evanthia Totti, Vera Palli, were gathered, and also others who do not usually frequent bars but go to *Cyberdykes's Parties*. The only males were two gay friends of Maria Cyberdyke's. Dancing under dimmed lights was the main characteristic of the party with women dancing in pairs or alone.

### **Celebrating With Parents**

Faidra Aristou, a 33-year-old woman, lives with her parents, sister, dog and cat in a 3-storey block of flats. Her mother's sisters with their husbands and children live in the other two apartments of the building. Faidra feels very close to her family and she often discusses with her cousins that they should build houses close to each other in order to stay together. Her girlfriend Klio Demisioti lives with her mother as well but she spends every weekend at Faidra's place. Faidra's parents do not object and they behave towards Klio as if she were their third daughter. When I arrived at Faidra's birthday party lots of people were gathered. Her mother and sister were in the kitchen serving the food that had been cooked by Faidra and Klio. At the dinner table were already sitting two of Faidra's ex-girlfriends, Dimitra, who had

made the birthday cake, and Panagiota, together with Dimitra's new girlfriend and another woman Mary who had her birthday as well. Other friends, men and women, together with Faidra's cousins and uncles were in the living room. After a delicious dinner, two of Faidra's friends together with her aunt began to sing accompanied by a guitar till late in the evening.

### **At Ifigenia's place**

Ifigenia Ksenaki is a woman in her mid-thirties who had spent, because of her occupation, many years in a rented house in a provincial town in Northern Greece. The main characteristic of Ifigenia's place was that it was open to a lot of people. Lesbians and straight, women and men would gather at her home and would meet each other. Ifigenia has never felt the need to go to lesbian places because as she says,

*I have never felt lonely. I am proud because I have friends. I cannot think of my life without them. [...] One day I looked at my books and thought, OK maybe I do not have any children, but I have godchildren. I will leave my books to them.*

### **Sharing a flat**

Eleni Christakou shares an apartment with Myrsine Moraiti in a neighbourhood in the centre of Athens. The apartment is on the first floor of a block of flats and looks like a student place in another country, in Berlin perhaps or in Paris. "Myrsine had an obsession with Berlin some time ago, now with New York", Eleni explained to me. When entering the place one finds oneself in a wide square corridor painted light blue. On the left there is the bathroom, while on the right the two doors lead to Eleni's and Myrsine's rooms respectively. The small kitchen is just opposite, the main entrance. I cannot say exactly which of the following characteristics created the impression of being in a student's apartment of a western metropolis; the coloured walls, the lampshades which were covered with paper, the burned photographs hanging from the lamp, the unaffected furniture, the espresso machine, the red chairs in the kitchen-. Myrsine is a painter and in her room one could see samples of her recent work while a chair painted white with black flecks looking like a cow, a couch and a

bed completed the picture. On the contrary Eleni's room, a big airy room, betrays its owner's interests. Books and notes, the computer and a printer rest on the large desk which covers the wall opposite the door, while above it hang shelves with numerous books. Their apartment is frequently visited by friends for coffee, a drink, or dinner. "This is how I am getting fat", Eleni complains, "since Myrsine cooks delicious things almost every day".

### **Offering hospitality to friends**

Maria Cyberdyke lives in an apartment in Athens with her mother, grandmother, and brother. The main living room is furnished with a dining table, a buffet and six chairs<sup>38</sup>. A sofa, two armchairs and a smaller table complete the scene. The only things that do not fit into the whole picture are the computer and the tape recorder, which rest on the dinner table. The tape-recorder loudly plays trans music, whereas the computer is used by Irene to create the flyers for *Cyberdykes' Women's' Only Parties*. Irene has never thought of leaving her mother's place in order to live alone since she has never had a problem in coming to terms with her family. She remembers the first time she went to Eressos and brought some friends with her,

*The first time I returned from Eressos I brought with me four women from Holland. When my mother came to pick me up from the port I introduced Dina to her. "Is she a woman?" she asked me. I answered "Yes, and she is a friend of mine". Nevertheless, these women did not join us for lunch. But after two, three days four other women came! Their hair was dyed half blond and half black. My mother had just painted the corridor of our house white and my friends left their luggage against the wall which made a black line. My grandmother rushed into her room making the sign of the cross. She had never seen such women. And my mother asked me next time to bring one friend instead of four. Next time I brought her two. One of them had a little*

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<sup>38</sup> Renee Hirschon in her article on interior and exterior space in urban Greece points out the significance of the dining table as an essential part of every home (1981: 78).

*boy with her. My mother offered them hospitality but she was a bit confused because the boy called both of my friends 'mum'.*

The association of home to public space is even more evident in cases where political action occurs at home as for example the publication of the lesbian magazine *Madame Gou*.

***Madame Gou:*<sup>39</sup> A Home-Produced Lesbian Periodical**

In March 1995 a group of seven women in Athens decided to begin publishing a lesbian periodical. The initiative belongs to Christina Tsantali a former active member of AKOE who participated also in the lesbian groups in the *Women's House* in Koukaki and in *Women's Bookstore*.

*A few years ago I met a woman from former Yugoslavia who was the rising star of the homosexual movement in her country. During her visit she told us about the situation of the lesbian movement in Yugoslavia and that they were printing a pamphlet, which she began to urge us to do here in Greece. "Why don't you do it? Come on! I can feel it that the only thing you need is just a tiny push! Come on! You should try!" She was one of those women who can support you psychologically and push you into doing things. And after she had left I decided to gather my friends and ask them whether they wanted to commit themselves to such an effort.*

Apart from Christina Tsantali the rest of the group included Chrisanthi Mantaka, who is Christina's partner, Vera Palli who knew Christina from *Women's Bookstore*, Efi Papageorgelli, who had once sent a letter to the lesbian group of *Women's Bookstore* and this is how she became acquainted with Christina, Toula Tsitiridou who joined AKOE for a period

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<sup>39</sup> *Madame Gou* means lesbian in argot. The editors of the periodical decided to use this title partly because it resembles to *Madame Figaro* -a Greek popular women-only magazine which advises women on how they should be dressed, wear make-up and behave- and in this manner they wanted to stress their opposition to such periodicals.

of time, and Athina Andreou, Toula Tsitiridou's partner. The seventh, Margarita Tsitou, used to be involved with the feminist groups in Athens<sup>40</sup>. Theirs age ranged from 24 to 32, while their occupations varied from computer scientist and physico-mathematician, to philologist. So, Christina gathered her friends and asked them whether they wanted to do something more creative instead of complaining about the situation in Greece concerning lesbian matters. Her friends agreed and they tried to change from a group of individual women to a solid editorial group who published a periodical. The main reason that led them to edit the periodical was their disappointment with the prevalent situation in Greece, and their aim was to cause a consciousness arousal. As Christina Tsantali points out, they wanted nothing more and nothing less than to contribute to a change in lesbians themselves.

*My objective is not to change Greek society. I want lesbians to change as much as they can and in as many ways as they can. And if they change, in how they act, they feel, they will bring change with them to a wider society.*

They usually met once a week or every 15 days except during periods of vacation such as during summer. Among the first decisions they had taken was to remain a group closed to other members because they feared that the result would be that women would just come to observe them and then they would leave. Their meetings took place in their houses, since the majority of them lived alone or with their partner, and the subjects which were discussed varied from comments on letters they had received, to an analysis of the latest issue of *Madame Gou*, to a discussion on the new topics they should present in the periodical. All women expressed their opinions on an equal level though some issues were the specialisation of specific women. For example, Toula Tsitiridou was responsible for writing the texts on the computer and had the responsibility of the format since she was the one who was a computer scientist, while Athina Andreou did the editing of the texts. Christina Tsantali was responsible for the letters they received. An interesting feature of *Madame Gou* is that it was virtually

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<sup>40</sup> Margarita Tsitou had already left the group at the time of my research.

“home-produced” since, apart from the stage of printing the whole magazine was conceived, written, and proofread at home. Women gathered either at Christina’s and Chrisanthi’s place or at Toula’s and Athina’s apartment and discussed several issues concerning *Madame Gou* in the midst of discussions on food, recipes, and other more ‘trivial’ issues.

The periodical published five issues <sup>41</sup> from autumn 1996 to November 1997. The subtitle of the periodical, which in the first issue was “Periodical from and for Lesbians” changed to “Lesbian Periodical Edition”. However, according to its publishers many women had a problem with the characterisation ‘lesbian’ and this was one of the reasons why they did not support the magazine as much as they would have. Christina Tsantali says,

*They think of us as a bunch of women who are stuck in the 80’s and we do not have anything better to say or to do than to complain or to urge them to buy the periodical. On top of it all, we call them lesbians as well. You see, nowadays, if you call a woman lesbian she may be insulted. [...] But we are adamant on this point. We have received many comments and we know that the subtitle is provocative for a woman but we will not change it. This is something that characterises all of us who participate in this edition. We are lesbians.*<sup>42</sup>

The magazine tried to cover many topics. From original theoretical articles and translations of others, to comics, news, and correspondence. Although they had begun their

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<sup>41</sup> Issue No 1 was published in Autumn 1995 and counted 30 pages, issue No2 was published in March 1996 and had 34 pages, whereas issue No3 was published in June 1996 with 34 pages. Issues No 3 and No 4 were published in December 1996 and November 1997 with respectively 34 and 32 pages each.

<sup>42</sup> In issue No 3, June 1996, pages 14-15 there is an article with the title “Why do you call me lesbian? Did I insult you?” dedicated to “The friend of mine who did not buy the periodical because she thinks of herself as a gay person and not a lesbian”. The article explores the connotations of the words ‘lesbian’, ‘homosexual’ and ‘gay’ concluding in the personal confession “The writer is a ‘gay’ and ‘homosexual’ who is trying hard to become a ‘lesbian’. The writing of the present article is to be included among her efforts”.

effort with relish they were soon disappointed primarily because they found limited reciprocation from other women. Considering the fact that three out of the six women who participated were unemployed and they had to use lots of their own money and time it was not surprising that they soon got tired and gave up. In their final editorial note they write:

*For You With Love*

*Here we are again perhaps for the last time. We have not covered all the topics which should preoccupy us and perhaps neither have we changed the life of lesbians in Greece because of the publishing of Madame Gou – although we want to believe that we have made a small contribution- but our endurance has come to an end. The balance in the group is very subtle and after a certain point we needed energy which could be received neither from outside nor from inside the group. We hope that, in case we do not find the courage to continue later on, some others will do it for us. We dedicate this issue to all these women who have shown us their support by sending articles, poems, and letters.*

The publication of *Madame Gou* lasted for two years and it was the only effort after *Lavris* to publish an exclusively lesbian periodical. It tried to articulate a lesbian theoretical discourse while at the same time it provided a forum for lesbian women in which they could utter their opinions, correspond with other women, and be informed on several issues of lesbian concern in Greece and abroad. However, its effect was limited. According to Christina Tsantali each issue sold around 150 copies but she estimates that the periodical was read by many more. Women were reluctant to actively participate in it in terms of expressing their opinions or sending material for publication. They commented on the fact that the group was too close and did not accept new members, that its style was old-fashioned, or that its topics belonged to the previous decade and were not of interest to lesbian women in the 90's. *Madame Gou* was a lesbian periodical which aimed to provide a public forum for discussions

and exchanges of ideas while at the same time it was produced in the privacy, of their own home by a group of friends amongst friendly chat, laughter, and exchanging of recipes.

The public/private dichotomy has been an important topic in discussions on same sex sexualities, since sexuality has always been considered to belong to the private sphere. However, for the emergence of new sexual patterns the transgression of this dichotomy is a necessity. As Weeks notes, the sexual citizen “is a hybrid being, breaching the public/private divide” (1998a: 36), who “makes a claim to transcend the limits of the personal sphere by going public, but the going public is, in a necessary but nevertheless paradoxical move, about protecting the possibilities of private life and private choice in a more inclusive society” (ibid.: 37). In the case of Greece, the ‘public/private’ dichotomy is further contested to the extent that if private houses act as places for socialising, celebrating, meeting, discussing, decision-making, editing, home can no longer considered as merely a place where a woman “busies herself with cooking, cleaning, airing and washing the linen, watering the potted flowers, sweeping and scrubbing, and then, if all else is done, with mending, embroidery or knitting” (Dubisch 1986b: 200). The traditional role of home as a ‘woman’s kingdom’ where she takes care of and nurtures her husband and children needs to be modified, and its role in other contexts should be examined. Drawing on the thesis that “no physical or institutional space is ‘public’ or ‘private’ outside of the social relations and geographical contexts that constitute it as such” (Brickell 2000: 165), my argument in this chapter is that due to the specificities of Greek society and the importance of home for women the latter has taken on many of the characteristics of public lesbian spaces. It acts out as space for meetings, birthday parties, editing a periodical, making pages for the Internet, while public lesbian spaces such as bars and organizations remain isolated, and address a limited number of women. Therefore, instead of assuming that Greece is behind in relation to Anglo-Saxon countries because of women’s reluctance to participate in public lesbian spaces we should rather examine how these women try to come to terms with their lives either by confronting, contesting and denying, or by accepting and conciliating prevailing cultural values. However, the negotiation

and contestation of dominant cultural values depends on context. The ability of home to function as space where same-sex desiring women can create, express themselves freely and be productive, is usually confined to cases, where they do not live with their parents. Only three out of seven women who live with their parents are open with them about their sexual choices, while in those cases parents do not know, there is a discontinuity to observe between same-sex desiring women's lives outside and inside the home. In the presence of parents who do not accept their daughters' sexuality, home is a place where one has to pretend and hide needs and desires. Family and relations to parents is the subject of the next chapter.

***Pothos, amfi, deon -Gay Magazines***

**Cyberdykes – Women’s Only Parties**

***Madame Gou* –Lesbian Periodical Edition**

## **Chapter VII**

### **Family Matters**

#### **Daughters, Mothers, Friends**

*My family knows. They are not happy with it but at least they know. My mother does not ask me any more about personal matters although she used to. Neither does she want me to tell her anything about it. When I was a little child I used to tell her everything. Can you imagine how painful it is when your own mother persists in ignoring you? She is allowed to tell me everything that troubles her, while I am not. Of course, I am familiar with this way of thinking because I have grown up with it. But still I object. When one loves someone else the only thing that should be of importance is one's happiness. Being happy in the way one chooses to be. If I am happy in a way my mother does not approve of, the least she can do is to respect it. Parents tend to think that the only way that leads to happiness is their way. But since*

*my mother knows that she is not content with her life, being just the partner  
of my father, why does she want her daughter to repeat her mistake?*

Interview published in the magazine *Gynaika*, “Ta Koritsia tis Sapphos” –“Sappho’s  
Girls”, (1995: 278)

Although, the study of kinship has constituted a major interest in anthropological research for many decades, since the early 1970s, “theories and debates about what were once taken to be the basic building blocks of kinship (kinship terminology, so-called rules of descent, marriage, and postmarital residence) no longer occupy their long privileged position of centrality within the discourse of anthropology” (Peletz 1995: 345). The inability of traditional theories of kinship to explain how social actors place themselves in specific contexts, negotiate their relationships, and relate to each other, combined with a great awareness on the part of feminist anthropologists, that kinship should be examined together with issues of gender and power relations, led to a significant change in the study of kinship <sup>1</sup>. While the examination of kinship as a system per se is outdated “studies of kinship in terms of social relations among variably situated actors engaged in the practice of social reproduction within broader political economic contexts have become central to contemporary anthropology” (Peletz 1995: 366). The field of kinship became a key site on which to theorize gender, power, and difference <sup>2</sup>, while ethnographic material on European and American

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<sup>1</sup> In the introduction of *Gender and Kinship. Essays Toward a Unified Analysis* Sylvia Yanagisako and Jane Collier provide us with a description of how feminist anthropologists challenged kinship theory by questioning its central assumption, namely the dichotomy between ‘domestic’ and ‘political-jural’ domains (1987: 4-6). Nevertheless, as Sylvia Yanagisako and Jane Collier (1987: 6) and Michael Peletz (1995: 346-348, 356-358) note, the work of other anthropologists such as David Schneider’s cultural analysis of kinship (1968) and Jack Goody’s theory on the evolution of the domestic domain (1983), provided an equally firm ground for a critical appraisal of kinship theory.

<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Yanagisako and Jane Collier propose a mutual analysis of kinship and gender to the extent that “gender and kinship are mutually constructed. None can be treated analytically prior to the other, because they are realized together in particular cultural, economic, and political systems” (1987: 7). However, they do not assert

kinship demonstrated that kinship relations are characterized by contradiction, paradox, and ambivalence. It was in this context that studies on ethnic and racial groups in America, lesbian and gay people, surrogate mothers, and new reproductive technologies provided the study of kinship and gender with new interesting material (Peletz 1995: 362).

Studies on lesbian and gay kinship gave a fresh impetus to anthropological inquiry contesting the belief that blood and love are the 'natural' given characteristics on which kinship relations are built. In *Families We Choose* Kath Weston (1991) provides us with a detailed description of the lives of gay and lesbian people who live in the Bay Area San Francisco <sup>3</sup> and answers questions about agency and structure, kinship and gender relationships. Arguing that "blood tie was never the only symbol for the enduring solidarity of intimate relations" (Strathern 1993) Weston demonstrates that the element of choice plays a significant role in the maintenance and elaboration of relationships with families of origin and chosen families. During the process of 'coming-out', to their blood families, lesbian and gay people in the Bay Area have the opportunity to clarify kinship relations. Parent's rejection of their daughters and sons, "You're no daughter/son of mine", or parent's acceptance, "You are still my daughter/son", proves that blood relations are selectively perpetuated rather than 'naturally' given (1991: 73-75). Thus, for gay people in the Bay Area "coming-out tended to bring 'choice' to the center of awareness and make it explicit as a significant facet of kinship relations that are ostensibly given in biology and nature. It is therefore no coincidence that selectivity became the organizing principle of gay families, or that when gay families emerged they were also called families we choose" (ibid.: 74) Introducing the element of

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that gender and kinship are linked in the same way in all societies (ibid.: 34). The ways they are linked together and are mutually constructed is a quest rather than a given.

<sup>3</sup> One significant characteristic of Kath Weston's work is her ability to describe lesbian and gay people as people who "lead complex lives, balancing the stigma of their sexual orientation with a range of other social obligations and preferences, constantly crossing and recreating boundaries between gay and straight communities and frames of reference" (Lewin 1993b: 978), while the principal shortcoming of previous research on lesbian and gay lives was its inadequacy in dealing with diversity (Lewin 1991).

choice as a significant parameter of both blood and chosen families, Weston refuses to regard gay families as ‘alternative’, ‘fictive’ or ‘substitute’ formations for ‘real’ families<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, she does not approach gay families as simple assimilation of the dominant discourse since “Even as gay kinship ideologies built upon prevailing beliefs about what makes a family, they transformed those beliefs by putting duration into forever and persistence into permanence” (1998: 76)<sup>5</sup>.

Similarly, Corinne Hayden in her “exploration of the ways in which many lesbian mothers employ notions of biology, in the context of donor insemination, to articulate their own sense of uniquely lesbian kinship” (1995: 42) concludes that biology cannot be understood on its own as a defining feature of kin. Although blood and love continue to stand out as important symbols of kinship, they are being symbolically reformulated while their perceived meanings are made contingent rather than self-evident. Following another line of research and focusing more on the relationships between gay and straight worlds, Gillian Dunne (1997, 1998) and Ellen Lewin (1993a, 1996b) contest the “dominant image of lesbian experience as ‘exotic’ and ‘other’” (Dunne 1998: 7), and challenge “the notion that

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<sup>4</sup> According to Kath Weston choice is always limited. Chosen families “seem made to order” in the meaning that “their organization appears accountable only to the reflexive question ‘Who is family to me?’”. But on the other side, these families “are made to order”, since they are “tailored and constrained by culture, economic developments, the historical moment, the state” (1998: 84). The persistence of heterosexuality to use a rhetoric of choice when talking about chosen families represents these families as the outcome of free will and therefore as having less responsibilities while it portrays ‘real’ families as the only ones who have ‘real’ obligations.

