

**Goldsmiths College  
University of London**

***Queer and Lesbian Feminism in Greece  
Politics, Identities, Subjectivities***

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Social Anthropology of  
Goldsmiths College for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London,  
September 2020

I, Dionysia (Diana) Manesi hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

September 2020

## Abstract

This thesis explores and critically reflects upon same-sex subjectivities, political discourses and collective forms of belonging developed between activist lesbians in Athens during 2013-2015. I argue that sexual subjectivity emerges out of the constant negotiation of normative hetero-gendered rules rather than the transgression of gender norms. I suggest that the temporality of the Greek lesbian feminist/ LGBT/ queer movement is marked by a time of coincidence in which the Greek crisis, different phases from the western history of the LGBT movement and local feminist histories collapse and produce ambiguities, tensions and potentialities. In particular, I argue that the emergent queer feminist movement goes hand in hand with haunting and displaced notions of the self. As contemporary vagabonds, lesbians and queer feminists embody the haunted subject of the crisis before the actual crisis, she is not taken by surprise and continues crafting space for herself as usual. I demonstrate that the emergence and building of queer feminist communities in juxtaposition to women's narratives of same-sex sexuality bring to the fore classed distinctions, generational discrepancies and ambivalent notions of belonging. I critique the notion of queer as straightforward transgression and suggest that it functions as an empty signifier which produces discursive ambiguities. Finally, I probe the interrelation between gender and sexual difference in producing sexual subjectivities.

Chapter 1 and 2 introduce the framework, both methodological and ethnographic, for the study of same-sex sexuality in Greece. In Part A I focus on temporalities, identities and community-building. In particular, in chapter 3 and 4 I present local LGBT and lesbian feminist histories and politics to demonstrate the notion of the haunting queer subject that temporally and spatially disrupts historical linearity, spatial arrangements, and crisis-informed narratives. Chapter 5 looks at the particularities of queer feminist community-building and its complexities to suggest the blurring between the individual and the collective, inner/outer worlds. From women's collective efforts to build spaces and histories I move onto Part B to the makings of lesvia subjectivity. In particular, Chapter 6 explores sexual subjectivities in generational time, Chapter 7 and 8 considers the interrelationship between gender and sexuality whilst Chapter 9 explores the classed underpinnings of lesvia and queer sociality.

My analysis of collective and individual aspects of women's same-sex life demonstrates that transgressing is not the canon of queerness and that gender norms also formulate the way women talk and live their same-sex sexuality. At the same time, lesbians and queer feminists bring to the fore the differential distribution of precarity in crisis-ridden Greece which presupposes subjects who are familiar with individual and collective states of unbelonging. These subjects are constantly on the move, they are used to feel strangers at home, and to craft worlds out of scratch. Strategies which ensure the management of unbelonging- both individually and collectively- are

continually developed on an everyday basis, and formulate lesvia and queer ways of life in Athens.

## Acknowledgments

I have been fortunate to write this thesis under the supervision of Mark Johnson. He was an exceptional interlocutor and patient advisor throughout this process. His patience, flexibility and generosity was given wholeheartedly especially when this journey got difficult and stressful.

In the Anthropology Department at Goldsmiths College I benefited a lot from the conversations I had with Mao Mollona. His insightful remarks and critical comments were very helpful and generously offered. I am also grateful for the conversations and support I was offered in different ways by Henrike Donner, Martyn Wemyss and Cris Shore. I am deeply indebted to the support and guidance of Athena Athanasiou in this project especially during fieldwork. Alexandra Halkia and Elena Papagardoufali also offered their advice at fieldwork stage. I would also have to thank my peers who gave time and input to my work and supported me in every possible way. In particular, I would like to thank Claudia Giannetto, Matteo Saltalippi, Clate Korsant, Elena Liber, Phill Willcox, Jo Sedillo, Sarah Howard, Charlotte Livingstone, and Toby Austin-Locke. I would also have to thank Olga Sevastidou, Ioanna Svana and Margarita Yannou for helping with the transcription of part of this material. And finally, Georgie Tomsett Rowe for proofreading and editing this work.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my participants, whose intimate stories “inhabit” this thesis, and who embraced this project with trust and understanding. I also would like to thank the lesbian feminist and queer community in Athens whose political and theoretical work creatively informed this project and tremendously affected my identity. There are many other people without whom this thesis wouldn’t have been possible. I owe much to the numerous discussions I had with Panagiotis Siokos, Athanasios Anagnostopoulos, Alkisti Euthimiou, Haris Zofos, Sotiria Gounari, Mariza Avgeri, Phryne Konti as well as for the support of Yulika Samara, Maritina Rapti, Froso Vakali, Mayessi Svoronou, Chinedu Anyanwu. Most of all, I am deeply indebted to Phryne and Panagiotis for their unconditional care, patience and encouragement throughout this journey.

This research was funded by a three-year postgraduate scholarship awarded by the Onassis Foundation which supported me financially for the completion of this project.

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### **Notes on the use of key terms and language**

Throughout the thesis I use the terms *lesvia*, *lesbian*, *queer lesbies*, and *queer feminist* interchangeably to a certain extent. However, I do try to apply them with some coherency: I use the term *lesvia* when discussing the local contexts in which women's individual and collective identity emerged during fieldwork. When referring to activist practices, networking and community- building I use the term *queer feminist* and *lesbian feminist* to denote the western and local linkages in which these terms appear and since these were the preferred terms of activist politics. Due to the frequent mention of *lesvia* and *queer* I italicize them only in first mention. I italicize direct quotes from interview material as well as excerpts from personal encounters which are close to the originary way they were said. I use the in-debt format for interview excerpts and box-formatting for archival material.

All Greek- English translations are my own unless stated otherwise. All fieldwork communication was conducted in Greek unless stated otherwise.

## Glossary of key terms

*dalika*: bull dagger/ *dalika* refers to the truck meant to carry heavy goods/ the term was used (in the 1970s- 1980s) as derogatory word to slur lesbians with a masculine appearance (or else mannish women). In the early millennium, it has been reclaimed by activist lesbians, which named their magazine after it. Yet it's rarely encountered as a form of identification.

*agorokoritso*: boy/girl (boyish girl), this term isn't an identity category, it's employed by women to describe feelings of unbelonging towards female norms and social expectations of appropriate girlhood.

*kavla*: sexual arousal, slang word for getting a boner

*kapsoura*: infatuation, emotional "obsession" with another woman

*kamaki*: hard-pan, the act of flirting/chasing another woman

*kerasma*: treating another woman a drink; the act of *kerasma* can be part of *kamaki*.

*parea*: group of people who come together voluntarily, usually in order to enjoy themselves through drinking, eating or dancing, but also in other contexts.

*poustis*: the word is used interchangeably with *aderfi* (sister, sissy), both terms refer to faggots/ pansies. They are socially perceived as morally derogatory terms. The term *poustis* in particular has been reclaimed by gay boys is also appropriated as a form of gender identification by younger girls within the queer feminist community.

*allokoti*: this is one possible translation of queer in Greek language and means weirdness. It's frequently used to talk about non-conforming desires (weird desires).

*Purple House*: This refers to a communitarian space (with leftist orientations) in central Athens, and particularly Exarchia, which hosts immigrants, refugees and antifascist groups and antiracist collectives.

*Ostria*: This refers to an anarchist squat in central Athens, also in Exarchia.

### Key Abbreviations

qv	queericulum vitae
LOA	Lesbian Group of Athens
qt	queertrans
EOK	Elliniki Omofylofyliki Koinotita/Greek Homosexual Community
AKOE	Apeletherotiko Kinima Omofylofilon Elladas/Greek Homosexual Liberation Movement
AMFI	the magazine of AKOE, amfi from “amfisvitsi” (questioning)
SYD	Somateio Ypostirixis Diemfylikon/Greek Transgender Support Association
AMOTH	Autonomi Omada Omofylofilon Thessalonikis/ Autonomous Group of Homosexuals of Thessaloniki
SATTE	Somateio Allilegyis Travesti-Transsexual Elladas/ Transvestite and Transsexual Support Association
KAG	Kinisi gia tin Apeletherosi ton Gynaikon/Movement for the Liberation of Women
KDG	Kinisi Dimokratikon Gynaikon/ Movement of Democratic Women
OLKE	Omofylofiliki kai Lesviaki Koinotita Ellados/ Greek Homosexual and Lesbian Community
KELPNO	Centre of Health and Disease Control/Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention

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WELCOME TO THE FEMINIST CENTRE

A trailer, a pyramid. A road that travellers take.  
What someone wants is for you to believe in that someone.  
Someone. In the shade of stammer.  
Omitted but understood.

Emily Petit

I found that it was not a simple matter to move from my experience of intimate involvement with the community to an anthropological analysis of that experience. I spent a year picking up and putting down my interview notes and fieldnotes before I learned that, in order to progress, I had to confront the ambivalence of my personal feelings towards the community in which I had lived and done my research. The process of exploring my own experience led me ultimately to see that feelings similar to my own were important in the accounts of the women I had interviewed and enabled me to use those feelings to guide my analysis.

Susan Krieger



# Chapter One

## Context, Themes, Terminology

### 1.1 Introduction

My research is an ethnographic study of the life of women who engaged in lesbian and queer feminist activism in crisis-ridden Greece. My main focus isn't life within austerity and crisis. Although I do address precarity as an ongoing state of uncertainty- physical and conceptual- for lesbians. I build on the work of Venetia Kantsa (2001) and Elisabeth Kirtsoglou (2003) about same-sex desiring women in Greece and explore different facets of lesbian life on an individual and collective level. Following Engebretsen (2008) my study investigates the emergence of conceptual, physical, and discursive manifestation of lesbia and queer spatiality in Athens and how lesbian lives and subjectivities are shaped by western influences, norms of female sexuality, gender social rules, generational time, class differences and community-building.

This chapter aims to make the reader aware of the context in which this study took place, set the research framework for what follows and clarify the use of certain terms and categories that appear throughout the text. More specifically, I focus on three main threads: The first section narrates major social and political changes and depicts the turbulent climate of the Greek crisis from 2010 onwards. This serves to contextualize my research but also position the agency of queer and lesbian feminists in crisis-ridden Greece. The second section moves to present linearly the overall structure of the thesis as well as some of the arguments that unravel in each chapter. Lastly, the third section looks at the definition of recurrent terms and categories- lesbia, queer, global/local and the west. Alongside the discussion of relevant anthropological literature, I aim to delineate what the above categories and terms do in my text, how I use them and what kind of meanings they uphold. In many respects, I also address what I choose not to consider, essentially what is left outside from this study.

Overall, this chapter aims to situate the study of female gendered lesbian and non-normative sexuality in the crisis-ridden Greek socio-political setting. By focusing

on the particularities of my fieldsite and looking at where the subjects of my study locate themselves I provide a sociopolitical framework upon which lesbian and queer life unfolds. I then move on to develop a conceptual framework that delineates the use of categories and terms of analysis with regards to the anthropological literature of gender, sexuality and national belonging in Greece. At the centre of this endeavour is to introduce settings, concepts and questions to which I return as I try to grasp and decipher their meaning and significance for the life of female- gendered lesbians.

### **1.1.1 The socio-political context of this study**

In 2010 the Greek nation-state was officially announced to be in a state of economic crisis. Since then the country has undergone a rigorous system of economic surveillance and political regulation imposed by the “Troika” and composed by European Central Bank (ECB), the European Commission (EC), and and International Monetary Fund (IMF). (Kallianos, 2018: 46). Between 2010 and 2014 Greece signed three Memorandum agreements (bailout packages) with the EC, ECB and IMF. As noted by Papataxiarchis (2018) the economic crisis quickly escalated into “a crisis of political legitimacy” of the two main parties, the right-wing, New Democracy (ND) and the socialist democratic party PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement), which have been running the country for 35 years (Papataxiarchis, 2018: 231).

In a short period of three to four years (2012–2015), Greek citizens went to the polls six times – four parliamentary elections, one municipal election that coincided with the elections for the European Parliament and one referendum (Papataxiarchis, 2018: 239). The first Memorandum was signed by the Papandreou government on May 2010. “There are money!” was Papandreou’s well-known, yet tragically ironic, slogan from his pre-election campaign on May 2008. The Papandreou government fell after the signing of the first bailout package and was replaced by a provisional government with an appointed technocratic, Lucas Papademos (November 2011- May 2012), which signed the second memorandum agreement (Papataxiarchis, 2018: 239). The elections of 2012 formally confirmed the collapse of the historical bipolarism between ND and PASOK. The first round of elected parties failed to form government since none of the strong parties (ND and PASOK) had the majority of seats (May 2012). The second round of

elections (June 2012) led to the election of three small parties (the right-wing party, Independent Greeks, the far right wing party, Golden Dawn and the left-wing party, Democratic Left) and New Democracy was forced into a coalition government with PASOK and the Democratic Left (DA). The coalition government ran until January 2015. Overall, the political system was largely restructured— small parties from the left and right margins occupied prominent positions in the renewed political scene and new parties were formed (Papataxiarchis, 2018: 239).

In the meantime, the country was up in arms. The social welfare system suffered severe cuts; the unemployment rate jumped to 25% in 2012 from 11.7% in 2010 and heavy taxation was imposed upon the Greek population. All this piled upon the indignation felt as a result of the collusion between the government and the Troika (Panourgia, 2018: 142). In the context of the ongoing crisis, an anti-austerity protest sphere was formulated. In particular, during the spring and summer of 2011, thousands of people poured into the streets of Athens at Syntagma Square (Constitution Square) as well as with a wide range of demands from “direct democracy” to the destruction of the parliament itself (Douzinas: 2013 quoted in Athanasiou, 2018: 22). During this time, protests, rallies, demonstrations reached unprecedented levels along with occupations of public spaces; police brutality escalated with several protesters getting injured and solidarity protests organized in response to state violence and forced evictions. This is what made, broadly speaking, what came to be known as the “indignant movement” (Athanasiou, 2018: 22).

At the same time, there has been a notable rise in xenophobia and racism. As underlined by Rozakou (2018) “various areas in the center of Athens were patrolled by civilians and numerous attacks against immigrants were recorded” (Rozakou, 2018: 194). At the same time, the election of Golden Dawn members to the Parliament coincided with the inauguration of “Operation Xenios Zeus” which signaled the broader criminalization of immigration (Rozakou, 2018). More specifically, as argued by Rouzakou (2018), Operation Xenios Zeus involved document checks in the streets of Athens. The police initiated checks on the basis of racial and ethnic difference and as a result several immigrants were taken to police stations and those who with no legal documents were transferred to detention centers, which were just popping out all over the Greek periphery (Rozakou, 2018: 199). The practice of “sweep operations” against

immigrants which proliferated during the 1990s was now further “developed” to a generalized policing of public space along racial lines which led to the violent prosecution and detention of immigrants (Rozakou, 2018: 191). For the period 2012–2013 alone, approximately 37.000 immigrants were detained (Angeli et al. 2014 quoted in Rozakou, 2018: 191). Operation Xenios Zeus signals the formation of a strong link between the crisis and restrictive immigration politics, what Papataxiarchis calls “a crisis of hospitality” (Papataxiarchis: 2014 quoted in Rozakou, 2018: 194). In other words, a particular kind of morality of securitization combined with a necropolitical discourse, was developed in the midst of the crisis according to which differently racialized, gendered and homosexual bodies were exposed to physical and social death: From the Operation Xenios Zeus to the arrest of seventeen women (May 2012), who were accused for spreading HIV and allegedly worked illegally as sex-workers, to the police detention of trans women in Thessaloniki with the aim to “beautify and clean the streets” (May 2014) (Athanasίου: 2018).

With the election of Golden Dawn racist and violent acts towards immigrants became overt and widely tolerated. There is a long list of attacks orchestrated by Golden Dawn but what needs to be noted is that deep state<sup>1</sup> actors always operated in the Greek political system with small and sporadic sweep operations organized by the police in collaboration with deep state actors. The pre-existence of deep state actors in the Greek political system also explains how Golden Dawn gained power within less than two years. There were two GD attacks that received wider social attention. On June 12, 2012 a group of twenty Golden Dawn members attacked five Egyptian fishermen who were living and working in the Perama and Keratsini area. The immigrants were beaten up and one of them sustained serious brain damage. In addition, as documented by Bambilis (2018), on September 18, 2013, Pavlos Fyssas, an anti-fascist rapper, who lived in the working-class suburb of Keratsini, was brutally murdered while trying to escape a group of Golden Dawn members. He was attacked and fatally stabbed by one of them. In the meantime, the police force, though called upon to save him, witnessed the attack without interfering to stop it. The assassination of Fyssas was reported in the local and

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<sup>1</sup> The term “deep state” refers to a body of people, who are well connected with government officials or the military, and are involved in the secret control and implementation of government policy. In Greece, Golden Dawn members,, including MPs, are believed to be secretly affiliated to the police force and the military.

international news and was followed by a range of anti-fascist demonstrations and events throughout the city (Bambilis, 2018: 68)

Between 2010-2012 there is also a rise in homophobic attacks, yet homophobia is structurally embedded in Greek society and attacks were happening long before the rise of Golden Dawn. However, the rise of Golden Dawn with its neo-Nazi discourse and practices actually opened the way for the social legitimation of overt hatred, homophobia and hate speech. On October 2012 members of Golden Dawn along with groups of Orthodox Christians attacked the opening of the theatrical play “Corpus Christi” by Terrence McNally in Athens. As described by Bambilis, a large crowd of people made it inside the theatre, stopped the performance, assaulted and threatened both actors and audience, despite the presence of police force which had surrounded the theatre (Bambilis, 2018: 63). The event was broadcasted immediately and a video circulated on social media capturing the Golden Dawn MP I. Panagiotaros shouting: “*Albanians assholes poustides (faggots, pansies)! Arseholes actors! Poutanakia (sluts) your time is coming!*” The same evening the Bishop of Piraeus, accompanied by Golden Dawn MPs and members of the police force, accused the director and the actors of “blaspheming” against the Orthodox religion and “hubris”, both accusations with juridical force in the Greek legal system (Bambilis, 2018: 64).

I began my fieldwork (October 2013) in the aftermath of Fyssa’s assassination whilst Operation Xenios Zeus was still actively persecuting immigrants and members of Golden Dawn were regularly out for patrol in neighborhoods wearing their military-style uniforms. The two memorandum agreements were already signed, the anti-austerity mass rallies (the “indignant movement”) were reaching to an end, and the joint government ND-PASOK-DA hardly had parliamentary support. In January 2015 just before the signing of a third memorandum agreement, the country went to another round of parliamentary elections. SYRIZA (the Coalition of Radical Left) which had already increased its seats in the 2012 elections, came first and formed a coalition government with the newly formed right-wing party, Independent Greeks. This government lasted from January 2015 to August 2015 and led the negotiations with IMF, EC, ECB over the third memorandum agreement. On June 2015 the negotiations with the IMF, EC and ECB over the third bailout package had reached dead-end. Alexis Tsipras, current president and head of SYRIZA, proclaimed a national referendum over

the third bailout package (Athanasίου, 2018: 29)

The question of the referendum was: “Should we accept the draft bailout deal, submitted by the ECB, EC and IMF, on 25/05/2015, and consisting of two parts: Reforms for the completion of the Current Program and Beyond and Preliminary Debt sustainability analysis?” (Tsatsanis & Teperoglou, 2016: 427-450) This was the second referendum in the country’s history since 1974 when a referendum was held after the fall of the Greek junta about the country’s political regime- crowned democracy versus republic democracy (Tsatsanis& Teperoglou, 2016: 427-450). The outcome of the 2015 referendum was negative to a third bailout agreement. However, the government reached an agreement with IMF, EC, and ECF and signed the third memorandum at the end of June 2015. At this crucial time, just before the signing of the new memorandum agreement and after the expiration of the second bailout package, capital controls were imposed on Greek banks (with a maximum amount of money withdrawal per day- 60 euros) in order to avoid the collapse of the Greek bank system. Large crowds of citizens gathered outside banks and ATMs to withdraw money. This moment encapsulated in many ways widespread feelings of fear and uncertainty.

After the signing of the third memorandum, a large segment of the SYRIZA party dissolved and left the coalition government and the party altogether. The Youth of Syriza practically dissolved at this point. On September 2015, the country went again to elections and SYRIZA was re-elected and formed again a coalition government with the Independent Greeks. Golden Dawn was elected third in power and smaller, new parties emerged (like the centre right-wing party “Potami”) and won seats in the Greek parliament (Bambilis, 2018: 62; Rozakou: 2018: 194). Finally, on August 2015 the public trial of Golden Dawn began, which after the assassination of Pavlos Fissas was accused for participating and forming a criminal organization. Various Golden Dawn MP’s were arrested at the time of Fyssa’s death (October 2013), they got on trial in 2015 and the trial is ongoing till the present day (Bambilis, 2018: 62; Rozakou: 2018: 194).

In the last three years (2015- nowadays) Greece has entered a stage of political stability, yet the country has seen widespread structural changes on every level of society. Since 2010, people are differently faced with economic dispossession, followed by a widespread state of precarious living that entails the normalization of poverty (the “neo-poor” subject of the crisis), the widening of economic disparities and deprivation,

and finally the downfall of middle- class lifestyles and dreams of “good life” (Athanasiou, 2018: 18-19).

In his study of SYRIZA’s discourse in its rise to power (moving from 4.60% to 26.89% of the vote), Stavrakakis (2014) suggests that SYRIZA has developed a populist rhetoric calling people to step up against the establishment (“us/the people” against “them/the establishment”). According to Stavrakakis& Katsampekis “SYRIZA interpellates a subject tightly bound to collective action and a project of self-emancipation through a linkage established in terms of shared lack/ frustration attributed to the action of a clearly delimited enemy, both external and internal (the established status quo)” (Stavrakakis& Katsampelis, 2014: 132). And they further suggest that “we need to rethink populism in its inclusionary left-wing version which SYRIZA has developed by putting forward an inclusive social profile” (Stavrakakis &Katsampekis, 2014: 132).

In the context of its inclusionary populism, SYRIZA puts forward a human rights agenda with important legislative changes for which grassroots LGBT groups have been fighting for many years. Human rights quickly became the terrain upon which SYRIZA tried to gain people’s support in the aftermath of having signed the third memorandum despite the referendum’s negative outcome. On December 2015, the law on same-sex cohabitation contracts passed and two years later- October 2017- the Gender Recognition law.

In 2013, the European Court of Human Rights condemned Greece for violation of article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) and article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) by not including same- sex couples in cohabitation contracts (ILGA: 2014). Between 2013- 2014, the EU court received a vast number of appeals by same- sex couples after the court’s positive decision on “the Valianatos and others against Greece” case (2013). LGBT activists mobilized to pressure the government to speed up the process towards this legislative change. However, the final version of the law on same-sex cohabitation contracts addresses heterosexual couples (there is no reference to same-sex couples although they are legally included). In addition, joint adoption is not allowed by same- sex couples and by cohabitants in general, as it refers to married couples.

The Gender Recognition law, which passed on October 2017, grants trans people the right to have their gender recognized without neither psychiatric diagnosis nor sex-change surgery. However, recognition can be granted only by a local court, meaning that a judge decides a trans person's social passing, whether external appearance fits with the gender the person identifies with. In addition, children between the age of fifteen and seventeen will have access to the legal gender recognition process, but the steps they have to follow are not completely de-medicalised, as they will have to obtain a certificate from a medical council at the Athens Children Hospital (ILGA: 2014). The Gender Recognition law was opposed by the Christian Orthodox church, which denounced the legislation as "a satanic deed" that would lead to "the destruction of social cohesion and the spiritual necrosis of man" (Smith: 2017) as well as by the right-wing party (New Democracy), the extreme right-wing party (Golden Dawn) and the communist party (KKE). The opposition parties resorted extensively at hate speech against LGBT people and relegated trans people to the magical realm of unreality (the head of the right-wing party, New Democracy, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, in his parliamentary speech, referred to the case of an eighteen-year-old who told the psychiatrist he wishes to change gender because "he went up to the mountain and an alien told him to" Smith: 2017) The latter legislative changes happened after my fieldwork, yet they reflect the work of LGBT groups that was taking place at the time of my study.

When this ethnographic study was conducted (between 2013-2015) amongst women who were actively involved in the lesbian and queer feminist scene, the attack and arrest of undocumented sex workers who were allegedly HIV-positive (May 2012), and its social side-effects preoccupied the community. This state-orchestrated attack condemned these women to social death with one of them committing suicide two years after her arrest. Queer feminists were outraged with the presence of KELPNO, the Hellenic Center for Disease Control & Prevention, as fundraiser at the 2014 Pride after its cooperation with the Greek authorities at the arrest of the undocumented immigrants, allegedly working as sex workers. They protested in front of its stand, shouting "KELPNO smells racism", "Police and doctors work together" and one of them made her way through the crowd, directly confronted KELPNO's representatives and wrote on their stand "Doctors-police force" ("mpatsogiatroi").



Lesbians and queer feminists engaged together in demonstrations, wrote texts that aimed to offer a gendered analysis of the crisis and of this particular attack (the role of the media, the medicalizing and pathologizing discourses of the state). Outside the Feminist Centre was written on the walls: “Whoever walks home at night, shit and mud to KLPNO” and “HIV-positive women aren’t dangerous but misogyny and patriarchy.” In addition, many activist lesbians erased Golden Dawn slogans on the city’s walls, yet this didn’t have an organized character, it was spontaneously done and usually at night.

Within the queer feminist and lesbian community, the immediate effects of economic precarization were rarely discussed *per se*. This has to do with the fact that grassroots (and autonomous) feminist groups focus on the disruptions of cultural norms, structurally embedded, in Greek society. Culture *per se* is the main locus of their politics. There was (and never has been) no problem-solving orientation in the politics of queer feminist and lesbian collectives. During the crisis, it was politics as usual for queer and lesbian feminist activists, which involved building spaces of care and support, producing leaflets and texts that shed light on the gendered and intersectional aspects of the crisis and demonstrating against racism and homophobia. The making of spaces, the building of networks of solidarity (between LOA, the Lesbian Group of Athens, and an anti-racist community space for immigrants and refugees at Exarchia, which I will call henceforth “Purple House”, and between Queericulum Vitae and autonomous antifascists) and the analysis of the ongoing political climate informed the activism of the women of my study.

Kirtsoglou has argued that there has been a deconstruction of the “social contract” in Greece, as neoliberal projects shrink the welfare state and social policy in general (Kirtsoglou: 2013). This context has also been described as a process of de-democratization in which social and political rights are undermined and the politics of fear increase militarism and securitization (Athanasίου: 2012). However, the Greek state and law hasn’t granted, until recently, any rights to gay, lesbian and trans people and therefore, the social contract doesn’t apply in a similar way to those who were already partly excluded from its sphere of rights and entitlements.

The relation of gays, lesbians and trans people with the Greek state was already broken. In fact, there is a prevailing lack of trust to the Greek state as guarantor of social rights. The crisis was less about a bond broken for LGBT people, it reflected the

reinforcement and expansion of violence and precarity into other domains of gay, lesbian and trans life- rise of unemployment, cuts in social welfare. Trans people have never relied to the state to pay for their transitions and at the same time they suffer exclusions from the job market. Lesbians and gays can rarely cuddle and kiss carelessly in public space and often experience rejection and silencing by family relatives, co-workers and friends. This is not to argue that LGBT people are simply victims of Greek heteronormative violence but to illustrate that the already precarious subject experiences dispossession with much less surprise, namely gays, lesbians and trans people have greater familiarity to living in a state of precarity long before the crisis. In addition, queer feminists and some lesbians clearly position themselves outside the frame of anti-austerity rallies (the “indignant movement”). In particular, queer feminists have criticized the indignant movement for its patriarchal (the Greek family man as the main victim of the Greek crisis) and patriotic underpinnings (use of Greek flags and patriotic slogans).

In other respects, the crisis also represents a crisis of cultural values and an opening to other possibilities of living. For instance, the rise of alternative communitarian economies and the opening of Beaver (a woman’s co-op set up by lesbians of the community), the inclusion of a human rights and LGBT agenda in the public sphere, the questioning of family values in popular cultural products- the films of Yorgos Lanthimos (“Dogtooth”) and Panos Koutras (“Strella”)- and finally, the proliferation of queer feminist collectives and LGBT groups at a time of heightened social conservatism and hostility (between 2010-2014).

### **1.1.2 Research questions and thesis outline**

My study concerns the experience of gender questioning among women and non-normative sexualities, who are involved in the lesbian and queer feminist activist scene, and explores the ways in which these experiences co-constitute individual and collective identities in the domains of sexual and gendered subjectivity, LGBT activism and political discourses, body pleasure and sexual practices, and finally lesbian and queer sociality and spatiality. How do sexual minorities live and flourish? What kind of

same-sex sexual subjectivities and identities are created in a period frequently described as a period of crisis, loss and dispossession? What kind of tools and imaginaries do women construct in order to produce conceptual and physical spaces? How does queer fit in the Greek cultural sphere? How is same-sex erotic desire discussed and approached? How does sexual identity intersect with age, class and gender?

These ethnographic questions open further epistemological concerns (Engebretsen 2008): How can one address the ongoing contradictions between discourses and practices, between the collective and the individual, between women's self-representations of being lesvia of some kind and the continually shifting notion of lesvia? How to deal methodologically with the apparent gap between rhetoric (discourses), community-building and self-narratives? Or to put it bluntly, how to bring together the makings of an emergent queer feminist community with women's narratives about sex, love, gender and erotic desire? In this respect, I address queer and lesbian discourses, practices and histories in Part A and then I extend the discussion from collective politics and practices to intimate, private matters of love, sex, gendered sexual subjectivity and lesvia sociality in Part B. There is no literature review chapter per se, I found it more productive to draw from different kinds of literature and spread the literature throughout the thesis and produce grounded theoretical claims that are set alongside the ethnographic analysis.

Chapter three and four trace the history of the homosexual and lesbian feminist movement along with the discourses and practices in which the women of my study engaged. Chapter three details the history of the homosexual and lesbian feminist movement through posters, archives, newspapers and texts. It's a history of concepts, practices and discourses that draws temporal lines across past and present and shows how the practice of writing a history chapter consists an act of re-writing minoritarian history and making/preserving memory. This overview also demonstrates recurrent state discourses and policies (AIDS epidemic), patterns of lesbian sociality, forms of community building, as well as the fragility of building political coalitions (between lesbian feminists and straight feminists). The ephemeral character of lesbian history brings to the fore the notion of the haunting political subject that appears, disappears, and reappears only to haunt the linear temporality of Marxist social movements in

Greece and to disrupt the western idea of progressive time (moving linearly from oppression to liberation).

In chapter four I explore the idea of the haunting feminist subject by looking at a range of practices and discourses developed by grassroots feminist groups and collectives. Most of the women in my study were involved in feminist groups and saw their involvement as defining for their sexual subjectivity. During fieldwork I found that activism wasn't just about politics and discourses but included a wide range of social and subjective experiences. By exploring the strategies and practices women develop in order to make space for themselves, I came to understand that feminist identities are primarily experienced through time and space. I am drawing here from Sarah Ahmed who looks at the ways bodies "inhabit" and "appear" across space and time, the noise they create in a room and the building of communities that override linear historical time (Ahmed, 2017).

Sarah Ahmed also suggests that feminist work is memory work, it entails working to remember what others wish to forget or shove away (Ahmed: 2017). In this sense, I argue that the world the women of my study build and constantly rebuild is shared memory. They accumulate work over time and return to past claims (anti-rape claims), they refuse to ignore what anarchists and Marxists wilfully shove away, they challenge hegemonic spatial arrangements by appearing in unconventional ways. Drawing from my ethnographic material on the making of queer feminist worlds, I propose the concept of the "haunting" to describe the queer feminist political subject and its work which centrally involves playing around and redefining conventional notions of time and space. The last theme explored in chapter four concerns the introduction of queer in the lesbian feminist scene. In Greece, queer is a culturally untranslatable (in Greek language and culture) word that invents its own history and finds its place at the intersections of western and local worlds. A look at how feminists discuss queer shows that it's fraught with tensions, reluctance and prevalent questioning of its western underpinnings.

Hence chapter five serves to shed light on the building of an emergent queer feminist community by dealing with debates over sexuality, sexual desire and gender, which formed the focus of many conceptual conflicts. The "Γλιτταίρ" (glitter) dispute, which was also the last women-only party to take place in Athens, and the t-shirt debate

brought together a variety of identities and subjects- gays, lesbians, straight feminists, trans feminists- some of whom normally moved in different circles, exposing and crystalizing changes in approaches within the community. Beyond the overt political disagreements were wider conceptual implications: the emergence of queer as productive discursive ambiguity that causes tensions over the boundaries of identities but also over the makings of identity per se (the “looking” versus “being” notion of queer); the deconstruction of the idea of a bounded community (the outer/ inner physical and conceptual boundaries of the community were constantly redrawn) and the emergence of two notions of community: community structured around gender difference (feminists) and community structured around homosexual desires (gay boys); and finally the contrast between society and the individual, which revolved around questions of spatial entitlement. The debates over queer, sexual desire and gender were the main “location” of a conflict between different perspectives which illustrate ongoing transformations within the community.

On the whole, Part A concerns the creation of an emergent queer feminist community, its struggles (discourses and practices) to carve out space for itself in Athens, its interactions with its past (homosexual and lesbian feminist movement); its spatial and temporal delimitation; and its haunting character. From Part A where I look at community life, discourses, practices and political subjectivities I turn to women’s narratives of sexual subjectivity, gender and the makings of lesvia identity (Part B).

In chapter six I explore women’s narratives and present an analysis of changing terms and meanings of different identity categories across generational lines. In this context, the category “lesvia” includes women who belong in different generations and are (or become) conscious of their same-sex erotic desire. By using generation as an analytical category I trace the genealogy of the lesvia category across the cultural narratives of similitude and difference. I draw here from Tom Boellstorff’s (2005) analysis of similitude and difference as a binary that contains potential analytical tension for the role of the western and local. The effects of globalization and the shifting of European and local dynamics can be traced in women’s generational sexual narratives. I locate the shift from same-sex desiring women to lesvia-identifying women as a transition from a narrative of similitude (desire for the same sex) to a narrative of difference (lesvia-identifying women who talk about same-sex erotic desire alongside

gender discontinuity). By this I do not wish to suggest that the global/local gap equates the similitude/difference nexus (local/similitude versus global/difference) but argue for the fundamental analytical importance of generation and generational time in which particular narratives about homosexuality are being worked out.

In chapter seven I explore the gendered stories of lesvia subjectivity which emerge in women's narratives about early childhood and their self-presentation in adult life. The categories *agorokoritsa*, *poustides* and feminine-questioning lesbies denote different understandings of the category "woman" and its intersection with homosexual desire. The *agorokoritso* category emerges in women's narratives about early childhood to denote a girl who doesn't fit within prescribed hetero-feminine roles. It also shows the prominence of the Greek hetero-gendered regime over sexuality and sexual desire since women construct and employ the *agorokoritso* category to talk about initial feelings of attraction and affection towards other girls. The category *poustides* as a gendered identification is employed by women who express erotic desire for other gender non-conforming girls, namely boy- looking girls, but also trans and gay boys. This gendered identification is fueled with gay fantasies of boy-to-boy sex. I also suggest that by identifying as *poustides*, boy- looking girls challenge the widespread machismo of straight masculinity in Greece and celebrate the effeminate tenderness of *poustides*. Feminine- questioning lesbies put forward alternative understandings of being a woman in Greece. They unpack the hetero-feminine (or hetero-female for the older generation of women) moral qualities (female modesty), social roles and cultural imperatives (marriage, motherhood) in order to craft their own place. As they narrate their stories, feminine lesbies chart personal genealogies that draw from the stories of their mothers and grandmothers.

In chapter eight, I enquire into the sensorial qualities of same-sex erotic desire. How do women put sex into words? Which sensorial experiences gain prominence in their self-narratives? Is there a gap between women's identifications and the sensorial? These are some of the questions that guide chapter eight in which I suggest that active and passive sexual roles work to reaffirm and blur the gendered underpinnings of lesvia subjectivity. The prominence of these sexual roles in women's narratives suggests that women build on the hetero-gendered activity/passivity nexus around which they play and essentially question its social meanings. I also elaborate on the role of penetration

as the sensorial experience upon which sexual roles and affects (openness and physical/emotional touchability) are defined, contemplated and challenged.

Whereas chapters six, seven and eight look at lesvia subjectivity as (individual) sexual identity, chapter nine looks at lesvia as collective identity which is achieved by socializing at certain spaces and places. I enquire into both activist and non-activist lesvia sociality (lesbian bars, Beaver and queer spaces) and explore the notion of the community beyond organized lesvia and queer feminist networks. I question the notion of what community means and how it is established through the sharing of lesvia and queer feminist identities and ideals (Part A). In this direction, I problematize the boundary between activist and non-activist spaces, between politicized and non-politicized women, between queer and lesvia sociality.

I begin by discussing the intersections between class and the lesbian bar culture of the 1980s till the present day and argue that lesbian identity as a political identity emerged out of the disidentification of middle-class women from the lesbian bar culture, frequently associated with working-class women and their lack of politicization. I continue by exploring queer spaces through the lens of activist lesbies and trans lesbies of a working-class background to argue that queer spaces are associated with a certain level of knowingness and sophistication regarding cultural diversity and western queer discourses and activism. In this context, I bring to the fore the dichotomy queer exceptionalism/ local provincialism and try to problematize its classed underpinnings. Finally, I look at the culture of *parea* gatherings developed at Beaver to argue that it enables an inter-generational and inter-classed blending between all kinds of women.

In the concluding chapter, I discuss belonging, displacement and nomadicality as key features of individual and collective lesvia and queer feminist life in Greece. I suggest that the makings of the queer feminist community and of lesvia subjectivity entails an incessant movement between groups and between identity categories. However, being mobile (physically and conceptually) means being in exile and crafting new worlds yet to be found. Against the backdrop of the *neo-poor* (new poor) subject of austerity (as conceptualized by Panourgia: 2018), I argue that lesbies and queer feminists are subjects who were in crisis long before the actual financial crisis and make this argument on the basis of a pre-existent differential distribution of precarity.

My thesis addresses the way objects of inquiry and particularly gender and sexuality are produced, studied and explored in the peripheral South in the field of anthropology. These are topics of inquiry that remain quiet marginal in the tradition of Greek academia that focuses extensively on class as a crucial socio-historical perspective of analysis. It is also about ways in which social scientists and anthropologists engage interdisciplinary with anthropological theory, methods, ethics, critical theory, gender studies and politics in ethnographic research. I thereby address the limits between disciplines and develop a framework in which theory and data come together in what Tom Boellstorff calls “critical empiricism” (2007: 19) (it’s not solely theory emerging out of data- empiricism- nor theory imposed upon data- grand theory- but an analysis that is brave to interpret and theorise data whilst also letting them speak for themselves).

Overall, this thesis offers a critical analysis of women’s sexual identities and subjectivities and their involvement in lesbian feminist groups and queer collectives in Athens. It draws from critical theory to discuss temporality, sexual generations, and spatiality in the making of the emergent queer feminist community and present the relation between lesbian feminism and queer. It also focuses on the ongoing gaps between gendered identifications and sexual desires, between the individual and the collective, between queer life possibilities and limits to these possibilities. In the next sections, I provide a comprehensive presentation of the terms *lesvia*, *queer*, *global/local* and the west in order to situate them in my study.

## **1.2 Definition of terms: *Lesvia*, *Queer*, *Global/ local* and the West**

Throughout my thesis, I use the terms *global* and *western* to some extent interchangeably as well as the terms *lesvia* and *queer*. In this section, I offer a brief ethnography-based and contextualized introduction on the use of these terms with the aim to clarify what I try to do and what I chose not to do in my study. I begin by considering *lesvia*, the main category of my research topic. I then turn to *queer* and



clarify its use in discursive and ethnographic terms and finally I look at the relation between local and global/western. In particular, I situate the notion global/local within the complexities of the Greek national identity and explore the effect of western influences within anthropology's Euro-centric inclinations. All in all, the west is employed and discussed as I encountered it and understood it in my fieldwork. In many cases, it appears interchangeably with the European and Angloamerican. Having said that, I wish to further clarify the relation between these terms by exploring my confused positionality within them (global/local and the west).

### **1.2.1 Lesvia**

The lesvia category is probably best described as collective and sexual identity for women who are self-aware of their same-sex erotic desire and come to see it as a defining marker of their subjectivity (Engebretsen, 2008: 54). Ethnographic studies conducted in the 1990s (Paxson: 2004; Loizos & Papataxiarchis: 1991; Papataxiarchis: 1991; 1992; Kantsa: 2011) underline the "weight" of gender and gender roles as prerequisite for the completion of appropriate Greek Christian Orthodox womanhood. The cultural "weight" of hetero-female roles, which include being a dedicated daughter and later becoming a good wife and mother, cannot be underestimated. In her study about lesbian life in the 1990s Venetia Kantsa (2001) suggests that women didn't necessarily identify as lesvies and attributed this to the prominence of the Greek gender regime as key feature of self-formation over sexuality and sexual desire (Kantsa, 2011: 128).

In the post-millennial era, new expressions of gender identity have emerged following the proliferation of spaces and activist groups for lesvia sociality. The women with whom I spoke identified as lesvies, yet there were acute generational differences on how women talked about gender, sex, and sexuality. For instance, some women of the older generation talk about same-sex erotic desire in terms of becoming women who desire other women. In line with Kantsa, this position seems to reflect the prominence of the Greek gender regime over sexuality and sexual desire (Kantsa, 2011: 128). Although this might be true for the 1990s and for the older generation of women, I suggest that lesvia identity in the post-millennial era and especially for the young

generation of women contains within it a new self-consciousness and awareness of sexual identity and desire.

Generation and sexuality as analytical categories intersect in fundamental ways and produce differently gendered lesbies that inhabit similar spaces yet construct different sexual narratives of self-formation. More specifically, there are two groups of women presented in my thesis: Same-sex desiring women who socialize at Eressos and talk about same- sex desiring subjectivity and express desire for the same sex (women-to-women love) and younger lesbies who surf on queer websites and talk about sexual subjectivity alongside gender discontinuity and a clear- cut delimitation between straight and non-straight worlds. Sometimes, in certain contexts, the politicization of the lesvia category amongst young women produces other gendered identifications like butch, femme and *poustides* which emerge on the intersections of western and local worlds.

In line with Engebretsen and Blackwood I came to understand lesvia as the conceptual site where various meanings regarding gender, sex and sexuality come into play and are explored, negotiated and constantly renegotiated (Blackwood: 2005a; Engebretsen: 2008). This also provides the conceptual framework for exploring lesvia collective identity in relation to spaces and places which bring to the fore the classed underpinnings of lesvia sociality. On the one hand, women's participation in lesvia activist spaces becomes a distinctive marker of lesvia consciousness. On the other hand, so-called mainstream lesbian bars are classed by activist lesbies as spaces inhabited by working- class women with "vulgar" attitudes. Class and sexuality intersect in important ways and bring to the fore divergent modes of social interaction and classed habitus. In line with Lefebvre who argues that social relationships are played out spatially (Lefebvre: 1991 {1974} cited in Engebretsen, 2008: 54), I suggest that women's adherence or membership to lesvia collective identity is marked by their participation in certain social spaces and places and not others (Eressos, Beaver, activist groups, women-only parties, lesbian bars).

Overall, the lesvia category is explored in my thesis as sexual subjectivity and identity which emerges through women's narratives and as collective identity which is primarily lived and experienced by women's adherence and participation to lesvia activist and social spaces. In this sense, lesvia sociality becomes the definitive marker of

lesvia collective identity effectuated at *parea* gatherings at Beaver, Eressos, lesbian bars and women- only parties. At the same time, gender non-conformity, either physical and/or emotional, along with activist engagement and self-awareness are seen as key aspects of lesvia sexual and activist identity. Throughout my thesis, I look at the lesvia category in terms of sociality- lesvia as collective identity- and sexual subjectivity- lesvia as sexual and gendered identity- whilst also elaborating on the intersections of lesvia sexuality with class, gender and age.

### 1.2.2 Queer

Undoubtedly, queer theory has exerted influence in the shaping gay/lesbian anthropology, however it has maintained a detached relation to everyday experience. I agree with Lewin and Leap (2009) that “the primary data sources informing queer theory have been literary or philosophical texts, rather than ethnographic ones” (Lewin & Leap, 2009: 6) and that “queer theory’s problematic relationship to the particulars of lived experience should not be pushed aside” (Lewin & Leap, 2009:6). In line with Lewin and Leap (2008) I also suggest that “any form of theory- building should affirm everyday political experiences and not disguise them” (Lewin & Leap, 2009: 8). In this sense, I consider queer both discursively and ethnographically. Firstly, I draw from women’s activist material (texts, posters) and practices (from graffiti and wall slogans to open discussions) to argue that queer as a category creates discursive disruptions by bringing to the fore prior and new social and cultural tensions (identity battles, class differences). Secondly, I consider queer through women’s self- narratives. Women come to see queer as a “thing” that’s far from their experiences of same-sex erotic desire. By this I mean that women don’t employ the term queer to talk about sexual subjectivity, namely they don’t identify as queer and claim that queer has less cultural and social shock value to the term lesvia.

On the level of discourses and social activism, I explore queer through the notions of “haunting” and “appearing” that run across time and space and activate dynamic gaps between European, Angloamerican and local worlds, between how queer is thought, discussed and practiced in a western “elsewhere” and how women relate it to Greek everyday reality and local activism. Given the word’s untranslatability in Greek

language I suggest that women tend to split its political and discursive usage from their sexual subjectivity and identity. This semi-detachment reflects the aforementioned tendency of queer theory to rely on the discursive and ignore everyday experience- what Sherry Ortner calls queer theory's "ethnographic refusal" (Ortner, 1995: 173 quoted in Lewin& Leap, 2009: 8) or what Joanna Mizielska calls "discursive inclusion" (Mizielska, 2011: 85-107), namely the use of queer terminology before people have actually began using it to talk about themselves. Queer attaches itself to the sphere of politics and social activism but remains semi- detached from women's narratives. Very often women talk about queer as a practice of conscious disidentification (Munoz: 1999) from oppressive social categories, a process that enhances their identification with the lesvia category.

The use of the term queer in relation to sexualities suggests latent differences between generations (older/younger lesbies) and between western "ideals" and local everyday reality. The global/ local dichotomy is dynamic, it can't be reduced to a difference between traditional/ oppressive Greekness and western- influenced sexual liberation. I agree with Boellstorff (2007) that "queer fails to adequately represent and include all people that could possibly be encompassed within it but never could or should" (Boellstorff, 2007: 18-19). By this, I understand that there is no possibility for an all-inclusive discursive term that can encompass all fields of human experience, including queer. It seems that something always slips away from language and discourse and that these slips reaffirm the impossibility of making full-graspable the complexity of gender and sexuality. However, what queer does, and should be explored, is that it serves as a "productive discursive ambiguity" (Engebretsen, 2008: 58) which re-activates social and cultural tensions between generations, classes, and ideological trajectories. And here is where the particularities of the ethnographic context enter the picture.

Queer becomes the site where different generations of women, differently classed and with different political claims explore the notions of western and Greek. In this context, queer serves to stage various tensions by inhabiting the place of an empty signifier, as conceptualized by Laclau (1996), a word that has no history and definite meaning in the Greek cultural sphere. Its history has to be invented and in this process it serves as productive discursive ambiguity capable of absorbing, diffusing, confusing and redefining tensions and categories by opening new avenues of inquiry on the

meanings of identities, politics and locality.

### **1.2.3 Global/ local and the West**

Throughout my thesis I discuss lesbian and queer social worlds and discourses in the intersections of global/local gaps. Similarly to Engebretsen (2008) I do not treat this gap “as a problem that needs resolution and don’t purport that the global/ local dichotomy is to be defined as a categorical, boundary-making term” (Engebretsen, 2008: 57). This dichotomy has been widely debated by anthropologists who study non-normative sexualities in non- western societies (Boellstorff: 2005; Blackwood: 2005a; Engebretsen: 2008) and are interested into how identity categories of Western origin-lesbian, queer, butch/femme, gay, transgender- travel to non- western cultures. This approach questions the anthropological focus on the non-western queer “other” and offers a transnational approach to sexualities that pays attention to the mobility of terms and categories as well as the assemblages created by particular locals within the global movement of queer identities and discourses. In this context, Blackwood suggests that the circulation of queer knowledge in non- western societies “helps to create not a “modern” lesbian identity but an imagined space of “like-minded” individuals situated within a larger global community” (Blackwood, 2005a: 187, also quoted in Engebretsen: 2008).

The Greek case though is somewhat different in that it doesn’t fit neatly within the western/ non- western binary on which anthropology is based and which it continually strives to grasp, negotiate and redefine. In line with Herzfeld’s book (1987) and Verdery’s review of this work (1988) I also suggest that the Greek case is exemplary of the discipline’s Eurocentric roots as well as of its partial failure to fully acknowledge its origins in Europe’s quest for self-definition which required it to pursue that definition of “elsewhere” to exotic “others” whilst at the same time ignoring the result of this process to others (like Greeks) who don’t fit neatly in the category of the exotic “other” (Verdery: 1988).

Herzfeld (1987) offers an insightful critique to anthropology’s “Eurocentric lust for self-definition” when he argues that western Europeans constructed and continue to construct their own genealogy (which includes Greece) on a discourse rooted in

romantic nationalism (Herzfeld: 1987 quoted in Verdery, 1988: 313). In this direction, he calls for “the discipline to acknowledge its Europeanist inclinations which he locates in the discipline’s overemphasis on structure, rules and theory at the expense of process, strategies and practice” (Herzfeld, 1987 quoted in Verdery, 1988: 313).

Any consideration of global/local worlds in the study of homosexuality in Greece needs to be placed within the discipline’s Europeanist inclinations and within the particularities of the Greek national identity. Regarding Greek national identity, Herzfeld (1987) purports the existence of a western/ orient oscillation which results from the fact that western Europeans assigned Greece “a special place as sacred ancestor of European civilization” (Herzfeld: 1987, also quoted in Verdery, 1988: 311). This entailed a continual struggle for Greeks to obtain control over their identity (Herzfeld: 1987 quoted in Verdery, 1988: 311). On the other hand, “Greece’s absorption by the Ottoman empire meant a fall from grace, a pollution of its European qualities by the taint of the orient” (Herzfeld: 1987, also quoted in Verdery, 1988: 311-312). Herzfeld goes on to describe “the character of Greek national identity within a set of contrasts between an official ideology with its hellenizing European orientation, its suppression of diversity, its concern with honor and normativity, and an intimate set of usages attached to “Romiosini” and the “inner Turk”, shame, identity as process rather than fixed absolute” (Herzfeld: 1987).

In Greece’s official discourse, homosexuality is expelled as the polluted remnant of a shameful Ottoman past. At the same time, notions of non-identitarian desire and lustful passion amongst men (the 1960s- 1970s gendered sexual scheme/ man-to-man sexual encounters) fit within Greece’s intimate discourse of the inner Turk who reacts to sexual fixity. Once globalization enters this dual national identity in the 1990s it is automatically connected to Westernization, European qualities and notions of western progress. By this I mean that there is a hegemony of western ideas, mainly European and Angloamerican, within the globalizing processes of Greekness, which is also reaffirmed by the fact that my informants often employ the notion of a western “elsewhere”. The notion of a western “elsewhere”, western “idealizations” and western identity categories (butch/femme, queer) to which I come back throughout my thesis when looking at women’s self-narratives and social activism consist part of the western/ orient oscillation of Greek national identity. More specifically, on the level of local

feminist and LGBT activism, the “west” signifies “identity politics and openness”, “America” or “Anglo-America.” Sometimes the “west” appears as synonymous with “Europe”, sometimes precisely with the “European Union” and its human rights discourse, sometimes “western Europe” and particularly “North-Western Europe” and “Berlin” (Mizielinska & Kulpa, 2011: 11-27). In any case, the “west” works as an ideal for “how things should be”, as an “elsewhere” that makes life “here” promissory since it enables imagining forms of being that are not quite “here” but nonetheless indispensable to imagining transformation “here.” In this context, I will be looking at queer globalization as interlinked with western, European and Angloamerican ideas.

In light of Herzfeld’s ideas (1987), this western “elsewhere”, which works as an ideal and as an incentive for transformation for local queer feminist and LGBT activists, is very much a product of Greece’s dual status as both the pariah of Europe and as its ancestral past. This notion of “elsewhere” is precisely the reverse result of Europe’s need for an internal “other” who could embody its past and glory (Herzfeld: 1987). The contradiction between “how things ought to be” and “how things are” draws from this western/ orient oscillation. By this I mean that identity politics and queer with their western heritage are classified as European qualities that contain the “right” ways of doing things. In this context, they are treated by local activists as authentic, complete and linked to European imaginaries whereas women who don’t identify as lesbians are considered as suffering from false consciousness and immersed within the intimate discourse of the inner Turk who enjoys the lack of fixity.

In the Greek case, the discussion of the global/ local dichotomy doesn’t fall neatly within a western/ non- western binary and one cannot neatly study how global identity categories are reterritorialized in the local national imaginary and/or how prior gendered sexual regimes change as an effect of globalization. The travelling of western identity categories in the Greek cultural sphere (butch/femme, lesbian, queer) and the claims of authenticity/ inauthenticity made by different generations of women who come from different social backgrounds cannot be clearly deciphered as I find myself as a native anthropologist trapped in constant national mirrorings. There is the mirror of the west to Greece as its ancestral past (the western portrayal of ancient Greece as the past of the modern homosexual); there is the internalized mirror of Greeks projected to the west as progress, fixity and control; and there is the internalized mirror of Greeks

projected to the orient as shame and lust. The latter is circumstantially employed either as source for shame or as source for pride and unruliness against Europeans' cultural tendency for fixity and control.

In the midst of these incessant mirrorings, I cannot clearly decipher which mirror is reflected when global ideas are transferred to the local; when the idea of a western "elsewhere" emerges in the local queer imaginary; when self-identified activist lesbians look down to working-class women who don't identify as lesbians; when queer activists import western ideas and practices to produce new discourses or when queers are considered by other activist lesbians as the elitist parts of the LGBT.

The global/ local dichotomy cannot be addressed without ambivalence as an opposition between global/western versus local/ "traditional" since there is a level of European complicity that works within this dichotomy. As stated by Herzfeld (1987), Greece is constructed as the internal "other" in the history of the European continent. Against this complex image, I chose not to address the national underpinnings of the global/local dichotomy though I discuss the ambiguities, tensions and discrepancies that emerge between western theory and local practice, between "here" and "there", between identity and non-identity, between sameness and difference, between women of the bars and activist lesbians that adopt western identity categories.

Coming back to my initial point, I agree with Moore (2004)- as recorded by Engebretsen (2008)- that the global/ local notion with its dynamics works "as a concept metaphor and that its role is not to resolve ambiguity but to maintain it" (Moore: 2004 quoted in Engebretsen, 2008: 58-59). By preserving the tension between universal claims and particular contexts and specifics new and different conceptualizations of what it means to uphold a certain non-normative subject-position become prominent (Moore: 2004 quoted in Engebretsen, 2008: 58-59). Undoubtedly, the ambiguity of the global/local brings to the fore spaces "where boundaries are explored, worlds are remade, universal meanings are reworked" (Engebretsen, 2008: 58). In line with Moore's point I also suggest that these are ambiguous spaces in which details, facts and connections produce context and meaning (Moore, 2004: 74). What's useful to keep here is that globalizing processes depict the interaction between western, mainly European and Angloamerican, ideas and practices with local Greek realities. In the



Greek case, local realities carry the particularities of a disemic<sup>2</sup> national identity<sup>3</sup> (Herzfeld: 1987) and the “weight” of anthropology’s Europeanist inclinations.

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<sup>2</sup> Herzfeld conceptualizes disemia as ideational system, a conflict of interpretations that encompasses all levels of social life. It encapsulates cultural tensions between a European sense of law and order on the one hand, and a Middle Eastern unruly and disordered idiom of relatedness, on the other. The later consists into a “further subdivision between the unities of self-display to those one does not “know” (*kseni*) on the one hand, and the knowledge of further internal subdivision that one shares with insiders (*dhiki [mas]*) on the other” (Herzfeld, 1998: 178).

### 1.3 Conclusion

I have discussed the socio-political contextual framework that situates the subject of lesbia and queer life in crisis-ridden Greece. I have demonstrated that the lesbian feminist and the emergent queer feminist community lived in a state of precarity long before the crisis and argued that the agency of these subjects is to be located outside the frame of anti-austerity movements (the indignant movement). I have engaged with the complexities of global/local dynamics and the west and their changing meanings in the domain of queer feminist discourses and practices. I have suggested that my complex positioning as a native Greek anthropologist in the midst of multiple and conflictual interpellations of national belonging made it harder to address the global/local and western nexus in a straightforward manner.

This is one of the first anthropological studies that brings together lesbian feminism with the emergent queer in Athens and which is primarily based on participant observation in the lesbian feminist and emergent queer feminist scene. It converses with previous studies on similar themes, including gay and lesbian life in Greece in the 1990s, historical studies on feminism and social movements in the post-junta era, and various considerations of gender, sexuality and kinship in Greece. In line with recent changes in the queer feminist and LGBT scene I suggest that internet cultures (social media), queer diasporas and transnational cultures, queer and Greek national belonging as well as the affective register of queer lives within austerity require further research.

In the following chapter, I set out the methodological framework for this ethnography. I present various methodological concerns in a processual manner (before, during and after fieldwork) from ethical dilemmas to self-transformation and positionality to data gathering and writing dilemmas. In this way, I wish to bring to the fore my continual efforts in pursuing this ethnographic study in the most honest way possible and reflect on my shortcomings and my difficulties in addressing issues that emerged post-fieldwork.

## Chapter Two

### Methodological Reflections

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss certain methodological concerns as they emerged before, during and after fieldwork. I should start by saying that I approach my field in line with Marcus' famous notion of multi-sited ethnography as a terrain (Marcus: 1995) where various spaces, places, people, practices and discourses coincide, blend, and meet. This approach entails following objects, people, places, discourses and stories and trying to locate links, discrepancies, meanings and aspirations. In this direction, I look at the field as an intersubjective site, where the other always requires the self to exist and vice versa.

The first section covers a wide range of methods with which I engaged during fieldwork: From life history interviews to participant observation to archival research to online ethnography and autobiography. Each method is discussed in relation to the challenges it posed, always bearing in mind its limitations. I then turn to positionality and reflect on the various aspects of my identity I brought to the field, how my presence affected field dynamics and the ways in which the field profoundly changed me.

The last section considers ethical constraints and writing representations. I look at how writing other's stories inherently bears some level of violence, the violence of ethnographic representation, which cannot be surpassed by simply stating one's good intentions. I also consider consent as processual, as something that can be initially given and later taken away. This was the case with interviews I conducted with trans women. A discussion of ethics before, during and after fieldwork involves considering a reciprocal, yet unstable, relation with the other, the informant, and trying to balance what people in my field would expect to read with what I feel I have to write in order to remain accountable to my study and the data I collected.

Overall, this chapter serves to clarify certain methodological concerns pertaining to this study but also to anthropology in general. I consider my use of methods alongside

Haraway's notion of feminist objectivity (Haraway: 1988), according to which the production of knowledge stems from partiality and situatedness instead of objectivity, "transcendence and splitting of the subject and object of study" (Haraway, 1998: 585-589). In this context, my partiality in the production of queer anthropological knowledge is seen as an asset. It also consists an exercise for myself as researcher to become more answerable for what I've learned from my fieldsite and how I saw it.

## **2.2 Research Methods: Fieldwork, Ethics, Positionality**

It is a common practice in the field of anthropological practice to discuss research positionality, subjective positioning and multiple aspects of the personal and research life that influence the ethnographic process, pre- and post-fieldwork. In their edited volume "Out in theory" (1996) Leap and Lewin insist that anthropologists should explore "the boundary lines defining and delimiting positionality in lesbian/gay anthropology" (Lewin& Leap, 1996: 5) and identify what is "the common ground contained in lesbian and gay experience" (Lewin& Leap, 1996: 5). In this context, research positionality and subjective positioning define fieldwork as a process that is constantly negotiated and re-enacted. In the discipline's history, fieldwork and the collection of data were seen as a scientific process and the anthropologist as an objective observer. The notion of scientific objectivity defined the discipline for many years, however today anthropologists view fieldwork as a process multiply situated and running across temporal lines, pre- and post-fieldwork.

The reflexive turn in social sciences subverted the idea of the observer as impersonal machine. More and more anthropological accounts convey how anthropologists relate to others, the ethnographer is no longer confined in a cultural vacuum. She/He brings her/his identity in the fieldsite. Thus, with the reflexive turn, the anthropologist as future author becomes self-conscious, reflexive, and critical about the ethnographic encounter and its possible power relations. The issues of the researcher's erotic subjectivity, namely sexual encounters in the field, falling in love with participants and constantly re-negotiating boundaries have been widely debated. Kulick and Wilson (1995) suggest that "erotic subjectivity does things. It performs, or, rather, can be made to perform, work. And one of the many types of work it can perform

is to draw attention to the conditions of its own production” (Kulick & Wilson, 1995: 5). It opens questions about the meanings of self/ other relation, and the power hierarchies that stem from the discipline’s colonial past (western self/exotic other).

In what follows I consider certain methodological aspects that frame the production of my research. By this I mean fundamental tensions between data collection and ethics, between self and other, between research positionality and subjective positioning.

### **2.2.1 Arrival, Entry, Data collection**

Before coming (back) to Athens, I had no access or prior engagement with the LGBT and queer feminist scene. I had no lesbian network, in fact I had no idea about lesbian life in Greece. Hence, I was very unsure if I would manage to conduct fieldwork on women’s same-sex sexuality. I had read the works of Venetia Kantsa (2001) and Elisabeth Kirstoglou (2003) and other Greek and English- speaking works on gay cultures (Yannakopoulos: 2010; 2011; Apostolidou: 2010; Riedel: 2005). My first contact with my fieldsite goes back to my time in Paris. When I left Greece in 2010, I went to Paris to study gender and sociology of art. There I met Dimitra, she was the first lesvia I met from Athens. She was participating in the organizing of “What Queer Fest?”, a three-day festival, which took place in various anti-authoritarian squats at 2010 with the aim to introduce queer and feminist concepts and practices to the anarchist scene in Athens. Dimitra became my point of entry to the lesbian community as she was the only lesvia I knew. By the end of 2010, I left for London and she returned to Greece.

After two years I contacted her about my research topic and she was very positive to meet and discuss. In one of my trips to Athens before the actual beginning of fieldwork (October 2013), Dimitra introduced me to Lora, a butch- identifying lesvia who was actively involved in the lesbian feminist scene for the past fifteen years. We went out a couple of times, she informed me about the various groups, the lesbian group, the queer feminist group, the trans queer group, their relations and the kind of work they do. As a member of the lesbian group (LOA) herself she warned me that it would not be easy to conduct fieldwork since my presence as researcher could affect the dynamics of the group (namely, the level of comfort women tried to feel in the group).

This put me off a bit and before my arrival I was contemplating the feasibility of the whole project.

Shortly after my encounter with Lora I moved to Athens, I rented my father's house in Pagkrati, which was very close to the city centre. I began by contacting institutionally- oriented LGBT groups (the Greek Homosexual and Lesbian Community- OLKE and Color Youth) and individuals working with international LGBT organizations (such as ILGA), who in turn provided me with valuable information and invited me to a couple of open events they were organizing for the information of the general public on coming out, homophobia at schools and talks about same-sex families. I also contacted a couple of local academics who worked on gender, sexuality and LGBT politics. One of them introduced me to a student who was a member of Color Youth, an organization for LGBT youths. For the first couple of months I was going to every LGBT event and open gathering taking place in the city. I began charting groups, collectives and spaces, and producing a cartography that helped me get a grip of the LGBT scene.

The one catalyst, door- opening space was Beaver, a woman's co-op set up by women affiliated to the lesbian and queer feminist scene. I began hanging out there with Lora and Dimitra. I met the women who worked at Beaver and many lesbian activists and I was confronted with a positive, yet cautious, attitude to me and my research topic. My sexual identity was an issue from the very beginning. I was frequently asked whether I was lesbia and if I wasn't how come I am interested in this topic. One Tuesday afternoon Lora and Dimitra took me to the lesbian group's gathering at the Feminist Centre- "*Come to get the baptism of fire.*" I entered the space and immediately sat to the first available seat. I felt women's gazes on me, they had curious looks that made me feel welcome and scared; I was "*new blood*" as Lora called me laughingly. It was clear very soon that my access to activist groups involved various "initiation rites" that had to do with negotiation of trust, fear of betrayal and my ethical accountability to the community.