<sup>5</sup> This argument is different from Marilyn Strathern’s (1996) opinion who argues that the climate of choice and enablement which seems to characterize the late twentieth century may lead simultaneously to ‘more’ traditionalization of family life, or else to a more de-traditionalization, whereas desire will be the legitimate and determining feature for building relations. However, according to Strathern, this particular de-traditionalizing is also a re-traditionalizing in another guise since “there always was a strong elective component to the enactment of family relationships, and those families that base themselves on choice (symbolized by ‘friendship’) claim traditional virtues in attending to the quality of interpersonal relations” (ibid.: 48).

homosexuality is intrinsically subversive of the sex/gender system” (Lewin 1996b: 108) <sup>6</sup>. In her work on lesbian motherhood Ellen Lewin (1993a) argues that motherhood in American culture is such a strong defining feature of womanhood that it supersedes the difference of a lesbian identity” (Lewin 1996b: 108). Lewin asserts that gay/lesbian lives are rarely played out in rigidly bounded communities. Instead their lives are characterized by a constant movement between gay and straight worlds with varying degrees of comfort characterizing the process <sup>7</sup>.

It seems that regardless of whether one focuses on families of blood, chosen families, new reproductive technologies, or single motherhood, discourse on lesbian and gay kinship proves of particular interest not only for the lives of people engaged in same-sex acts but for the concepts of kinship itself. Or, as Corinne Hayden puts it, “The ways in which lesbians and gay men negotiate such reinscriptions [of relatedness] make explicit not only the contingency of these symbols [blood and love] but also –equally important in theorizing kinship- the dynamic, mutual construction of gender, generation, kinship, and sexuality” (1995: 57). In a society like Greece where “kinship has been regarded as a fundamental principle of relatedness and a powerful idiom of action” (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991: 3) while its pervasiveness “in married life, in the constitution of gender identities, in economic cooperation and political negotiation, and in ritual action has been established by many ethnographers” (ibid.: 7) the relations of same-sex desiring women to their families is of importance. A number of questions arise: How do women who are engaged in same-sex

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<sup>6</sup> A similar remark was made by John Gagnon and William Simon, “despite the understandable tendency to conceive of many of deviant behavior as exotic and strange, it is important to view deviant behavior, including sexual deviance, in terms of its essential relationship to the conventional structures and processes of collective life” (1967a: 1).

<sup>7</sup> Not only in her work on lesbian motherhood (1993a), but also in the subsequent one on same-sex marriage among lesbians Ellen Lewin (1996b) contests the existence of a ‘gay culture’ and focuses on the more complicated, contradictory relationships between the ways gays and lesbians organize their lives and their views of their places in the wider society.

relationships structure and negotiate their kinship relations? Do they come out to their families of origin? Do they have any children and if yes, how do they act out and negotiate their roles as mothers? Are there any other nets of support besides kinship relations to help and assist them? The present chapter tries to answer some of these questions.

### ***From the Perspective of Daughters***

In *Families We Choose* Kath Weston demonstrates that the emergence of coming-out to blood and adoptive relatives as a historical practice and possibility, is a rather recent innovation, since, before the 1960s disclosure of a gay identity was out of the question. Only in the early 1970s “activists valorized coming-out to heterosexuals as a strategy designed to gain political power and promote self-respect” (1991: 47). The thought “If I don’t come out, how will things ever get better?” led many people to the decision to come out to their parents and relatives. Through ‘coming-out’ people challenged portrayals of homosexuality as sin, sickness, or a ‘phase’ while “the goal was to attain a measure of self-determination through self-definition” (1991: 67). Apart from being an issue of self-acceptance and respect, ‘coming-out’ was used for the testing of kinship relationships as to whether they would prove to be genuine or not.

The majority of women I have talked to in the context of this research assume that their parents are aware of their sexual preferences, even if a significantly smaller number have not ever done a ‘proper’ coming-out to them (see also Table IV, page 182)<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, independently, whether parents know or not, or suspect their daughter’s sexual behavior, a reluctance to talk about the subject is the common characteristic of their stance.

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<sup>8</sup> Kath Weston (1991) mentions that for an act to count as a ‘coming-out’ individuals had to make a clear statement about their sexual preferences. Discovery did not count although many people wished their relatives to find out and thus to diminish the anxiety of disclosure.

**When families do not know ...**

Chrisanthi Mantaka was born and raised in a small village in Northern Greece. Having spent all her school years regarding herself as 'sick' and thinking that she was the only person in the world who ever fell in love with women, considered the opportunity to study abroad as a unique chance to get away from a repressive environment. When she returned to Greece, after having completed her studies, she moved to Athens to live together with her partner. Although she now visits her parents quite often, during the summer and the Christmas vacations, Chrisanthi characterizes her relationship with them as a rather distant one. Geographical distance and the fact that they have not lived together for many years are not sufficient explanations for the frigidity in their relations. Chrisanthi attributes it to the fact that her parents are disappointed in her.

*The fact that I live here in Athens and not somewhere close to them disappoints them. The fact that I have not married, that I am not doing things in the way they expect me to, heavily influences our relationship. I think that they are aware of my relationship with Christina and this is why they are ... a bit strange. They no longer believe that we are just flatmates. I think they know all about my relationship with Christina, but we have never discussed it.*

However, the atmosphere of secrecy and concealment distresses her because of two reasons. The first one is that she cannot have an honest relationship with her parents which makes her feel sad, and the second one is that she is faced with a conscious problem since she has to hide herself.

*Though I appreciate honesty and I like to be honest there is something which holds me back [in coming-out]. But this situation worries me a lot. The older I get the more it troubles me. It worries me because I would like to have an honest relationship with my parents first and foremost, and afterwards with*

*everyone else. I would like to let them know, but I do not feel ready yet. You see, they are the first ones who should know. I want to start with them, do you understand? I do not care so much about my friends, well ... ok, I do care. But I believe that if I were going to take the first step and tell my parents, then I would be able to come-out to anybody else. Till now the only 'coming-out' I have ever done was to people I met when I studied abroad. One day I hope to find the courage and tell everyone: "This is me. I am proud of what I am, I like what I do, I always wanted to be like that, and I will continue to be like that". Just because this is me. I cannot act and behave differently. This is what I want to do in life and I want people to respect and accept me as such.*

According to Chrisanthi's account 'coming-out' to parents seems to be the landmark for coming-out to everyone else and thus gaining self-respect, dignity and ultimately personal freedom. Similarly, Maria Fotiadi's story presents the importance of being accepted by family on terms of self-respect, self-recognition, and equanimity.

### **When families know ...**

Maria Fotiadi had her first sexual relationship at the age of 30 with a woman whom she had met in a feminist group. Love came as the result of friendship, respect, and mutual fondness. For both of them it was their first same-sex experience, an experience which caused simultaneously pleasure and strain. Maria lived this erotic story in complete isolation and did not share it with anyone else. In Maria's words:

*I did not tell anyone. I did not dare. How could I? I did not consider it as a real relationship, I did not recognize it as such. Despite the fact that I was with this woman for four whole years. I think that is the reason why the relationship had so many problems.*

Her partner, Dimitra Elevtheriou, remembers how difficult the relationship was, partly because Maria did not dare to speak about it to anyone, let alone her parents.

*Only the idea that someone would learn got her into a panic. She never spoke about it. But, with her second relationship she was much more open. This woman, the other one, entered into Maria's family dynamically, because family is very important to Maria. She imposed herself on the members of Maria's family and made everyone love her. Even the husband of her sister accepted her. Even if he had any objections he did not express them because he loved the girl, he truly did. I was impressed. I would never have dared to do something like that. Now her mother knows, her sister knows. I would have never expected her mother to accept it. Because she is a rather conservative type and she wanted her daughter to get married, and have children.*

Her mother's reaction and acceptance of her homosexual choice was for Maria a significant fact. When Maria decided to talk to her mother she was thirty-six and her mother was 80. Maria's father had already died. Since her partner was not Greek but lived abroad Maria decided to go and visit her for a third time. At this point her mother objected, "Why are you going there since your life and your home are here?".

*I decided that I did not want to hide it from her anymore. And so I told her. For three whole days we kept a distance from each other. Of course, we continued to do things together, to go to the cemetery. But our relationship was suffering a lot. I still remember when she said to me, "And I cannot tell anyone about it!". The poor woman! With whom could she share her bitterness? On the third day at eight o'clock in the morning she called me on the phone and told me: "I do not agree with your way of life but I love you very much and I have missed you a lot. So, come here, I want to embrace you". I hung up the phone, had a good cry and went to her place. My mother was extraordinary. Although it was something completely new for her she made an effort to accept it. By chance she had seen a film about Oscar Wilde*

*on TV earlier that summer. And she was frustrated by how much he had suffered only because he was a homosexual. This film had touched her.*

While Maria's mother accepted her daughter it was not easy for her to accept her daughter's partner as well. In the beginning her mother refused to see Maria's girlfriend when the latter came for the summer vacation. However, she had some doubts whether this decision was the right one.

*She told me, "And if I want to invite you for lunch or bring it to you, will I not do it because she is there? I am the one who would lose. Why should I lose?". After my friend had come I continued to visit my mother every day. One day she asked me, "Where is Alexandra?". "At home", I answered. "Right now I am going to call her and ask her to come over". "Do as you please", I replied. And she invited her. Alexandra put her nicest clothes on and came. And that was it. Afterwards we went to my mother's for lunch every day.*

Soon after Maria's mother had learnt about this relationship, she and Maria's girlfriend became good friends. Although she was a rather lonely person and preferred to stay at home, she easily let the girl persuade her to go for lunch or for a ride, and the three of them used to go out together quite often. From the perspective of Maria the relationship with her girlfriend became more intimate and stronger after having talked to her mother. Considering the fact that Maria comes from a very conservative environment, where female homosexuality is considered to be either non-existent, or, if existent is thought of as a filthy sexual act, the 'confession' to her mother even at the age of thirty-six marked a turning point in her life. She felt more free to live her relationship openly and without guilt. On the contrary, when she had the relationship with Dimitra Elevtheriou she did not share it with anyone for two whole years. Even when she started to discuss it very reluctantly with some friends of hers, or with members of the feminist group, things did not become easier. Because she had repressed her

feelings for such a long period she was afraid that people would start to ask her questions such as “How is it?”, “How do you feel?”, etc. And this is exactly what they did with the result that she felt distressed and humiliated. But afterwards, because she had already discussed it with her mother, she felt relaxed enough to discuss her same-sex preferences openly with friends and acquaintances.

Another interesting example on how important it is when parents, especially mothers, accept their daughters homosexual behavior is given by Kiriaki Paschali a twenty-six year old woman. Kiriaki remembers herself kissing and hugging girls from the age of five. When she was fifteen she spoke about it to her mother whose reaction was: “I do not care with whom you share your bed as long as you are careful, you are happy, and you smile. Your smile gives life to me ...”. Kiriaki says:

*I think that this was a reaction which won me over to her side. Every time I reflect on her response, I realize that this was the best move she could ever have made to keep me close to the family. I do not know whether she really believed what she told me but her reaction kept me close to her until her death.*

Nevertheless, not all parents react in the same way. In their majority the parents of women I have talked to refuse to discuss their daughters’ desires. In some cases daughters are the ones who refuse to talk about it but in other cases, however, women have been quite open about their sexual choices. Still, their parents refuse to discuss it. It seems that this knowledge is so difficult to handle that in most cases parents pretend that they do not know. The following stories support this assumption.

#### **When families know but pretend they do not ...**

Ifigenia Ksenaki started to be sexually involved with other women at the age of fifteen. According to her this encounter did not happen on a conscious level but “was the natural outcome of a physical attraction”. During her second relationship with one of her

schoolmates at the age of eighteen, the mother of her friend was informed about the relationship by her daughter. Although Ifigenia's friend felt comfortable enough to speak to her mother about her erotic relationship, the mother did not react the way her daughter had expected her to. She began to phone Ifigenia and threaten that she would tell everything to Ifigenia's mother if she would not break off the relationship.

*Since her own daughter had already 'confessed' it was impossible for me to deny it. So, I decided to meet her. My purpose was not to tell her that "Look! we are in love with each other, we will do whatever we like, and we do not care whether you agree or not!". I just wanted to meet her in order to gain time and postpone the moment my mother would learn. [...]I was terrified of facing the possibility that my parents would find out. It seems that I had already embodied the dominant models. This was not the case with Faidra. She thought that letting her family know about her sexual preferences was a very natural thing to do <sup>9</sup>. On the contrary, I was aware of the fact that although my erotic life did not pose a great problem to me, it would certainly pose one certainly to my family. I knew that they would oppose it. As a matter of fact my sexual choices were a problem for me as well, but age, desire ... made me overcome it. Perhaps this was also the reason why I tried as much as I could so that my parents would not learn about them.*

Ifigenia met her partner's mother and told her that the two girls had had physical contact once. Ifigenia insisted that this had happened because they were young and at that age one is curious about new experiences. By the end of the conversation the girls promised indirectly that they would not meet again erotically and they would remain just friends. In spite of this promise the mother continued to keep a close eye on them in order to ensure that

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<sup>9</sup> Faidra, is Faidra Aristou, who is a good friend of Ifigenia. The fact that she did not fear her family and could talk to them openly influenced her to a great extent in the way she perceived and lived out her homosexual desires.

the girls 'will remain just friends'. When she realized that they were continuing to see each other on a sexual level she called Ifigenia's mother.

*My mother entered our home speechless, ready to slap me in the face. Out of the arrogance of age I told her: "I know that you know. Do you want them to come here and talk?". Her answer was: "They may come". What a surprise! I called them and I asked "Would you come?". And they came. Mother and daughter. Eleven o'clock at night. And I was so daring that when my partner's mother asked me "Where is your place?", I answered her, "Your daughter knows". When they came only my partner's mother and me discussed the situation with each other. My friend and my mother remained silent. The conversation lasted till five o'clock in the morning and it was very painful. I think that it cost me dearly. A death-like silence followed our discussion. One week later I left to study in another city. My mother did not mention the whole story ever again and she was left with the impression that this relationship had been terminated. She had also the assurance of my friend's mother, of that female 'detective', that we had ceased seeing each other. Of course, this was not true. The relationship continued for another two years although we lived in different cities.*

Sixteen years later Ifigenia's mother still refuses to talk about her daughter's sexual life although the overwhelming majority of Ifigenia's sexual relationships are with women. These women frequent her mother's place, have lunch with her, with some of them she has made friends. Nevertheless, Ifigenia still lives with the fear that she will be 'revealed' and her mother continues to wish for her daughter a partner and a child.

*Irrespective of my secret sexual life, which she is very careful not to reveal, because she could not handle it, the facts she has about my personal erotic relationships are the best ones she could get. The women she meets are*

*people whom she respects, by whom she is charmed, with whom she likes to talk. Through these women she meets another world, a world she has dreamed about. And this confuses her.*

Ifigenia's mother is very careful not to reveal her daughter's sexual life while Ifigenia is similarly careful of not being revealed. The play of silence still continues although she and her mother have a very close relationship, even more so, since her parents are divorced and Ifigenia has been brought up by her. Ifigenia very often goes to her mother's place for lunch, they spend the Christmas vacations together, and they firmly support each other. However, despite their closeness and affectionate relationship neither she nor her mother are ready to openly discuss Ifigenia's love affairs. The effort which was made by Ifigenia at the age of eighteen to admit her erotic relationships with women did not have a successor. Ifigenia chose silence instead. There are other cases, such as the ones presented by Evanthia Totti and Rena Tata, where daughters talked to their parents openly but the latter prefer not to discuss it.

Evanthia Totti, aged 30, comes from a well-educated environment. After having completed her studies in Greece she decided to go abroad for postgraduate studies. During her stay abroad she had her first erotic encounter with another woman, she participated in lesbian organizations, and finally took the brave decision to come-out to her mother when the latter came for a short visit.

*We had a discussion about male homosexuality as represented in the movies.*

*"What do you think?", she asked me. Although I was in two minds whether I should let her know, I thought, well ... this is your chance!. "I cannot perceive such acts between two men, but I can certainly perceive them among women", I told her. "How comes? Have you ever been with a woman?", she asked. "Yes", was the answer. "...! Are you telling me that you are a lesbian?". "I do not know mum, I am not telling you that I am a lesbian. I am just saying that I have been with women erotically and that I am attracted to*

*them". "So what?", was her shocking answer, "I have been once with a woman too. Does it mean that I am a lesbian?". I was shocked! My mother continued her story. She had once been with a classmate at the age of 15-16 but this does not make her a lesbian. Similarly, she thinks that I could not possibly be one, since I had always behaved so femininely. She continued by telling me that I was not supposed to tell her such things as, for example, that I am not going to have any children and so forth. The next month was a nightmare for both of us. One moment she was furious with me, the other she cooked meatballs and vegetables for me, crying all the time.*

Although her mother's decision was not to share her daughter's confession with her husband, this was the first thing she did after she had returned home. Evanthia's father was deeply disappointed with his daughter and decided to write her a letter warning her of the 'bad road' she had chosen to follow. However, he never discussed this issue again except for one occasion when he told her, "I do not agree with not getting married under any circumstances, and for any reason". When Evanthia decided to return to Greece after having completed her studies her parents saw in that return a hope for her 'salvation' and urged her to go to a psychologist and to an endocrinologist. Both of them reassured the parents that there was nothing wrong with their daughter. Nowadays, Evanthia's relationship with her parents could be described as a friendly and loving one although her parents do not like to discuss Evanthia's sexual partners. Her father does not mention it, while her mother has been warned to give a call before visiting.

Rena Tata, a 36 years old woman, who had spent many years in a European country where she studied and worked, has a similar story to present. One day, when she was about 25 years old, she decided to speak to her mother. At that time she was in an erotic relationship and felt so happy that she wanted to share her joy with the members of her family. On the eve of her departure she told her mother:

*I see that you worry because I am alone and I do not have a partner. This is not true. I am with someone, we spend a wonderful time together, and I am very happy. But this person is a 'she' not a 'he'. I was standing behind her while she was frying potatoes for our dinner, and I still remember my mother's shoulders freezing the moment she heard what I had just told her.*

The next day Rena left. During the following they phoned each other every day, some times twice a day. They did not say anything particular and they did not mention the subject that troubled them. Three weeks passed like this. Rena asked her mother to tell Rena's father, in order to share it with someone and not feel lonely with an 'unspeakable secret'. Her father reacted more positively and assured Rena that she had no reason to worry about them. They would handle it. Although it was not in her plans, one month later she came back to Greece to see them.

*I came for two weeks. I realized that although we had a great time together nobody discussed the issue. I left again and some time later I separated from my partner. I did not tell them anything but somehow they found out, perhaps from the tone of my voice. Soon afterwards my mother began to tell me, "You have to find a boyfriend, you must try, you never know, perhaps you would be better with a man". Since then, every time I came for the summer vacation and they opened a bottle of wine the usual toast was, "Next time with your degree! And afterwards with a good husband!". I kept telling them that they should not expect the groom. Gradually they ceased to wish a good husband for me.*

The stories of Evanthia Totti and Rena Tata present us with striking similarities. Both of them have decided to talk to their mothers after having been abroad for a period of time where they have been in more tolerant environments towards homosexuality, have met other lesbian women, and have begun to feel more comfortable with their same-sex desires. At this

point they felt the need to 'come-out' to their parents mainly because they did not want to exclude them from their lives. Or, as Evanthia Totti puts it:

*I love them and this is the main reason why I did not want to exclude them from my life. I knew that after having made this choice my relationships with them would be influenced. I did not want to exclude them, I did not want not to have any contact with them. This is the reason I told mum. I wanted to live without guilt, without remorse.*

Interestingly, both Evanthia Totti and Rena Tata chose to talk to their mothers first, letting them tell their fathers. Although, the father of Evanthia reacted negatively as soon as he learned about it, while, Rena's father was more positive and encouraging, in both cases the fathers refused to talk about it in great detail. Evanthia and Rena present us with stories where daughters make an effort to include parents in their lives. Nevertheless, parents choose to play the game of silence and pretend that they do not know. The tendency of parents to ignore their daughters' sexuality is obvious even in cases of women who are open lesbians.

Eleni Christakou, aged 37, used to go to the lesbian organizations in Athens during the 80's, and is to be listed among the first Greek women who began to frequent Eressos. As in the cases of Evanthia Totti and Rena Tata, Eleni felt at a certain point the need to share with her mother her erotic feelings towards women, after having spent many years in Germany. She has never discussed it with her father, because, as she told me, she has never dared to go to him and say, "Look dad, I am a lesbian". But she suspects that her father knows, a suspicion which was confirmed when her father told her, "The greatest foolishness you have ever done was to separate from Froso". Froso was Eleni's partner for a long period of time. However, despite the fact that Eleni is quite open about her sexual choices and friends of hers quite often visit her parental home, her mother persists in asking Eleni when she is going to marry.