In my second visit, I spoke to one of the older women who seemed to informally co-ordinate the meetings. She had a very positive attitude and urged me to talk about my research in the next group meeting. Once I disclosed my research topic, women reacted differently to my participation. Some women were positive and argued that this would offer visibility to the lesbian community and were happy that somebody would

record the group's history; others were concerned about how my presence would affect women, especially those who come for the first time in the group and already feel vulnerable and exposed. I was asked more than once whether I intended to come to the group regardless of my research topic. My dual status as a straight woman questioning her sexuality and as a researcher that's here to write a thesis about lesbian life in Athens complicated my participation. However, after two months the lesbian group (LOA) decided to accept me as long as newcomers were informed about my dual status. I also began going to the group's social gatherings at the Purple House, which took place every second Tuesday of the month (the Purple House is an antiracist space in central Athens, Exarchia, that hosts immigrants, refugees and antifascist groups) where I also met women who were "friends" but not regulars at group meetings. After four months, I had met many lesbians at Beaver, had been initiated to the "hat game", had begun attending LOA as well as LOA's social gatherings at the Purple House.

One month into fieldwork and I tried to get in touch with the queer feminist group (QV) for which I had heard many rumours that spanned from utterly negative comments to deep admiration. I had already spoken with one of its members and visited her to discuss my topic. She was also an anthropologist close to completing her thesis. She had also produced relevant work on gender and power relations in the anti-authoritarian movement. She promised to help by introducing me to the group but underlined that she could not guarantee how things would work out. She told me that the fact that nobody knew me beforehand could be an issue. After about three weeks from our initial contact she invited me to the opening of the group's social space. It would be a good chance for people to get to know me. There I met some group members who invited me to their weekly meeting.

In my first meeting, I was asked about my research topic and my role in the group. Initially everybody looked interested, yet the atmosphere was awkward as if people didn't know what to say or how to say it. I continued going and in the third week my participation was thoroughly discussed. My sexual identity was less important than my political affiliations, that is, whether I came here because queer is a trendy topic in academia and what kind of research ethics I uphold. The discussion lasted almost three hours after which I felt exhausted and seriously began reconsidering my participation in the group. In the end, the agreement was that none of the group's meetings,

dynamics, talks and disputes would be reflected in my research. It took more than four months to feel comfortable at QV, I rarely spoke and when I did, my body was shivering and my voice was breaking. However, by the end of the year, the queer feminist group (QV) became the space where I felt more at home and the people with whom I felt more close until the end of my fieldwork.

In one of the lesbian social gatherings at the Purple House I was introduced to Moira, a trans feminist lesvia who ran the queer trans group (QT). She invited me to come to their Friday meetings to get an idea of their work. After the Christmas break of December 2013 I went to the Feminist Centre, where the queer trans group held its meetings along with LOA. The group was very open to my participation, in fact it was never discussed per se. This was truly unexpected, yet it didn't consist a blank check to my participation. After a couple of months, I was told by one of the trans women that she was keeping an eye on me and told me that during the first period she was very negative to my presence since I wasn't talking very much about myself at group meetings. Similarly to the queer feminist group my presence to the trans group was based on the fact that I would not record any meetings or group discussions.

By participating in the above groups I gained access and acceptance as a feminist researcher that is trustworthy. This gave me access to activist women from different strands of the queer feminist and lesbian movement. In the second year of my research I had build rapport and trust with many women who had become my friends or at best my sisters. Going to parties, dinners and social gatherings in women's homes was an integral part of getting to know women beyond activist meetings and events. After ten months in the field I also organised parties, home gatherings and erotic poetry reading nights at my place. I disclosed my research status and discussed my project to the women I hang out at Beaver and other lesbian and queer spaces. It seems that news about my research spread fast in the form of gossips, rumours, and curiosity about "the new girl in town." The question of my sexual orientation was brought up every time I discussed my topic. I also followed LGBT blogs and websites and visited the LGBT bookstore, "Colorful Planet", where I bought local lesbian literature and poetry.



Regarding my research methods, I engaged with participant observation in social spaces and conducted informal life history interviews with a loose structure and focus on certain themes “family”, “childhood”, “love”, “sex”, “relationships”, “activism”, “identities.” I chose to record my interviews in order to reassure I would not forget what is said; recording was about making sure to remember things as they were said and a way to lessen my insecurities as researcher. The presence of the digital recorder unsettled some women, yet the rapport would markedly improve when I talked about my life. As Deleuze and Parnet (2002) suggest interviews are a way of grasping one of the multiple combinations that can emerge from an encounter, because they create a common space and time that has movement of its own (Deleuze& Parnet, 2002: 7, 27).

I think in this sense my interviews had unexpected outcomes, some themes were covered in great detail, others were left unspoken, and my position also shifted from listener to interlocutor. Each encounter triggered different emotions and I had to handle my insecurities and personal attachments when listening to women’s stories while also managing to deal with silences (and develop the skill of active listening, that is, giving space to the other’s feelings and thinking process). In many respects, the interviews were contingent time-spaces in which many contextual issues came into play. All of the interviews took place in Athens, lasted from four to eight hours, followed a life history format, and were conducted with women I met in the lesbian and queer feminist activist scene. Some women were actively involved into groups and collectives, others were part of a larger network that gathered around activist events and parties.

Informal chatting at social gatherings over food and drinks was also another source of ethnographic data collection. Social gatherings were the ideal space to open conversations, ask clarifications, contribute to debates and grasp contradictions between what people said in activist meetings and how they acted in real life. I would frequently excuse myself and go to the toilets to take notes of key phrases and words; it wasn’t always easy to make out my scribble notes the next morning. I didn’t openly discuss this practice since I felt that it would jeopardise the bonds of trust and understanding I was trying to create at the time. One time that I took my notebook out, women felt uncomfortable and began observing and talking about my note-taking. I would hand write my fieldnotes the next morning whilst I could still remember conversations and sensorial experiences. In total, I produced eight notebooks.

I also conducted archival research at the Feminist Centre, where the lesbian group kept an unorganized material of documents, posters, magazines and books on lesbian life and activism since the early 1990s. In addition, I visited the Feminist Archive “Delfis”, where I had the chance to explore in depth the history of the feminist movement from the late 1970s till the present day. And finally I visited the archives of the General Secretariat for Gender Equality that belong to the General Ministry of Internal Affairs.

By exploring along and across the archives, I tried to follow the development of lesbian life through ideas, processes and activities across historical periods. Zeitlyn (2012) argues that archives can be seen as instruments of hegemony, reflecting particular ways of thinking and governing populations (archives as an expression of governmental control over subjects). In this context, I looked at the AIDS epidemic as a recurrent medicalizing discourse that pathologizes the figure of the homosexual by rendering him unintelligible and threatening to the Greek national core. I also drew connections with the recent resurgence of the AIDS discourse (2012) in the context of a crisis- infused medicalizing discourse, in which the state was seen as a patient that needs help and protection from external others (in this case, the “polluted” migrant female sex-workers) that threaten its wellbeing and survival.

Another approach to archives, elaborated by Zeitlyn (2012), is that of “a liminal zone” (Zeitlyn, 2012: 465), that oscillates “between memory and forgetting” (Zeitlyn, 2012: 465). According to Borges, “to think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract” (Borges: 194 quoted in Zeitlyn, 2012: 465). In this context, “memory, including cultural memory, is always permeated and shot through with forgetting. In order to remember anything, one has to forget; but what is forgotten is not necessarily lost forever” (Assman, 2010: 105-106 quoted in Zeitlyn, 2012: 465-466). This approach perceives the archive “as a liminal zone where people, objects, memories and files may be potentially lost or retrieved”. Taylor (2003) calls this “the politics of ephemerality”, that is, “the power to choose to preserve/remember or to forget” (Taylor, 2003: 173-74, 192-93 cited in Zeitlyn, 2012: 466).

Looking at archives as liminal zones that enact and orchestrate rites of entry, passage, and exit between memory and forgetting fits well with my approach to lesbian feminist archives as haunting zones where different histories come into play with anti-

rape discourses creating feminist affective worlds across time. By going through archival material and previous academic works on lesbian history, the history of the lesbian feminist movement is repeated and rewritten, yet not forgotten. I treat archives and past academic literature as mediating traces connecting past and present and producing fragmented temporal and spatial charts of lesbian life. Rewriting is remembering and engaging with the politics of ephemerality that marks lesbian feminist history in Greece.

Mostly, I hang out and talked with women in different times and places such as Beaver, lesbian bars, home gatherings, taverns, holiday trips at Eressos, dinners and parties at private houses, mailing lists, discussion threads, online chats, and activist meetings. I travelled to my girlfriend's country house where I got to meet some lesbians who lived in the countryside. I also went to Thessaloniki for the 2014 Pride parade where I met some lesbian activists and hang out at squats and bars. I would find out about events and parties through the internet and social media (Facebook); most of the women were actively involved in discussion threads and others wrote articles for online magazines. Yet, many parties circulated mouth-to-mouth or through closed mailing lists. The highly sensitive condition of lesbian and queer sociality required a constant vigilance over the organization of parties and the circulation of invitations.

Another method of gathering data involved Marcus famous notion of following tensions as another site of generating a multi-sited terrain in ethnographic research (Marcus: 1995). By following conflicts over identity and membership that took place in parties and social gatherings I traced various spheres of everyday life, personal and activist life, and scales, global/local. By following conflicts online and in real life, I began tracing the conceptual threads which consisted the sources of commonality and difference in community building. The t-shirt debate and the "Γλιτταρ" (glitter) dispute, which are discussed in chapter five, emerged by following these disputes as they unfolded online and as I discussed them with queer feminists and lesbian activists. My engagement with social spaces and my active participation in the lesbian and queer feminist community demanded the use of diverse methods alongside a continual effort to balance personal, activist and research life.

### 2.2.2 Self- transformation, positionality and erotics in the field

Positionality is never neutral or easy to interpret. The researcher easily turns into an activist as the boundaries between personal life and the everyday life of the community become fluid and impossible to maintain. The latter involves making posters/ banners, writing and discussing activist texts, speaking publicly about lesbian politics, shooting a queer porn clip, going to demonstrations, bartending at parties, playing music, sweeping floors, gathering signatures, serving drinks etc. Marcus suggests that complicity (1997) is a crucial feature of ethnographic research, which entails that research positionings are entangled, they are never fixed. In this line of thought, my participation was always active, never passive, in fact fieldwork became a self-transformative experience where I witnessed my sexuality shift and change. A crucial element of Marcus' complicit approach concerns the need to rethink the self/other relation, which becomes more prominent when the researcher is an already "native" anthropologist.

Narayan (1993) questions the limits between outsider and insider status, between "real" and "native" anthropologists by analysing them as part of the discipline's colonial past. The underlying assumption behind the "real"/ "native" dichotomy is that "a native anthropologist would forward an authentic insider's view to the discipline" (Narayan, 1993: 671-686). In this context, native anthropologists are perceived as insiders that lack critical distance. The complex backgrounds of "native" anthropologists (in terms of class, ethnicity, gender) as well as the differences between different kinds of native anthropologists are passed over. However, fieldwork involves multiple strands of a researcher's identity. As noted by Narayan, different aspects of an anthropologist's identity become involved in different times; there are certain facets of the self that joined me with the women that I interviewed and others that underlined my differences (Narayan: 1993). In the context of homosexuality, the issue of the researcher's sexual identity and erotic subjectivity can be a source of difference or similarity. As a non-lesbian I was questioned about my interest in women's same-sex lives. This was frequently done in a sarcastic manner by women who directly questioned me on how I identify: "So you are the straight woman who wants to study the lesbians?", "Are you a lesbian?", "I will make one hell of a lesbian out of you", "Are you aroused with all the

*lesbians around you?*” These remarks, some intentionally provocative, others truly perplexed, marked my outsider status as a straight woman, who wasn’t previously affiliated to the community; it also shows the invisible boundaries of social worlds (between lesbian/ straight worlds).

As a native Greek who left to study in the UK I was considered wealthy and was treated with caution by queer feminists (QV). Especially my relation to British and capitalist academic institutions was frequently discussed as a sign of my ethical shadiness to anti-capitalist and anti-institutional principles. I had to negotiate the social weight of being a Greek researcher studying in a private foreign university, which marked me as an outsider to a community with anti-capitalist/ anti-institutional orientation. As a native anthropologist with a past in leftist activism and as a “wealthy” Greek studying in the UK, I wasn’t granted the benefit of doubt, namely, there was a firm expectation that I should know best and avoid making mistakes (for example, blending my double position as both researcher and activist). In addition, my previous affiliation to leftist activism formed in important ways my field interests in that I became more interested in queer feminist and lesbian grassroots politics that had an affiliation to anti-authoritarian politics. I saw this as part of my personal and political involvement. I was less involved to institutionally-oriented LGBT activism. Of course I kept notes of events and activities with an institutional agenda but my fieldsite included activist lesbians who formed community bonds around queer, lesbian and trans feminist grassroots collectives with an anti-authoritarian agenda.

The boundaries between personal and research life were hard to sustain, especially once my sexual orientation began to shift. Three months into fieldwork I got into a relationship with an activist lesbian. Gradually I was seen and began seeing myself as a lesbian. This transformation had tremendous impact on my fieldwork. Firstly, I shifted from sexual outsider to partial insider. Secondly, the shifting of my sexual identity became an experiential source of ethnographic data. I began noticing changes on how I perceived my body, how I experienced sex, how I began feeling socially invisible, how my activist engagement became source of my empowerment as a lesbian.

In the discipline’s positivist history, the autobiographical element of fieldwork had to be left aside given the pressure to split the self from the object of study. The anthropologist had to adopt a neutral and scientific approach to the field. The

autobiographical mode of writing was highly controlled in the process of ethnographic writing. Semi-autobiographical works began to emerge in the late 1960s and flourished after the reflexive turn in anthropology in the early 1980s. Judith Okely argues that the autobiographical experience of fieldwork requires the deconstruction of the relationships an anthropologist forms with cultures and/or groups as well as an examination of inner intangible experience (Okely, 1992: 1-29). As immersion proceeds the anthropologist begins to learn not only through verbal interactions but through all the senses, through movement, through bodies, and the whole being in a total practice (Jackson: 1983).

In this sense, the shifting of sexual orientation from straight to lesbian became source of knowledge. This can be traced in my reflections about penetration and sexual practices, the denial of hetero-femininity as a necessary step to becoming a femme lesvia, the ambivalent relation to western identity categories and the ongoing global/local gaps between the “here” of everyday reality and the “there” of a western “elsewhere.” By reflecting on my ambivalence towards the community but also by looking at my shifting sexual identity I was able to witness how feelings towards sexual desire and community-building move and fluctuate (moving from hetero-sexual to homo-sexual, from inclusion to ambivalence about the terms of community-building) and locate those that were similar to the accounts of the women I interviewed. This process enabled me to use those feelings to guide my analysis. I wrote dozens of personal notes that later mixed with my poetic engagement where I was also trying to find my voice and write from a feminine perspective. In the end, this whole endeavor accumulated to a coming-out and poetic text (see Appendix A) where the boundaries between self and other constantly shift and merge.

My status as an outsider to the lesbian community involved a process of getting to know Athens from the beginning. Everything was new and exciting from the places I visited to the parties I went to the way I began to see the city from the perspective of a self-identified lesbian feminist who writes lesbian slogans on public buildings in the middle of the night. In the beginning of my fieldwork I felt foreign in many respects, ten months later I began conducting interviews, which were also revelatory for myself. Women’s voices fueled my voice, in many ways I felt that I found myself through their stories. Overall, my status as an outsider, who became a partial insider, entailed that

fieldwork involved hard emotional labor, especially the negotiation of boundaries with myself and others as well as the continuous engagement with conflictual debates and unresolved questions on what it means to lead a lesbian and queer life in Athens.

The fact that while conducting fieldwork I became a lesbian meant that many participants were gradually seen as future lovers. At the same time, my research questions focused on lesbian love, intimacy, activism and sexual practices. In this context, an integral part of my socialization meant learning to deal with flirting and sexualized interaction in bars, meetings and social gatherings. In the beginning, this was particularly hard given my personal confusion and the way I was perceived within the community as “*the straight academic who studies in the UK and came to study the lesbians.*” Below is an autobiographical excerpt from my fieldnotes which depicts the fieldsite as an erotic site where desires and gazes from both researcher and participant meet and interact.

She arrived with a firm, yet clumsy walk, and sat by the bar. I watched her slowly roll a cigarette, lick it with care and place it behind her ear. Her eyes were dark brown, her lips were rosy, her skin was fair. Her figure was athletic and slim. I caught myself staring at her suspenders that loosely touched her breasts. I blinked and looked steadily across the narrow street. I was tired. I found it pleasant to let go a little, and spend my time with my hands folded on the chair. I leaned my head backwards; the word beaver was going round and round in my head.

I was feeling her eyes on my neck. I looked at her, she nodded with a smile. She then gave me an intense look that made my body feel exposed, dispersed all over the place, I felt shy and unable to assert myself, which made me even more anxious since I knew I could not hide my mood swings. She took a quick sip from her beer, lit her cigarette and strolled towards me like a modern flâneur. She sat next to me; there was an awkward pause. “*Well*”, she said, “*what star-sign are you?*” “*I am a Gemini*”, I said, a bit surprised with her line-opening question on astrology. “*You know what they say about Geminis? They cannot make a choice easily, they are always wondering what is the right thing to do- it is a question of ethics for them- whereas Virgos...they*

*simply change their minds all the time. My ex-girlfriend was a Gemini...oh god...she drove me crazy... So I hear you are the straight academic who came to study the lesbians?"*

Fieldnote excerpt, April 2014

The need to have my lesbian identity recognized, and the need for physical and emotional intimacy beyond the friendships I had from my past life in Athens, ultimately led me into a relationship with an activist lesbian. The significance of this relationship was far from clear to me during the ten months we were together. While I struggled to create a safe place and a new "home" where I felt sure of my identity, my relationship with another lesbian decentered and displaced me, forcing me to recognize the commonalities but also classed differences between us (Blackwood: 1995). At the same time, it helped me to regain my sense of self and establish a bond that bridged the distance between us. The end of the relationship impinged on my engagement with the lesbian group from which I left shortly after the break-up. However, I maintained close contact with many activist lesbians and continued attending social gatherings, talks and events. In many respects, fieldwork was emotional labour. I was investing in relationships, building bonds, getting hurt, finding myself. Two close friendships fell apart as a result of my dual status as both friend and researcher and the women requested that I delete their interview recordings, which I did. The fragility of my friendships in the field, the fact that I would easily go from intimate friend to neutral researcher, was part of the emotional risks I faced while forging friendships with people who were also my informants.

A considerable number of recent anthropological publications explore same-sex sexuality and ethnographic fieldwork, in particular sexual practices, sexual relations, and gendered identifications (Blackwood: 1995; Newton: 1993; Leap & Lewin: 1996; Weston: 1998). Elisabeth Engebretsen (2008) underlines that these studies focus on sexual practices and less on the nuances of erotic subjectivities (Blackwood: 1995; Newton: 1993; Leap & Lewin: 1996; Weston: 1998). Esther Newton discusses the anthropologist's erotic subjectivity as a flow of emotions- ranging from passionate erotic attraction to profound affection to lively interest (Newton, 1993: 13). My experience



resonates with Newton's ideas, as developed by Engebretsen (2008), in that my interaction with my informants involved a wide range of emotional intimacy from joking to flirting to gazing to touching "par hazard" to blushing (Engebretsen: 2008). Because I was perceived as feminine I attracted masculine-looking and acting women, who either identified as butch or as lesbians. It was not always easy to handle flirting especially during the first months of fieldwork when the codes of same-sex flirting were completely unknown to me.

While I find it hard to balance my personal with my research life, my simultaneous participation in three activist groups became a source of distress. The power dynamics between these groups and their ideological discrepancies meant that I had to be very self-aware of my political opinions. In more than one occasion I find myself in the middle of ideological cross-fires between these groups. In some cases, my simultaneous participation in more than one group was seen as an issue for my activist commitment and group loyalty. Once I established my presence I found it more easy to delimit boundaries between myself, fieldwork and interlocutors. So for the most part I lived alone and spend the weekends at my girlfriend's place; the first six months I was attending every event, party, open discussion, which resulted into my physical exhaustion. In the first three months into fieldwork, my body got sick and I had to undergo a small operation. The following months I was very selective about social invitations, I went mostly to things organized by the groups to which I was committed and trusted my instinct in decision-making when things got confusing and demanding. I also tried to allow the research to develop beyond pre-conceived notions and adapt my reflections to the concerns and issues raised by the women I met.

### **2.2.3 Ethical constraints and writing representations**

O'Reilly suggests that ethics is about "trying to ensure that you cause as little pain or harm as possible and try to be aware of your effects on the participants and on the data" (O'Reilly, 2005: 63 quoted in Engebretsen: 2008: 85). The importance of ethical principles emerges post-fieldwork as events, contexts, and voices start turning from an enmeshed collection of fieldnotes to an organized and theorized ethnographic analysis.

Most of my ethical questions emerged at the intersections of consent, disclosure, confidentiality and inner/outer community- boundaries.

I have already discussed some of the difficulties of conducting fieldwork in lesbian and queer feminist spaces, especially the contradictions between sharing these spaces as a community member and as a researcher. I found that it was complex to generate research dynamics in these spaces because people construct them as safe spaces for socialization. Doing research in these spaces entails a great ethical responsibility, which in my case was aggravated for the following reasons. Firstly, I wasn't previously affiliated to the queer feminist and lesbian scene, which made me very self-aware of the research dynamics I was trying to generate. Secondly, belonging into these spaces made me particularly sensitive to people's daily lives whilst the shifting of my sexual identity made it hard to decipher the limits between my multiple roles-empowered lesbian, community member, researcher. Thirdly, participants in this research are potential receivers of my research and some of them very aware of the literature on queer, anthropology, and gender and this brings to the forefront issues regarding how broader ethical concerns and ethnographic ideas will translate within the community.

During my fieldwork I came to meet a number of trans women, whom I interviewed in relation to their experiences of femininity, sexuality and community-building. By the end of my fieldwork and mostly in the post-fieldwork phase, trans women expressed a latent discomfort with the fact that they had provided me with interview material. For this reason, I decided not to include their narratives as I realized that their consent was initially given and later withdrawn. In addition, I find it hard to engage with trans narratives since the gap between cis and trans, between cis researcher and trans informant is very socially loaded and hard to work around given the vulnerability and marginalization of trans people in Greece. Trans people were skeptical of cis researchers. Many times I heard that cis researchers come to trans spaces to "examine" trans women by putting their bodies and experiences under scrutiny. This was a difficult reality for me to come up against. In addition, one of my interviews with a trans woman didn't turn out well, which made me more aware of my shortcomings but also of the intrinsic difficulty of interviewing trans people whilst lacking any experience of transitioning or gender- questioning myself. For these reasons, my study

focuses on the experiences of cis lesbians and queer lesbians, yet I have included two interview excerpts regarding the experiences of trans lesbians in queer spaces and one open discussion between trans feminists and anarchists in order to further illuminate the complexities of community-building.

During fieldwork and at all stages of interviewing, I have sought the informed consent of all participants. I didn't hand over consent forms as I found that it turned the interview into a formal and impersonal setting. There are limits to the use of ethical guidelines such as forms of consent especially when one conducts research amongst vulnerable groups and in homophobic countries like Greece. In these contexts, signing a form of consent enforces people to be totally open about their homosexuality in line with a Western-prescribed notion of visibility (visibility as transparency). In every meeting, I made sure to remind informants that parts of what they shared might be used for the writing of this thesis. In this sense, obtaining consent was a continual process of making sure that the interviewee doesn't forget the research aspects of our encounter. I have changed all their names and where possible avoided background information that could expose them in a harmful manner. In this direction, the places women visited abroad, the places they grew up and in some cases the spaces where they socialized are altered.

Where possible the groups and collectives to which women were affiliated are referred as general categories- lesbian group, queer group, trans group. However, the names of the groups are not altered as this seemed to make incoherent the overall structure of the thesis. Beaver is kept with its original name since it's a café-bar and less a community-space in the strict sense of the term. I struggled to protect the confidentiality of the women I interviewed. I was very much concerned with the fact that people already familiar to the queer and lesbian feminist scene in Athens might probably recognize several places and people in this thesis. On another note, I avoided writing about sensitive topics pertaining to emotionally-disturbing events in women's lives especially if they were not relevant to the argument. In addition, there is minimal description of spaces in order to protect the confidentiality of places and people. I am well aware that there are going to be people who will recognize themselves or others in this study. I wish that they will also acknowledge that my intention was, and still is, to

serve the production of deep knowledge and understanding about lesbian and queer feminist life in Greece.

Many choices that I made after fieldwork in terms of ethnographic analysis can be considered problematic from an absolute ethical perspective. Engaging with the inner/outer boundaries between community spaces and the outside world was particularly hard given the fact that they were constantly debated and renegotiated. This became a major concern in relation to chapter five on identity battles, where two incidents that took place within the community in the strict sense of the term actually involved wider social actors that made them public in the broader sense of the term. Inner/ outer community boundaries shifted constantly during fieldwork as did my thoughts on whether I should include these incidents. I have to say that there was no clear answer to this. In the end, I decided to include them since they may have started as community disputes but turned into wider debates that brought together different social actors- anarchists, feminists, leftists, people outside the community- and opened themes that went far from the community's agenda. There is no reference to groups or people, the debates are presented in terms of political arguments that put forward particular conceptualizations of bodies and identities. It is again my hope that the people who will read them will appreciate that my intention was to shed light on community- building and contribute to the understanding of queer and lesbian community- building in Greece.

As I've already said I found myself at the cross-fire of ideological battles between groups which had to do partly with my participation in multiple groups both as community member and researcher. Many times I expressed my opinion, quiet firmly, and didn't hesitate to criticize statements, events and relations based on the beliefs I was also developing as a community member- from misogyny to internalized homophobia to scapegoating practices in group dynamics. This was particularly hard when I was called upon for not raising my opinion or for having a different opinion from the one my interlocutors expected. I gradually became more confident in raising concerns as a community member and splitting my opinions and disagreements from my research status.

Similarly to other trainee anthropologists with whom I have discussed post-fieldwork and writing-up, I also experienced the need to disengage from community

activities as a result of the writing up process, albeit for other reasons. I found it particularly hard to maintain my bonds with the community in the process of writing “about” the people I met and engaged with. In the writing-up phase I needed to take the time and space to reflect on the material I had collected and create an environment in which tensions, stemming from my personal life as well as from my involvement in the community, could be processed and negotiated.

In order to engage with women’s narratives analytically, I had to distance myself from friendships I had build during fieldwork, which meant withdrawing from community activities and stop seeing people I had interviewed. I had found myself in the community and I found it difficult to reconcile the demands stemming from my involvement to community activities with the demands of the ethnographic analysis. As I began working on my material, I felt even more the need to distance myself completely from queer and lesbian events. Whenever I visited Greece I only met a couple of friends and avoided going to community events and parties. This was partly due to the weight queer and lesbian lives had taken all over my personal life and from the need to create a critical distance in order to engage analytically with my material.

While these ethical concerns made the process of writing particularly hard and slow, the issue of representation became a major concern. In every process of ethnographic representation there is a dimension of closure, which entails folding back from the openness of fieldwork to the closure of academic authority and the speaking on behalf of others. During the first phase of writing “I tried to develop a form of political lyricism that worked on the edges of theory, personal diary, women’s narratives, and political manifesto” (Manesi: 2018, conference abstract, Retrieved from: <https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/easa2018/paper/44387>).

I found very appealing writing in a form that made indistinguishable what is said from the way it is said, blurring the boundaries between ethnographic reality and fiction, merging voices, and academic and literary genres. My need for this type of engagement with the material resulted from my deep immersion into the field, which had taken over my whole life to the point that poetic (and feminine) writing emerged as part of the post-fieldwork phase. Gradually, poetry and creative writing found their place in my life and in this thesis (see Appendix A) and I was able to distance myself enough to approach analytically and ethnographically my material.

Overall, the writing up process could be divided in three phases: I spend the first year dealing with the effects the research had on my life, writing my coming-out story, engaging with poetry, and struggling with the distance I had to create in order to write ethnographically whilst also feeling a strong need to find my voice and language as a feminine lesbian academic. The second year I had to deal with the ethical constraints of my writing, which involved an ongoing negotiation of boundaries drawn during fieldwork and ethical concerns raised post-fieldwork. The third year I had to deal with the violence of writing, as Blanchot says “writing is the greatest violence” (Blanchot, 2003: xii), and the weight of authority that stems from it. I had to build the confidence to write about women’s lives and analytically reflect on their narratives. I found that by acknowledging the force of ethnographic representation and the violence of writing I was able to deal with the uneasiness, anxiety and discomfort I experienced as part of this process and build the necessary confidence to write.

## 2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed methodological concerns, research aspirations, difficulties and shortcomings, from positioning to ethics to processual consent. By looking back to this discussion on methods I understand it in relation to the distance/proximity nexus of ethnographic research. Throughout the 1980s, there was an empathy boom which urged ethnographers to break free from the position of the objective observer and seek to get closer to participants.. As articulated by Weston, empathy within anthropology (developed after the 1980s in the history of the discipline) entails an effort to better understand, grasp, feel and inhabit the world of the “other” while recognizing the privileged position of the ethnographer as the one who touches upon and interprets the “other” (Weston, 2018: 16). In contrast to empathy, Weston suggests that “it was always sympathy that cultivated in the fieldworker a kind of biographically informed imaginative apprehension that is faithful to people’s circumstance, not her own, and more productive of insight than any objectivist detachment” (Weston: 2018: 21). Thus, maintaining the necessary distance to produce knowledge is seen as prerequisite of the ethnographer’s magic. I agree with Weston’s notion of the ethnographer’s sympathetic magic, which consists into a spatial reconfiguration that establishes a strong relatedness between people and things, between environment and people, between researchers and participants either through direct contact or close proximity. Once established these relationships seem to persist, even at distance, since their affective registers have impinged us in formidable and profound ways (Weston: 2018).

My ethnographic magic brought me in close proximity with the other and with myself even when the creation of distance at post-fieldwork was seen as a necessary step for the writing process. I sat down with women, projecting my fears, desires and losses a gap hanging between us, making us uncomfortable and at ease. Together, we worked out what went wrong and right in our lives, what formed us, what molded our skin and left an impenetrable stain. Together we found what we had in common and what separated us. Together we tried to produce an understanding out of messiness. I tried to feel responsible to the abstraction of knowledge-production, but as time passed, I felt

responsible to deliver the rage, hope, love and tenderness that women have entrusted to me. Informed by this sense of responsibility towards knowledge, towards these women, but also towards myself, I made particular choices that defined what is said, what must be said, what is not said and what is left open for future analysis. I hope that the women will appreciate the effort and find aspects in this study that resonate with them.



**PART A**  
**Politics, Temporalities, Identities**

## CHAPTER THREE

### Charting lesbian feminist and homosexual local history or An exercise in queer collective memory

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I delineate the Greek sociocultural context of homosexuality in general and female homosexuality in particular with a focus on the history of the homosexual and lesbian feminist social movement. An examination of the history of these movements serves to contextualize my research and helps to situate homosexuality between western and local dynamics and trajectories, and across different historical periods. However, the writing of this historical overview brought to the fore a series of questions regarding its purpose and aim: Why a chapter about history? What's the purpose of repeating history? And if you write a chapter about history, does it serve western academia or the people of your fieldsite? And how does it relate to local academic knowledge produced in Greece to which Anglo-American academics do not have access? These questions regarding power and the production of knowledge kept returning throughout the writing of this chapter and by the end, the answer was twofold.

Firstly, by offering a historical overview I grant validity to the ethnographic present of this research. This reflects an epistemological propensity towards historicisation, which pervades much of the thinking of our time, anthropology being no exception, and attests to a tendency to include all aspects of human life within genealogies (of objects, movements, knowledges) with the aim to account for the constitution of the social. Secondly, by repeating the histories of the homosexual and lesbian feminist movement, queer collective memory is preserved. Repetition here works as part of a self-learning process but also as a way to grant these minoritarian histories a recurrent presence. Concurrently, these histories downplay the metaphysical character of the concept of history (linked to linearity, teleology, eschatology, continuity) since queer historical time is fragmented. The only way to talk about these

movements is by going back and forth in time, looking for traces, echoing disjunctions and gaps that produce new links.

The history of the homosexual and lesbian feminist social movement has been widely recorded by Greek and foreign historians, theorists, activists. There is a gap between Greek and English-speaking academic work with the work produced in Greek remaining largely untranslatable and underrepresented compared to English-speaking academic work. This gap reflects the power structures of knowledge production that tend to prioritise Anglo-American works. As a native anthropologist myself I encountered this gap; it was puzzling as much as it was challenging. On several occasions, it felt as though I were literally translating knowledge from one language to the other, from Greek to English, and moving knowledge from the South European periphery to the Northern European centre. By locating myself in between two languages and “translating” Greek academic work in English for an Anglo-American audience, I am also trying to bridge this gap by looking at “translation” as a re-writing process.

The chapter is structured into two large sections. The first section engages with the history of the homosexual movement from its early years till the present day. I focus on the AIDS epidemic as a recurrent biopolitical discourse structured around the nation as body politic and its perceived vulnerability vis-à-vis non-normative sexualities and identities. A similar biopolitical discourse emerged in 2011 targeting allegedly HIV-infected female migrant sex workers. The latter was analysed by queer feminist collectives as part of the state’s patriarchal violence that strives to preserve the “cleanliness” of the male Greek citizen by rendering non-normative sexualities and bodies dangerous for the Greek national body. The first pride gatherings and the ongoing tensions between Taxstis and Velissaropoulos reflect the turbulent co-existence of a gendered sexual scheme (man-to-man sexual economy of desire) and the emergence of an identitarian movement with its focus on homosexual desire. AKOE emerged out of ongoing divisions between travesti and homosexuals, between homophiles with influences from western gay identities and the gendered sexual scheme according to which a man didn’t need an identity to have sex with another man. This cultural reticence against identity is located in the shift of AKOE’s proclamation from a discourse that purports the liberation of homosexuals to one that purports the

liberation of homosexual desire (depicted in the shifting of *Amfi*'s subtitle from 1978 to 1979).

The second section looks at the history of the lesbian feminist movement throughout the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s. I draw from the archival material I collected at the Feminist centre, where LOA held its meetings, and at the feminist archive "Delfis." I also make use of interview material and zines that circulated in activist spaces. The recording of lesbian feminist history by Greek scholarship is recent, yet quiet rich<sup>4</sup>. The work of Venetia Kantsa about the lesbian community of Eressos (2010a); the work of Elisavet Pakis on the theatrical performance "Lesbian Blues" (2010); the co-edited volume "Women's Greece" (1992) which includes works from activists, historians and anthropologists; the two-volume publication on Dora Rosetti by Odos Panos (2012) which includes her interview to the lesbian feminist activist Eleni Bakopoulou (2012); and several co-edited volumes on gender, sexuality and critical theory which include articles about same-sex parenthood and reproductive technologies (Kantsa: 2015); lesbian and gay spatial boundaries (Kantsa: 2010b); lesbian motherhood (Kantsa & Chalkidou: 2014), written mostly by Venetia Kantsa etc.

These anthropological studies were conducted by researchers who developed close contact with the community, yet didn't necessarily identify as lesbians or gays. Their main focus is same-sex desire through the lens of kinship roles (mother- daughter relationship). Identification processes are explored in relation to the "unregulated" sphere of sexual and erotic desire (that doesn't necessarily lead to claiming the "lesvia" identity). Affirmative and autobiographical studies have come to light in the last couple of years by "Polychromos Planitis" ("Colourful planet") though most of them focus on trans and the travesti culture of the 1980s (Betty Vakalidou's work), along with the short

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<sup>4</sup> In the last 10 years some edited volumes on gender and sexuality were published filling an important gap in Greek literature with major texts in critical theory- *Sexuality: theories and anthropological politics* (Yannakopoulos: 2006), *Feminist theory and cultural critique* (Athanasiou: 2006) and *The body borders* (Makrinioti: 2004). Butler's works, *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that matter*, were translated in 2008 and 2009 respectively. In 2012 the coedited volume *Body, gender, sexuality: LGBTQ politics in Greece* included the essays of certain activists and collectives. Moreover, the Centre of Gender Studies was established at 2006 to cover teaching and research needs in the fields of gender in social policy and policy analysis of gender equality in a European, national and local level (see: <https://www.genderstudies.panteion.gr/>). The department of Social Anthropology and History at the University of Aegean began offering courses at the postgraduate level in the field of Gender studies at 2003. The same year a new Master program entitled "Women and Gender: Anthropological and Historical Approaches" was launched. And finally in 2015 an interdisciplinary Master degree "Gender, Society, Politics" was introduced at Panteio University.

documentaries of Paola Revenioti about the life of trans women in the 1980s and her long documentary about kalliarda etc.

My lesbian historical overview builds on the work of Venetia Kantsa and adds the early and latter history of LOA, which hasn't dissolved as a group but is less active since it left the Feminist Centre on September 2015. I try to bring the fragmented lesbian history together not to make it a coherent whole but present its non-linear links and breaks across time. Apart from the history of the lesbian feminist movement through texts, archives and interviews, I consider the role of literature- the novel-diary of "Dora Roseti" and theatrical performances- "Lesbian Blues"- in its building. By the end of this review I look at women-only parties and disagreements that emerged between activist lesbians that reflect the influence of western queer activisms and discourses.

During the 1970s- 1980s lesbians were affiliated to the autonomous feminist movement. This was not an easy political alliance; in 1982 lesbians left the Women's coffeehouse at Genadiou street. After the demise of the feminist movement in the mid-1980s and the fallout between straight feminists and lesbian feminists, lesbians turned to gay organizations, networks (EOK) and magazines (Pothos in Thessaloniki), with whom they shared the same space and which hosted articles on lesbian themes. On the level of discourses, lesbian feminists crafted strong links with autonomous feminists. If the relation between lesbian feminists and straight feminists was active and quiet turbulent, the relationship between homosexuals and lesbians appears distant and aloof. They share the same space and lesbians publish articles at gay magazines and participate at Pride gatherings yet this was not a close political alliance in ideological and discursive terms. It was not until the emergence of QV in 2004 that this gap shifted in that QV introduced a queer feminist discourse that brought the homosexual movement closer to feminist discourses and tools of analysis. More specifically, QV illustrated the role of patriarchal structures in relation to Greek nationalist discourses that strive to purify the Greek male heterosexual citizen. In this context, the gay homosexual body is otherized and pathologized partly due to the dual discursive orchestration of patriarchy with Greek nationalism.

Overall, this chapter illustrates the most important moments of the Greek homosexual and lesbian feminist movement and critically reflects on the sexual and gendered discourses (re) produced through time. My intention is to present a

conceptual history by looking at the resilience of biopolitical, otherizing discourses put forward by socio-political and statist forces- the biopolitics of the AIDS epidemic and the securitization of the nation state- as well as discourses of gender and sexuality developed by those who engaged with the building of the homosexual and lesbian feminist community. In particular, I am referring to the gendered sexual scheme and the notion of masculine homosexuality, to butch/femme lesbian identities, to lesbian invisibility and the non-linearity of lesbian history. The latter inform how sexuality and gender are discussed by same-sex desiring women and younger queer lesbians in Part B.

### **3.2 1978- 1988: The homosexual movement, AKOE, the recurrent AIDS epidemic and first Pride gatherings**

Throughout the history of the modern Greek state, homosexual acts have been subjected to some form of legal control. Homosexuality was considered a criminal offence until its decriminalisation in 1951, an act which is not however, synonymous with a broad social acceptance. The prevalence of the gendered scheme (male-to-male sexual economy of the 1960s and 1970s) is noted by Faubion (1993) who argues that what circulates socially in this economy is gender identity and not sexual identity. The only prerequisite of the male-to-male sexual economy is that it remained in the realm of an unarticulated common secret (Riedel, 2005: 85). Sex between men was not for social identities but for private enjoyment (Riedel, 2005: 85). The emergence of the homosexual movement follows the Greek biopolitics of the AIDS epidemic, reappearing in 1976 and 2012 respectively, to classify vulnerable groups who turn into the abjected (Kristeva: 1980) figures of Greek nationhood.

The movement to be called Greek Homosexual Liberation, or AKOE, emerged with the AIDS epidemic, appearing in the Greek media before the virus itself, and shaping the way that activists forged a homosexual movement in Greece (Agrafiotis: 1997). The initial committee for the establishment of AKOE (Greek Homosexual Liberation Movement) appeared in autumn 1976. A main point of contention was the draft bill on the “protection from sexually transmitted diseases and the regulation of relevant issues.” The draft bill, as noted by Riedel (2005), sought to control sexually transmitted diseases by giving police the right to arrest anyone caught loitering in public space if the police deemed that they were cruising for men (Riedel, 2005: 86). In theory, anyone would be able to write to the police and whomever they charged would be duly detained for at least a year (Riedel, 2005: 86). When taken to court they further faced the punishment of exile. In addition, the draft bill targeted “immoral” women working in erotic clubs (“konsomasion”), namely female sex workers cruising men on the streets and in nightclubs, as well as those who had not been medically tested. More specifically, the draft bill proclaimed that the so-called “immoral” women would need a police permit to work in erotic clubs. It prescribes that “a woman will be characterized

immoral when she is over 21 and only after the decision of the local council in collaboration with the relevant police authority” (Amfi, 1977: 11).

One of the first gatherings of AKOE, which was arranged together with travesti, took place at the theatre Louiziana in Athens on 25 April 1977. Although the group did not exclude by principle lesbians, the organization consisted mostly of male homosexuals, which further reflects the invisibility of lesbians in the public sphere. The participation of travesti (there was no discourse on transsexuality and/or transgenderism until the late 1990s) in the creation of AKOE caused a wave of internal tensions, which, according to Riedel (2005) and Faubion (1993) depict a gap between western cultural assumptions of gay liberation and the local male-to- male sexual economy (Riedel, 2005: 87). In the male-to-male economy of the late 1950s and 1960s, any man could have sex with another as long as his sexual actions are all “active” (Faubion: 1993). His manhood does not come into question as long as he is not willing to give up his masculinity to another by taking a “passive” part, that is, becoming a “tsoli” (which in kalliarda<sup>5</sup> refers to a gay boy who gets paid for sex). This resonates with Bersani’s suggestion that “the distinction between roles approved for male citizens and others appears to center on the giving of seed (as opposed to the receiving of it)” (Bersani, 2010: 60), namely for a man to anally penetrate another is culturally interpreted as sexual release which does not render him a second class citizen (as opposed to the “poustis” who enjoys anal penetration).

One of the internal disputes was the Taxtsis- Velissaropoulos debate, both prominent figures of the homosexual scene. The conflict lasted for some months and circulated among the wider LGBT community of the time. More specifically, Taxtsis<sup>6</sup> estimated that the seriousness of the movement could not be established if AKOE was founded with gender deviant people: “*Founding AKOE under the skirts of some prostitute travesti would be the same as founding the women’s movement on the whores of Sokratous street*” (Tsarouchas, 1995: 227, quoted in Riedel, 2005: 88). Taxtsis’

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<sup>5</sup> An argot/ subcultural homosexual dictionary written by Ilias Petropoulos in 1971.

<sup>6</sup> What needs to be noted, and has already been noted by Brian Riedel (2005: 85-90), regarding the formation of AKOE and the Taxtsis- Velissaropoulos conflict is that Taxtsis clearly saw a conflict between a French imported model of homosexual activism exemplified by Velissaropoulos insistence on identifying people as homophiles and Taxtsis insistence that “this was denying the right of the majority of men to sleep now and then with another man without necessarily considering themselves a homophile, with all the negative connotations that word has even for homophiles themselves” (Taxtsis, 1989: 292 as quoted by Riedel, 2005: 87- 88).



argument reflects a moral economy of gender propriety by which the homosexual subject needs to abide if he wishes to qualify as subject for recognition before the state and the law (Theodorakopoulos: 2005). Taxtsis supported this position while he was sex-working as a travesti at nights on the streets of Athens. This is indicative of how shame works to construct the self “through an affective connection to the shaming of another” (Crimp, 2002: 34), in this case the shaming of travesti. In Sedgwick’s words, “one of the strangest features of shame is the way bad treatment of someone else, someone else’s embarrassment, stigma, debility, blame, can so readily flood me with this sensation whose very suffisiveness seems to delineate my individual outlines in the most isolating way imaginable” (Sedgwick, 1993: 14; 36-37).

Thus, the shaming of travesti worked to delineate Taxtsis’ morally imbued individual outlines and preserve the male-to-male sexual economy to which Taxtsis had grown accustomed. At this point I should underline that the trans movement was not separate from the homosexual movement. An important part of the trans community gathered around *Koukles*, a well-known trans bar in Koukaki, where trans work in the club’s show (or at the bar) to make ends meet. The show includes lip-synch performances performed in glamorous customs, stand-up acts, accompanied by teasing and jokes with the audience. The first attempt to articulate a trans political discourse separate from the homosexual movement comes with the formation of SATTE around 2003, which quickly dissolved due to internal disputes. What should be noted is a temporal, yet not clear-cut, division between “politicized trans”, involved in groups and activism, from the early 2000s onwards, and a trans street culture of sex-working imbued with trans figures (such as Tzeni Xeiloudaki, Tania Kelli, Aloma) appearing on Tv talk shows throughout the 1990s.

In her autobiographical book “How much?: The abduction of Costas Taxstis” Betty Vakalidou (2009) narrates her never-ending vendetta with Costas Taxstis and the trial that followed the escalating quarrels between them. What needs to be noted for this era is the intensive state violence against travesti; the countless police raid on “piatses” (sex-working spots in central Athens) and the stigmatisation of travesti as a marginalized abnormal group. Following Vakalidou’s narrative one reads through the pain and shame of unliveable lives. The violence amongst marginalized figures (Taxtsis-Aloma, Taxtsis-Betty) reflects the pain of subjugation which backfires and turns into a

self-inflicting pain. The abjected subject is found trapped in the circular matrix of power, shame, pain, power.

The activity of AKOE played a significant factor in the withdrawal of the draft bill. AKOE activists gathered signatures, including foreign artists and scholars, filled the streets of Athens with slogans, and organized an open protest and panel discussion on the draft bill on the 26th January 1981 (Riedel, 2005: 85-90). On that day, AKOE activists, trans figures (Betty Vakalidou), and segments of the left-wing youth, adopted a common resolution which was submitted to the Greek Parliament (Theodorakopoulos: 2005). Eventually, the draft bill was withdrawn under the international pressure exerted by AKOE. The Greek mass media of the time referred to AIDS as an essentially foreign disease, happening elsewhere, coming from elsewhere (Riedel: 2005), fostering a culture of fear in which discourses of stigmatization and medicalization collide with what Tsalikoglou describes as Greece's fantasy of "narcissistic invulnerability" (Tsalikoglou, 1995: 83), which feeds into Greeks' notion of living in a risk-free national vacuum.

Similar biopolitical and gendered discourses seeking to protect the "healthy national core" emerged again in the wake of the Greek financial crisis<sup>7</sup>. On 15 December 2011, the Greek Minister of Health, Andreas Loverdos, declared that illegal migrant sex workers, who are forcibly tested HIV-positive, ought to be deported from the country since they are to blame for the "spread" of HIV to Greek families. In particular, Andreas Loverdos stated that "the infection goes from the illegal migrant women to the Greek client, into the Greek family" (McDonald- Gibson, 2012) . On April 10th 2012 (FEK 1002, issue 2, 2/4/2012) the Greek minister of health announced the new revised roles for the Centre of health and disease control (KELPNO). According to health clause 39A, and particularly paragraphs 4-13 of article 1, certain sections of the Greek population are to be held accountable for the spread of HIV, namely female sex workers, drug users, immigrants with no legal documents and homeless people.

In early May 2012, the Greek police carried out a massive sweep operation in central Athens which led to the arrest of seventeen migrant women, who police alleged were working illegally as sex workers. The police forced them to undergo HIV testing and charged them with causing grievous bodily harm. All of this happened with the

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<sup>7</sup> I see the crisis as a precarious state of being emerging out of a normalizing and normalized state of emergency.

blessing of the Health Minister, Andreas Loverdos, and with opinion polls showing the plummeting of the social-democratic Party, PASOK, in the upcoming national elections that were to take place in May 2012 (Baboulias: 2013). The pictures and names of the arrested women were published on the police website and circulated all around Greek media. Against this outrageous violation of human rights the Greek media acted in full complicity by accompanying their photos with stories about the spread of the virus, the infection of Greek family men, and the dangers to which the Greek family unit is exposed (Athanasίου: 2014a).

Feminist and anti-racist groups reacted acutely to the circulation of women's pictures and their social stigmatization. The Health Minister supported this decision by stating that the protection of the nation's health should be placed above all other concerns. As noted by Athanasίου (2014a) "the Feminist Initiative for the Elimination of Violence against Women condemned the discriminatory, humiliating, subhuman way in which these female sex workers were treated by state authorities" (Athanasίου, 2014a: 7)

At the same time, a joint protest between queer feminist and anti-authoritarian groups, QV (queer curriculum vitae), Migada and Gender Asphyxia, was organized with the slogan "Racists and Misogynists are dangerous, not HIV-positive women!" (see following photo) One year later queer feminists and anti-authoritarians protested against the presence of KELPNO in Athens Pride 2013 denouncing the Pride committee for including KELPNO among its sponsors.

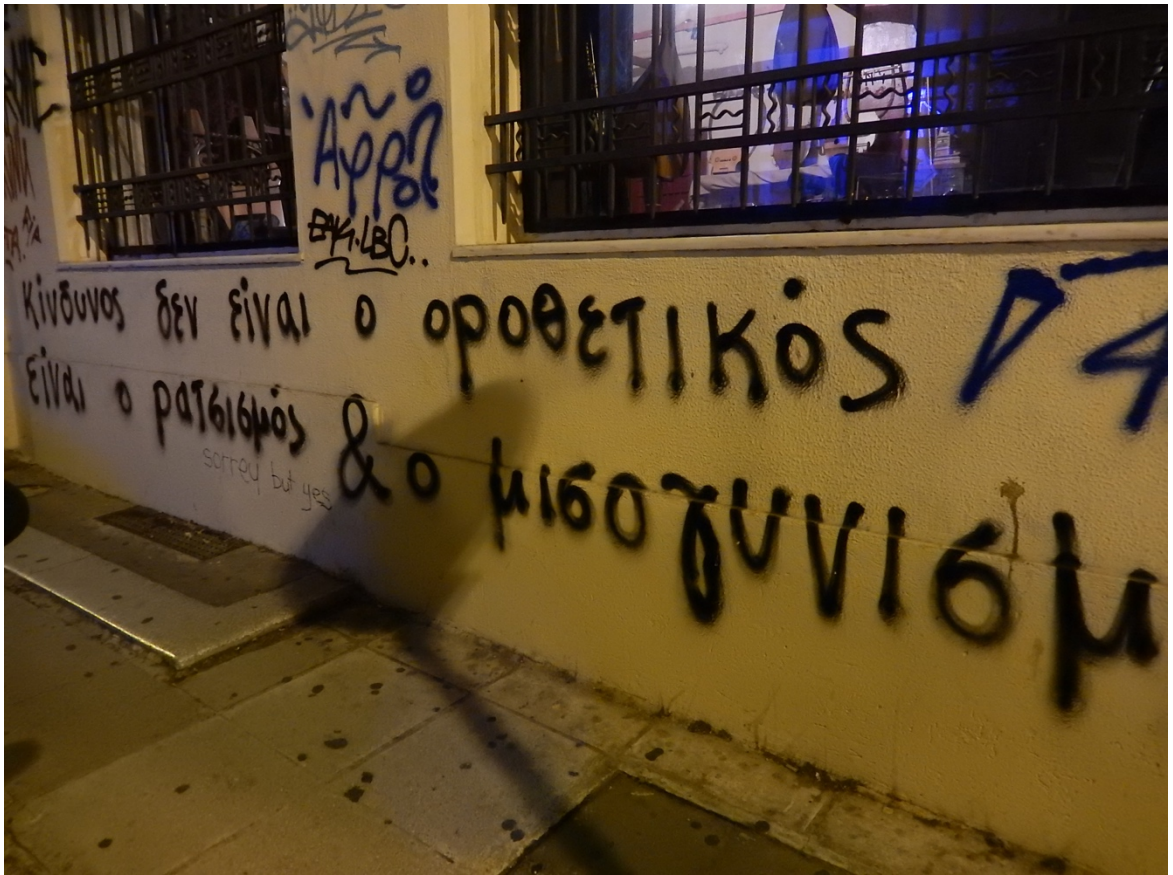


Figure 1: “Dangerous is not the HIV- positive, it’s racism and misogyny”, wall slogan on Valtetsiou Street close to the Feminist Centre, Exarchia

On December 2013, the documentary “Ruins” by Zoe Mavroudi was released and screened in various social spaces locally and internationally (Mavroudi, Z.: Ruins, September 8, 2013, Accessed on December 2013, Retrieved from: <https://ruins-documentary.com/en/>). The documentary graphically depicts the HIV witch-hunt that led to the public shaming of the female migrant sex workers that are considered gender and racial outcasts within the moral and political economy of Greek austerity. The health clause 39A was repelled after a wave of reactions on an international (it was condemned by the Human Rights Watch and the World Health Organization) and local level only to be reactivated again on June 2013 by the new Health Minister of the far right, Adonis Georgiadis, as a necessary step towards the protection of the nation against potential public threats to its health and stability. It was finally withdrawn in April 2015.

However, women’s lives were destroyed upon their public shaming: “*This damage will chase us and our children forever*” writes one of the arrested women who

later committed suicide two years after her arrest (Demetis: 2016). Under the operation Xenios Zeus, thousands of people have been stopped, searched, and detained by the police in clear violation of human rights. In May 2013 the police detained more than 25 trans women in Thessaloniki in one of its racist raids to “cleanse” the city. This caused a series of reactions from SYD (Greek Transgender Support Association) who pressed charges for illegal detention, police abuse, verbal abuse, torture, violation of human dignity, and other criminal acts.

From the 1976 draft bill on the “protection from sexually transmitted diseases and the regulation of relevant issues”, to health clause 39A of 2012, the body of the foreign sex- worker and the homosexual man are both perceived and represented dangerously precarious for the health and safety of the Greek body politic. In the Greek political imaginary, they both function as technologies of power exercised through normalization and securitization and as part and parcel of Greek national fantasies that work to strengthen gendered and racial conceptions of Greek citizenship (Foucault: 2007).

Most anthropological accounts on the evolution of local LGBT politics (Apostolidou: 2010, Riedel: 2005, Faubion: 1993, Yannakopoulos: 1995) are structured in three consecutive phases: in the first phase, from the 1950s to the 1970s, the dominant model of same-sex desire is understood through the hierarchically gendered regulation of sexual activity (passive *aderfi*<sup>8</sup>- active man), the lack of pre-marital encounters and the somatic justification of male urges (Apostolidou: 2010). The study of Kostas Yannakopoulos (1995) on male homosexuality demonstrates how understandings of friendship, male nature, and illicit desire, excludes any identifications and collectivities to arise under the rubric of homosexual identity. More specifically he suggests that “a

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<sup>8</sup> For more than two decades the only socially acknowledgeable distinction relating to homoerotic practices was that between “andras” (man) and “*poustis/aderfi*” (fag). This distinction is a clear- cut segregation across the border of gender binary (the gendered sexual economy). According to Riedel “socially and culturally, sexual contact between men does not necessarily indicate any particular socio-sexual identity inhering to one individual or another” (Riedel, 2005: 83). In the Greek homophobic discourse, the words *poustis* and *aderfi* associate with moral degradation and the negative fetishization of rear-pleasure which is presumably contrary not only to nature but to social responsibility and national citizenship (Apostolidou, 2010: 85). Following again Riedel (2005), the derogatory power of these words emerge from “the assertion that its subject lacks proper manhood; the *poustis* allows his abuse, accepts being penetrated, has no sense of shame and surrenders his humanity without a fight” (Riedel, 2005: 111). However, as argued by Loizos& Papataxiarchis, the scope of reference of the word “*poustis*” pushes beyond sex and sexual positions, pointing most strongly to the person’s moral character, the word easily slides, like “*malakas*” (masturbator), to refer to an immoral character (Loizos& Papataxiarchis, 1991: 228). In the Greek homophobic belief, the *poustis* is ultimately someone who lacks full humanity and his moral weakness exposes him to all sorts of moral dispositions (Loizos& Papataxiarchis, 1991: 228).

westernized homosexuality of young Athenians who call themselves gays did not constitute a distinct subculture outside the general youth culture following the example of western gay culture” (Yannakopoulos, 1995: 17).

The second phase (from 1977- 1988) after the fall of the Greek junta and the media-fuelled identification of homosexuals with the AIDS epidemic was marked by a vivid action taken on behalf of certain individuals (Paola Revenioti, Betty Vakalidou & Loukas Theodorakopoulos) and the formation of organizations (AKOE in Athens and AMOTH in Thessaloniki) that sought to defend the rights of homosexual citizens. One of the central aims of AKOE was the introduction of homosexuality within the Greek public sphere. The magazine *AMFI* came out in 1978, its subtitle read “for the liberation of homosexuals”, in 1979, the subtitle changed to read “for the liberation of homosexual desire” (Riedel, 2005: 89). According to Faubion, the move from a newly born notion of homosexual identity to homosexual desire denotes what he calls “queer before its time” (quoted in Riedel, 1995: 89). This position reproduces an orientalisng perspective as it fails to account for the power of Greek heteronormativity in depoliticizing sexuality by rendering it a matter of the private field (Yannakopoulos, 2010: 7). In addition, it seems that queer for Faubion is linked to fluidity of desire, whereas queer came to signify mostly a fluidity of gender identity. In this case, moving from a newly born homosexual identity to homosexual desire reflects the difficulty of introducing identity politics in the Greek public sphere. As Yannakopoulos notes, the public/private divide is evoked mostly in the case of homosexuality, which is interpreted as “a matter of the bedroom that is no public affair” (Yannakopoulos, 2010: 7). Eventually, this division works to protect the institutions of social reproduction by patrolling the public sphere and preserving the moral borders of the heterosexual regime of Greek nationhood (Warner & Berlant: 1998).

Looking into the responses to AIDS by gay movement activists, it seems that they were dominated by an attempt to fit together: a safer sex message, the need to separate homosexuality from the disease and the sexual philosophy of the liberation of homosexual desire. According to Brian Riedel (2005: 100) the sexual economy of desire has its roots into the 1950s- 1970s sexual economy of hierarchal gendered roles (active man- passive *aderfi*) rather than sexual identities (Riedel, 2005: 100). By rendering the liberation of homosexual desire as the ultimate goal, and since desire can exist alongside

any socially available sexual identity, it would not make sense to organize the movement in terms of any particular sexual identity (Riedel, 2005: 100-101). Thus, the movement could not address itself to an identity based class of people; nor could it imagine a response to AIDS in that manner (Riedel, 2005: 101). In this context, as suggested by Riedel (2005): “A response to AIDS that focuses on safer sex practices mixes easily both with the practice-oriented sexual economy of gendered roles (active man- passive *aderfi*) into which AKOE emerged, and with the sexual philosophy of desire which AKOE nurtured in response to that economy” (Riedel, 2005: 100).

Both Papadogiannis (2015) and Riedel (2005) underline that the magazine *AMFI* published photos of men kissing, however it did not reproduce the very idiom gay men used when cruising or having sex. This is merely due to the fact that *AMFI* was taken to court in 1981 for the use of inappropriate language, particularly the phrases “dynato kavli” (strong boner) and “fourioziko kavli” (hasty boner) in one of its published poems by Nikos Spanas (Papadogiannis, 2015: 267). The magazine of another smaller homosexual group in Thessaloniki, AMOTH (Autonomous Group of Homosexuals of Thessaloniki), enriched its articles with phrases such as “pidiomaste” and “pairnontai” (“shagging”) (Papadogiannis, 2015: 267), whilst the term queer appeared in one of the group’s parties. In his personal blog the host of the party, A. Batsioulas, mentions that he picked up the term “queer” from foreign queer punk fanzines: “*I thought queer referred to young people with piercings and combat boots that feel mad and outraged for the world while thinking about sex.*” By early 1987, AKOE had a number of organizational and financial problems due at least in part the drop in support, and as Riedel informs us, it quickly dissolved, whereas *AMFI* was published until 1989 with the help of gay activist, Grigoris Vallianatos (Riedel, 2005: 98).

The third phase, which begins in the mid-1990s, signals a fall in the number of organizations and groups for the support of homosexual rights. EOK (Greek Homosexual Community) was formulated by former members of AKOE but took the legal form of a corporation. It was presided by Vangelis Giannelos and published the magazine DEON. During 1990s a new perception of sexual identities was beginning to take place. Yannakopoulos describes the new perception of recognizable and visible gay homosexuality in contradiction to a masculine homosexuality which designates sexual practices (activity- passivity) that do not entail a homosexual identity (Yannakopoulos,

1998: 82).

At this third stage, Apostolidou (2010) argues that a newly formed representation of homosexuality has taken place, in which systematic coming out and quests for visibility are traceable. However, during the 1990s, there is a drop in grassroots LGBT activist groups and organizations. LGBT activism is organized solely around prominent LGBT figures- Grigoris Valianatos, Paola Revenioti and Maria Cyber- who arrange mass participation events while engaging with mass media. In this context, accusations of personal self-interest and private profit at the expense of the collective and communitarian interest were very common and are graphically depicted in Riedel's ethnographic research (Riedel, 2005: 187-188). The privileged social class of these LGBT figures and their bourgeois discourses (and practices) was frequently mentioned at the time of my research by queer feminists and some lesbian feminists to denote the existence of a classed gap between a bourgeois, liberal human rights discourse and an anti-authoritarian queer feminist discourse. Nevertheless, at the time 1990s, Paola Revenioti worked to unify transsexuals and travesti through *SATTE*, capitalizing upon the recognition she received through her magazine *Kraximo*; Maria Cyber arranged Cyberdyke parties in various lesbian bars in Athens and ran her radio show in which she showcased various happenings of LGBT life in Greece; Vangelis Giannelos as president of EOK, intervened in larger media circles in defence of the Greek LGBT community, projecting a conservative brand of gay as normal (Riedel, 2005: 132-178).

A defining moment for the revitalization of the lesbian and gay movement was the raid in the club "Spices." In late February 2003, the police raided the bar, searching for the figures behind what the police report called a child pornography web. The alleged ring operated a webpage that "contained adverts from paedophiles asking young boys to meet them at the club Spices" (Child porn ring linked to gay club", 2003). Not one single story about this was corroborated. That particular weekend, eleven people were arrested and five were charged in connection to the alleged child pornography web. Some were also charged with public indecency as they were caught "engaging in sex before an audience" ("Child porn ring linked to gay club", 2003). The media coverage exposed the names and ages of the arrested. Some days later one of the arrested committed suicide in his cell with a note explaining that he could not live with the shame of being identified by the press.



This homophobic attack, followed by the public shaming of the arrested which drove one of them to suicide, bespeaks a Greek necropolitical discourse (Mpempe: 2003) which condemns to social and physical death any sexuality outside the heteronormative reproductive family. The imagined conflation of homosexuality with paedophilia indicates that homosexuality is understood as a perverse threat to children, to the social order, to the familial narrative of reproductive futurism (Edelman: 2004) and reproductivity- reproductive sexuality (Halkia, 2004: 316), against which the homosexual is portrayed as inherently dangerous. It seems that the homosexual violates the gift of continuous communality, namely the collective immortality of the Greek reproductive nation. What is also violated is the compulsory privacy of homosexuality (Bunzl: 2005) that renders it a private matter- with the police report mentioning they were caught “engaging in sex before an audience” (“Child porn ring linked to gay club”, 2003). This attack revealed the terrifying powerlessness of homosexual lives, associated with silence (Kantsa: 2001) and shame (Sedgwick: 1990). The attack fuelled a modern quest for visibility which began emerging in the late 1980s. After this homophobic attack the “Polychromo forum” (Multi- coloured forum) emerged, a grassroots space for discussion and collaboration with no permanent structures other than someone to moderate the conversation. In its first meetings 200 people gathered (Riedel, 2005: 64-74).