*I think that she represses it, she wipes it somehow from her memory. I told her openly. As openly as it can ever be. Nevertheless, she asked me once: “When are you going to marry?”. “Mother, I am thirty years old”, I was thirty by that time, “during all these years no man has ever called me on the phone. And if someone would have called me he would be nothing more than a friend. What are you saying to me now? Since I have been erotically related to women throughout all these years, how could I possibly get married?”. She stared at me and then ... then she talked about the weather. Some time later, perhaps the next year she asked me again “When are you going to get married my child?”<sup>10</sup>.*

The last story is the one presented by Maria Cyberdyke. Maria Cyberdyke is the soul of *Cyberdykes*, editing flyers, organizing parties, and taking part in events. She still lives with her mother who has been aware of her daughter’s sexual relationships since Maria Cyberdyke was fifteen and a half years old. She has even been to *AKOE*’s offices once accompanying her daughter. Maria Cyberdyke describes their relationship as a very close one and could not possibly imagine herself living apart from her mother. Still, although her mother knows everything about her friends, choices, and activities, she behaves as if she did not.

*Mum knows but does not want to talk about it. She does not want to get upset. But she knows everything. Of course she does. Who I am with, whom I fancy, everything. But when she gets angry she keeps telling me “You should not think that I do not know what you are doing”. “I know that you know”, I answer, “why can we not discuss it?”. “Leave me alone!” she replies. She*

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<sup>10</sup> A similar reaction is reported by Leah Fygetakis; one of the women she interviewed told her that her mother avoids discussing or even mentioning the fact that her daughter lives with another woman although she has been living with that woman during the last four years and she has always been invited to family events as a close friend (1997:169).

*does not want to discuss it. She even told me to get married once. "Get married. Just for social reasons".*

The element of secrecy and concealment characterizes the above stories. Even if daughters have made an effort to discuss their sexual choices with their parents and thus to include their blood family in their sexual life, it is parents who cannot stand the burden of that knowledge and often pretend as if they do not know anything. Furthermore, even if parents present a willingness to discuss it they worry about the opinion of other people. This leads them to hide it from the rest of the world and to urge their daughters to act similarly<sup>11</sup>. When Rena Tata began to appear on TV panels on homosexuality participating as a sociologist her parents asked her to cease.

*Now they worry because I appeared on TV once. "What will people say? We live with these people, you have not found a job yet. If they learn about it, you will never find a job. Besides, think of us. What are we going to tell our relatives, our neighbours, our friends? Ok, I can accept it, you can do whatever you like, but do it secretly. Find a girlfriend, bring her home, but in secret.*

In contrast to evidence drawn from ethnographic work on American gay and lesbian kinship the element of choice seems to be of little relevance in the Greek example where relations with the family of origin remain of special importance. Moreover, it is interesting to note that when I asked women I have talked to about the relations with their families in general, the striking majority of them referred exclusively to their mothers, as their stories demonstrate. In Greek society the upbringing of children is considered to be the task of

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<sup>11</sup> Discussing the reaction of blood families when they learn about lesbian and gay kin, Kath Weston draws attention to the fact that in cases where emphasis is given to family as a solid unit rather than a collection of members -as for example, among people of color, whites with strong ethnic identities and people who consider themselves working class- relatives want to keep the news about homosexual behavior within the family (1991: 56).

women. These are the ones who should take care of their children and ensure that they become ‘the right sort’ of person. As Chrysi Igglesi argues “each woman’s destiny is interwoven with requisitions and restrictions dictated by gender. These requisitions, which form the female model, have not changed substantially in postwar Greece despite social and political reforms. Women in my research have grown up with the ideal that their primary destination is the fulfillment of their gender role. Traditional values on femaleness, motherhood and woman’s identity defined their socialization on a structural level” (1990: 250-251). In the context of modern patterns of mother-child interactions the word ‘effort’ is what characterizes the up bringing of her children (Doumanis 1983). A mother is depending on her children for her personal fulfillment, and to the extent that she has not learned to have her own ambitions or her own activities, she feels guilty and worthless in case she fails in her maternal role or her children disappoint her (Kataki 1984). Due to their strong relation it is significant for daughters when mothers know, while mothers are the ones who feel more endangered in case their daughters fail to fulfill their gender roles. However, to become a mother is not sufficient for the fulfillment of gender roles if it does not happen in the context of marriage.

### ***Mothers and Want-to Be-Mothers***

During the 1970s, in the context of lesbian-feminist communities in Anglo-Saxon countries, motherhood was considered to be a compromise with patriarchy. As one woman in Arlene Stein’s research says, “Central to the definition of being lesbian was not having children, unless you had a child from a previous heterosexual marriage” (1997a: 133). This picture was about to change at the beginning of the 1980s. The critiques lesbian feminism had received from lesbians of color and pro sex lesbians “pointed toward an understanding of lesbianism as situated in a web of multiple oppressions and identities”, and “shifted lesbian politics away from its focus upon ‘male threat’ and toward more diffuse notion of power and resistance” (Stein 1997a: 125). The outcome was that, instead of being regarded as a

contribution to male domination, motherhood was claimed as a source of female difference and power. Today the issues of getting children and keeping them are faced by many lesbian women in Europe and in America. As Kate Griffin states, “Access to insemination, custody, and legal recognition of the relationship between lesbian and gay parents and their children are subjects currently high on the agenda of lesbian and gay movements in many European countries” (1998: 25).

Despite the passionate discussions which occur abroad, in Greece, the overwhelming number of women, who are mothers and are simultaneously engaged in same-sex relationships, have children from previous marriages since single motherhood is still a limited option for women in Greece which holds one of the lowest percentages on children born outside wedlock among European countries <sup>12</sup>. Although a significant number of same-sex desiring women consider the possibility of having children by asking a friend, using a sperm donor, or adopting a child, the actual number who become mothers through such means is very low if any at all. Insemination techniques and adoption are available to non-married

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<sup>12</sup> It is interesting that the number of women who are mothers outside marriage, regardless of whether they are homosexual or heterosexual, is still very low in Greece, in both urban and in rural areas. According to Loukia Mousourou (1981) only 0,99% out of the total number of newborn children were born outside the wedlock in 1967, while this percentage rises to 1,33% in 1977. In a recent research published in *To Vima tis Kiriakis – Sunday Tribune-*, under the title “I Diaforetiki Zoi” –“The Different Life”-, (18<sup>th</sup> June 2000), this percentage is nowadays 3%, which is still very low in comparison to countries of the European Community that have an average of 24%. In their research on non-married mothers in Greece Anastasia Riga et al. (1991) conclude that, despite their initial assumption, motherhood outside marriage does not constitute a further step towards a developing process. “It’s about women who are totally depending on their fate, who are alone, who raise their children under difficult financial, social, and family circumstances” (ibid.: 82). However, the above remarks may not hold good for women from upper classes who decide to have a child on their own, and are equipped with educational backgrounds, financial independence, and a social network to support them. For a thorough research on single-parent families see Dimitra Kongidou *Monogoneoikes Oikogeneies. Pragmatikotita- Prooptikes- Koinoniki Politiki, Single Parent Families. Reality-Perspectives-Social Policy-* (1995), as well as her article “Monogoneoikes

people<sup>13</sup> but in praxis they are rarely used. Insemination is a high-priced means of reproduction which is not always crowned with success, whereas, there are very few chances for a single-parent to adopt a child, not to mention for a homosexual one, because of the limited number of children who are available (Papazisi 1996). But despite practical shortcomings, there seems to be a contradiction in terms between 'same-sex desire' and 'motherhood'. In an article published in the collective volume *Lesbian Motherhood in Europe* Irene Petropoulou writes that Greek society regards the lesbian as unfit for motherhood with the result that same-sex desiring women who are mothers "prefer to avoid seeking public attention for fear that they may be taken to court and lose custody of their children"<sup>14</sup>, while "access to donor insemination, adoption or fostering for lesbians, are rights granted to heterosexual couples only" (1997: 227). Among the women I have talked to only two of them had children from previous marriages.

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Oikogeneies kai Anaparastasis tis Monogoneoikotitas apo Mones Miteres", -"Single-parent families and Representations of Single-Parenthood from Single Mothers"- (1994).

<sup>13</sup> The right on gay and lesbian marriage is a contested issue among homosexual organizations. Although *EOK -Greek Homosexual Organization-* and *Symbraxi -Co-operation Against Homophobia-* advocate for the right of gay people to get married, and even organized a conference under the title *Omofilofilos Gamos -Homosexual Marriage-* in Thessaloniki, in March 1996, members of *O.P.O.T.H. -Homosexual's Initiative of Thessaloniki-* wonder whether gay marriage constitutes a liberating or a compromising act. Articles published in the group's magazine *O Pothos -The Desire-* express their hesitant position towards marriage (i.e. "Omofilofilos Gamos" - "Homosexual marriage"- 1996, 1: 6, "Nea" -"News"- 1996, 2: 3, "Ela na Pandreftoume, Darling" -"Let's get married, darling"- 1997, 10: 8). Likewise, the editors of the lesbian magazine *Madame Gou* have a similar ambivalent position towards the issue (i.e. "Gamos. Dikaioma I Paraitisi apo ti Diafora" -"Marriage. Right or Withdrawal from Difference"1997, 4: 17-23). Although they agree that people should not be discriminated against, on the grounds of their sexual orientation, they wonder whether a preoccupation with marriage constitutes nothing else than reconciling to the dominant structure. From an official point of view, research published in the mainstream magazine *Gynaika*, in September 1996, revealed that the Greek state is very reluctant to discuss the issue, while the Orthodox Church strongly objects to it.

### Being a Mother

Angeliki Chatzigianni is fifty years old and lives in Athens. At the age of thirty she got married for a short period of time and became the mother of a daughter who now lives with her father. Soon the marriage broke up and Angeliki with her child moved to her parents home. It was not until she became thirty-five that Angeliki heard about homosexuality and realized that a woman could be sexually involved with another woman. She started to read the lesbian magazine *Lavris* which was being published at that time and to frequent the *Kafeneion Ginaikon* -Women's Coffeehouses- with a friend of hers who was divorced and had two daughters of her own. During this period she visited FEMO<sup>15</sup> where she spent an entire week. The co-habitation with women from different countries, some of whom were with their children, gave her the opportunity to experience another way of life.

*I met many lesbian women who talked to me about their lives. I got from these women the necessary strength I needed in order to live alone with my child after having returned to Greece. When I told them that I was still living with my parents they could not believe it. [...] After this trip I felt comfortable with my new life, and it was easier for me to decide to live with my child alone. I was eager to meet other women and to go out with them. I read many feminist books, I began to think in sexual terms of a Swedish woman I had met, I went to Lesbos, I met women from Germany, Belgium, England. So it came as a natural thing to talk about my new life to my family and to my friends, men and women alike.*

When she returned she felt the need to come-out to her parents since she did not want to hide herself and invent lies. Her parents reacted in different ways. Although her father did

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<sup>14</sup> There is no legislation which prevents a lesbian woman from having the custody of her children. However, in court cases over the custody of children, if a mother is suspected of lesbianism this supplies father with an uncontested advantage.

<sup>15</sup> FEMO is a women- only camp in Denmark.

not react negatively, her mother was shocked and threatened that she would take the child and reveal everything to Angeliki's ex-husband, a threat which she ultimately fulfilled. Nevertheless, Angeliki's ex-husband did not fight for the custody of their child and respected her choice. Angeliki started to travel and to meet people but her new way of life was not accepted by the members of her family. When she decided, two years later, to renovate an old house which belonged to her in order to stay there with her daughter, in the beginning, her parents and husband did not want to let her live with the child alone without the protection of her parental home. But, according to Angeliki, the real difficulties began as soon as her daughter, at the age of fourteen, learned about her mother's relationship with another woman. Speaking of the relationship to her child Angeliki says:

*When she was seven, eight years old my parents took care of her and brought her up. But also my parents in law intervened in her education. Afterwards I had her with me for a period of time. Now she is with her father. The main benefit of the fact that so many people intervened in her upbringing was that I had plenty of time for reading, listening to music, going out, travelling. However, it was also difficult since I did not always agree with all these people on how my child should be raised. I wanted to infuse her with the principles of being autonomous, independent, and self-confident. Although this has often caused conflicts between my daughter and me and I realized that we antagonized each other every time we met, I was not ready to give up all my interests in order to undertake the full responsibility of my maternal role. I refused to be confined to the home. [...] Today we have not spoken to each other for seven months because I sold a house that she wanted for herself. [...] I do not think that she has accepted my sexual choices even though she is now nineteen years old. We have not contacted each other, since last December. She has chosen to be completely silent. She attributes*

*her silence to other reasons but I think that her reaction is strongly related to my sexual choices.*

Being a mother and being erotically involved with other women seem to be incompatible in the case of Angeliki. Angeliki came-out at a late age and needed time for herself in order to read, to meet other women, to travel, to expand her horizons, to ‘find herself’. Due to the absence of a lesbian community which would provide her with emotional help, and practical support with the upbringing of her child, Angeliki was strongly, if not totally, dependent on her family. But the fact that her parents did not agree with her way of life, resulted more than once in Angeliki’s daughter becoming the grounds for the emergence of conflicts and disputes between Angeliki and her parents.

The case of Popi Grammenou is different. It is a story about losing custody, although the children accept their mother’s choices and would like to live with her. Shortly before becoming thirty Popi met a woman and realized that she would never feel happy or fulfilled unless she divorced her husband and spent her time in the company of other women. When she asked for a divorce her husband gave it to her under certain conditions. These conditions were that he would keep the custody of their children, she would not be allowed to remarry, and her personal property would be given to him as support for having the children.

*I signed the contract. Such was my desire to be completely independent. At that period I stayed very close to my children. I saw them every day. I did not realize that I had left them.*

With the permission of her ex-husband she visited her children every day but when he was absent. She cooked for them, did their homework with them, paid doctors and private lessons. Another clause of the personal contract she and her husband had signed was that he would keep the children until he got married. As soon as the father of her children got married she took legal action in order to get the kids back. But he possessed some love letters which

had been sent to Popi from her first relationship with a woman and he brought them to the court when Popi asked for the children's custody.

*These letters were sufficient to prove that I had an erotic relationship with this woman. During the trial many things were said, for example, that I am lesbian and the leader of international homosexual organizations. To cut a long story short, the words 'lesbian', 'homosexual', 'love letters from another woman' acted like a bomb in that court. Despite the fact that I had my own business, my own car, had a nice place to live, and paid the doctors and private lessons for my children ... I brought all these receipts to the court to prove to them that I took care of my children financially. Although I had this proof and people witnessed my honourable conduct the court's judgement was that since the children had lived well with their father during these years why should they not continue to live with him? This was the judgement. Although the children professed that they wanted to be with their mother. My oldest child said before the court that he wanted to be with his mother, because she had been close to them during all these years, because she loves them very much, because they love her very much, because, because ... No attention was paid to any of this. My son came back to me as soon as he became eighteen. He is now twenty and a half. He is a student. My other child is now sixteen and a half. I am waiting for the moment she becomes eighteen and is allowed to come home.*

Popi decided not to have another trial. This is what her lawyers advised her. Since the words 'lesbian' and 'homosexual' had been heard in the court room –although they are not mentioned in the judge's decision- there were almost no chances of her getting the children back. She decided to wait. For the last two and a half years her son has lived with her and her partner with whom she has been together for more than six years. Having children and being

in a same-sex relationship proves to be difficult. The reason for that is not only that the ex-husband wanted the custody.

*If a woman is alone she is considered to be a second-class citizen. People cannot perceive that you do not necessarily need a man to stand beside you, that you can do it perfectly well on your own. This is the first problem, namely, people's prejudices. Another problem is that my partner and I have lived together for six and a half years now. We leave our apartment together in the morning; we return together at night, the whole neighbourhood can see us. And some of them look askance at us. I think that the child has a bigger problem than we do. Probably because I have believed in my decision from the very beginning but the child does not always feel very comfortable living with a couple of women. My son is a responsible and reliable person. We have a very good relationship and he respects human rights, human freedom. But on the other hand he lives in Greek society and he is strongly dependent on people's opinions. He is at that age when one depends heavily on one's own group, on one's company of friends. His friends do not visit our place although we have encouraged him to invite them in. He avoids bringing them home perhaps because he feels that he cannot do that. He himself decided not to do so. Of course, I can understand why. I do not know how it will be later. I think of it quite often; what will happen when he meets a girl, falls in love with her and wants to create a family? How difficult it will be for him to present his mother as a homosexual? [...] It is very difficult to raise a child alone whether being homosexual or not because society does not help women who want to raise their children alone. Society protects only the married couple, does not stand up for single mothers whether they are homosexuals or not. If someone is lesbian things get even worse. Because she is economically dependent on people from whom she must hide her*

*homosexuality. If you run an enterprise your constant fear is what will happen to your child if people learn that you are lesbian. Because you have the responsibility of your child as well, you are not only responsible for yourself.*

In both stories, the one told by Angeliki Chatzigianni and the other one told by Popi Grammenou the difficulties of raising a child in Greece while being involved in a same-sex relationship are evident. Apart from the financial difficulties these women may face, they feel a lack of support. Despite the existence of playgrounds and day schools, grandparents and members of the extended family continue to play a significant role with the up bringing of children. But what happens when grandparents refuse to offer their help because they object to their daughter's way of life? The absence of other networks of support is more apparent in these cases. Besides, the existence of children estranges often prospective lesbian friends. Popi Grammenou complains that she feels isolated even from her own circle of friends:

*I experienced negative discrimination on the part of society because I am a lesbian, and negative discrimination in homosexual groups because I have kids. A minority in a minority group. I could never be completely incorporated into these groups because we did not share the same problems. I did not find in these groups space for children no matter how hard I tried. And this is something I miss. I have not yet met lesbian women with children*

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<sup>16</sup> Because being a lesbian and a mother bears many difficulties in the context of Greek society, women with children do not usually live openly as lesbians. Popi Grammenou and her partner came to the Lesbian Week in Crete (September 1996) with the hope of meeting other lesbian women who have children. Unfortunately there hopes did not come true.

The fear of discrimination against their children was mentioned as another difficulty<sup>17</sup>. Since they are brought up in a society which places great value on heterosexual marriage children of mothers in same-sex relationships could face problems in their socialization. The above difficulties are apparent in the answers women gave me when I asked them whether they were considering the possibility of becoming mothers.

### **Of Becoming a Mother**

When asked, several of the women I have discussed told me that at a certain point in their lives they had thought of or were thinking of the possibility of becoming mothers either by insemination or taking sperm from a friend, a gay friend, or a female partner's brother. Nevertheless, I have not yet met any woman who has already done it. Some of them even mentioned the possibility of a heterosexual marriage in order to protect the child. Urania Kominou told me:

*I have always loved children. I remember once I had even thought of getting married because I wanted a child. I came very close to marrying the cousin of an ex-girlfriend. He was a good friend of mine, he knew that I liked to be with women ... but I felt discomfort. We were together for three months. [...] Later, I was thinking of having a child with a gay friend of mine, using his sperm. But now that I have realized what it means to be a mother –I have watched straight friends who have recently become mothers- I do not want this any more. The 'I' changes to 'us'. I am very happy in the relationship I have now. I am sure that were I to have a child, my kid would come first and then my partner, and this scares me*

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<sup>17</sup> Sarah Green makes a similar remark speaking of lesbian mothers in London. "The probability that children would experience discrimination because of their mother's lesbianism concerned all lesbian mothers I met, and was the reason many did not reveal their lesbianism to institutions with which the child was involved" (1997: 92).

Urania's unwillingness to have a child is mainly attributed to her worry that a prospective motherhood would harm her relationship. But in most other cases women's reluctance to bear children have to do with a consideration of the child itself. When Ifigenia Ksenaki was 33 years old she had to consider the possibility of having a child very thoroughly because she had had an operation and her doctor urged her to get pregnant. Perhaps later it will be too late, he told her. Although Ifigenia had thought of the possibility of being impregnated by a gay friend with whom she was very close, she turned it down.