The first attempts for Pride gatherings bear the characteristics of a grassroots movement. As stated by Apostolidou (2010), the first gay pride took place in 1985 by AKOE in Zappeio (the central Athenian park). It was a small gathering that received very little publicity. After that there were the parties that Paola Revenioti organized in various locations. The next attempt was in 1996, in Pedio tou Areos (another Athenian park) with the participation of Paola and EOK (Apostolidou: 2010). In the years 1997-1999 there were closed Pride parties in clubs with no political agenda. In 2000 EOK, in collaboration with “Sibraxi” from Thessaloniki, organized the ambitious 3-day Pride festival in the Pneumatiko Kentro (Central Municipality of Athens) of the municipality of Athens with a political, cultural, and informational character (Apostolidou: 2010). From 2001-2004 nothing took place until the organization of Athens Pride in 2005. This was organized on a grassroots level by lesbian feminists that came together via the online forum “Sapphides” along with some gays and antiracists from the Purple House.

EOK decided not to participate and SATTE also followed its lead.

One of the former organizers, Michaela from LOA, gives her account of the first Athens pride which took place in 2005 and brought together five hundred people:

*Michaela: "...Nobody believed it would happen, we worked so hard, so hard, to set up the whole thing...the stage, the bar, the chairs, the singers...When the time of the march came, we did not really know how many people would follow, we were prepared to do it ourselves- fifteen people...the police asked me how many rows to close on Stadiou street for the march. I told them I don't know. We gathered on the street to start the march and suddenly all the people, already gathered at Klathmonos square, came with us. We blocked the whole street. The feeling was amazing and something I will never forget. That day five hundred people began marching...we even had dykes on bikes..."*

The 2005 Athens Pride showed the relatively invisible and frightened LGBT community which however did not remain distant into representing itself. Marching meant engaging with feelings of fear and vulnerability, described here as a body-shivering experience. Elsa, who belongs to the older generation of same-sex desiring women and a regular at LOA's meetings, in one of our (interview) discussions told me:

*Elsa: "...I remember wearing my sunglasses and a jockey hat while others wore masks; my heart was raising, feeling exposed like that, I felt that everyone was looking and knew exactly who I was, what I was...it was not easy...not easy at all."*

Years later, gay socio-sexual identities are still influenced by the sexual philosophy of desire articulated by AKOE. Nowadays, this is reflected in disputes regarding the limits between identity and desire, particularly when it comes to negotiating the terms of safe space. In some occasions, the sexual economy of desire is romanticized as a "less censored" approach to human sexuality whereas the lure of indulging into illicit desire is referred to as part of a less constrained era. The practice

of romanticizing the sexual philosophy of desire is enacted by the older generation of LGBT activists (Paola Revenioti) and by a small part of the contemporary LGBT community. A large part of LGBT rights activists perceive the discourse of Europeanization as the symbol of human rights and gay rights against which the sexual economy of desire is treated as an orient remainder of an illicit promiscuity that belongs to a past era. The open discussion with trans activist Paola Revenioti and professor of linguistic anthropology, Costas Canakis, which took place at QueerFest, a festival organized for a second consecutive year at Embros Theatre in May 2013, depicts some of the issues discussed. In this open discussion Paola Revenioti said: *“I don’t get the kids today that talk about homophobia, Greeks are not homophobes, just assholes full of psychic complexes, but they are shagging each other everywhere (oloi pairmontai).”* Apart from the romanticizing of past eras of illicit promiscuity, the discussion also revealed latent tensions between LGBT rights activists of the present time who talk about homophobia, visibility, and gay rights on the one hand, and on the other, LGBT activists of an older generation abiding to the sexual philosophy of desire and cruising discussed here by Paola in the context of a sex-working street culture.

Other times, this discourse is treated as an outdated economy of oppressed sexualities belonging to another era when people could not name their desires and lived with fear and repression. In queer feminist terms, “masculine homosexuality”, otherwise called sexual economy of gendered roles, or a sexual philosophy of desire into which AKOE emerged, is reinterpreted by Queericulum Vitae (henceforth QV), Queertrans (henceforth QT) and the Lesbian Group of Athens (henceforth LOA) as part and parcel of a “naturalized” patriarchal and homophobic discourse. In the context of QV’s intersectional analysis, hegemonic masculinity, namely macho heteronormative roles and behaviors, become the ultimate source of homophobia and gender/ sexual oppression. Thus, the primacy of the gendered scheme can be traced back to the (homo)sexual economy of gendered roles of the 1960s and 1970s (active man- passive *aderfi*) and queer feminist analysis of hegemonic masculinity in QV. The following excerpt from QV zine denounces the patriarchal and oppressive qualities of hegemonic masculinity. Drawing from body acts to gendered roles and qualities, QV identifies hegemonic masculinity with patriarchal power structures and interprets “masculine homosexuality”, that is, the male-to-male sexual economy, as part of a hegemonic

patriarchal system which sets the terms of an oppressive gendered scheme.

Hegemonic masculinity is: To talk a lot, to talk loudly, to define what is funny, what is boring, what is nice, what is beautiful, showing off your muscles, showing off your gut...to know, to be skilful, to think that everyone can do it, to think that you know...Masculinity is being able to: fish, cook, clean, carry, fix the toilet flush, write, play, drive, swim, dig...having an opinion, saying it, declaring that you don't know as you seem to know everything else, finding the way, lighting the fire, getting wet without feeling cold, enduring famine, thirst, being beaten, not giving in, making it with few but also with plenty...scaring others but never feeling scared, being moved emotionally but never crying, not being afraid, running fast, getting away, saving others- being able or at least wanting to become a hero- Masculinity is hairiness, the big, hard dick, the piss splash, the ejected sperm, the plenty, the big, the high, the heavy voice, the swagger (*magkia*), *kavla* (sexual arousal), rudeness, cynicism, vulgarity, wanting simply to fuck, wanting to fuck...masculine lovers, being single, not committing...being disobedient, brutal... taking the risk but not the responsibility...Masculinity is wanting to be masculine: straight looking and acting, "being a man and not thinking that you are", "being a man not only by the voice, walk, look, but in the mind", thinking that you are masculine enough, blaming everything that is not masculine enough, swearing, calling the other "pousti" (fag), Albanians, sluts, making an identity a swear word, fucking women, sluts, fucking whores, fucking violently, raping, for your pleasure, for the nation, for the gang of friends, beating women, and *aderfes*.

QVzine, 2010 (issue 4), excerpt from the introductory text "Masculinity is...", p.12

Overall, within the queer feminist/ LGBT movement the sexual philosophy of desire (articulated by AKOE) and the gendered sexual economy of the 1960s- 1970s are re-appropriated and interpreted differently by each LGBT group and queer feminist collective as that which we cannot negate as part of our movement's history. At the same time, the AIDS epidemic indicates a recurrent Greek biopolitical discourse that deems less privileged women and homosexual *aderfi* as the abject figures of Greek nationhood. I wish to finish this section with a quote from QT's discussion at the anarchist squat Ostria, that took place in May 2014. The trans woman, and leading figure of queertrans (henceforth QT) responded to anarchists' nostalgic inclinations for the anti-authoritarian movement of the 1980s, including the homosexual movement: "*That was the politics of kavla (sexual arousal), really. And people had no other choice but to*

*define themselves as travesti, poustides, non-normal.*” It seems that the liberation legacy of the homosexual movement is remembered, cursed and forgotten, all at the same time.

### **3.3 The importance of reiterating lesbian history**

The history of the lesbian feminist movement is scarcely documented. This overview is based on articles found in the lesbian feminist archive of the Feminist Centre, ethnographic notes along with the previous literature on lesbianism in Greece. Its main purpose is to present the reader with the history of lesbian feminism. Since lesbian histories disappear, either they are burned (like Dora Rosetti’s notebooks) or remain locked in private houses, only to reappear at some moment in the future, and then wither away again, I felt the need to record the ephemera of lesbian life in Greece. Perhaps it was also my urge to turn against the ephemera of the unliveable life, the scarcely documented, the erased, the crushed under the exclusionary matrix of Greek heterosexual imaginary. Thus, this is a historical overview that records events, people, groups, activities, gatherings, magazines, and ideas exchanged. Feelings are not recorded as I would wish, yet they are here, in the constant disappearance and re-appearance of lesbian voices in Greece. If I could condense feelings in one sentence I would say fragility, loneliness, joy, strength and solidarity are all over these moments of appearance in time.

Before going any further I should note that this section focuses on lesbian feminism, namely talks about the “politicized lesvies.” The pervasive division between politicized lesvies and women of the bars (or else same-sex desiring women) that are reluctant to adopt the lesvia identity has been ethnographically encountered (Kirtsoglou: 2003). Thus, there were the lesvies of the LGBT movement, lesvies of bars, lesvies who identified as gay, lesvies who did not like labels, lesvies who said they loved women, lesvies who preferred to stay peripheral to activism, lesvies who were out, lesvies who could not be out, lesvies who saw coming out as circumstantial, lesvies of Beaver, lesvies of Eressos, lesbian anarchists, lesvies who read a lot, lesvies who rode Vespa bikes, lesvies who liked shoes, lesvies who liked skirts (to be honest those were few and far between), lesvies who embraced female masculinity and identified as butch,

lesbies who perceived butch/femme within a sexual economy of desire (top/bottom), lesbians who liked electro, lesbians who went to *skiladika*, lesbians of Exarchia, lesbians of Gazi etc. This overview focuses on lesbian feminists, the ones politically affiliated to groups and collectives, those determined to produce lesbian feminist discourse in Greece. Lesbian groups continued to be formed ever since their first appearance in the mid-80s regardless of whether they were small in size, short-lived, and with dispersed membership. All in all, lesbian discourse was constantly produced even during the “silent” years (1990s). In what follows, I will be drawing from the work of Venetia Kantsa (2001) in order to reiterate certain aspects of the lesbian feminist movement of the 1980s- 1990s that will help me locate historical affiliations and discrepancies to the ethnographic present.

### **3.3.1 1980s: The Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women**

#### ***Lavris*, Eressos, and the building of lesvia consciousness**

The position of lesbians within the feminist movement in Greece was turbulent; lesbians were there and not there at the same time, an “invisible presence” in the feminist movement. Venetia Kantsa (2001) in her study of same-sex desiring women in the 1990s informs us that the first lesbian group was established in Athens in 1978. The group brought together women who were already involved in the feminist movement, members of the “Movement for the Liberation of Women” (KAG), and women affiliated to AKOE. The first meeting of the “Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women” (Avtonomi Omada Omofilofilon Ginaikon) took place at the AKOE lodgings with the participation of ten women. The group gathered there weekly and began publishing articles at *AMFI*, AKOE’s magazine. On the grounds of recurrent disagreements with homosexuals regarding the use of the space and since lesbians felt more affiliated to the feminist movement, they decided to move to the “House of Women” in Romanou Street (Kantsa, 2001: 97). The women’s bar, which also functioned there, offered space for lesbian gatherings and socializing (Kantsa, 2001: 97).

The lesbian group held its gatherings there for a couple of years and published the first lesbian magazine *Lavris*. The first issue appeared in the kiosks of Athens on

March, 8<sup>th</sup> 1982. In the first issue the magazine states:

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.... The absence of a lesbian discourse in Greece concerns us, we consider it a huge gap nowadays. But it's not only the absence of a lesbian voice but also of a lesbian approach/ analysis to feminist issues. This is the gap we wish to address and we believe that our magazine will help open a dialogue between us and other Greek lesbians- but also with women that refuse to listen to us- a dialogue that will help us clarify our positions as lesbian feminists, dissolve any myths we hold about ourselves, declare our existence, help us communicate with each other, meet and find ourselves.

*Lavris*, 1982 (issue 1): p. 4 (also quoted at Kantsa, 2001: 104-105)

The group participated openly in feminist marches with lesbian banners. This caused distress among heterosexual feminists. Haroula Psedonimou in her article "Screams and whispers: The lesbian issue in Greece" (1992: 81-92) refers to lesbian urban raids in the city with sprays and stencils as well as fights with men in bars since these women were open about their sexuality. Lesbian urban raids on the city's walls constituted an activist practice I engaged during my fieldwork. At night I would walk around central Athens with other lesbian feminists and write slogans on the walls of public buildings and shops at Akadimia street (a central street in Athens) or inside the toilettes of bars. The slogans would stay there for a couple of days until they were erased. Night walking and writing slogans on walls consisted a situational, navigating and appropriating engagement with urban space (Psedonimou, 1992: 83).

As stated by Katsa (2001) & Psedonimou (1992), in 1982 the Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women participated in the conference "Sexualities and Politics" organized by AKOE at Panteion University (Kantsa, 2001: 107; Psedonimou, 1992). The radical positions of the group made a profound impact, these were encapsulated in the controversial slogan "The future is female" (Kantsa, 2001: 107). The same group also attempted to burn down a porn cinema. According to the group's declaration in *AMFI* (1983, issue 14/15) lesbian sexuality is a political choice:

Lesbian sexuality gives a woman back her lost eroticism, her sentimental fulfilment... A lesbian, because she places a woman at the heart of her being, liberates herself. She is free to find her true self, to discover the world surrounding her, to create it from scratch.

*AMFI* 1993 (No. 14/15) (also quoted at Kantsa, 2001: 108)

In the third and final issue of their magazine *Lavris*, lesbies address the political segregation between lesbians and straight feminists by stating the importance of challenging compulsory heterosexuality:

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?

*Lavris* 1982 (issue 3) (also quoted at Kantsa, 2001: 109)

In the summer of 1983 the lesbian group left the “House of Women” due to conflicts with the hetero- feminists (Kantsa, 2001: 98). This conflict and its impact on the course of the (lesbian) feminist movement is still discussed by same-sex desiring women of the older generation. In one of my personal discussion with Ninetta, a lesbian feminist, who was actively involved in the feminist movement, she recalls at the closing party of “Women’s Bookstore” an insightful question for the women’s movement: “Can there be a feminist movement without the lesbians?” After the group left the “House of Women”, some lesbians returned to AKOE where they stayed until 1986-1987 without much political action. Other lesbians went to feminist groups and Women’s Coffeehouses, where they also experienced the reactions of straight feminists. By that time, Ninetta was participating in a consciousness-raising group with the neo-feminists of KDG, she didn’t identify as lesvia, in fact she had no contact with her sexuality whatsoever. In what follows, Ninetta talks about the sudden arrival of lesbies in the Women’s Coffeehouse on Genadiou street and the reactions they stimulated.



*Ninetta: “Our consciousness-raising group held its gatherings at the Women’s Coffeeshouse on Genadiou Street. At the general assembly of the coffeeshouse in which I was also present, the issue of the lesbians came up...that the coffeeshouse opened and lesvies arrived and took over their space, their own place, with their noise, their loudness, their butchness...they were mostly butch...all the other women panicked...the feminists, the intellectuals, the leftists, younger and older, with the presence of the lesbians...they said “we don’t want the Movement of Democratic Women to be labelled”...that it’s a lesbian place here...but I am telling you they were noisy to stress out how separated these two worlds were back then...and how aggressive things were for lesbians...They later went to the Coffeeshouse at Romanou street and also left after a huge fight with the hetero-women...that fight is still remembered, if you ask the older ones. It’s the first established clash between lesbians and straight feminists...simply existing as a lesbian was enough to stir confrontation, that is, being but not showing to be lesvia was the issue and still remains an issue in Greek society...Do whatever you want but never show what you do...At the closing party of the Women’s Bookstore one of the slogans written on the wall read “Is there really a women’s movement without the lesbians?”, this slogan was ahead of its time...what was going on in the western world...lesbians as a collective entity were the first women to work hard on feminism...”*

Throughout the 1980s women from Greece began travelling to the island of Lesbos and formed, with other women from abroad their own community by the beach of Skala Eressou. Men were not allowed beyond a specific part of the beach and trespassers were chased away. In line with an international lesbian separatist discourse, women defended their right to a women-only space existing beyond the gaze of men and met the hostility of the villagers (Kantsa, 2001: 125-127). The history of the lesbian community in Eressos is graphically depicted in Venetia Kantsa’s ethnography “Potential friends, potential lovers” (“Dinami Files, Dinami Eromenes”) (Kantsa: 2010a) where she describes the life of the community, the turbulent relation of lesbians with the villagers, women’s lives and erotic relations in Eressos. Kantsa presents the lesbian history of the island from the arrival of European and American lesbians in the 1970s

who formed a separatist lesvia territory on the beach of Skala Eressos to their open confrontations with the locals in the mid- 1980s, who preferred to serve the “good type of tourists”, and the acts of violence and court trials that followed them. And finally, the gradual reconciliation between lesbians and locals is associated with tourist investments, consumerist attitudes and the decline of the lesbian feminist movement (Kantsa: 2001).

Throughout the 1990s more than 1000 lesbian women would visit Eressos every summer. The camping site next to the seaside near Psaropotamos was a place of special significance. It is frequently mentioned by the older generation of lesbians as a vibrant place, where women would set up fires, build their own huts, and spend their nights dancing, flirting, singing, and drinking (Kantsa, 2001). Gradually bars owned and/or run by lesbians appeared, women would go out together to informal happenings, disco clubs, and sometimes collectively engage in sport activities (canoe racing, beach volley). The older generation of lesbies I encountered at LOA had formulated an important part of their lesbian consciousness at Eressos.

Below Ninetta, Vera, and Voula, who belong to the older generation of lesbies, describe their experiences from Eressos in the mid 1980s as lesbian pilgrimage, as a liberating place that helped them build their lesvia consciousness but also as a place that made them confront themselves as lesbies. The material presented here draws from interviews but also from *Dalika*'s special issue on Eressos (Dalika, 2010, issue 3: pp.46-48)

Ninetta: *“The first time I went as an invisible lesbian, meaning that I was not out, I went with two hetero-couples, the place had its symbolism, it carried something sacred for me, I had heard stories about this place, it had a lesbian allure, a myth surrounding it. I went with curiosity, fear and hesitation, all these mixed feelings a woman experiences when entering a lesbian space.”*

Elsa: *“...the place was full of lesbians, the environment was so familiar, for the first time in my life I did not feel like a minority, because I always feel like a minority in every social gathering, this time I was not “the weird one” and it was liberating. Since then every time I arrived at Eressos I felt an inner exultation.”*

Vera: *“On this beach I realized that being lesvia isn’t only a sexual identity, it’s also a political-social identity. Walking to and from the village, swimming, hanging out in groups (parees), talks, fires by the beach, a new sense of belonging was building inside me. I am not a lonely, wandering lesvia, I belong to the lesbian community of the world. For many years, Eressos was my summer destination. During the winter I was looking forward to find myself there not only to go swimming under the hot sun but to bring my soul out in daylight. To see a lesbian image of myself around me, to feel a proud lesvia, to feel free. To purify myself in the cool water that gradually washed away my internalized homophobia.”*

Voula: *“On the one hand, I felt happy for the many lesvies openly walking around the beach and on the other hand, I felt afraid. Did I identify with them? Everyone here knows I am a lesvia? Can I be out with them? I went to Eressos every year and always felt ambivalent. Am I putting myself in a ghetto? Should I visit another place next year? I tried it a couple of times. It felt like two lesvies in a world that makes you invisible. I always returned here.”*

For the younger generation of lesvies Eressos is less mentioned as a pivotal place for the formation of their lesvia identity. But still it is a place they visit at least once as lesbians. At the summer of 2015 I visited Eressos and, since I was at my lesbian blooming, most of my notes ended being autobiographical. I met many local lesvies, hanged out with women from LOA at the two lesbian bars, *Belleville* and *Flamingo*, and spent my mornings reading and swimming naked at the end of the long beach, close to Vana’s canteen, under Sappho’s rock. Local lesvies would tell me how much the beach has changed ever since the beach bar changed ownership (currently owned by a male villager). Commercialization and profit were mentioned as parameters that contributed to the decline of the community. One of the women at the beach told me:

Woman in Eressos: *“Some years ago, the lesbian element was more vivid. And the bars organized more happenings for lesbians, once the owner of the*

*beach bar near the camping changed, the allure of the beach also changed, families, straight couples, groups of men began mixing with lesbians.”*

Nevertheless, I felt that the place still had a lesbian allure and in a way consisted a transitional step for my lesbianism and for accepting my body. In an interview with Rena, a young butch, currently 25 years old, she describes Eressos with the same excitement to Ninetta’s and Elsa’s:

*Rena: “I knew there were lesbians there and while going I felt like a Christian going for pilgrimage at Tinos island...I loved it...I was feeling so policed at my mother’s country house in Crete so when I arrived there it was amazing. I felt so free, so liberated, it was as if Beaver and the various lesbian groups (parees) had gone on vacation together. I felt that here we could live whatever we wished!”*

At the same time, there were younger women, who have travelled and lived (or still live) abroad, who argued that Eressos didn’t correspond to their needs and desires in that the place was too “*laiko*” (as they called it), meaning plebeian, implying that it was a bit outdated. The latter clearly signifies a generational shift when it comes to the lesbian life of Eressos.

After this short presentation of Eressos and its role in the formation of the contemporary lesvia I shall now turn back to the activities of the Autonomous Group of Homosexual Women. In spring 1985, a new house of Women opened at Koukaki and the lesbian group moved there to share the space with a feminist group. The name of the group changed within time from “Lesbian Group to Autonomous Lesbian Feminists” to “Women’s Group of Koukaki” (Kantsa, 2001: 89-100). The women’s bar at Koukaki dissolved and women moved to the Women’s Bookstore (1989) and stayed until its closure in 1991. By mid-1980s, the effort to produce an autonomous lesbian feminist discourse appeared to wither away. Yet, the very fact that these groups existed and brought together women, who shared their experiences and articulated an independent lesbian discourse should not be underestimated as they managed to open space for the introduction of terms, claims and discourses which at the time drew from what in the

Angloamerican world was known as lesbianism (Kantsa: 2001).

In Thessaloniki, lesbians participated in the “Autonomous Group of Homosexuals” (Avtonomo Metopo Omofilofilon Thessalonikis, April 1980) without forming an autonomous group and published articles in its magazine “Bananes.” They also participated with lesbian banners at the International Women’s Day in March 1981. In October 1981 the Autonomous Group of Homosexuals dissolved. That same year, the Women’s House of Thessaloniki was created and lesbians held their gatherings there (Pseudonimou, 1992). The group lasted one year and quickly dissolved, however lesbian sociality at the women’s bar did not stop, and lesbian articles were also published at the House’s magazine, “Gaia.” But the atmosphere was gradually changing. As Charoula Pseudonimou mentions the primacy of a male discourse within the House began discouraging lesbians. They left shortly after a conference organized by the House in collaboration with autonomous feminists in 1989 (Pseudonimou, 1992: 90).

### **3.3.2 1990s: The years of silence and the breaks of *Madam Gou* & *Lesbian Blues***

During the 1990s there was a general decline of the lesbian feminist and the feminist movement altogether. Bluntly speaking, this era corresponds to the “Middle Ages” of the feminist movement. In general, this silence doesn’t mean the absence of any grassroots activity and/or engagement with political action. However, two independent initiatives, *Madam Gou* and *Lesbian Blues*, emerged to break the silence on issues of lesbianism and women’s sexuality. A lesbian magazine and a grassroots theatrical performance reflected on the pervasive silence in Greek society regarding issues of sexuality and gender, and attempt to create rifts in the Greek system of compulsory heterosexuality.

In 1995 a group of seven women who were not affiliated with any political group decided to publish a lesbian magazine, *Madam Gou* (*Madam Gou* means lesvia in kalliarda). In its first issue the magazine presented its profile:

*Madam Gou* results from the efforts of a group of lesbian friends to express themselves and create a channel of communication. After years of publishing inactivity within the lesbian community, we felt more sensitized against the continual racism we experience and wanted to make some steps towards the emergence of an identity and a sense of pride we owe to ourselves. At the same time, we wish to oppose our own opinions against the image projected on mass media for us (lesbians). We felt the need to share knowledge, experience, love and support. To give voice to every lesbian that desires it and hope to the one that does not dare it yet...

*Madam Gou*, 1995 (issue 1): 1

The group of friends was quite introvert but remained open to the exchange of ideas, texts and the creation of networks and contacts. From fall 1995 to November 1997 *Madam Gou* publishes five issues that cover a wide range of topics, from theoretical texts to translations of foreign texts, local and foreign lesbian news, comics, lesbian values, lesbian life stories, and other cultural references (movies, novels etc.). However, the widespread silence of the 1990s did not permit the further flourishing of this initiative. Two years later, in 1997, *Madam Gou* announces its closure:

Goodbye with love. Here we are again like last time. The issues we need to address are not over, neither did the life of lesbians change with the passage of *Madam Gou*, however we would like to believe that we made our small contribution but our strength to continue exhausted itself. The balances within a group are fragile and our energy needs constant recharging which was not possible, neither inwards nor outwards. We hope that if we do not find the strength to continue in the future, others will do it for us. This issue is dedicated to the women that showed their support, sending us texts, letters, poems.

*Madam Gou*, No. 5, p. 1, 1997 (also quoted at Kantsa, 2001: 189)

The same year, in December 1995, a group of women in Athens who were concerned about the absolute silence and invisibility of lesbianism, and their

consequences on the lives of women, approached Christiana Labrinidis<sup>9</sup> to create a theatrical performance with the aim “to make a rift in silences that are deeper, and more criminalized” surrounding sexuality and gender, and to speak about an invisible racism, that of the unspeakable kind<sup>10</sup> (Vourna: 1998a, 1998b quoted in Pakis, 2010: 110). The performance, which came to be called “Lesbian Blues”, has been studied by Elisavet Pakis (2010) in her work “Playing in the Dark: Performing Impossible Lesbian Subjects” where she explores its impact in challenging systems of compulsory heterosexuality and its performative elements whilst playing in the dark of a hegemonic Greek national imaginary (Pakis, 2010: 108-164). I will be drawing from her work to shed some light on the 1990s era of lesbian history in Greece.

As Pakis informs us seventeen women met with Labrinidis. This was the beginning of a prolonged, difficult, long-term relation that led to the creation and performance of “Lesbian Blues” in the spring of 1998. The group was a diverse alliance of women from the autonomous feminist and lesbian feminist communities, some identified as lesbians or bisexuals, others not; they also had differing ideas, motives, and expectations regarding the performance: some joined because of a feminist stance whereas others focused on their lesvia identity (Pakis, 2010: 111). There were also differences on how lesbianism was understood. But they all agreed it was an urgent and important political matter to address issues of women’s sexuality. As Labrinidis says: *“It was a trial for women’s strength and endurance to claim the unspeakable and to inhabit their sexuality, something that is greatly suppressed and in general forbidden for women...The whole process was a process of empowerment...the changes in “Lesbian Blues” had to do with social and personal homophobia, racism and unspeakable fear, and with the differences that emerged initially between the straights and lesbians who participated in the play”* (Psarra: 1998).

“Lesbian Blues” played for a month, between mid- March to mid- April 1998. During the show the theatre received death threats and a phone call about a bomb placed in the theatre. However, with the agreement of the theatre owner the performance was not interrupted. Five women performed on stage, with the texts

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<sup>9</sup> Christiana Labrinidis had studied playwriting, women’s studies, and directing in the US in the 1980s, and had practiced women’s experimental theatre at that time. She had worked in areas of social theatre, exploring with grassroots communities, questions of difference, social conflict, and antagonism (Pakis, 2010: 109).

created by them and three other women. As noted by Pakis (2010) the improvisation of gestures/movements and the creation of texts was directed by Labrinidis in creative writing and performance workshops (Pakis: 2010). Pakis further suggests that the performance addressed various themes: silence and invisibility in family relationships; mother/daughter relations; autobiographical stories of self-discovery; the differences between straight and lesbian women; the effect of schooling as part of a sexual and gendered socialization and the passage to adulthood; autobiographical stories of lesbian desire; stories that brought about a foreclosure of the possibility of lesbian desires; and gender outlawing (Pakis: 2010)

All in all, “Lesbian Blues” consisted an ephemeral performance that appeared in the era of silence. It fleshed out the “unperformable”, “what is barred from performance”, namely lesbian life, same-sex desire, feelings of isolation and unbelonging amongst women, in an effort to make visible what is conveniently left in the sphere of the “invisible” in the Greek national imaginary- an invisibility very often discursively reiterated as such (Pakis, 2010: 108-164).

### **3.3.3 2000s: The early years of the Lesbian Group of Athens (LOA) women-only parties and the building of lesbian sisterhood**

*“Butch with butch, knot!  
Butch with femme, bow!”  
(fieldnote excerpt, May 2014)*

The Lesbian Group of Athens (henceforth LOA) was created in November 2000 and marked a turning point in the history of lesbian feminism as it broke the haunting silence of the 1990s and inaugurated a new era for the emergence of the contemporary lesbian feminist movement. The creation of LOA marked a shift from informal socializing at lesbian bars and Skala Eressos to more activist and organized networking. Eight year after its creation LOA published its magazine *Dalika* (*Dalika*, 2009- onwards), signing as “the avant garde of lesbian thought, lesbian action, lesbian gesture, lesbian



discourse in lesbian and other spaces.” Regarding the name of the magazine *Dalika* we read the following:

{...} a word they throw against us instead of bricks, a word young girls with butch styles, clothing and attitude, hear as they pass by bus-stops and construction sites...now we wear it as our own...from a swear word we make it a title of honour, giving it the humour it deserves and acknowledging its political scope.

*Dalika*, 2009, Issue: 2: p. 4

Thus, the magazine appropriates *dalika*, a derogatory term for lesbies, in order to give to it different meanings, flavours, and emotions. In addition, the magazine appears to adopt an assertive perspective towards lesbianism, namely it does not focus on the absences (as was the case with *Madam Gou*), that is, on that which is forever lost and/or squashed under the Greek heterosexual matrix, and does not focus solely on the production of a lesbian political discourse (as was the case with *Lavris*). On the contrary, women talk about their bodies (body hair, fashion, motherhood), their desires (lesbian erotica), their preferences (lesbians getting involved with straight girls), their lifestyles (the difficulties of being lesvia in the Greek countryside, lesbian lifestyles and cycling, lesbian bars), in an attempt to build together “the conditions of our visibility, with our deafening presence in the small yard, so close and so far away from the rest of the world (*Dalika*, 2009, issue 2: 6).” *Dalika* has currently published eight issues and is collectively edited. Some women choose to write with pseudonyms, a tradition that has its roots to Greek, yet also Angloamerican, lesbian history and should not be reduced to lack of appearance (see chapter four on forms of lesbian appearing).

In one of the group’s weekly meetings some of the older women of LOA, who do not attend the group anymore, and instead came to pay a visit, talked about the first years of its creation:

*“In 2000 we saw a poster about the organization of Gay Pride in the Central Municipality of Athens (Pneumatiko Kentro), we gathered there, some men on one side, some women on the other and the media in the middle. When they asked for*

*a lesbian to come forward and speak, none of us was willing to talk. It was not only the fear of exposure but also the fact that we did not know what exactly to say about ourselves. Thus, we decided to create a group by lesbians and for lesbians.”*

The first years of LOA were fraught with passion and quarrels regarding the group’s orientation. Each lesbian had her story, her pain to share, her perspective on what it means to be a lesbian. “*After every meeting we were leaving with a headache*”, Nelli tells me. The first year the group was close to dissolving because of conflicts regarding its participation in the Polytechnic demonstration (17<sup>th</sup> November)<sup>11</sup>. There were the ones who were used to visibility since they have been going to Eressos and were actively involved in building a separatist lesbian community, and the ones who did not share the experience of Eressos and were uneasy with the idea of participating openly in a demonstration with lesbian banners. Fortunately, the group worked around this political gap and continued its activity for many years. Its meetings were initially held at women’s houses, but later LOA approached the hetero-feminists, and asked them to join the Feminist Centre. The group stayed there until 2014.

During the first years, LOA’s discussions revolved around butch and femme identities. It was very common to ask a new woman in the group whether she’s butch or femme. The following slogan playfully encapsulates the early years of the group’s debates on lesbian identity: “*Butch with butch, knot! Butch with femme, bow!*” After every meeting, women went for food and drinks at a nearby tavern. The practice of *parea* socialization (see chapter nine on *parea* socialization) after LOA’s meetings was still taking place at the time of my ethnographic research. This created an atmosphere of warmth, sisterhood, and belonging amongst women. The limitations of butch/femme identities, but also the weight of the word “lesvia”, are mentioned by older women that attended the group in its early years.

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<sup>11</sup> The Athens Polytechnic demonstration takes place annually, it’s a three-day commemoration event that pays tribute to the uprising of students against the Greek military junta of 1967-1974. The uprising lasted three days (from November 14, 1973 to November 17, 1973) and ended in bloodshed since in the morning of 17 November a military tank crashed the gates of the Polytechnic school. The commemoration day, located in the Polytechnic school, ends with a demonstration from the School to the United States Embassy.

Liza, whom I will be presenting in chapter six, felt distressed when they called her femme, she saw it as one more division besides the straight/ lesbian divide:

*Liza: "One night I was out with my partner and women of LOA and one of them called me femme, I got so upset, I hit my hand on the table, cried and left. I think I saw it as one more division amongst us. Later I felt more at ease with my femininity."*

The weight of the word *lesvia* was constantly negotiated and explored through the group's discussions on lesbian identity, which involved sharing stories and emotions (fear in the streets, guilt for one's homosexual desire, shame after coming out, loneliness and old age); building trust and rebuilding the fluid boundaries of the group that shifted constantly. The synthesis of the group changed every Tuesday based on the women who showed up at the door. LOA also engaged in collective actions (building coalitions through open talks and activities with the aim to inform and educate other social groups). In many respects, the lesbian group was multi-tasking: From offering emotional support to establishing *lesvia* identity and sexual awareness and intervening in debates on homosexuality.

In 2003 the "Well of Loneliness" by Radclyffe Hall was published in Greek. Its translation is the long-term work of Niki Stavridi, a lesbian feminist activist, closely affiliated to LOA from its very beginning. The group also produced a collection of articles "Multiple readings on the Well of Loneliness" (2009) which was discussed in an open event. Three years later, the lesbian novel-diary "Her lover" by Dora Roseti would reappear in bookstores in June 2013 and receive wide acknowledgement. The book is written in the form of a literary diary in which Dora narrates her love and passion for Lisa. The two young women, a student named Dora and the liberated Lisa, meet in Athens and fall in love. Dora, the more introverted of the two, chronicles the doubly tormented love in diary form; this is a story of a homosexual love in a rigidly heterosexual society. After the publishing of her diary by some male friends who did not care enough to anonymize the stories in 1929, Dora would disappear completely, only to reappear briefly in a meeting and discussion with lesbian feminist Eleni Bakopoulou in 1983. Bakopoulou, who was an active member of the Autonomous Group of

Homosexual Women, searched for her, and eventually found her. She recorded Roseti's testimony (in writing), but then put it aside and continued with her life. In 2006, prompted by a new edition and the resurfacing of the novel, and by her own impending death, she published the notes of her meeting with Dora. These notes include the testimony Dora Roseti left her, together with her reflections on the ephemera of lesbian life.

Through the oral testimony of Dora to Eleni Bakapoulou unfolds a lesbian history spatiotemporally located in Athens between 1920-1980 and fraught with fragments, breaks, silences, pain, doubts, and pleasures. The ephemera of Dora's lesbian history, which emerges in 1929, disappears and re-appears in 1983, only to join the Greek lesbian archive in 2006, designates the exclusionary matrix by which lesbian subjects are formed. Lesbians constitute the abjected beings who form the constitutive outside of compulsory heterosexuality in the Greek cultural and national imaginary. According to Butler (1993), the abject occupies those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life that formulate the borders of human intelligibility, namely the abject is not granted the status of the subject, yet their social existence and designation as "unlivable" is necessary to decipher the limits of recognisable subjects (Butler: 1993).

In the context of building coalitions with other social minorities, LOA addressed the Purple House to host its social and political activities. The Purple House along with the Network for Social and Political Rights, is a self-organized space formed around 1998 with the aim to support and bring into contact various social minorities (anti-racist collectives, groups of various immigrants, a self-organized school for teaching Greek to immigrants). The space maintains strong leftist, anti-racist affiliations build on the principles of solidarity, coexistence, and exchange of ideas while also maintaining its autonomy from political parties. From 2004 onwards LOA organizes LGBT film screenings at the Purple House (2004-2009); weekly social gatherings (one Thursday per month) for socializing, discussing, drinking, flirting and having fun; in some cases, these weekly gatherings turned into music nights dedicated to female artists such as Laurie Anderson & Lena Platonos, Janis Joplin & Sotiria Mpellou, and Arleta; and finally, two large-scale events which took place every year for a decade- the women-only party and the mixed brunch (2004-2014).

In addition, the group engages collectively in various political actions with speeches and/or marches: the anti-racist festival of Athens, Athens Pride, European Social Forum, International Transgender Memory Day, International Woman's Day etc. Most women describe their experience at LOA as a self-transformative journey. Nelli, who belongs to the older generation of lesbians, speaks about LOA as a life-changing experience.

Nelli: *"LOA was the actualization of the feeling of community, until then I experienced it fictionally through the texts of the French Lesbia magazine. LOA became the place where you could discuss things about your life, where other women try to listen and understand you, a place where you produce lesbian discourse...I learned how to talk about myself, I learned to talk about my feelings...it formed my perspective towards life...it gave me the filters to analyse the world around me."*

The first women- only party took place in 2004. This was achieved after LOA's long-term and strenuous discussions with the Purple House. Women-only parties were born out of the strenuous efforts of the older generation of women who met and formed their sense of community at the beach of Skala Eressos. In the following text LOA explains the need for a women- only party and its importance in Greek society. The following text circulated for the years to come (until the last women-only party in 2014):

...when your social reality goes hand in hand with invisibility, when you have no choice but to lead a double life, when you constantly have to explain and justify your sexual desire to others, then a space you can call your own becomes extremely important...when the word “lesvia” which is part of who you are is nothing but a derogatory term, then creating a space that builds sociality among women, a space where they can dance, flirt and celebrate their sexuality is a necessary surviving strategy, a strategy of historical importance for lesbians...Although a women- only party seems contradictory to the all- inclusive, anti-racist ethos of the Purple House, it comes by acknowledging the fact that exclusion is multi-layered, deep and contradictory. Thus to ignore the circumstances under which people experience different sort of exclusions signals the failure of practicing resistance. Luckily enough, the Purple House did not ignore the lesbians’ different experience of exclusion.

Excerpt from LOA’s leaflet, December 2004

The parties were the result of collective work between women of LOA (else called LOADES) and the network of personal contacts surrounding them. In most parties, women engaged with the “hat game.” The “hat game” consists a ritual practice of sexual intimacy which entails the exchange of the hat between women followed by the exchange of kisses between them (see chapter eight on sexual practices). Some women told me that this is a way to address women’s guilt with their own sexuality by actually encouraging flirting, kisses and the creation of a lesbian sensuality, which actually struck me from the very first party. Undoubtedly, the “*hat game*” serves to open the field of lesbian desire, so deeply oppressed in public space, where overt expressions of homosexual intimacy and desire (kissing) are being policed.

The different energy in a room full of women is recurrently mentioned by some women of LOA. They argued that women seem to be more comfortable with their bodies and more capable to enjoy their sexuality in a room full of women. This was contemplated by younger lesbies, boy-looking and affiliated to queer, who argued that this was not a defining feature of their experience at LOA’s annual parties. The younger generation of queer lesbies often referred with skepticism on the female energy of these parties yet they didn’t question the necessity for the organization of women-only parties. It was considered a great conquest of LOA to create such a space for women to come together as well as succeed in forging a political bridge with the Purple House.

Thus, there was an intergenerational acknowledgement on behalf of younger queer lesbians of the struggles suffered by older women for the establishment of these kind of parties. Below, Miranda, who belongs to the older generation of lesbians and Moira, a younger trans lesbia, discuss women- only parties.

Miranda: *“LOA aims to drag the Greek woman outside her shell, make her proud for who she is, for her lesbianism. I felt that every woman who has grown up in Greece with its strict patriarchy needs to have this experience. I saw it as a mission. Lesbians should come together, talk and feel proud about themselves. And this was also the concept behind women-only parties...To criticize a woman- only party, a space where women come to cruise other women, is as patriarchic as bishop’s Seraphim’s hate speech!”*

Natalia: *“I went to the women-only parties and yes, they have a different energy, it’s a sort of energy women have, which is lost once men enter the picture, it’s not that men have a bad energy. It’s a matter of women feeling more relaxed in women-only spaces. At women-only parties, one woman would take her shirt off and others will follow whereas at the mixed parties of QV or at the parties of Queertrans, the ones who do risky things like that are only but a few...there is this feeling of patrolling, the male gaze, the straight gaze, I don’t know how to call it but I am always impressed by how different, how relaxed it feels at women- only parties.”*

To conclude, LOA became the melting pot for the emergence of independent activists and collectives. Various women who attended LOA later formed and/or participated at the formation of other groups like QT and QV. In the fourteen years of its existence, LOA tried to incorporate different sexual and gender identities, from trans men to trans women to bisexuals. This was not always effectively done but it transformed profoundly the group, other times with open conflicts, other times with its failures to become as inclusive as LOADES wished.

### 3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the history of the homosexual and lesbian feminist movement marked by ongoing divisions between travesti and homosexuals, between straight feminists and lesbian feminists. I showed that the biopolitical discourse of the AIDS epidemic recurrently appears to stigmatize and marginalize non- normative bodies and sexualities, from the passive *aderfi* to the female migrant sex worker. In addition, I discussed the links between queer feminism and the homosexual movement in QV's approach to hegemonic masculinity.

In the second part, I unravelled the non-linear history of the lesbian feminist movement by looking at discursive activist material that forged the emergence of the lesvia identity. In addition, I considered the international community of Eressos as the basis upon which organized forms of lesbian activism emerged in the early millennium. I looked at the early history of LOA and particularly the organization of women-only parties which contributed tremendously to the formation and empowerment of the contemporary lesvia identity. The shifts from *Lavris* to *Madam Gou* to *Dalika* put forward different types of lesvia identification, from political (more polemical) lesbianism to affirmative (more embodied) lesbianism. The following years of LOA were marked by intergenerational gaps between second- wave lesbian feminists, who grew up at Eressos and at the lesbian bar culture and younger queer feminists, who were networked to western queer activisms and discourses.

In the following chapter, I consider the queer feminist political subject as a haunted figure that emerges out of this non-linear homosexual and lesbian feminist history. I discuss its fragmentation in the way it appears to "inhabit" space, partly as a ghost, partly as a spectral constellation. I look at the kind of politics this new political subject produces and consider rage and killjoying as constitutive parts of becoming a queer feminist in Greece. Finally, I reflect on the use of the term "queer" by tracing its temporality alongside the LGBT and feminist movement and present the meanings ascribed to it by local women activists.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Queer feminist politics in Athens:

### Haunting- Intersectional killjoys- Appearing

#### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I presented a historical overview of the lesbian feminist and homosexual movement in Greece by moving back and forth between discourses and locating the temporal lines that connect them. The process of reiterating lesbian feminist and homosexual history turned into an ethical imperative that drove me to record this history against the regulatory forces which contribute to the erasure of lesbians and gays from the history of social movements in Greece. This chapter explores the political discourses produced by queer feminists and activist lesbians, with the aim of unravelling the traits that comprise the queer feminist subject. For this purpose, I use activist material, posters, texts, zines, newspaper articles, and archival material. I reflect on them with the help of critical theory, Derridean at its core, and try to locate the queer and lesbian feminist political subject that transgresses normative spaces, discourses, and ideologies.

The women who unravel their lives, open their hearts, and talk about their identities, their sex life, and the complexities of their desires in the ethnographically informed Part B, are the same women who crafted space, produced lesbian feminist and queer texts, designed posters, demonstrated on the streets against rape culture and homophobia, kissed fearlessly in public, disrupted anarchist squats, drew slogans on walls, and went to Pride. This chapter serves to shed light on the lives of these women from the perspective of the discursive material they produced, the open talks and demonstrations they organized, and their guerrilla graffiti raids in urban space.

The chapter is structured into four sections, which discuss the queer feminist and lesbian political subject as “haunting”, as “appearing”, as an “intersectional enraged killjoy”, and as one that (self-)reflects on the western and local meanings of “queer.”

These three traits emerged ethnographically through my engagement with the everyday activist life of queer feminist collectives and lesbian groups. Each section draws from a variety of discursive material, from posters and archival material, to ethnographic fieldnotes, and interviews.

The first section draws from Derrida's hauntology to depict the queer feminist subject as a haunted figure which seeks to give justice to past feminist claims. In particular, I look at the anti-rape discourse produced by anarchofeminists and lesbian feminists and draw temporal lines that link them to the claims of autonomous feminists of the 1980s. I suggest that the contemporary queer feminist political subject is "haunted" by autonomous feminism with anti-rape claims (and male violence) consisting a recurrent theme. The queer feminist subject is haunted by its past and at the same time, it haunts the progressive linearity of "radical" (and Marxist) social movements and the (western) linear sequence of time by building feminist communities and affects across time.

The second section turns to visibility and the politics of appearing. Visibility has been an ongoing claim of the lesbian feminist group (LOA), yet becoming visible in Greece doesn't necessarily amount to being openly lesbia. Drawing from a non-confessional approach to appearing (one that doesn't entail transparent visibility), I consider lesbian forms of appearing in public space, namely graffiti raids on public buildings, which take place at night. I consider the ghostly appearances of lesbians in public space through their love walls slogans and graffiti that ruptures the straight life of the city. In addition, I look at LGBT organized "kiss-in" protests as acts that directly address and reveal the heterosexual regulation of urban space. And finally, I consider forced forms of appearing at the media coverage of Pride parades, and discuss the queer vulnerability which emerges from this unwilling exposure.

The third section considers the queer (trans) feminist subject as an intersectional killjoy who disrupts the happiness of straight male anarchists. During 2013- 2014, trans feminists crafted space for themselves in an anarchist squat in Athens, Ostris, by continually challenging the silencing mechanisms of anarchism. The latter work by systematically ignoring the voices of sexual and gender minorities under the rubric of a revolutionary sameness which is based upon the notion of a post-revolutionary egalitarianism. Trans feminists target relentlessly anarchist spaces that declare

themselves inclusive (in the context of their ideologies) and at the same they enhance the reproduction of exclusions by silencing the presence (or absence) of sexual and gender minorities. The trans feminist political subject which emerges out of the disruptions of this “happy” silence is enraged. It’s a rage that quickly turns into an assertive force and disrupts feelings of comfort. In many respects, the enraged presence of trans feminists in anarchist squats- more than three open discussions were organized in anarchist squats by QT during 2013-2015- resonate with Stryker’s call for transgender rage. In her poignant article “My words to Victor Frankenstein” (1994) Stryker suggests that “transgender rage is a queer fury, an emotional response to conditions in which it becomes imperative to take up, for the sake of one’s own continued survival as a subject” (Stryker, 1994: 249). And she further argues that it’s “the exclusion from the human condition fueling this deep and abiding rage” (Stryker, 1994: 249).

The fourth section looks at the understandings of the term “queer” by all kinds of feminists (straight, lesbians, trans). Queer has been used in various types of publications, such as leaflets, zines, community journals and, finally, in formal academic articles and books in Greek. It’s frequently used by local academics to represent sexual minorities, however with little consideration of how activists use it in everyday life. Here, I give primacy to the meanings that lesbians and queer feminist activists attribute to the term queer. I argue that queer was not seen as a site of identification. The term was used as “an umbrella term” for members of different sexual minority groups and developed around a diverse social movement that targeted gendered social oppressions and discriminations against homosexuals. Moreover, it brought to the fore a set of complex discourses that created the terms for a new politics of sexuality set against orthodox Marxist and patriotic discourses (see Appendix B).

While looking at activists’ understandings of queer I also present a conceptual history of the LGBT movement in Greece and the term queer to argue that it’s marked by temporal disjunctions and asynchronies. A similar argument is put forward by Kulpa and Mizielinska (2011) in their study of queer and LGBT politics in Central and Eastern European countries (Poland), fraught by temporal disjunctions. In particular, they suggest that the term “temporal disjunction” consists, not only an effect of history, but also “a condition of cultural hegemony” (Kulpa, Mizielinska & Stasinska, no date: 119) according to which “the geo-temporality of the West becomes hegemonic because it is

discursively presented as more advanced, while others are framed as backward” (Kulpa, Mizielinska & Stasinska, no date: 119). According to Mizielinska (2011), the consequences of “temporal disjunction” are observed on three levels: firstly, identity-building, secondly, stages of development, and thirdly, knowledge-production. The first level is about the emergence of hybrid identities in Central and Eastern European countries in contrast to Western/Anglo-American historiographical accounts that depict coherent sexual identities (Kulpa, Mizielinska & Stasinska, no date: 120-121). The second level is about “time of coincidence” in Central and Eastern European countries vs sequential, linear stages of development in Western/ Angloamerican worlds that follow a progressive narrative of development, moving from oppression to liberation (Kulpa, Mizielinska & Stasinska, no date: 120-121). And finally, the third level concerns the hegemony of Western/ Angloamerican queer theory in knowledge- production, namely, Mizielinska suggests that meanings, categories, and discourses are dominated by Western models of knowledge-production, which in many cases, are being uncritically transferred and reproduced by local queer theorists in their respective countries (Kulpa, Mizielinska & Stasinska, no date: 120-121; Mizielinska: 2011). I found this categorization particularly relevant in my study of queer and LGBT activism in Greece, yet I will be focusing on the second level regarding the Greek LGBT/queer/feminist movement, that is, the temporal coexistence of different, sometimes contradictory, discourses that correspond to different times of western LGBT activism (see temporal map, Appendix C).

Drawing from the work of queer theorists in Central European countries, Derrida’s notion of hauntological time and my ethnographic material I suggest that the queer feminist political subject in Greece puts forward claims that haunt the linearity of the living present by building feminist communities across time; it appears in space either as a spectral ghost or as an enraged activist; it kills the happiness of anarchists, who celebrate their all-inclusive revolutionary agendas by introducing intersectional and experiential discourses; and finally reflects on the meanings of queer by juxtaposing the western, Angloamerican notion of queer to local histories. How do activist lesbians and queer feminists relate with the western and local understandings of queer? What constitutes and differentiates the discourses of queer feminists? Who is this political subject called queer feminist who emerged in Greece within the last decade? These are

some of the questions that continually emerge throughout this chapter.

This chapter focuses on lesbia and queer feminist politics and looks at the co-constitutive character of these discourses (the subject constitutes them and is constituted by them). The queer feminist political subject displaces hegemonic discourses, is exiled from Marxist revolutionary agendas, and crafts through rage and imagination its own place in the world. A position which aims to kill the joyfulness of hegemonic narratives, to haunt the order of temporal linearity, and to appear in public space against all odds.

## **4.2 Spectres of radical feminism**

### **The temporal heterogeneity of feminist anti-rape rage**

In chapter two I presented the fragmented and non-linear history of the lesbian feminist movement in Greece, where I argued that the relationship between straight and lesbian feminists was turbulent. In addition, I tried to draw temporal lines between the homosexual movement of the 1980s and queer feminist collectives in terms of ideas, practices, and approaches. I wish to conceptualize these temporal leaps, particularly regarding the lesbian feminist movement, as spectral constellations that sprang out of an anti-rape rage followed by the proliferation of anarchofeminist collectives over the last 5 years (from 2013 onwards). Instead of following a linear chronological order charged with expectations of progress, I focus on the possibility of moving across time, namely collapsing time through an anti-rape rage expressed by feminists in the present and in the 1980s. I wish to suggest that through historical touches and spectral constellations we could form feminist communities across time, communities shaped by what Benjamin calls “a memory of the future” (quoted in Traverso, 2016: 170). Contemporary feminist ideas and sentiments etch themselves in the memory of autonomous feminists who shaped their imagination. The latter played the role of what Benjamin calls “subliminal points of reference” (Traverso, 2016: 59).

In June 2016, anarchofeminist collectives (Brastards, Beflona) along with independent lesbian feminist activists organized an anti-rape demonstration with the aim to denounce the vast number of rapes structurally silenced by Greek authorities.

Anti-rape activism is, of course, a legacy of seventies feminism. The Movement of Democratic Women (KDG), along with autonomous feminist groups in the mid-seventies, took the lead in organizing mobilizations for the legalization of abortion, the change of Family Law and the reformation of the Penal Code on rape.<sup>12</sup> My archival research draws from the study of Marilena Simitis “New Social Movements in Greece: Aspects of the Feminist and Ecological projects” (2002). However, I look at the archival material of the 1970s- 1980s feminist movement from the perspective of temporal disjunctions and haunting repetitions between past and present feminist claims, discourses and practices. It is with this intention that I bring my observations in relation to some of her archival material (Simitis: 2002).

It goes without saying that the claims of autonomous feminists were not restricted to the change of the legal framework. They aimed to effect structural changes by bringing to the fore the ways male power is reproduced and by publicizing male violence in general. In this context, the women’s group in Thessaloniki (which also published the magazine “Katina”) set up a SOS-helpline for abused women that ran for a couple of years. In the following excerpt from the Women’s House of Athens we read:

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<sup>12</sup> Based on the Greek Penal code (3500/2006) the definition of rape goes as follows: “Whoever with physical violence or with threat of grave and direct danger forces another to intercourse or to tolerance or action of an indecent act, is punished with incarceration.” Until 2006, domestic violence was not recognised as a separate criminal offence at the Greek Penal Code, it was placed together with other legal provisions from sexual abuse, abuse of minors to indecent assault, child pornography etc. (articles 336-353 of the Penal Code) under the section “Crimes against sexual freedom and crimes of economic exploitation of sexual life.” With the law 3500/ 2006 domestic violence became a separate criminal offence but the perception of rape remained problematic. Based on Greek legislation (and case law), rape is not considered an offence against the victim’s personality but an offensive act against sexual freedom (“genetisia eleutheria”), meaning the right to the self-determination of body, sexuality, and reproduction (Terminal 119, 2008: 58-59). With this definition of rape, the woman is perceived in terms of her womb and its reproductive abilities and not as an individual whose rights are offended altogether (social- ethical stigmatization, psychological traumas that affect women’s social and economic life etc.). The autonomous feminist movement demanded that rape should be defined as an offence against women’s personality and not simply against her sexual freedom. They also demanded that rape is automatically persecuted by the state and not only after filing a lawsuit- indictment, which was the case until 1983. Broadening the definition of rape beyond extra-matrimonial vaginal penetration was a recurrent claim of the feminist movement. In 2006 with article 336 of the Penal Code (after 20 years!) the word “extra- matrimonial” that defined “rape copulation” was removed. With this change domestic abuse and marital rape are granted legal status (Terminal 119, 2008: 58-59). Another conquest of the feminist movement was the recognition of anal penetration (“para fysi”) apart from vaginal (“fysi”) as a form of rape. Other important claims of the autonomous feminist movement were: the establishment of gender equality at courts (regarding the composition of the judges and the jury), the training of judges on rape trials and particularly on how they should treat the victim. In addition, they demanded that any questions regarding the victim’s sexual past (before the rape) are prohibited by law. It was a common practice for the lawyers of rapists to ask the victim questions on the number of sexual partners she had, whether she felt sexually satisfied etc. The above claims were ignored so nowadays judges in rape cases are mainly men with no special training while lawyers never stopped asking about the victim’s sexual past (see table 3). Finally, autonomous feminists requested the presence of feminists as legal prosecutors in rape cases to offer their support to lawyers affiliated to the women’s movement (Terminal 119, 2008: 58-59).

We know that the essential solution to the problem of violence by men at the expense of women (which is generated in the spheres of family, education, mass media, in the whole “patriarchal society”) is not going to be given solely by some laws.

Excerpt from “Rape: Myth and Content”,  
publication by Women’s House of Athens, 4 December 1982  
(also quoted at Simitis, 2014: 179)

For autonomous feminists, female oppression is interlinked with patriarchal violence, and gender is embedded within the existent power structures. In this context, the question of violence is a question of the uneven distribution of power, a question of structural hierarchy, that formulates social perception and social reality and derivatively becomes “a categorical distinction, a difference” (MacKinnon, 1987: 40). In this sense, rape was interpreted as part of the social inequalities between men and women.

Rape is the extreme reconstruction of daily life, which is marked by male aggression at the expense of women on the physical and mental level. On the contrary, women’s sexual behavior has been shaped by the threat that surrounds it. This fear can persist without being justified every moment. It is sufficient that it is kept there. Rape is there to remind women that freedom is utopian.

Excerpt from “Violence and women or else bite the hand that feeds you”,  
publication by Women’s House of Thessaloniki, March 1982  
(also quoted at Simitis, 2014: 179).

In this context, rape was associated with everyday life and the rules of patriarchal society that structure the social relations between the two sexes. The threat of rape was there to remind women that sexual freedom is punishable and that compliance with female roles (sexual modesty and performing well their kin roles, namely being a good daughter and wife) reassures women’s growth and safety. Thus, as long as patriarchy structures social reality with rape consisting the most violent example of total ownership over women’s bodies, women will never be free. Male violence, along with reproductive rights, were the main themes of autonomous feminist activities

throughout the 1980s. In particular, “Reclaim the Night<sup>13</sup>” demonstrations were organized; helplines offering help and support to abused women were set up; there were self-learning and empowerment groups on rape, male violence and social relations;; demonstrations were organized at the trial of rapists; posters, leaflets and pamphlets were distributed and solidarity groups were formed in support of abused women (Simitis, 2014: 180). The similarities on the level of discourses (anti-capitalist, anti-institutional), practices (consciousness-raising, self-learning groups), and organizational structure (small size, autonomous, anti-hierarchical) between past and present anarchofeminist groups and lesbian feminist collectives, invoke the question of the ghost, the revenant, that which returns (see Appendix E)

But where and who are the ghosts? In “Specters of Marx”, Derrida observes that “every period has its ghosts, its own experience, its own medium, and its proper hauntological media” (Derrida, 1994: 241). When looking at two posters, one from the late seventies and one contemporary, we observe that a spectre is haunting the queer feminist movement, the spectre of autonomous feminism with rape resurfacing as a category of women’s oppression within a society that silences and normalizes domestic and sexual violence (see following tables). Indeed, legal authorities, political parties, and the Greek family orchestrate a well-tuned rape discourse that goes hand in hand with the cultural triptych “Family, Religion, Fatherland.” The following tables consist of articles taken from the Greek press published during 2013- 2015 as well as extracts from rape trials that serve to depict rape as endemic to Greek sociocultural structures.

- Why did you prefer to go by foot at the village and did not take your motorbike?
- What were you wearing the day that, as you say, you were raped?
- How were you sure he had a gun?
- How do you know it was really a gun?  
Perhaps it was a toy.

Questions addressed to rape victim by legal prosecutor and lawyers in defence of the perpetrator,  
Rape trial in Karditsa at 20.10. 1984 (Papariga- Kostavara, 2007: 54-58)

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<sup>13</sup> These were marches organized for the right of women to be able to move through public spaces at night without fear. They took place in various places at the UK, USA, Italy, Germany. In Greece, they took place at the late 1970s-early 1980s.



Syriza is like a woman:  
When she says No she means perhaps  
When she says Perhaps she means Yes  
When she says Yes she is not a woman

The MP of the right wing party, New Democracy, Eyrpidis Stylianidis in a tweet post about the negotiations of Syriza with the IMF, July 2015

Femen, those stupid women, attacked (with their naked breasts, what else really?) Dominique Strauss Kahn. Unfortunately, they were lucky! On the one hand, because he was surrounded by people and on the other, because the perky, ex-president of the IMF, currently faces judicial problems and it was not a good idea to provoke them. Otherwise, those hysterics would need three days to get back on their feet- and not from the beating...

(Kasimatis: 2015)

I will now turn to the response of feminist activists by looking at posters from different eras. The first poster (figure 1) is an example from the various marches and demonstrations organized by autonomous feminist groups against rape and male violence in the mid-seventies. I present it here since its performative force exceeds its living time and presence. Forty years later another queer feminist group (gender asphyxia) produced a very similar poster against rape culture (figure 2). As an index or barometer of unfinished feminist revolution, rape operates in the “living-present” as a large scale metaphor for women’s oppression.



Figure 2: "And at night I carry hammer in my pocket... Every form of defence against male violence is legitimate." Demonstration for the support of a woman's trial at 26/5 in court because she defended herself against her rapist, 24 May, 6pm, at Propylaea-Anti-rape poster, late 1970s.

**οι βιαστές δεν είναι ράτσα ειδική  
είναι άντρες καθημερινοί!**



για την Ε. που φοβάται να περπατά μόνη της  
και για τη Α. που όταν είναι στο δρόμο τη νύχτα, κοιτά συνεχώς ανήσυχια πίσω της  
για την Ν. που όταν βγαίνει φροντίζει να μην πει παραπάνω για να είναι νηφάλια στο γυρισμό  
και για τη Ε. που πριν βγει ελέγχει ξανά το μήκος της φούφας της  
για τη Σ. που κρατά τα κλειδιά ανάμεσα στα δάχτυλά της σαν όπλο  
και για τη Δ. που στο αυτοκίνητο κλειδώνει πάντα τις ασφάλειες  
για τη Μ. που όταν ο ταξίτζης άρχισε να της την πέφτει αναγκάστηκε να κατέβει στη μέση της Κηφισίας  
και για τη Κ. που κάθε φορά που φοβάται μόνη στο δρόμο σκέφτεται πόσο διαφορετικά θα ήταν αν ήταν αγόρι  
για την Χ. που προτιμά να κάτσει σε ένα πάρτι που βαριέται παρά να φύγει μόνη της  
και για την Γ. που αποφάσισε να αγοράσει σουνιά κι ας μην είναι αίσουρη αν θα μπορούσε να τον χρησιμοποιήσει όταν χρειαστεί  
για την Ι. που έχει πει στην Κ να της κάνει αναπάντη μόλις φτάσει σπίτι της γιατί αλλιώς ανησυχεί πως κάτι της συνέβη  
και για τη Α. που κρέμεται πάντα στη μισητή θέση στο λεωφορείο, κι αν αυτή είναι παρμένη προτιμά να στέκεται όρθια  
για την Π. που όταν κάποιος κόλλαγε πίσω της στο λεωφορείο δε μίλησε γιατί νόμιζε ότι υπερβάλλει  
και για την Α. που έκανε ολόκληρο κύκλο για να αποφύγει να περάσει από ένα σκοτεινό στενό  
για την Η. που φοβάται όταν ακούει βήματα πίσω της  
και για τη Κ. που όταν είναι μόνη στο δρόμο κάνει ότι μιλάει στο κινητό

Για όλες εμάς, που το φύλο μας και μόνο αποτελεί λόγο να φοβόμαστε στο δρόμο, η απειλή της αντρικής βίας είναι καθημερινό βίωμα. Μιλάμε για τις ματιές σας, τα χουφτώματα στο λεωφορείο και την τρομοκρατία στα στενά.

**Μιλάμε για τον βιασμό που παραμένει αόρατος.**

Θέλουμε ο δρόμος να είναι και δικό μας πεδίο δράσης και έκφρασης και έχουμε σιχαθεί να μας τον στερείτε. Μιλάμε για όλους εσάς, γκόμενους, φίλους, συντρόφους και περαστικούς, που βλέπετε τα σώματά μας σαν αντανάκλαση των επιθυμιών σας και σαν πεδία επιβολής των προνομίων σας. Δεν πρόκειται να αλλάξουμε τον τρόπο που περπατάμε και ντυνόμαστε, θα αλλάξετε εσείς τον τρόπο που μας κοιτάτε.

Ο μόνος λόγος που μια γυναίκα πέφτει θύμα βιασμού είναι ότι ένας άντρας τη βιάσει. Οποιαδήποτε δικαιολογία όπως: «τα ήθελε» ή «έδωσε δικαιώματα» δεν είναι τίποτα παραπάνω από ξεράσματα πατριαρχικού λόγου. Αυτή ακριβώς η κουλτούρα του βιασμού είναι που μεταθέτει την ευθύνη από το θύτη στο θύμα. Η διέξοδος που απλόχερα μας δίνεται είναι να τεθούμε υπό την προστασία γκόμενων, πατεράδων ή φίλων σε ρόλο νταβατζή, που θα φροντίσουν για την ασφάλεια αυτού που τους ανήκει.

Να σταματήσουμε να είμαστε αντικείμενα είτε των «καλών» είτε των κακών προθέσεων των αντρών.