*I did not want it. I am not sure that I can raise a child on my own. I am not sure that two women can live with a child. Some people might do it and I am not the one who would object to it. But this is not what I would choose for my own child. [...] It sounds too selfish to me.*

Ifigenia's reasons for not having a child in a context of a lesbian relationship have to do with the needs of a child and her desire to provide it with an easy way of life. She thinks that, at least at the present, things would not be easy for a child who is being brought up by two women engaged in a sexual relationship<sup>18</sup>.

Although motherhood is valued highly in Greek society, it seems that only 'proper motherhood', motherhood in the context of heterosexual marriage, is the one which is highly valued. In a presentation on the modern Greek family, Evthymios Papataxiarchis (1994) argues that in opposition to other European societies where cohabitation and consensual union, as much as single parent households emerge as powerful alternatives, in Greece the nuclear heterosexual model of the family shows an impressive resilience and the capacity to

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<sup>18</sup> While in Crete for the Lesbian Week, Katerina Dimitriou and Olga Sapountzi had a discussion on motherhood with Popi Grammenou and Melina Takaki. Katerina and Olga were thinking of having a child using the method of artificial insemination. Nevertheless, because they were living in a provincial town where people know each other they wondered whether it would be wiser if Katerina Dimitriou had a fake marriage. Popi Grammenou answered her that it is very difficult for a child to be raised by two women and a fake marriage provides no solution since people know that they are lesbians.

be reproduced in changing structural conditions. Due to the dominance of the domestic model, little space is offered for single-motherhood, let alone lesbian motherhood. Elli Papandreou, among others, protests against that situation:

*Why are we the ones who are supposed to corrupt the children? Did you read the other day about that woman who threw her baby in the well? What makes her a better mother than me? She has all the rights and I have nothing. Have they tested me? They haven't. They do not give me a single right. They do not allow the formation of other kinds of families*<sup>19</sup>.

Jill Dubisch (1995) remarks that although motherhood in Greece is a state that is highly respected, one might even say revered, and unintended childlessness is a tragedy and the cause of many prayers, vows, and pilgrimages, this does not mean that motherhood is regarded without ambivalence, or that the more children one has, the better a mother one is. It is only in the context of marriage and on the condition that a woman can successfully fulfill her maternal duties, that her status as mother is highly valued. In contrast, in cases of same-sex desiring women their ability to be 'competent mothers' is strongly questioned because they are perceived as people whose primary pursuit is their sexual gratification and therefore cannot possibly hold the kind of altruism expected from mothers. Interestingly, when same-sex desiring women do become mothers they are heavily dependent on their families of origin for practical and emotional support, a remark which has also been made by Ellen Lewin in her research on lesbian mothers in the USA; "Despite my early expectations that lesbian mothers would tend to substitute friendship for kinship ties in constituting support networks, my interviews showed something very different. Lesbian mothers, no less than heterosexuals, regarded family members, particularly their parents, as the most reliable source of support and

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<sup>19</sup> Research on children with lesbian mothers in England has not revealed any significant differences between the children of lesbian and heterosexual parents. On the contrary, "they felt they had benefited from the insights they gained into gender relations and from the broader, more inclusive definition of family they acquired through growing up in a different kind of family" (Saffron 1998: 35).

as their most appropriate resource when times are hard” (1996a: 119) <sup>20</sup>. The reliance on parents and especially on mothers, at least in the case of Greece, is to be attributed to the significance of family relations and on the prevailing belief ‘that a child needs a proper environment to grow up’. If it is assumed that a mother cannot provide it, than her family of origin is considered to be the second best choice for the up bringing of children. Yet, in such cases parents might exercise extreme pressure on their daughters and urge them to denounce their sexual choices, a situation which becomes even more difficult due to the absence of other strong forms of support among same-sex desiring women.

### ***In the Company of Friends***

Discussing friendships between gay and lesbian people Peter Nardi comments that “[Although], friendship is typically seen as a voluntary, egalitarian relationship, involving personal choice and providing individuals with a variety of psychological, social, and material support, patterned variations in how friendships are formed and maintained point to important social structure components” (1992: 108). Specifically, in the case of gay and lesbian people, factors such as the social constraints forced upon them, the fact that they are often rejected by their own families, and the need to be part of a group in order to sustain a sense of self, lend to these friendship characteristics which are usually held by heterosexual families. Friends became an important part of one’s life and provide emotional, psychological, and financial support. Therefore, Nardi argues, that though the metaphor of family is often invoked when people want to draw attention to the closeness and importance of family relations, for gay people the ‘friends as family’ model is more than a metaphor. As Jeffrey Weeks notes,

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<sup>20</sup> In her research on lesbian motherhood in Great Britain Gillian Dunne (2000) comes to similar conclusions and underlines the importance of kin in her respondent’s accounts of their social interaction. However, Dunne remarks that “often quite strained or difficult relationships between respondents and their parents were transformed as daughters became mothers and their parents became grandparents” (ibid.: 31), a situation which is in contrast with the Greek example where only ‘proper motherhood’ is highly valued.

“Friendships provide the ‘lifeline’ that a biological family, it is believed, should provide, but often cannot or will not for its non-heterosexual offspring” (2000: 217). However, this model is a rather recent innovation. In *Families We Choose* Kath Weston remarks that solid friendship ties have not always been a taken-for-granted feature of gay lives and refers to John D’ Emilio according to whom, “recognition of the possibility of establishing non-erotic ties among homosexuals constituted a key historical development that paved the way for the emergence of the lesbian and gay ‘community’ ” (1991: 118). Afterwards, in the 1980s, the institutionalized gay community of the 1970s, with its shops and bars and associations, gave place to the formation of gay and lesbian families. “As a successor to non-erotic ties elaborated in terms of community or friendship, chosen families introduced something rather novel into kinship relations in the United States by grouping friends together with lovers and children within a single cultural domain” (ibid.: 136). Although not all researchers agree with the introduction of a kinship terminology in the description of gay and lesbian friendships, the majority of them acknowledge the significance of friendship in gay and lesbian lives <sup>21</sup>. Contemporary research focuses on the different ways friendship relations are structured and negotiated taking into account that factors such as sexual orientation, age, relationship status, motherhood, ethnicity, may play a vital role in the formation of such relations <sup>22</sup>.

In Greece, due to the absence of a strong lesbian community, women tend to form smaller networks of support for interaction and mutual help. Such friendship relationships,

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<sup>21</sup> In the introduction of the edited volume *Lesbian Friendships. For Ourselves and Each Other* (1996) Jacqueline Weinstock and Esther Rothblum wonder whether the use of kinship terminology to describe friendships among lesbian women attempts to assimilate, or radically depart from the politically charged and publicly accepted conception of family. They worry that describing friends as family will lead to a dismissal of the difference that may exist between the two. Therefore, they suggest that attention must be paid to the actual ways of being friends and having friendship instead of adopting uncritically, a kinship terminology.

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Jeanne Stanley (1996). Although she agrees that friendships have a tremendous impact on lesbian lives because they provide lesbians with acceptance and affirmation, she draws attention to the fact that many descriptive factors of one’s life may heavily influence friendship relations.

which are usually the outcome of personal choice and preference, become even more intimate due to limitations women face in their interactions with other people. Weston has rightfully observed that though sex may not be an everyday topic, references to it are omnipresent in settings like workplaces, schools, churches, and holiday camps in the form of ‘innocent’ questions such as “Are you married?”, “Where are you spending your holidays?”. “Every time a lesbian or gay man faces a question like this, she or he must decide how forthcoming to be about sexual identity” (Weston 1991: 67-68). Since the majority of women do not want to be open about their sexuality in their workplace or in other environments the possibility of making and developing new friendships is considerably limited. Thus, with the passage of time relationships with lesbian friends become more intimate and women rely on each other to derive advice, emotional support, and sometimes material help. Klio Anagnostopoulou describes it vividly:

*Our interests do not coincide with the people in my workplace. I rather prefer to be with people with whom I have something to share, to discuss. When a woman at work has problems with her husband, or worries about her child because it is ill, or does not get good marks at school, I do not have much to say. Similarly, she is not interested in learning what I do when I go to a lesbian bar. Given the circumstances such relationships cannot develop. So, now I am not interested in meeting other people any more. I am together with the five-six women I have known for years and we meet in our places.*

However, sexual orientation is not always a sufficient factor for sustaining friendships. Parameters such as age, occupation, personal interests, and relationship status, may play a crucial role in the development of these relationships. When Popi Grammenou had her first erotic relationship with a woman at the age of thirty, while she was married to a man and had already had two children with him, her family rejected her. Although she had been very close to them till then, she remembers that when she came out and decided to leave her

husband, her mother and two sisters strongly opposed the decision. The only person who stood up for her was a lesbian friend she came to know through an SOS line.

*My family showed me the door. My sisters told me “If this is the road you have chosen, follow it. You do not belong in our families”. My mother had the same reaction at that time, during the first six months. My father was already dead. And I was completely alone. The only person who took care of me was a lesbian friend from Athens. She was my family, my only source of support for about a year. I could rely on her. When my divorce was ready we celebrated it together, we invited people home, I had for the first time a regular drinking bout! This was my first ‘real’ party because I had a reason for celebrating.*

With the passage of time the stance of Popi’s family began to change gradually. Her younger sister offered to help Popi to find a job in the company where she already worked while her mother began to accept and respect her daughter’s choice and started to invite her and her partner Melina Takaki to her place. Although their relation with Popi’s family had smoothed, Popi and Melina soon experienced a feeling of loneliness and isolation. Because they have a very demanding job, and they live together with Popi’s oldest child, they are not interested in frequenting lesbian bars and staying out late at night, in order to meet other women. Therefore their chances of getting to know someone are restricted. Besides, they would like to meet women with whom they would have common interests, could go to the cinema together, or could travel. If these women happened to be mothers as well, Popi and Melina think that they would have everything they wished for. But their lesbian friends are younger, childless, and have a way of life –going out, staying out late at night- that Popi and Melina cannot and do not want to follow. On the other hand, their chances of meeting and being befriended by people from other environments are very limited since they do not want to come out to their colleagues at work, where they spend the majority of their time, because they cannot risk losing clients. The result is that they frequently feel lonely and isolated.

The story of Eleni Christakou underlines the fact that in Greece family relations play a vital role and compares them to friendships. Eleni Christakou compares her experience abroad with the one she had when she returned to Greece and remarks that although when she was abroad her family, her networks of support, were her friends, she was faced with a completely different reality as soon as she came back:

*In Germany there were certain people with whom I had been together for many years. There was this woman from Spain who came to study, another French one who had also come for the same reason, and a German girl who lived there. These women were my family. We supported each other economically, sentimentally. We knew that if someone among us was ill or needed money the rest were going to help her, to support her. In Greece I have not yet encountered such relations. I do not think that women in Greece really care for one another. In Greece if your friend says to you that she does not have any money, that she is hungry, you still continue to bother her with your love disappointments instead of helping her. Venetia, I have the impression that people here soliloquise and not really communicate with each other. On the other hand, family plays a very important role. I can see it myself. Although I have been absent for so many years my family makes every possible effort to help me. To help me financially, to stand beside me on a psychological level. This is something I had forgotten during the past eight years. For example, because I do not have a washing machine my mother insists that I bring my clothes to her to wash. She takes it as a matter of course to clean my clothes! The family plays an important role. This is something I had forgotten while being in Germany. At that time my family were the women I have told you about.*

The focus on household, marriage, and the procreative roles of women led ethnographers of Greece to assume that women with strong family ties are least likely to

experience close friendships and when they do, friendship is usually used as “a substitute for kinship, it is expressed in terms of domestic kinship, it is susceptible to the fluctuations of domestic life, and it usually fades in time (Papataxiarchis 1991: 157)”<sup>23</sup>. Thus, “friendship seems to be expressed outside marriage, it is free of kinship and provides the context in which problems related to conjugality are dealt with. Friendship flourishes best perhaps in territory left uncolonized by householding” (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991a: 22)<sup>24</sup>. In this context friendship and the domestic sphere of kinship and family relations appear as contradictory terms, a remark which is not solely confined to Greek ethnography<sup>25</sup>. As Sarah Uhl (1991) observes, friendship in southern European societies has been recognized theoretically and empirically as a male-oriented situation, while women are supposedly prohibited from

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<sup>23</sup> Even, if attention was given to friendship relations these were usually examined through their relation to the household. For example, Juliet du Boulay argues that neighborhood is one of the most obvious areas of friendships among women in Ambeli. Still the impact of these relations on the wider community is relatively small. “Neighborhood therefore is an important relationship in a community where sources are limited and where the most obvious source for a certain type of help and companionship is provided by the person next door, but which affects community relations more through underlining existing relationships than through creating new ones” (1974: 217). However, Robinette Kennedy’s research on women’s friendship in a small village in Crete attempts to approach these relationships for their own sake and to demonstrate that “Women’s friendships, even in this small, traditional community, are rich, freely chosen emotional bonds that, in intensity, are comparable to –and often surpass–women’s kinship ties” (1986: 121).

<sup>24</sup> Still, research on women’s friendships is in its infancy. Were it to be conducted, it should take into account, apart from marital status, the descriptive factors of age, occupation, or sexual orientation. On the contrary, friendship relationships among men is a research topic which has received relatively greater attention, at least in rural Greece. See for example, the work of Michael Herzfeld (1985) on friendship based on animal theft in a village on mountainous Greece, and Evthymios Papataxiarchis (1991) on male solidarity as expressed in the context of *kafeneia* -coffee-shops- on the Aegean island of Lesbos.

<sup>25</sup> In their introduction in *The Anthropology of Friendship* Sandra Bell and Simon Coleman (1999) state that although former ethnographic evidence has argued that friendship has little chance to flourish where kinship structures are strong, clear distinctions between friendship and kinship are not always easy to sustain. Recent work demonstrates that boundaries between friendship, kinship, affinity and love are disintegrating, at least in Western examples.

forming friendships, primarily because of their identification with the domestic sphere of home. Her findings from research in Andalusia challenge these assumptions and demonstrate that “the female dilemma of balancing domestic decorum with the apparent need for friendship is resolved through a process of cognitively and behaviorally veiling friendship in domesticity” (ibid.: 102). Similarly, I argue that friendships among same-sex desiring women are of crucial importance as the stories of Klio Anagnostopoulou, Popi Grammenou and Eleni Christakou vividly describe. Yet, due to women’s reluctance to be identified with their sexuality and the significance of family relations, these friendships are formed around small and often isolated networks and usually remain confined in the context of home, while age, occupation, educational level, relationship status, and interests prove to be equally important.

### ***Chosen Silence***

The narrations of Chrisanthi Mantaka who faces a conscious problem because she has not come out yet to her parents, of Evanthia Totti and Rena Tata who had spoken openly to their parents because they wanted to remain close to them, Angeliki Chatzigianni’s whose daughter was raised by her parents, and the account of Popi Grammenou who goes with her partner to her mother’s place for lunch, confirm the assertion that the role of family in Greek society is of particular significance. Moreover, in the absence of a lesbian community or a lesbian network, which could act as a substitute for family relations, kin preserves its role as the principal means of emotional, practical and economic resource. Thus, same-sex desiring women often feel the need to hide their sexual choices from their kin and relatives in order not to endanger their relations. In recent small-scale research on Greek American lesbians who live in the United States Leah Fygetakis explains the invisibility of those women within the Greek community and to one another on the grounds of their effort to appear ‘honorable’. “Greek is a culture of rigidly maintained family and sex roles”, while “the expression of *Eisai kalo koritsi* (You are a good girl) is commonly repeated from childhood to adulthood to those who dutifully fulfil their role expectations” (1997: 162). In this context it is not unusual that

women try to hide their erotic feelings towards other women in order not to dishonor themselves and/or their families<sup>26</sup>. Leah Fygetakis concludes that an explanation, which would view these women “as simply needing to work through their internalized homophobia and ‘acculturate’ better to their lesbian identities and community” would be inadequate. “These women should not be discounted as simply not brave enough, not proud enough, or not having enough of a positive lesbian identity. On the contrary, they are on an odyssey, attempting to ‘embrace both poles simultaneously’ with dignity and honor” (ibid.: 188).

But daughters are not the only ones who choose to be silent. In cases where women engaged in same-sex relationships feel ‘brave’ enough to come-out to their parents, it is usually the parents who negate this time, the act of ‘coming-out’, by refusing to talk about the issue, and warn their daughters that they should not let other people know. Since kin and family relations are very important in Greek society this is their way of sustaining and preserving the relationship with their daughters<sup>27</sup>. In his presentation on gender and kinship transformations in contemporary Greece from 1974 to 1994, Evthymios Papataxiarchis concludes that “from the viewpoint of potential change the key aspect of the dominant pattern of Greece is the concept of marriage. The formation of alternative, multiple identities and social arrangements depends on the successful contestation of this ideology” (1994: 18)<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Juliet du Boulay underlined the vital role lies may play for the smoothness of relationships among the villagers in the area of her research. She notes that, “One of the principal lies is that told to conceal some failure of an individual or his family to live up to the highest requirements of the social code. These failures can be intentional or unintentional, and encompass a vast range of social action” (1974: 193).

<sup>27</sup> Having said this, I must add that I do not intend to suggest that there are no cases where parents have refused to embrace their children. Under certain circumstances, when kinship relationships are endangered, young women have been kicked out of their natal homes, and there are many women who live under the constant fear of being ‘revealed’.

<sup>28</sup> This remark constitutes the main theoretical principle of *Contested Identities*. “From the perspective of Greek ethnography, we see while in certain contexts kinship and gender are implicated together as a mixed idiom of domesticity and personhood, in other contexts outside marriage they are constructed in mutual exclusion and in opposition to one another” (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991a: 25).

“At least you can marry!”, “When are you going to get married?” are the phrases same-sex desiring women in Greece have to face from their parents over and over again. Although they try to contest the dominant pattern of marriage and utter new stories about relations, feelings, desires, the former seems to be so powerful that their parents refuse to listen to their stories. Even if daughters strive to overcome silence and speak about themselves it is parents this time, and especially mothers, who seek a refuge in silence; they are silent about their daughters’ choices to others, prefer not to discuss it, sometimes they even refuse to acknowledge it.

Anthofilli Stefanou says:

*I would not tell mum. Because I know that she already knows but does not want to hear about it. ... I do not want to tell her and make her suffer for the rest of her life out of guilt for being the one to be blamed for my sexual choices. Because this is how she would explain it. Of course, she is a person who does not accept for herself the dominant discourse on being a wife and a mother. She contests it because she realizes its shortcomings since she has experienced them herself. But on the other hand, she is not happy with the idea that her daughter rejects the values of family and motherhood altogether. She would like for me to get the best, fulfil the ideal. She would tell me, “I do not want you to live marginally. If possible, I would like you to find the best husband and live happily in the context of family and motherhood”. This is how mothers are. Regardless, of whether they, in their own lives, have contested the expected role for a woman, they do not want their daughters to reject it.*

Yet, even if women do not always contest successfully the dominant model of gender, new narrations on desire, sexuality, and the self have already begun to emerge. These are

stories which are uttered by same-sex desiring women who live in contemporary Greece and are addressed to each other, to their families of origin, to me.

## Chapter VIII

### Narrations of Desire

#### Stories of the Self

*I AM I AM NOT*

*maybe for men I am lesbian; I do not care*

*I became lesbian for her; she did not*

*I say that I am not lesbian; I say that there are dinosaurs and snakes outside*

*I am lesbian because this is how I have been registered*

*I am lesbian because I like playing with tomboys*

*I am lesbian because I am woman; I am not lesbian because I am female*

*I am lesbian because I gave myself in exchange for, and with a good view*

*I am lesbian because it turned out so*

*I became lesbian to drive out the rest of them*

*I became lesbian for my child's sake*

*lesbian*

*lesbian*

*what is that?*

*I do not know English*

The above poem with the title “Eimai den Eimai” –“I am I am not” is included in *Lesbian Blues* (1998: 35). The book is based on the performance *Lesbian Blues* that was staged in the theatre *Technohoros* in Athens, March-April 1998.

Since the classification of ‘homosexuality’ as a discernible erotic activity, a number of scientists, theorists, and lay people with same-sex desires have tried to give an answer to its ‘roots’<sup>1</sup>. Biological<sup>2</sup>, psychological, mixed biosocial, and social constructionist approaches, each offered different and often contradicting explanations in their effort to answer the question “where does homosexuality come from?”. Especially theories, which proposed mixed biosocial explanation for homosexuality focusing on innate instincts and sex drives, were widely accepted by gay people themselves. During the 1970s in Western countries, same-sex desire was closely linked to the acquisition of a lesbian and gay identity, while coming-out processes were synonymous with the discovery of one’s true self. Coming-out was rather “a process of discovery or admission” of a previously hidden truth, “than one of construction or choice” (Phelan 1993: 773).

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<sup>1</sup> By no coincidence the first article published in Greece on female same-sex desire was the translation of “Why Lesbians?”, written by Sue Cartledge and Susan Hemming and selected by the then newly formed Women’s Group of AKOE (*Apelefterotiko Kinima Omofilofilon Ellados, -Homosexual’s Liberation Movement of Greece-*). The writers of the article cite the biological, psychological, and lesbian-feminist approach to the subject and conclude that although they feel ‘different’ they are not really interested in detecting the ‘roots of their difference’ but are only concerned with examining and understanding the specific contexts in which it appears.

<sup>2</sup> The preoccupation with a biological explanation for homosexuality is not limited to the scientific efforts of the first sexologists at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Simon Le Vay’s (1991, 1994) recent assumption that the size of the hypothalamus in the brain, is to be held responsible for homosexual acts, was embraced not only by a number of scientists but also gay people.

The tendency to focus on the uniformity of the lesbian identity was to be abandoned a few years later in favour of approaches that would allow for differences. In a review of seven anthologies consisting exclusively or largely of lesbian first-person narratives published between 1977 and 1982, Bonnie Zimmerman (1984) comments that while anthologies, published at the end of the 1970s, stretched the sameness of lesbian subjects, later collections spoke of diversity. The same remark is made by Biddy Martin (1993) who argues that, during the 1970s a number of lesbian autobiographical writings appeared which promoted a view of lesbian identity as uniform and monolithic, based primarily on a shared psychological experience or perspective. However, from the 1980s onwards identity was instead approached as a site of the complex interactions of many variables<sup>3</sup>.

The above mentioned shift in lesbian narratives reported by Bonnie Zimmerman and Biddy Martin forms part of a wider change in sexual story telling. In *Telling Sexual Stories* Kenneth Plummer (1995) studied and thoroughly analysed what he calls the shifting of sexual stories in late modernity. Taking as his examples rape, gay and lesbian, and recovery stories he discerns between modernist and late modernist sexual stories and links the first ones to the “scientist tales of sexuality that have engulfed us over the past century or so: the beliefs in the naturalness of sex; the beliefs in being able to find out the truth of our sex; the belief in some unitary, essential, core experiences which connect in some deeply patterned fashion capable of discovery” (ibid.: 132). Such stories share a common structure which is composed of the elements of silent suffering, breaking the silence and seeking the truth, followed by a subsequent transformation. It was during the 1980s and ‘90s that, according to Plummer, a new kind of sexual story telling emerged. These late modernist sexual stories, which do not lead to the adoption of an identity, do not seek the essential truth but rather allow for

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<sup>3</sup> Ellen Lewin detects the tendency to stretch sameness of identity and ignore differences in later collections of lesbian narratives. In her article “Writing lesbian and gay culture: what the natives have to say for themselves” she criticises edited collections on lesbian and gay life stories because they “essentialize homosexual

difference, multiplicity, and change, did not necessarily “replace the modern narratives but run alongside them, providing a dispersal of critical commentary” (ibid.: 133) <sup>4</sup>.

It is in this light, in the light of the eclipse of the essence, the delight of differences, the power of participation, the significance of sign, and the tactics and strategies of time and space (Plummer 1995: 147), that I aim to present different narrations of desire. Or, as John Gagnon and Richard Parker (1995) would phrase it “local histories of desire” <sup>5</sup>. Desire will be alternatively presented as an inborn characteristic, as a revelation, or even as a lifelong process. It will be discussed on an imaginative level and in praxis. It will be approached during the first years of school or later in life. All these various narrations support the idea that desire is not a given, static element of one’s life neither does it necessarily lead to the adoption of an identity. It is rather a means of perceiving the world and negotiating one’s relations with oneself and others. However, these narrations on identities and subjectivities, these stories of the self do not take place in uncharted areas. They come to confront, negate, substitute, or just complete already existing stories on gender, sexuality, and the person in Greek society.

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identity, never directly inquiring into its properties, implicitly assuming that it is the pre-eminent characteristic around which all others are to be arrayed” (1991: 788).

<sup>4</sup> In the article “Postmodern Bisexuality” Merl Storr (1999) argues that the emergence of what Kenneth Plummer (1995) labels as ‘late modernist’ and herself as ‘postmodernist’ sexual stories should be placed a few years earlier, in the 1970s. She maintains that if anyone should listen to bisexual stories of that period they would find the characteristics of postmodern sexual stories.

<sup>5</sup> In the introduction of their edited collection *Conceiving Sexuality. Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World* John Gagnon and Richard Parker (1995) comment that instead of assuming sexual desire as “natural and automatic and heterosexual and universal” one should rather try to “uncover local histories of desire” (ibid.:12-13).

## ***Narrations of Desire***

Contemporary narrations of same-sex desire among women do not just contest the idea of a uniforming and all-embracing lesbian identity but are the means for narrating hopes, anxieties, relationships, choices. “Lesbianism, once an act of passion between women, now became a complex metaphor: not a simple sex act, nor a simple way of being, but a profoundly complex symbol anchoring a range of concerns, pleasures, and anxieties” (Plummer 1995: 141). From the narrations of desire which follow, although some could be described as ‘modern sexual stories’ in Kenneth Plummer’s terms – they speak of revelation, the finding of truth, or ‘always having known’, while others bear elements of ‘late modernist’ ones -are characterised by doubts, interruptions, and hesitations-, all of them narrate more than just sexual encounters. They speak of family, children, friendships, school years, travelling, jobs, dreams, fears and illustrate further the point that “sexuality is never separate from history, ‘class’, ‘race’, or a host of other social relations” whereas “ a scholar cannot do any of these topics justice without taking sexuality into account” ( Weston 1998: 4) <sup>6</sup>.

### **“I am lesbian! I believe I am lesbian”**

Popi Grammenou was married at the age of eighteen, and had her first child when she was twenty-two years old. By the age of twenty-five she had already become a mother for a second time. During the first years of her marriage she was totally occupied with the raising of her children who fulfilled her life and gave a new meaning to it. Her life was settled, her husband had a good job, he treated her well and she was satisfied with his behaviour towards her, their children, and the responsibilities he had undertaken in their house. The only problem they had concerned their sexual life. Popi remembers that she tried to avoid sexual encounters with her husband as much as possible since she did not enjoy them.

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<sup>6</sup> The statement that same-sex desiring women are integrated into the society and therefore research on their sexual activities should not be disconnected from the larger context of their social life, has already been made in 1967 by William Simon and John Gagnon.

*We did not discuss it. It was a taboo subject. Of course, I was thinking a lot about it. I listened to young women of my age who said that they enjoyed having sex and I was surprised. I could not understand how it was possible. On the other hand I listened to my mother who said that she did not feel anything while having sex with my father. She told us that this was the only thing she did not like doing with him, and I thought OK, maybe this is how things should be. Perhaps this is the right way to feel. I thought that perhaps sexual satisfaction belonged to men, they are the ones who should be satisfied during intercourse, and that women are supposed to avoid it. I just tried to excuse myself and justify the situation. My husband on the other hand did not discuss the topic, or he believed me when I was telling him that I was tired; in that manner years went by.*

Housework and children occupied Popi most of her day and she did not have the time to reflect on the situation. However, when her children grew up and started to go to the nursery school Popi realised that she was not satisfied with her personal life.

*When I was twenty-eight years old my second child had already started to go to the nursery school. I was at home alone. Since I was not preoccupied with the children all day I started to travel. In the beginning I made short trips. Later, I went for a few days to Italy, or to Istanbul to buy leather jackets. It was during these excursions that 'I met my fate'. While I was travelling with my mother and sister on a bus to Istanbul I met an American woman with whom I became close friends. When we came back to my hometown we continued to see each other and she used to visit me at my place in the presence of my husband and children. We went out together, we went to the cinema, and I felt really nice till the moment she made an erotic confession to me and mentioned the word lesbian. I was really shocked. I returned home and could not sleep during the whole night. Of course my first reaction*

*towards her was to negate everything; “What are you talking about? I am married, I have my children, I do not want to have anything to do with it. The only thing I want from you is that we remain friends and go to the movies together.” And we remained friends and continued to go out together till she told me that she was about to leave and go to Italy for her job. “I am leaving, I am going to Italy. You behaved very foolishly”. And she left ... without giving me an address, a phone number, nothing. When she left I realised that I was in love with her. I went through a very difficult period of my life. For more than one year I locked myself in my room and stared at the ceiling. I did not want to see anyone, I alienated myself from everybody else, even from my own children. Of course, I continued to cook, to clean the house, but I fulfilled my duties mechanically. The relationship with my husband worsened every day. He kept asking me “What is wrong with you, anyway? You have everything you want! I am here for you! You are going to drive us all crazy!”. I also had some psychological symptoms, I lost weight. And then I realised that what I felt was love. I suffered very much because I had lost her, because she had gone away. At that moment I came to the decision to end my marriage. Suddenly, my whole life appeared to me in a new light. My children continued to be very important to me, but my personal needs became even more important. Still, I could not do anything because things were so perplexing. I did not know where to start. The first thing I wanted was to be financially independent. Of course I wanted to divorce. But how would I live? How could I go back to my mother and tell her “Look, I am divorcing my husband because I am lesbian”?*

These new and strange feelings led Popi to interpret various moments of her past from a different perspective:

*When I realised that what I felt was love, I made a retrospection of my past and began to recall my erotic feelings from adolescence onwards. I realised that when I was fourteen I tried to be the first pupil in my class because I was in love with my teacher. But I realised this only after I had fallen in love at twenty-eight. Besides, when I was sixteen, seventeen I met a young woman with whom I hung out. I enjoyed her company very much, I liked to go to the movies with her, to have fun. I suddenly realised that what I felt must have been love. It was like the sky had opened and it was revealed to me that what I felt after the age of fourteen towards other women was purely erotic. When I felt happy and content because I was that teacher's pupil or because I was Brigitte's friend I did not realise that this was love. I thought that they were just my best teacher and my best friend.*

However, the rediscovery of her past was not of much use for the present. In the midst of contradictory feelings, Popi saw one night a television show on AIDS. There appeared an SOS line where people could call and be informed on subjects concerning homosexuality in general, not just AIDS. Popi wrote the phone number down and called them later the same week. She told them that she was married with two children, that she had recently realised she was attracted to women and was desperately looking for someone to listen to her. The people from the SOS line gave her the phone number of a group of young women. Popi called them and started to go out with them. The encounter with these girls was very helpful for Popi because she realised that she was not the only person in the world who felt erotically towards women and that there were other people like her with whom she could talk, go out, and have fun.

*They really helped me. They offered me the ears I was desperately looking for. I felt stronger to get through that period of my life. I felt stronger to divorce and I did not think any more of how I was going to sustain myself financially, how I was going to live. I just wanted to live. I did not want to*

*become seventy, eighty years old and have the sense that I had wasted my life, that I had not lived it the way I wanted. I did not want to sacrifice my whole life for the sake of social pretensions. There was a strong power inside me which forced me to live my life the way I wanted. Today I am amazed how I have done it because I did not have a job, I did not have anything*

With the support of her new friends Popi was ready to 'come-out' to her husband. He was the first one to know about the changes in Popi's life. She told him that something was happening to her, that she felt attracted to women. One night she even burst out in tears shouting, "I am lesbian! I believe I am lesbian!". The word 'lesbian' came out as a cry. In the beginning her husband was very supportive and he assured her that he would stay at her side and would help her. He even encouraged her to form a relationship with another woman with the precondition that they stayed together. But Popi soon realised that she could not lead a double life and decided to divorce him.

*I left home without any money, without my children, without anything. I just left. I said STOP! and I opened the door. The only things I took with me were my son's cap and my daughter's doll.*

Recalling that period of her life Popi refuses to see her act as heroic. "There was not anything heroic about it", she told me once. "It was simply the only thing I could do. I remember, I once gave an interview to a feminist magazine. The reporter described my decision as very courageous. It was not. I had simply no other choice". The years which followed were difficult for Popi. Without financial or psychological support from her family she had to struggle for her professional and economic independence. But above all she had to face the loss of her children's custody. Today, several years later, Popi shares her life, her apartment, and her job with her partner. Her eldest son lives with her and she is waiting for her daughter to join them. She has achieved a lot but still feels that she has to fight every single day.

*Outside our home it is a battle for us. This is how we feel. We feel that we have to fight. Why? You know how people talk about homosexuals and we feel insecure since we are dependent on people because of our job. On the other hand, everybody wants to be respected and acknowledged. It is very hard knowing that people do not respect you. The way people talk about homosexuals isolates us. When we discuss with my partner about what we miss we come to the conclusion that it is people that we miss most. We have friends but we are friends with them because they are homosexuals; this is a common parameter which is not enough to bond people together. Our choices are very limited and we feel isolated, we cannot communicate the way we want to.*

Gilbert Herdt and Andrew Boxer compare the coming-out process with ritual and argue that “If coming-out is the key ritual of gay and lesbian culture, then it is, simultaneously, a healing process, indeed, a healing rite of considerable power for the self and society alike” (1996: 17). The perception of one’s desire as a revelation of a hidden truth and the need to ‘come-out’ to others provides one sometimes with the necessary strength to face the present and fight for the future, especially when external circumstances are very difficult. Supported by the women she had met through the SOS line Popi found the courage to make a major change in her life since she was not willing to lead a double one. If sexual identity “is not the product solely of what individuals might prefer” but rather “implies a system of preferences based on morally laden cultural ideas and emotions of what is valued and desired by the society as a whole” ( Herdt 1997: 19), Popi could endure the adoption of a lesbian identity only with the help of others. However, as years pass Popi realises that the common parameter of same-sex desire is not sufficient to bring people together, particularly in the absence of a lesbian culture, and therefore feels sometimes lonely and isolated.

**“... at that moment the sun was rising and the light fell into her eyes ...”**

In contrast to Popi Grammenou who ‘discovered’ her homosexuality at a late age many women claim to have always known it. A common pattern which re-emerges in many women’s stories of same-sex desire are early childhood memories of love and affection towards other girls –usually classmates in the primary school, but also girls in the neighbourhood, on the bus, or on the beach.

Eleni Christakou was one of the women who bought the first issue of *Lavris*, was a member of the women’s groups in Athens during the 1980s, and a frequent visitor of Eressos, besides being one of the very few women I have met who have never been sexually with a man. Eleni’s erotic memories start at the age of nine.

*I fell erotically toward another woman when I was nine. It was very romantic ... I was late for school and another girl who was one year older than me was late too. We waited outside the schoolyard till the prayers would finish <sup>7</sup>. At that moment the sun was rising and the light fell into her eyes. That was it. I realised that I ... I liked this woman very much. I began to think of her all the time ... Soon afterwards I began to fall in love with various women. Of course, till I became seventeen all my erotic stories were platonic.*

Till the age of sixteen-seventeen Eleni did not feel any guilt about enjoying the presence of women. It was rather common for girls to be in the exclusive company of their female peers during adolescence. Sometimes parents even expected from their daughters to behave likewise and tried to prevent them from hanging around with boys. Eleni started to think of herself as ‘different’ only after her friends and other girls at the high school had begun to go out with boys.

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<sup>7</sup> Even nowadays the school day in Greece begins with prayer usually performed by a pupil. During the prayer pupils are not allowed to talk or move and those who are late have to wait outside the schoolyard till it ends.

*When I was seventeen my schoolmates talked about their boyfriends and asked me, "What about you? Don't you have anyone?". At that time I began to worry and got anxious because I did not like anyone. I started to have feelings of guilt and thought that I was the only creature in the whole world who did not fancy boys. Soon after, I met my first girlfriend with whom I had a relationship which lasted for five years. We were of the same age and were at school together. After knowing each other for four years we started a relationship without thinking much about it. The story went like this, "Do you want to?"; "I want to"; "This is how I feel"; "How do you feel?". For a whole year we were just hanging out together without having any sexual contact.*

During their five-year relationship Eleni and her girlfriend met other women and realised that they were not the only ones who loved women.

*I used to work in a record shop and one day a woman came in who was a bit older than us. We knew that she was lesbian the first moment we saw her because she was very butch looking and she flirted with me. Due to her, we met several other women we would never have imagined were lesbians. Times were different then. Women had to hide themselves; there were no bars or homosexual organisations. The women we met were married women, they had children. Many married women. Some time later the first lesbian organisation appeared and the first issue of *Lavris* was circulated.*

Eleni bought the first issue of *Lavris* and began to frequent *Women's Coffee-houses*. She was enthusiastic about the presence of other women, their discussions, the fun they could have together. She is still befriended by girls she met during that period of her life. After a while she started a relationship with a member of the group and they moved in together. In the meantime the activities and the discussions within the lesbian group continued and the

women tried to explain who they were and what they wanted. Their collective and fighting spirit did not leave space for feelings of guilt. At the age of twenty-four Eleni left Greece to go to work and study in Europe because she fell in love with a woman she had met in Eressos.

*She stayed for one year in Greece but then she had to go back to complete her studies. And she told me "Come". I followed her and I planned to stay there for three months and then come back. But I stayed. I found a job, I worked at the post office, I stayed ... because it was a 'women's town'. Many things were happening [...] Lesbian women are much more open with their families and their environments than we are. They have many organisations. Not only for lesbians, but also for women generally.*

In spite of the benefits of a European city's tolerance of lesbian women Eleni decided to return to Greece because of the "sun and the sky" only to find out that things there were much more difficult than she had imagined. The absence of lesbian groups and politicised discourse cost her dearly, and she was not satisfied with the fact that bars were the sole places for lesbian encounters. Being accustomed to a lesbian network of support she was disappointed that she couldn't find in Greece the kind of 'family' and intimate relationships she was looking for. As argued in Chapter V the existence of separate spaces that facilitate the free expression of same-sex desire and enable the acquisition of sexual identities is an important feature in many cultures. Herdt notes that, "One of the findings of my own comparative work on culture, sexuality and historical change has been to demonstrate that the institutional actor in search of a new identity requires a separate social space; it is within this liminal space that culture is created and transformed" (1994: 79). The few lesbian places, which existed in Athens during the 1980s, enabled Eleni Christakou to overcome her feelings of isolation and adopt a more positive attitude towards homosexuality. Furthermore, her yearlong presence abroad in a 'women friendly' city increased confidence in herself and her choices, while the absence of a lesbian culture in Greece caused her great dissatisfaction.

### **Growing up in a rural area, or the fulfilment of dreams**

Space is equally significant for crucial choices in one's life. Chrisanthi Mantaka has grown up in a small city in northern Greece. She began to feel sexually attracted by other women at the age of ten- twelve years old while she was still attending the primary school. From then onwards she fell in love with various women but without ever expressing it or being physically involved with any of them. Neither did she have anyone with whom she could share it or ask for advice. She continued to go out with boys and girls alike, to have many friends, but she never expressed her erotic desires. She heard the word 'lesbian' for the first time when she was fourteen- fifteen years old.

*I knew that I loved women, that I was attracted to them but I did not know this word, neither could I identify myself with it. I learned it at school during the lesson on lyric poetry in ancient Greece. A teacher of ours had mentioned it and suddenly I realised that it was exactly what I was. I told myself, "That's me! I am lesbian!"*

Due to the environment she was growing up in and the limited chances she had to express or even discuss her sexual desires with other people Chrisanthi's dream was to leave her hometown and go somewhere else. In Greece, even nowadays, the main excuse for young people to leave their natal home is to go somewhere else to study<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, Chrisanthi had entrusted all of her hopes in being free to express herself while studying abroad.

*It was not about studying, my desire to study was not that great. OK, I wanted to study, but the main reason for leaving was not to study at all. I just wanted to leave, get far away. I wanted to get away from everyone and everything.*

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<sup>8</sup> In cases where children return to their natal homes after the completion of their studies, they continue very often to live with their parents till the moment they get married. Although in major cities many people live on

Eventually, Chrisanthi left for a European country right after she had finished school. The first year was the year of adjustment and things were not easy for Chrisanthi. But they got better as soon as she started her second year of studies. Although she did not participate in lesbian groups and organisations, Chrisanthi went with her lesbian friends to gay bars and clubs, attended lesbian events, and watched gay pride parades. That was also the period during which she formed her first sexual relationship with a woman.