**να οπλιστούμε ενάντια στη διάχυτη ματσίλα,  
να πάρουμε πίσω το δρόμο!**

gender#asphyxia\*

Figure 3: “Rapists are not a special race. They are daily men! Let’s arm ourselves against machismo and take back the streets!”- Anti- rape poster, June 2014, gender asphyxia collective.

The above queer feminist poster reads the following:

We are talking for those of us whose gender is the reason we feel afraid on the street. Male threat is a daily experience. From sneaky glances to sexual groping in buses and feelings of fear at dark alleys. We are talking about the rape which remains invisible...the only reason a woman is a rape victim is because a man raped her. Any other excuse: "She wanted it" or "she was tipsy" are nothing else but disgusts of patriarchal power. This is how rape culture transfers responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim.

Just as Derrida's attempts to theorize ghostly figurations in and of Marx's writing is facilitated in "Specters of Marx" by his introduction of the concept of hauntology, so this same concept might likewise assist in illuminating some of queer feminism's spectral dimensions. Deliberately evoking the ontological premises of being and presence, hauntology "refutes such certainties by invoking the ghost as a figure of undecideability that productively unsettles received categories of identity" (Munford R. & Waters M., 2014: 19). More crucially, though, Derrida uses hauntology as a tool for excavating the strange temporality of haunting – what he calls the "non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present" (Derrida: 1994, xviii) – in which "the ghost functions as a sign of slippages between past, present and future in order to reveal the radical contingency of the "now" " (Derrida: 1994, xviii). By disordering progressive temporal structures by obscuring the chronology of past, present and future, the spectre simultaneously disrupts the moment in which it appears and reveals the "non-contemporaneity of present time with itself."

According to Derrida, the "living present" is not only a moment that is already, and will always be, haunted by the ghosts of the past, but one which is also, simultaneously, haunted by the future: "the spectre", he claims, "is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back" (Derrida, 1994: 49). Using the term "revenant" (from "revenir" in French, which means to come back), Derrida explains that the spectre "begins by coming back" (Derrida: 1994, 11); indeed, "no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or a living future" (Derrida, 1994: 123). Part legacy, part prophecy, the spectre is an emissary of pasts and

possible futures that the present cannot exorcize: “they are always there, spectres, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet” (Derrida, 1994: 221). Derrida’s notion of the spectre as a vehicle of nostalgia – for futures that were not realized, or potential that was not fulfilled – speaks, moreover, to the discourses of queer feminist collectives in the living-present, and particularly formulations of female identities that seem to “ghost” the styles and politics of previous eras. By looking at the two posters, one notices the repetitive patterns and rhetorical reenactments that speak to the ambiguous temporality of the spectre of autonomous feminism which “presents itself only as that which could come or come back” (Derrida, 1994: 221) or as that which actually never left.

By going back to the mid-eighties and the downfall of the autonomous feminist movement, we are able to trace the ghosts as they traverse variegated precincts of queer feminism’s rhetoric and practices in the living-present. It has been noted by other anthropologists (Marinouidi: 2017) that the institutionalization of the autonomous feminist movement by the end of 1980s was effectuated by calls for modernization and legislative changes. The election of the Panhellenic Socialist Party, PASOK, in 1981, resulted in the absorption of claims posited by the autonomous feminist movement that came to be seen as an outcome of the work of political parties and their affiliated women’s organizations (Varika, 1992: 71). By the end of nineties, autonomous feminist groups were no longer present in the social sphere, and the memory of their activities had partially faded away. In the meantime, the institutional Left had appropriated and “normalized” most of their discourses (Marinouidi: 2017).

Nowadays, queer feminist collectives (QV, gender asphyxia), which maintain critical ties with the anti-authoritarian movement, are still considered “thematic” since they engage with something “partial” to class struggles. As argued by Marinouidi (2017), this mode of thinking follows a long-term segregation of the political which indicates that women engage with feminism, gays and lesbians with homophobia and trans people with transphobia whereas anti-authoritarian spaces are male-dominated and fraught with masculinistic fantasies of sovereign mastery (Marinouidi: 2017). Their revolutionary discourses refer to the liberation of Man without realizing that power functions as an assemblage of discourses, without acknowledging that some are granted the status of accomplished political subjectivities while others struggle to be seen and

heard.

Queer feminist collectives (QV, gender asphyxia) emerged from a desire to create structures against the silencing mechanisms of the anti-authoritarian movement and thus, produce their own counter-discourses. The process of disidentifying from oppressive discourses involves “working on, with, and against” a dominant discourse. In this process, the split character of the subject, which is experienced when somebody finds oneself in-between divergent, and sometimes contradictory, political belongings, becomes a source of tension and self-production (Munoz: 1999). One of my informants, Ismini, a straight feminist, speaks about her experience within the anti-authoritarian movement and her engagement with feminism. In her narrative she navigates the building of her selfhood through, with, and against these structures:

*Ismini: “It felt as if there was an ideal to which I had to fit. And it was bad that I did not fit, I had to fit, it felt compulsory. But I was incompatible to the ideals of anarchism. The narratives they had for women were predetermined, women were considered politically inadequate. It would go like this: «You may be educated but what do you know about real life and politics that happen on the streets». There was no place for cuteness or any sort of femininity, you had to be macho to gain some respect. You could say that our feminist group developed some resistance against these hierarchically gendered narratives.”*

Returning to Derrida, the ghost not only acts as a substitute for what is not there, but renders apparent that which has been cast out in order to safeguard particular power arrangements. In this way, the ghost encourages us to develop an ethics of responsibility towards the barely visible “others” of the past, present and future, auguring a “politics of memory...inheritance, and of generations” (Derrida, 1994: xviii). I’ve argued that the contemporary anti-rape discourse refers discursively and aesthetically to 1970s feminism, yet more punk. By drawing from its own past, contemporary feminism attempts “to exorcise not in order to chase away” (Derrida, 1994: 175) the ghosts of autonomous feminism but this time to make amends and as Derrida aptly puts it “to grant them the right, if it means making them come back alive, as revenants who would no longer be revenants, but as other unconditional arrivants to

whom a hospitable memory or promise must offer welcome” (Derrida, 1994: 175). Derrida’s insistence upon the shared importance of memory and inheritance seems relevant to contemporary debates between queer and feminism – debates that reflect anxieties about the past debts of autonomous feminism and the future obligations of queer feminism. These debates turn into identity battles over what truly makes maleness, with bodily differences and gendered identifications becoming sources of frustration in the process of building queer feminist spaces (see chapter five: the t-shirt debate). My point in all this is that one way of thinking about the heterogeneity of queer feminism in Greece is by working temporally through feelings of rage. This also suggests that queer spectrality as a phantasmatic relation to historicity, accounts for the affective force of an anti-rape rage of the past in the present, an affect issuing from another time and placing a demand on the present in the form of a feminist ethical imperative.

### **4.3 LGBT activists, visibility, and the politics of appearing**

On 6 January 2014, a group of LGBT rights activists affiliated with the group *Pousti Riot*, along with individual lesbian and gay activists, gathered at the port of Piraeus to protest in favor of the draft bill for same-sex civil partnerships and against Bishop Seraphim’s homophobic statements and hate speech. On November 2013, the European Court of Human Rights required Greece to permit same-sex couples to enter into civil partnerships<sup>14</sup> (Troboukis: 2014). In not so doing, Greece was ruled by the

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<sup>14</sup> The pro-civil union agenda of LGBT rights activists runs back in 2007 when LGBT rights activists supported a pro-marriage agenda, which drew from a vagueness in law 1329/1983- Application of the Constitutional Principle of Equality of the Sexes- of the civil code according to “which the preconditions for getting married refers only to humans, persons to be married, and husbands, and does not discern on the grounds of gender and sexual orientation” (Kantsa, 2014: 818-836). However, according to the interpretation of the law, marriage is conceived as a heterosexual union. On 2007, as noted by Kantsa (2014) “the majority of LGBT rights organizations, including independent lesbian and gay activists, claimed their right to civil marriage and organised a pro-marriage campaign with the title “Say, I do!” The campaign developed around a civil rights agenda in the context of which meetings were held and articles were published” (Kantsa, 2014: 818-836). In March 2008, the right- wing party, New Democracy, stated the introduction of the draft law on cohabitation contracts, which, however, didn’t include same-sex couples. On 3 June 2008, at the small island of Tilos, two couples, a lesbian and gay, got married with the agreement of the mayor of the island, as a resistance to the law’s overt discrimination against same-sex couples. As suggested by Kantsa (2014) “the event received wide publicity at the Greek media, yet a court session convened after a couple of months declared the marriages “unfounded” on the grounds that the law regarding “gender difference” was unfulfilled. It was not much later that the couples took their case to to the European Court of Human Rights” (Kantsa, 2014: 818-836). The subsequent governments did not amend the law until the European Court of Human Rights conveyed to Greece was in violation of article

European Court of Justice for violating the European Convention on Human Rights. (Smith: 2013). Before the upcoming discussion of the draft bill on same-sex civil partnerships, various Christian Orthodox figures, Bishop Seraphim among them, appeared on television and claimed that "homosexuality is an unnatural aberration that's not observed amongst animals" and that "the church intends to excommunicate those politicians who intend to vote in favour of the draft bill on same-sex civil unions" (Smith, 2013: no page).

On Epiphany, LGBT rights activists waited for Bishop Seraphim to toss the cross into the sea and began kissing, others were waving colorful LGBT flags and handing out leaflets that read: "Love is not a sin." In the following days, Pousti Riot stated on their blog that "love is not as sin, we don't hide, we don't apologize, we don't remain silent. We demand equal rights" (Troboukis: 2014). What needs to be noted is that kissing is not an acceptable public behavior; many lesbian and gay activists share similar stories about bars and cafés with a gay and lesbian clientele where they might be told off if seen kissing their partner. On May 2015, at a gay-friendly bar in central Athens, a gay couple was asked to be more discreet and stop kissing as this could potentially upset other customers. After a couple of days, a number of gay and lesbian activists organized a kiss-in protest where they held banners that read "Homophobia is provocative, not kissing" (Kostopoulos: 2015).

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8 (right to respect for private and family life) in conjunction with article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) and same-sex civil unions became again a matter of discussion. Finally, the Syriza government, on December 2018, amended the law on cohabitation contracts to include same-sex couple (Kantsa, 2014: 818-836).





Figure 4: Photo circulating on social media from the kiss-in protest, January 2014, Photo via [poustiriot.blogspot.com](http://poustiriot.blogspot.com)

These militant-erotic interventions that took their most public form in Pousti Riot's kiss-in protest in front of religious authorities, Christian followers, and television cameras, performatively enact a right to existence, that is, a right to appear. According to Butler, appearing to others happens within the context of precarity; it's an exercise of precarity that seeks to unsettle the very conditions of precarity (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 101). To a certain extent, the question addressed through activist kisses enacts a performative message that reads "We are here", or otherwise "We are still here", which

means that “we, gays, lesbians, and trans have not become the glaring that structures your public life” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 196). In reflecting upon activist kisses as a form of appearing in public space, I found value in the way in which Athanasiou & Butler (2013) conceptualise appearance in the form of “a performative plane of “taking place”, irreducible to surface phenomenality in that it opens up to concern what is performed in ways that avow the unperformable” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 192; Athanasiou: 2016). Against the face of an uncanny stranger, a ghostly arrivant, whose appearance in public space creates noises and cracks, the realm of appearance opens to the material conditions of its own possibility (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 193). I interpret this as underlying what Sabsay calls the “uncontainability of lines of flight” (Sabsay, 2016: 35) enacted by the exposure of LGBT activists to multiple gazes, to the violence of the heteronormative matrix, to the Greek Orthodox body politic, to the Greek media, to homophobic customers.

According to Butler & Athanasiou (2013) the stabilizing and normalizing canons of gender, sexuality, nationality, and able-bodiedness set the terms of human intelligibility and thus, structure the conditions of (human) appearance and recognition (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 251). In this context, the challenge is to mobilize “appearance” through particular forms of corporeal engagement that create dissonance, cracks and noise into the politically sovereign configurations of power (Butler & Athanasiou: 2013). Gay and lesbian bodies lead precarious lives- they are exposed daily to homophobic violence and endure physical suffering with slurs and attacks that can lead even to death (on September 2018, the LGBT community was mourning the death by lynching of the drag queen, HIV gay activist, Zak Kostopoulos/ Zackie Oh on the streets of Athens). The kiss-in protests carry the element of surprise (activists suddenly invade spaces), and require that lesbians and gays choose to be there and, in particular ways, present in public space. Kiss-in protests arise from bodies assembling together, claiming attention, and exercising a performative force of some kind which could potentially break the ceremonial boundedness of Greek Christian Orthodox gatherings.

Another form of “appearing” in public space are lesbian urban raids on the city’s walls, an activist practice with which I engaged throughout my fieldwork. Many nights I walked around central Athens with other lesbian feminists (some affiliated to the

short-lived feminist guerrilla group “Astochia Thilikou”- “Feminine Infelicity”) and wrote slogans on walls, benches, bus stops, shop windows, toilets, and public buildings. This also involved erasing fascist slogans of Golden Dawn and/or writing on top of them. Some of the slogans were declarations of love, others were declarations of identity, whilst others directly addressed the straight residents of the city: “Maria loves Eleni”, “Adele come back, Emma”, “When did you realize you were straight?”, “Mum, I’m a lesbian”, “Dad, I’m gay”, “The passion for anal sex is stronger than holy water”, “Heteronormative parents, homosexual kids”, “I want you even more hairy” etc.

The slogans stayed on the walls for a couple of days before they were erased. Our nightly walkabouts in the city, writing slogans, hiding under our hoods, leaving our trace in the city for its straight residents to notice the next morning, evokes the ephemeral character of lesbian appearance in public space. Below are some photos of lesbian slogans written on walls (see also Appendix D).



Figure 5: "Mother, I am a lesbian", wall slogan, May 2014



Figure 6: Women's same-sex symbol, wall slogan, June 2014



Figure 7: "When did you realize you were straight?", wall slogan, July 2014



Figure 8: Sofia+ Maria, LOVE, wall slogan, June 2014

Following Athanasiou's approach on appearing, I also suggest that these instances of "unauthorized appearance" evoke the spectral presence of ephemeral slogans and lesbian bodies that have been rendered socially invisible and return to haunt public space by enacting the performativity of ghostly presences (Athanasiou:

2016). I find Athanasiou's use of the spectre particularly useful in how she productively shifts the notion of the spectre from the realm of the unreal/unrealized to an emerging and enduring state of appearance within and against existent political arrangements, "haunting the interior of edifices, ontologically upsetting their terms of possession and making them susceptible to other inhabitations" (Athanasiou, 2016: 265).

In this context, I interpret lesbian urban raids in central Athens as intrinsically involved in the forces of spectrality. Lesbian bodies and lives emerge in the morning daylight to haunt the heterosexual life of the city. In many respects, they enact the performativity of ghostly ephemeral presences, that is, establishing spaces of appearance "beyond the conventional premises of appearance, which equates visibility with transparency" (Athanasiou, 2016: 265). Thus, the performative repetition of slogans manifested on walls and public buildings can be considered as an unauthorized lesbian appearance, "a ghostly presence haunting social space" (Athanasiou, 2016: 265).

A last form of appearing I will be considering involves Pride parades and the politics of visibility. It should be noted that the terms of "appearing" at Pride parades have been widely criticised by queer feminists. Contrary to the conventional linkage of Pride with coming out and visibility, queer feminists argue that there is no single notion of coming out and visibility. Both coming out and visibility constitute an intersubjectively informed process involving multiple psychic registers in one's life. In many ways, the terms of visibility enacted at Pride parades are experienced as a forced condition that doesn't consider the differential distribution of vulnerability among the bodies that assemble in public space for these events.

In June 2014, before the Pride parade, a trans feminist activist was distributing her group's flyer in front of the lesbian group's stand (LOA) when a photographer working for a gay-friendly lifestyle magazine took her picture (Maragidou: 2014) She confronted him immediately insisting that he deletes it. He refused on the basis that Pride is a celebration of visibility in public space. Many LGBT activists gathered around demanding that he deletes the photo while the trans feminist activist was arguing that trans people are repeatedly scorned, harassed, and beaten and thus, the exposure of one's photo could easily mean exposure to loss, injury, and damage. Some days later, a bisexual friend, affiliated to QV, found a picture of himself kissing his boyfriend on

social media (facebook). He describes feeling utterly vulnerable and exposed. Fortunately, the photo was deleted, however he had to explain to Paola, who belonged to the older generation of travesti activists for whom Pride meant a celebration of visibility, that a non-consensual photo violates his sense of privacy regardless of the context in which it's taken (at Pride parade) and that it exposes him in unforeseeable ways to the world (a form of outing).

What is at stake here is the becoming visible not only of those whose lives are permeable, but also of the actual event. Similarly to Zeynep Gambetti's discussion of the Istanbul Pride parade at Taksim in 2013 (2016: 28-52) I also argue that the management of visibility by the media controls the significance of Athens Pride, pinning it to a widespread, and rather uncritical, insistence on a liberal notion of visibility, framed along the epistemological "premises" of appearance (visible means transparent), without allowing for registers of vulnerability and new meanings of "appearing" to emerge (Gambetti, 2016: 37). Another part of the debate focused on the differential distribution of vulnerability of the bodies gathered at Pride. To further explain this, let me illustrate the notion of vulnerability. Butler (2016; 2004) points out that vulnerability emerges from the subjects' relationality and is constitutive of our capacity for action. It's relational in that we are radically dependent upon others for the material and social world in which we come into being, and by our capacity to affect and be affected (Butler, 2016: 12-28). The latter works as a reminder that "we are socially informed beings whose shape and agency is actually co-constitutive with an outside that necessarily impinges upon us" (Sabsay, 2016: 285).

To address vulnerability does not serve to address a universal fact in nature but to acknowledge, as noted by Athanasiou (2016), that there is "no shared condition of vulnerability" (Athanasiou, 2016: 271), which is not afflicted and inflected from the start by the historically authorized power relations, differentially invoking it as a naturalizing marker of those exposed to gendered, sexual, or economic regulatory violence (Athanasiou, 2016: 271). In this context, the right to appear is marked by one's capacity to be affected (vulnerability as capacity) and by the historicity of resistant, oppositional responses to regulatory violence (Sabsay: 2016). By stressing the differential and relational character of vulnerability, queer feminists and trans feminists (in the above case) are forging "a mode of being, becoming and resisting always already traversed by



the norms and traumas and passions of vulnerability” (Athanasίου, 2016: 275) where trans vulnerability emerges as a power effect and as a possibility for critical agency.

From the kiss-in protests, to the lesbian urban raids, to the media coverage of Pride parade, the politics of appearing as “making space” and “taking place” (Athanasίου, 2013: 180) give way to different understandings of power that bring together vulnerability, discourse, and affect, while also suggesting that the right to appear is contingent. It’s the physical space of appearances when activists invade a space to claim attention, it’s the ghostly appearances of lesbian slogans on the city’s walls, and finally, it’s the resistance against Athens Pride’s unitary notion of “appearance.” In line with Athanasίου’s reflection on non-sovereign agency (Athanasίου, 2016: 256-278), the queer feminist subject which emerges from the above cases claims a non-sovereign form of political agency, that is, a notion of agency that remains immanent to power, socially involved, formed, and compromised, always already vulnerable but also potent enough to claim its right to appear (Athanasίου, 2016: 256-278).

#### **4.4 Trans feminist killjoys against anarchists:**

##### **Killing the fantasy of an anti-romantic sexual discourse**

The leading figures of queertrans (henceforth QT) have worked hard to bolster a trans feminist discourse in the queer feminist movement. Until the end of the 1980s, the homosexual movement was a mixture of travesti, homosexuals, punks and anarchists; the sexually revolutionary magazine *Kraximo*<sup>15</sup> (1981-1994) was circulating at kiosks in Athens declaring that “every job with the aim of profit is prostitution” (also quoted in Faubion, 1993: 238-239), TV personages like Tzeni Xeloudaki were mentioned by most trans women as role models, it was only in the early millennium that a more coherent discourse on trans politics emerged with SATTE (Transvestite and Transsexual Support Association 2004- 2006), later SYD (Transgendered Support Association, 2010-present) and then QT (approximately, 2010- 2016). In one of QT’s encounters with

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<sup>15</sup> The magazine was published at 1981, the last issue appeared at 1994, there were 14 in total. The content of the publication was consistently “provocative” and clearly shunned any attempt at bourgeois respectability. Its subtitle read “a magazine of revolutionary homosexual expression.” Gay liberation, AIDS, violence against gays and travesti, and prostitution were its central themes.

anarchists, Moira, one of its leading figures argued: *“Apparently back then everything fell under the rubric of sexual perversity, one had to be too much of a faggot to become a trans woman, one had to be too much of a lesbian to become a trans man.”*

The leading figures of QT were engaging with political discourses about sex, gender, and identity which revised the relation between culture and materiality, while at the same time they were upholding nuanced political models of trans identity. In addition, they were providing trans women with a support network and significant “awareness” on trans issues. From advice on transitioning and its medical aspects, to the reclaiming of derogatory terms (*traveli*), the disclosure of transphobia in the LGBT movement, to the never- ending efforts of building trans- friendly spaces (Ostria, an anarchist squat in Exarchia, which gradually became trans-inclusive) and participating in open discussions about sexism and transphobia at anarchist squats. In what follows, in her interview, one of the trans women, affiliated with QT, speaks about the process of crafting trans space at Ostria: *“The space became trans-friendly with endless talks, fights, formal and informal...the senior “anarcho-fathers”<sup>6</sup> treated me with great respect. For them I am revolutionary because I am trans which on the one hand is transphobic as a political stance but on the other hand, they see it as a daily revolutionary practice...And the younger ones watch me treat these legendary “anarcho-fathers” as just one more asshole with whom I have to put up everyday and this actually works politically to my advantage. I was relentless with them!”*

Sarah Ahmed’s work on feminist killjoys (2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2010d; 2017; 2004) offers a view of the leading figures of QT as killjoys. Ahmed contends that “a killjoy is the one who gets in the way of other people’s happiness” (Ahmed: 2010a). According to Ahmed (2010a), the feminist kills other people’s joy by unveiling and denouncing moments of sexism which otherwise “get hidden, displaced or negated under public signs of joy” (Ahmed, 2010a: no page). The anger of the feminist actually helps bring to the surface bad feelings that circulate between people and things, yet the feminist is usually labelled as the one who ruins the happiness of others in the room- she is stereotypically portrayed as over-sensitive and uptight (Ahmed: 2010b). In discussing

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<sup>16</sup> The term “anarcho-father” refers to male power holders, usually older anarchists that exert power sometimes by commanding, other times by being the ones that others in the movement turn to for advice- in this case their influence was depicted in “being listened to” (Apoifis, 2016: 146).

feminist subjects in relation to politics of happiness Ahmed argues that the feminist subject “brings others down” by talking about things that others prefer to shove off, by not letting negative and “difficult” feelings disappear and by exposing how happiness is sustained through the erasure of the signs of not getting along. She further contends that “feminists do kill joy in a certain sense since they disrupt the fantasy that happiness exists in certain places and thus, they unveil the fictive character of an imaginary happiness” (Ahmed, 2010a: no page).

Drawing from Ahmed’s argument, I suggest that the two trans women of QT are contemporary trans feminist killjoys. They attempt to dismantle universal notions about gender, trans identities, and sexism in their open talks at anti-authoritarian squats. Once they enter the room, they bring anarchists down by exposing the misogynistic underpinnings of the movement’s anti-romantic sexual discourse. This anti-romantic mode, also encountered in Kadir’s ethnography on the squatters movement in Amsterdam (2016), where she points out the role of anti-romantic sexual gossiping in maintaining the hetero-patriarchal emotional sovereignty amongst anarchists. This anti-romantic mode is predicated on a mastery and rejection of mainstream middle-class morality which promotes heterosexual normativity and heterosexual marriage, and restricts female sexuality. Hence, as noted by Kadir (2016), this mode anti-romanticism “values sexuality and sexual practices with multiple partners and without emotional bonds, and celebrates female sexual assertiveness, and dominates in anti-authoritarian spaces” (Kadir, 2016: no page). These polygamous sexual practices intend to challenge compulsory monogamy and marriage, with the aim of creating new conceptualizations of social relations and heterosexuality. However, this discourse is articulated with a strong investment in authenticity– the idea that you need to follow a set of distinct social practices, from squatting to devaluing consumer goods in order to consider yourself a “real” anarchist.

Many studies on anarchist movements and cultures have depicted the authenticity/ inauthenticity battles which frequently lead to the scapegoating of those who don’t conform to the prescribed rules of anarchist “realness”, are very common (Portwood- Stacer: 2010). For Giddens, “authenticity is established by the individual’s ability to bring his/her practices in line with an accepted narrative of identity” (Giddens: 1991 quoted in Portwood- Stacer, 2010: 489). In the Greek context, the authentic

anarchist sexuality addresses primarily male needs and desires and suppresses female desires under the rubric of a politics of sameness that proclaims to reject traditional gender roles and cultural values, and promote women's equality with men (Shannon D. & Rogue J. & Daring C.B. & Volcano A.: 2012). As already noted by Portwood- Stacer (2010), as well as other theorists in polyamory studies (Noel: 2006; Haritaworn: 2006), "there is an apolitical discourse on polyamory within anarchism that does not engage with a critique of power" (Portwood- Stacer, 2010: 485).

The processes of crafting and performing female heterosexuality within anarchism is fraught with intensities of diminishment, reparation, threat, loss, disavowal. As Eve Sedgwick reminds us in her introduction at the Epistemology of the closet (1990), identification is not simple mimesis, "to identify always includes multiple processes of identifying with" (Sedgwick, 1990: 61). In this context, identifying with a political ideology, lifestyle, or orientation means also ambivalently "counter-identifying, as well as partially identifying with other aspects of the social and psychic world" Sedgwick (1990: 63) and finally "disidentifying from a previous position" (Sedgwick, 1990: 61) to inhabit another. Ismini, whom I have already presented, describes her sexuality through the lens of the anarchist anti-romantic sexual discourse.

*Ismini: "Those years having free wild sex...was interpreted as a passion that takes over me, a thrilling desire beyond my control but the next day I would feel guilty, that I did not respect myself enough...my desire was becoming hurtful, I did not have the conceptual tools to support a sluttiness within anarchism and men were treating me as if I was crazy, weird, dysfunctional...thus, becoming a slut became a traumatic experience for me, but it was unconsciously a form of resistance against all this...and then I turned to feminism, which was essentially linked to queer communities since that's where it was nurtured, not within anarchism."*

What is depicted here is one of the major contradictions within anarchism which also corresponds to a discrepancy between the sexual liberation rhetoric and its actual practice (Papadogiannis& Gehrig: 2015) . As suggested by Portwood- Stacer (2010), "critiques of sexual moralism can be taken as license to flout community standards of

mutual respect and to objectify the bodies of others, with the ultimate result of reproducing hegemonic sexism. If people see the adoption of counter-hegemonic identity labels as sufficient to actually counter hegemony, they may end up reproducing oppressive power dynamics” (Portwood- Stacer, 2010: 490). Many women within anarchism spoke about an “unequal” freedom of sexual expression, that is, sexual assertiveness was hardly fought and, in some cases, morally reprimanded—the scapegoating of the slut. From the discussions I had with queer feminists about anarchist squats I contend in line with Kadir (2016) and Portwood- Stacer (2010) that anarchists tend to see the adoption of polygamous sexual practices as sufficient to counter hegemony and bourgeois conservative ethics, and very often end up reproducing oppressive power dynamics (Portwood- Stacer: 2010; Kadir: 2016).

In the open talks the leading figures of QT held at anarchist squats, they aimed to disturb the rejection of authority that characterizes anti-authoritarian spaces by exposing how their happiness is sustained through erasing the fact that informal hierarchies actually exist. In one of these open talks Moira argued: *“I don’t see many cis male anarchists today, perhaps it’s because they think feminism is not an acceptable form of doing politics and has no place in anti-authoritarian spaces...but are there any gays in your spaces? And what about women? Don’t they have a sexist incident to talk about? Maybe I should come to one of your meetings then...”* In killing their fantasy of all-inclusiveness, they do kill a feeling (Ahmed: 2010b). And then there was silence. None of the “anarcho-fathers” (Apoifis, 2016: 147) directly responded to the sexism and transphobia Moira denounced, and far fewer women spoke. I have already argued that in the anti- authoritarian movement, the anti-romantic sexual discourse assumes that no subject is off-limits and that women possess an equivalent sexual agency to men’s. However, as stated by Kadir, “in a subculture that pays lip service to feminist ideals, but has not integrated feminism into daily practice, and thus no mastery of feminist ideals actually takes place, the anti-romantic style backfires and reifies the subordination of women by viewing them literally as stand-ins for their male lovers” (Kadir, 2016: no page), which could perhaps explain the silence on behalf of female anarchists in QT’s open discussions. I should note here that throughout my fieldwork many straight or bisexual feminists affiliated to anarchist squats had stories to tell about feeling exploited, ignored, isolated and in some cases banished, aptly or subtly, from the squat.

Coming back to QT's political debate at Ostria, the two trans feminist killjoys referred to the use of overtly sexist and homophobic words ("mounia"- cunts, *poustides-faggots*) deployed by some male anarchists and anti-authoritarians as weapons to attack and deride the police. Another phrase I heard was "We will fuck you over" ("Tha sas gamisoume") (also noted at Apoifis: 2016). Using language of sexual assault (what Susan Brownmiller (1975: 14) calls "man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear") conveys a disregard for the impact of sexual violence and rape culture as a political tool oppressing women (Brownmiller, 1975: 14). Apart from the issue of language, trans feminists focused on the stigmatization of femininity perceived in anarchist circles as a capitalist by-product that should be contained for the counter-hegemonic sexual discourse to acquire truth-value. In anarchist spaces, marriage is viewed as fundamentally a patriarchal institution that reflects a sexist legal system and conservative cultural values. In this context, rejecting traditional femininity and challenging women's oppression means denouncing mainstream expectations of femininity generated by marriage and enhanced by consumerist beauty products such as high heels, hairstyles, nails, makeup, and colorful clothes. Yet, the latter are reprimanded as making women less of an anarchist.

Finally, trans feminists challenged those anarchists who object to LGBT politics for its lifestyle patterns (that seem too glossy and consumerist) on the grounds that they buy into a neoliberal ideology that over-emphasizes individual agency and diminishes the role of "real" structural oppressions perpetuated by Christian Orthodoxy, neoliberal capitalism and other power hierarchies (Portwood- Stacey: 2010). In response to this political stance, trans feminists fiercely said: "*Stop treating the LGBT movement as something capitalist and foreign, it's us right in front of you! Being lesbian or gay does not necessarily mean that someone is anti-capitalist, it's not a general political stance, however anarchism promises anti-sexism and liberation!*"

Undoubtedly, their work constituted a critique of anarchism's sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. In the world of cis male heterosexual anarchists, the two trans women, had a strongly disidentificatory role (Munoz: 1999). Their denouncement of anti-romantic sexual discourses and heteronormative values were productive interventions in which anti-authoritarian politics were momentarily destabilized, enabling them to come into the role of the cultural worker (Munoz: 1999). They did and

did not belong to the anti-authoritarian movement. They forged a place for themselves that's not coherent but definitely efficient in changing the atmosphere in the room. In their presence, anarchists felt tense, no longer relaxed, and less celebratory of their spatial inclusiveness.

#### **4.5 Debating the meanings of “queer”:**

##### **A discussion amongst all kinds of feminists**

When it comes to the use of the word “queer” let me begin by saying that it was introduced by Queericulum Vitae (henceforth QV) in 2004 to denote an intersectional approach to LGBT and anti-authoritarian politics. It was often used to refer to identity politics and has often become a point of contention between two apparently divergent trends. On the one hand, queer feminist collectives use it to describe a political identity which is intersectional and self-reflective. This queer feminist political subject engages into never-ending processes of discursive and affective disidentification from various narratives that quilt Greece's ethno-patriarchal ideology.

On the other hand, more institutionalized parts of LGBT activism, such as Colour Youth support the use of queer as a form of self-identification alongside its exceptionally diverse terminology. The latter falls upon forms of discursive inclusion of identity terms that appear first on leaflets and webpages, before their actual use as terms of self-identification. To put it otherwise, they do not reflect an actual inclusion taking place at the moment of their discursive appearance (Mizielinska: 2011). Instead they structure what Kulpa, Mizielinska & Stasinska (no date: 122) call a form of “inclusion before coming into being” (also mentioned at Mizielinska's study of LGBT politics in Poland, 2011: 85-107). For example, on the webpages of Colour Youth and “Kamena Soutien” (Burned Bras, a feminist online webpage), one encounters the complex terminology of western identity politics with few references to the histories of local feminism. A recent example of discursive inclusion is the term “Non- Binary”, which was first discursively included in leaflets and webpages and then began coming into being as self-identification.

In my personal discussions with women, lesbians, trans, and straight feminists, queer rarely appeared as a form of identification, yet it was an integral part of the language feminists used to talk about intersectionality, identity politics and inclusivity. It appeared in texts, banners, and zines, and acquired different meanings. Its elusiveness- the fact that it was hard to pin it down- along with its untranslatability in Greek language caused distress and tensions amongst straight feminists, LGBT activists, and lesbian feminists. In many respects, the word queer functions as an empty (or floating) signifier (Laclau: 1996) that depicts the “impossibility of meaning of gender”- gender as coherent identification- (Dean: 2000; Dean & Dyess: 2000) as well as the non-linear movement of LGBT history in Greece.

In this context, I suggest, in line with Jaspir Puar (2007), that we need to think beyond a western mode of progressive politics which upholds teleological narratives, and posits queer and its western readings as the arbiter of radicality moving from oppression to liberation in a linear western sequence of time (Puar, 2007:22). The range of practices and actions performed by LGBT, queer, and lesbian feminist circles in Greece put forward the need to think about the entwining of queer, identity politics, and feminism. Following Mizielinska’s and Kulpa’s point about LGBT activism in Central and Eastern Europe (2011), I suggest that various historical stages of western LGBT activism co-exist and collapse into one another in Greece. From the haunting anti-rape claims of contemporary feminists that reproduce the aesthetics and discourses of second-wave feminists to coming-out stories and the celebration of visibility at Pride parades. In many respects, and based on what I was told by a close anarchist friend, queer is synonymous with identity politics and this results from the fact that queer did not emerge in Greece as a counter-political project against mainstream identity politics as was the case with Angloamerican histories of the emergence of queer against the limitations of identity categories (lesbian, gay). To put it otherwise, the queer feminist movement in Greece did not emerge out of a “queer vs LGBT” rivalry (see temporal map Appendix C, partly inspired by Mizielinska’s (2011) map on the Polish LGBT movement).

To support this argument, I will now provide a brief chronology (see Appendix C). In 2005, the first Athens Pride took place; only one year before, in 2004, the first queer feminist group, Queericulum Vitae, was formed; six years later, in 2010, Queerfest,



a three-day festival with talks, screenings and music gigs, was organized by various collectives and queers that came together in an assembly, discussed the cultural pertinence of the term queer, and worked to initiate feminist, queer, and identitarian understandings within the anti-authoritarian movement in Athens. In 2010 the trans feminist group, Queertrans, turned its virtual trans support network into regular group meetings at the Feminist Centre. In 2013, Beaver opened, a café co-op ran by lesbian feminist activists, affiliated to the Lesbian Group of Athens and Queericulum Vitae, with the aim of building a less oppressive workplace and a meeting environment for people and groups that find it otherwise difficult to “belong” somewhere. In addition, queer and lesbian feminist activists have moved between groups and attended more than one group at the same time; lesbian feminists moving from LOA to QV; lesbians attending both LOA and QV; trans lesbians moving from LOA to Queertrans; trans lesbians attending both LOA and Queertrans. At the same time, queer and lesbian feminists support institutionally-orientated groups (such as OLKE, Color Youth, SYD) who campaign for legislative changes. I was frequently told by queer and lesbian feminists that these are groups who are doing a different, yet necessary, kind of work.

By looking at the choice of strategies and discourses in Greece we notice the mixture of queer with LGBT politics, the mixture of queer with anarchist ideals and the mixture of queer with anarchofeminism; from aggressive, in your face queer feminist grassroots actions, through to the celebration of coming out, identity politics, and radical feminist appeals against rape culture, to assimilationist “do-it slowly and unobstructively” institutionally-orientated activism (Mizielinska: 2011). Thus, discourses produced in Greece are marked by what Mizielinska (2011) calls “a time of coincidence” where identity politics with their intersectional models of subjectivity, however limiting or satisfying they may be, and their representational mandates of visibility and struggles for recognition (LGBT rights activists and the quest for legislative changes) coincide with the circulation of queer as an empty signifier (Stavrakakis: 1999; Laclau: 1996) to which queer and lesbian feminists, who represent the “radical” side of the LGBT spectrum, attach various meanings.

More specifically, the cultural and linguistic untranslatability of the word “queer” in Greece makes possible the emergence of what Dean & Dyess call “an absence of meaning” (Dean & Dyess: 2000) which brings to the fore the culturally contingent

explanations of gender. In particular, Tim Dean & Cynthia Dyess (2000) in their anti-essentialist, psychoanalytic account of gender take one step further into criticizing Butler's deconstructivism for failing to consider the constitutive limits of subject formation. In particular, they support that once gender is conceived not in terms of proliferating possibilities of meaning (which has led to the rapid multiplication of categories and terminologies for self-identification within identity politics at the moment) but of a certain impossibility of gender, then its discourses and practices need rearticulation. In this line of thought, I suggest that queer can be viewed as an empty vase which creates a void in language along with the possibility of filling it (Dean & Dyess: 2000). As the signifier of an emptiness it also represents the promise of its impossible fullness, namely it graphically reflects the impossibility of ascribing concrete meaning to gender. Here I also draw from Lacan's reference to the Heideggerian vase, as depicted by Stavrakakis (1999), where he suggests that: "It creates the void and thereby introduces the possibility of filling it. Emptiness and fullness are introduced into a world that knows not of them. It is on the basis of this fabricated signifier, this vase, that emptiness and fullness as such enter the world...if the vase may be filled, it is because in its essence it is empty in the first place" (Lacan VII: 120 quoted in Stavrakakis, 1999: 39).

In "Emancipations" Laclau (1996) begins by asking "Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?" After discussing the empty signifier in relation to ambiguous, equivalent, and floating signifiers, Laclau describes the conditions of an empty signifier as follows: "An empty signifier can, consequently, only emerge if there is a structural impossibility in signification as such, and only if this impossibility can signify itself as an interruption (subversion, distortion) of the structure of the sign" (Laclau, 1996: 37). He argues that the empty signifier is the product of the "exclusionary limit" of a signifying system. As underlined by Laclau (1996), "it's the tension between a constitutive limit and the impossibility of representing the excluded that produces empty signifiers" (Laclau: 1996: 37; Stavrakakis: 1999).

Queer as a floating signifier denotes a word that points to no actual object and has no agreed upon meaning. The introduction of queer in the Greek cultural and activist LGBT scene functions like a void meant to be filled, a void signifier meant to stir politics and activism. Following the post-Marxist discourses of Laclau & Mouffe (1985)

2001) to agonistic democracy, I also suggest that every void signifier is meant to speak about the incomplete character of every discourse around which politics and antagonisms (on regional, global and local levels) emerge in order to cover up its constitutive emptiness (Laclau & Mouffe: 2001 {1985}; Mouffe: 2005; Mouffe: 1993; Butler, J. & Laclau E. & Zizek Sl.: 2000; Zizek Sl.: 1989).

The biggest challenge concerns the western legacy of queer and how it enters the Greek LGBT imaginary. The word queer is fueled with western idealizations of what it means to be queer- queer as coming from elsewhere- which are continually contested (if not incredible and impractical) since everyday lived experience affirmed stark distinctions between men and women in material, structural, symbolic terms, and between homosexuals and heterosexuals. Women affiliated to LGBT activism and anti-authoritarian politics start by essentially underlining what queer is not, in what ways it differs from western queer activism, searching for its local flavors and meanings, locating queer away, within and/or against a western-imported notion of queer as vague fluidity. Aliko, a lesvia femme affiliated to LOA and QV, Kirki, a straight feminist, affiliated with QV, and Maria, affiliated to LOA, argue that queer isn't culturally pertinent as a form of self-identification. They suggest using the term queer as a political standpoint alongside lesvia and feminist identities with the aim to represent the "radical" and anarcho-intersectional side of the LGBT spectrum.

*Aliko: "Ok I don't think queer is an identity, I can understand it as a political standpoint but not as an identity...I could never say that I am queer since I cannot give away my lesvia identity which I find very important in the Greek cultural context {...} I don't like the easiness with which everyone can say they are queer without...I don't know...I feel that as an identity it has no content, anyone can say "I am queer" but not everyone can say "I am lesvia" and support this life choice."*

*Maria: "I am annoyed with queer since I see it becoming a trend. A woman who doesn't want to call herself lesvia will approach me and say she's queer. It's a way to close yourself, a way to avoid saying what you are. Like I used to say I am bi, now we don't say bi, we say queer. If I had to identify I would call myself*

*queer lesvia. I would call myself lesvia because I know it will shock and bother people. If I say queer, people might not even be aware of the word and its meanings.*

*Kirki: "I adopt the feminist identity. I couldn't call myself queer straight since it doesn't make sense in the community. Calling myself a feminist is a stronger identity which carries more meanings. In the LGBT community I identify as straight and not as queer straight in order to make clear that I am not appropriating lesbian and gay experiences and positions."*

Maria, Kirki, and Alik clearly differentiate queer from lesvia identity and argue that it can only be seen as a political standpoint. Maria goes further to suggest that queer can be a modern way of being in the closet (similarly to Mizielinksa's (2011) observations about Polish LGBT activism). The tendency of queer to make the boundaries between identities fluid cannot be imported or adapted in the Greek cultural sphere where heterosexist structures call you a *vromolesvia* (filthy lesbian) and a *poustis* as slurs. When talking with Moira, a trans feminist lesvia, affiliated to QT, she purports that queer is more about "perverse" sexual practices. Moira indicates an ongoing divergence between trans identity politics and a notion of queer, which is mostly cis and less "radical" as it proclaims since it's often used as a way to conceal identity instead of liberating it. At the same time, Elena, a straight trans woman, who grew up and lives in Perama, a poor, working-class suburb of Attica, is totally unaware of the word (which also reveals the class-based character of queer).

*Moira: "When queer was introduced in the Greek LGBT scene it was seen as a very liberating identity. Gradually I realized that people did not use queer for their own liberation but in order to avoid saying that they love getting fucked in the ass. Instead of saying I'm a man who loves getting ass-fucked, they said I am queer. Then I noticed that many cis straight people began using the term queer and I found this very problematic {...} At the Queerfest of Embros theatre they said it's absurd being a trans woman and lesbian...similarly in a workshop on queer, which was organized at Embros*

*theatre, some people argued that queer is a dead caterpillar! No! Queer is not a dead caterpillar! Queer is talking about your sexuality, about your body, saying I am a woman that goes to bed with men but loves receiving piss in her nose, fucking men with a strapon and calling them weasels {...} Queer is the “pervert” (anomalo). If you don’t call yourself a “pervert” and simply say queer, this sounds like saying you are a woman who loves women instead of calling yourself lesvia.”*

Elena: *“I’ve heard of queer. I don’t know what it means. Can you tell me? Does it mean that there are many genders like six, seven or that there is no woman and man at all? Then what are we really? It doesn’t make sense.”*

Moira argues that queer is more about “perverse” sexual practices and less about gender discontinuity (see chapter six on the narratives of younger women about lesvia and gender discontinuity), clearly showing that trans activism in Greece is structured around sexual difference. In addition, the fact that Elena is unaware of the word shows the class-based character of queer which presumes access to (queer) theory and high cultural resources- queer cybercultures, networking and travelling abroad (see chapter nine on class-based analysis of queer spaces). Queer as “productive discursive ambiguity” (Engebretsen: 2014) emerged in the face of classed differences (class as cultural capital) between politicized and non-politicized women, between women who are influenced by western queer discourses and women who are less exposed to engaging with western queer activism and practices. Class differences are played out around “queer exceptionalism versus local provincialism” (Taylor: 2007) and bring to the fore ambiguities, tensions, and discrepancies between local and western worlds. I will be returning in more detail on the classed underpinnings of queer in chapter nine. As productive discursive ambiguity, queer also criss-crosses intergenerational lines. Same-sex desiring women of the older generation didn’t relate with queer ideas and activism. They claimed lesvia identity and sought to re-appropriate the cultural weight of the word “lesvia” in Greek (mostly used as a slur), as well as provide the space for lesbies of different ages and class backgrounds to come together and speak about themselves, their bodies and desires (Kantsa: 2011). Younger lesbies blended lesvia

identity with queer elements whereby queer entails an openness to trans women and men as well as an emphasis on lesvia identity as gender discontinuity (see chapter six). Below, lesbies of the older generation present their understandings of queer:

Nelli: *“When the new kids came along they asked for political correctness and I felt that this new wave of the feminist movement was aggressive. There was a pressure to empathize with their viewpoints. I felt a pressure to accept these new things. And there were things I’ve never thought, for example I didn’t like the dildo, gradually my denial shifted and I began changing my viewpoint. Same goes with trans issues and queer...When Moira came to LOA initially we had a very good relation, later I felt she was very hostile, she would support trans issues with such an intensity {...} Gradually I felt that there was a pressure to follow a correct ideological line at LOA, that the lesbian feminist group would be less open, instead it would follow an ideological platform upon which we all agreed upon. Namely, we had to discuss it and say this is who we are. The group was losing its openness; you know the kind of meetings where different sort of women showed up every time. And this pressured me a lot by the very end.”*

Ninetta: *“I am not related with queer, it’s not part of my history in feminism and lesbian separatism. From what I hear in activist circles, I’ve understood that it has to do with gender dysphoria, or another translation could be “allokoto” (weird).”*

Nelli reflects on queer as part of an inter-generational battle between the older generation of lesbies that grew up with lesbian bars and the lesbian community of Eressos (from the mid-seventies onwards) and a younger generation of lesbies and trans lesbies that questioned the boundaries of lesvia identity by adopting queer political tools and striving for clear-cut ideological lines of thought. Ninetta defines queer as something pertaining to gender and less to sexuality. For many lesbies, affiliated to LOA, queer was perceived as having to do more with gender and less with sexual desire. Overall, lesbies responded differently to queer depending on their age, their gender

experience and their degree of affiliation with local and western activisms. To conclude, queer as an untranslatable signifier upholds various potentials located in its ability to traverse its emptiness (the emptiness of every signifier which is later filled with meaning) (Stavrakakis: 1999) and produce hybrid meanings as lesbian and queer feminist activists project their desires and set it against local and western sexual histories.

## 4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I laid out the queer feminist political subject as haunting, as an intersectional enraged killjoy, as a ghostly appearance, and as self-reflective of local and western dynamics regarding the meanings of the term queer. The queer feminist stays long enough in one position- haunting, self-reflecting, killjoying- to cause subtle disruptions that result either from compulsive displacement (the state of migrant or exiled) or from nomadicality. Reflecting upon the position of trans feminist killjoys, who enter anarchist spaces and disrupt their fictive happiness by pointing out the silencing mechanisms of anarchist structures, I would like to argue that they inhabit the position of the displaced minority. Namely, when trans feminists kill the happiness of anarchist utopianism, they primarily address the fact that the same structures that promise to liberate them actually forcefully displace them. I discuss this process alongside the anti-romantic sexual discourse of anarchists who purport a libertarian approach to sex, yet female assertiveness can easily be stigmatized- the scapegoating of the slut.

In the first section I discussed the queer feminist subject through the lens of feminist activist material (posters) to show that the aesthetics and anti-rape discourses put forward by contemporary feminists, resonate with the claims of autonomous feminists in the 1980s. In this context, I conceptualized the queer feminist subject as haunted (in the Derridean sense) by its past and as haunting (western) linear temporality by building temporal threads and communities across time. In this context, I wish to argue that when queer feminists haunt the linear temporality of Marxist politics (see Appendix B) and the western linear (and progressive) sequence of time moving from oppression to liberation, at the same time they are being haunted by their feminist past; they inhabit the state of the nomad as conceptualized by Braidotti (1994).

More specifically, Braidotti argues that the nomad expresses the deep desire for an identity that has disavowed essential unity and stability in that it is made of changes, flows, shifts and transitions (Braidotti, 1994: 22). And she further explains that “the nomad is not devoid of unity; its cohesion is engendered by repetitions, cyclical moves, rhythmical displacements” (Braidotti, 1994: 22). The rhythmical displacement of the haunting feminist figure brings to the fore the notion of a temporal nomad that builds communities across time. Thus, the queer feminist political subject inhabits



circumstantially either the position of the forced displaced or that of the perpetual nomad.

In addition, I explored the politics of appearing, from ghostly ephemeral appearances to staged appearance (kiss-in protests), in order to show that LGBT activists relate with public space in a variety of ways that exceed the western narrative of coming-out and visibility as transparency. I looked at three cases of appearing as “making space” and “taking place” (Athanasidou: 2013) which allow for registers of vulnerability and new meanings of “appearing” to emerge. The reconceptualization of appearance brings along a need to look at the differential distribution of vulnerability amongst these acts of appearing. Kiss-in protests entail a visible, and more endangered, exposure of gay and lesbian bodies in public space. For this reason, these kind of protests are always mixed and with many participants. Urban lesbian rides on the city’s walls are a solitary practice. In this case, bodies are well-hidden in the dark, yet still quite vulnerable in this guerrilla practice. Finally, the media coverage of Pride parades dictates a unitary distribution of power where activists lose control of their image to the consumerist propagation of the event. In this case, appearing turns into a form of outing which can have severe consequences in one’s personal and professional life.

The last part of this chapter explored the meanings of the term queer. I presented a short conceptual overview of the introduction of queer in the Greek cultural sphere and argued that it’s marked by time of coincidence (LGBT and queer politics in a complementary relation). I then looked at how women, lesbians, trans lesbians, and straight feminists, talked about it, discussing queer as an empty signifier (Laclau: 1996) to which women attach various meanings, affects, and expectations. What women agreed upon was the discursive weakness of queer to translate minoritarian gender and sexual experiences in the Greek social sphere- namely “it has less shock value” and can be easily appropriated in an “everything goes” mode of politics. At the same time, queer brought to the fore a social movement that strived to introduce intersectionality in the anti-authoritarian movement. It also produced self-reflective political subjects who draw from their personal stories of exile and displacement as sexual and gender minorities and craft their own space, discourse, and community.

In the next chapter I will look at two identity battles that took place within the queer feminist and lesbian scene with the aim of discussing the continual struggle of

identities that find themselves between an idealized queer (western) longing and a harsh heterosexist everydayness.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Identity battles and Community building: Gender, Desire and Difference

#### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the queer feminist subject as a haunting, intersectional killjoy that ghostly appears and disrupts temporal and ideological linearity. I looked at moments of appearance in public and urban space, killjoy confrontations with anarchists and haunting anti-rape claims. I argued that by appearing, killjoying, and haunting, the queer feminist subject upsets normative ideologies and structures. This chapter turns to identity battles, which were constantly emerging within the lesbian and queer feminist community, in order to shed light on how identities (lesbian, feminist, trans, gay) and queer are played out. The boundaries between identities, between bodies, and their meanings were constantly redrawn and causing distress amongst different identities.

Each chapter makes use of ethnographic data differently and employs different angles of analysis on the making of queer feminist and lesvia identity and community. In this chapter, I discuss identity battles that bring to the fore wider cultural and social concerns on the meanings of categories, boundaries and identities. Since I was also involved in these debates I will analyze them as I witnessed them from face-to-face chats, group discussions, and online discussions. There is no reference to groups and collectives in order to protect the anonymity of the participants but also abide to my ethical responsibility against the community, that is, my personal commitment not to expose the internal life of the community. There is no description of spaces or direct quotes- the italicized quotes are written as I remember them. I employ abstract and wide categorical terms- gay boys, straight feminists, lesvies, trans feminists- to refer to particular political standpoints with the aim of shedding light to processes of community-building. The terms and categories “queer”, “cis”, “trans”, “gender fluid”,

“gay”, “lesbian” are used in the ways activists employed them in these debates. Western (meaning European and Angloamerican) and local dynamics emerge alongside these debates to depict the gap between “appropriate”, “ideal” European and American uses of categories set against the locality of “lived experience” in Greece.

The chapter is divided into two sections each focusing on a particular identity battle. The first section looks at the “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) dispute which marked the last women-only party (February 2015). Lesbian feminist activists (LOA), building upon the tradition of women-only parties, shifted their discourse from “women-only parties” to “parties for multiple genders with the exception of cis privileged males.” Multiple actors got involved into this dispute which lasted for many days. From leftist gays who argued that their exclusion contradicts the ideals of leftist communitarianism to which the Purple House abides to boys who identified as gender fluid and argued that gender classification was happening at the party’s entrance. Of course there were those at the outskirts of the community who argued that identities are unnecessary labels and others to whom the category “cis” didn’t make sense. All these points of collision essentially revolved around western imaginaries of what it means to be queer and the local realities of lesbian and trans women.

Following the notion of the haunting queer feminist subject, which I developed in chapter four, and drawing from Joanna Mizielska’s discussion of queer and western temporality in Eastern European countries (2011), I wish to suggest that the “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) dispute comprises a political moment of uneasiness on “what exactly is going on” (Mizielska, 2011: 100) In particular, the “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) dispute exemplifies “the lived experience of temporal asynchrony” (Mizielska, 2011: 91) that marks the queer feminist and LGBT movement in Greece. To put it otherwise, the dispute brought along identities that put forward contradictory claims: Lesbian separatist feminists of the older generation, Marxist leftists, gender- questioning boys, lesbians of the younger generation, and trans women, who perceive trans identities in binary terms. By bringing together voices from different times in the history of the western LGBT and queer movement (see Appendix C) the dispute functions as an expanded “now” in which past, present and future do not follow one after the other but clash, coincide, and entangle-constructing “a time of coincidence” (Mizielska, 2011: 100).

The “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) dispute brought along western idealizations on what it means to be queer, and local lesbian feminist and separatist histories. The co-existence and clashing of these temporally divergent voices makes it impossible to come up with a scheme, old or new, local or western, which would fit well to explain the “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) dispute. To see it as a linear transition from women-only to mixed queer spaces would be a simplistic move that does not do justice to the complexity of gendered and sexual experiences which clashed with each other. The way this dispute unfolded brings to the fore forces of uncertainty and ambivalence that break a linear conception of time (from identity politics to queer, from oppression to liberation), and shows that queer and identity politics in Greece are marked by “temporal asynchronies” (Mizielinska: 2011: 91).

The second section entitled the t-shirt debate looks at a dispute which involved feminists and gays within the queer feminist community, and centered on men’s entitlement (straight and gay) to dance naked at queer parties. This debate is of particular significance since it involved wider parts of the community, from autonomous anarchists to feminists to queer gays. Given that the external boundaries of the queer feminist community are built against the figure of the straight male anarchist, the t-shirt debate served to reassert them. In addition, a clear-cut boundary between feminist and gay identities emerged in relation to community-building. More specifically, feminists put forward a gendered feminist community structured around gender identities, whereas gays purported a sexual community structured around sexual identities and desires. Throughout the debate, male bodies and their meanings, the boundaries between “inner” and “outer” worlds, and the concepts of privilege and trauma, set the terms upon which identities and their claims upon community space were discussed.

This section draws some analytical angles from Sarah Green’s work “Lesbian Amazons: Lesbian Feminism and Beyond in the Gender, Sexuality and Identity Battles in London” (1997) which looks at a period (late 1980s) when the lesbian community in London was experiencing considerable conflict since the meanings of gender and sexuality on which the community was based were being profoundly challenged. Her work proved very useful when looking at the complexities of community building within the queer and lesbian feminist scene in Greece.

Overall, this chapter moves from the elements that compose the queer feminist subject discussed in chapter four- haunting, intersectional killjoy, ghostly appearance- to the inner life of community-building and identity- building. The notion of identity put forward in these identity battles neither reifies differences, nor affirms what is shared, rather it puts differences into play and introduces practices of undoing, which get entangled into global/local gaps; outer/inner worlds; ungraspable desires/self-identification; and the limits between the personal and the collective.

## **5.2 The “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) dispute, the last women-only party:**

### **Opening the category “Woman”**

The party “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) was the last women-only party organized by the Lesbian Group of Athens (LOA). The party took place at the Purple House, a leftist squat that hosts antiracist groups and collectives, where LOA has been organizing its parties and social gatherings for the past ten years (since 2004). The way this party developed brought together conflicting motivations and interests into one social space, and placed a premium on gender identity as cause of distress- or rather a variety of identities, most particularly “woman”, “cis male”, “trans”, and later classes, lesbian feminist activists and leftists. The problem emerged when these identities became both the source of commonality between people and a source of discrimination. So this party was unusual, partly due to the continual poking around the details of the contents of these identities and the meanings of queer, partly because it was the last woman-only party to take place in Athens.

“Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) stands in Greek for Women, Lesbians, Intersex, Trans men, Trans women, Bisexuals, Inquisitive people, Fluid genders. The word is an acronym inspired by a queer feminist group in Leipzig, LAFRE, which consists of trans people and cis women. Their notion of safe space addresses FLIT people, Frauen (women), Lesben (lesbians), Inter (intersex), and Trans people, and excludes cis male privileged people. The lesbian feminist group (LOA) maintained a close relationship with LAFRE for about a year (2014-2015), exchanging visits, ideas, and political tools. So when the time came for the annual women-only party, the younger generation of lesbies decided to write a

different kind of invitation from the one LOA had been distributing for the past ten years. Inspired by LAFRE's notion of safe space, the women of LOA wrote a party invitation aiming to open the category "woman" to a wider range of interpretations—from women-only, the invitation now addressed "multiple genders with the exception of cis men."

In this context of LOA's party invitation, queer means being more open to the various interpretations of the category "woman", thus trying to embrace the "beyond the gender binary" western notion of queerness. However, this signaled the beginning of a battle on identities, authenticity, and queerness that lasted many days after the party. In many respects, the conflict demonstrates a historical moment where western notions of queer as transgression, a form of gender-crossing, clashes with local lesbian separatist practices and politics of sexual difference.

The group justified its decision to exclude cis male privileged people on the grounds of social exclusions exercised against other identities in the context of a male-centric society. Below is an excerpt from LOA's party invitation.

Well it would be wonderful if it was not necessary, since it would mean that we have moved beyond sexism and derogative behaviors against women, trans people, and gender-questioning people. However, in such a male-centric society, where women are excluded directly or indirectly from the coffee shop to the parliament, where cis male privilege sets the terms of communication in most social spaces, we believe that Athens needs a party, once a year, that escapes this norm. This party is for women, cis and trans, lesbians, bi, hetero women, trans boys, fluid genders, intersex, and people that are questioning their gender or sexuality, as well as whatever stands for cis male privilege.

Extract from LOA's party invitation, Γλιτταίρ (glitter), February 2015

On the night of the party, the door entrance turned into the point of entry and exit for various gender and sexual identities. Around midnight, a number of gay boys, affiliated to leftist groups as well as to institutionally-oriented LGBT groups, as I later found out, created a fuss at the door demanding to enter. Some of them felt confused with what cis stands for and others argued that this gendered exclusion contradicts the values of egalitarianism that the squat represents. Gender-questioning boys, who

identified as queer, argued that gender classification was happening at the entrance, which they found offensive to their self-identification. Trans women argued that queer as gender transgression is highly problematic and argued that the party addressed people who socialized as female genders. Lesbian feminists argued that the concept of the party builds on the history of LOA with women-only parties.

I talked with various activists involved in the debate and ethnographically (Marcus: 1995) followed the dispute via online group discussions as well as an open discussion held at the Purple House and organized by LOA in the aftermath of the party. Ironically I was supposed to cover my shift at the door entrance from 11pm onwards, yet I got sick and did not make it. However, I followed the dispute as it unfolded in a spatially multi-sited terrain- from online to face-to-face chats to group discussions with various people involved in this dispute- I identified three levels of argumentation: Firstly, leftist egalitarianism versus politics of difference; secondly, “looking” versus “being” queer; and thirdly, privilege as a categorical term that structured the discussion on identities and entitlements. I will try to unravel the components of this dispute and offer a critical reading of the last women-only party and its impact on the categories “queer” and “woman.”

One side of the debate centered on leftist egalitarianism and the politics of difference. More specifically, a number of gays, affiliated to leftist groups and/or institutionally-oriented LGBT groups argued that the hosting of a party which excludes males is an offensive act discriminating against homosexual (gay) minorities. In addition, there was a general confusion on the meanings of the category “cis.” Some gay boys were asking persistently if they are considered cis privileged and on what basis they are excluded from the party. This reflects an ongoing gap between the introduction of western identity categories (such as cis and non-binary), and the local realities and experiences of LGBT people that don’t necessarily relate to them. In addition, the confusion on what cis actually means relates to a practice of “inclusion before coming into being” (Mizielinska, 2011: 90), namely a form of discursive introduction of identity terms and categories on leaflets and magazines before people have actually adopted these terms as self-identification (Mizielinska: 2011).

Gay leftists argued that every social group that experiences discrimination of some sort should not be considered privileged, and suggested that a separatist party runs



counter to the egalitarian ethics of the Purple House. In this context, the exclusion of cis gay boys was seen as enhancing discriminations, as “*a ghetto with a feminist label*”, that has nothing to do with the leftist vision of a liberated and inclusive society. In chapter two, I discussed women-only parties as the conquest of LOA, and of the older generation of women who approached the Purple House to host their parties and craft lesbian space in Athens. This wasn’t a conquest that ended at the first women-only party (2004), it was constantly debated and every year LOA was prepared to support its political stance. In this case, the fact that the party addressed multiple genders made it more difficult for lesbian feminist activists to support the boundaries of their space on the basis of it being “women-only.”

The argument put forward by gay leftists draws from a particular imaginary of communing and solidarity, which has been practiced in Greece for the past several decades in which communitarian spaces are treated as sites of resistance. However, as supported by Stafylakis (2013), in communitarian spaces, “political action is frequently replaced by a moralism of low-engagement: routinized attending and small acts of identitarian solidarity/love, sometimes a fantasy of non-alienated entertainment” (Stafylakis: 2013: 127-140). In addition, this prevalent male-defined conceptualization of communing confines power within the individual’s political life; it maintains a public/private divide that serves to ignore the historically specific and asymmetrical patterns of privilege and oppression encompassing the private sphere in Greece.

In the context of this culture of communitarianism, gay leftists perceived their exclusion from the party as diverging from what they idealistically perceive as an egalitarian practice of communing, in which internal differences amongst identities and groups of people are relegated to the totalizing forces of revolution. The latter will effectuate deep structural and social change and concomitantly deliver the freedom of the subject from all its constraints. Against this argumentation, lesbian feminists talked about structural oppression, male privilege and intersectionality that acknowledges internal differences in their present form (in line with the idea of an “hierarchy of oppressions”).

The queer side of the debate concerned the invitation’s reference to fluid genders. This caused the reaction of gender-questioning boys who argued that they should be able to enter since they are queer. In addition, they argued that when they arrived at the

party they were automatically classified as cis privileged based on their appearance. They suggested that “looking” queer (which means “*looking glamorous and wearing a piece of jewelry*” as one gay boy sarcastically said) was more important to how much they have reflected internally upon their gender.

Here the debate revolved around the “looking” versus “being” nexus- also emerging in Sarah Green’s work (1997). A gay friend in the group discussion organized by LOA at the Purple House said: “*What about fluid genders? How are they defined? Is it a matter of appearance? Whether their queerness is noticeable or not? Whether they are glamorous? And who sets these criteria?*” Whether “being” queer is grounded on appearance (“looking” queer) or whether appearance (“looking”) and being don’t necessarily coincide was an ongoing question. Other gender-questioning boys argued that self-identification (as gender fluid) is internally felt and an approach to queer as appearance is very unsettling. However, queer styles were constructed in terms of clothing, hairstyles, and attire within the community. The gap between “looking” and “being” emerged once physical appearances were placed within a western anti-identitarian notion of queer- queer as gender fluid. The “looking” versus “being” nexus of queer implies that underneath all the cultural construction that makes the surface, namely one’s body posture and appearance, “lays an “authentic” individual who could, in theory, be unearthed, given adequate release of the constraints that prevent such self-discovery” (Green, 1997: 164), and thus reach this core “being”. In this context, queer appearances (“looking”) have to be unearthed for the “true” fluidity of the “being” to come to the fore.