*I started to go out, meet people, you know ... I started to live in a way I could only dream of while I was in Greece. In Greece I had never had a relationship although I fell in love with women very often, although I wanted to be with women. There was no chance that I could fulfil my dreams. Neither did I have anyone with whom I could talk, with whom I could share my secrets. I was completely alone. But when I went abroad I started to live. I made many, many new friends. These were mostly lesbian women. I also met heterosexual ones but we were just friends, very good friends.*

While she was still studying she came to Greece for the summer vacation with a lesbian friend of hers and they went together to Eressos. Chrisanthi was impressed by the friendly and relaxed atmosphere of the place and the number of lesbian women one could encounter. There she met her partner and decided to come back to Greece after the fulfilment of her studies.

*I met Christina in Eressos. Afterwards we did not see each other very much because I was still studying. We had spoken once or twice on the phone but we did not meet. Then I started to call her more often, then she came to see me and we stayed together for fifteen days ... and since then we have been*

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their own, in provincial towns and villages, marriage continues to be the principal excuse for the permanent leaving of the parental home.

*together. Christina is the reason why I came back. If it wasn't for her I would have never returned.*

After the completion of her studies Chrisanthi went to Athens where Christina lived and moved in with her. However, she is not happy about the situation which prevails in Greece because same-sex desiring people are not able to express themselves and live out their lives in secret. She has to hide her erotic life from her family members and her colleagues at work, a situation that disturbs her.

*I would like to find the courage and tell everyone I know "This is me. I am proud of what I am and of what I am doing. I like it; I have always wanted to do it; I will continue to do it. Because that's me. I cannot do anything else. Perhaps I have already tried to act differently and I simply cannot. This is what I want to do with my life and I want you to respect it and accept me".*

The move of same-sex desiring people from rural to urban areas in search of more receptive and sympathetic environments towards homosexuality is recorded by a number of researchers, especially in the United States (D' Emilio 1983b, Weston 1998)<sup>9</sup>. In the course of my research I have met many women who moved to bigger cities or went abroad using as an excuse studying or job opportunities, but looking in fact for more receptive environments. In that sense Chrisanthi Mantaka's case is not unique although perhaps a bit more intense than others since the move from a small Greek town to a European metropolitan city signalled a major change in her life. During the eight years Chrisanthi spent abroad she had the opportunity to meet other women, surpass feelings of guilt, and form a positive sense of

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<sup>9</sup> Karla Jay reports that lesbian women in the United States choose to move to major metropolitan areas and cultural centers in search of better job opportunities, greater chances for socializing, and because there it is more possible to adopt, be awarded to foster, or locate suitable sperm donors than in a small town in a conservative state (1995: 11).

herself. However, returning to Greece she was faced with a completely different situation which compels her to live in secrecy and isolation.

Despite the fact that all three above mentioned narrations of desire differ a lot in terms of family situation, relationships to others, and involvement with lesbian groups, they all share as their common characteristic reference to the existence of a lesbian identity<sup>10</sup>. If Popi Grammenou, Eleni Christakou, and Chrisanthi Mantaka use the word 'lesbian' for their self-identification, the rest of the stories do not refer to erotic desire as a stable identity but are instead characterised by changes, interruptions and contradictions.

### **A Group of 'Lesviazouses' at School**

Sofia Anagnostaki, editor of *Lavrís* and habitué of Eressos, was born in a big town of Northern Greece into a well-educated middle class family. She realised that she was erotically interested in women at the age of twelve, just after she had begun high school.

*By the age of twelve I had already finished the primary school, where my schoolmates were both boys and girls, and I started high school, where I was surrounded exclusively by girls<sup>11</sup>. A few months later I realised that I fancied one of my schoolmates and started to chase her in the locker rooms trying to kiss her. The other girls noticed it and began to call me by a male name. They did not behave violently. We had fun since everything seemed to be natural. I eventually had an affair with this girl after six whole years. That was the first*

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<sup>10</sup> Valerie Jeness asserts that there is a well-documented "theoretical and an empirical difference between 'doing' behaviours associated with lesbianism and 'being' a lesbian" and asks "What is the nature of the process by which some women come to see themselves as lesbians?" (1992: 65-66). In her opinion the answer is to be found in a process of detypification whereas the social category of 'lesbian' is redefined and reassessed such "that it requires increasingly concrete and precise meanings, positive connotations, and personal applicability" (ibid.: 66).

<sup>11</sup> It is only recently, the last fifteen years that girls and boys have not been separated during their high-school years. Until then, at least in the big cities, girls and boys would go to different schools throughout their adolescence (from twelve to eighteen years old) and would meet again at university.

*time she came back to Greece for vacation after she had gone abroad to study. Back at the age of twelve, a few months later after I had fallen in love with Dina, I fell in love with one of my teachers, and then with another one, etc. At that moment I reached for the encyclopaedia to see what lesbianism meant.*

Sofia remembers that she did not experience her feelings towards women as a threat that would mark her for life. Since she used to fancy boys when she was in the primary school and had even exchanged hugs and kisses with some of them during summer vacations she felt that her affection towards women was just another dimension of her eroticism.

*I thought I could be with a boy as well but in everyday interactions I spent most of my time with women, I looked at them. I remember, later, when I was thirteen-fourteen years old, I tried to find a part of a man's body that I would like more than a woman's shoulder. I stepped out on to the balcony of our apartment and watched people who walked down the street. It was summer and many ... many shoulders went by. I liked watching all the women and could not think of a male body part that could be equally attractive. Gradually, I realised that I preferred women.*

The absence of guilt is also to be explained by the fact that Sofia was not the only one in her class who was erotically interested in women. When her mother discovered a note, which Sofia had written to one of her schoolmates, and asked her "What is this? Are you going to become lesbian now?", other mothers were worried. They were afraid that their daughters would start to have lesbian feelings towards each other.

*We were a very nice group of friends and now that I am thinking of it, one of them is still lesbian, the others had lesbian relationships and are ... bi. They had affairs with women and men alike ... Back at that time we had the feeling that we were doing something heroic and the teachers referred to us as the*

*“clique”. We were “bad” girls who smoked, drank, and some of us loved each other. This made our group even more interesting and fascinating because we did something girls usually do not.*

Her erotic encounters with women were limited to staring at and dreaming of them, but Sofia discovered sexual self-satisfaction.

*A film that was very important to me was “The Silence” of Bergman. Because that woman, that gorgeous one, who had an androgynous physiognomy and twisted her hair into a bun taught me how to masturbate. Toulin! That’s it! Ingrid Toulin! There was a scene in the film where she wore a man’s striped pyjamas. On Saturday when I had nothing to do I tried to imitate the action I saw and this is how I discovered self-satisfaction at the age of fifteen. My friends laughed at me when I proudly shared with them my discovery. “Ha!ha!ha! I have been doing it since I was seven!” But the fact that such a beautiful actress, taught me to touch myself appeared to me very nice, very poetic, very artistic.*

When Sofia finished school the dictators had already taken command. The climate in Greece was anything but democratic and Sofia was quite restricted during her university years. The rest of her friends from school had gone to study abroad and she continued to see Dina, her lover from the first years at high school, during summer vacations. She was the first person she made love with, but soon afterwards Dina decided that she preferred men. Sofia continued to be sexually attracted to women while at the same time she became very close to one of her male co-students. They used to go out together, listen to music, and go on holiday. His reluctance to have sex with Sofia due to his conservatism was rather convenient for her. In 1975, one year after the fall of the dictatorship, Sofia was in Athens and cohabited with her female partner.

*I lived in Athens with my partner. Because we did not have any money we came to a brilliant idea! I should return to my hometown for one year, have a fake marriage, take the money from my dowry, and do afterwards whatever we wanted to. Back then, in 1983, the institution of dowry was still valid. I found a friend of mine who was gay and liked the idea of getting part of the money from my dowry in order to go, let's say, for postgraduate studies in London. But we were not lucky. When the announcement of our engagement was published in the local press my father received an anonymous call. "You, poor guy! The groom is sissy, communist, and poor!". A minor scandal took place, we left the city, and the groom got angry because my relatives insulted his. He got so mad that he even went to my father and told him "Do not call me 'poustis' <sup>12</sup> because also your daughter is a lesbian and we had arranged it together". I was absolutely furious with him!*

Sofia never got married or even thought of getting married again <sup>13</sup>. After she had spent a number of years in the provinces due to her job she returned to Athens where she still lives. Her erotic relationships with women have continued throughout her life as she continues to frequent Eressos and participate in the lesbian scene.

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<sup>12</sup> *Poustis* is a Greek demotic term for the description of the male homosexual. James Faubion wrote that "Male friends, especially young friends, charge one another often enough with being *poustis*, though they remain friends only if they do not mean exactly what they say" (1993: 223). Kostas Giannakopolulos refers to the differences in the use of the terms *poustis*, *adelfi* (sissy), *omofilofilos* (homosexual), and the western term 'gay' (1998: 83). Similarly, Sasho Lambevski (2000) in his ethnography of the Skopje 'gay scene' argues that the terms 'homosexual' and 'gay' do not necessarily have the same meanings as in western countries to the extent that homosexualities in Balkan, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern societies are differently constructed compared to the West.

<sup>13</sup> In the meantime the Family Law has changed and dowry has been substituted with parental allowance. A woman does not have to get married any more in order to receive an amount of money, a house, or other benefits.

### **Deciding for Women**

When asked about her sexual life Anthofilli Stefanou recalls memories at the age of fifteen-sixteen years old, a period during which she was very close to a friend of hers with whom she had grown up. From that age onwards till they had finished school the two girls spent the majority of their free time together without being interested in flirting, meeting young boys, or going to clubs. They did not have any physical contact with each other but according to Anthofilli there was an erotic dimension in their relationship. Soon after the completion of high school Anthofilli went to study in another city. Another platonic story, similar to the first one, evolved between Anthofilli and one of her female co-students.

*During the first year of my studies I shared an apartment with Vaso. We went to the university, attended lessons, had a small circle of male friends. Everything was kept 'under normal circumstances'. Eventually, we met Lela, another co-student, and one evening she brought to our house Panagiota. That was it. Without any discussion, without being conscious about it, ten days later, Vaso started to sleep with Lela and I with Panagiota. Neither Vaso and Lela, nor I and Panagiota had ever made love to each other. Never.*

A few months later Anthofilli met Ifigenia Ksenaki.

*It was during our second year of studies. We were still very good friends with Lela and expressed ourselves erotically towards each other. We expanded, perhaps even more than expanded. Why did we act like this? Because neither she nor I had anyone else, we behaved in an erotic manner towards each other. We were very close at that time with Lela, we were friends, but there was not anything sexual between us. And then, one day, we met Ifigenia and she gave a name to our behaviour. She came to Lela's house where I was because she wanted to borrow a book. She came in, she sat down. We were sitting with Lela together, almost on top of each other. After a while we ran*

*out of cigarettes and Ifigenia offered to go and buy some. While leaving she stood shortly at the door and told us “When I come back I want to ask you something”. The moment she left I told Lela, “I bet she will ask us whether we are sexually together”. This was a strange thing for me to say because I did not know anything about Ifigenia, whether she preferred women or not. I hardly knew her and had not heard anything about her. Besides I was not aware of homosexuality. We only knew a friend of ours who we thought might be homosexual. But nothing else. Ifigenia returned and as we had anticipated she asked us what kind of relationship we had. The scene was funny because although we were lying with Lela, embraced on the bed, we cried with one voice “A friendly one. Just a friendly one”. And then Ifigenia said, “OK, I will be frank with you. I used to have a relationship with a woman”. “Ah!”, was our answer. Ifigenia left and I fell in love with her from that very first day.*

Ifigenia gave a name to Anthofilli’s feelings and the latter fell deeply in love with her. An erotic relationship began among the two of them, which would last for several months and would change later into a deep friendship. However, Anthofilli would not admit to herself that she preferred women to men but only several years later after she had already gone abroad for postgraduate studies. It was there, away from her hometown, when she realised that it was not a coincidence that the majority of people she was erotically attracted to were women.

*It was this year [during her second year of postgraduate studies] when I told myself “Be careful!” This is your choice. You should start to realise that this is your choice. You must accept it and see what you can do. It was difficult. Partly, because I was abroad, surrounded by Greek students who were very conservative. I was totally on my own.*

The period she had spent abroad was not the only decisive one in Anthofilli's life. Another major turning point was the moment she decided to return to her hometown. Till that time Anthofilli had lived out all of her relationships with women away from her natal home and from her childhood friendships. When she returned she made the decision to be more open with her friends about her sexual desires.

*While in my hometown, I have always behaved like someone else. None of my Athenian friends knew anything about this. But one year ago I started slowly to talk about it to some people. I started with Kate. She did not know anything. Only once had she heard something about Ifigenia but that was it. Full stop. Nothing more. Gradually, I talked to almost all of them.*

Today Anthofilli lives together with her yearlong partner surrounded by a network of friends who accept her way of life. Nevertheless, she does not want to make her sexual life public, especially in her job and family, since she thinks that such a 'coming-out' in the context of contemporary Greek society would entail great risks.

### **Desire as a process, not a given**

Ifigenia Ksenaki, Anthofilli's friend, fell in love at the age of fifteen when she was at high school.

*I had my first relationship with a woman when I was fifteen. It was not something I was conscious about. I just felt a strong erotic desire ... But it wasn't me who made the running. I just responded to someone else's initiative. ... My first feeling was guilt. But the feeling of guilt was rapidly replaced by desire and soon afterwards by sensual pleasure. Just imagine, how intense pleasure can be when this is one's first erotic experience and one is in love. I forgot guilt ... I just forgot it. I made love and I continued to make love for more than a year without ever verbally confirming it.*

Ifigenia fell deeply in love with women several times afterwards. Her relationships were intense, emotionally loaded. Some of them lasted for a few months; others lasted for years. However, her erotic preference towards women did not prevent her from falling in love with men at least twice. Ifigenia is convinced that erotic preference is not a static, unchangeable situation, an innate characteristic. She thinks of it rather as a process, not a given, and argues that every person has to seek her erotic identity. Furthermore, desires are subject to change and she does not exclude the possibility of being with a man in the future, although now it is clear to her that she definitely prefers women.

*I do not really know which my sexual preference would be if my friend at the age of fifteen had not encouraged me to make love to her. Probably I would have had the same preference because I have been able to recognise erotic desire towards the same sex since the age of six. When I recall memories of that period I can vividly remember two little girls during the first and the second year of primary school with whom I was in love. But at the same time I felt erotically towards little boys as well. It is not a gene. But then, what is it? How do we become erotically sensitive towards the same sex?*

And she continues,

*Many young people face difficulties in the search for their sexual identity. In my humble opinion the orientation towards the opposite gender is not a given. It goes through many channels. I observed young people from very close up and I think that for some of them their sexual identities pose a great difficulty in their lives. One important factor is how sexual identity is defined. Another field of research is how each one of us experiences situations. How each person constructs her erotic identity. Regardless of whether this identity is homosexual or heterosexual or gay or lesbian. Erotic identity can be a thousand things. We are not just one thing. The men I loved, I desired them. I*

*did not go to bed with them only to wash away my guilt. I did not do it, at least on a conscious level. I did not dream of a woman and was with a man. I dreamed of a woman and I was with her or I was not. I dreamed of a man and I was with him or I was not. At least on a conscious level I think that I had the honesty to do so. But I know many people who do not fulfil their dreams. And this is [the ability to fulfil our dreams] a very important part [of our lives].*

Ifigenia does not claim that preferences and erotic choices can be changed without consequences, nor that each one of them has the same outcome on one's life. She is perfectly aware of the difficulties in preferring women as erotic partners.

*It is a kind of a curse to prefer women. It is difficult on a social level, not on the personal one. Nowadays, being 35 years old, I recognise that it is very difficult. When I was 20 it did not cross my mind, although that was the time when I faced the major difficulties. It is hard.... It is hard to try to express something which is a taboo for the majority of people. It is hard to try to show your eroticism, your charm, to expose your thoughts.*

Ifigenia defines desire as a process and claims that sexual identity is not a stable and fixed entity, defined once and for all<sup>14</sup>. But for the emergence of distinctive identities “something more than sexual activity, or even homosexual desire is needed: the possibility of some sort of social space and social support or network which gives meaning to individual

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<sup>14</sup> At one of the parties organised by Maria Cyberdyke I met a charming young woman who used to be an active member of the lesbian scene in Athens. At the moment I met her she was living with her male partner. She was in love with him and they were having a great time together. As she told me, he was the one who prompted her to go to the party and meet her lesbian friends.

needs” (Weeks 1992: 246) <sup>15</sup>. In Greece the absence of a lesbian culture together with the significance of family relations has prevented the establishment of distinctive identities. In their place we find narrations of fluidity and change. However, such stories are not necessarily conservative, dictated out of fear. They are probably more close to the lives of women and their needs. In 1967 William Simon and John Gagnon wrote in an article about lesbians, “we must take into account the problems of managing relations with family and friends, of earning a living, of finding emotional and social support, and, possibly, of greatest importance, of struggling (as we all do) to accept our constantly changing selves” (ibid.: 249). Selves change and so do identities. The question is, whose sexual stories can be narrated, to whom, in which contexts? Speaking of sexual stories Kenneth Plummer asserts that “This era brings with it the potential for new sexual stories that harbor the potential for political change. A radical, pluralistic, democratic, contingent, participatory politics of human life choices and difference is in the making” (1995: 147). What is still missing in Greece are not narrations about fixed identities but the necessary conditions where different narrations of desire can be uttered, contexts where fixed boundaries are being negotiated. A theatrical play which was staged two years ago in Athens tried to do just this. It sought to breach boundaries and disrupt order by calling into question the fixity of identities. The last narration I am going to present is about a lesbian theatrical play which was staged in Athens a few years ago. Its inclusion among narrations of desire is due to the fact that the play itself narrates stories of desire, sexuality, identity, while for its accomplishment women who participated had to narrate their own stories. Finally, the story of this play is a narration on how stories about female same-sex desires are perceived, evaluated, contextualized, and reacted upon in the context of Greek society.

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<sup>15</sup> Gilbert Herdt (1997) proposes that instead of sexual ‘identity’, ‘orientation’, or ‘preference’, which are probably misleading terms, because they conceal the morally laden cultural ideas and emotions an individual is exposed to, we should rather speak of sexual cultures.

***I am I am not***

Public events with lesbian themes are rather rare in Greece. A major exception was a theatrical play which was staged in Athens in spring 1998. Written and performed by women who regardless of their sexual choices, shared their common interest to move beyond the lesbian/straight dichotomy, the play was about sexuality, motherhood, identity. Its story can be traced back to 1995 when lesbian women and others engaged in the women's movement in Athens, approached the writer/director Christianna Lambrinidi, and asked her to help them stage a performance on lesbianism <sup>16</sup>. The narrative of their encounter appears in a press release published in the Internet:

*“Lesbian Blues” is the first play in Greece written and performed by women who love women –against homophobia, against the exclusion of the autonomous female sexuality which defines and is defined by women themselves. It began in 1995 when lesbian women and others from the women’s movement watched the theatrical play “Rifts of Silence”. Then, they approached the theatrical writer/director Christianna Lambrinidi and asked her to help them to write and direct a play about deeper silences and more*

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<sup>16</sup> I first met Christianna Lambrinidi in summer 1994 when I was in Eressos. A theatrical writer whose plays were staged in the United States, Australia, France, and Denmark, a stage director, and an instructor of creative writing, she joined us during the last two days of our summer vacation *Women meet Sappho* (a two-weeks summer vacation which included lectures on Sappho and the Women's Writing Continuum) and presented us with a seminar on creative writing. During the course she gave us two assignments. The first one was to write a dialogue between two characters on something that should be wearable. This item could be complete or incomplete but should be available to any woman to wear it. The second assignment consisted of writing two paragraphs on a woman's character and her persona. The issues of sexuality, lesbianism, and the way one chooses to project herself to the world, should be included in the second piece of writing. We were altogether twelve women and the experience of trying to write such a piece of work was rather interesting. Even more so, due to the conversation that followed and which focused on issues of sexual choices, identity, and self-definition.