In epistemological terms, the “looking” versus “being” conflict reflects what Copjec (2015) describes as the prevalence of historicism over desire, represented by Foucault and Lacan, who both agree that “it’s dangerous to assume that the surface is the level of the superficial” (Copjec, 2015: 43) However, for Lacan “the exclusivity of appearance must be interpreted to mean that appearance always routs or supplants being, that appearance and being never coincide and this makes the condition of desire” (Copjec, 2015: 44). Whereas, for Foucault and historians, “being has to be grounded in appearance, paving the way for the conception of a self-enclosed society, building on the repression of a named desire” (Copjec, 2015: 44-45). To a certain extent one could argue that it’s the deadlock of historical discursiveness, reproduced in the “being” vs “looking”

queer, which fostered a series of unresolved tensions on the party's entrance and in its aftermath.

The third aspect of the debate involved privilege as not only a way of talking about identities, but also as a process of crafting internal hierarchies within the community. Gay boys were insisting that "cis" and "queer" aren't a matter of appearance. From this it follows that privilege isn't a matter of "looking" cis male, it's internally felt ("being"), and as a result of this internalization, it's elusive and can only be experienced when social oppression actually takes place. On the other hand, trans women perceived privilege as indistinguishable from leading a cis life and were very critical of queer as a form of gender transgression. In one of my private discussion with Moira, a trans lesvia, affiliated with QT, she discusses privilege as something you "carry" and "wear" in your everyday life, something you can't just leave behind and go to a party as a fluid gender.

*Moira: "Again the joke with all those gender queer, ultra queer, non binary etc...that has been going on lately. This does not dissolve the privileges that you either carry or not. Privileges do not disappear for a night at a party and magically reappear the next morning; we carry them our whole lives; they define us; for some people not having them becomes a matter of everyday survival."*

Whether gender identity is elusive or permanent, whether it is visibly performed ("looking") or internally felt ("being"), whether it seems performed at the expense of other vulnerable identities ("privilege"), all these factors determine one's gender position and its recognizability. Throughout the "Γλιτταρ" (glitter) dispute, trans women distanced themselves from a notion of queer as gender fluid. On the border war between trans identity and queer as gender fluid, trans people argued that "looking" is ultimately linked to social passing, that is, how one blends with the normative world. On this matter, some LGBT activists, affiliated to Color Youth, complained that the discourse on privilege oversimplifies human experience in that it ends up creating piles of privileges or oppressions (quantity-based model). And essentially it compartmentalizes the individual into spheres of oppressions and spheres of privileges to be defended in each occasion.

The women of LOA in the aftermath of the party clarified that “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) wasn’t a queer party addressed to all genders. Instead they argued that the concept of the party was building on the group’s history with women-only parties. Many lesbian feminist activists argued that by opening the category “woman” to a western notion of queer as fluidity they wished to avoid “*stereotypical*” representations of gender. In this respect, the “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) dispute turned into a stage where identity categories and their western (European and Angloamerican) and local meanings were played out.

Gradually I realized that the ongoing tensions on the meanings of gender categories- “woman”, “man”, “cis”, “genderfluid”- reflect a strenuous gap between western queer ideals (queer as gender fluidity) and local everyday realities that reaffirmed stark distinctions between men and women, between homosexuals and heterosexuals (Green, 1997: 182). In the context of western/local inconsistencies, gender fluidity was considered by trans women, lesbian feminists, and some gays as an ephemeral type of identification that doesn’t “translate” into local social realities. At the same time, there were those who argued that fluidity is internally felt (“being”) and its expression (“looking”) should not be questioned on the basis of its authenticity- namely, looks that reflect a gender fluidity which is socially relatable.

The “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) debate marked the end of women-only parties, however it also revealed the complicated character of community-building. As suggested also by Green (1997) the space of the community “consisted of several overlapping spheres- politically, socially, symbolically, and there was an uneasy co-existence between them” (Green, 1997: 102). Sometimes they were physically separated- women-only parties; other times they were conceptually separated- gay leftists and lesbian feminists and their clashing views on privilege and communing; yet other times they were played out in border wars- between trans identity and queer as gender fluid; still other times they were located in the western/local nexus- western queer (fluid) sexualities versus local realities of man/woman, homo/hetero.

The next debate, the t-shirt debate, builds on the questions raised in this section about privilege and community-building. In particular, the “t-shirt” debate brings to the fore the relation between gender, desire, and identity in a debate staged between feminists and gays which can be encapsulated in the following question: Can identity be all about gender and all about desire at the same time?



Figure 9: Poster for the Γλιτταίρ (Glitter) party, the last women-only party of LOA, February 2015

### 5.3 The “t-shirt” debate: Feminist identities and homosexual desires

The t-shirt debate centrally involved “difference”, that somewhat shadowy term (Green, 1997: 163) that appears to embody relationality, identities, and the negotiation of boundaries and social divisions. In 2015 at a party organized in Thessaloniki after the Thessaloniki Pride parade, some boys took off their shirts. This was not the first time boys danced naked at queer parties but it was the first time it prompted the reaction of feminists. Some women felt uncomfortable and decided to take action by telling boys to put their shirts back on. In the aftermath of this event, a series of discussions broke out in the queer feminist community in what later came to be known as the t-shirt debate.

The dispute lasted many days and involved wider parts of the queer feminist community, spreading from Thessaloniki to Athens. It centrally involved feminists, affiliated to queer feminist and anarchofeminist collectives, and gay boys, also affiliated to queer feminist collectives. Transfeminists were not involved in this debate. Their absence reflects the stark distinctions between trans identitarian and queer feminist politics. The term gay boys, instead of gay men, is employed in the way gays used it to talk about themselves throughout this debate. Politicized gays in the queer feminist community preferred the term “boy” to “man” since the latter is culturally loaded with heteronormative connotations of Greek machismo.

Before going into the arguments that were made in this dispute, I would like to make a phenomenological note about the atmosphere in which queer discussions usually unfold, and particularly discuss the role of silence at group meetings. Long echoing silences from ten to twenty minutes were quite common in queer feminist group discussions. The expressive function of silence in speech, in the assignment of meaning, and in the ordering of a political discussion is hard to understand. In music, silences appear, or are opened, to give notes their room, to give space for the resonances of the voice or musical instrument to be noticed, to unfurl, or uncoil (Bedford: 2015). In this context, there is no silence devoid of sound, instead there is a potential of sound to be witnessed (Bedford: 2015; Brett & Wood & Thomas: 2006).

Similarly to the function of silence in music, I suggest that coughs, breathings, giggles, and whispers, create a symphony of sounds in the long gaps of silence which unfurl in-between discussions. Silences serve to sharpen queers’ capacity to listen and

helps them re-organize their feelings and thoughts. Long pauses and small breaks between speakers serve to form the terrain for renegotiating the terms of a political debate, disconnecting it from patriarchal terms of dialogue, which involve sudden outbursts interruptions and forms of oppositionality that seek to overturn the interlocutor and don't allow space for self-reflection. Silences in queer feminist group discussions constitute a behind-the-words negotiation of hesitation, anger, and empathy that come to the fore when the time feels right.

In the t-shirt debate, the presence of straight boys at queer parties was questioned, in that they were seen to inhabit queer spaces as voluntary tourists coming and going at their own convenience. I was frequently told that "*they wear some glitter, play the "hat game", take their shirts off, get some level of queerness, and then leave.*" At the same time, feminists felt distressed by the fact that gay boys and straight boys danced naked at parties. This was seen by them as losing their, difficultly fought, female entitlement over space. Feminists, affiliated to queer feminist collectives (gender asphyxia), argued that gay boys were less sensitive to the fact that female bodies can't dance naked in the same way that boys can take their shirt off with no second thoughts. In this context, male bodies were perceived as bodies that carry the stain of patriarchal violence, which cannot be easily erased under the pretext of a non-normative commonality between gays and feminists, between non-normative sexualities and gender-questioning women. Indeed, which bodies can, or are entitled to, take their shirts off and what does the male naked body signify?

The t-shirt debate brought to the fore two issues: firstly, that the community did not differ from the "outside." The "outside" here is embodied by straight anarchist boys; they embody the external boundaries of the community and it is against them that the queer feminist community strives to set its boundaries. And secondly, homosexual desire and its bodily expression can work at the expense of the building of a gendered feminist community. From the perspective of feminists when gay boys flirt shirt-less with straight boys at queer parties, they are indulging in their desires carelessly and ignoring women's trauma with men. For a number of queer feminists this trauma is located in the genealogies of patriarchal control exerted upon female bodies. They view the female body as a social body; namely, "the body is not conceived as a tabula rasa

onto which masculine or feminine attributes can be indifferently projected. The body codes meanings projected on it in sexually determined ways” (Grosz, 1994: 18).

The position of queer feminists regarding male bodies and the expression of homosexual desire, reflects their belief in the fundamental, irreducible differences between genders, which no amount of ideological equalization can disavow. What is at stake for queer feminists is “the activity and agency, the mobility and social space, accorded to women” (Grosz, 1994: 17-19). They argue that the patriarchal weight which male bodies embody, needs to be acknowledged as such. This claim goes hand in hand with the proliferation of an anti-rape discourse in the last couple of years, which seeks, amongst other things, to offer welcome to the promise of autonomous feminism of the late 1970s- mid 1980s (see chapter four on the haunting queer feminist subject). From a poststructuralist perspective it seems that feminists engage with the practice of “strategic essentialism”, as introduced by Spivak (1985/1996), which entails “provisionally accepting essentialist foundations for female identities as a strategy for collective representation in order to pursue struggles over the negotiation of boundaries at spaces” (Spivak: {1985}, 1996: 214).

What the t-shirt debate has in common with the “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) dispute is an investigation of the concepts upon which the community constructs itself. Repeatedly, the concepts of language, body, and identity, and their interconnections were explored. Repeatedly, the differences within the community, whether due to differences in individual experiences and political perspectives over the meanings of queer, or due to differences between identity categories such as cis/trans, straight/ gay, were discussed through the concepts of trauma and privilege. These concepts interweaved with a tension between expression (gender, sexual or other) and oppression which was reenacted in every conflict. As noted by Green (1997) in the sexuality debates of the lesbian feminist movement in London, what is expressed may oppress, what oppresses expresses a privilege that should be reassessed for its intentions and the level of damage it causes (Green: 1997).

The recognition of privilege was made the foundation of every conflict and a source of empowerment for sexual and gender minorities. Feminists in the queer community emphasized the oppressive character of heteronormative power and the damaging effects of privileged identities on other under-represented identities. In many



disagreements, privilege initially seems to be something that happens, an effect of power and structural oppression, but gradually it becomes a categorical term to speak about the assumptions each person makes about the world and his/her position in it. It turns into a thing, something that acquires ethical qualities, it condemns as much as it gives voice.<sup>17</sup>

The notion of privilege has its own genealogy in the lesbian and queer feminist community. In the 1970s, one of the main precepts of autonomous feminism was the need for women to break away from male control and strive for their own independence on all facets of everyday life. In this context, as stated by Simitis (2010), men were perceived as either adversaries or as representatives of the diverse ways in which patriarchy objectifies women's bodies and reproduces the uneven distribution of power between the two sexes (Simitis, 2010: 166). The lesbian feminist group (LOA) maintained a notion of privilege as an exercise of male authority, which draws from the autonomous feminist movement of the 1980s. In this context, privilege is interpreted as an extension of patriarchal values.

From privilege as an exercise of male authority supported by the lesbian feminist group and some anarchofeminist collectives, to the conceptualization of heteronormative privilege in mixed queer spaces, "one of the main threads was that one's personal behavior must strive to be free of oppressive misrepresentations" (Green, 1997: 42). This required a constant alertness and reflection "over the emergence of previously unrecognized prejudices and assumptions, both in oneself and in others" (Green, 1997: 42). To attack someone about his/her behavior was common and expected, yet from their nature these attacks were very personal and potentially hurtful (Green, 1997: 42). It was quite common for people within the community to be on guard with regards to their behavior and its implications, they were ready to question anyone who behaved in a way that revealed some exertion of power (sexism/homophobia/transphobia) (Green, 1997: 40-44).

The notion of privilege seems to embody the point of tension between second-wave (and Marxist) feminist politics and queer feminist politics. It lingers between male

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<sup>17</sup> Identity politics involve a socio-structural concept of power combined with one that locates power within the individual; power is both external and internal. In the process of subjection, it distributes privileges and submits the subject into language but also holds the subject accountable for his/her deeds and wrongdoings since it derives from him/her and is directed towards him/her.

authority and heteronormativity, which as a political tool lapses into heterosexuality. As a political tool in activist circles it serves to draw power assemblages between class, gender, and sexuality. It also frequently becomes the umbrella term for discussing any sort of discrimination similarly to the word “racism” (“ratsismos”) which in the 1990s was used to talk about homophobia (Riedel, 2005:128). At the same time, heteronormative privilege formulated the terms of delimiting and crafting lesbian and/or queer spaces, namely the claims and entitlements played upon queer spaces revolve around the discourse of privilege and heteronormativity.

Some underlying questions I encountered at the “t- shirt” debate were the issue of identity expressed as a challenge to its coherence. Firstly, identity was interpreted through the lens of two historically informed discourses. On the one hand, there was the sexual economy of homosexual desire (and homosociality), which had its roots to AKOE’s legacy (Greek Homosexual Liberation), and on the other hand, the perspective of a gendered feminist identity, which had its roots in the autonomous feminist movement of the late 1970s- early 1980s. And secondly, while discussing the concepts of trauma and privilege another question which emerged was the relation of the individual to the community. What are the criteria of creating queer space and does this involve somehow constraining individual difference against privilege? How can diverse identities coexist in the same space and what is the ethical responsibility of the individual against the community? Where is the line between the personal and the political of queer trauma?

In an effort to avoid clear-cut distinctions between sexual and gender identities, not to adhere to given terms, not to assume their ideological liabilities, many gays and feminists associated the importance of building an alliance between different identities with the transformative effect of care and openness. They imagined a space of exchange in which different identities express themselves, affectively and bodily, but also acknowledge the different experiences of others. How can it be that what for one identity seems violating, for another is desirable? How does one work around this predicament? How can different bodies and their desires coexist in the same space without feeling violated? The impetus for transformation was followed by categorical and political border-crossing between gay boys and feminists, namely some gay boys were underlining the importance of sexual difference over homosexual desire in the makings

of queer space whereas some feminists, mostly boy-looking lesbians, were questioning the boundaries of sexual difference and purporting the creation of a queer feminist community beyond the feminist gender difference/gay desire dichotomy.

Although there was a belief in the possibility, and more importantly, the desirability of encountering “difference” and accepting the other, there was never a period without conflicts and compromises. The demand for inclusiveness stumbled upon that difficult balancing between the individual and the social, the personal and the political (autonomy and difference versus community and sameness). As argued by Green (1997) “the personal is political” demanded that personal experience could not be questioned making it illegitimate to proclaim the “truth” of the experience of the “other” (Green, 1997: 130). And thereby closing contact between identities while new identities were constantly emerging under the influence of western queer discourses (for instance, non-binary). Here I should note that the feminist dogma “the personal is political”, which dates back to the 1980s, has also changed through time in its use and meaning. Nowadays, when employed it brings along, the “eternal repetition of pain” (Brown, 1995: 408) found at the heart of many contemporary demands of identity politics. It appears that “the personal is political” frequently lapses into a notion of “identity as the experience of injury” and fixes itself there in a sort of defensive closure.

In addition, the boundaries against straight boys were debated as anti-straight external boundaries that turn into internal policing and end up turning one identity against the other, and prescribing levels of oppression that leave little space for the affective labor involved in building relations of trust and empathy within the community. A number of gay boys argued that the discourse of privilege entails the enhancement of an anti-straight political stance set along the rigid privilege/trauma discursive schemes and argued that new words and tools have to be found to talk about identities.

The call to rethink the trauma/privilege discursive scheme, which resurfaced constantly in identity battles, resonates with Wendy Brown’s concern about wounded attachments. Her main concern regarding identity politics is that in producing political identities based on damages inflicted by dominant groups, those marginalized risk fetishizing the wound as evidence of identity and thus reinforcing precisely that which should be the impetus for transformations (Brown: 1995). Thus, by making privilege the

sole tool of analysis against which conflicts between identities are measured, unintentionally has the effect of giving the hierarchy of oppressions a formal structure, which contributes to the conflicts occurring anyway within the community over identities (Green: 1997). The privilege/trauma discursive scheme around which debates, including the t-shirt debate, were frequently discussed, and the constant contemplation over the meanings of these terms, reflects the difficulties gays and feminists faced in the building of a queer feminist community in which the individual and the collective are brought into play. However, these disputes served a two-fold purpose: firstly, by arguing over the meanings of identities in the making of community-space, gay boys, lesbians and straight feminists were negotiating and redrawing internal and external boundaries and secondly, the disputes per se served to diffuse tensions and bring to the fore points of commonality and care for each other.

It was repeatedly argued by some feminists and gay boys that building queer space, that is, bringing together various identities, is a fragile endeavor. It involves realizing that the space cannot ever be safe for everyone and that the process of crafting space and structures for complex, yet contradictory, identities isn't stress-free. What for one woman feels liberating (for instance dancing shirtless with no bra) for another is not (for instance dancing with her shirt and binder). Thus, the process of building community space (at parties) entails looking at differences not as irreconcilable conflicts but as fragile negotiations (as a close gay informant told me: "*I take one step back for the other and against my privilege in a culture of caring and political companionship*").

The principle of political companionship as another form of intimacy, drawn from anarchist practices and ideologies, offered the ground for commonality. Political companionship granted a common ground amongst different, somewhat complex and contradictory, identities within the community, and turned into the ethical backbone of community-building. However, it often clashed with a particular kind of queer individualism- the kind that argues that everyone is a minority of one and has the right to create and continually recreate himself/herself.

Of particular concern was whether the feminist concept of hetero-patriarchy locked down the definitions of gendered bodies. The relation between bodies and identity categories emerged as a major concern by boy-looking lesbians. Some of them argued that by treating male bodies as inherently burdened by the weight and history of

patriarchal oppression, other bodies and ways of experiencing gendered identities are foreclosed. Poka, a boy-looking lesvia, in one of our private discussions posed the following rhetorical questions: “*What defines a male body? Where do trans bodies fit in this narrative? A trans boy’s mastectomy, where does it fit in this party? Is it more radical for him to dance naked? And what about a trans woman’s body in transition?*”

Cohen (1985), Joseph (2002), D’Emilio (1983) and Green (1997), in their discussion of communities and the construction of boundaries, suggest that identities are established by imagining the existence of some kind of commonality. Cohen puts forward the notion of “an authentic common identity as a closed box, with elements gathered from an heterogenous reality” (also quoted in Green, 1997: 130); while Green in her study on lesbian separatist communities in the UK (1997) suggests that the content of those boxes are continually being investigated “as personal histories are producing a proliferation of boxes, thereby opening these boxes” (Green, 1997: 130-133). Poka’s reflective questioning serves to open the boxes of identities, reflect on their contents, and imagine community-building as a process of box-opening. The closing of boxes was equally necessary for the establishment of boundaries against the “outer” heteronormative world. Thus, opening and closing identity boxes was part and parcel of the everyday life of the queer feminist community (Green, 1997: 130- 133).

On the other hand, feminists, as well as some of the gay boys, focused on sexual difference as a reality that cannot be negated and an identity that cannot be reduced to a fluid construction. For them, this approach dictated what Green has called (1997: 166-167) “an apolitical, hedonistic “*do what you want and forget feminism*” perspective” which was perceived “as laissez-faire with regard to desire” (Green, 1997: 166-167). The implication of this (namely, we take our shirts off since this is a part of homosexual arousal- “kavla”) was something queer feminists were fighting against since they argued that it silenced the violence to which women have been subjected for centuries.

They also put forward the importance and power of a woman’s negation, namely that a woman’s “No” is a conquest, difficulty fought and won; thus, it needs to be heard and acknowledged as such. A woman’s “No” (in this case a “No” to boys dancing shirtless at queer parties) should not be read as source of conflict within the community but as her conquest: “*We should consider how a woman’s negation sounds within the community. We should be able to say, “No, this bothers me” and then find a way to co-*

*exist. A negation should not necessarily mean conflict*”, said a boy-looking straight feminist. The boundaries between the individual and the collective resurfaced again, between a woman’s personal conquest of saying “No” and its political significance within the community. The importance of this negation being heard and understood was a non-negotiable boundary for some feminists.

In an effort to build lines of agreement between two apparently opposing narratives, gay desires and female identities, an emphasis was placed by some boy-looking feminists on the importance of shifting, of transforming concepts, particularly the concept of violation and of gender identity. In many respects, identity politics proved inadequate to explain the circumstantial character of power and violation, namely how the positions of triggerer vs triggeree switched given the circumstances (a triggered can become triggerer and vice versa). As it was concomitantly supported, these disputes, like the t-shirt debate, offer the terrain to talk about power and the violation in a productive manner (that could potentially provide new tools of imagining space and talking about power and violating acts).

The t-shirt debate revealed a political gap between a feminist definition of space that prioritizes women (a gender identity) and a sexual definition of space that prioritizes gay sensuality and homosexual desire (a sexual identity). The gap persisted as gay boys saw male bodies primarily as sexual identities in a culture of homosociality, whereas feminists saw male bodies as gendered identities loaded with the symbolism and genealogies of patriarchal oppression. In some cases, gays argued that male bodies undoubtedly bear symbolism, yet the building of queer space offers the opportunity to get to know male bodies all over again. The division between feminist and gay sexual identity dropped out when differently positioned women affiliated with either gender or sexual desire to make sense of themselves. For example, boy-looking lesbians who wore binders underlined the blurred boundaries between genders and bodies and focused on the sex-positive character of the party. The transforming potential of this debate was underlined by gay boys who argued that conflicts can be seen as ways of getting to know *“our differences.”*

The feeling that the community is not a contained entity “beyond” the outside world was generally accepted along with the acknowledgement of the impossibility of constructing a totally safe space. Safe space emerged as a hybrid space of home and

belonging, a complex coexistence of a “beyond” and a “within” heteronormative power. There was a utopian longing for a space where people will act lovingly towards one another while at the same time they would fight amongst each other against the coercive structures of heteronormativity into which they were born.

Another side of the debate focused on trauma. In many discussions I had with gays and feminists on the meanings of trauma they seemed to agree on its elusive character. Regardless of whether it’s locatable, whether it’s a trauma invoked in some occasions and disregarded in others, it remains ungraspable, it slips away at the moment of its utterance. The word trauma was deconstructed in group discussions and face-to-face chats to the point that it became an abstract tool which means so many things and at the same time, it’s hard to decipher what it includes and how it relates to life experiences. In this particular debate, boy-looking lesbians perceived trauma for its potentialities to resignify masculinity, particularly in relation to certain masculine attributes (hair and muscles). Gay boys saw trauma in relation to the internalization of anti-straight politics and the policing of desires by the “*unstoppable*” force of privilege, whereas some feminists interpreted women’s trauma as embedded within patriarchal oppression.

The relation between privilege and trauma caused never-ending discussions on the meanings of identities and power structures. In the context of the t-shirt debate, the privilege/trauma discursive scheme reflects an approach to minoritarian identities as “pain effects” (Berlant, 2007: 330- 331; Mowitt: 2007). According to Berlant (2007), “pain organizes your specific experience of the world, separating you from others and connecting you with others similarly shocked (but not surprised) by the strategies of violence that constantly regenerate the bottom of hierarchies of social value you inhabit” (Berlant, 2007: 331). Thus, “subaltern pain is a public form because its outcome is to make you readable for others” (Berlant, 2007: 331). This is why activists in identity politics assume pain as a readable sign across hierarchies of social life; “the subaltern is the surrogate form of cultural intelligibility, and negated identities are pain effects” (Berlant, 2007: 331; Mowitt: 2007). Throughout the t-shirt debate the recognition of trauma as an effect of privilege was indissoluble from the building of empathy and trust. Sometimes, it was an ethical imperative, other times, it was a desire for power to be both the origin and end of negated identities.

The continual use of trauma reflects not only the psychosocial aspect of gender identity, but also the inherent ambivalence of the privilege/trauma discursive scheme. The acknowledgment of trauma becomes both a source of empowerment as well as a cause of conflicts within the community. In one of my discussions with Ismini, a straight feminist affiliated to a queer feminist group in Thessaloniki, she quite insightfully told me that there is no transformation that does not involve an engagement with the other's trauma. She drew from the lesbian sex wars of the 1980s in the UK to argue that sometimes it's not possible to exclude an important part of your life, however hurtful it may sound to others (in this case other lesbian feminists who thought that BDSM was nothing more than patriarchal violence in the bedroom). We went on to discuss the sex-positive character of this particular party, which was less addressed as such, and how by going to such a party one has to adhere to its sex-positive character.

To conclude, the “*manipulative power of trauma*” and the “*unstoppable force of privilege*” were indissoluble categorical terms that structured conflicts within the community. There was a general tendency to push the privilege/trauma discursive scheme to its limits, with the hope that it would transform into something else. The t-shirt debate brought to the fore contradictory views on community-building and opened the discussion on the terms of safe space. In the end of this dispute it became clear that queer desires were seen by gay boys as the medium for building trust and understanding within the community, whereas gender identity was seen by some feminists as the sine qua non of queer feminist community building.



## 5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed two identity battles that involved wider parts of the queer feminist and LGBT community. I unraveled their components and tried to locate them within the local and material history of groups and identity categories (leftists and communitarianism; lesbian feminism and separatist practices; feminists and the haunted claims of autonomous feminists exemplified in the power of a woman's "No"). I argued that these identity battles put forward a notion of identity as a site of struggle that works around closing and opening boxes (Cohen: 1985). In these debates the contents of identity boxes were continually investigated; various gendered and sexual identities- "lesbian", "man", "woman", "genderfluid"- were closing and opening.

In the t-shirt debate I discussed the ongoing clashes between feminist gendered identities and gay sexual identities. Although this debate was staged between men and women, there were many women, boy-looking lesbians, who were taking standpoints that were closer to gay sexual identities. I presented the debate in the context of the privilege/trauma scheme, through which identities and their social implications were continually challenged. I argued that political companionship as an ethical principle, drawn from anarchist practices and ideologies, served to relieve differences amongst sexual and gender minorities. In addition, the importance of self-transformation but also world-transformation- a desire to imagine new ways of looking at male bodies, new ways of talking about identities beyond the privilege/trauma scheme- highlighted conflicts between identities, in this case between gay boys and feminists. Finally, I suggested that in the t-shirt debate, identity-making and community-building are seen as processes complicit with heteronormative power (oscillating between a "within" and a "beyond"). This aspect of identity- making, community- building, outer/ inner world was also brought up a lot.

Regarding the "Γλιτταίρ" dispute I argued that it presents an example of temporal asynchrony, a moment that brought together discourses and identities from different times in the history of the western (and especially Angloamerican) LGBT and queer movement. I also looked at identities as invocations of authenticity- "looking" versus "being" queer- and suggested that the claims upon which these conflicts on boundaries

were made were also asserting what constituted identity. I placed the “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) dispute within a western/local nexus, located between western notions of queer as gender fluid and local histories of lesbian separatism and trans identity politics; between a western queer ideal (of how things ought to be) and the everyday reality of sexism and homophobia.

The force of western queer discourses over local experiences and realities formed a contradictory experience for queers and LGBT people. To put it otherwise the world in which the LGBT people existed was harsh and heterosexist; trans people were beaten and scorned, women were harassed, lesbians were rendered invisible. Following Green’s argument (1997), I also suggest that “the thinkability of a space, safe and less hostile, was a “reality” set against a concretely-experienced “fiction”” (Green, 1997: 182). Indeed, as Green concludes “no amount of intellectual recognition (and self-reflection) on bodies and identities could remove trans women, gay boys and lesbians from their everyday experience of a world that reasserted notions about gender and sexuality as authentic and static identities” (Green, 1997: 182 ). The disjuncture between imagining another reality, and the harshness of everyday reality, created feelings of dislocatedness, where “queer” became an (western) “elsewhere” to which activists strived whilst the present was rendered something that needs to utterly change for lesbian, gay, and trans lives to flourish.

In Part A I discussed the makings of the emergent queer feminist community by laying out histories, temporalities and politics and examining the ways in which women within lesbian and queer feminist groups and collectives construct their political identities. The first two chapters were concerned with local histories and politics as well as the discourses put forward by LGBT groups and collectives. This chapter looked at identity battles in the making of the queer feminist community and brought to the fore the role of queer as productive discursive ambiguity that challenges the underpinnings of identity (“looking” versus “being”). In many ways, Part A serves to contextualize the narratives of lesbians that unfold in Part B, the same women who consist the lesbian feminist and queer community narrate their personal stories in Part B. In this context, I look at identity-making as a two-dimensional process, which involves both the collective life of women in social activism and their individual narratives of gender, desire, intimacy and love.

In Part B, I turn to the personal stories of queer and lesbian women that are less about activism, politics and ideological discourses. In particular, I explore the makings of lesvia subjectivity through the lens of generation, gender, and sex, and explore lesbian and queer sociality through the lens of acute class differences. The following chapter (chapter six) looks at generational sexual narratives and explores the narratives of same-sex desiring women and lesvia- identifying women, and the generational shifts that inform them.

**PART B**  
**Generations, Subjectivities, Spaces**

## CHAPTER SIX

### Generational sexual narratives

#### From same-sex desiring to lesvia-identifying women

##### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the generational sexual narratives of politicized LGBT women in Greece. I suggest that women's sexual stories put forward particular notions of sameness and difference that construct two historically interlinked subjects, namely same-sex desiring subject positions (women-desiring-women) and lesvia identifying women. An idea that runs through this chapter is that the performed lesvia-self shifts by entering different generational worlds. I draw from Plummer's concept of generational narratives, defined as perspectives and standpoints in social worlds, "which are deeply connected to how we structure and organize our memory and visual worlds" (Plummer, 2010: 171); and I argue that the narratives of older and younger women I am discussing here are located and defined by generational time. In other words, through the generational order of lesvia experience, I wish to suggest that life cycles, life memories, life pasts, and local histories define in fundamentally the types of non-normative subject positions that can emerge.

By following a generational analysis to life history narratives (Hammack & Cohler: 2009), I wish to avoid a common trap in the discussion of non-normative sexualities in Greece. I wish to avoid reproducing the country's structural dependency upon central Europe and the West, whereby the globalizing effect of lesbian and gay movements, structured by identity politics, queer fluidity, and gender diversification, are assumed to be positively affected by globalization whereas cultures of "women-loving-women", who put forward a narrative of similitude are considered outdated and less affected by globalization. Narratives of similitude should not be reduced to a "bad" residue of an outdated past that haunts a "progressive" queer future which functions as a regulatory ideal and entails the proliferation of gender categories and western identity

categories (butch- femme lesbian categories, genderfluid, genderqueer etc). Generational sexual narratives function synchronically, namely several generations of lesbians coexisted in the queer feminist scene, in LOA (Lesbian Group of Athens), QV (Queericulum Vitae) and other LGBT initiatives, at the time of this ethnographic research. New generations were building side by side and in conflict with older generations, difference side by side with similitude, gender diversification side by side with womanhood, femininity side by side with femaleness.

On the level of politics, conflicts between generational standpoints were recurrent and have been discussed in previous chapters. In particular, the “Γλιτταίρ” (glitter) dispute (chapter five) signaled for instance clashes between systems of aspirations (women- only spaces versus queer spaces and the claim of inclusivity) and definitions of the category “woman” and “queer” (“looking” versus “being” queer) found in different periods. It was possible to grasp different claims, attachments and structures of feeling in relation to the sexual that were at odds with different generations of people within the queer feminist/ LGBT movement. The younger generation, composed of women in their mid twenties- early thirties, highlighted the expectation of other sexualities to come that lay in contradiction with sexualities of the older generation, mainly separatist lesbians of Eressos and the culture of women-only parties. This underlying contradiction quietly infused much of “the synchronic sexual generational order, and broke out into fear and direct hostility— fear of losing space, generation attack, and scapegoating of all kinds” (Plummer, 2010: 183). On the other hand, the re-emergence of an anti-rape feminist discourse by contemporary feminist groups (Migada, Beflona, Brastards) which seems to bear elements of past feminist generations (see Appendix E), reaffirms Plummer’s and Derrida’s argument about generational ghosts that haunt the present; behind current anti-rape feminist discourses echoes the lingering world of second-wave feminists in Greece who set up anti-rape feminist agendas whilst claiming the change of the Greek Family Law in the late 1970s.

From generational collisions and hauntings on the level of LGBT politics discussed in part A, I now turn to the generational sexual narratives of politicized women, particularly same-sex desiring women in their late forties to early sixties and lesbians in their early twenties to mid-thirties. By looking closely at the ways women talk about their lives I notice an apparent discrepancy between older women’s narratives of

similitude and homoeroticism (same-sex love) and younger women's narratives of difference and gender discontinuity. The historical move from narratives of similitude (homoeroticism and "desire for the same sex") to narratives of difference (homosexuality as gender discontinuity) cries out for explanation. There are particular historical and social reasons behind this: The accession of Greece into the EU in the 1980s; legislative changes; the introduction of queer in the Greek cultural milieu; the proliferation of LGBT groups; the expansion of Pride parades; the globalization of gay and lesbian culture; the internet as medium for gathering information and creating cyber homosexual worlds; the adoption of western identity categories amongst others.

A cross-generational element that emerges in the narratives of both age cohorts has to do with coming out stories. Stories of coming out figure as less defining within women's life narratives, yet there are generational differences located on how women talk about coming out. It's not that moments of coming out do not take place but that they do not represent milestones in women's stories of coming to self-awareness. The older generation of women tell me that there was no notion of coming out when they were coming of age, most of them chose to come out much later in their life course, yet coming out emerges as a gradual and internal process of naming homosexual desire. For the younger generation of women, the practice of coming out is already an established practice of homosexual becoming when they were growing up. Expressing and becoming aware of homosexual desire is quickly placed within identitarian forms of love, yet coming out is selectively done at different times, in different places, geared towards different audiences. There is a generational line that moves from the absence of the notion of coming out to a selective notion of coming out, which in both cases figures as less important to lesvia selfhood and everydayness (forming erotic relationships and groups of friends) compared to the western notion of coming out, which signals gay liberation as well as an accomplished notion of homosexual selfhood.

In some cases, coming out to family and friends is just one moment amongst others, other times it's a moment of acknowledgement that signals minimal change in how women actually experience their private selves (and how committed and accepted they feel in their relationships), and it further depends on one's personal and familial circumstances. For older women, like Ninetta, coming out concerns them less than feeling accepted and recognized by their sexual partner. Instead of coming out stories,

older women emphasize the importance of recognition as an intersubjective experience within an erotic relationship. This expectation emerges in Elsa's relations with married hetero women and Theodora's "special" relationship. For younger women coming out is a selective practice. They come out in different times and places, sharing those aspects of their lives that will cause them less distress (for instance, coming out as feminist but not as lesvia). Overall, the notion of coming out put forward by older and younger lesbies resonates with Boellstorff's understanding of "an epistemology of lifeworlds where homosexual subjectivity depends not on integrating diverse domains of life and having a unity in all situations but on separating domains of life and maintaining their borders against the threat of gossip and alienation" (Boellstorff, 2005: 174).

The chapter is divided into two sections, each section begins with some preliminary thoughts that serve to historically contextualize women's life histories as well as underline recurrent elements and narrative patters that bring to the fore particular cultural understandings of female homosexuality in Greece. I then turn to the narrative presentation of lesvia and same-sex desiring subject categories in the context of the queer feminist/ LGBT movement, and explore initial intimate relationships, self-recognition, memory and love relations as they appear to re-emerge within women's narratives and influence the formulation of same-sex desiring subject positions and lesvia identities, the later going hand in hand with a process of consciously politicizing homosexual desire. Throughout this chapter, I give prominence to women's life stories with the aim to grasp life cycles, life pasts, and life memories that unfold within their narratives. Which aspects of women's same-sex experiences bring to the fore non-normative subject positions? How is similitude and difference discussed? What do they wish to say about themselves as they narrate their life stories? These are some of the questions that are continuously addressed in this chapter.



## 6.2 Older women's experiences of same-sex attraction

This generational sexual world consists of women of second-wave feminism, who were born roughly between 1945 to 1968, and participated or lived through the rise of the feminist movement in Greece (1974- 1982). They fought for significant changes in women's social and sexual oppression in the 1970s- from abortion rights to the change of the Family law- set up rape crisis centres, organized "Reclaim the Night" demonstrations, developed ideas on male violence and sexual harassment, formed consciousness- awareness groups that aimed to create the space for women to speak, share and reflect over women's bodies, roles and aspirations. These women who were now in their early fifties and sixties "still reflect on these issues and look at their sexual lives moving around these ideas" (Plummer, 2010: 171). Some were actively involved in the feminist movement, others were coming of age at the time of its rise, yet they are part of the post-junta generation of women who reclaimed their bodies and fought against women's inequality and patriarchal oppression.

In addition, this is the early "coming-out generation" in Greece; between 1970s and 1990s the LGBT movement was gathering some strength, lesbians were trying to find their voice and position themselves in the autonomous feminist movement (groups of lesbians held their gatherings at Women's Coffeehouses); this is also the beginning of lesbian visibility with relevant magazines (Madam Gou, *Lavris*) making their appearance. With intense stigma, homosexuality was entering the public sphere (mass media) in the 1990s, the era of the post- AIDS epidemic that sprang up in Greece during the late 1970s and signalled the emergence of the organized homosexual/transvestite movement (with AKOE and later EOK).

The older generation of women faced particular challenges, namely becoming an independent, "modern" woman and expressing same-sex desire. There were still no alternative discourses (or these were just beginning to emerge) to being lesbia at the time, apart from the dominant narrative of the AIDS epidemic and of homosexuality as "deviancy." Women's sexuality was intrinsically linked to marriage, domestic responsibility, and motherhood. Women's life possibilities were limited, yet this generation of women developed an awareness of the stigma against same-sex sexuality.

They were coming of age at a time when the dominant discourse on homosexuality was largely pathologizing and partly illegalizing it with the 1976 draft bill on the “protection from sexually transmitted diseases and the regulation of relevant issues” which however did not pass. In this social context, women who realized that they might be homosexual experienced feelings of fear and guilt; to come-out as homosexual was very challenging or yet inconceivable. The idea of being lesvia and hence “deviant”, extends in women’s narratives of repression of same-sex desire for fear of being exposed as “deviants” (“anomales”), as “dalikes” (“bull daggers”), as “biftekoudes” (common slurs for lesvies). This relates to the fact that heterogendered normativity, marriage and reproduction was instituted as part and parcel of the country’s post-junta cultural triptych “Fatherland, Religion, Family.”

The partial fusion of sexuality and gender in older women’s narratives suggests the need to reflect on similitude (“desire for the same sex”) and same-sex love as an integral part of this generation’s sexual narrative. Women of this generation talk about erotics within, and not between, sexual subject positions (woman-to-woman erotics). This contrasts with the narratives of younger women for whom desire for difference is reflected in gender discontinuity, which means seeing oneself as non-straight/non-heteronormative and appropriating western sexual categories (butch- femme, genderfluid etc.) to reflect on their sexuality. What needs to be noted is that gender discontinuity doesn’t only signal gender non-conformity, meaning that it doesn’t only require visibly questioning gender norms or gender- bending in a public way (body postures, clothes, make-up etc.), it also signifies feeling the weight of dominant structures as constraining and experiencing restrictions within the available terms of being/becoming a woman.

The older generation forms worlds of similitude where being a woman is not taken for granted whereas the right to love another woman is either inconceivable, unattainable, or hard to claim. Older women tended to display less sexual awareness, growing up with stricter rules on what it means to be a proper Greek, Christian Orthodox woman. Indisputably, women slept with women who did not see themselves as lesvies. At the time, the sexual act of sleeping with another woman didn’t make you a lesvia since there were no available identity categories, namely the idea of same-sex desire as an identity wasn’t yet formulated.

Older politicized lesbies embrace similitude as a self-affirmative and same-loving experience, it's about loving oneself as a woman, owning the female body and the right to desire, to desire differently, non-heterosexually, that is, desire another female body. This also involves certain practices and ways of experiencing sexuality and the world such as engaging sexually with married women that don't identify as lesbies; feeling exiled from the male world; seeking recognition from erotic partners; socializing at lesbian bars while feeling ambivalent about the lesbian bar culture; experiencing same-sex love at the margins of same-sex intimacy and eroticism; choosing to live away from the family unit; and finally, creating space by and for themselves.

Amongst older women, there is less tendency to weave progressive narrative trajectories that locate lesvia subject formation back to early childhood (Engebretsen, 2008: 137- 138), and more a desire to talk about homoerotic desires. The less progressive narrative structure of the older generation indicates a time when inhabiting and identifying with the lesvia subject position wasn't yet formulated. Women draw attention to the blurred boundaries between same-sex intimacy and eroticism and talk about their first erotic encounters as something sudden, unexpected, a "special" kind of relationship. In addition, they don't strive to locate identity in a particular moment in early childhood that revealed to them their homosexuality; they describe developing gradual awareness of their homosexual inclinations by forging intimate bonds with women.

The narratives of similitude put forward by this generation of women challenge the ways difference is conceptualized as the sine-qua-non of western lesbian sexuality. The "potential friends- potential lovers" sexual scheme (Kantsa:2010a; Kirtsoglou: 2003) which structures this generation's sexual narratives suggests that blurred boundaries between the other and the same, between hetero and homo, can produce "special" relationships and other ways of experiencing sexuality. During this time, the word "lesvia" was not yet anchored as an identity category and at the same time, unmarried women were severely reprimanded as "gerontokores" (spinsters). For this generation of women, choosing to lead non- heterosexual lives meant exploring the sphere of homoerotic desires, crafting space where they can come together such as lesbian bars and grassroots feminist groups.

Overall, similitude refers to a state of womanhood, both as self-affirmation and desire for the same, which structures the ways of talking, feeling, and living same-sex love at the time. For the women of this generation, “owning” homosexual desire is about “owning” femaleness; politicized lesbians didn’t look or wish to look “different” from other women while so-called “dalikes”<sup>18</sup> weren’t considered part of the world of politicized lesbians as stated by Psedonimou (1992).

### **6.2.1. Narratives of similitude: Initial intimate relationships & dating married hetero-women**

Elsa was a cheerful woman in her late forties, she was single, unmarried and wasn’t dating at the time. I met her quiet early into my fieldwork and we soon began to hang out as she always enjoys the company of fellow-LOADES. For the majority of women of her generation, the burden of accepting oneself as a lesbia and as a woman was experienced throughout her life course; in this sense there is no before and after in her retrospective narrative of being lesbia. Elsa grew up with all the gendered burden of a girl in a male-dominated family, her brothers were sent for studies abroad while she had to stay close to her mother; once she started menstruating, she was told she should be cautious of boys for fear of getting pregnant. Elsa dated and had sex with a couple of men but was afraid of them as her mother once told her that men are beasts who want to serve their needs and women are their vessels. While having sex with a man Elsa describes freezing out of utter horror that he was going to turn into a werewolf. The male world felt hostile and alien, full of potential threats, namely rape and unwanted pregnancies.

When she moved out of home, her parents warned her that in being an unmarried woman living on her own, she was besmirching the family’s reputation. She tells me she felt attracted to girls at school, yet it took time to evolve and accept herself. Self-acceptance emerged as a constant point of negotiation in Elsa’s sexual story, it

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<sup>18</sup> The local term *Dalikes* (bull daggers) refers to loud masculine women of a working class, plebeian background who spent their time hanging out at bars, caring less about politics, and undertaking manly jobs (taxi drivers, deliveries, construction work). The term was primarily addressed as a slur during the 1980s and later was appropriated as the title of LOA’s magazine.

involved accepting her desire for women, gaining confidence as a woman and finding a place in the world where she would feel less frustrated and more relaxed with who she was. Fear of rejection from friends, family, and society in general, formed Elsa's experience, combined with the fact that she had no available representation or image of herself or of life as a non-heterosexual woman. The popular discourse in Greece branded physical and emotional intimacy amongst women as "deviant", "wrong", an "illness", a "sin" that needs redemption, or at best a phase until women find the right lad to marry ("*ena kalo paidi*"). It's exactly this discourse Elsa struggled to confront throughout her twenties. Women's narratives of repressed desires often display fear of rejection, shame, and a pressure to conform to the heterosexual paradigm, yet Elsa was coming of age when homosexuality was "unknown" with television and film providing the framework to see her desire reflected at the margins of heterosexual love stories.

Elsa: *"When I watched movies on TV and saw a couple kissing I identified with the man not with the woman. I could understand the pleasure a man feels when kissing a woman and not the other way around. I dated some guys in my early adolescence, we kissed and I remember going home to wash my teeth afterwards (laughs). I didn't like it. I had a platonic attraction for boys but it would not last long, my interest for women was more intense. At twenty-four, I dated a guy and while we were having sex I was fantasizing I was with a woman in order to feel sexually aroused. After this I decided to stop dating guys.*

*{...} I had a burden, a negative burden as a lesvia. I was afraid people would think I was a "pervert" ("anomali"), that they would not accept me. I felt insecure as a person anyway and this was an extra burden for me to carry, namely how to face people's negative comments about my homosexuality. I could not stand it. Nevertheless, I realized in early adolescence that the attraction I felt for women was not seen as normal in society and initially as a virgo (laughs) I thought that since this is considered a "perversion" ("anomalia") I need to repress it, to eliminate it. It would take nothing but a decision, I would simply take it out of my head and destroy it. I said to myself: "This doesn't exist! You will erase it!" But one night I dreamed I was making love to a woman and woke up with a vivid memory of how beautifully I felt her*

*body on me. That's when I thought that even if I say to myself I have to repress it, my subconscious will always react. This is not something I could solve logically. I decided that I can't subjugate my desire, I can't go against it. I will support it, the idea of going against it drove me crazy. Of course, I could not face it socially but I decided to support it deep inside me, even if nobody else knew about it, even if I had to hide it, I would try to accept it as something that is not bad for myself as it doesn't harm anyone {...}*"

It seems that women became aware of same-sex attraction before actual sexual encounter with other women; most often women began questioning themselves by letting their gut-feeling- or else their intuition- guide them. When women of the older generation talked about initial relationships they expressed their fear for being found out; these initial relationships were rarely defined as such, usually they emerged in the blurred zone between same-sex intimacy and eroticism, followed by repression and a never-ending effort to accept the relationship as erotic. Consider Elsa's narrative when she talks about the grey zone between female friendship and eroticism which structures the way she perceives flirting and contact with women.

*Elsa: "We were friends, we began hanging out at school, talking about the difficulties we faced at home. Sometimes I could tell from the way she looked at me that this was something more than a friendship...but I was very shy as a person, gradually it was becoming obvious that it was more than a friendship, it was something else, as an emotion, an attention and an interest for the other person...I could not tell her anything so I wrote her a letter and gave it to her. When she read it, we threw ourselves on the bed. We'd reached the end of the tether and desire was pouring out of us.*

*It was the first relationship for both of us, we were immature and freaked out. I was thinking "what we're doing, this can't be permanent or anything serious, the serious thing is to date a boy." We would date guys for some time and then get back together. Our relationship lasted four years with breaks in-between {...} It was the first sexual experience for both of us, we didn't have any experiences with boys or girls, we were inexperienced and it was nice, our*

*contact was very emotional, and it had a lot of acceptance. We didn't have anything to compare it with or anything to criticize. And this helped me since I was very timid, it helped me relax sexually and feel more at ease with my body and more comfortable to express myself. For example, I stopped feeling ashamed during sex, I could show an orgasm when I felt it."*

While Elsa struggles to come to terms with herself she tells me that her subsequent relationships were with women who were either in denial of their homosexuality, married, or intended to marry a man at some point. Regarding her long-term relationship which lasted close to eight years, Elsa tells me that her partner's internalized homophobia, the fact that she could not come to terms with her homosexuality and preferred to live it secretly-visiting her only for the weekends-gradually discouraged her. After the break-up she felt angry that she was gradually losing the prospect of having children. She relates this to her life's difficult circumstances due to her sexuality and to the fact that there was no available representation of same-sex parenting at the time.

Finding a sexual partner and fighting for the right to love another woman is a difficult trajectory under such pressures to conform to the heterosexual norms of married life. Elsa tells me that breaking-up was not easy; there was fear of isolation since she didn't have a large network of lesbian friends around her. Lesbian bars and surfing on chatrooms were some of the ways she found to cope with isolation. She met a group of women online and began going to bars. Even though Elsa tells me she didn't enjoy the atmosphere at lesbian bars, particularly the flirtatious atmosphere with the "*aggressive looks of lesbies with a masculine style*", she continued going until she got involved with lesbian feminist groups. In her early forties, she met a younger woman online with whom she had a very passionate sexual affair. But this woman had other relations with men. Elsa tried to break off the affair several times; she felt hurt every time she knew her lover was with another guy. When Elsa was told she had decided to marry, she ended the relationship. Later this woman admitted to Elsa that being with her meant choosing a very difficult path in life. Elsa lost contact with her since she could no longer feel like a shadow in her life.

The way Elsa discusses her erotic feelings for women indicates an ongoing effort to discard the dominant public discourse on homosexuality, which perceives it as an “abnormality” or at best “women’s experimental phase.” This discourse is in no way culturally obsolete. In 2013, on a television program about homosexuality<sup>19</sup>, a famous psychiatrist, Thanos Askitis, bluntly identified two types of lesbians: the “masculine spider woman” and the “female woman disappointed by men”, reinforcing a morally-imbued national homophobic discourse that pathologizes women’s sexuality, and homosexuality in particular, as deviant. Elsa struggles with social stigma, along with her own reluctance towards desire, which I had the sense that went beyond her lesbianism.

From various discussions with politicized lesbians of this generation, I realized that initial relationships formed women’s sense of self in fundamental ways. For some women, questions around identity sprang in the aftermath of initial intimate relationships while for others, questions around sexual preferences and identity did not emerge since “*it’s a hard, dead-end path*” as Elsa’s sexual lover who was also in a relationship with a man once told her. Undoubtedly, the fear of being exposed (and rejected) ensured that same-sex eroticism remained hidden in everyday life. However, the ambiguity of initial intimate relationships, which flourish at the grey zone of female friendship and eroticism, enabled some sense of life-continuum and self-reflection for the emergence of same-sex desiring subject positions away from the discursive gaze of homophobia that labelled this intimacy as “deviant”, “sick”, “pervert” (“anomali”).

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<sup>19</sup> Kriti TV show “Antitheseis” with Yiorgos Saxis, April, 10, 2013, Accessed on January 2014, Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMfPS312d8g&t=526s>



## 6.2.2. A “special” relationship: Same-sex love & the “potential friends- potential lovers” sexual scheme

Theodora, a single woman in her late forties who enjoyed painting and making jewelry professionally, had similar experiences to Elsa. She was less comfortable in talking about herself, yet she was eager to offer her generation’s experience. In many occasions, she introduced me to people as “*the researcher that wants to study the lesbies.*” In one of our casual conversations she mentioned the concept of “*searching*” (“*psaxnomai*”) as both a phase and a state of mind which was pertinent to her sexual experience. In her early twenties Theodora dated various men and confesses feeling afraid of getting pregnant and having an abortion. She tells me the story of her first relationship with a woman she met at university. In many respects this relationship defined her sensibilities in love relations. As she narrated the story it was becoming more and more obvious to me that it was an emotionally intense experience.

*Theodora: “Well, my first experience...I was at university, 18 years old...we matched, it happened effortlessly, I had this feeling that it would last forever. For the first time, this person created this sense of never-ending. I made plans for us in the future, I projected myself with her in the future. But there was no flirting when we met. I didn’t even like her, we fought a lot, we could not be in the same room {...} I can’t explain it, it just happened. I didn’t see a woman and liked her. It wasn’t like that. It was sudden. At least for me. At some point, we began hanging out and I noticed that I was missing her when she was away, when she left to visit her hometown, her absence was painful, I felt the city was empty, that’s when I realized I was in love. Things happened gradually... We got together, it was spontaneous. We were close and it just came out, bodily, we didn’t say anything before or after.*

*We were together for some time, about four years. We were together every day, every night. I connected well with this person, emotionally it was very intense {...} Then she left, she went back to her hometown to marry and have kids.*

*{...} It was something we kept to ourselves, nobody else knew about it, we didn't discuss it with other people, it stayed between us, it was a "special" relationship that was also erotic. Whatever happened we either discussed it with each other or thought about it on our own. There was no idea of coming out. It was like this secret between us {...} I felt that it was more something that happened with this person because it was her. I didn't know if I would continue with women. There was no clear identity formed for either of us. It felt more that I fell in love with her because it was her and I could not do otherwise. Our contact was so intense, even metaphysical; I felt we connected telepathically sometimes, for example, when we were in danger we asked each other whether we got a sense, a feeling of the other's fear. Things like that. I don't know if these things are true but our connection, our relation was special. To a telepathic level. It was very painful when she left."*

Many women of this age cohort had stories of relationships that were unfolding naturally, they were just "happening", though they were not judged as good or bad, they were not considered as the "real thing", and remained locked down in the sphere of the "unimaginable" and "illegitimate." Having said that, women's narratives of initial intimate relationships reflect a fear of exposure (and rejection by friends and family) as well as a general "ignorance" on how to approach and support these relationships in any different way. At some point, after graduation, gendered norms of compulsory heterosexuality regarding marriage began to pressure women in same-sex relationships to break them off and start dating men. The end of Theodora's "special" relationship, followed by her partner's decision to move back to her hometown and marry, was devastating. After the break up Theodora begins hanging out at lesbian bars. There seemed to be a prevalent lack of visibility and social stigma about homosexuality during the time Theodora was building her identity. In addition, Theodora's desire for sameness along with a partial fusion of gender and sexuality, reveal the emergence of same-sex desiring subject positions, which later became the lesvia identity category.

Theodora: *"It was very hard feeling a minority back then. Nowadays, things are better, people are interviewed by lifestyle magazines like Lifo, there*

*is greater representation of gays; homosexuality is perceived as more acceptable. Back then things were very hostile. Only a few women dared to appear on television and they received relentless attacks by journalists, priests, everybody...It seemed like a hard path, it made you feel awful if you identified with this community, it made you think how hard your life is going to be. It wasn't an image of women celebrating their sexuality, it was harsh, few women appeared on television and they had to be prepared to receive obscene attacks from everyone.*

*My relationships looked alike...I've heard about masculinity, the butch/femme scheme in particular, but in my relationships we both looked alike. This is what attracted me, the same, that carried something intimate for me...There was no difference in looks or appearance in my relationships, we looked alike, I don't know, it felt close, we were similar, we were close.*

*{...} I can't differentiate myself as a woman and as a lesvia. What is this? I don't know. My self changed with my political engagement in the lesbian community, I found things there that helped me express myself and reflect more on my life."*

Theodora struggled with the idea of marriage. She talks about marriage as a kind of social stability that helps the relationship evolve. It seems that she wished to have the prospect of marriage in her life. Elsa's and Theodora's stories of relationships with women that ended when their partners married reflect how same-sex relationships were irreconcilable with the hetero-normative expectations of marriage and motherhood. Women felt pressured to conform to opposite-sex dating and marriage, thus, at the time it was hard to maintain and support a same-sex relationship. However, women talk about "special" relationships, which occupy the grey zone between female friendship and eroticism and widen the meanings "girlfriend" and "relationship." For Theodora, it's her partner's personality that makes the relationship "special", yet "special" also signals the grey zone of same-sex intimacy and eroticism. The discourse of "special" relationships goes beyond the western definition of lesbian relationships that have to be recognized and celebrated as such in order to be acknowledged as erotic.

Both Elsa and Theodora discuss loving and desiring another woman as a woman and clearly tell me they didn't date masculine lesbians of the time. The manner in which they discuss same-sex love involves locating difference within sameness. In particular, they talk about active and passive sexual roles and about sameness as a form of likeness and a possible source of romantic closeness. Elsa enjoys having a woman in her arms who can "let go", adopting an active sexual role, while Theodora talks about a romantic kind of love that blends sameness with closeness and intimacy. Overall, Elsa's and Theodora's same-sex love narratives are followed by an intimacy with female friends and a desire for the same sex. Sentiments of care and affection for close friends produced feelings of being different while "attracted to the same", yet the fact that women haven't heard of homosexuality whilst they were growing up means that women got involved in relationships with other women without any prior knowledge of homosexuality per se.

Elsa and Theodora's narrative trajectory highlights ambiguity and blurred boundaries between same-sex intimacy and eroticism. The feeling of being different within a woman-to-woman narrative of desire was debated through initial erotic relationships, whilst same-sex love retrospectively becomes a definite marker of their lesbia identity. At the forefront of older women's generational narratives stands same-sex love regardless of women's sexual orientation, as well as a language of homoeroticism that finds its expression in the blurred boundaries between female intimacy and eroticism.

### **6.2.3. Narratives of similitude: Owning womanhood, Male worlds & Loving women**

Ninetta was in her early sixties and quiet a story-teller; she loved telling stories set in the time of the feminist movement in Greece. By listening to Ninetta's life history Plummer's (1995; 2010) suggestions about sexual life histories become clearer and clearer, namely that "we live our sexual lives through moments with others in the here and now, and tell our stories at this juncture, we do this also across a series of life stages and historical moments that we then carry through life with us to any particular sexual moment of the present. We live with perpetually reconstructed life others, life

memories, life stories, life accounts, life selves—drawing continuously on our own imagined pasts” (Plummer, 2010: 168). Ninetta’s sexual self is encrypted in images, gifts, posters, memories, and letters and her stories about women, sisterhood, and sexuality are bound by the generation in which she lives. She acknowledges this by distancing herself from queer readings of sexuality and by locating her experience in a woman-to-woman narrative of desire that is intrinsically linked to an internal and gradual process of loving herself and flourishing as a woman.

Ninetta: *“Feminism saved my life, I was reborn in Greece in 1979- 1980 when I arrived {...} It made me love people all over again...because I felt I was nothing, nothing, nothing, like my mother and grandmother, I could not think that I had the right to have desires of my own, I was nothing {...} When I attended the feminist group of Ampelokipi, gradually the idea of living independently grew inside me, to live on my own without the excuse of going for studies. The Women’s Coffeeshouse was my social space and it was so beautiful, there were no cafes or tea houses for women at the time, a woman from Sweden with another woman from the Netherlands that both came after the fall of the Greek junta took over the first floor of a conserved old house in Genadiou street where the Movement of Democratic Women held its meetings. On the first floor they set up their coffeeshouse with marble tables and underneath sewing machines with small curtains.*

*{...} My first relationship was with a woman from this group, we never socialized as a couple, it wasn’t named as a relationship but when people saw one of us they would instantly ask about the other and say how much we look alike, our body types, our behaviours...we were seen as two women who were very close...But it was complicated, it was a relationship that was not a relationship...initially I went through the process of having to admit to myself that this is an erotic relationship {...}*

*{...} At the women’s vacation group, we gathered, drank, talked about our relationships and organized summer vacations, basically we were coming together and bonding but...I was “hidden” (“in the closet”, my explanation)...I didn’t know how to handle it and they didn’t know how to react because when*

*you tell somebody that you make love to a woman, not the word lesvia, but making love to a woman...there was no such concept, it didn't exist, even in my head, it didn't exist before I fell in love with a woman and made love to a woman, I entered a dark room and these women in the group could not say something {...} I opened my mouth to other hetero women, they could not understand, they looked baffled, and I could not understand, it was as new for them as it was for me, because people who have never heard the word homoerotic, they automatically think it's a sin, something disgusting and shameful, things like that... and they forget it's a human relationship, my friends didn't ask me anything, how I lived this relationship, and I stayed silent again...*

*I didn't have many relationships with women from the community (post 2000) so I can't say about how others feel about it but I can tell you this: The way women love and relate with each other is different from the heteronormative, it's hard and demanding, but it has an element of female sisterhood which isn't always positive but it's not the heteronormative way of relating {...}"*

Ninetta's woman-to-woman narrative of desire falls upon her wish to own her body, to feel proud for being a woman. In western understandings of gay and lesbian subjectivities, difference is usually conflated with distance from normative sexualities; the same and the other set against each other (Boellstorff, 2005: 4-5; 51). Ninetta acknowledges the distance of same-sex relations from the heteronormative, yet it's a distance which presupposes the bond of sameness, that is, love for womanhood and personal/political bonds with women. Same-sex desiring subject positions are imagined not in terms of decreased familiarity between straight and lesbian worlds; the language of desire is used to explore sexual worlds, hetero and homo, and create the basis for the formulation of same-sex desiring subject positions.

Ninetta's generational narrative carries multiple worlds collapsing in the present time. She discusses the post-junta feminist movement in Greece and its links to Europe, she makes comparisons to what is absent here, and points out the contribution of women who came from abroad and shared their experiences from European feminism. In Ninetta's generational narrative, feminism is both a Greek and European

phenomenon. Ninetta doesn't see herself more European as she sees herself "reborn" in Greece during the post-junta feminist movement. She discusses the local particularities of feminism more than the way things are done in central Europe. This shows that even if feminist ideas were imported from Europe, the temporal "urgency" of the feminist movement in Greece, happening in the "here and now", took over a Greek tendency for western idealizations on how things ought to be done or are imagined to be elsewhere. In Ninetta's generational narrative, there is less utopia towards a western "elsewhere" and more discussion about feminist cultural blending happening in the "here and now."

Ninetta's generational story dictates particular ways her generation positioned and moved through the world; her body was shaped in feeling afraid of the world of men while her references depict this generation's transnational forms of belonging—from the "Well of Loneliness" (Radclyffe Hall) to "The little difference and its huge consequences" (Alice Schwarzer) to "The end of shame" (Anja Meulenbelt). These feminist references, European-imported and appropriated, are unknown to the younger generation, yet they were part of Ninetta's generational sexual world. In 2015, the sexual world in Greece is shaped by transnational queers who live in between cities, various LGBT groups interconnected through ILGA, queer feminist groups, westernized gay and lesbian identities, Pride parades organized in cities across the country. Yet lesbians of the older generation like Ninetta tell their stories and point to sexual traditions associated with past decades. Here are the traditions of anti-rape struggles, abortion rights, contraceptive crusades, the influence of European feminism, the transnational movement of women, the conflicts between lesbian and straight feminists, consciousness awareness and experiential talking in an organised activist circle of sharing. In this generation's narratives, male and female worlds are separated as women fought for the right simply to be themselves, and separatism was considered a step forward to owning womanhood.

Ninetta: *"Opening myself emotionally to a man felt like a treason to women's world. I didn't want a man to touch me...it was very experiential...how to explain it...I didn't want a man to touch me, the female cell that I experienced in feminism, in women's groups had entered my personal life, it was a powerful experience...I was emotionally and ideologically a separatist because I belonged*

*in the generation of women who needed to live separately from men, regardless if you were hetero or homo, we needed to craft our own space. I felt very close to women who slept with men. I think that this idea was never nurtured enough in the Greek public sphere - in United States it was more widespread- namely that women regardless of whether they sleep with men or women need to invest time and energy in creating their own spaces and living alongside each other. Personally, I feel this is a necessary phase for every woman to have, create her own space, where she can become a woman. It can be hard and it was hard for the women's vacation group...for hetero women who were building a female cell that held so much power and at the same trying to manage their lives with men."*

In many respects, the narrative of similitude was born out of separation from the male world and its potential hostility that runs across Ninetta's sexual history. However, at some point in her genealogical narrative she bends over and looks at past ideas- the hostility of male worlds- from her position in the present; she reflects on what the new generation brings along, which is not part of who she is, yet enables her to look at male worlds side by side with female worlds.