*penalised ones than the Muslim- Christian- Gypsy- Turkish- Greek issue, a play which would be about the invisible and the unspeakable.*

Maria Cyberdyke, Sofia Anagnostaki, Despina Kontaksi and other women asked Christianna Lambrinidi to help and safeguard them. And she agreed. Till that moment none of her theatrical plays could be labelled as 'lesbian' although all of them were written from a lesbian perspective. Having already written plays on mother-daughter relationships, and on relations among women from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, Christianna thought that it was her obligation to write a play for and with lesbian women who live in Greece, a task she owed to herself and to these women. They embarked on the project without a script, and with the exception of Christianna none of these women had ever had any previous experience with the theatre. At the beginning Christianna acted as a creative writing tutor and asked women to imagine a snapshot for each one of four different scenes where the relationship of the daughter to her mother should be represented. The degree of dependence and influence from mother figure varied in each scene starting from total dependence and ending with the acquisition of a self-defined persona after a major transformation had occurred through the very processes of writing-up and acting out. During the rehearsals, which started shortly after the beginning of the writing-up and usually took place at Christianna's house, the latter urged women to sense their bodies, open their souls, express their feelings. The experience was sometimes upsetting and emotionally painful. The negotiation of identities, sexualities, mother-daughter relationships, motherhoods, feelings of exclusion was not always an easy task. From the initial inspiration to mount the play, till the actual fulfilment of the idea, the way was long and strenuous whereas the difficulties were not solely confined to the financial level. The women who participated in the project had different ideas about the acquisition of identities, self-identification, and the way such negotiations and disagreements should be reflected in the play. The outcome was that during rehearsals, which lasted for a three-year period, the composition of the group changed significantly as some women left and others joined. Perhaps even more interesting than the play itself were the

discussions, the arguments, the controversies, and the debates within the group during rehearsals.

It was August 1996 when the group decided to meet in Eressos for a number of rehearsals. The eight actors-writers and the director had arranged to meet there in order to work on the final draft of the script and on stage acting. The very place of Eressos with its history, the annual gathering of women which was at its peak in August, the sandy beach and the clear blue sea water and the relaxed atmosphere of vacation, promoted Eressos as the ideal place for such an event. Out of the nine women who met to prepare the performance one identified herself as a lesbian, three were committed to lesbian relationships but did not always adopt a lesbian identity, one declared herself as bisexual, and the last three were sexually involved with men; two of them had children. All of them loved the female body and were ready to expose themselves on the stage for other women to see. All of them were ready to talk about their sexualities and offer performances having sexuality as their subject. During the rehearsals, which took place at the camping site and on the beach of Eressos, in the rain and under the moonlight, the women experienced new ways of self-expression playing with their physical bodies, their memories, and their sentiments. On the second day, during lunch in a local tavern, a passionate discussion took place among the members of the group. The motive was given when Maria Fotiadi, who was assigned to get an interview from the group on behalf of *Madame Gou*, posed the question of self-identification. Maria Cyberdyke argued strongly that the play should be labelled lesbian, and women who participated in it should identify themselves as lesbians. Given the fact that the group consisted of women with various sexual desires, and the very subject of the play was the negotiation of different sexualities and identities, the discussion was heated and ended up in a quarrel. In the end Maria Cyberdyke decided to abandon the group and claimed that as long as lesbian sexuality continues to be marginalized, negated, and morally penalised she was for the indisputable adoption of a lesbian identity till the moment there was no need to discern between lesbian, straight, and bisexual people. The majority of other women argued differently insisting that

no change would ever occur if one encouraged the acquisition of one-dimensional identities and preserved boundaries<sup>17</sup>.

The play *Lesbian Blues* was finally staged for a limited number of performances in April 1998. During the course of one month women appeared on the stage of the theatre *Technohoros* every Monday and Tuesday. Speech, body performance, and acting were combined in a play which was about sexuality, desires, relations to mother, motherhood, self-expression. The texts were written by eight women whereas only five of them appeared on the stage. They were not all lesbians. Some of them loved women, others were sexually involved with men. Some of them had children, others did not. Their effort was to talk about women who live in Greece, contest dominant models of what 'being a woman' means, negotiate their own sexualities, try to find out their own way of life. Or, as it is stated in the aforementioned press-release:

*The women of Lesbian Blues are 'we' and not 'them'<sup>18</sup>. On the stage the five actors and the eight writers play their mothers, talk gibberish, record violence at school and in the street, discover our perversions, narrate them, experience motherhood, are shamelessly photographed, open the drawers of their houses and tread underfoot their mothers, their selves, their bodies – bodies which were long preserved ...in formalin, as during funeral processions.*

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<sup>17</sup> At this point Maria Cyberdyke's opinion resembles Kostas Giannakopoulos' (1998) notion that the contest of rigid sexual identities and the denial of a 'homosexual'/ 'heterosexual' distinction among Greek homosexual men is rather the outcome of an internalized homophobia than a revolutionary stance which contests binary dichotomies.

<sup>18</sup> Here the writers play with the distinction between 'we' and 'them'. From a mainstream point of view lesbians, women who do not identify themselves as straight, or women who contest and negotiate their prescribed sexual roles are 'they'. In the context of the play the actors and writers of it try to subvert this distinction and change 'they' into 'we'.

Christianna Lambrinidi says that her aim was not to produce a play that would exhibit how lesbians feel, act, fall in love, a play that would present lesbians as exotic alien creatures. On the contrary, the principal goal was to challenge dominant features of thinking and lead the audience into a reconsideration of sexuality, identity, womanhood. Or, in the words of the journalist Mary Sinanidis<sup>19</sup>,

*For the most part, the play is more interested in showing a voyage of self-discovery than it is in portraying hardships of lesbian life – racism and hatred is assumed. ... It's this hurt that makes the women courageous. And the blues was born out of people's need to express their daily pain and joy – so "Lesbian Blues" it is.*

For ten evenings the 120 seats of the theatre were occupied by lesbian, gay, bisexual and straight people who watched five women on the stage dressed in men's suits trying to act out their own stories, move beyond stereotypes, utter a discourse which would draw on similarities among women rather than differences. Often an open discussion between the audience and the contributors of the performance followed. The play was simultaneously about silence and a leak in silence. It was about silence because its topic, same-sex desires among women, is unrecognised. Because women who wrote and played it used pseudonyms. Because it was deliberately ignored by the press. Jeffrey Weeks writes that, "Sexuality is woven into the web of all our identities which is why the emergence over the past two hundred years, and more rapidly since the 1960s, of alternative or oppositional sexualised identities is so unsettling to sexual conservatives of all political colours: such identities breach boundaries, disrupt order, and call into question the fixity of inherited identities of all kinds,

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<sup>19</sup> The play was neglected by the press and the mass media. As Christiana Lambrinidi told me only three reviews appeared in the daily press; "Oi Kiries Horevoun *Lesbian Blues*" –"Ladies Dance *Lesbian Blues*"-, an article by Giota Kotseta put out in *Tempo* on the 17<sup>th</sup> March 1998, "Lesbian Blues: A Moral Crash Test" which was written by Mary Sinanidis and published in *Athens News* on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1998, and "To Aorato Theama" –"The Invisible Show"- published in *Elevterotypia* on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 1998.

not just sexual” (1995: 36). But at the same time it tried to become a break in the silence. Christianna Lambrinidi and her collaborators decided to picture same-sex desiring women not just as sexual subjects but also as mothers, daughters, friends. The claims of the women of *Lesbian Blues* resemble demands uttered by gay and lesbian youth in Chicago as reported by Gilbert Herdt and Andrew Boxer, “The youth reject the moral assumption that to be gay or lesbian is simply, to have a sexual orientation or preference for the same sex, or to want only sex with the same sex. They claim instead aspirations and ideals of the whole person: that is, the personality or self, the body, their social spaces and roles, their spirituality and concept of the soul” (1996: 23).

### *Stories of the Self*

The prevailing element in the above women’s stories is the notion of desire <sup>20</sup>. Regardless of the term they use for their self-description -‘woman’, ‘girl’, ‘lesbian’, ‘homosexual’, ‘dyke’- what they stress is their right to desire. A desire which emerged at a younger or later age, led to major or less changes in one’s life, became public or remained invisible, but in all cases a desire which cannot be restricted to marriage, is not confined to the opposite sex, and does not necessarily lead to procreation, a desire which is described as a bodily urge and a need, not a mental choice <sup>21</sup>.

In their article on sex and sociality Laura Rival, Don Slater, and Daniel Miller, disagree with a view which constructs the individual subject as an effect of her or his sexual

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<sup>20</sup> Following Herdt and Boxer I define desire as a conception which “expresses heartfelt feelings to obtain satisfaction beyond the self and the will to perform action that seeks appreciation of these feelings in all human affairs” (1996: 5).

<sup>21</sup> Carol Worthman emphasizes the need for the inclusion of the human body in anthropological research and draws attention to epistemological work which “resocializes the body, recognizing it as created and experienced through emotion and subjectivity in dialogue with or subjugated by social practice and knowledge” (1995: 601).

desire and argue that “the potentiality for human sexuality must be understood from the viewpoint of a particular creative actor, culture, which, in the end, can be regarded as the normativity of a given population. All sexuality falls under a normative regime of some sort” (1998: 316). The ‘normative regime’ of female sexuality in Greece dictates that women “should realize their sexualities in the prospect and course of marriage and in the context of households” (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991b: 228) while “the sexual identity of women is subordinated to their kinship role as mothers and guardians of the domestic order” (ibid.: 223). Women with same-sex desires in contemporary Greece do not construct themselves solely ‘as an effect of their desires’. Their narrations of desire and their stories of the self are heavily imbued with the imperatives of gender and sexuality prevalent in Greek society. The majority of them have slept with men, some have been married, others have had children. A quite substantial number had to go abroad to feel free enough to express their same-sex desires, while for many of them, living in Greece still presents a major problem due to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Moreover, their mothers continue to ask them when they are going to get married, and I have heard many people say that same-sex desires among women are solely to be attributed to the fact “that they have not found the right guy yet”.

But, despite the limitations these women face, the dominant structures they have to struggle with, and traditional narrations they have to contest, despite the silence they have to confront, and conflict with their families they face, they try to utter new narrations of desire and construct new stories of the self. Even if these stories are few, fragmentary, and do not lead to the formation of a new audience ready to bear them in communities of meaning and understanding, where newly vocal groups can have their experiences validated in and through them (Plummer 1995), what they do is to seek a new definition of the self which will take into account bodily needs and pay attention to the “embodied nature of identities and experience” (Moore 1994a: 3). Through their narration same-sex desiring women stress their right to be who they like, to love whom they want, and live their lives the way they have chosen. Additionally, these stories have a potentially subversive effect since “whatever the form of

institutional action are -social and sexual regulation, states and churches- the real transformation is taking place elsewhere in the nooks and crannies of everyday life” (Weeks 2000: 244).

## **EPILOGUE**

### **DAUGHTERS WHO DO NOT SPEAK, MOTHERS WHO DO NOT LISTEN**

*Embedded in stories are particular renditions of gender that are already raced and classed, renditions that show people in action, chasing down the curve balls that identity throws their way. The moral of the stories? Gender may assume a million shapes, but it is never just gender.*

Kath Weston in *Render Me, Gender Me* (1996: 126).

An interest in the silence which surrounds erotic relationships among women in contemporary Greece motivated me to search for narrations of desire, stories of sexuality and

the self uttered by same-sex desiring women<sup>1</sup>. Recent research in the domain of sexuality has demonstrated that sexuality is not a given, natural, uncontested fact, nor can its various expressions be interpreted according to a 'normal/abnormal' logic. Far from being just an instinct or a drive, desire is a complex process, constructed from many parameters; the body and its pleasures, the socio-cultural context and what it allows for, and the discursive aspect according to which sexual acts are represented. Nowadays it is widely acknowledged that patterns of desire are mediated by the specific socio-cultural sites in which they appear (Wieringa and Blackwood 1999); "in the most recent discussions of sexual desire the focus moves from inside the individual to the external environment. Rather than asking what internal forces create desire, the questions are, how is desire elicited, organized, and interpreted as a social activity: How is desire produced and how is desire consumed?" (Gagnon and Parker 1995: 12-13). Thus, I became interested not in questions of why, but how female same-sex desires are expressed, discussed, negotiated, how they are related to others parameters which inform one's subjectivity, how they are dependent upon, influenced by, and contested from the socio-cultural context they emerge.

The specificities of Greek society with its particular emphasis on the significance of family and kinship, and the importance of motherhood on the one hand, and Western-imported discourses on gender and sexuality on the other, form the context in which such desires are felt, articulated, communicated and negotiated. Greece is a society where kinship and family relations play a crucial role in the definition of female and male identities, while full adult status for both women and men is obtained through marriage and the acquisition of children. Yet, at the same time Greece is a society in constant flux where major changes have occurred lately in family and gender relations; the change of the Family Law, the country's participation in the EEC and the import of Western discourses on lesbianism and same-sex

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<sup>1</sup> At this point I follow Karin Lutzen who argues that the study of sexuality is not only a study of *La Mise en discours* but also of silence which must be used as a means to "reconstruct the attitude causing the refusal to talk about and touch on certain areas" (1995: 27).

sexualities since the mid 70s. From the end of the 70s onwards a lesbian movement began to emerge, groups were formed, articles were published, bars were opened and Eressos in Lesbos was established as an international lesbian meeting place. Yet, an indigenous lesbian movement made relatively little impact on the lives of same-sex desiring women, who in their great majority are quite reluctant to claim a lesbian identity and come out as lesbians. For the same reasons they avoid frequenting Eressos and being identified with a place which is considered to be marked as 'lesbian', -at least for same-sex desiring women who gather there. The outcome is that while a relatively small number adopt lesbian identities or are engaged in political activity, most of the women don't wish to be seen in lesbian places, to participate in projects which could be labeled as 'lesbian' or to be members of lesbian groups. Furthermore, they conceal their erotic desires from their families, work environments, and quite often from heterosexual friends. When asked they answer that Greek society is not ready yet to accept people who are open about their same-sex desires, especially in the case of women; they say that their families would not possibly accept their sexual choices; and for these reasons they are afraid that a 'coming-out' would jeopardize their relations with their families and their status in their working environments. It follows that, in contemporary Greece only a small number of same-sex desiring women turn their eyes to the West in their effort to find positive identifications with the term 'lesbian', strive for the creation of a lesbian culture, and are eager to meet other lesbian women from Western countries in order to discuss, flirt and exchange experiences. In contrast, the striking majority avoids any public expression of their desires and remains isolated in the privacy of their homes and with the company of a few selected friends.

According to Anthony Giddens (1992) the ideal of 'romantic love' is lately being replaced by 'confluent love', a situation which is entered for its own sake and is continued only in so far as it is thought satisfactory for both individuals engaged in it. In contrast to 'romantic love' that is based on heterosexuality, life long commitment, marriage and children, 'confluent love' has no specific connection to heterosexuality and allows for same-sex

relations. This transformation of intimacy, which is the product of global economic and social forces and is related to the process of globalization, enabled other ways of being, living, and falling in love which cut across the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy. Yet, the impact of these new discourses on gender and sexuality, however global they might appear, depend heavily on the specificities of each society and the stabilities of everyday life, and are confronted by traditional narrations which are to be found in every culture (Weeks et al. 1996). The reluctance on the part of Greek same-sex desiring women to adopt lesbian identities and to become engaged in a 'lesbian' way of life following Western examples is to be attributed to the specificities of Greek society, a society which emphasizes the importance of family, kinship and procreation, and the significance of home.

The relative absence of a lesbian movement, culture and discourse does not preclude a similar absence of new narrations of desire on the part of same-sex desiring women. Such shifting and changing stories of sexuality and self do actually emerge and co-exist with more dominant ones. The places where these stories are uttered are usually not public 'lesbian' identified spaces but the private space of homes. The latter have taken on many of the characteristics of public lesbian spaces and function as a places where same-sex desiring women meet, create, discuss, have fun, express themselves freely. Regardless of how insignificant and trivial it may look from the perspective of identity politics, women's gatherings at their homes, their parties and discussions, are of special significance for them. However, these narrations seldom occur in the presence of parents. Due to the significance of family and kinship relations and the interdependence between children and parents, it seems that there is little space for the negotiation of dominant discourses on gender and sexuality between them. Daughters are not supposed to disappoint their parents and usually remain silent about their erotic desires and sexual choices in order not to endanger their family relations. It seems as though parents cannot face social disapproval if their daughters do not fulfill their roles and do not meet parents' expectations; especially, mothers feel particularly threatened because their personal affirmation is dependent on whether they have successfully

fulfilled their maternal role. Therefore, even if daughters feel 'brave' enough to speak about their lives, desires and hopes, there are parents, particularly mothers acting as guardians of the domestic order, who refuse to listen. When women narrate these new stories of sexuality and the self, addressed to themselves, to each other, to the anthropologist, to prospective audiences, what they stress is their right to desire, claim for the recognition of an autonomous desire that is independent of men or the acquisition of children, and argue for their right to be themselves and be perceived as whole persons and not as people who are going through a transitory phase. Even if these narrations do not always succeed in replacing more traditional stories, they still may be considered as radical, since as Edward Soja and Barbara Hooper argue, "a new cultural politics of difference and identity that moves toward empowering a multiplicity of resistances rather than searches for the one 'great refusal' the singular transformation to precede and guide all others" (1993: 187). To the extent that "sexual history is continuously being made and remade, year by year, in the intimacies of everyday life" (Weeks 2000: 245), even dispersed and isolated narrations of desire may bring about a change. They certainly do, not only for their narrators, but also for the rest of us provided we are willing to listen to them, listen to these stories which contest 'us' versus 'them', which exhibit that difference and similarity is a more complex issue than the 'hetero/homo' divide permits us to think. Kath Weston (1996) has rightfully observed that, "gender may assume a million shapes, but it is never just gender" (1996: 126). A similar remark can be made for sexuality alike. Narrations on female same-sex desires are not simply just about lesbian identities, or gender deconstruction. They are stories presented by same-sex desiring women who, regardless of whether they identify themselves with different terms - 'woman', 'girl', 'person', 'lesbian', 'homosexual', 'gay', 'dyke'-, they all speak about relationships with the family, childhood memories, traveling, work opportunities, residential choices, friendships, love affairs, child rearing, fears. The moral of the stories? Sexuality may assume a million shapes, but it is never just sexuality.

## APPENDIXES

### Appendix I: Articles on female same-sex practices published in Greek mainstream magazines

- 1993, June. Beatrix Campbell. "Lesvies, o Fovos tis Apokalipsis" –"Lesbians, the Fear of Disclosure"-. In *Cosmopolitan*, female magazine. Article on lesbians in the United States who came out.
- 1993, November (10<sup>th</sup>). D.K. "Andriki kai Ginekia Omofilofilia: Tolmiroi oi Andres, Distaktikes oi Gynaikes" –"Male and Female Homosexuality: Bold Men, Hesitant Women"-. In *Elevtheros Typos*, -Free Press- newspaper. Interview with the president of the *Elliniki Omofilofili Koinotita –Hellenic Homosexual Community-* Vangelis Giannelos and the clinical psychologist Dimitra Skaloubaka.
- 1993, October. Efi Alevizou. "Eressos. To Chorio ton Lesvion" –"Eressos. Lesbians' Village"-. In *MAX*, magazine. Article on Eressos, a summer resort on the Greek island of Lesbos which attracts many lesbian women from all over the world.
- 1994, March (15-21). Ileana Panagopoulou "Ekeini kai Ekeini. Ellinides Lesvies" –"She and She. Greek Lesbians"-. In *EGO*, magazine. Interviews with Isavella Aktipi, Katerina, Marina, and Eleni Tsaklari, members of *Elliniki Omofilofili Koinotita –Hellenic Homosexual Community-*.
- 1994, March (23<sup>rd</sup>). "Giati me edioxsan?" –"Why I was kicked off?"-. In *Nea*, -News- daily newspaper. Interview with Isavella Aktipi, member of *Elliniki Omofilofili Koinotita –Hellenic Homosexual Community-* who was dismissed from the *Panellinio Gimnastiko Sillogo -Pan-Hellenic Gymnastic Group-* after she declared herself as a lesbian during a TV show. /
- 1994, March. Petros Kasimatis. "I 'Timoria' tis Isavelas" –"Isavela's punishment"-. In *K*, newspaper. Interview with Isavela Aktipi about the reasons she was dismissed from her job.
- 1995, January (22<sup>nd</sup>). Vena Georgakopoulou. "I Sappho ton Pagon" –"Sappho of the Ice"-. In *Kiriakatiki Elevtherotypia -Sunday Freedom of the Press-*, newspaper. Article on the Russian poetess Marina Tsvetaeva and her love for a woman called Sonetchka.
- 1995, October. Giannis Papaioannou. "Gay: I Amfivoli Apelevtherosi" –"Gay: the Doubtful Liberation"-. In *OI*, magazine. Article on gays –men and women- in Greece of the '90s.
- 1996, December. Marilena Simou. "To Paidiko Prosopo tis Omofilofilias" –"Infantile Homosexuality"-. In *Advantage*, magazine. How parents should react if they realize that their child has homosexual desires.
- 1996, December. "Thelo na me Agapas gia Afto pou Eimai" –"I want you to love me for what I am"-. In *METRO*, magazine. Survey on how young people perceive same-sex desiring people, and interviews with two same-sex desiring women, and two same-sex desiring men.
- 1996, July (25<sup>th</sup>). Chrysa Pachoumi. "Koritsia Alliotika apo ta Alla ..." –"Girls Different from the Rest ..."-. In *Teletheatis*, -"TV Viewer"- weekly TV guide. Brief article on lesbians.