*Ninetta: "I am not related with queer, it's not part of my history, in activist circles, I've understood that it has to do with gender dysphoria, another translation can be "weird" ("allokotos") {...} but I felt exiled from the male world and I closed the door. I can admit this now...for many women of my generation who feel they don't want to have anything to do with the male world...it's a social condition, it's socially informed, it's not biological, women who felt excluded and excluded others, who felt repressed and repressed others...now that I am over sixty I can say that I don't care, I want to open myself to the world beyond the sexual and see the other as a totality, a human being that has in-between his legs another organ; for all these years, I saw the man as a penis and this was something society made me see, it didn't happen by itself, it wasn't possible to look a man in the eyes calmly, the male world felt dangerous...the*



*female world taught me this...and the histories of my mother and grandmother.”*

Overall, narratives of similitude build on genealogies running back to past generations. Based on Ninetta’s as well as Theodora’s and Elsa’s narratives, similitude in the 1980s came to signify firstly, a discourse of homoerotic desire built around the blurred boundaries between same-sex intimacy, female sisterhood, and homoeroticism; and secondly, a European-imported and appropriated discourse for women’s liberation which came to signify the need to love oneself as a woman and live separately from the world of men. This suggests that women produce their configurations of same-sex love by blending elements from European and Greek worlds. In particular, the notion of two women who are very close, two women who look alike, two women who love each other, women who date hetero women, does not correspond to how western narratives theorize lesbian and gay identities by pinning them down to difference (difference as identity and distance from the normative). The discourse of homoerotic desire marks the emergence of same-sex subject positions and defines this generation’s sexual stories.

### **6.3 Younger women coming to awareness & Narratives of difference**

This generational sexual world consists of women of the emergent queer feminist/LGBT movement in Greece- a group of women born roughly between 1980-1997, who socialized and formed their identities in LGBT groups and queer feminist collectives. This group of women grew up during the revitalization of the LGBT movement after the police raid at the gay club “Spices” in the early 2000s; the rise of international gay and lesbian human rights activism; the end of the Greek junta (1974); and the accession of Greece into the EU (1981) that signalled the rise of claims for greater equality along with more inclusive notions of Greek citizenship.

At the same time, the internet becomes an important socializing force for young people seeking to learn about lesbian and gay culture. It provides them with a way to explore their identities, interconnect with one another, and form their own communities. In addition, travelling becomes a viable option and helps women explore

other lifestyles and ways of being homosexual. Many women of the younger generation travel to Europe for a couple of years as part of their studies or to live abroad. Travelling seems to enhance an openness to women's sexuality, and signals the creation of a transnational lesvia subjectivity which flourishes at the intersection of globalization and locality. Mobility (physical and conceptual), as I will be discussing in chapter nine, is classed in that women who are able to afford it travel abroad, women who work on a semi-temporary basis and have other sources of income, and/or women who have set up a transnational network of friends.

On the level of lesbian and gay activism, one notices a variety of practices, already discussed in chapter two (Part A), in which various women of this generational world are involved. The LGBT/feminist/queer movement becomes a battlefield- as much as a cross-over- between different strategies that build narrative assemblages by taking bits and pieces from all kinds of discourses. From QV's anti-Greek poster "*Proudly the nation's shame*" (2010) that performatively demystifies heteronormative narratives of Greek machismo as the intimate citizenship regime; to radical feminist groups organizing anti-rape demonstrations and shouting "*We are here! We are many! Shut up crummy sexists!*" (2016); through to Colour Youth's project "Tell it to Us", introduced in 2014 with the aim to record incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence and discrimination against LGBT people in order to inform and sensitise Greek society on this issue; to educational campaigns organized by *Rainbow Families* and the *Group against Homophobia and Transphobia in Education* with the aim to organize social awareness and better integrate LGBT people in Greek society by pursuing legislative changes.

The younger generation of women build their identities alongside their political engagement with LOA, QV, and broader LGBT initiatives. Contrary to the narratives of similitude of older women, this generation puts forward a narrative of difference, which draws from western, transnational and local discourses, where women consciously adopt lesvia identity categories and politicize same-sex sexuality. The movement from sameness to difference should be placed within the history of the LGBT movement in Greece. From AKOE's proclamation "for the liberation of homosexual desire" in the late 1970s and the women-desiring-women narrative of desire, we move onto the introduction of lesbian and gay identities alongside claims for Europeanization during

the 1990s, and arrive at an intersectional approach that encompasses patriarchy, gender, and homosexuality in the early millennium (see Appendix B) and which brings along European queer ideals with local feminist histories.

Narratives of difference come along with the introduction of queer in the Greek cultural and LGBT scene. More specifically, the notion of queer emerges in women's narratives as a political identity encompassing anarchism, feminism and intersectionality and as a claim for wider inclusivity. Most women tell me that queer doesn't carry cultural value as an identity, namely it has less "shock" value to the word "lesvia." Women affiliated to QV do not employ the term "queer" for their self-identification, they support an intersectional identity- "lesbian politically queer" (see chapter four on the meanings of the word "queer"). The generation who imported queer in the Greek cultural terrain is very critical of a "lifestyle" notion of queer that goes beyond lesbian and gay identity categories and can be easily appropriated by the heteronormative, which as an analytical tool, used by queer feminist collectives, lapses into the straight/ heterosexual. In this generation one notices a prominent tendency to discuss same-sex desire through the lens of gender discontinuity, which entails feeling restricted within normativity, consciously distancing oneself from gender norms and expectations, and visibly and/or emotionally challenging them.

One common understanding of difference relates to the realization of divisions between social worlds. There are straight and lesbian worlds, normative and non-normative sexualities. Heteronormativity becomes the analytical tool through which women try to make sense of their position in the world as well as of their feelings of difference. The sexual stories of this generation are structured around European and American lesbian and gay culture, that is, women use western identity categories- such as lesvia, bisexual, butch/femme, genderfluid, along with local terms- *poustis*, *dalika*- to make sense of feelings of difference and same-sex attraction. The butch/femme scheme, a gendered sexual scheme structured around masculine and feminine women, emerges in LOA's discussions as well as in casual conversations amongst women at "Beaver." Sometimes it's portrayed as something restrictive that impinges upon the ambivalence and fluidity of active and passive sexual roles, while other times it functions as a kick starter for conversations on the dynamics (sexual and other) of lesbian relationships. In

some cases, it's also treated as an outdated heterogendered sexual division that is not "queer."

In the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that coming out stories are portrayed differently in each generation and that coming out appears less defining for women's sense of lesvia self. In the narrative of gay liberation, coming out stories are linked to a desire to gradually disclose oneself as homosexual towards different audiences. As stated by Troiden (1988), "the desire over time to disclose is treated as a pre-social, universal need: to the extent that people routinely present themselves as homosexual in most or all social settings; their homosexual identities are realized. In this interpretation, to say one is gay or lesbian only to certain people, in certain places, or at certain times, means one's self-development is incomplete" (Troiden 1988:41, quoted in Boellstorff, 2005: 204). This confessional discourse of homosexuality defines the way western gay and lesbians live and experience their notion of accomplished homosexual selfhood (Boellstorff, 2005: 204).

However, amongst younger politicized lesbies and older same-sex loving women there is a lower expectation that homosexuality is confessed everywhere. And this is because coming out is reformulated within Greek notions of a porous selfhood according to which the boundary between inner and outer self is weak, namely each can be affected by the other (Halkia: 2004). Women of both age cohorts tell me that being a lesvia is not an issue, the problem arises once they become visible. The issue of visibility and its consequent social costs (verbal and bodily attacks, feelings of exclusion in various social environments, and feelings of estrangement from family relatives) explains why challenging gender norms, instead of talking about nonvisible sexual "perversions", has gained prominence amongst younger women's perception of homosexuality as gender discontinuity. In this context, women's narratives of difference that focus on gender discontinuity break the boundaries of visible/invisible since being gender discontinuous isn't only about visibly challenging gender norms, it also involves feeling (and talking about feeling) restricted within and distanced from hetero-feminine norms.

Narratives of difference entail firstly, the adoption of lesvia identity following a conscious politicization of same-sex sexuality on behalf of younger women; secondly, the realization of divisions between social worlds, the lesbian world set against the

straight world; and thirdly, the appropriation of western identity categories with a focus on gender categories (and less on sexual practices) and queer feminist analytical tools (heteronormativity) to talk about same-sex attraction. I shall now turn to women's narratives in order to further elucidate how they discuss homosexual desires by focusing on the radical potentialities of gender discontinuity.

### **6.3.1 “Black sheep” and Narratives of difference:**

#### **Homosexual desire as gender discontinuity**

Naoko, a boy-looking girl in her early twenties grew up in Crete, moved to Thessaloniki and later to Athens. Currently she lives in Berlin. Naoko has chosen for herself a different name from the one she was given by her parents. She introduces herself with a Japanese female name that means “happy child.” When I met Naoko she was very excited about life, sex, love and women, she wanted to explore the world, experiment with sex, change environments and meet different people. She tells me she enjoys being everywhere and nowhere, that is, not belonging somewhere in particular. She enjoys moving from Kolonaki, a posh area in central Athens to Exarchia, an area known for its anarchist subculture and student life since the 1980s; moving from lesbian clubs to straight bars; from the LGBT community to the straight world. She points out the clear cut divisions between lesbian and heteronormative spaces. What seems to frustrate her is the lack of “in-between” places where she can socialize and flirt though she feels comfortable in all kinds of spaces.

Naoko identifies as lesvia with a distinctively boy- looking appearance. She feels annoyed when others call her butch, which frequently happens given her boyish looks. For Naoko, there are boy-looking girls with feminine attitudes and feminine-looking girls with boyish attitudes. Gender is not only about physical appearance but also about personality traits. She tells me she enjoys exploring her body sexually and switching between active and passive sexual roles. Her narrative of difference crystalizes around gender non-conformity as a sign of homosexual desire. Naoko is a girl that looks like a boy, yet never wanted to be a man, seeing herself as a hermaphrodite child who dresses at the boys' department.

Naoko's narrative is largely structured around gender identity in that she talks about hinitial feelings of difference through the lens of gender non-comformity. For example, the realization that she enjoyed doing boyish things from playing with boys to pulling the skirts of girls. By the age of twelve Naoko was certain of her attraction to girls, yet she felt she could not express it easily like the rest of the boys in her hometown. Naoko builds a progressive narrative of coming to lesvia awareness that goes back into childhood and early adolescent stories of same-sex attraction which are discussed through the lens of her boyish looks and behaviours.

*Naoko: "I was the black sheep in my hometown, from my piercings to the music I listened to, I didn't fit with anyone, I felt the only lesvia there, probably in the world. Thank God I had the internet...I could not stay in Crete, there were no women who were out, and I didn't want to stay, I like to move and change, how else I would meet all these chicks I've dated (laughs).*

*Every summer beautiful German blonde women came to the hotel and I would go under their skirts and grab them (laughs). I was a badass boy in primary school, a little "kagkouras"<sup>20</sup>, I wanted to grab them, grope them, kiss them, the hottest pussies in the island... I had a pretty sexist approach then since I grew up with a lot of sexism around me.*

*Until 11 years old I saw myself as a boy, I copied boys. Nobody restrained me, my parents were very easy going, I grew up very free and wild in the fields, I would come back home with my knees bleeding. I liked shooting with my bow and hunting with my uncle. I grew up like a boy, I played basketball with my father, I never wore a skirt, my mother cut my hair short, I never had to wear shirts or dresses. They called me "George" from a basketball player I really liked. They treated me like a girl that acts like a boy. I hung out with boys but I was also the last of the pack. Boy groups are like packs, there is a leader, and if you aim to beat the shit out of leader, the rest will respect you. They function hierarchically, somebody will be the black sheep, and usually it was me since I*

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<sup>20</sup> kagkouras: the muscular guy who drives a fancy (cabriole) car and plays really loud music- contemporary Greek laika- and usually annoys people around him. The term is used within the queer feminist community to refer to toxic Greek machismo. The kagkouras is closely linked to the performative of mangas.

*was a girl hanging out with boys, I was the last of the pack. I ran errands, to do this and that for the group {...} In high school, things changed, I found out about gay people, boys began flirting and chasing girls, and I felt a little left out.*

*{...} I felt different because I got a lot of side-eyed looks, I could not understand why people looked at me...as a kid I embraced everything different...maybe if I saw other gay people around me, I wouldn't have felt like this. 70% of the people in my hometown asked me if I was a boy or a girl. Usually, I would tell them I am a girl, other times, I was more aggressive and tell them "I am whatever the fuck I want" {...} I am always very open and I think I win people over, I have a way of addressing people without putting myself in a vulnerable position and even if the way I look, dress or socialize isn't acceptable, they see me simply as Naoko.*

*I had many crushes on girls, I met my first crush on a chatroom, she was older than me, a student at university, and we used to talk on the phone for hours. I was very much into her, I told her at some point, she took her distance though. It was cool! She was straight so I thought there is no point. But we stayed friends. On my school's yearly excursion, I came to Athens for two weeks, I hung out at lesbian bars, had a lot sex, plenty of drinks and realized I didn't like this lifestyle {...} Later when I went to Thessaloniki, I met a kid and we became fuck buddies, we had a lot of sex, we did drugs, hung out, and talked about our lives; we spent two months like this, we cared for each other; then I came to Athens because of another crush I had with a boy-looking girl. I don't know love makes things complicated and I am still figuring things out about sex and love, I don't know it's kind of weird, me and sex have an awkward relationship (laughs)."*

Naoko has no stories of repression or unfulfilled desires, she is very open about her sexuality to her parents and the world. She doesn't conceptualize this as part of her coming out story but as a result of growing up in a very free and accepting environment. She mentions feeling the "black sheep" in her hometown due to her boyish looks, her tattoos and piercings. I got to know Naoko through her tattoos. Apparently, there is a different generational life cycle of embodiment that runs across women's narratives. For

younger women like Naoko body modifications (tattoos, piercings) take a new significance for their sexuality whereas for the older generation, reclaiming the female body is an end in and of itself. Naoko had a story to tell for each tattoo: the waves refer to circuits that produce sound and to her love for electronic music; the scissors refer to the hairdressing school she attended; the bass clef is about learning to play the bass; the wolf is “a wolf like her”, an homonym song she loves; the upside down triangle symbolizes water and gender equality; the swallow refers to the fact that she flees from one place to the next; a Japanese word in the katakana dialect which means life; the small planet refers to the fact that she thinks humans are like small planets, asteroids that create their own worlds; and last but not least the bicycle refers to her great love for bikes, when she lived in her hometown she used to ride her bike for hours; the bike symbolizes escapism and daydreaming.

Naoko gives prominence to boyish-looking and acting attributes under the rubric of her lesvia subjectivity. She sees herself primarily as a boyish girl and subsequently as lesvia. She feels she was born with a homosexual desire that finds its expression in her boyish performance. When talking about active and passive sexual roles Naoko uses the term queer, essentially to describe an openness to sexual experimentation. For Naoko it's all about being open to experimenting with your body and firmly supporting yourself regardless who you have to face. This kind of assertiveness is rarely encountered amongst the older generation of lesvies.

What needs to be noted is that younger boy-looking girls talk primarily about homosexuality in terms of gender discontinuity. Contrary to the older generation that talks about same-sex love, intimate friendships, and a “desire for the same sex”, the younger generation of lesvies consciously politicize their homosexuality and talk about homosexual attraction in terms of gender discontinuity, which entails (visible) gender non-conformity but also emotional disassociation from gender norms and rules of behaviour.

Women of this generation adopt lesbian identity categories and differentiate themselves from the “women-loving-women” narrative of the older generation in that being homosexual means experiencing the restrictions of heterogendered norms. The *agorokoritso* category emerges across different generations of lesvies, yet it's the younger generation, which is more keen to see it retrospectively as an indication of



lesvia selfhood. In the subsequent chapter I will be discussing in detail the category *agorokoritso*, which essentially is about being an alternative kind of girl with boyish attitudes and/or looks who fancies girls but doesn't want to be a man.

### **6.3.2 “Black sheep” and Narratives of difference II:**

#### **Homosexual desire as becoming butch**

Rena, currently in her late twenties, grew up in a working class suburb in Athens, her father worked in a factory and her mother was a housekeeper. Rena discusses her relationship with her parents through the lens of her visible gender non-conformity; she felt pressured by her mother who bought her dresses and feminine clothes and fought a lot with her father because, as she tells me, she felt that he favoured her brother and didn't allow her to enjoy things like staying out late, shouting in quarrels, learning to drive, and observing him when he was fixing things in the house (since these things were not deemed appropriate for a girl). Rena experiences getting her period and growing breasts as oppressive bodily changes that signal an entry into womanhood as her mother and girls at school kept telling her. She began lifting weights at sixteen and enjoyed observing her muscles grow and feeling her hands and legs grow stronger and stronger. When I asked her about her desire for women she took me back to when she was five and peeked at blonde women on afternoon TV shows. She would wear a pair of black sunglasses so that she could gaze at them without anyone noticing her. Her first relationship with a girl was traumatic and left her feeling totally exposed and dismissed as a woman in the process of claiming her masculinity, which went hand in hand with her homosexual desire.

*Rena: “When I began realizing that I liked women I remember staring at my teacher’s breasts and feeling very awkward about it, I thought it was bad, as a girl I wasn’t allowed to like girls. For a short period in my life I was wondering whether I should have been born a boy since this would have made my life easier, I had this desire and nothing around me resonating with it, no image of a woman liking another woman, for many years I was forcing myself*

*to be straight {...} I did not tell anyone but myself, I felt guilty...I allowed myself to fantasize about a woman only as a kind of reward for a good performance at school...*

*At nineteen I began forcing myself to be feminine and straight, I never felt comfortable with dresses and make up...I met my first girlfriend on the basketball team, she was very liberated with her sexuality, we hung out as friends, she probably figured out that I was into her...she urged me to have sex with a guy, she was very persistent about it, and I went on a date with him and later at his place...I went for it, I thought that since I had never done it before with a guy, maybe I'd like it. I've never felt more bored in my life...After this, I began thinking that probably I am a lesvia. Later we slept together, our relationship lasted for five months, I was very much in love, we weren't out as a couple or anything like that {...}*

Rena's story of trying to have sex with a man resonates with those of other women who describe trying to have sex or relationships with men in order to become straight and "normal." Many women gave accounts of having sex with men and fantasizing they were with women, trying to feel aroused with men, or masturbating and trying to think they are having sex with a man. Some women found these "forced" encounters with men traumatic while others saw it as a transitional phase to finding their lesvia self. Despite women's pressure and shame attached to these sexual and/or imaginary encounters with men, they also consolidated their preference for women. Gender non-conforming women like Rena and Naoko experience desire for girls in early childhood and think of their life potentially as boys; this doesn't mean they wish to transition; it's related to the fact that there is no available lesbian representation or image of being any other type of woman apart from a heterosexual feminine woman. It also relates to an ambivalent envy for normalcy, which stems from a wish to stop feeling the "black sheep" in one's family or hometown, that is, an abject figure (Kristeva: 1982) that nobody can classify and understand.

The latter is also accompanied by a feeling of resentment for the pleasures of normative heterogendered roles and desires. Rena explores western identity categories, particularly butch masculinities, by surfing on blogs, online magazines, and websites. It

was the time before the spread of social media. Rena finds a blog by two girls that talk about female masculinity in a positive manner; until then she thought that looking masculine was “*kind of lame*”. However, she doesn’t use the local term *dalika*. No woman whether she hung out at lesbian bars or at LGBT groups, identified as *dalika*; it seems that it’s the haunting figure of lesbian history in Greece, a term appropriated as the title of LOA’s magazine, yet never used by younger (or even older politicized) lesbians as a form of identification.

Rena went out with girls she met on dating websites. She also went cruising at gay bars (Sodade, Escape, Noiz, Onar) with a group of gay friends; there she usually flirted with straight girls that came along. Rena identified as butch after her long-term relationship with a feminine girl. She talks less about homosexual desire and more about the gendered aspects of her desire within a butch/femme sexual scheme. Hetero-gendered difference is also depicted in her desire for feminine bisexual girls. When I asked her what makes bisexuals more attractive, she told me that it might be the fact that they have dated men in the past; this makes it feel like a conquest, “*when you’re in bed with a bisexual, it’s like you’re antagonizing another man, you are on the same level with him, even winning him.*” Coming out wasn’t structuring Rena’s narrative in any important manner whereas finding a sexual partner and being able to live as “butch” were some of Rena’s recurrent concerns. Gender non-conformity is crucial in Rena’s experience of homosexual desire, the one feeds into the other. Gender discontinuity is about desire for feminine women; homosexuality is about the pressures of compulsory hetero-femininity and the process of appropriating butch identities.

### **6.3.3 Female gender discontinuity: Travelling feminine desires against heteronormative transnational worlds**

Aliki, a feminine woman in her mid-thirties, grew up in Athens into a middle-class family with Christian orthodox values. When talking about her childhood she describes herself as an introverted child, very timid and with great difficulty in expressing her needs and emotions. In her retrospective reflection, she interprets initial feelings of emotional detachment as part of a woman’s experience within patriarchy.

She tells me that for many years she felt comfortable remaining the silent figure next to other people's lives: "I could not imagine that people expected anything more from me." Aliko recalls falling in love with a girl in primary school. She cherishes this feeling as something "special" and finds emotional release in secrecy, it's something nobody else knows and understands.

Repeatedly she tells me she felt detached from her desires and describes embarking onto a journey towards owning her desire while also feeling afraid for its dissolution. Throughout her narrative, desire is seen as a process, not a given entity. She experiences desire as lacking, full of gaps and holes, formed and deformed through the other's gaze. In her narrative, desire is discussed through the lens of female discontinuity, that is, Aliko feels unease with the normative desires of hetero-femininity and uses western categories (slut-pride, butch/femme, lesvia) to make sense of her homosexuality.

*Aliko: "{...} I felt that I was not enough, there was something I was not giving, there was something I wasn't receiving, something was always missing, I could not register myself as an integral part in my relationships; when others talked about me, for example the people with whom I was in a relationship, I felt that I was not exactly present, as if they were not talking about me.*

*{...} I needed to see my desire, to recognize it as my own independently from the other person {...} because I always needed this mirroring, the other's mirror helped me see my desire, somebody had to want me in order for me to feel that I am desirable and when I did not see this, I would fall into a void. It felt as if I did not have an independent desire, I was expecting from others to reaffirm its existence and this was very distressing, I was falling into holes, there was no continuity in these feelings, in my desire {...} When I would break up with somebody I had this terrifying feeling that I would also lose a part of myself because I would lose the feedback I needed in order to feel that I actually have a desire {...} I needed to keep desire alive, not let it burn out, maintain it, in some way.*

*In this journey I feel I have conquered my sexual desire via the butch/femme scheme and the pleasure I re-found in heteronormative*

*dynamics. My desire could have withered away, but in the end it didn't, my desire found its own meanings and I want to stress this out because it was not a given that I owned my desire. I managed to form it in mind and in practice...it feels like a conquest in my life course"*

Aliki's narrative seems similar to Ninetta's generational narrative in that they both strive to own and inhabit their bodies, and embark onto a journey to love themselves. The process of self awareness in becoming female and/or feminine involves claiming the right to desire differently. For Ninetta, it involves loving herself as a woman and acknowledging her homoerotic inclinations, whereas Aliki distances herself from normative hetero-femininity and finds release in the internal gaps she creates between hetero-gendered expectations, her desire for butch women and her wish to become an assertive feminine slut. Gender discontinuity is emotionally depicted in Aliki's life narrative, where desire for men, desire for butch women, and homosexual desire are discussed through the lens of deeply felt hetero-gendered restrictions in terms of female roles, sexual pleasures, and social expectations.

Aliki's journey into the depths of desire is enhanced by travelling abroad, an option which wasn't available for older women, especially for working-class women during the 1980s. Aliki's trip to Europe marked a turning point in her life since she rethought and reformed her lifestyle. She describes feeling she had "*no solid sense of selfhood*" until then. Travelling abroad marks a breaking point from a straight life to a self-exploratory journey in desire, femininity, and homosexuality, as well as a point of entry into LGBT activism upon her return to Greece. After this trip Aliki begins diverting straight lines and expectations, re-orientates her relation not just towards women, "but also to a world that has already decided how her body should be "orientated" in the first place" (Ahmed, 2006: 102). Once she returns she draws herself towards lesbian objects, persons, worlds and divides herself from heteronormative ways of being (Ahmed: 2006). Aliki's narrative reflects Ahmed's phenomenological approach to the lesbian body as an act of labouring. In particular, Ahmed suggests that "it takes time and work to inhabit the lesbian body, the act of tending towards other women needs to be repeated, often in the face of hostility and discrimination, to gather such tendencies (meaning lesbian) in a sustainable form" (Ahmed, 2006: 102)

Aliki: *“At twenty-three I went for Erasmus in France and this turned out to be a life-changing trip. I left a straight, oppressed, and religious, girl and after a month there, everything zeroed {...} Everything changed in my head, when I returned I did not believe in anything. I started my life all over again {...}*

*When I found myself there, I found out that there is another way to be, another way to live, for example I found people who didn't believe in God, which was unthinkable for me at the time. When I returned I no longer hated my family, I saw them as humans, not as parents who oppress me, I no longer believed in God, all the lines connecting me to the past were cut off {...}*

*Before this trip, I remember suffocating in normativity, immersed in these heteronormative structures and straight socialization {...} and I did not have the political tools to see it {...} For some years, my sex life was horrible. I had sex with men without wanting to have sex, it was coercively done. I felt an attraction for the boys I was with, but very soon it withered away {...} they wanted to have sex and I didn't, I recall having sex without really wanting but not saying “no” either {...} Once I left I saw myself as pure nothingness because I realized I wasn't any of the stuff I left behind. That's when I began thinking if I am not what I left behind then what am I really? What do I want? This was the trip that ultimately changed my life (smiles)”*

Traveling is a form of border-crossing, both emotional and literal, which means finding herself in big metropolitan cities and adopting political tools that change the way she perceives herself. By travelling she dislocates herself from past affiliations and opens herself to western and European notions of identity. While Ninetta strives to create the space locally where she can express her love for women, Aliki finds the space abroad and online and adopts queer feminist political tools (heteronormativity) and western and European identity categories (butch/ femme, slut-proud) to talk about sexuality in relation to gender. The collapse of gender and sexuality in younger women's narratives reaffirm Valentine's (2007) argument about the need to reflect upon the conceptual dissociation between gender and sexuality. In Aliki's narrative, gender discontinuity doesn't emerge as a form of visible gender non-conformity, namely not

wanting to be or look feminine. Discontinuity here refers to the gaps she feels between ascribed and chosen gender positions, between hetero-feminine and non-normative desires. Discontinuity also refers to physical gaps between Western European and local Greek worlds which Alikí frequently criss-crosses, but also to social gaps that define the available categories for being a woman.

Alikí's retrospective reflection on women's desire through the lens of heteronormativity opens an array of questions on gender, namely what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a non-normative woman, what other possibilities are there available for her, and finally, how she can inhabit her desires as a woman from a non-normative position. Her notion of gender discontinuity follows an understanding of difference, which entails feeling estranged from, and at the same time restricted within, normative hetero-femininity. Gender discontinuity as a form of emotional distance from hetero-femininity builds Alikí's politicized and transnational lesvia identity. Feeling gender discontinuous entails consciously nurturing emotional gaps, holes, and distances in one's experience of being a woman. This finds its expression either as a process of becoming a woman through self-love (Ninetta) or as a process of adopting a non-normative feminine position by producing new narratives of desire and even erotic experimentality within and beyond heteronormative sexual dynamics (Alikí).

## 6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at the narratives of lesbies from a generational standpoint. I argued that similitude and difference emerged as crisscrossing and divergent aspects of women's sexual narratives, marking the experiences of different generations in different times. The narratives of older women are structured around the culture of lesbian bars even though politicized lesbies don't enjoy their atmosphere, which runs back to an ongoing class division between politicized and non-politicized lesbies in Greece. The 1980s-1990s was the time when lesbies were finding each other and crafting "safe" spaces for themselves. Older women draw attention to the blurred boundaries between same-sex intimacy and eroticism, and produce a discourse of homoerotic desire which finds its expression in the "potential friends- potential lovers" sexual scheme. They talk about the lack of available resources to make sense of their homosexual inclinations as well as of available lesbian representations. The older generation discusses "special" relationships, pressures to marry, and the influence of feminist ideas in their everydayness.

The narrative structure of same-sex desiring women isn't progressive; it doesn't run back to childhood stories of feeling different or "always knowing it." Contrary to older women's narratives of becoming a woman, younger women build progressive narratives of difference that run back into early childhood and look for the radical potentialities of gender discontinuity as feelings of discomfort with available gender categories and modes of being a woman. On the other hand, younger women's narratives emphasize gender discontinuity as a form of visible gender non-conformity and emotional (non-visible) distance from hetero-gendered norms. Younger women self-consciously choose to play around with gendered aspects of their homosexuality. However, gender non-conformity doesn't necessarily lead to a western kind of genderqueer, which as a form of self-identification has less shock-value in the Greek cultural sphere (see chapter four and five on the meanings of the word queer).

Travelling abroad and surfing on the internet emerge as the cultural "somewhere else" that differentiates in fundamental ways women's generational experiences. The younger generation of women blend local cultural references with global social media



and travel abroad- from Berlin to Barcelona- to explore the gender and sexual potentialities of their lives. They embrace the transformative potentials of globalizing processes (of a western “elsewhere” in the “here and now”) by creating their own personal sexual and gender collage from social media, global TV shows, and travelling across Europe. In this process they rework global understandings of lesbian and gay subjectivities. By blending together different identity categories- *poustis*, *dalika*, lesvia, butch/ femme, genderfluid- they draw lines of familiarity with, and differentiation from, western sexual subjectivities by picking and choosing elements that correspond to their experience in the globalized world.

In this context, coming out becomes a situational, and not a self-accomplishing practice, it's selectively done and less definitive of women's understanding of lesvia selfhood; heteronormativity coincides with heterosexuality and is seen less as an abstract set of practices reproduced within power structures and appropriated by straights, gays, lesbians; queer is introduced (by QV) initially as an intersectional political identity and less as a form of self-identification; and finally, straight and lesbian worlds are emotionally and spatially separated even though they sexually often overlap (lesvies often date straight girls). The latter division serves to put forward notions of gender discontinuity, which is experienced either as gender non-conformity or as emotional gender questioning. As a consciously underlined division it serves to bring to the fore the role of western identity categories as a positive force for LGBT social claims. In the following chapter, I will be looking at the gendered aspects of lesvia subjectivity, from *agorokoritsa* to boy-looking girls to *poustides* and feminine-questioning girls.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The gendered stories of lesvia subjectivity

#### Agorokoritsa, poustides, feminine-questioning lesbies

##### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the gendered subject categories of lesvia subjectivity in Greece. As already observed by Faubion (1993) about the male-to-male sexual economy of the 1960s- 1970s what circulates socially in this economy is gender identity and not sexual identity. The latter is also relevant to female homosexuality, where gender, as we will see, appears as a decisive marker of lesvia subjectivity, yet I also wish to demonstrate ethnographically that gender and sexuality aren't two separate spheres, they interrelate in fundamental ways in the formation of lesvia subjectivity. Through the gendered ordering of lesvia experience, I wish to suggest that gender and sexuality are linked in important ways. In this direction, I also critique studies on gender and sexuality in Mediterranean anthropology that overemphasize the role of kinship and traditional gender roles (Loizos& Papataxiarchis: 1991; Campbell: 1964; Cowan: 1990; Dubisch:1986; Peristiany: 1966).

From the 1960s to the early 1990s most ethnographies depicted a model of gender complementarity according to which men and women served prescribed social roles and accomplished full selfhood by "being good at being men" and "being good at being women." (Herzfeld: 1987). This anthropological trend meant that contingent subject categories, changes across time and space (between urban/rural contexts), and culturally "illegitimate" sexual practices (cruising in parks at night) that brought to the fore ambivalence, lack of stability and transgressive gender roles and sexual practices were given less attention since they didn't fall within the honour/ shame gendered scheme that consisted at the time the backbone of Mediterranean anthropology.

All in all, during the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s there was an anthropological tendency of exoticizing patriarchal models in Mediterranean countries. As argued by

Hadjkyriakou (2009), the complex ways in which gender and sexual identities are formulated was not explored and “alternative” kind of boys and girls as well as homosexual desires were not represented (Hadjkyriakou, 2009: 17). The “honour and shame” anthropological tradition, though culturally insightful, can be accused for being reductive and over-simplistic in that it provided single-dimensional accounts of rural societies and failed to locate and study change (Hadjkyriakou, 2009: 17). Coming to the early 1990s, the first anthropological studies on same-sex sexuality emerge (Kirtsoglou: 2003; Kantsa: 2001; Paxson: 2004; Canakis& Yannakopoulos& Kantsa (eds): 2010) in which same-sex desire is discussed as subject positions- “extant social categories of selfhood” (Boellstorff, 2003: 25) -and subjectivities- “the various senses of self and assumptions about life one obtains when occupying a subject position” (Boellstorff (2003: 25) -alongside family roles, motherhood, and kin relations (mother-daughter relations). By focusing on subject positions and subjectivities in relation to kin and family relations, anthropologists of sexuality turn their attention to “the social fact of gay and lesbian selfhood” (Boellstorff, 2005: 26). Alongside this literature, I wish to show that identity categories are not secondary to subject positions in the formation of lesvia selfhood. Younger women find themselves by creating assemblages of self-made categories, subject positions, sexual desires, and western- inspired identity politics.

As discussed with regard to generational sexual narratives, the shift from lesvia as homoerotic desire to lesvia as gender discontinuity demonstrates different possibilities of lesvia subjectivity generationally crafted, lived, and produced. Gender emerges as a crucial element of understanding difference for both generations, yet it’s the younger generation that enjoys displaying verbally and/or bodily their own gender “fucking” as a sign of being different. By listening to women’s narratives I came to realize that lesvia as homoerotic desire (desire for the same) was a highly disputed quality and difference as gender discontinuity was taking over older generational sexual narratives. The constraints within which women of both generations have been growing up- pressures to marry followed by familial ceremonial gatherings that affirm and reproduce gendered norms of female propriety (“ena kalo koritsi”) and male egoism (Herzfeld: 1985) have often restricted the potential for other lesvia identifications and sociality to emerge, including intimate relationships. This chapter explores the gendered aspects of lesvia identification which emerged in women’s narratives, with the aim to bring to the

fore and weave together gender categories, generational stories, and sexuality as interrelated variables in lesvia subject formation.

The first section concerns female masculinities and focuses on the narrative presentation of the *agorokoritso* subject category and the appropriation of gay identity categories, in particular the category *poustis* (pansy), by boy-looking women. I explore the ways self-recognition and initial awareness of difference is conceptualized in gendered terms and how particular moments and trajectories influenced lesvia identifications. In this context, straight machismo influenced the ways masculinity is conceptualized amongst politicized queer feminist lesvies. The second section looks at femininity and normative womanhood as two interrelated fields in the production of politicized lesvia subjectivity. More specifically, non-normative femininity is discussed in terms of social conventions (pressure to marry), self-love and the building of female genealogies alongside the process of becoming a woman, and finally, in relation to sex and sexual practices (penetration). However, the categories of *agorokoritso*, boy-looking girls that adopt gay identity categories (*poustis*), and feminine-questioning women are prescriptive, they do not describe and/or represent coherently women's social and personal experience. I shall now turn to women's narratives and look at the categories they construct to speak about same-sex sexuality, gender and lesvia difference.

## 7.2 Female Masculinities I: Opening the category “Woman”, becoming an *agorokoritso*

One of the recurrent elements in retrospective lesvia narratives concerns gender difference portrayed along the lines of heterogendered masculine roles and performatives, which take the form of *agorokoritsa* and *poustides* (emerging within the narratives of younger women). The degree to which one’s performance diverges from normative womanhood, either by dressing like “men”, acting like “men”, or even passing as “men” defines lesvia subjectivity in fundamental ways (Engebretsen, 2008: 145). It seems that the questioning of normative womanhood is a prerequisite for becoming a lesvia of some kind, whether this means assuming an active sexual role, performing some sort of masculinity (physical and/or behavioural) or feeling attraction towards masculine women.

The masculine- feminine gendered sexual scheme is a nuanced sexual narrative that seems to structure lesbian relations of love, sex, and intimacy and is also encountered in other places (China TP lala categories and US butch- femme categories). As I will be arguing, becoming lesvia implies differentiating oneself from normative womanhood along with assuming an active sexual role, yet the masculine-feminine lesvia gendered sexual scheme isn’t rigidly prescribing categories and roles. For same-sex loving women of the older generation, who were more or less involved into the feminist movement, lesvia as sexual identity is the dominant category upon which same-sex desire and homoeroticism interlink in the building of their lesvia subjectivity. For the older generation the process of becoming lesvia has more to do with sexual desire and homoeroticism and less with a consciously enacted and felt kind of gender bending.

The gendered *agorokoritso* subject category, which is subscribed to by younger and older women, doesn’t refer to a term of self-identification; it consists a self-reflective and self-constructed gender category through which younger women try to make sense of feelings of difference when looking back to their childhood. In addition, it also compensates for failing to deliver what’s experienced as compulsory heterogendered female roles. By expressing desire for women within the strictly heterogendered Greek society, women are becoming gender transgressors. In her review

of “female-bodied” gender transgressors, Evelyn Blackwood (1998) suggests that transgression “is casted as resistance to an oppressive gender ideology, usually identified as male dominance or patriarchy” (Blackwood, 1998: 493; also Blackwood, E. & Johnson, M.: 2012; Engebretsen: 2008). She continues to point that “in the US context, transgressive schemes took the form of butch/femme (Kennedy & Davis 1993), camp-drag (Newton: 1979, 1993) and transgender people (Bolin 1994; Garber 1991; Stone 1991; Prosser: 1991)” (Blackwood, 1998:493). For the most part, these identities were perceived as a product of “a hierarchical gender system of compulsory heterosexuality and oppositional genders (Blackwood, 1998: 493), which entails that performing the gender that corresponds to one’s sex within the heterosexual paradigm is less troublesome than performing and enacting the “wrong” gender” (Blackwood, 1998: 499) Drawing from this analysis, it appears that the lesvia subject category is fraught with ambivalence since women use gender and sexual categories to make sense of difference, whilst at the same time pushing against them as something that limits self-awareness. The lesvia subject category is felt as both enabling women’s sense of self and restricting it in terms of sex and active/ passive sexual roles, where identity categories and roles are turned upside down.

In this context, I wish to explore how the lesvia identity category works for the women who later get involved into social activism; how do they present themselves; what kind of stories they articulate as part and parcel of their lesvia subjectivity; to what extent does presenting lesvia subjectivity via the agorokotitso category, boy-to-boy narratives of desire, and feminine-questioning corresponds with their everyday social subjectivities; in what ways does lesvia discourse and ideology differ from or coincide with everyday practice of lesvia life. In her anthropological review of gender transgression, Evelyn Blackwood, alongside other gender theorists, suggests that “women become “men” (including female “berdache,” female soldiers, and passing “women”) because of sexual desire for other women (Newton: 1984; Raymond: 1979; Rich: 1980; Rubin: 1975; Trumbach: 1994; Nanda: 1991)” (Blackwood, 2005c: 240). In this view, as argued by Blackwood (2005c), the restrictions imposed on women’s expression of same- sex desire, which stems from a patriarchal ideology of male control over women’s bodies and sexuality, compels them to transgress the hetero-gendered dominant paradigm in order to be with women. In other words, women are forced to

pass as “men” in order to be able to live their homosexuality (Blackwood, 2005c: 240)

As mentioned above, the category *agorokoritso* isn't an established identity category, it's a constructed category used by women to recount feelings of unbelonging during early adolescence. These are girls who do not feel at home with available gender categories. The *agorokoritso* subject position can be traced in physical, behavioural, and emotional attributes. Drawing from Engebretsen's analysis (2008) of lesbian masculinity in China (the T category), I suggest that an *agorokoritso* of some sorts is a girl who “acts like a boy” or considers herself genderless in early adolescence. It's perceived as a natural definitive mark of the self, “something you can't help not to be.” It also includes gendered masculine attributes of physical or mental strength, independence, emotional unavailability, sexual attraction for girls, and in some cases a boyish physical appearance (for example, wearing shorts and hating skirts) (Engebretsen, 2008: 147). The *agorokoritso* subject position is later left aside once girls grow up and identify as lesbians. It is these gendered practices and sexual categorizations I will turn to now by looking at women's narratives.

Kassandra in her early thirties grew up in a strictly Christian Orthodox family with prescribed gender rules and codes of behaviour. She grew up with her brothers in a male-dominated household where male manners and particular feelings were deemed appropriate. She felt prohibited to show weakness and express any other emotion apart from anger. She began adopting male behaviours that were considered more accepted and less provocative within the Christian Orthodox gendered system of values. When talking about her gendered upbringing Kassandra recalls that she was not allowed to wear trousers, shorts, t-shirts with short sleeves, basically any kind of clothing that revealed her female figure. Her body was de-sexualized in accordance with Christian Orthodox rules about female chastity. Kassandra hated wearing skirts. It was an oppressive gendered uniform she was obliged to wear in order to fulfil her family's religiously-imbued expectations for appropriate female roles and behaviours. In her mid-twenties, she started wearing skirts but she felt unease in the lesbian community since she diverted from the stereotype of the masculine-looking lesbia that wore trousers.

When I asked her about bodily changes happening in early adolescence, like getting her period, growing breasts, she tells me she felt ashamed of her period and

compelled to hide it every month. She had no idea what a period was and thought she could die by bleeding. Retrospectively she describes feeling her body constrained by these prescribed gender rules, that is, her bodily movements weren't soft and loose. The category *agorokoritso* appears to describe how she perceived herself through the gaze of others- teachers, parents- but also how others perceived her social behaviour when she was a child. She spoke of her idea of *agorokoritso* as a category that best describes the fact that she wasn't attracted to boys and at the same time she was failing to fulfil normative female roles and behaviours.

*Kassandra: "I was the kind of girl that had different interests from other girls, a girl that acted like a boy, played basketball and ran very fast. I didn't feel agorokoritso, I began realizing that my actions were perceived in a particular manner at school. Teachers would tell my mother I am an agorokoritso but it felt something natural. I felt that I was different from other girls but I did not have something specific in mind, a model into which I had to fit or something. It was very weird...When I reached fifteen teachers began telling me to start acting like a proper girl. I was just who I was. There was no girl, no boy idea in my head, I remember my teachers stressing this so much...This was my first contact with the fact that others may have seen me as a lesvia, they were not wrong but it was amazing how this emerged suddenly when I went to high school.*

*{...} I felt that others treated me differently so I began wondering that maybe what I had in my head about myself may be different from actual reality.... I was more respected in boy groups and couldn't understand why.... I was more aggressive than other girls, my word was more trustworthy, I would get mad quickly and easily, I never allowed anyone to win me over in a verbal confrontation.... I was the kind of kid that stood out because of their behaviour.*

*In Christian summer camps there was a variety of girls; you could be any kind of girl as long as you were a girl that wore a skirt. My teacher called me "the primitive." She said it in a good way to describe a kid that's genderless, shouts a lot, is funny and aggressive, innocent and restless. In Christian Orthodox spaces, innocence also means having no sexuality. But all the girls at*



*summer camp had something neutral, they didn't want you to be feminine, perhaps that's why I passed easily despite my masculine characteristics. I felt more at ease in Christian summer camps, there was less pressure to conform, I was free to act as I wanted, always wearing a skirt but they wouldn't call me agorokoritso because there were all kinds of girls there. Agorokoritso was also said in a judgemental way since I didn't fit well with girls; people looked at me with a confused look and called me out because I affected their perception of reality."*

The gendered agorokoritso category refers to a girl that deviates from prescribed heterogendered feminine roles and behaviours (being loud, less reserved/shy, assertive and argumentative) and feels genderless in that she doesn't fit neatly in female norms and social expectations. The gaze of others is decisive in fleshing out *agorokoritso* as a subject category that emerges in the narratives of many young women to talk about feelings of difference when they were growing up. Agorokoritso denotes a lesvia subject category that pushes away from experiences of womanhood whether this means gender confusion and unbelonging or adopting particular masculine attributes, which include shielding yourself emotionally, namely hiding your vulnerabilities from the world.

When she talks about her desire for girls she links it to feeling genderless. Genderless here goes hand in hand with diverting from heterogendered feminine roles and expectations. As an agorokoritso she adopts typical masculine characteristics (loudness, hanging out with boys and feeling attracted to girls) that fall upon the notion of genderless used interchangeably to describe a different kind of girl in a society where conservative hetero-gendered norms define proper femininity and desirable female attire. A girl growing up in a male-dominated household and within the rules and prescriptions of Christian Orthodoxy resulted into making her feel genderless: *"I didn't feel that I had any sexuality because of the Christian Orthodox discourses that defined my upbringing, I was not seen as a girl because I was not attracted to boys. All the discourses I went through made me feel genderless. When I add lesvia on top of all this then one more characteristic of what it is that makes a woman (meaning, being heterosexual- my addition) is cast away."*

Masculinity is relationally crafted in that initial erotic encounters impact the way women talk about being *an agorokoritso*. When I asked Cassandra about the girls to whom she's attracted, her response was very straightforward; she likes feminine girls with strong personalities, which she perceives as a masculine attribute. A strong personality entails being assertive and argumentative enough to take space while also adopting certain masculine body postures but not necessarily looking like a man or wearing less feminine clothes. She describes feeling safer in her last relationship with a girl that managed to see her softness behind the masculine tough surface she had built against the world, which included being verbally aggressive and shielding signs of vulnerability. Cassandra identifies as lesvia but repeatedly expresses her concerns about the limitations of lesvia identity that can't contain the complexities of sexual desire. She said that she never felt wanting to be a boy instead she felt unease with the fact that people could not see her as an alternative kind of woman.

When I asked her about butch/femme identity categories, Cassandra got very defensive, telling me she felt particularly uncomfortable with these labels since they reduce sexual and gender experience into masculine and feminine attributes, whereas she prefers to see herself as a totality instead of reducing herself into a partial category. Throughout her narrative, Cassandra uses categories to make sense of herself and constantly pushes away from them; these categories denote what she is and what she is not, what she left behind and what she tries to embrace. Once she reached adulthood the *category agorokoritso* was no longer used to make sense of herself, yet it informed the way she talked about female masculinity, firstly as the prevalent notion of the masculine (mannish) lesvia in Greek society, and secondly as the product of an heterogendered system according to which erotic attraction for women, social privileges and behaviors are linked solely to men, who have male genitalia (Blackwood, 2005c: 240).

Following Engebretsen analytical viewpoint for TP categories in China (2008), I argue that temporality emerges as an important factor in the *agorokoritso* gendered sexual subjectivity since it entails being a woman who loves women from very early on in life. Same-sex attraction among women or girls was most likely grasped as opposite-gender attraction, that is, alternative girls felt that since they experienced attraction for other girls, they probably are (or should be) boys in a certain way. As I will be arguing,

the agorokoritso subject category reflects, reiterates and challenges the prevalent hetero-gendered scheme. The process of developing an alternative gendered subjectivity as an agorokoritso was usually backed up by narratives of gender unbelonging and feelings of isolation within the dominant heterosexual paradigm. Especially, for the older generation of women that did not know about homosexuality while growing up, feelings of difference and attraction for girls were contextualized through the lens of a genderless notion of the self, which should not be confused with the western understanding of the term as agender, gender-free. The local particularities of the term “genderless” used to refer to sexual and gender confusion and unbelonging reveal the conflation between gender and sexual identity. When looking closely at forms of female masculinities, where a kind of genderless agorokoritso emerges as a sign of sexual and gendered non-conformity and lesvia subjectivity appears as its resolution, one realizes the gender-sexuality conflation.

Nelli was born and raised in a working- class suburb of Athens into a petty bourgeois family. She belongs to the older generation of lesvies that grew up during the late eighties/ early nineties, when LGBT activism was less vibrant. She is now in her early fifties and lives in the same suburb with her eleven-year-old child. In her life narrative, Nelli reinvents her childhood past by creating connections between unexpressed feelings of affection for other girls, shameful name-calling in class, and feelings of estrangement from her parents. For Nelli sexual desire is linked to how she experiences her gender- “*looking like a poustis.*” Sometimes she falls within the heterosexual matrix, other times she produces new meanings by transforming the gendered categories and narratives that represent them. At some point in her life narrative she calls herself “*a genderless lesbian angel.*” This last image is produced as a result of a series of memories, visions about herself, the other’s gaze, and her long-term efforts to overcome feelings of fear and social restraint. When talking about her childhood she shows me photos from that time in order to provide me with an image of “*the girl that was not like the others.*” She called herself “*the slouchy (to skyftouli)*”, “*the bushy (to fountoto).*”

Nelli: *“My difference was visible {...} At the age of fourteen I was developing my own style, listening new wave, Bod Dylan, rock and roll. I blossomed in my way. I would wear my baggy jeans with a loose knitted sweater and had short curly hair. I remember once we went out with a friend and she said “Nelli you look like a poustis {...}”*

*By the age of twenty, I was what you could say genderless {...} I did not present a particular gender identity, expressed in a particular way and orientation {...} It was as if I had no sexuality. I did not touch upon this matter. I was like an angel {...} That’s what some girls told me once. I found them attractive but didn’t show it. I was maintaining a very calm attitude and they were saying that I look like a small angel. Also, with boys I was not a woman, more like a small kid. An in-between thing, I don’t know. Yes, I was like this for many years in an effort to avoid choosing something and going ahead towards something that seemed dead-end. Or simply I could not figure it out. I could not find something representing me {...} Yes, I was genderless, an angel because I did not position myself against my gender and because I did not assert something sexually {...} On the erotic level, I felt blocked, I felt that if I expressed anything, it would be homosexual and people would reject me {...} I liked girls, straight girls, but did not say anything. It was difficult for me to support my desire, to express my desire, so I preferred to stay in the neutral zone {...} I had sexual fantasies with girls but I had a feeling they would not reciprocate and I was ashamed to show it, to claim it. Thus, neutrality was a form of asexuality, a way to avoid choosing my sexuality. All this was before I started hanging out at lesbian bars and had any sort of sexual experience.”*

Drawing from Blackwood’s analysis on the US gender scheme in juxtaposition to the Minangkabau sex/gender system (2005c), I suggest that in the Greek heterogendered system, “the hegemonic gender derives from one’s sex, gender is not considered an identity, performed or otherwise” (Blackwood, 2005c: 244). Based on this dominant sex/gender system “gender is believed to derive naturally from physiological sex; a “real” woman possesses female genitalia, desires men, bears children, and acts

like a woman” (Blackwood, 2005c: 244). In this context, lesvia is a “woman” that enacts a masculine gender or a kid-like gender (in-between genders) that possesses no clear gender attributes. In many respects, the challenging of normative femininity, which operates on the level of the *agorokoritso* category, is the only way to express lesbian desire. Consider, for example, Nelli, who considered herself genderless based on how she felt about girls. Similarly, Cassandra thought of herself as *agorokoritso* given the way others saw her deviating from normative feminine roles and behaviors.

The *agorokoritso* category also functions on the level of lesbian imaginary morphologies that correspond to fantasies of growing a penis and also attributing to oneself a masculine or gender neutral name. For example, Maria, whose lesvia subjectivity involved adopting an active sexual role, tells me she expected to grow a penis when she was a child. In this regard, being an *agorokoritso* implies directly challenging conventional womanhood and body features by playing around with the delimitation of sexual organs and the “having/being” the phallus implicit within different gendered positions (Butler: 1993).

*Maria: “As a kid I went through my own transition phase and called myself Panos. When I began realizing my gender, I remember looking at my pussy and thinking I would grow testicles. And I would become a boy. What I wanted. I remember putting socks inside my panties and calling myself Panos {...} For a long time, I had this thought in my head that I would grow a penis and become a boy. On the one hand, I looked at my body and its changes. And I liked them, I liked my breasts. But on the other hand, I realized that I would be an agorokoritso. When they called me agorokoritso I didn’t feel like an agorokoritso but my female body was growing and probably this also blocked my sexual expression. I don’t know, I felt guilty about it. I think that I couldn’t find a role model for myself, for what I was, I didn’t see it anywhere around me {...} Later I came to terms with my sexuality. But I also saw myself as agorokoritso. I thought that a boy leads a better life, that he seems to enjoy sex more. All this before I had sex. I had this feeling that the world was male, I also had this sexuality and wanted to become a man. I thought my sexuality could be accomplished if I were a man. When I grew up, I came to terms with my body*

*and its shape. But in no case did I want to change my body.”*

The agorokoritso category oscillates within a quest for the right balance between certain features of masculinity in terms of social roles and behaviours, and self-acceptance as a different kind of gender (less of a woman but not a man) backed up by an active sexual role and potentially, but not necessarily, a masculine/boyish physical appearance. Normative femininity is experienced as coercive (as compulsory womanhood) and essentially heterosexual, thus it's meant to be challenged for the lesvia subjectivity to unravel. The sort of wishful thinking expressed by Maria, namely wishing to be a boy, which did not mean identifying as a man or wanting to transition to male consists the major element for differing between lesvia from trans narratives (Engebretsen, 2008: 147).

Many women expressed an envy for sexual “normalcy”, which can also be perceived as a sort of social mourning for their exclusion from “normalcy”. From butch-identified women, to gender non-conforming, to agorokoritsa, the challenging of womanhood and its heterosexual premises, along with an envy for a socialization as the opposite gender- a wish for a natural and acceptable form of socialization as men defines the spectrum of female masculinities in Greece. By wishing to socialize within the confines of the norms established for the male gender, gender non-conforming women reveal the strong pressures to conform, the restricted modes of being a woman, and the limitations of lesvia lives, especially masculine lesvies, which often feel cast at the margins of social life.

For instance, consider Rico's narrative, a butch-identifying lesvia, who speaks about feelings of inadequacy regarding her masculinity: *“I kept thinking that my life would have been simpler if I was a boy but I didn't want to be one...my masculinity is socially undervalued and I kept trying to compete with men when I dated straight girls but my masculinity vanished and so would I every time I thought like that. Later I began thinking that there is no point competing with men, it would be so hard if I continued in my life with this mentality.”*

A dissatisfaction/uneasiness with normative femininity was also expressed by feminine lesvies, who describe going through a tomboy phase as a way to question the burden of heterosexuality upon which feminine roles, looks, and behaviours are

premised. This brings us to boy-to-boy narratives of desire, namely women that adopt gay identities as a way to talk about female masculinity and its entanglements with sex and same-gender desire. The gay category *poustis* (faggot, pansy) is adopted by younger women to describe an effeminate female masculinity but it's also used to describe a bisexual desire for girls and boys and/or for other boyish girls, thus again gender and sexuality interrelate in fundamental ways. By employing a boy-to-boy narrative of desire, *poustis*-identifying women put forward another gendered sexual scheme.

### **7.3 Female masculinities II: Boy-to-boy narratives of desire & the tender masculinity of *poustis*-identifying women**

The gay identity category *poustis* (faggot, pansy) was not only employed by a number of young gender non-conforming women and lesbians as part of their boy-to-boy sexual fantasies but also as a way to talk about effeminate masculinity. The process of questioning one's gender and body appearance is typical for a number of gender non-conforming women involved in the queer feminist scene. Very similar to the *agorokoritso* category, the category *poustis* is not used socially as a form of self-identification, though it's socially recognizable as a slur in Greek homophobic discourse and as an identity category within the gay scene alongside *aderfi* (sissy) (see chapter two on the meanings of *poustis* and *aderfi*). It's mostly encountered in the narratives of young butch-identifying and gender non-conforming women who identified as lesbians, whether circumstantially or consistently. The category *poustis* emerges as a way to talk about gender non-conformity, femininity, and the complexities of sexual desire. I will now turn to the narratives of three gender non-conforming women who dated feminine girls (one of them also dated men and identified as bisexual at the time) and appropriate the gay identity category *poustis* as a gendered identification that depicts boy-looking girls who fantasize about having sex (or have sex) with other boy-looking girls.

Poka is a gender non-conforming lesbia in her late twenties, who has chosen a different name for herself from the one she was given at birth. Poka identifies as *poustis* and is in a two-year relationship with Froso, who has dated men in the past and

circumstantially identifies as lesvia. Poka begins her narrative by telling me that she grew up like a boy, she looked like a boy, acted like a boy, yet she did not feel like one. She openly identified as lesvia in high school. This was an identity she never questioned despite her desire for boys and her gender non-conformity to female norms and prescriptions. Other times she tells me she doesn't feel like a woman and therefore her lesvia identification is restrictive. Poka feels particularly uneasy when she's recognized as a girl, and experiences the pressures to conform to conventional female appearance, especially when it comes to getting a job. Repeatedly she tells me that men on the street see her as an ugly girl. This causes her distress and makes her feel the male gaze like "*knives on her body.*"

She talks about having sexual fantasies with boys that freak her out and at the same time, turn her on, especially when she is having sex with her girlfriend. She has never acted upon her desire for boys or butch women. Poka's gendered identifications oscillate between idealized notions of conventional masculinity, that is- wishing to be a boy, to feeling distressed as a gender non-conforming lesvia. Other times she describes herself as genderfluid, that is, some days she feels like a boy, others like a girl, and yet others like a small kid. When she was twelve, a boy in summer camp asked her whether she had half a pussy, half a penis; the thought of perhaps being hermaphrodite was a big relief. For years, she was trying to explain to herself the fact that she feels half a man, half a woman. When I asked her whether she ever thought about transitioning she tells me that she doesn't feel unease with her body but instead she feels frustrated that she's socially perceived as a gender non-conforming girl, "*an incorrect girl, a girl- mistake.*" Poka socially feels cast away as an abjected girl-figure that's "*a mistake of nature*" and this is also reflected in how she strives to distance herself from the normative gaze of others, yet inevitably, it's inscribed on her and forms her perception of gay boyhood as an alternative way of being a woman.

*Poka: "I think masculinity is more definable than femininity. For a woman not to perform her femininity means she has a more liberated relation to her gender...I don't know, perhaps it's the only way for me to experience my femininity; it's easier to adopt the femininity of a poustis than of a woman; maybe, it's the only way I can feel good about it; saying I am a poustis is my*



*way of dealing with my femininity {...} If you are a gay boy you are not requested to perform a masculine role; I feel ambivalent about masculinity, both disgust and awe. On the one hand, I admire it, on the other, I feel disgust for the way masculinity exercises power and control over other people. As a gay boy I feel there is less pressure to be a man. I would like to be a boy that doesn't have to conform to compulsory masculinity {...} Sometimes it feels easier to identify as a kid, it has less burden from masculinity and femininity {...} When others look at me they see a weird creature, a harmless child that doesn't make straight people feel uncomfortable about their gender or their sexuality. In straight environments. I feel bad that I am not a girl, I am not pretty or feminine and usually groups of boys don't accept me, I have to make jokes in order to compensate for how I look in some other way. And this makes me angry since I do it to avoid their rejection."*

By adopting the gay identity category *poustis*, Poka tries to challenge normative womanhood and embrace a sort of boyish femininity that plays with masculinity without engaging with its toxic parts. It's the tender masculinity of a *poustis* which oscillates between flexible boyhood, meaning full of potentials and with fewer social burdens, and conventional masculinity. Poka's femininity finds refuge in the tenderness and fragility of a boy that's permitted to be less "good at being a man" (Herzfeld; 1985). On more than one occasion, Poka discusses her sexual fantasies with men, where she switches between active and passive sexual roles, being the boy that has sex with a woman and the boy that is fucked by another boy.

Poka's notion of *poustis* spans from identifying as a boy in puberty, to engaging with her femininity and feeling more at ease during sex as a female-bodied lesvia. In addition, she approaches the child as a gendered identification with playful potentialities, moving within, around, and some times beyond, idealizations of appropriate manhood and femaleness. As a girl, and especially as the wrong type of girl, she locates the burden of the patriarchal male gaze which constructs her as a "mistake", an "abomination." The challenge of normative womanhood alongside the complexities of desire discussed through the lens of sexual fantasies for boys and boyish girls recurrently emerge in women's identification with gay identity categories.

Lydia uses various identity categories to describe her gender and sexuality. In her life narrative, she moves from lesvia, to trans boy, to poustis, to femme, to bisexual. Her gender questioning goes hand in hand with her sex life as well as with her activist life. Lydia describes going through a period of social transitioning where she lived as a boy for about a year. During that time, she identified as poustis. This is a gendered identification she kept when she transitioned to becoming femme again. Repeatedly she tells me that gender is not only something she wears, it's something she feels, it's affectively informed, it's sensually felt through smells and colours, it's something inside her which persistently gives meaning to her gendered identification as poustis. From her life as a trans boy to her second transition to becoming feminine again and her life today as a feminine woman and bisexual, Lydia argues that she has always felt like a poustis- interchangeably she also calls herself aderfi.

*Lydia: "After my first girlfriend I dated Manolis, he was very versatile, he gave me the phallus and the penis and asked me to fuck him...After him I began thinking that perhaps I am not a girl. I can't tell you if it relates to my transition...perhaps it does since I mention it here with you.*

*I felt pressured being in one position, being feminine all the time, I felt I entered there with guilt... And in my lesbian relationships, I didn't want to be the femme, I felt it was restrictive.*

*{...} I did not feel female, I did not feel a woman, and for that reason I never felt butch. As a boy I wasn't masculine, I was more a femmeboi {...} I remember visiting the house of a gay director and finding in his bathroom a morning facial cream with tangerine flavour (laughs). I like masculinities that use facial cream {...}*

*As a boy I liked butch women and boys but I attracted feminine girls and had sex with feminine girls. In the scheme butch/femme as two positions that interact and influence each other, which is also encountered in Greece, I never felt or identified as butch, I felt a poustis {...} I looked like a boy before puberty, a very defective man {...} I went from very femme to feeling a boy {...} It was never a denial of femininity but of femaleness {...} I liked aderphes such as Rufus Wainwright {...} In some sense it's the notion of aderfi against the straight man*

*{...} I don't know how to explain it. I still feel a poustis. I can feel a poustis or a lesvia but I don't feel a bisexual. I feel a poustis...I feel it's inside as a gendered identification...I like the effeminacy of gay men that is not necessarily strong, yet it's there, it's noticeable and very attractive. With tangerine facial cream, yes.*

*{...} A very commonly heard approach is that desire addresses people and not genders. I hate this approach, desire is not genderless, it's not solely about people, desire addresses gendered identities. In this sense, the men I've dated with the exception of some who could be seen as straight men with no flaws, no cracks in their masculinity, are usually men with defective masculinities. They miss points in their masculinity, some of them consciously...some know a little about gender and feminism {...} I like people whose gender identity does not comfortably fit one position or the other. Most of the men and women I've dated had this element...Being a defective masculinity and at the same time more complete. I feel they are more complete because of their difficulties. It's difficult being butch, being a trans man since you have to prove yourself to others and at the same be yourself."*

In Lydia's narrative gender identification and sexual desire interact, one doesn't necessarily define the other, but they meet to create points of self-reflection and multiple pieces that mould her identity. From sexual versatility, to desire for "broken" masculinities, to bisexuality and its position within the community, often perceived as a boundary identity that "flirts" with the normative, Lydia builds her identity in circumstantial movement. By taking bits and pieces from various worlds, she builds an identity-collage that makes her all at once: poustis, femmeboi, bisexual, versatile, feminist, lesvia, and femme. The challenge of normative womanhood in combination with a desire for "broken" masculinities- butch women, trans boys and straight, yet less macho, men; men who have to try harder to be "good at being men"- define her identification as poustis. By identifying as poustis she sees herself as a tender masculinity that uses tangerine facial cream, treats her body with care and sensitivity, talks about feelings, and enjoys performing (in terms of style, clothes and body postures) a boy in puberty whose exploring his body and its meanings. The category

*poustis* encompasses Lydia's gender ideal, to which she continually returns despite the fact that she socially passes as a feminine woman that dates masculinities-men and women.

Naoko, whom I have already discussed, likes boy-looking girls with short hair and dynamic personalities but dates mostly feminine straight girls. Naoko grew up like a boy, she had a boyish nickname until the age of eleven, she acted like a boy, dressed like a boy, and played with boys. She felt free to express herself even though she describes herself as the "black sheep" in her home town; she tells me she stood out because of her piercings and tattoos, as well as her boyish style and manners. She did not identify as a *poustis* but expressed an unfulfilled desire for boyish girls, which she related to the fact that she enjoys pushing beyond identity categories and occupying the position of in-between genders. Naoko enjoys causing confusion about whether she's a boy or a girl. It seems that "tricking" and confusing people about one's gender can become a source of pleasure. Naoko's notion of *poustis* emerges within a boy-to-boy narrative of desire, that is, feeling attracted towards other boyish girls, girls that look like boys yet live like girls.