## Appendixes

- 1996, July (2<sup>nd</sup>). Evita Andreou. "Martyria" -"Testimony"- . In *EGO –I-*, magazine. Personal narration of a woman who fell in love with another woman after she had been married and had two children).
- 1996, July (2<sup>nd</sup>). Tonia Makra. "I Alli Seksoualikitita" –"The Other Sexuality"- . In *Einai –It Is* magazine. An account of the biological, psychological, and self-choice approach which have been adopted for explaining same-sex desires.
- 1996, June. Sofia Kappa. "Lipstick Ladies". In *Dune*, magazine. Interview with four same-sex desiring women.
- 1996, October (21<sup>st</sup>). Tasiana Tsiakou. "Sta Vimata tis Sapphous ..." –"Following in Sappho's footsteps ..."- . In *To Onoma –The Name-* magazine. Brief article on lesbian bars in Athens.
- 1996, September. Michalis Skafidas. "Gamilio Parti" –"Wedding Party"- . In *Gynaika –Woman-*, magazine. Publication of and comments on an opinion poll which was conducted in Greece on marriage among same-sex desiring people.
- 1997, April (15<sup>th</sup>). Tzacharoula Lada. " I Adelfi mou Einai Gay" –"My Sister is Gay"- . In *EGO –I-* magazine. Sonia's story who found out that her sister Lisa was gay.
- 1997, June (15<sup>th</sup>). Unsigned article. "Epitelous Ekdilothikan ..." - "At least they came out ..."- . In *To Vima –The Tribune-*, newspaper. Article on Helen de Generes and Anna Hesse, two American women who declared publicly their love for each other.
- 1998, September. Geni Agiandriti. "Lesbian Chic" in *BIC* , magazine. 'Instructions' on how to seduce another woman.

## Appendix II: Questionnaire

*Call for Participation in Research with Subject*

*“Female Same-Sex Desires in Contemporary Greece”*

*Venetia Kantsa*

*Postgraduate Student of Social Anthropology*

### *The Research*

*The topic of my research concerns how female same-sex desires are experienced, negotiated, and contested in Greece in the 90's.*

*Its aim is the emergence of a female same-sex discourse, and examination on how erotic choices are interrelated with other parameters which inform one's subjectivity like family, occupation, friends, place of residence.*

*The methodology I intend to use consists of thorough discussions with women who are erotically involved with other women, observation in places where women meet and gather, and study of printed material on female same-sex desires which has circulated in Greece recently.*

### *The Call for Participation*

*The present call is addressed to women who live in Greece and are or were erotically involved with other women regardless of age, occupation, family status, place of residence and is indifferent to whether they adopt a lesbian identity, participate in lesbian organizations, frequent lesbian bars, or not. The only prerequisite is their personal interest for participating in such research.*

## Introductory

I became interested in examining female same-sex desires in contemporary Greece due to the popularity of the opinion that such relationships are invisible if not non-existent. In contrast to a male discourse on same-sex desires, -which is represented in terminology, articles, and recognized sexual practices-, female same-sex relationships are unperceived and unrecognized due to the specific construction of female sexuality. According to a 'hegemonic' or 'dominant' discourse on sexuality, female sexuality cannot be conceptualized without a male presence while at the same time women can only become full persons through their roles as mothers and wives. According to this logic, it comes as no surprise that female same-sex relationships, even if recognized, are regarded as a 'sin', or 'abnormal', or as titillating practice performed for men's pleasure.

The recent, and in most cases excessive, interest of the mass media in the topic should be attributed to their concern to increase their ratings rather than to a genuine, more receptive attitude towards lesbians. Furthermore, when I first became interested in the topic, in February 1994,

politicized lesbian discourse in Greece had ceased. Previous to this the lesbian magazine *Lavris* had been published which had distributed three issues between 1982 and 1983. In 1994 the publication of *amfi* was interrupted, while the feminist magazines which hosted articles of lesbian interest during the 80s were going –and still are- through a recession. Here I should note that today in 1996 the situation appears to be slightly different due to the recent publication of the lesbian magazine *Madame Gou*, the republication of *amfi*, the distribution of the monthly pamphlets *Vitamin O* and *O Pothos*, the presence of the *Roz-Mov Pages* on the Internet. However, back in 1994 the only references to female same-sex desires were confined to T.V. shows or to the presentation of Eressos in the magazine *MAX*.

Therefore, because I was convinced that the topic of female same-sex desires was more complicated than its representation in public discourses and TV shows, I became interested in examining the reasons why such practices are unrecognizable despite their existence and in studying spaces where they appear.

### **Previous research approaches**

My first approach to the subject of female same-sex desires was the analysis of the Greek lesbian-feminist discourse as it is presented in the lesbian magazine *Lavris* and its comparison with a Western contemporary discourse. This article is going to be published in the next issue of the feminist magazine *Dini*.

My second approach had the form of a small-scale field research I conducted in Eressos, Lesbos from July to October 1994. In the context of this research I was interested in issues of community and identity. A brief presentation was published in the second issue of *Madame Gou*.

### **The present research**

Because of the absence of a lesbian culture, the negative connotations of the word *lesvia* – lesbian-, and the importance of family relations female same-sex relationships in Greece remain to a large extent invisible. Therefore, if someone is interested in examining such relationships, they should not confine their research to a visible lesbian identity.

In combination with participant observation in Eressos, lesbian bars and homosexual organizations, and thorough analysis of published material on female same-sex desires I am interested in meeting and having discussions with women who are erotically involved with other women. Women who do not necessarily adopt a lesbian identity, but whose sexual choices influence their relationships with family, friends, colleagues. Therefore the present call is not only addressed to women who identify themselves as lesbians, are members of lesbian groups, or participate in the so-called ‘lesbian scene’. It is addressed to all women who have had or have sexual relations with other women and regard these sexual choices as being interrelated, and which influence other parameters of their identity.

For women who are interested in contacting me, I suggest some topics we could discuss. For those women who are not able to see me personally, I can present them with a questionnaire which they can send back to me by post or by e-mail.

Thanking you very much in advance. Needless to say absolute discretion is paramount.

My address is:

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### **I. Topics for Discussion**

Generalities: Age. Place of birth. Place of residence. Education. Occupation. Family conditions.

Life History: Childhood. Adolescence. Friends. Love affairs.

Coming-Out Stories

Self-Identification: A comment on the terms 'lesbian', 'homosexual', 'gay', 'dyke'.

Relations to Others: Relationships with the family of origin. Relationships with 'straight' friends, relatives, colleagues.

Sexualities: Female same-sex relationships and sexuality. 'Butch-Femme' roles.

Motherhood: Mothers and Want-to-Be mothers.

Lesbian Bars and Eressos: Frequency of visits and impressions

Lesbian – Homosexual- Feminist organizations: A politicized lesbian discourse in Greece –present or absent?

Contact with Lesbian Movements Abroad: Degree of involvement through magazines, Internet, due to presence in Eressos or travelling abroad.

Conclusion: Comment on female same-sex desires in contemporary Greece. Comment on the present research.

### **II. Questionnaire**

#### 1. Biographical Profile

When and where were you born? Where do you live now? With whom? Have you been to college?

Do you work? Where? Do you receive financial assistance from elsewhere?

Have you ever been married? Do you have any children? If yes, with whom are they staying?

#### 2. Coming-Out Stories

Brief description of childhood and adolescence.

When did you feel erotic for another woman for the first time? How did you feel? Have you ever heard before about lesbians, homosexual women? Were there any role models with whom you could identify? To whom did you speak about this for the first time? How did she/he react?

#### 3. Terms of Self-Identification

What do you think of the terms 'lesbian', 'homosexual', 'gay', 'dyke'? Are there any differences between them? When and where did you hear about them?

Is there any term from the above which you would use to describe yourself? Do you use these terms with different meaning in different contexts?

4. Sexuality and Sexual Relations

How many sexual relations have you had so far with other women? How would you describe them? How long did they last? Where did you meet your sexual partners?

Did you ever have the experience of acting according to gender roles -woman/man- in the context of your homosexual relationships? What do you think of butch/femme?

Do or did you have sexual relations with men? How would you describe them?

How would you describe heterosexual relations in comparison to homosexual ones? (In accordance to intensity, duration, commitment of the relation). To what extent do two women, former lovers, remain friends after their relationship has been ended?

5. Relations to Family of Origin

What kind of relations do you have with your family? Do they know about your erotic choices?

If yes, what was their first reaction? Did their stance alter through the passage of time? Did your erotic choice influence your relationship with them? How would you like them to have reacted?

If they do not now, would you like them to be aware of your erotic choices?

Do you think that your family attitude towards homosexuality has influenced the way you perceive and experience your own homosexuality?

6. Motherhood

Do you have any children? Who raises them? Under what circumstances were they born? (With/without marriage; with a sexual partner/by insemination)? What difficulties/facilities did you have? How is your relationship with the father of the child? How did your family react?

In case you do not have any children would, you like to have one? How? (Sexual act/Insemination?) With whom would you like to raise your child? (Alone, with your lover, with your family of origin, in the context of a marriage even if it would be 'a white one?'). What difficulties and what facilities do you think you were about to face?

7. Relationships with Other People

What kind of relations do you have with heterosexual friends/acquaintances/colleagues? With whom and under which conditions would you share your erotic choices?

Do you differentiate between your friends/acquaintances according to their sexual orientation? Do you prefer the company of same-sex desiring women/men? Do you think that networks among same-sex desiring women could work out as an alternative form of family on terms of understanding, psychological support, material help? Do you think on the contrary, that the exclusive company with same-sex desiring women/men could lead to exclusion and isolation?

8. Sexual Choices in Relation to Occupation and Place of Residence

To what extent has the choice of your occupation in all its parameters -salary, environment and relations, leisure time- been influenced by your erotic choices? Are you open about your sexual choices in your working environment?

Was your choice to live abroad, or in a big city, or in the province influenced by your sexual choices? Did your presence in a big city or abroad make you more receptive to your sexual desires?

9. Eressos and Lesbian Bars

Have you ever heard of Eressos as a place which attracts lesbian women from all over the world? Have you ever been there? How often do you go there? What are your impressions? How would you describe your experience?

Do you visit lesbian bars? How often? What do you think of them?

Is there any relation between lesbian bars and Eressos? What are their similarities and their differences?

10. Politicized Lesbian Discourse

Are you informed about the existence of lesbian, gay, and feminist groups in Greece? Did you ever participate in such groups and organizations? Can you describe your experience? Do you think that there exists in Greece a politicized lesbian discourse? What kind of moves is being made in that direction? Are there any difficulties? What and why?

11. Contact and Influences from the West

To what extent are you familiarized with the lesbian movements abroad, in Europe and in America through lesbian magazines, Internet, contacts in Eressos, journeys to Western cities?

Do you think that the contact with Western lesbian women and the awareness of theoretical trends and political movements help in the acceptance of same-sex desires?

Is there any relation between recent trends abroad on all levels -theoretical, political, cultural- and today's situation in Greece? Are there any influences, interrelations?

12. Comments

According to your opinion, how are female same-sex relations discussed, perceived and criticized in Greece?

Is there anything you would like to see changing? In which direction?

What do you think of the present research?

### Appendix III: Biographical Profiles<sup>1</sup>

Biographical profiles of women I have interviewed are based on age, place of birth and/or residence, education and occupation, family situation, involvement with the 'lesbian scene' in Greece. All the facts are based on the time of the research, namely July 1996 to January 1998, and all the names are pseudonyms, unless otherwise stated. The use of pseudonyms is a very common anthropological practice which aims to provide anonymity and protect the personal lives of interlocutors, especially in cases when the topic of research is a very sensitive one such as the examination of same-sex practices in homophobic societies (Warren 1977, Weston, 1991). Only in the case of Christianna Lambrinidi I have used her real name -after discussion with her- since she is the publicly known director of *Lesbian Blues*.

Anagnostaki, Sofia

Aged 49. She was one of the editors of *Lavris*. She now lives in Athens alone and works in the public sector.

Anagnostopoulou, Klio

Aged 34. She came from an island to Athens at the age of 18 to study. She used to frequent the *Women's Coffeeshouse* and Eressos. She owns her own apartment and works in the public sector.

Aristou, Faidra

Aged 33. She lives in Athens with her parents and spends the weekends with her partner. She is occupied with the seasonal family business.

Chatzigianni, Angeliki

Aged 49. She has a daughter from a previous marriage. She lives in Athens and works in the public sector.

Christakou, Eleni

Aged 36. A habitu  of Eressos, was for many years abroad where she worked and studied. She lives in Athens sharing a flat with a friend of hers.

Elevtheriou, Dimitra

Aged 43. She lives in Athens and is self-employed.

Fotiadi, Maria

Aged 43. Although she is primarily based in Athens she spends long periods abroad. She is an artisan.

Grammenou, Popi

Aged 41. She has two children from a previous marriage. She lives with her partner in Thessaloniki and owns her own business.

Kalivioti, Anna

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<sup>1</sup> This list of biographical profiles of women I have interviewed is inspired by Emily Martin's work who provides a similar list of the participants in her project (1987: 209-224).

Aged 24. She was born in a provincial city where she still lives with the exception of a short period she spent in Athens. She does not have a permanent job.

Kammenou, Ioanna

Aged 23. She lives in Thessaloniki with her parents where she works in the family business.

Komninou, Urania

Aged 36. She lives in Thessaloniki and works in the public sector. In addition, she helps her partner with her private business.

Kontaksi, Despina

Aged 30. Born in the countryside she now lives in Athens as a freelance journalist. She is one of the women who wrote and staged *Lesbian Blues*.

Kontou, Lida

Aged 32. She lives in Athens with her partner and works in the private sector.

Kritikou, Erika

Aged 18. She lives in Athens with her father and works as a trainee in a private business.

Ksenaki, Ifigenia

Aged 35. She spent many years studying and working in a provincial town in Greece. She lives in Athens and works in the public sector.

Mantaka, Chrisanthi

Aged 29. She was born in a provincial city and studied abroad. She now lives in Athens with her partner and works in a big company.

Maria Cyberdyke (self-chosen name)

Aged 27. She lives in Athens where she organizes lesbian parties and other events and tries to make lesbian women visible.

Mavrogiorgi, Elina

Aged 35. She was born, lived, and worked for many years in Athens. Now she is completing her postgraduate studies abroad.

Mitsaki, Rea

Aged 30. She lives in Athens and runs a business with her partner.

Mitsopoulou, Viki

Aged 30. She is still studying and has a part-time job. She has a permanent relationship for two years.

Nikiforiadi, Voula

Aged 30. She lives in Athens and works as secretary in EOK, the Greek Homosexual Community.

Palli, Vera

Aged 26. She was born in Northern Greece and she moved to Athens to study. She belongs to the editorial group of *Madame Gou*.

Papadaki, Amalia

Aged 27. She was born in a small city in Northern Greece and moved later to Thessaloniki to study. She works in the public sector.

Papandreou, Elli

Aged 38. An active member and representative of EOK, the Greek Homosexual Community, works as a freelance translator in Athens.

Paschali, Kiriaki

Aged 26. She moved from Thessaloniki to Athens where she works in the private sector.

Rozakou, Katerina

Aged 33. Lives with her parents in Athens. Works in the public sector and frequents Eressos and lesbian bars.

Stefanou, Anthofilli

Aged 33. She has done postgraduate studies abroad and works for the public sector in Athens. She is involved in a yearlong relationship.

Tata, Rena.

Aged 36. She went to study abroad at the age of 18 and returned many years later. She lives with her parents in Thessaloniki and is involved with the lesbian movement.

Totti, Evanthia

Aged 31. Lives in Athens and has worked in the public sector since she completed her postgraduate studies abroad. She participates in the 'lesbian scene' of Athens.

Tsantali, Christina

Aged 34. She lives in Athens with her partner. She is one of the editors of the lesbian magazine *Madame Gou*.

**Appendix IV: Women who Appear in the Thesis**

Chatzigianni, Angeliki	See biographical profiles
Anagnostaki, Sofia	See biographical profiles
Anagnostopoulou, Klio	See biographical profiles
Anagnostou, Tereza	A habitué of Eressos
Andreou, Athina	She was on of the editors of <i>Madame Gou</i>
Aristou, Faidra	See biographical profiles
Asimaki, Panagiota	One of the editors of <i>Lavris</i>
Christakou, Eleni	See biographical profiles
Davarinou, Meni	She took part in <i>Lesbian Blues</i>
Demisioti, Klio	A friend of Anthofilli Stefanou
Dimitra	A friend of Faidra Aristou. She was at her birthday party.
Dimitriou, Katerina	One of the organizers of the <i>First Greek Lesbian Week</i>
Dina	Girlfriend of Sofia Anagnostaki
Elevtheriou, Dimitra	See biographical profiles
Fotiadi, Maria	See biographical profiles
Francesco, Maria	An Italian habitué of Eressos
Grammenou, Popi	See biographical profiles
Harris, Joanna	An English woman in Eressos
Kalivioti, Anna	See biographical profiles
Komninou, Urania	See biographical profiles
Kontaksi, Despina	See biographical profiles
Kotsopoulou, Mina	A friend of Anna Kalivioti
Ksenaki, Ifigenia	See biographical profiles
Lambrinidi, Christianna (real name)	She is the director of <i>Lesbian Blues</i>
Lela	A friend of Anthofilli Stefanou
Mantaka, Chrisanthi	See biographical profiles
Maria Cyberdyke (self-chosen name)	See biographical profiles
Mary	A friend of Faidra Aristou. She was at her birthday party.
Moraiti, Myrsine	Eleni's Christakou room-mate

*Appendixes*

Nikou, Marilena	She participated in the <i>First Greek Lesbian Week</i>
Palli, Vera	See biographical profiles
Panagiota	A friend of Faidra Aristou. She was at her birthday party.
Panagiota	A friend of Anthofilli Stefanou
Papageorgelli, Efi	One of the Editors of <i>Madame Gou</i>
Papandreou, Elli	See biographical profiles
Petrou, Maria	One of the organizers of the <i>First Greek Lesbian Week</i> and the editor of <i>Roz-Mov Pages</i> on the Internet
Roussou, Poliskeni	One of the editors of <i>Lavris</i>
Rozakou, Katerina	See biographical profiles
Sapountzi, Olga	One of the organizers of the <i>First Greek Lesbian Week</i>
Simou, Anna	One of the organizers of the <i>First Greek Lesbian Week</i>
Stefanou, Anthofilli	See biographical profiles
Takaki, Melina	She participated in the <i>First Greek Lesbian Week</i>
Tata, Rena	See biographical profiles
Totti, Evanthia	See biographical profiles
Tsantali, Christina	See biographical profiles
Tsitiridou, Toula	Belongs to the editorial group of <i>Madame Gou</i>
Tsitou, Margarita	One of the editors of <i>Madame Gou</i>
Unnamed	A coffee-shop owner
Vaso	A friend of Anthofilli Stefanou

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