*Naoko: "I remember fantasizing about women since I was a child. In a way I feel I was born this way. I never liked men, which doesn't really mean anything, it could be challenged in any minute but for the time being this is what I feel. Sometimes, I think that even though I am not attracted to men {...} I may hide a gay man deep inside me. Yes, I feel that if I ever changed my gender and became a man I would choose to have sex with men and not women.*

*With men I always gave the friendly vibe, if they get playful with me in a more erotic manner, it gets on my nerves but then I go with it and play it crazy, it's cute, I like making fun of them, «trolling» them, I say ok, I will play the gay guy for you! (laughs) That's usually my defence mechanism if a man hits on me.*

*{...} I don't think I am trans, I feel ok with my body, I do not feel oppressed by it, however sometimes I wish I had a mechanism where I could switch between a pussy and a penis whenever I wanted. Become something more*

*broad, something more hermaphrodite, I always felt close to this, I didn't want to be a boy or a girl, I felt more in-between both, a boy-girl. When I met Poka I felt close to her, I like boyish girls, I always fancied baby butches. Lately I've been dating feminine girls, mostly straight girls. I never found a butch to date, yet I like androgynous girls that aren't too feminine or too masculine."*

What needs to be noted is that stereotypical and over-displayed masculine behaviours were classified as straight machismo and were not tolerated within the queer feminist and lesbian community. In my understanding, the use of gay identity categories relates to an experience of masculinity beyond toxic straight machismo and provides a way to embrace effeminacy both on a bodily and mental level. A boyish girl that employs the category *poustis* to make sense of her effeminate masculinity, seeks to distance herself from normative femininity and toxic machismo. By occupying a space of effeminate masculinity, she devalues the status of straight masculinity and indulges in the playfulness of the moto "*boys will always be boys.*"

Other gay identity categories, like *otters* pertaining to the gay bear culture, were employed by butch-identifying women who crafted their masculinity by dissociating themselves from lesvia womanhood. For instance, Rena, who identifies as butch lesvia, uses selectively the gay category of *otters* and adopts certain body features: "*I use the term selectively. I don't identify with the desire of poustides for other men or with their effeminacy. I differentiate myself from poustides in terms of their desire for men but also from the feminization that comes with it. I think I adopt specific features from otters. I embrace two features of masculinity, body hair and bellies. I appropriate this identity even though I am not a poustis. I am hairy but not that much...and I have a small belly. But I don't use this socially as an identity, it doesn't make sense to anyone, it's recognizable as such, at least in Greece.*"

Androgynous and boyish physical appearance was highly valued within the queer feminist and lesbian community. However, outside the world of politicised queer feminist lesbies, *poustis* is not seen as a gendered identification. In any case, boyish girls refract normative gender constructs by playing around with them. While Blackwood (20005c) in line with other anthropologists identifies "gender transgression as resistance to male-dominant hegemonic order" (2005c), boyish girls in Athens articulate

a more nuanced cultural process for the production of gender non-conforming positions. In the Greek cultural regime, the hegemonic kinship ideology, according to which “each gender is rigidly distinct and based on two sexes but not male dominant” (Blackwood, 2005c: 251), consists the ideological norm which boyish girls rework, challenge and reiterate. In this context, Lydia, Poka, and Naoko produce forms of gender transgression that seek to offer a version of masculinity beyond the ill-informed Greek straight machismo. This is encapsulated in the figure of the poustis, who is tender, effeminate, flamboyant, and sensitive to others and to oneself.

#### **7.4 Feminine-questioning lesvies**

Throughout this chapter, and in the subsequent, I argue that becoming lesvia involves the challenge of normative femininity, the questioning of gender norms and in some cases the ambivalent adoption of an active sexual role. When talking about female masculinity queer feminist women draw a straightforward link between femaleness and heteronormativity against gender non-conformity. The resistance to hetero-female norms along with the adoption of masculine attributes feed into the gradual building of gender non-conforming lesvia subjectivities. The complexities of lesvia ideology come to light when examining the narratives of lesvies about femininity. Their narratives are far less continuous than those of agorokoritsa, or butch, or even poustis-identifying women. Women who contemplate their femininity express greater temporal gaps between earlier life and adulthood as well as less continuity between femininity and lesvia identity categories.

If women in Greece are practicing homosexual (and/or non-normative) desires and performing their femininity in the context of sexual intimacies and gender roles made available by the mandate of reproductive heterosexuality and in the context of Greek family values, the implication is that heteronormativity fosters space for same-sex sexualities and non-normative femininity as much as it represses them as also noted in Boyce’s ethnographic study of male-to-male sexualities in India (Boyce, 2006: 94). As a result, femininity beyond the heterosexual paradigm is fraught with ambivalence, it falls back to the heteronormative whilst generating new meanings on what it is that makes women’s non-normative femininity.

A small number of women within the community identify as femme, others see themselves as constantly shifting between feminine and gender-questioning identity categories while others see themselves as same-sex loving women. Several women who have dated masculine lesvies in the past do not talk about femininity and rather emphasize lesvia primarily as a sexual identity. They describe suddenly falling in love with a woman, who happened to be masculine-looking and/or acting and gradually come to adopt a lesvia sexual identity.

As I've already argued, the gendered sexual scheme (masculine/feminine lesvies) is a nuanced dating practice that's ambivalently performed within the lesbian community. Many queer feminist lesvies who perform and embrace their femininity, usually fall in love with women and form relationships in their mid-twenties to early-thirties. In agorokoritso retrospective narratives, women locate feelings of gender unbelonging and desire for other girls when they are growing up. The narratives of feminine lesvies differ in that homosexual desire and gender questioning emerges in adulthood.

Thus, temporality figures differently between agorokoritsa and feminine lesvies. The intergenerational gaps and shifts from narratives of lesvia identity as homosexual desire (lesvia as sexual identity) to narratives of lesvia identity as gender discontinuity (lesvia as gendered sexual identity), which was discussed in detail in chapter six, are reflected in women's discussion of femaleness and homosexuality. Here, whilst discussing lesvia identity, the youngest generation focus primarily on gender conformity/ non-conformity as distance from the normative, whereas the older generation perceives homosexual desire as part of an internally-felt process of becoming women. In what follows, I discuss the narratives of four women, some of whom identified as lesvies, some as femme lesvies, and others as queer. All reflect on what it is that makes them feminine and how it relates to becoming lesvia, seen as sexual and gender identity.

Aliki, whom we have already mentioned, with her well-maintained haircut, tight jeans, and loose t-shirts, struck me as a distinctive femme figure with an intense flirtatious gaze. She identified as lesvia and femme and enjoyed actively pursuing butch women. She described her sexual relationships with butch women as source of pleasure

and experimentation particularly when it involved playing around with heteronormative sexual dynamics. As she put it in one of our conversations, when she realized she was lesvia, she consciously re-orientated her desire towards women and distanced herself from her straight past.

If femininity is a sex which is not one in multiple senses, and if what queer femininity, as Ulrika Dahl (2012) suggests, “is anything and everything that does not equate it with the reproductive, respectable, heterosexual approximation to womanhood that nobody embodies exactly, and if femininity is nothing but an idealized form that bodies of flesh and knowledge migrate towards and from, then Alikí’s journey to inhabit her desire should be seen as an open-ended process for reclaiming femininity through all its variations, representations and materializations” (Dahl, 2012: 57-64). Reclaiming her femininity meant going through different phases with her gender, from denying normative heterosexual femaleness to becoming a femmeboi (that is, embodying the gay femininity of a *poustis*), to caressing the wounds of heterosexual femininity and finally re-appropriating femininity within the gendered butch/femme sexual scheme.

*Alikí: “{...} Lesbian roles and identities came along, butch/ femme, I did not know anything about these things. I ended up loving them as identities, as processes. Through them I got to know how to be lesvia, how to live as lesvia and enjoy sex, masturbate and actually enjoy it. These were totally new discoveries! {...} Through femme lesbian identity I managed to appropriate my femininity, which came out of heteronormativity, wounded and with all the traumatic baggage that comes from stigma, devaluation, harassment. I wanted to get out of this and reclaim my femininity, a sort of femininity that is fearless enough to claim its desire. I invested a lot in the process of re-living, re-making my femininity {...}*

*There was an agony in moulding my lesbian femininity since it clashes with straight femininity but I don’t feel any connection with straight femininities. Femininity for me is a psychic, emotional process; it’s performative, I enact it and define its meanings.*



*As a lesbia I went through a phase of denial with my femininity, namely I did not want to show anything feminine, I think it was a little reactionary towards how others saw me. My family would constantly tell me “oh! what a sweet girl you are, why don’t you leave your hair grow and instead you cut them off like a boy!” I didn’t want to be what they wanted to see, I felt that if I showed a feminine image, it would be interpreted as a return to normativity; indeed, that’s how everybody read it, as girlhood, namely, being a woman, and my non-normative self remained invisible and devalued {...}*

*Now I don’t have the need to distance myself from the normative and I don’t feel it links me back to trauma; I can perform my femininity in ways that fit me more since it’s a conscious choice, it’s not a place where I simply landed, it’s a choice, it’s where I position myself in this gendered scenery, with these dynamics around me {...} My femininity is assertive not normative, I will actively flirt and ask for what I want, I don’t wait for the other to tell me whether I’m desirable.”*

In Alikı’s narrative, the process of reclaiming femininity is intrinsically linked to finding pleasure in *heteronormative sexual dynamics*. She tells me how these dynamics, when seen beyond social power structures, can acquire different meanings that serve mere sexual pleasure in a guilt-free setting. Being sexually receptive is seen as an active role since she is claiming her desire from a femme position. Repeatedly she argues that butch/femme identities are not a copy of a real thing that resides elsewhere (“*men and butch masculinity are not the same thing*”) but rather it’s a serious space for erotic play and performance. In particular, she emphasizes the way in which her pleasure emerges in response to her partner’s desires and that she needs not to be physically active to be responsive but that she acts by “fetishizing” heteronormative sexual dynamics as she suggests. Alikı celebrates the process of getting fucked and even more importantly the psychic experience of self-shattering that being fucked enables. The sexual experience of powerlessness and loss of control is enjoyed without relinquishing claim to activity, without becoming the active lover’s object, but simply a subject who owns the pleasure of her position.

Aliki: *“Letting a butch fuck me is an active position. I adopt the position of actively asking for what I want. In the past, these sexual roles and dynamics were more relative, I also enjoyed fucking the women I dated {...} Gradually I realized that I prefer staying in one role, in one position; I don’t like crossing the lines. After my last relationship I can no longer go from one side to the other, my desire did not spring back to the other side {...}*

*{...} It felt like stripping off hetero dynamics from patriarchal power structures- misogyny, oppression, sexism- in which they exist and orientate them towards sexual desire. By re-appropriating my desire, I actively make use of it, it doesn’t define me. During sex, heteronormative sexual dynamics can become a consensual power game that isn’t loaded with the oppressions of the social, it’s mere pleasure. When I realized this and experienced heteronormative dynamics free from their social connotations it was really revelatory. It felt as if things were taking their right place inside me {...}”*

Reclaiming femininity through femme lesbian identity involves reconceiving active and passive sexual roles by displacing and relocating desire beyond the patriarchal shame implicit to sexual receptivity. Aliki manages to reposition her femininity within and above heterogendered power dynamics; it’s precisely this reflexive move that enables her to inhabit heteronormative sexual dynamics and reconceive sexual receptivity as an empowering element of her femininity. I draw from Benjamin’s (1998) feminist psychoanalytic re-reading of Freud set alongside Nestle’s essay “The gift of taking” (1987: 122-127), which glorifies the reclaiming of penetration by lesbian femme sexualities, to argue that the position of receiving stimulation, holding tension (sexual, or aggressive) or directing it inward, being able to take inside, followed by the longing for relinquishing to the hands of the other, brings up a certain question of what does it mean to be a subject of desire (Benjamin, 1998: 77). Thus, Aliki puts forward “a notion of passivity according to which sexual subjectivity is constituted as much by being able to own desire, contain excitement, hold it (metaphorically speaking) inside the body rather than evacuating it immediately through discharge” (Benjamin, 1998: 77).

Similarly to Engebretsen's discussion of femme lesbians (TP categories) in China (2008), I also suggest that temporality emerges as key feature in feminine lesvia subjectivity in two crucial ways. Firstly, feminine lesvia subjectivity or simply lesbies who don't identify as femme but are feminine-looking and/or acting depend on hetero-female qualities, which means that they gradually arrive to lesvia subjectivity and identity (Engebretsen, 2008: 151-155). Secondly, it's also constructed through a retrospective narrative of difference, both gendered and sexual, that runs along female genealogical lines - "*what connects me to my mother/grandmother and what divides me from them.*" It was a common attitude that feminine women were not always seen as lesbies, perhaps going through an experimental phase or bisexual at best.

The fact that queer feminine women were easily absorbed by heteronormative female appearance and behaviors made it more difficult for them to claim a fundamental difference to normative femaleness and locate what differentiates them from straight women. In many cases, as with Liza who grew up with the older generation of lesbies who formed LOA, difference is discussed through sexual attraction for women and less through narratives of feminine discontinuity against hetero-feminine norms.

Liza, while tomboy in appearance by wearing jeans and t-shirts with a half-shaved hairstyle, saw herself as feminine but did not consider butch/femme categories important for her lesvia identification. She and her partner were not similar, her partner was older and masculine-looking, but she didn't consider her relationship in need of gendered identifications. Liza recalls falling in love with a teacher at summer camp when she was thirteen. Repeatedly, she tells me she didn't know anyone "*like her*" and spend many years feeling "*the only one in the world.*" Liza recounts feeling caught between different worlds and finding refuge in lesbian-themed films and books. During her university years her lesbianism was more "internally felt." As she explains in one of our conversations, her lesbian political consciousness was in a very primary stage. She disclosed her same-sex inclinations to some close friends and engaged in erotic play with some women, mostly when they had a couple of drinks, but they would then make it clear that they were not interested in anything further.

Finding her way to lesbian desire involved exploring her relation with boys and wondering whether she was bisexual. She tells me that she felt certain about her desire

for women but was still debating whether she desired boys. She recalls feeling isolated while studying in the countryside. There were seemingly no lesbians with whom she could hang out and if there were any, few of them were open about it. She began meeting other lesbians through the lesbian group in Athens. She met her partner there and they got together on one of her trips to Eressos. Until then Liza describes feeling lonely and ambivalent about identities and sexual roles. When talking about femininity Liza does not link it to her lesbia identification, which she interprets primarily as a sexual identity. She brings along the sexual narrative of the older generation of women for whom being lesbia is about claiming a different kind of desire and less about performing a certain kind of gender-bending. Yet, Liza discusses femininity through the lens of lesbian sex, penetration and pleasure. She talks about a gendered “energy”, a form of lightness, that defines femininity in relation to the external world, “being less heavy”, wearing clothes that reveal the female figure and engaging with so-called “female” chores in the household are amongst the “stuff” that make up femininity.

Liza repeatedly argues that femininity is contextual, that is, when she compares herself to a straight woman she is less feminine whereas compared to a butch she is more feminine. She describes herself as the kind of woman with girly looks; high heels, make up, bows, and dresses are not her thing. For Liza, sexual receptivity, namely the body’s openness to “receiving”, the process of “letting go” during sex, is interpreted as an integral part of what makes femininity. In this context, she experiences butch/femme identity categories as “one more division between us” which she later considered as part of her difficulty to come to terms with her femininity.

*Liza: “From the years I was going to the lesbian feminist group, I remember one particular incident. After a group meeting, a bunch of us had gone for dinner at a nearby tavern. I was with my partner and during the conversation someone brought up that I was femme. I got very upset! I hit my hand on the table and left sobbing in tears {...}*

*I was very sad when I realized the existing social division between straights, gays and lesbians. I interpreted butch/femme as one more division amongst lesbians, thus more division meant more loneliness...of course it was not about that. Today, I will support those identities against those that say this*

*sort of thing does not exist, there are lesbies out there that experience their identities in this way, nobody can say that they don't {...} This incident and my subsequent reaction triggered sensitive parts, it was not about the label, I began wondering whether I am in denial of my femininity.*

*I think that "receiving" in sex is the ultimate femininity. And since I have a problem with "receiving" inside my vagina, I feel I have a problem with my femininity. But I don't feel I am less feminine because of this, as for example, a stone butch may feel that she has no femininity, therefore she doesn't want any sort of penetration {...}*

*I feel there is a part of my femininity I have not embraced yet because of this issue and I feel that it has a lot to do with how inferior femininity and sexual receptivity is perceived socially."*

It seems that becoming receptive is considered an emblem of femininity but it's also delivered in both Liza's and Aliko's narrative as "a spatial metaphor of encompassing twoness" (Benjamin, 1998: 77), where penetration inflicts, moves, and excites genitals while the holding function of the vagina helps create an intersubjective space between active and passive (Benjamin, 1998: 77). In this context, as argued by Benjamin (1998), "the vagina represents the quality of ownership, of containing one's desire and excitement, without which active subjectivity is thinned to a defensive construct" (Benjamin, 1998: 77). Queering femininity and sexual receptivity means that penetration per se is no longer a static force that divides active and passive roles, it's more intersubjectively felt as part of women's relation to their partners and in the context of an embodied choreography of desire and pleasure in which feminine and masculine bodies enact and lean towards each other. Clearly Liza dissociates femininity from lesvia sexual identity, namely femininity, and particularly the femininity of a lesvia, is seen as an issue that has less to do with lesvia identity. Contrary to Aliko's gendered narrative of desire, in Liza's case there is no consciously stated and clearly expressed wish to reclaim femininity. However, there is a subtle and ambivalent relation to femininity, which is reflected in Liza's discussion of lesbian sex, femininity, and receptivity. Liza worries that there might be a part of herself as both a feminine woman and lesvia that she is not embracing given her reticence to penetration.

Drawing from Paul Boyce's discussion of sexual subjectivities in India in relation to the works of Adrienne Reich and Michel Foucault (2008), I also suggest that by thinking about the multiple ways in which feminine sexualities divert from conventional hetero-female roles, creates the conceptual space for understanding complicity and ambivalence in the production of lesvia subjectivity, namely "how lesbian subjects, especially feminine lesbian subjects, are formed within existent socio-cultural structures, but are not determined by them" (Boyce, 2008: 113). In my discussions with feminine- questioning lesvies it seems that most women, younger and older, had to deal with the pressures to marry and have children exerted by their families. It became clear that social norms of womanhood, which determine motherhood as a prerequisite of womanhood, the necessary step to becoming a "fully-rounded" woman, were beginning to pressure lesvies in their early thirties. Families would exert pressure to get married or "*find a good lad*" (ena kalo paidi). The reaction of lesvies spanned from coming out to their parents and directly confronting their family's expectations, to remaining silent and creating a distance from their families as part of a "forced" and/or conscious decision to keep their personal lives "separate"/away from their parents. The pressure to marry, which gets higher as women get older is differently experienced by feminine girls who have dated men in the past than for agorokoritsa who looked and/or acted like boys and were attracted to girls from very early on in life.

From Alikí's narrative as a femme lesvia in the context of the butch/femme gendered sexual scheme to Liza's narrative of lesvia as a sexual identity, I will now turn to Laoura's queer femininity which brings along elements from different cultural settings. When I met Laoura it was a short while before I left Athens, she had just returned in Greece. She had spent the last ten years working abroad as a performance artist and living in queer feminist squats. While living abroad, she flourished politically and emotionally, she explored herself as a performance artist and formed other-gender relationships with masculine women and trans boys, yet she explicitly tells me that she feels attraction for dynamic personalities, including femme girls. Laoura was in her late-thirties, with a very warm smile, she wore lipstick, had coloured nails, and light blonde, half-shaved hair, she struck me as a very feminine girl. She was hybrid in many ways,

firstly because she had travelled and lived abroad for a very long time, and secondly, because she was using more performative mediums of political and activist expression (she was less kin to anarchist ways of organizing the political). She recalls being very sexually assertive as a kid, from masturbatory fantasies of being abducted, to using various objects in the bathtub for her arousal. She also recalls kissing her girlfriends, playing the doctor, and dancing blues close together. She describes these incidents as part of a child's sexuality, uncensored and guilt-free.

Her first long-term relationship with a boy was very romantic, full of passion and lust, she loved having sex with him in different locations. She felt alive, desirable and energetic about life and relationships. The relationship ended when she got pregnant and he did not take any responsibility on the matter. However, she felt so much in love and enjoyed having sex while being pregnant, it was as if her body was "*drugged on its own hormones.*" The abortion was a traumatic experience that made her feel dispossessed and exposed. She recounts waking up and finding herself naked amongst other bodies in a hospital room. His fearful and negative reaction to the abortion made her angry as she realized that she "*was playing a minor part in his movie whereas she wished to stage her own life movie.*" She tells me that her next relationships with boys were less "*straight*" in that these were men who were very loose with their bodies and liberated with their sexuality (for instance, one of them often cross-dressed). What made them less "*straight*", namely less toxic, less hegemonic was their "*playfulness.*" They were less rigid and did not hesitate to express affection and tenderness towards their male friends. Retrospectively, Laoura considers this diffused eroticism, which was addressed towards all genders, as a queer element in her partners' straight male performance.

Once she left to study abroad, her life changed, she exposed herself to different mediums of artistic expression: video, performance, body art, noise, sound which went hand in hand with changes in her personal life. She got involved with queer feminist collectives and began dating and experimenting with girls. Repeatedly she tells me that she treats her sexuality as an art project: Autobiography, art and experimenting with myriad things from BDSM, to post-porn, to playing sexually with girls, and opening herself to different bodily experiences. She considers her exposure to non-straight environments definitive in the shifting of her sexual desire. She went through a phase

of experimenting with sex and playing erotically with women at sex parties. But her identity as a queer lesbian was established once she fell in love with a woman. Butch/femme identity categories were less prominent in the queer feminist scenes in which she socialized. Lately she's attracted to masculinities (butch women, trans boys) and this makes her hesitant to identify as lesvia since many of her partners in the past were transitioning or considering to transition to male genders (FTM).

When I asked her about her erotic relations with women she tells me that romance, namely the feeling of sharing something special with another person, passionate love, and becoming sexually bottom (whereas she generally sees herself as versatile) are things which she sees as blending nicely together. When she fell in love with a woman she felt as if her dreams would come true. It was the time that her feminist dreams, her sexual desires and her political proclamations would finally blend together; but her dream, both personal and political, dissolved once she began realizing the limitations of community life: *"we are here but this won't last, we may have a common identity but it doesn't mean we agree on things."*

Laoura's notion of non-conforming femininity involves questioning feminine roles and behaviours such as the notion of self-sacrifice and caring for others, which both her mother and grandmother developed, as well as challenging their viewpoints on female modesty. She feels a great responsibility to avoid reproducing the same power dynamics she encountered in her family and tells me that these things are constantly under negotiation: *"If they are forgotten, we will be forgotten."* Her non-normative femininity also involves exploring her appearance beyond and within normative femininity from clothes to hairstyles, from becoming a feminine and attractive tomboy to a slutty femme. It seems that sexual desire went hand in hand with her gendered identifications as tomboy and later as femme. Laoura moved from the borders of femininity (tomboy) to the excessiveness of femininity (femme) to politically claiming her right to sluttiness. The gaze of others, namely the queer community, friends and erotic lovers, along with the narratives of her mother and grandmother about women, formulated her assertive position towards her sexuality and femininity. Throughout her narrative, she describes moving progressively towards sexual assertiveness, body positivity, and feminist ways of living (with self-made rules).



Laoura: *“As I was growing up I remember that I didn’t have big breasts and I was very hairy and back then I felt these things were defects {...} I also remember getting my period and everyone around me panicking and the blood flow not stopping. My mother and grandmother were in total panic and were telling me I should not get very close to men from now on.*

*My femininity has gone through different stages. As a small girl I had long hair and wore dresses, then in puberty I wore black clothes, Dr. Marten shoes, I was more punk, I developed a kind of aversion to femininity. It was also because I felt unsafe on the street, men harassed me and I didn’t want it, I didn’t want to get this reaction from them. Also for the short time I was in anarchist squats in Thessaloniki, I didn’t want to look like a Bimbo, a Barbie, I wanted to be taken seriously, and I couldn’t be macho, you know have a steady voice, speak loudly and embody this sort of solid presence in space {...} When I left Greece and got involved in queer feminist squats, I shaved my hair and people saw me as a tomboy (smiling). Amongst all these things, I had less guilt about my sexuality, I realized I could still be an attractive girl with a shaved hairstyle {...}*

*When I moved to Berlin, people saw me as femme. Generally, I am very open to the gaze of others and the kind of projections social environments make on me. I adopted the femme identity, I found meaning in reclaiming a sluttiness with my femininity, which appears to have links to mainstream femininity such as having long hair and wearing dresses. Gradually I began loving these feminine fetishes...using make up, lipstick, pins, grooming myself (laughs). It was my answer to the widespread masculinity of the queer community where I socialized at the time, which was presumably neutral and deconstructed whereas femme identities were seen as less queer. This upset me a lot {...}*

*Sluttiness is not only about looks, it’s an attitude, I want to live without remorse, against all this misogyny and blaming of women about infidelity and immorality. I feel these are things I had to claim because I grew up in a conservative family where there were morally prescribed rules on what’s good and bad for women and a need to preserve female dignity. My sluttiness had to do with reclaiming public space, every woman should be able to wear short*

*skirts and walk down the street without fear. These were also things I adopted from the sex workers' movement. It also matched my life, the live sex performances, the workshops of the groups I attended, the sex parties, the diverse artistic mediums I used to explore life and art. I realized that claiming the right to speak from the position of the slut and at the same time be heard and respected is very hard and important.*

*When I came to Athens, I was shocked by the widespread sexism around me, I stopped wanting to be femme since I felt I needed to separate myself from mainstream femininity. I cannot make my difference easily visible here and I cannot spot lesbians on the street, I think I like female masculinities here because it's also easier to spot them (laughs)."*

In one of our conversations at Beaver I recall staring at the red marks left from our lipsticks on our half-smoked cigarettes. Laoura was telling me how much she likes leaving traces of her femininity behind. The traces of her lipstick create a continuum between past and present; they become the psychic traces of her agency in finding, owning and holding on to her slutty femininity. Drawing from Ulrika Dahl's approach on femme fashioning as "a form of material citational practice (a form of laboring) where femmes reflect on particular collective identities- lesbian, trans- and technologies of femininity" (Dahl, 2009: 43- 77), I realized that Laoura was embracing femininity's restraints namely that "to be truly feminine one needs to accept the handicap of restraint, learn to operate heavy machinery and come to adore it" (Brownmiller, 1984: 86).

While Laoura's narrative was intrinsically related to gaining a greater awareness of her body and recognizing herself as a woman and lesvia, her experience of growing awareness as lesvia appeared to have a lot to do with challenging conventional gender norms and opening herself to queer desires regarding sexual practices and erotic attraction for non-normative genders. The relative shifts in her sense of self were differently experienced given her travelling and networking abroad, which constitute elements of the emergent transnational notion of queerness in Greece. However, it soon became clear that social imperatives of femaleness, inherited by Laoura's mother and grandmother, along with particular bodily experiences (such as having an abortion),

were constantly renegotiated as she was opening herself to different perceptions and experiences of gender and sexuality. As she tells me her mother did not have the tools to understand her life choices. For years, her mother was very frustrated and believed that Laoura had taken an immoral path in life. Building networks of understanding with her mother was not easy. It seems that the process of reconceiving her sexuality and femininity was genealogical in that she was dealing with generational memories, the past choices of powerful female figures in her family along with long-established familial ideas on female propriety.

Contrary to the narrative of masculine-looking and acting lesbians (agorokoritsa, poustides and butch women), who experience gender non-conformity in early life and weave their self-narratives on gaps, discontinuities and discrepancies between earlier and present life, feminine lesbians craft their identity through inter-generational lines. Thus, Laoura's narrative builds female genealogies with the aim to challenge and understand the limitations and breakthroughs of previous generations of women in her lineage. The construction of female genealogies is seen as an integral part of accepting herself as a woman, including pushing against female norms and moral codes, which also emerge in the narratives of the older generation of women.

Ninetta was in her early sixties with grey hair and a very warm home. She welcomed me in her living room and served me coffee with cookies and/or liqueur. The decoration was full of photos from different periods of her life. Ninetta grew up in an ethnically mixed region in the Middle East from which she was forced to flee. She remembers this as a traumatic moment in life. It seems that she never got over the fact that she always felt foreign in the place she was born. As part of an "undesirable" ethnic minority she describes feeling alien and at the same "*having to pretend she doesn't feel that way.*" In many ways, this otherizing experience resonates with her experience of lesbian difference, that is, initially feeling different and not knowing it, and once becoming aware of it, remaining silent about it. Throughout our conversations, Ninetta discusses her relationship with her mother and grandmother, the lack of self-accomplishment and self-worth they felt, the social imperatives of marriage and family life that impinged limitations on their life choices. These female figures became the mirrors through which she creates links and breaks in her life, she expresses disdain for

the social restrictions of normative womanhood (of the time) and recognition of their breakthroughs against the dowry system and prescribed rules about female chastity. It became clear that finding her position within her female generational tree was central to embracing herself as a woman and later as a lesbia.

*Ninetta: "I grew up in the midst of a dispute between two women, the bride, my mother, and her mother-in-law, my grandmother. This was an underlying story in my home, an ongoing dispute between these two women that lasted for years and years. It was experienced in silence, nobody talked about it, yet the controversy between these women was boiling underneath. In this story, the victim was my mother and the one with authority was her mother-in-law, my grandmother. In this relation my mother was the one feeling humiliated by her. My grandmother was very tough. She grew up with her four siblings, her parents died, they were orphans and nobody took care of her {...}*

*Books helped me find myself in the world and empowered me {...} because I felt I was nothing, I didn't think I could claim anything in life, I didn't have any notion of claiming my desire, I didn't encounter this in my family...Later I realized that these strong female figures also felt they were "nothing", they lived their lives feeling they were "nothing." It took a long time and a lot of soul "digging" for me to appreciate the women of my family. For years, I was angry with my mother, I thought she was responsible for the fact that I had so low self-esteem. Other kids at school socialized, had friends, I was always alone...I began reading.*

*My mother had studied music, she played the violin but never worked professionally. I realized that my mother abandoned her love for music to get married and have a family. She played the violin since she was five years old, one day she was playing the violin, the next day she found herself with a duster in her hands {...} Gradually, I came to understand her, I worked a lot to understand my mother, the limitations and struggles she faced. She fell in love with a man, they got engaged, then in world war II the relationship broke off, he just vanished, the engagement was never officially solved and at that time this was a big taboo. Later she married my father.*

*Through feminism I realized the confinement of my mother and grandmother in the role of the mother and wife, and their breakthroughs respectively. My mother and her sister challenged the dowry system since they chose their husbands themselves. At the time this was a big transgression.”*

When I asked Ninetta about her relation with her body she tells me she did not know her body, particularly the role of sexual organs, stimulation, arousal, and pleasure were “*scientifically*” undiscovered areas. For instance, in her twenties she thought she could get pregnant by a man’s touch. Repeatedly, she tells me that she did not feel that she inhabited her body, its fluids and desires and that the feeling of sexual arousal was disconnected from her sense of self. In her twenties she experimented with some men in an effort to get to know her body alongside her own “*scientific*”, as she calls them, attempts to explore her body on her own. She narrates one of her first memories of sexual repression which she saw as a link forged between prohibition and pleasure. She was seventeen when she went to smoke a cigarette in secret in the bathroom. As she inhaled the smoke, she felt aroused with every zip and at that moment she remembered the time she felt aroused as a kid when she was pissing in the backyard of her house in the countryside.

Regarding her sexual relations with men she emphatically stresses that she has never had an orgasm with a man. When she reached twenty-nine she fell in love with a woman she met in a feminist group and felt her body alive for the first time. From this moment she embarks on a journey into sexual pleasure, she begins wondering what it means to be a woman, to be a lesbia. Her personal exploration went hand in hand with her political involvement with the post-dictatorial feminist movement in Greece (1977-1983). Ninetta grew politically and emotionally in the rise of the feminist movement. She lived through its wins, its controversies, its losses; the disputes between straight feminists and lesbian feminists in the late 1970s; the building of the Women’s Coffeehouse; the proliferation of Women’s houses in various Athenian suburbs; women’s demonstrations for abortion rights and the change of the Family Law; women organizing vacations together; and finally, the beach of Eressos and the lesbian separatist community. All in all, the process of creating space with women and for women defined Nineta’s notion of womanhood.

She became a separatist lesvia and talks about femininity as an integral part of being a woman. Accepting herself as a woman was fundamental in becoming a lesvia along with sharing and creating space with women. The idea of relations with a man was seen as an act of betrayal to female sisterhood. The male world was seen as separate and unwelcome. Throughout her lifetime, Ninetta tried to build relationships with women, some were difficult, tormenting, and existed in silence, others were assertive, supportive and more socially open. She talks about her lesbian identity as less socially but felt internally in that she tried to build bonds with women whereas she never tried to build close relations with men- *"I am a lesvia because of my life with women. The word lesvia was a constant negotiation."* She tells me that what makes her lesvia is the fact that she tries to build space with other women, whether they call themselves lesbies or not, namely the process of opening herself to female sisterhood is part of her lesbian experience. This resonates with the blending of straight and lesbian worlds that defined the older generation's narrative of similitude which I discussed in more detail in chapter six.

About her first relationship she tells it was *"unnamed"* (it wasn't called a lesbian erotic relationship but two very close friends), she did not discuss it with anyone, she remained silent about it and even the break up was *"unnamed"* as such. This resonates with the "potential friends-potential lovers" sexual scheme of the older generation of lesbies also presented in chapter six. Ninetta describes feeling sexually as if she entered a dark room, she didn't know it was possible to make love with a woman, it was a totally new discovery, bodily and emotionally. She describes her body opening and closing and when it's totally open, it's like an open realm of desire, threatening and liberating for both. In order to create distance from her first relationship, which had its silences, its pleasures and deadlocks, she left for studies in Mytilene, *"putting an oceanic border between us"* as she tells me. Later she left for Italy following a lesbian she met in Mytilene; she stayed in Italy with her for about seven years and got involved to feminist cultural spaces there. The difference between "named" and "unnamed" relationships is temporally experienced since Ninetta talks about them as relationships with or without starting and ending dates. She returned to Athens after almost ten years, she got involved with the building of the lesbian group, and formed relations with women, some hidden, others open.

Ninetta talks about her relationships with women and her lesbianism as a cultural border-crossing which resonates a lot with Anzaldúa's notion of borderland inhabitants. According to Anzaldúa (1987), the borderland people are "the females, the homosexuals of all races, the dark-skinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 38). In fact, as Anzaldúa says (1987), "they are born in a space where they are considered illegitimate or at best they are perceived as different (and biopolitically categorized as such), and thus, they are constantly asked to question and explain (to others and to themselves) their own existence" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 37-39). By defying the general expectations of being a woman in Greece- that is, mother, wife, heterosexual, Madonna, and whore- Ninetta becomes "a border inhabitant, an existence on the threshold of any definition, a shifting ground where the self is not built on legitimacy or conformity" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 41), but rather on the plurality of spaces, moments and feelings she shares with other women.

Ninetta: *"When I fell in love with this woman and we made love I felt I crossed a bridge; for me it felt like crossing a bridge, never to return back, I crossed it once, a wall was demolished, and it was an important wall, the wall of the heteronormative, it wasn't a simple wall, it was a medieval wall, and it felt amazing, and I knew this was a political moment, so I went to find the lesbians at their gatherings, to see them and let them see me {...} I believe it's central for a woman to make space of her own, to experience this sort of sisterhood...to get over the antagonism, live together with women, and find common grounds. The statement of second wave feminism "you are not born a woman, you become one" makes sense for me, having a pussy doesn't mean anything, it's about creating a small space where you can witness how you become a woman."*

Ninetta's narrative, which resonates with many other stories of the older generation of women, shows that femininity can only be understood in relation to becoming a woman and a lesbia, seen as clashing processes. It also involves challenging social restrictions of reproductive marriage and family life in the process of becoming a lesbian woman. The importance of naming emerges in the narratives of women that

lived relationships in silence, that is, unnamed, secretive, confusing, and behind closed doors. Stories of coming out to her mother, to other feminists in the groups she attended during the 1980s, emerge as temporal thresholds that mark the weight of the word “lesvia” and her ongoing efforts to negotiate and embrace it as a social identity. When it comes to reflecting on womanhood, Ninetta discusses ongoing genealogical shifts in what becoming a woman meant for her generation in contrast to both butch/femme identity categories and the younger generation of women who adopt the terminology of western identity politics and discuss femininity as performative and deeply enmeshed within politics of difference.

Ninetta: *“I can’t reduce my experience to butch/femme narratives, I formed relationships with lesbian women in a time when butch/femme notions were left behind for me... I saw myself as a sexually aroused woman with another woman. To be honest, this butch/ femme cliché upsets me since it has nothing to do with my experience, I don’t like it when others simply call me femme. I have drawn my path in life through feminism, I worked a lot on becoming a woman, because I was a being with no sexuality, I didn’t want to become like my mother, I hated this sort of woman. I bring with me a history of internalized repression for women and I found meaning in feminism. In women’s groups, I loved life all over again, I loved myself as a woman, I can’t erase this experience under the butch/femme rubric. I hate this otherizing gaze when it happens...because I hated being a woman and I lived in this hatred, I didn’t want to be like the women in my family, in many ways I didn’t become like them...women that weren’t proud of being women, yet women’s pride was an unknown concept at the time of my mother and grandmother. What does it mean to be proud that you’re a woman? {...} This notion had no social value back then, a woman was proud because she married a man and was socially accepted or she was proud because she confronted the family institution in order to become a teacher, I don’t know {...}”*

*Lesbies struggle to find a balance, emotionally in their daily lives, which is very important to be productive and creative, you need an emotional balance. For lesbians it’s more tormenting when they find themselves within butch/femme*



*schemes, social prohibitions, hiding from themselves from others, loosing so much energy...In many ways, society marginalizes sexual minorities with the hardness of this experience, it feels like a displacement on a foreign land...*

*Yet I worked to get inside my body, the body I have today, the cis body as they call it, those things, cis, trans are far from my experience, because I fought a lot to inhabit my body, to accept this breast...I draw a journey to my pussy, and I still can't say that I have freed myself from misogyny...that's why I can't get into these discussions about cis/ trans, being a woman is not a given for me, namely that the breast and pussy simply makes you a woman...it doesn't make you something else but it doesn't make you a woman."*

What I have described above is various negotiations of non-normative femininity among younger and older women, who have encountered pressures to conform to the social imperative of normative womanhood. To get married, be feminine enough but not slutty, be modest, grow long hair, wear clothes in a particular manner, form a family and have kids by their early 30s, and generally accomplish themselves as women by abiding by socially prescribed rules of what it means to be a "successful" woman in Greece. It was a common attitude for queer and feminist lesbians to challenge normative womanhood by colliding with the patriarchal values of the Greek reproductive family. For younger lesbians, becoming feminine and becoming a woman were seen as two separate processes whereas, for older women, these two processes coincided, yet there is an overarching trend -in both generations- of deconstructing essentialist notions of womanhood by turning from "being" to "becoming" a woman. By creating genealogical (dis) continuities with/from their mothers and grandmothers, lesbians challenge what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a politicized lesbia that glorifies femininity, chooses alternative lifestyles, and creates her own rules for sexual pleasure, intimacy, and love.

## 7.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed narratives of female masculinity and non-normative femininity through the subject categories used by politicized lesbians to make sense of difference, and I tried to highlight how heteronormative gender stereotypes structure the discourses and dynamics of these categories. I also tried to show the different constraints of sexuality and gender experienced by older and younger generations of lesbians and demonstrate how they managed to craft an identity that felt at home to them. However, ambivalence towards these subject categories recurrently emerged as a mixture of “rules” and “anti-rules” on what gender and sexuality means and how they relate to each other. Categories were used to produce meaning and at the same time were challenged for the significance of their meanings. A questioning of the rules of normative womanhood formulated the *agorokoritso* category used by women when looking back at childhood years. Ideas about toxic straight machismo also emerged from boy-looking lesbians who adopted the gay category of *poustides* (pansies) to name their effeminate lesbia masculinity. In both cases, feelings of unbelonging within normative womanhood, as well as a recognition of conventional heterosexual masculinity and its toxic parts, defined the emergence of lesbia subjectivity for both generations of women.

The category *agorokoritso* was employed by women to recount an unbelonging within normative womanhood. Women crafted this gender category which describes female-bodied people who identify as lesbians, and demonstrates, either physically, mentally, or emotionally, a kind of gender transgression when growing up, which doesn't necessarily lead to becoming a masculine-looking, acting and feeling-lesbia. Women who use the *agorokoritso* category in their self presentation tend not to see themselves as explicitly masculine or feminine. The category *agorokoritso* reflects the position of a sexual and gender outcast who doesn't feel at home with hetero-feminine norms. Boy-looking lesbians who identify as *poustides* experience lesbia identity primarily as a gendered identification, created at the margins of gay effeminacy and heteronormative femininity. This group of young women look for an expanded possibility of what gender normalcy might contain and enjoy displaying linguistically, but also physically, their gender-fucking. Gender non-conforming lesbians who desire

other gender non-conforming women perceive their gendered identification as “poustides” as part of a boy-to-boy narrative of desire.

Finally, the narratives of feminine-questioning lesbians show that masculinity is not the only way of embodying a different kind of woman. Femininity is seen as a “becoming” process intermixed with homosexual (and/or non-normative) desires, whereby being cis-feminine (or cis-woman) isn’t seen as a given in the strict sense of the term (cis). For many women, queer, lesbians, or other, the process of crafting their female genealogies through self-narrative, and finding their place in relation to their mothers and grandmothers, is essential. In order to inhabit a feminine sexuality on many levels, emotionally, mentally, but also bodily, women clashed with the past generations of women of their families. This was a necessary step for the building of feminine-questioning lesbia subjectivity as much as it is for gender non-conforming lesbians to craft their own categories in order to feel at home with themselves.

In this context, gender continuity and discontinuity, namely affirming and questioning hetero-gendered norms involves recognizing the limits of conventional heterosexual femininity in the context of Greek repro-sexuality (Halkia: 2004). This includes the pressures to marry along with pressures for gender conformity, that ends up structuring lesbia identity in gendered terms. As I have previously discussed, the transition from narratives of same-sex loving women who portray similitude as what connects them to themselves and to the world, to narratives of lesbia-identifying women who portray difference as what distances them from the normative world, is followed by the queer politicization of homosexuality (since the early millennium) whereby Greek patriarchy and gender norms are no longer seen as solely a feminist issue but as an all-encompassing oppressive structure that brings together poustides, lesbians, feminists, anarchofeminists, and human rights activists.

In the following chapter, I will focus on younger women’s sexual practices and look at active and passive sexual roles. I have already touched upon the role of sexual fantasies (boy-to-boy narratives of desire) and of penetration (and the re-conceptualization of activity/passivity) in the formation of lesbia subjectivity. In the next section, I wish to discuss the ongoing ambivalence between identities and sexual practices with the aim to probe sexuality and gender in establishing lesbia subjectivity. I wish to show how the distinction between active and passive sexual roles is crucial for

the emergence of lesvia subjectivity but also how it becomes the terrain upon which identity categories are questioned and challenged for their shortcomings.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Sexual practices and active/passive sexual roles

#### 8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I tried to unravel the elements that consist lesvia subjectivity in contemporary Greece by focusing on generation and gender as analytical categories. My aim was to illuminate the ways in which gender and sexuality interrelate and are socially informed by generational sexual histories, heterogendered structures, LGBT activism, and the influence of identity politics enhanced with the arrival of the internet and new social media. Gender discontinuity emerged as a crucial element that marked the shift from narratives of homoeroticism and lesvia as same-sex desiring to narratives of difference from the hetero-normative and lesvia as a gendered (and politicized) sexual identity.

The primacy of gender over sexuality, which seems to structure younger women's narratives of lesvia identity, is critically challenged when they talk about sexual practices and active/passive sexual roles. While the previous chapters look at lesvia-identifying and same-sex desiring women through the lens of disciplinary normative structures and the politicization of homosexuality in Greece this chapter tries to address erotic practices without treating them "as discursive products, solely as symbolic of cultural and political relations" (Spronk, 2014: 3). Instead of only looking at how power relations frame sexuality, I wish to look "at the sensual aspects of sexuality as mediators and shapers" (Spronk, 2014: 3) of lesvia identity in Greece.

In her work on same-sex erotic practices in Nairobi, Rachel Spronk (2014; 2005) calls anthropologists to pay attention on the bodily sensations that make up sexual identities. Even though the relation between sensorial experiences and discursive identification is widely debated by queer and cultural theorists and material feminists (Edelman& Berlant: 2014, Butler: 1993, Dean: 2000; 2009; Gronz: 1994; 1995; Braidotti: 1994; 2002), queer anthropologists (as noted by Rachel Spronk: 2014) talk less about the sensual aspects of sexuality. In the context of wider feminist and LGBT social

movements (1970s), western gay and lesbian anthropologists (Weston: 1991; Morris: 1995; Boellstorff: 2007) focused on “studying norms and hierarchies underlining the organizations of sexuality and gender, or looking at the politics of sexuality in relation to gender and identity” (Spronk, 2014: 5). From the 1980s onwards, sexuality was re-discovered as a field of anthropological analysis, this time due to AIDS. As suggested by Spronk (2014), anthropologists quickly moved from looking at the biomedical discourses and sexual regimes of HIV narratives, to re-discovering sexuality cross-culturally; probing the relation between sexuality and gender, and examining “how meanings and desires are influenced by culture and society” (Spronk, 2014: 5; 2005).

Recent anthropological work (from the early millennium onwards) in Greece sprang out of the need to talk about homosexual lives which are continually pathologised and marginalised. In this context, sex emerges as a sub-topic of reproduction, sexual citizenship, gender, HIV/AIDS politics, and the human rights agenda (Yannakopoulos: 1998; Yannakopoulos: 2011; Canakis& Kantsa& Yannakopoulos: 2010; Athanasiou: 2007; Halkia: 2004). In an effort to move this literature forward and contribute to contemporary anthropological studies, I focus on non-normative sexual practices and look at women’s discussion of sex and sexual practices. An intersectional approach that wishes to look at gender and sexuality as two interrelated fields requires that we look at how sex is discussed and brought into language, how pleasure is sought and experienced, how activity and passivity are perceived and finally how they relate to women’s sense of lesvia identity.

In their theoretical debate about sex, love and vulnerability in “Sex, or the unbearable” (2014) L. Edelman and L. Berlant argue that sex portrays the limits of identities to speak for bodies but it further stages “the experience of the multiplication of knowledges that have an awkward relation to each other, crowd each other out, and create intensities that require management” (Berlant& Edelman, 2013: 6). In this direction, I try to move beyond a Foucauldian analysis according to which sex acts are loaded with biopolitical discourses of social power and control, which undoubtedly needs to be studied as such. My analysis draws inspiration from T. Dean’s work on barebacking subculture (2009) which shows that focusing on “corporeal and erotic interactions provides a productive starting point to theorise the performative aspects and intersubjective meaning-making of sexuality” (Spronk, 2014: 6)

The material presented here is not generationally analyzed since the older generation was more reluctant to talk openly about sex. I will primarily focus on how gender non-conforming women, namely agorokoritsa and boy-looking lesbians, talk about sexual pleasure and the sensorial. I have already tried to address how feminine-questioning women talk about penetration as an empowering act of receiving (chapter seven). The first section gives an ethnographic account of certain practices of lesvia flirting such as the hat game and illustrate the role of alcohol consumption and *kerasma* in framing the setting for lesvia courtship to take place. The second section gives prominence to women's discussion of sex, pleasure, and the sensorial. Sex consists a productive moment for social meanings and sensations to converge upon and constitute sexual and gender identities. Yet it's also "a moment of profound unknowability" (Edelman& Berlant, 2014: 63). As suggested by Edelman& Berlant, "sex produces sexual knowledge as much as non-knowledge, it opens us to a sphere of unpredictability" (Edelman&Berlant, 2014: 63-64) and it is precisely this I wish to address by looking at how women try to put sex into words. Which sensorial experiences gain prominence in women's self-narratives? How is sexual activity and passivity discussed? How does sex formulate and challenge their identities? These are some of the questions to which I will be returning throughout this chapter.

## 8.2 Playing the hat game & practices of flirting

Sex was usually a topic of discussion amongst groups of friends at bars (Beaver). Flirting was also encouraged despite the small number of spaces where women could freely indulge freely into flirting, kissing, and meeting other women. Hat games were “staged” occasions when flirting and sexual intimacy was becoming the main point of social interaction and relatedness. I often observed and participated in the hat game which is another version of the *spin the bottle* game but women aren’t sitting in a circle, instead the hat switches hands amongst women on the dance floor. The playful atmosphere is enhanced by the safe and relaxing context of the bar, enhanced with alcohol, cigarettes, and music. All this seem to ease any restraints and intensify underlying desires to flirt, dance, kiss, and court other women on the dance floor. The hat game was a “staged” performance , especially since it involved flirtatious gazing, as well as elaborate dancing in pairs and in groups, lighting cigarettes and buying drinks to other women.

Aside of the hat game, women opened conversations on astrological themes with questions like “*What’s your horoscope?*” “*Have you checked your erotic synastry?*” “*What was the zodiac of your ex?*” One night out at Beaver, Nora, who is in her mid-thirties and works for an LGBT magazine, tells me that the horoscope defines one’s appearance whereas the zodiac demonstrates one’s being. Nora smiled while telling me that the position of my zodiac against planet Aphrodite defines with whom I will possibly match better. When I told her I am a Gemini, she began counting her previous ex-girlfriends to spot who were Geminis and in the end she told me that they aren’t good zodiacs as they act differently in their relationships and differently with their friends. She then asked me how many times I’ve been in love and looked very surprised when I responded twice since this doesn’t seem to match the erotic behaviour of Geminis. After a couple of days, I asked Lena, who is at her early thirties and actively involved in LGBT activism, why lesbians enjoy talking so much about astrology and she confidently replied that “*it consists a way to rationalize the erratic character of desire and human relations, plus the community is small so if a lot of people use astrology as a means of socializing you also*



*get hooked into it.*” Thus, astrological themes worked as an ice breaker amongst women and consisted a playful way to meet and flirt.

On many nights, I ended up playing the hat game at parties and special nights hosted at bars and private houses. The hat changed hands, women mingled and the atmosphere was getting so relaxed and flirtatious that some felt comfortable enough to take their shirts off and dance naked. When this happened the window shutters would close, especially at lesbian gatherings hosted at the Immigrants’ House. Throughout the night women were on alert to check whether men were gazing them. If this was the case, they did not hesitate to pick up a fight with them and ask them to leave. On one particular occasion, I ended up playing the hat game and taking my shirt off with a group of women I was hanging out earlier the same afternoon. There was the couple Tzeni and Natalia in their early- thirties, there was Sofia, who was 35, single, and wealthy- a filmmaker that lived for some time in New York, and finally there was Naoko, boy-looking and in her early twenties, who identified as lesvia and was very energetic. Once we arrived at the party we met other women and began buying each other drinks. The party was a crowd-funding event for an antifascist festival and therefore, the space was packed with leftist and anarchist men.

Before the hat game the atmosphere was heating up with women taking over the dance floor and dancing in pairs while the rest were forming a closed circle around them to ensure that the women could dance carefree. This time the hat game did not involve a large group of women, yet still it was switching hands on the dance floor. The circle was closing more and more around us as more leftists and anarchists were arriving at the party. By 3 p.m. the atmosphere was very sensual and erotic among us, some women, including myself, took their shirts off while dancing. The women forming the circle interchanged places with those in the dance floor, always making sure that there were enough women at the “unofficial” guarding of our small dance floor. While we were dancing, kissing and caressing each other in our circle, Naoko noticed a guy staring at us. Immediately, the women-guards took in charge. They noticed him trying to approach us through the crowd. Naoko turned facing him and gave him a firm and decisive look that made him turn around and leave. The next morning, Lora came for dinner and called Lydia who was missing last night to tell her what had happened: *“last night we did it our way and Naoko, my child, scared the shit out of him (laughs).”* The hat

games were popular amongst younger and older women in lesbian bars and parties so the fact that it took place in a crowdfunding antifascist party was unusual in that respect as was the unofficial lesvia dancefloor created in a straight- dominated space.

Apart from the hat game, gazing is a key substance of a woman's courting behaviour. Intense and "dispossessing" looks are establishing "an idiosyncratic lesbian identity, one that is established in the glance of others and exchanged by their looks" (Munt, 1998: 31). This said, women don't fall in love by exchanging looks, gazing acts as an initiation point to establish an intimate contact, sexual, emotional, or other. Desire is the most significant and intersubjective attribute that gazing wishes to establish. In other words, it functions as a source of power. Here gazing is about claiming space against men. One night out at Paramithi, a lesbian bar near the area of Gazi with glass windows covered with posters (one can barely look inside), something particularly unexpected happened. I met with Lora, a boy-looking lesvia in her mid-thirties who identifies as a geek *poustis* and we went to the bar together. There we met with Rena, an English language teacher who identifies as butch. We sat and ordered food and drinks. They were both telling me how politicized lesbies enjoy coming to mainstream lesbian bars, where more plebeian, working-class lesbies hung out. Lora tells me me that plebeian lesbies don't like hanging out with politicized lesbies because politicized ones are open about their sexuality.

At some point during the night, two men arrived and sat at the other side of the bar. One of them began looking at me and nodding as if he wanted to buy me a drink. Once Lora realized what was happening, she began looking at him, persistently and firmly. When I asked her what's going on, she told me off: "*Mind your business.*" This was going on for about half an hour until he nodded at Lora, then she got up, went over their table and gave one of them a flyer about homophobia. She later told me that she whispered to one of the guys "*because you've been bothering us all night.*" Lora was very upset after the incident. She told me that I am in space that defines me as lesvia by default but that this does not make it ok for him to stare at me and make me part of his sexual fantasy. The discussion then turned to how Rena feels dismissed when she dates straight girls and men flirt with them in bars and social gatherings. Apparently, persistent and intense looks work as both a practice of flirting and of claiming lesvia space against men.

Alcohol is also key substance in lesvia gatherings and erotic conversations. The night starts out at private houses where groups of women gather to relax and have a couple of drinks, later they go out at a casual bar (Beaver) where they consume food and drinks and then continue their night, dancing and drinking, at a lesbian nightclub. Alcohol consumption amongst groups of women forms “the egalitarian basis of companionship” (Kirtsoglou, 2003: 45), precisely because wine glasses are constantly refilled without worrying who pays what. As suggested by Papagaroufali (1992) there is a relation between drinking together and *kerasma* (treat) that creates emotional bonds amongst groups of women (Papagaroufali, 1992: 48-69). My glass was always refilled and occasionally a masculine looking woman would offer to light my cigarette. The codes of lesvia flirting involve offering small shots of alcohol and offering to light the cigarette of another woman.

In various anthropological studies, alcohol consumption is interpreted as a symbol of emotional partnership (Papataxiarchis: 1991), a superior burning “spirit” in its literal and symbolic sense (Danforth: 1982; 1989) which is protagonist in the performance of gender roles (Gefou- Madianou: 1992a). Undoubtedly, food and drink commensality facilitates the creation of further egalitarian bonds between a group of women. Kirtsoglou gives an account of a *parea* (group of friends) of same-sex desiring women “who drink vast majorities of alcohol but remain in control, thus exhibiting a conventionally male quality which can nevertheless pass as female modesty” (Kirtsoglou, 2003: 78). Alcohol consumption, as argued by both Cowan (1990) and Papagaroufali (1992), enacts the negotiation of traditional discourses on gender roles, especially since loss of control, release of sensuality, and drunkenness are considered dangerous for the reputation of the household- “what would the neighbours say?” (Cowan: 1990; Papagaroufali, 1992: 49).

However, the consumption of vast amounts of alcohol with the effect of losing or maintaining control also depicts women’s general reticence in expressing same-sex desire given the straight moral patrolling of public space. Alcohol serves to bond women and make life carefree. It enables flirting by treating other women as well as dancing with them. And finally, it serves to re-evaluate life as more love-oriented and less fixated on goals, schedules and financial worries. As suggested by Gefou- Madianou (1992) “this sort of “anti-productive” behaviors and attitudes serve to emphasize an egalitarian ethos

among women (in this case), an ethos which concerns moral attributes rather than material assets” (Gefou- Madianou, 1992: 17). Overall, alcohol enhances the space for lesvies to dedicate songs, dance, and flirt in an atmosphere that diffuses the boundaries of normative heterosexual family life.

Female promiscuity consists a highly contested lifestyle in the lesvia community. Some disapprove of it as a practice that makes a lesvia life all about sex and erotic stability harder to achieve; others see it as part of socializing in a small community, where women sleeping with each other is inevitable, and finally others interpret it as a sign of female empowerment. Engaging in casual sex, one-night stands, and short-term relationships means adopting a sex-orientated lifestyle, which is a conventionally male erotic practice. By adopting a promiscuous lifestyle same-sex desiring women and lesvies break with social rules of female modesty and enact their claim to uncensored sexual pleasure. The figure of the promiscuous lesvia represents a confrontational and highly threatening (for normativity) figure as she dares to ignore rules of female propriety, and embraces sexual desire for its erratic and lustful qualities.

The hat game, small talk about astrology, alcohol consumption combined with treats, song dedications, and cigarette-lighting, along with the exchange of gazes, consist some of the practices of flirting interwoven with the fashioning of a particular sexual and gendered lesvia subjectivity. These are women (same-sex desiring women, agorokoritsa, boy-looking lesvies, feminine-questioning lesvies) who engage in public and assertive performances of same- sex erotic desire from standpoints invested with much less power to normative heterosexual desire. In the process of flirting they forge pareas of lesvies that flirt, play basketball, hang out and share life together. I now turn to the narratives of women on pleasure, sexual activity, and passivity, that is, the makings of lesvia sex.

### **8.3 Talking about sex: A conversation amongst gender non-conforming & feminine-questioning lesbians**

When women socialize at bars they frequently talk about sex and share past and present experiences in relation to active and passive sexual roles. The discussions kicked off with questions like: Do you have a girlfriend? What kind of women do you like? Are you a top or a bottom? By exploring women's narratives with a focus on sex, pleasure and sensuality, I offer additional insight to the ways sexuality and gender interrelate in the constitution of lesbia subjectivity. David Valentine has argued for the need to re-examine the conceptual split between gender and sexuality as both separate and connected categories and experiences (Valentine, 2007: 239-240 also quoted in Engebretsen, 2008: 156). Valentine claims that "the recent tendency to claim, as empirical fact, that gender and sexuality are separate and separable experiences results in a substitution of an analytic distinction for actual lived experience" (Valentine, 2004: 217). The intimate connection between gender and sexuality is uncovered when we turn to look at women's sexual practices.

In one-to-one discussions I had with women, sex became the point of reflection on the social meanings of the body in relation to gender and sensorial experience, showing "how the body's role is to transform ideas into things- it realises existence and is its actuality" (Spronk, 2014: 7; Csordas: 1990). My questions included, yet were not limited to: favourite sexual positions, use of sex toys, sex games, favourite erotic body parts, BDSM, means of sexual arousal, masturbation, straight sex, lesbian sex and other kinds of sex, as well as questions about how sex affects their relationships. The following stories aim to show how lesbia self is realized through sex and to broaden the discussion on gender non-conforming and feminine-questioning lesbia subjectivity.

Maria, a single lesbia in her early thirties, told me that her first sexual experience was not good since it was with a girl who assumed an active sexual role and as she also adopted an active sexual role; they were not sexually compatible. Her first relationship with Katerina, a straight girl in her mid-twenties, lasted two years. It was a hidden/closeted ("kryfi") relationship, nobody knew about it, and Katerina often broke

up with her to be with boys. She describes experiencing the relationship in between spaces, between the bedroom and the outside world; in the daylight it was as if they were friends but when the night fell and they went to the bedroom they were lovers. Sex was all about an uncontrollable urge, an effort to melt the “*coldness of the day we lived as good acquaintances*” and bend over Katerina’s reservation to be in a lesvia relationship with her.

Maria’s identification with the *agorokoritso* gendered narrative has to do with the fact that she felt more at ease in an active sexual role. Being active felt familiar, taking pleasure by giving pleasure to another woman. Penetration (fingers) or letting another woman go down on her was something that required the building of trust with her partner. In many respects, an active sexual role is portrayed as being in control of the sex act. This translates into sexual positions, being on top of another woman and seeking to please her. For Maria, good sex has to be holistic and involve the body in all its sensorial possibilities. She describes sex as a choreography of bodies immersed into one another. Her sexual narrative fits well with Monique Wittig’s (1973) discussion of the lesbian body, a body reconceptualised to obtain different sensations and meanings.

Maria: *“I never like women just because they are hot or have a nice ass and things like that, I usually get aroused as a whole, with the way she touches me, the way she sits on top of me, the way our bodies feel together. It’s a sum of things. I fall in love in a very photographic manner...for instance, I still remember Katerina’s neck when we slept together. Many things in sex are not only about rubbing and licking...feeling a body on top of you gives pleasure. When I have sex I try not to go for the spots that will make a woman cum. I like staying on body parts that are not directly there for stimulation. Like licking the body as a whole, kissing it, rubbing on top of it, caressing it...I think these things are more important than sex per se, for two bodies to get to know each other. And there you can notice if two bodies actually fit. I like going for those body parts that are more dissatisfied, the knees, the ankles, the belly. For instance, a woman may touch my belly or lick my fingers and I will get very aroused. These are things I really enjoy. I also like it when a woman sits on my back and rubs herself instead of using her fingers. I like feeling her skin on my*

*back, this sensuality, I like it very much, feeling a body, her breasts and belly behind me, on my ass, the sense of her skin. And the back is a very neglected area, it's not washed well enough, it lifts weights, rucksacks...I appreciate it when a woman approaches my body with the wish to explore it, when she sees the body erotically as a whole and does not go for specific body parts. I like it when bodies engage in this choreography and then go for the actual sex, perhaps it also helps me relax and give over my need for control. Generally, like I told you, I enjoy slow sex, in the way I approach a woman, in the way I get to know her during our relationship, and in the way I have sex. I don't like the "in your face" sort of sex. I think it's a construction. You know as if I've made the sex scenario in my head and approach the other just to perform the show. I like it when somebody doesn't go for the breast or the pussy that are eroticized body zones but instead wants to explore the body, kiss it, look at it, feel it... what is this body, this new body in front of you?"*

Maria's "body-sensorial knowledge" (Spronk,2014: 5) underlines the fact that "meaning is articulated in action itself, and perceived through its affective and sensuous qualities" (Spronk, 2014: 18). It consists of experiencing the body in all its sensualities, opening the body to its potentialities, and redefining body parts. For most women who identify with the *agorokoritso* category, the feeling of being in control during sex was recurrently appearing as a way of distancing themselves from stereotypically heterofeminine sexual roles whereby a woman adopts a passive sexual role and gives in to a male active lover. Maria told me that she cannot easily reach an orgasm when receiving oral sex but when it happens she feels liberated and in touch with her feminine side but adopting a passive sexual role is a matter of trust. Heterosexual active and passive roles structure the setting upon which Maria produces sexed difference and brings her *agorokoritso* gendered experience in contact with her sex life as a lesbia.

Maria enjoys using dildos, tying them very tight around her pelvis so they can touch on her clit. She tells me that for some time, she was trying to come to terms with the phallic connotations of the dildo. For instance, she was thinking whether the dildo works as a sort of substitute for the penis. For Maria, the dildo is about having rough sex, yet she sees it as one more sexual practice amongst others (along with the use of

fingers and non-penetrative sex). Maria's *agorokoritso* gendered experience involved calling herself Panos and imagining she would grow a penis.

Maria: *"When a woman is on top, she assumes what we call a male role, and when she is underneath, she is a woman, she moves in more feminine ways. I am talking very figuratively now. This obviously is not true. It's never true. But I've been mostly with women that make me want to adopt an active sexual role. I don't know if being bottom is the "high" of femininity, being more liberated. Right? For me this needs more work. Probably with Lena I explored my passive position a bit more. Being top is about taking control over the woman's pleasure and at the same time taking care of my pleasure...I want to be with women that also make me want to be passive, basically with women that I know I can trust and that will respect my body. I don't want to feel that they invade it. I want to feel that they can fuck me tenderly, cause generally penetration can hurt, I am also a bit tight down there, so she will need to make me horny enough before trying to penetrate, I don't want to hurt because then I get turned off sexually {...}*

*But with the women I've been I always assume a male role like I would be the one to buy her drinks, take stereotypical things I've seen in movies and reproduce them, a sort of ideal other I've made in my head based on gendered stereotypes I watch on films.*

*{...} I was shocked with the image of the dildo, it looked like a hawser between my legs (laughs). It was a shocking image and then I was wondering "ok, then women need penetration so badly?" I had this thought for some time but as I looked at myself with the dildo, this initial thought faded away. I was wondering why lesbians need dildos? Is there something missing? I was thinking we use dildos because women don't have a real penis to penetrate. You know this sort of nonsense. Many women I've dated would cum without a dildo, orally or with my fingers, and then I said to myself that penetration is one more aspect of sex that can happen with a dildo, with fingers, with various things depending on what kind of sex you are in the mood of having."*



What unfolds here is a certain normative ambivalence which consists of using heterosexual dichotomies to express same-sex desire within the nexus of active and passive sexual roles, and at the same time asserting that these are uniform heteronormative meanings. The lesvia subjectivity described here corresponds to Boyce's notion of ambivalence amongst male-to-male sexualities in India (2006). It appears that Maria's lesvia subjectivity is less about "an either/or situation- an in/out of the heterosexual matrix- but rather a subjectivity achieved in ambiguous relation" (Boyce, 2006: 87) to heterosexual passive and active sexual roles. In other words, Maria's ambivalence on the active/passive sexual dichotomy works to re-enact it and undermine it by rendering it unnecessary to make sense of her *agorokoritso* gendered experience. For most *agorokoritsa* the adopting of passive sexual roles depends upon the trust and confidence their partner inspires. This also feeds into a notion of emotional untouchability that is seen as a sign of masculinity such as Kassandra's shielding of her vulnerabilities from the world (chapter seven).

Froso, an assertive woman in her mid-thirties, has been dating mostly men and doesn't identify as lesvia but she acknowledges the political importance of lesvia identity and will consciously identify as lesvia in particular social environments. Froso has been travelling all around the world for almost ten years. She saw herself as an empowered straight girl that dated men and was assertive enough to ask for what she wanted sexually. When living abroad, Froso enjoyed dressing up and going clubbing, she wore shirts with sexy necklines, high heels, and make up. By her early-thirties she felt more at ease with her body. Sex with men was no longer happening in "*silent mode*", she was becoming more and more assertive and able to get what she wanted. When we talked about orgasms she told me that most women prefer clitoral orgasm but she also wanted to achieve vaginal orgasm with men. Froso was clearly fond of men that looked like boys and less like "mature" men. She enjoyed non-penetrative sex, hand jobs, oral sex, watching porn and masturbating together, licking, kissing, all kinds of sexual actions of a more "*adolescent*" kind as she calls them. When she began dating women she describes rediscovering her body all over again. She was particularly happy with the fact that she could finally enjoy sex beyond penetration.

Froso: *“Female pleasure seemed so difficult, I mean technically, I didn’t know if I satisfied my partner at the time. I began wondering if she actually enjoyed it or was faking it, you know what boys usually wonder about women. Back then the girl I was dating enjoyed penetration, giving and receiving. We didn’t use dildos or vibrators but it was really amazing, she was doing it with her whole body, it wasn’t just a technical movement of her fingers. If I closed my eyes I could not figure out whether she had a penis or not. Oh God! It looked so hard the way she was doing it. Her hand was like an extension of her body that started at her shoulder to her elbow and then went down to her fingers. It was like a penis. An amazing thing! I’ve never met any girl that could do such a thing. You know she wasn’t just sitting on her side and using her hands, she was on top of me with her whole body, placed her hands on the outside of my vagina and fucked me like a man, you know how a man sits on top of you...”*

*I like the moment a woman cums; even if I have already had an orgasm, I get worked up again; penetration really turns me on especially when I penetrate a woman, I don’t know, I feel closer to her, I don’t know if it’s only bodily arousing, maybe it’s also emotional, it gives me a feeling of control over sex. Perhaps it’s also the feeling of the unexpected. Because I began dating women at an older age, everything felt so new and different, I still feel surprised when I touch my partner’s breasts, when I kiss them, lick them, caress them, it still surprises me.”*

The importance attributed to mutual orgasm through non-penetrative sex signifies a particular notion of female sexuality redefined as pleasure. Even though penetration is a source of sexual pleasure, it’s no longer necessary to achieve orgasm and this leaves space for non-genital foreplay, what Froso calls “*adolescent*” sexual play to denote an explorative approach to bodies and pleasure, one that doesn’t see penetration as an end in itself. Froso felt increasingly sexy once she began dating women, she describes feeling attracted to masculine women and enjoying both passive and active sexual roles. Losing sexual attraction for men is frequently mentioned by women that start dating women in their late twenties and mid-thirties. Froso described masturbating obsessively ever since she was seven and imagining that she’s the one who

is on top and penetrates a woman. She would later come back to this memory and see it as a source of her same-sex desire. She met Poka at the Pride parade and was attracted to her from the moment she saw her. She then launched into a detailed discussion of her sex life with Poka which asserts how active and passive sexual roles, penetration and imaginary morphologies establish embodied differences that play around control, tension, release of tension, and “letting go.”

*Froso: “We both enjoy similar things. I would say that we are both passive if there is any such thing. Poka gets sexually aroused very easily, I think if she were a man, she would constantly get a hard-on. She laughs at me when I tell her. But I like it, the fact that she’s so sexually active turns me on, I like it a lot...There are many things we explore together, we’ve been doing many things she hadn’t done before, I mean she wouldn’t let me touch her for some time and didn’t want me to penetrate her but then it happened a couple of times and she also enjoyed it. We like making up sex stories and in those stories Poka is a guy. It’s not only during sex, we live as if she has a penis, I find it very arousing, now it’s no longer something unusual. Sometimes when we have sex it’s as if I am with a man, only by the descriptions we get so turned on. But it’s not like being with a man, I see her as a third gender.*

*Other times we have sex without referring to it, you know like woman to woman and I feel that since this came up, she feels more at ease with her female body, with her genitals and lets me touch her without any prohibitions to penetration...This fantasy was hers, I saw how much it pleased her and I went along but I am also assertive I will approach her and ask to have sex with her penis...But it wasn’t simply a fantasy, sometimes it’s as if she actually has a penis and we...we make this choice. This has nothing to do with my previous relations with men, I am sure about this, I’ve told her, I don’t know whether it makes her feel insecure, whether she thinks that I remember my times with men but it’s really something between us that has nothing to do with gender or with my desire to shag a man.”*

The deconstruction of the normative “having” of the phallus (Butler: 1993) that bounds up the oppositional gender system serves to enact sexual fantasies of an heteronormative dynamic into which both Froso and Poka enter only to displace its propensity and enable “a provisional critical mimesis that transfigures and traverses masculine and feminine binaries” (Butler& Athanasiou, 2013: 50). Contingent, mutable, and critically imitative heterosexual fantasies become a source of pleasure whereby interstitial gendered positions- boys that are more like girls and girls that are more like boys- form gendered lesvia subjectivities along the playful lines of active and passive sexual roles. Again there is no clear-cut distinction between active and passive sexual roles, rather a gendered lesvia subjectivity achieved ambivalently along the lines of masculine and feminine dichotomies.

Similarly, Alikı’s discussion (chapter seven) on penetration, femininity, and the “fetishizing” of heteronormative sexual dynamics, reveals the ambivalent, yet deeply gendered, character of active and passive sexual roles where the rigidity of these positions in hetero-sex can become a source of pleasure (thus, assuming stable sexual roles in a non-heterosexual setting). Finally, when reflecting on her past heterosexual encounters and her present lesvia encounters, Froso took pride in acquiring sexual skills, which meant enjoying sex and exploring different sexual practices for their sensorial possibilities- fisting and squirting were amongst the things she wishes to explore in the near future. Discovering desire becomes a journey into pleasure that enacts and constitutes her assertive femininity. She describes exploring her body in a similar way she has travelled all over the world from Europe to Asia.

Poka, who identifies as *poustis*, has been dating mostly straight girls since her early adolescence. Most of her initial relationships took place behind closed doors (closeted/hidden relationships). Very often straight girls were simultaneously dating another guy. For many years she didn’t wish to be touched sexually, she didn’t take her shirt off, and felt that girls wanted her to fuck them. She enjoys watching gay porn and looking at the way boys move their dicks around and rub them against each other. She described the penis as an organ that enacts an external relation to the world- “*it’s out there, you can see it erected.*” With Froso she describes feeling more at ease with her body being touched and enjoying listening to her sexual stories with men. They both

get turned on by talking about Poka's penis, which was named "Manolis."

Poka: *"Very often I ask Froso to tell me sexual stories with men and this turns me on so much. I think I identify with them and imagine that I am fucking her like they did and we both get so aroused at the idea. But other times I identify with her, I think they are fucking me like they fucked her...I don't feel like a man or imagine being one, I just like the organ, I like imagining that Froso blows my dick and my cummings are all over the place, they are visible and sprayed over her breasts {...} The dildo feels fake, I've even cried about it, I don't know, you watch her taking blowjobs, grabbing it and putting it inside her pussy and you know it's fake, I am thinking "It's not mine! It's like an empty vessel inside her!" I feel better if we just talk about it like say I ask her to grab my dick."*

Poka's thought of herself as *poustis* is enacted within the heteronormative sexual dynamic in which she engages with Froso. The corporeal experience of sex augments Poka's gendered sense of being a gender non-conforming lesvia that feels like a deficient boy. Poka exists at the border of the *agorokoritso* and the boy-looking lesvia narrative since she sees herself as a boy-looking lesvia with opposite-gender attraction. She thinks of herself as a deficient boy because of the way she has sex with women. Sexual touchability is a matter of feeling at ease with herself and her partner. Sex becomes an endless play between bodies and their meanings. In addition, the contingent character of her penis "Manolis", born within language, discloses the fictive character of heterosexuality altogether. Bodies and their sensibilities are constantly rediscovered, Poka touches Froso's body for the first time, letting go of preconceived meanings, she moves as if she doesn't know what each body part means, what sex means for that matter. For a lesvia that combines elements from both *agorokoritso* and boy-looking narratives, it's no longer solely about active and passive sexual roles, it's about imaginary games, teasing the body's image, moving it beside another body. And finally she reconfigures the shame attached to "deviant" women- "*girl-mistake*"- that doesn't fit within normative femininity into the image of a deficient teenage boy who takes pleasure out of obsessional masturbation (and the waste of his sperm).

Poka: *“I think I relate kavla (sexual arousal) with shame, I like it when they humiliate me, you know tell me that I have a small dick and can’t fuck her properly or finish before she cums {...} I feel like that sort of kid that wastes its sperm, nobody wants him and he masturbates obsessively and feels ashamed about his body, a lonely, unwanted creature of undefinable sexuality. I’ve never got over these feelings of shame and devaluation in sex...because you know, if sex is like a game and the child is connected with sexual immaturity, I don’t want to be sexually immature with Froso.*

*Other times during sex I feel like a small kid. As if it’s a woman with a small kid, I am the small kid that doesn’t know how to fuck very well, sex is more like a game, a tender caress. I think girls like it when sex is more innocent, it seems enchanting to maintain a childishness at sex, more like a small animal, it’s not like a porn film constantly changing sex positions, it’s a lot about touching, rubbing in a sort of teasing manner, it’s like a game that I start playing and every time is like the first one, as if body parts don’t mean anything, particular body movements don’t mean something. Like a kid that starts and doesn’t know when and how.*

*When I am having sex with Froso I feel like a small animal and less human, I have rarely felt like a woman in sex. Most of the times I feel like a boy in puberty, this feeling is more intense at sex. But when my sexual partner actually makes me trust her I may feel like a girl after sex like I imagine most women feel after sex, desired and carefree, I feel the centre of attention after I cum {...} I remember my relation with Dimitra she liked me as a girl, made me feel wanted and that it was possible to fuck as a girl, to take my clothes off, let her do things on my body. I felt that my body was accepted how it was and this relaxed me a lot.*

*Penetration is not an easy thing for me, I can’t finish with it and sometimes it can be painful but lately I think that I want to be fucked and enjoy it (laughs).”*

Poka’s self-narrative underlines the gradual development of a non-conforming gender identity which is less rigidly defined by active and passive sexual roles. It also

supports fluid sexual roles, supported by communication, trust and pleasure rather than static sexual roles. My general impression was that lesvia as sexual subjectivity entails assuming an active sexual role, namely the desired qualities of a lesvia lover focus on pleasing another woman. Acceptance of gendered subjectivity as both woman and lesvia most commonly falls back to desired sexual qualities, which essentially depend on heterosexual binary roles that the *agorokoritso* and boy-looking lesvia seem to counter. Sexual receptivity, namely taking on a passive sexual role, was often mentioned as what makes a good lesvia lover, a lover who is primarily a “pleaser” of her partner’s desires (“being good at being lesvia”). This challenges the deterministic link between active sexual roles and masculine-looking, acting, and feeling lesvies.

Nelli, about whom I have already spoken, in her early fifties has been separated for over ten years from her lesvia partner with whom she has a child. Nelli describes being sexually reserved until her mid-twenties, partly due to the fact that she had never heard about homosexuality and partly because she felt blocked to express any kind of sexual desire for fear of rejection. She told me she always felt comfortable and enjoyed socializing with women, yet she felt there was no space to express her same-sex desire. During her university years she had a crush on another girl at the music school she attended who turned out to be a lesvia, yet Nelli regretfully told me that she didn’t go with her feelings and never told her anything.

While at university she got involved in LGBT activist groups. As with many women in the similar age group who did not like going at lesbian bars, gay activist groups were the only place to meet and flirt women. Nelli wrote the lesvia column of a gay magazine (the magazine of EOK) and met her life-long partner through the readers’ letters section. Nelli likes boy-looking lesvies that move in-between genders either behaviourally or physically - “*the ones you cannot figure out whether they are boys or girls.*” When talking about sex, Nelli tells me how much she enjoys anal sex whereas vaginal sex was something she had to work on throughout time. After her break-up she was more relaxed and open to experiment with vaginal sex. However, she notices that vaginal sex and penetration make her more emotionally open and vulnerable.

Nelli: *“We didn’t use dildos, mostly one or two fingers. I was more available for penetration; she didn’t really want any penetration. I liked anal penetration...because vaginal penetration was harder {...}*

*After the break up I had more sex, more vaginal sex and penetrative sex. I opened up sexually and suffered. It was something new to me, it meant many things, so I could not withhold myself from falling in love. I opened up more emotionally with vaginal sex. I met a woman I really likes, we hooked up for a couple of days. She’s the only one I let penetrate me that much and I ended up in love with her. The sex was very intense and I liked her a lot but she didn’t feel the same way... and it hurt me a lot, these were truly intense and unprecedented sexual experiences {...}*

*I was triggered emotionally more through penetration and this frustrated me {...} I went into this journey of exploring my vagina and I could not handle it very well, perhaps this was also {...} I don’t know, this part of sex (meaning: penetration) connects me a lot. I can’t, I can’t, all my defences tumble and I cannot easily maintain distance, sadly so {...} At some point my vagina was more important than my anus. Generally, I was not on good terms with my vagina, penetration was difficult and I wanted to reconcile myself with my vagina, I hadn’t had a lot of vaginal sex. I wanted to reach the point where I could own it and take enough pleasure out of it. When I began having more penetrative vaginal sex, I freaked out, it was very intense, I would cum so hard, not only with my vagina but also my clitoris, Anyway, well it took me a lot of time to unravel the potentialities of my sexuality.*

*I think that if you have an active sexual role you can remain uninvolved emotionally, meaning that you do not let go, you don’t open up in order to maintain control {...} but with vaginal penetration, vaginal sex, once you open yourself, it feels as if it controls you more, you get involved more emotionally...”*

In Nelli’s narrative, letting go or withholding from vaginal penetration becomes the site of her gendered and sexual subjectivity as both woman and lesvia. Sex is an explorative journey into the possibilities of penetration, both vaginal and/or anal. In accordance to Maria’s narrative, the dildo is again connected to “rough” sex. Nelli



preferred fingers to dildos- *“there’s nothing like the hand!”* The experience of sex shifts in Nelli’s lifetime and particular body parts obtain different meanings whereas penetration is linked to emotional availability/touchability, that is, opening the vagina and/or the anus to being penetrated entails feeling vulnerable.

Naoko, about whom I have already written, the young boy-looking lesvia, who fancies other boy-looking girls with short hair and dynamic personalities but dates mostly feminine straight girls, clearly divides sexual arousal (kavla) from emotional arousal, which is like *“a click in your brain that requires more things than sex.”* She describes sex as an urge taking over the brain that makes everything spontaneous and exciting: *“Emotions are so fast and arbitrary I cannot control them.”* Naoko grew up in the countryside, she passed as a boy, her parents addressed her in the male gender, she enjoyed climbing, running fast, and taking part in various boy group activities. Naoko identifies as lesvia but adheres to a boy-to-boy narrative of desire.

Repeatedly she tells me that she’s never done something with a boy-looking girl because only feminine girls keep hitting on her- it’s harder to find another boy-looking lesvia given the masculine/feminine gendered sexual scheme that formulates lesvia dating in a subtle way. Naoko sees herself as sexually versatile, she enjoys being fucked, and tells me that she takes pleasure out of pleasing another girl. She describes feeling less confident in long- term flirting and instead prefers making out and sleeping with girls she meets parties like a more promiscuous kind of lesvia.

Naoko: *“I like exploring every possibility in sex, experimenting with different things, for example I like the 69 position because I get the chance to lick her and she also licks me at the same time. I also love going down to a girl, I get turned on with her pleasure...I always cum with my clitoris, I’ve never had a vaginal orgasm, it can turn me on but if it hurts me I don’t want her to continue. There have been times that I’ve felt really ok with it, that’s when I’d grab her and tell her «now, you are going to fuck me because I’m horny but I am not grabbing you to fuck you, I want you to fuck me» Being top behaviourally, meaning the way you act in bed, but vers with your body, and enjoying penetration.*

*Straight girls know good sex, they know how to fuck with passion, you can fuck from the floor to the wall. I don't know if the fact that they have sex with men has to do with this, they aren't afraid of pain or something, I don't know. I hadn't had sex with a lesvia for a long time. For me lesvies tend to be very reserved at sex."*

Naoko's preference for straight girls feeds into the narrative of the enchanting masculine lesvia that seduces a feminine straight girl, yet it also echoes the older generation's sexual narrative in which the lesbian and straight world weren't divided. In addition, the active sexual role is still maintained within an active/passive power dynamic in terms of sexual behaviour, that is, the one who dictates and imposes the terms of pleasure is top even if she assumes momentarily a sexually passive role by receiving penetration.

Top/bottom sexual terminology is employed by lesvies of the younger generation. In this context, being top means guiding and instructing on what you want the other person to do on your body. Rena, a butch-identifying lesvia, who doesn't desire any penetration, describes how assuming a passive sexual role, which for her means letting the other do things to her body (for instance licking her pussy for hours), does not necessarily mean becoming bottom: "*if I grab her by the hair and ask her to go down on me and lick my pussy, that is a passive sexual position, yet this isn't bottom, it's active.*" Active and passive sexual roles involve being (or not being) sexually receptive but also translate into sexual power dynamics, namely who controls the tension, orientates and dictates the other's sexual activity.

The critical questions voiced about *agorokoritso* and boy-looking women who identify as poustides demonstrate a gendered sexual subjectivity that is formed ambivalently against active and passive sexual roles. Poka's, Maria's, Naoko's, and Nelli's narratives contemplate the meanings of penetration to reveal the contingency of active and passive sexual roles. For feminine-questioning lesvies like Froso, penetration becomes the practice through which she actively reclaims her femininity and her right to enjoy "letting go" without relinquishing her position as an object of desire (Nestle, 1987: 122-127; Bersani: 2009). Gender non-conforming and feminine-questioning lesvies find stimulation through "fetishizing" heterosexual dynamics and playing around with

the meanings of active and passive sexual positions and their affective registers of control and loss of control (letting go). In this process they also re-signify phallic morphologies (such as the penis).

## 8.4 Concluding remarks

The fact that gender non-conforming lesbians talk about their bodily experiences is important (Spronk, 2014: 18). It enables an understanding of the relations between gender and sexuality, and sheds light on how the reconfiguration of lesbia identity as gender non-conformity for the younger generation of women is registered by the effects of the body (Spronk, 2014: 18). As a conclusion I will present some thoughts regarding sexual practices with the aim of showing how women's narratives build upon the hetero-gendered activity/passivity nexus around which they play and essentially question its social meanings.

As I've already mentioned the manner in which Maria discusses paying attention to neglected, and conventionally desexualized, body-parts is indicative of a lesbian re-discovery of body parts and their sensualities as depicted in Monique Wittig's novel "the Lesbian body" (1973). As a lesbia with an *agorokoritso* retrospective narrative Maria perceives sexual activity as the act of giving pleasure to another woman but also being in control of her own body during sex. However, *agorokoritsa* like Maria and Naoko in Cvetkovich words (1998), "take responsibility for their partner's sexual pleasure could, in their eagerness to attend in another's desires, as easily be considered feminine as masculine" (Cvetkovich, 1998: 159). Yet Maria interprets sexual activity as a sign of her masculinity, it confirms her *agorokoritso* experience and provides her a framework to reflect on the meanings of penetration. Penetration can be done in different ways (fingers, dildos) depending on her partner's mood, it's just a sex act among others, which Maria places in a continuum from rough to gentle sex.

Froso, the only feminine-questioning woman presented here, stresses the power of penetration and the labor of receptivity (Nestle: 1987). Along with Aliko (see chapter seven) she debunks passivity from its stigmatization. Froso strives to make herself open to the pleasures of penetration. By casting the power to receive sexual pleasure as desirable she challenges constructions of getting fucked as negative or linked to trauma. Froso, like Aliko, consciously plays around heterosexual power dynamics by restaging sex stories from her straight past with her partner, Poka. These verbalised fantasies become a source of stimulation for both. Like Aliko, Froso ends up shifting the language

of sexual power which links giving up power to a stigmatized version of passivity. Achieving orgasm through penetration is seen as an empowering journey to owning desire and enjoying vaginal and clitoral orgasm. She describes closing her eyes while being penetrated and feeling the imaginary sexual organs of her partner (for the imaginary lesbian phallus see Butler: 1993). In so doing, she breaks with any simple relation between active/passive roles, penetration/being penetrated (Cvetkovich, 2003: 49- 82).

As suggested by Cvetkovich (2003; 1998), different kinds of penetration- oral, anal, dildo, fingers, fisting- mean different things, a complexity often effaced within phallogocentric culture that see penises doing the penetrating and vaginas as the only ones penetrated (Cvetkovich, 2003: 49-82). Nelli stresses the pleasure of anal penetration and its stigmatization within the lesbian community. Anal sex was discussed by women as a less common, yet very intense, source of pleasure. For the older generation of lesbians penetration with dildos was a less known sexual practice. For instance, Ninetta in one of our discussions where she talks about her sexual experiences tells me: *“we never used dildos (Ninetta uses the term “olisbos”, instead of dildos, which in ancient Greek refers to an artificial penis), one time I suggested it and she said that I am bringing the ghost of a man because I have phallic fantasies but we weren’t free to indulge into pleasure...we had so many things in our heads holding us back, we couldn’t be free...and her reaction felt like a rejection.”* Elsa also notices intergenerational differences on sexual practices: *“the new generation uses dildos as an accessory, in my time it wasn’t like this, if you wanted to use it you were anxious how your partner would react.”*

Nelli uses the heterosexual active/passive sexual scheme along the lines of physical and emotional transparency (touchability) to talk about her emotional vulnerability which she links to being penetrated. Nelli’s narrative hints that making herself open is a physical process of allowing herself to be penetrated and in so doing her inner world of not just her body, but also that of her mind and feelings, opens up. Openness is linked to emotional vulnerability, which is connected to the body and being penetrated. However, Nelli’s sexual narrative is that of an *agorokoritso* of the older generation, which, when compared to Maria’s, seems very different in that her

*agorokoritso* experience doesn't lead to identifying sexual activity with masculinity but with being lesvia.

Regarding Poka's narrative, I find that it resonates with Ann Cvetkovich (2003) reflection on butch untouchability, where showing vulnerability is not so much a sign of disempowerment but a privilege that is often unavailable and harder to achieve. Poka connects touch with trust and being with a sexual partner that makes her feel good with her body as a woman. Poka's physical untouchability, her difficulty to display emotion openly and "*let people see through her*", as she tells me, has to do with the social stigma of being a "*girl-mistake*", "*a wrong-girl*." Public vulnerability is more like a threat to her safety and dignity- "*men's gazes feel like knives on my body*." Interestingly enough, Poka's untouchability opens her relation of the sexual to post-human/ other-worldly experiences. In her narrative, Poka blends the sexuality of teenage, yet defective, boys with animals/other-worldly creatures. Poka explores non-human ways of approaching sexual touch and in this process sex becomes an "otherworldly" experience where bodies are re-made and re-discovered in every physical contact.

Naoko reconceives sexual activity less as a physical state, that is, an act of penetration, and more as a power game of domination and submission. Dictating the terms of the sex act by giving instructions to her partner is seen as a sign of being in control. In Naoko's narrative, penetration doesn't signify feminization, being able to enjoy "getting fucked" (Cvetkovich, 2003: 58) is really a matter of enjoying the limits of active and passive sexual roles, crossing from one side to the other and back again. Straight women are seen as more "sexually assertive" yet this has to do with the fact that they can have sex without being subjected to social trauma to which politicized lesbians have been exposed.

To conclude, becoming lesvia of any kind, whether gender non-conforming or feminine-questioning, entails working through the hetero-gendered passive/active sexual scheme to make sense of lesvia sexuality. The above discussions on sex and sexual practices illustrate how lesvia identity is staged as opposite-gender attraction in the activity/passivity nexus (activity/masculinity- femininity/ passivity). This discourse also reflects back to the older generation's narrative of homoeroticism where occupying the same-sex desiring subject position meant identifying sexual desire for women as "*a desire to do things*" to other women's bodies, which lapsed back into the heterosexual

trptych desire for women- male sexual activity- masculine lesvia (in other words, there was the world of active lesvies and the world of passive straights). This determinist link is no longer played out by the younger generation of lesvies who politicize their sexuality and perceive it primarily through the lens of the Greek gender scheme.

The topic of sexual practice and desire amongst younger lesvies denotes the proliferating and shifting subject positions that bring along heterosexual roles, fantasies, and bodily sensations to establish a sense of sexual and embodied difference serving pleasure. Gender non-conforming lesvies of the younger generation enjoy penetration without linking it to feminization, and see their sexual passivity as part of pleasing their partners. The idea of receiving pleasure through oral sex or any kind of penetration is not irreconcilable to the gendered lesvia subjectivities of agorokoritsa and boy-looking lesvies. There is no rigidity of active and passive sexual positions on the site of erotic play; when stable sexual positions are played out between a couple (in a butch/femme sexual scheme), they are part of a conscious “fetishization” of heterosexual power dynamics and roles achieved from a position of critical distance to heterosexuality.

In this chapter, I have tried to show that sexual practices play a fundamental part in creating sexual and gendered subjectivities and further complicate the relation between sexuality and gender as categories of meaning. Sex is essentially a sensorial site whereby lesvies feel lesvies (as a sexual identity) and find their gendered selves by ambivalently placing themselves within the hetero-gendered active/passive sexual scheme. Sexual practices become the field where their social meanings, such as the devaluation of penetration, are rearticulated and reworked. In the last chapter, I will explore lesvia (and queer feminist) subjectivity as collective identity crafted by and contested within the “community.”

## CHAPTER NINE

### Making lesvia and queer feminist space in Athens: Classed inclusions/exclusions

#### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter considers lesvia collective life and sociality, and examines queer and lesvia spaces as sites where class, sexuality, and gender intersect and produce ambiguities and contradictions on lesvia participation and membership. Following the ways I have discussed lesvia subjectivity in the previous chapters and in line with Engebretsen (2008) I suggest that lesvia consists “a trope that encompasses personal subjectivities, social meanings, and actions together into specific lesvia and queer spaces” (Engebretsen, 2014: 228). The spaces I will be discussing are physical places where women met and formed social relations but are also infused with classed dynamics and idealizations on what it means to be lesvia and what it means to be queer.

To put it otherwise, scene spaces, where lesvies and non-normative sexualities can be legitimately visible, act as “sites for the maintenance and reproduction of power relations” (Scraton& Watson, 1998: 123 quoted in Skeggs, 1999: 213); they do not act only “as stages for the recognition of “new” lifestyle options” (Scraton& Watson, 1998: 123 quoted in Skeggs, 1999: 213) . In this context, I look at scene spaces, particularly lesbian bars, Beaver, and emergent queer activist spaces as classed spaces, which have claims and cultural entitlements upon them. My attempt to reconceive lesvia and queer spaces as classed spaces is based on the narratives of activist lesvies of the older and younger generation about lesbian bars, Beaver, and queer activist spaces. I followed the development of Beaver, went to queer activist spaces, and hung out at lesbian bars for around two years, talking with various lesvies regarding collective membership and belonging. I spoke with lesvies of middle- class and working- class background who were involved one or another into lesbian feminist activism. However, the voices of working- class lesvies for whom lesbian bars consist the primary space where they socialize and experience their sexuality are not recorded.



The notion of “imagined communities” developed by Benedict Anderson (1983) has been widely employed for the understanding of queer marginalised communities (Engebretsen, 2014: 228). In line with this notion of “imagined communities”, Green suggests that “in order to “imagine”, “use” or “assert” boundaries, an unquestioned acceptance of an authentic common identity is needed, a closed box containing commonalities out of a lump of heterogeneous reality” (Green, 1997: 130). Valentine highlights community “as an achievement and considers how it fails to account for all its imagined members” (Valentine, 2007: 73). Since community is an unattainable ideal, lesvia spaces can only be explored as “fragile” endeavours to come together, make political claims, exchange feelings, form friendships and bonds. Thus, I explore lesvia spatiality as a multiplicity of experiences, feelings and places, not necessarily directly linked to each other, which come together through the politicization of the lesvia and queer category, and the subsequent organized community that emerges (Engebretsen, 2008: 262).

The chapter is divided into four sections: the first section considers past and present narratives of middle- class women about lesbian bars. I consider the creation of classed boundaries that produce feelings of exclusion and states of unbelonging at lesbian bars. Through the narratives of middle- class activist lesbies of the older generation, ethnographic snapshots from my visits at bars, as well as the narratives of younger queer lesbies, I outline the overarching classed qualities of lesvia spatiality. More specifically, I consider the ongoing split between politicized lesbies and lesbies of the bars as an “othering” process played around the notion of middle-class respectability/ working-class vulgarity. For middle class lesbies lesbian bars become exoticized spaces. A similar division is re-enacted by the younger generation of queer feminists played out on the notion of queer politicization and the lack of it. I am concerned to talk about the relationship between class and sexuality in the construction of the lesvia community in order to shed more light on how and when certain spaces, flirting practices and gender performatives are granted more validity than others. By looking at past and present narratives about lesbian bars and about working-class, plebeian women who hang out there, I seek to present the intersections between class, generation, and lesvia spatiality. The second section presents ethnographic narratives from one particularly significant lesvia space: Beaver. I discuss women’s engagements

with the space and I consider the inter-class dimensions of *parea* sociality enabled at Beaver. In particular, food and drinking commensality, which comprises an integral part of *parea* sociality, cultivates an egalitarian ethos and enables an illusionary transcendence of class differences. Beaver as a contact zone between differently classed women brings together different meanings of community building. In this respect, I query the trope of community beyond *lesvia* identity and activism and explore spatiality and sociality beyond meetings, demonstrations and the rhetoric of human rights and visibility. The discussion shows that community building involves informal get-togethers, small talk, and “having fun”, as much as organized forms of social activism. Beaver is more than a place of contact for women of different class backgrounds and sexualities. It’s a mediating cultural space located in between lesbian bars and queer spaces, a space where women reflect and work through cultural issues pertaining to lesbian bars and queer spaces.

The third section looks at queer activist spaces, parties and social gatherings as classed spaces ethnographically recorded from the perspective of activist cis and trans *lesvies*, some of a working class background. Drawing from women’s narratives about queer spaces, and ethnographic snapshots from my fieldnotes, I discuss how and why we need to consider the classed elements of queer activist spaces as opposed to being solely seen as non-normative sexual spaces. This relates to the preceding chapter’s (chapter four on queer feminist politics) discussion that demonstrate queer as “an intersectional indexer of wide-ranging, cross-cutting affiliations and social distinctions, and extending beyond an exclusively sexual domain” (Engebretsen, 2008: 230). Yet queer spaces as non-straight spaces strive to set clear-cut boundaries against the male anarchist entitlements made upon them. The discussion shows that negotiations about *lesvia* identity and queer community seems to fundamentally hinge on frameworks of queer sophistication and elitism, as described by Binnie (2004), which in many ways constitute the classed character of queer feminist spaces.

What, then, is community? And how does class intersect with *lesvia* and queer spaces? I argued in the chapters on generational sexual narratives (chapter six), gendered notions of *lesvia* subjectivity (chapter seven), and identity battles in the queer feminist and *lesvia* scene (chapter five), that feeling different with regards to experiencing same-sex attraction and enacting the “wrong” gender formulated the

consciousness that in the long run drove women towards lesvia sociality and probably identity and activism.

However, as I will be discussing, middle- classed habitus as cultural authority informs the way women experience spaces as different from the norm and as fraught with power relations. Class differences are rarely directly addressed as such by women, yet they inform women's perception of cultural claims made upon these spaces. For this reason, this chapter looks at the classed underpinnings of lesvia collective life and sociality in order to develop a more nuanced definition of lesvia community. Instead of assuming that class is irrelevant to collective lesvia life, I enquire into class as an intersectional cultural force that forms spaces and boundaries in lesvia collective life and sociality. The discussion shows that differently classed lesbies inhabit space and build their politicized lesvia identity by identifying with, and disidentifying from, classed spaces. The complexity of class distinctions, which take the form of cultural authority, not only confirms the fragile sense of community and fraught process of community-building, but also sheds light on the uneven distribution of qualities within the community.

## 9.2 The significance of class in lesbian bars from the 1980s until today

*“It was kind of vulgar, this sort of behavior in bars”*

I have frequently mentioned the ongoing division between politicized lesbians and lesbians of the bars. This is also played out generationally between same-sex desiring women who sprang out of separatist feminism and the international lesbian community of Eressos and younger queer feminist women affiliated to anarchism who are mobile, self-reflexive, and ambivalent regarding their gender identity. These boundaries are played out in scene spaces, particularly lesbian bars and queer spaces with class differences forming a powerful cultural barrier and shaping the character of these spaces. The importance of class in forging these boundaries gets lost in the anthropological literature (Yannakopoulos & Yannitsiotis: 2010, Kantsa: 2010a; 2010b; Yannakopoulos: 2011; Canakis & Kantsa & Yannakopoulos: 2010) under the rubric of social oppression and widespread homophobia (which makes invisible the classed elements of scene spaces).

Given the pervasive heterosexualised character of everyday space in Athens (streets, workplace, neighborhoods) lesbian bars and spaces where one can feel at home as a lesbia and/or a non-normative sexuality are represented as spaces with subversive potential that create new possibilities for Athenian urban life (Riedel: 2010; Yannakopoulos & Yannitsiotis: 2010) As much as this is true, it's equally important “to recognise the (classed) tension in negotiating social spaces, rather than the “subversion” of the values which it holds” (Taylor, 2007: 14-15).

Class consists an important gap in the study of sexuality, yet recently, there has been an unprecedented attention to the relation between class and sexuality (Skeggs: 2001; Southerton: 2002; Taylor: 2007). My approach of scene spaces as classed spaces where particular exclusions and (dis)identifications are played out draws from Bourdieu's theory of classed habitus (1984). In Bourdieu's theory (1984), “habitus is seen as a three-dimensional space, defined by the volume of human capital, composition of capital and change over time” (Taylor, 2007: 15). It can be also described as a “feeling for the game in which the embodied self is always marked by his/her starting point

(Johnson and Lawle, 2005: no page, 3.4 also quoted in Taylor, 2007: 15), namely you cannot hide from your inherited classed background. In this direction, Taylor while reflecting on Bourdieu's habitus suggests that it is "generative of distinctive social practices or dispositions, which result from social conditioning related to one's position in social space" (Taylor, 2007: 15). In this context, class becomes a quality that attaches itself to individuals, a sticky sign of some sort (Ahmed: 2004), which is rendered apparent "in the everyday interactions, which social actors in social space engage in" (Taylor, 2007: 15).

Mobilities within and through social space, and the encompassing aspects of class and sexuality that intersect in important ways, generate "sympathies and antipathies, affections and aversions, tastes and distastes, namely particular forms of non/compatibility and dis/ tastes" (Bourdieu, 2000: 150 in Taylor, 2007: 29). In her study on working class lesbian life in the UK Taylor (2007) suggests that "having the "right" cultural and social capitals- which, when legitimated turns into "symbolic capital", a resource which working-class lesbians "lack"- produces opportunities and advantages across various social spaces" (Taylor, 2007: 2). In addition, the various regulations, which operate within scene spaces and form classed entitlements, also function on an embodied level (Taylor: 2007). In the lesvia and queer feminist scene, looking equates with being, how one looks equates with who one is and thus, class is also something "written on the body"- clothes, behaviors, body postures.

Drawing from Bourdieu's theory of classed habitus (Bourdieu: 1984), I approach class as cultural capital producing tastes/distastes and less as economic capital- I use the word "plebeian" interchangeably with working-class lesbians to denote their cultural taste. In the last eight years, and as a result of the prevalent precariousness of everyday life in Greece ("living with austerity"), the middle-class has been collapsing as a financially viable class. Middle-class women earn less than (or exactly the same as) working-class women, yet they still maintain their cultural capital or a network of kin relatives that still earn enough money to support financially other family members. Amongst middle-class activist lesbians, symbolic capital (legitimated cultural capital) is accumulated by the following factors: higher education studies, the class background of one's family, mobility- travelling and/or living abroad- and dis-identification from the lesbian bar culture which is identified with working-class, plebeian lesbians.

In the early 2000s, the widespread politicization of same-sex sexuality marked a turning point from the era of lesbian bars and informal gatherings (1980s- 1990s) to organized forms of social activism. Symbolic capital now stems from one's politicization and familiarity with European feminism and identity politics. This kind of politicization entails the generation of self-consciously created communities, where the claiming of lesvia identity is spatialized. Scene spaces- like women-only parties and the lesbian group's (LOA) monthly social gatherings at the Purple House- aren't just leisurely spaces for consumption, but spaces where the claiming of lesvia identity is enacted- spaces meant to be safe from the male gaze of heterosexual spaces (Taylor, 2007: 139).

The lesvia scene consists of two groups: there is a group of women whose identity takes shape and form through activism, the politicization of personal experiences, and claims of recognition and visibility, and a group of women whose identity is primarily lived at lesbian bars. The tension between middle- class lesvias and working-class, plebeian lesvias runs back to the emergence of the (lesbian) feminist movement (see chapter three). In the 1980s-1990s, same-sex desiring women who produced lesbian feminist discourse were initially affiliated with the feminist movement (*Lavris*) and later with homosexual groups (EOK); they maintained a marginal position in both the feminist and homosexual scene.

However, lesbian bars have existed ever since the 1980s- "*these dark and smoky places.*" Ninetta once told me that "*during the 1980s only working-class women dared to be out*", meaning being visibly lesbian. Lesbian bars were frequented by all kinds of women- straights or lesbians- since identities mattered less, that is, identities were less formulated as they are in the present. Below is an excerpt from *Dalika* published at 2012 which presents stories from lesbian bars in the late 1980s and 1990s.

**Porta:** In 1997 where the old bar "different" used to be, opens Porta. Fine decoration, nice environment, loud music, Greek and foreign. Pilgrimage from all kinds of women, beautiful, young, old, masculine, and non-masculine. Plebeian (laikes) and stylish, they would give everything to catch a glimpse of the beautiful brunette they kept their eyes on the entire night.

A friend of mine in the parea gets drunk and wants to have sex with her ex-girlfriend, we restrain her from doing it. During the Carnival season, I am dressed like a nun and lurk around a very handsome butch to my great failure. A space with a lot of energy and for women with hard nerves.

**Odysseia:** On the first floor, rhythmic lights, crowdedness, a woman dances alone, she's lost in the music, an image that always comes in mind every time I think of Odysseia. Quarrels for the eyes of a plain looking woman, remarks from the bar owner to two women who were all over each other, almost having sex at the back of the bar. Monday morning discussions with your parea:

-But are bars really places where you can meet women for a relationship?

I will quit them.

- Do we have other places I don't know about? Where will you meet lesbians then?

And all of us again on a Friday night there in search of our other half.

**Woman's perfume:** At Exarchia, impressive name and even more impressive women. There I've had my epic night of drunkenness! A large parea, a friend of ours is dancing on top of the bar, she dances *tsifteteli* (a form of belly dance) with the confidence and allure of a straight woman. A *dalika* of the old type approaches us and asks the woman sitting next to me:

-Is the girl with you?

-Yeah, something going on?

-No, just asking.

The woman next to me then tells me:

- We avoided her disappointment and an ongoing conflict, you can't bring straight women in bars, they are real troublemakers!

**Tavania:** After leaving the bars in central Athens we continued our night to Pireas, at Tavania. We usually went already drunk and I have a pretty blurry

memory of the bar. Darkness, unknown faces, women you quickly got to know through drinking. A momentary encounter of different worlds, yet very similar- *lesvies of Athens/lesvies of Pireas* (my addition). Our meeting point at bars is our love for women.

**Telia kai pavla**: We returned from our summer vacations at Eressos. Our first night out in Athens with a *parea* of women from Eressos. We are trying to extend the feeling of being on vacation, to extend the feeling that we are still there, at Eressos, where our only point of reference isn't the bars. Our destination: Telia & Pavla at Alexandras high-street. Overcrowded, women outdoors and indoors. Women dancing with their hands lifted on the air as if they were calling for the rain spirit to comfort and refresh them to carry on with the ceremonial Saturday night out. Echoing music with *vlachotsiftetelia* but who cares, we are here for other reasons.

**Almaz**: The bar gathers mostly young women. Girls dressed to kill and in the latest fashion trends show up every Friday and Saturday along with a bunch of people at Gazi. Loud music, intense colours. I overhear the conversation next to me:

- I enjoy the company of men, same with straight people, I don't like only gay bars, today I just happened to come here.

- I agree. I don't like ghettos or dalikes...

Different times, different mores and customs.

*Dalika* (2012, issue 6): 14-17

Contrary to contemporary queer feminist activist spaces that tend to be youth-dominated, lesbian bars have always included women of different ages and generations. In the 1980s and 1990s, the division between lesbian and straight worlds was loose, if not to say, nonexistent. Straight girls hung out at lesbian bars, causing a fuss amongst *lesvies*, with their enchanting looks and their seductive *tsiftiteli*. Drinking and dancing comprise the means for establishing strong emotional partnerships amongst women. By



drinking, women also flirt, laugh, relax, and touch each other on the dancefloor. The above excerpt from *Dalika* also shows women's reticence for lesbian bars as places that are not suitable for establishing long-term and viable relationships. There is a latent fear to being linked to these spaces, women feel the need to state that they happened to find themselves there. The lack of boundaries between straights and lesbians is seen as an asset- all kinds of women hang out in these spaces- and as an adversity, women are reluctant to call themselves the type of woman that hangs out at lesbian bars.

The lived and emotive experience of lesbian lifestyle in the 1980s includes *skyladika*<sup>21</sup> and *vlachotsiftetelia*<sup>22</sup> (or else *kapsourotragouda*<sup>23</sup>), which fall under the rubric of the culture of *kapsoura*.<sup>24</sup> The classed aspects of *kapsoura* (defined by Kirtsoglou (2003) as "infatuation with a woman") and the habitus it enacts, namely *kerasma* (treating another woman a drink), excessive drinking, dancing, and loss of emotional and physical control, is discussed with great ambivalence. Women dance with their hands open, longing for the rain, longing for an open horizon beyond the bars; at the same time, women indulge in sex and *fasoma* (intense sexual foreplay). Women, who desire long-term relationships, complain about the promiscuity of lesbian bars. What needs to be noted is that female promiscuity is classed in that it is usually politicized middle-class lesbies who strive to prove their respectability against disreputable and promiscuous women.

In addition, appearance was less regulated, masculine women- *dalikes*- and women with mannish attitudes were recognized as "looking like lesbies" but all kinds of women went there to meet and flirt. Apart from physical appearance, recognition was also enacted by (sexual) gossiping amongst groups of friends - "which lesvia knew who." It seems that the erotic practices of women who hang out at lesbian bars fall upon the heterosexual scheme of man/woman in terms of gender roles and behaviors. Flirting practices involved *kamaki* (hardpan), ethnographically described by Zinovieff "as the

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<sup>21</sup> *Skyladiko* is a decadent form of *laikó*, which derives from the Greek word for dog- σκύλος, *skilos*- meaning *doggish* or *doghouse*.

<sup>22</sup> *Vlaxotsiftetelia* means belly dance of *vlaxiki*, namely provincial, origin.

<sup>23</sup> *Kapsourotragouda* (*songs for kapsoura*) produce moments of ritualized *merakloma*, that is, moments governed by drunkenness, loss of control, pleasure, dancing, and release of sensuality.

<sup>24</sup> In the Greek cultural context, *kapsoura* is not the same like *erotas* (sexual love), *kapsoura* enters the scene of *erotas* once something is not working as it should, or when something is going terribly wrong. *Kapsoura* is accompanied by feelings of rejection, betrayal, cheating, uncertainty, anguish. *Kapsoura* is like a tidal wave that blinds you with its intensity, a mixture of passion, despair, *kavla* (sexual arousal), and resentment.

actions depicted by a Greek man who pursues a (usually foreign) woman with the sole purpose of having sex” (Zinovieff, 1991: 203 also quoted in Kirtsoglou, 2003: 54). *Kapsoura* consists an emotional state of passion, despair, and *kavla* (sexual arousal). Indulging into periods of *kapsoura* entails excessive drinking, smoking, longing for the other, dancing and perhaps going to *bouzoukia*<sup>25</sup> with friends. To permit oneself to be tormented in states of *kapsoura* is proof of one’s deep love, which involves playing with fire and taking pride in bearing the pain of love; it also entails a particular way of negotiating boundaries and protecting the self. Kirtsoglou situates *kapsoura* at the site of agonistic masculinity {also employed by Herzfeld (1985) and Papataxiarchis (1991)}, however she suggests that women’s *agonas* is directed more towards the self than others (Kirtsoglou, 2003: 54).. What motivates women beyond sex per se (having sex with another woman) in *kapsoura* is the way it is performed, which draws from what is conventionally thought to be a masculine performance (*kamaki*) (Kirtsoglou, 2003: 54). In this context, acts of jealousy are part of the *kamaki* practice which, Kirtsoglou suggests, aims to create strong emotions to the other woman. In the following story of my encounter with Tota, she discusses jealousy over “the eyes of a woman” as an act of agonistic (struggle) masculinity.

Tota began hanging out at bars in her mid-forties. When I met her she was in her mid-fifties. She was married for many years and had a daughter who was in her mid-thirties and an activist lesbia. She had long blonde hair and wore hippie style jeans with a sweater. Tota began going at lesbian bars after she got divorced, she kept telling me that her prospects were limited while growing up in Kolonos, a working-class borough in Athens. Currently, lesbian bars are the spaces in which she experiences her lesbia identity. She began telling me stories from “Paramithi as einai” (Fairy tale it is), a lesbian bar at Gazi: “*I have a lot of stories to tell about butches that act like men, they have that kind of mangia*<sup>26</sup>, *they would even hit you over a girl.*” Similarly to Kirtsoglou’s writings

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<sup>25</sup> Nightclubs with “laiko” music in Greece are popularly called bouzoukia (referring to the musical instrument “bouzouki”). The structure of the space includes a main stage where singers, dancers and musicians perform, the tables are placed around the stage, very closely to each other so that every guest can watch the show. In some nightclubs, throwing flowers is common practice. Usually they are thrown on singers, dancers and other spectators in moments of drunken carelessness and emotional frenzy. Frequently they are also used as a means of flirting.

<sup>26</sup> The *mangas* (the tough) is a representative of the post-1922 urban subculture of the *rebetes*. A hashish smoker or a petty thief, the *mangas* “was a person who lived outside the accepted standards of the traditional Greek society” (Butterworth and Schneider, 1975: 11, quoted in Cowan, 1990: 174).

about mangia (2003), Tota talks about a performance of womanhood fashioned around what is conventionally perceived to be masculine (154) in the social world she inhabits—that is constructed, by her, as traditional. Acts of jealousy (and territorialism) over a woman translate some aspects that are traditionally associated with performances of manhood through which men are understood to negotiate their sexual worth and virility.

The following fieldwork excerpt from my visit to “Taxidi”, which has now (2018) closed down, brings us to the ethnographic present of lesbian bars.



Figure 10: The main entrance to “Taxidi”, March 2014. The lesbian bar closed down some time between 2016-2018.

We gathered at Lora’s house to watch another lesbian film and Eleni was complaining how films are bad and low-budgeted but we end up watching them anyway because they are lesbian. We then decided to go out together. It was almost 10pm. Lora left with her motorcycle while Eleni and I

took a cab. At Beaver we had drinks and food, we met other women there, friends of Lora's and Eleni's, and within less than an hour we turned into a large group of women. It was almost impossible to talk to everyone, chairs moved around and drinks exchanged hands. By 2pm when Beaver was about to close for the night some of us were tipsy, others were drunk, and others could handle more drinks. We left Beaver and walked to a nearby bar, called Taxidi (Trip). I had never noticed it in all the times I had passed by this street. On the way we were shouting to each other, laughing, and holding each other's hands. Before we went in, Lora told me "*Beware you're about to enter a parallel universe. Prepare yourself for a cultural shock.*" I nodded.

The bar was dark lighted. Some women were wearing checkered shirts, which Lora calls the hallmark of butchness. Others had dyed blonde hair and wore high heels. The bar was playing skyladika since it was after 3pm. Two girls who also work at Beaver joined us later. I was dancing and drinking next to Lora. A group of women- of the straight-looking kind- were dancing with their friends. I noticed one of them moving her body in a semi-drunk mode, she grabbed my hand to join her at the dancefloor. Lora and Eleni were asking specific Greek songs from the DJ. We left around 5pm. It was early dawn. This was my first night out to a so-called "mainstream" lesbian bar.

Fieldnote excerpt, November 2013

In 2013 the proliferation of spaces for women's socialization is unprecedented- from queer spaces and parties to various activist groups and Beaver. However, lesbian bars are still "friendly" scene spaces where women hang out, flirt, and spend their leisure time. Since the article of *Dalika* magazine about lesbian bars in Athens (2012) lesbian bars are now represented as "parallel universe", as "cultural shock", yet boundaries are now clearly articulated. Lesbian bars are seen as spaces inhabited by plebeian, non-politicized lesbies. Middle-class lesbies of the older generation, now affiliated to the lesbian group, describe feeling out of place in bars. Ninetta tells me that the lesbian group emerged out of a need to exist in "*respectable*" spaces beyond "*the dark and smoky*

*bars of kamaki with women's aggressive looks and flirting practices.*" The lesvia feminist identity and its political structuring similarly emerged from the disidentification from the working-class culture of *kapsoura* pertaining to lesbian bars. Middle-class women actively distanced themselves from these classed spaces and sought to form spaces for claiming lesvia as an identity, like women- only parties (parties without cis men) and monthly activist gatherings (film screenings and bar nights) at the Purple House.

The lesbian group (LOA) was quite diverse and included women from different class backgrounds as well as different generations and ages- from 15 to 55 years old. But when it came to lesbian bars, the reactions of activist lesvies of the older generation, and younger queer feminist lesvies, spanned from dismissal to critical distance. I was told by many politicized lesvies that lesbian bars are places where women who are not "out" hang out. Working-class women were described to me as women who want to look like women and adopt macho behaviors of the sexist kind. The vulgarity of their flirting practices was mentioned by a number of lesvies of the older generation who felt that they didn't belong there. In what follows, I draw from interviews with Elsa, Nelli and Ninetta, same- sex desiring women of the older generation for whom lesbian bars consisted the only spaces to meet and flirt women. Elsa, Nelli, and Ninetta express their discomfort with the overall atmosphere of the bars as well as with the attitude of working-class/plebeian women in the 1990s.

Elsa: *"I was shocked by the sight of two women kissing, it was my own homophobia I had to overcome and lesbian bars were a necessary step for this. These were the only places I could go. But the fierce gazes of masculine women made me feel uncomfortable. On one level, I felt nice being around lesvies, but this intense gazing...I don't know, it was kind of vulgar, this sort of behavior..."*

Ninetta: *"I went to bars to see other lesvies...not for kamaki...I went to see other women and how they live their lives...and it was a nightmare...when I discussed it at the lesbian group, other women understood what I was talking about...you entered the bar and you would freeze from all the eyes staring at you...this was years ago, early 1990s, but I also went to Mirovolos two years ago and had the same feeling, these intense looks...and if you return the look she*

*turns the other way... evasions...and then she whispers to the woman next to her asking who am I and who knows me...I find these things repulsive...but I always had difficulty in being myself in large gatherings, amongst family, or amongst groups of lesbian friends {...}*”

*Nelli: “Lesbian bars were not my style at all. I didn’t like skyladiko and I wasn’t really into drinking, I would go there with a water bottle. There were many things I could not find there...And I couldn’t even meet women...It was only kamaki, I would get a treat from the other side of bar and see a blonde all dressed up and with make-up. It just wasn’t...A different kind of world...And lesbians were more marginalized compared to today...The new generation has an ideology and also the internet. Things are very different I think.”*

Elsa’s, Nelli’s and Ninetta’s narratives about lesbian bars and the overall discomfort they felt, resulted into distancing themselves from these classed and “over-sexualized” spaces and creating a version of lesvia self-rooted in “respectability” and politicization. *Skyladiko* and *kamaki* are rendered part of a marginalized world in which middle class lesbies feel alien and unable to fit in. The underlying claims for “respectability” in scene spaces- where women can meet, exchange ideas and form bonds beyond drinking- and *kamaki* brings to the fore class-based stereotypes about middle-class respectability and working-class vulgarity. In particular, Skeggs suggests that “respectability consists one of the central mechanisms around which class struggles are played out and reproduced in the present” (Skeggs, 1997: 1 quoted in Taylor, 2007: 198). In this context, as suggested by Moran & Skeggs (2001) “propriety and entitlement provide the means through which practices of social exclusion and demands for social inclusion can be articulated by individuals and communities” (Moran & Skeggs, 2001: 417). Middle-class lesbies are demanding their right for a space, which practically, they don’t have. Through the narratives of the older generation of women I notice contradictory feelings of discomfort and entitlement over lesbian bars- “*even if we don’t like them, this is where we go, these are our spaces.*”

In the present, plebeian women who hang out at bars are stereotypically

perceived and portrayed as more sexist and homophobic. Working-class, plebeian lesbians of the bars are discussed in terms of their lack of politicization, their gender-conforming appearance and their macho behaviors. They are considered “loud”, “noisy” and lacking a certain style and comportment. Marianna, a queer feminist lesvia activist in her mid-thirties, in several occasions told me that women outside LGBT activism, meaning lesbians of the bars, dislike masculine women (dalikes) and prefer women with straight-looking appearances. Her remark clearly shows that boundaries are led out around physical appearances, namely appearance and how it is read by others serves “to de/authorize certain identities and claims over space” (Taylor, 2007: 24), that is, certain appearances are read as having more value than others.

For younger queer feminist lesbians, gender non-conforming appearances, which I have already discussed (chapter seven), are valued and accepted as a sign of queer lesvia politicization. In this way, women aren’t misrecognized as straight, they do not pass as heterosexual on the streets or in the workplace. Boy-looking appearances are recognized as “looking like lesvia” with short hairstyles, athletic clothes, jeans, loose shirts, and a general lack of excessiveness (big jewelry, excessive make-up, colorful clothes). Skirts and dresses are less common amongst young queer feminist lesbians; jeans and colorful, loose t-shirts are the preferred attire.

During the first months of my fieldwork, whenever I wore skirts at lesbian gatherings I felt out of place and gradually I adopted the appropriate attire in order to better blend in the queer feminist and lesvia scene. Even though lesbian bars are frequented by all kinds of women, not only plebeian women, queer feminist lesbians rarely hang out there and when they do, it’s from a critical standpoint of the “real” working-class space. Their politicization as queer feminist lesbians produces “an acute consciousness of the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, shaping their criticism around notions of “pretentious” scene space as opposed to “real” working-class space” (Taylor, 2007: 139- 140) - in this case between “politicized” lesbian activist space and “non-politicized” bar spaces. The gendered and classed performatives of working class, plebeian lesbians, who are easily misrecognized as straights and can be macho, are devalued as and reduced to “the truth of their being” (Taylor, 2007: 24). There is no exceptional sophistication to their appearance, behavior or mode of living. As argued by Taylor, the recurrent “contrast between the “real” and the “pretentious” served to

highlight the tensions and distances, both physically and emotionally, between these two, often separated territories” (Taylor, 2007: 140). Aliko, a queer feminist lesvia, whom I have previously presented, reflects on this ongoing division and how even the sexual aspects of lesbian bars are dismissed in the criticism of queer feminists.

*Aliko: “When I moved to this house I began hanging out at lesbian bars {...} And I didn’t even like this type of socializing, going out late, drinking, listening to “skyladika”, my whole socialization was with activist lesbies but still I went there to feel that I am around lesbies, to experience this vibe, this feeling of commonality; lesbian life happening around me {...} I have been through periods when I could not come in contact with this so-called mainstream, I couldn’t even hang out for a coffee with somebody if we did not agree politically on some things, later this changed {...} However, I feel that the queer critique to the mainstream often undermines lesbian environments and this bothers me...in this general critique against the mainstream, lesbian experience in bars is also shoved away, this form of lesbian life is not acknowledged as it should be, it’s lost under the label of the mainstream...”*

The process of “othering” lesbian bars occurs through class processes revolving around “respectability” and “politicization”. The older generation of women put forward a notion of “respectability” in their critique of lesbian bars. Working-class “mannish” attitudes- women who act based on what they conventionally perceive as masculine in social reality- are devalued along with *kamaki* and *skyladika*. By dis-identifying with these spaces women of the older generation turn to lesbian feminist politics of a “*European type*.” The younger generation of queer feminists move their critique from respectability to politicization, which is again classed. By maintaining a position of critical distance, that is, going occasionally to lesbian bars and enjoying *skyladika* but not identifying with the reality of lesbian bars, queer feminist and politicized lesbies create a gap between the “real” experience of lesbian bars and “un-real” experiences of bars (authentic/ inauthentic gap). This gap is classed as much as it is political and needs to be problematized as part of the ongoing class divisions within queer and lesbian feminist politics. The lesbian scene changed a lot with the opening of Beaver, a women’s



co-operative, which consists of younger queer feminist lesbians who have been engaging in social activism for the past ten years.

### 9.3 Beaver

One month after my arrival and in the midst of the socio-economic crisis (which operates as a regulatory force), *Beaver* opened. A women's co-operative that operates on the basis of egalitarian principles and with horizontal structure. The co-op consists of eight women who met in lesbian feminist groups and have engaged in LGBT activism since the early millennium. Beaver quickly turned into a hangout for women of different ages and class backgrounds. In contrast to other co-ops, which sprang as alternatives (solidarity economy) to the current economic situation in Greece, Beaver opened the avenue for a gendered evaluation of labour (by being a women's co-op) while also addressing the needs of sexual and other minorities. As stated in the co-op's inauguration text "*we wish to build a space for people and groups who find it difficult to belong somewhere.*" (excerpt from Beaver's inauguration text. Retrieved from: <http://beavercafe.blogspot.com/2013/11/p-margin-bottom-0.html>). Thus, it's not a co-op aiming solely to address the needs of a unified Greek (male) national body, suffering under the relentless austerity measures like several left-wing co-ops, but one that sprang out of a need to respond to the gendered dimensions of the crisis (women's high unemployment rates, loss of state benefits etc.)

Beaver turned quickly into a women-dominated space coded under the word "beaver" (English slang for pussy). The space hosts various events (artistic and other) stemming from the interaction of its members with diverse groups and collectives. In this context, Beaver collaborates with various LGBT groups and artistic initiatives (Outview film festival<sup>27</sup>, Fytini events<sup>28</sup> etc) and organizes arm wrestling nights, painting exhibitions, poetry readings, themed parties, performances, book

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<sup>27</sup> Outview Film Festival is an International LGBTQI Film Festival based in Athens and organised every April-May since 2007 with film premieres, international guests, and film awards. It was initially organized by the older generation of LGBT rights activists and particularly Maria Cyber who has been running the festival since its early beginning.

<sup>28</sup> Fytini, vegetable butter, was a queer DIY record label created at 2014 and ran for three consecutive years. It became a network of essentially diasporic sound artists and performers, some lived abroad, some in Athens while others in between Athens and big metropolitan cities (Berlin, London).

presentations, and activist discussions. Across the wall in Beaver is a declaration that Sappho has been taken captive, a cultural captive. Across the street one reads “Free Sappho” with the slogan re-written on top of an anarchist slogan. The slogan denounces the ongoing cultural repression of female homosexuality.



Figure 11: “Free Sappho”, wall slogan, central Athens, 2014



Figure 12: Beaver view, June 2015

Gradually I began seeing Beaver as a contact zone that enacted a lesbian world-making process. It brought together young queer feminist lesbians with plebeian women and women of a working-class background who hang out at lesbian bars. The temporary transcendence of ongoing class divisions in the lesbian scene is enacted in the setting of the *parea*. The term *parea* is documented by many ethnographers who specialize in the area of Greece (Loizos and Papataxiarchis: 1991a; 1991b; Papataxiarchis, 1991; 1992, Cowan, 1990; Madianou-Gefou, 1992b; Kirtoglou: 2004). Since the opening of Beaver, women gradually formed small *parees* composed of close friends, ex-lovers, and an extended network of women coming and going. The *parea* as an affective community is certainly not unique as an example of contexts where alternative idioms of relatedness and personhood are constructed. As Bell and Coleman have argued, “networks of intimacy, frequently unrelated to kinship ties constitute key arenas of social interaction and identity formation” (Bell & Coleman, 1999: 5 quoted in Kirtsoglou, 2003: 71). The sharing of food and drinking, along with dancing, is instrumental for the forging of the *parea* and the construction of emotional bonds that transcend (or pretend to transcend) class differences in the context of an egalitarian ethos.

In her ethnographic work about a group of same-sex desiring women in a provincial town in Greece, Kirtsoglou defines *parea* as “a group of people who come together voluntarily, usually in order to enjoy themselves through drinking, eating or dancing, but also in other contexts” (Kirtsoglou, 2003: 5). A *parea* can be stable through time and exist beyond the spatiotemporal bonds of commensality or not, while in most cases it is (or it pretends to be) an egalitarian schema. As suggested by Kirtsoglou (2003) the functioning of the *parea* presupposes “a commitment and a continuous effort on behalf of its members towards the creation of an atmosphere of trust that allows the different actors to release themselves emotionally and to co-exist harmoniously in an egalitarian ethos” (Kirtsoglou, 2003: 151). This egalitarian ethos which transcends individuals and social categories, is created through *kerasmata* (treating drinks). Many ethnographies that specialize in the area of Greece (Papataxiarchis: 1991, 1992; Kirtsoglou: 2003; Gefou-Madianou (eds): 1992; Papagaroufali: 1992) illustrate the importance of food and drinking commensality, and the exchange of *kerasmata* as a practice that establishes “non-hierarchical, highly emotional alliances with an overemphasized sentimental function and a devalued instrumental one” (Papataxiarchis, 1991: 161 also quoted in Kirtsoglou, 2003: 65).

In the ethnographic works of Papataxiarchis (1991) and Kirtsoglou (2003), the notion of *parea*, and certainly that of close friendships, become sites for the articulation of gendered emotions and “alternative to kinship bases of personhood” (Papataxiarchis, 1991: 158). More specifically, Papataxiarchis (1991) suggests that male friendships consist an anti-structure to kin-dominated forms of relatedness, whereas Kirtsoglou argues that same-sex desiring women form *parees* where the boundaries between friendships, sexual lovers and alternative kinship bonds based on “fellow-feeling”, can’t be easily differentiated. Kirtsoglou suggests that same-sex desiring women form “strong emotional affiliations that reify sexual desire and the body” (Kirtsoglou, 2003: 65). Friendships can easily turn into erotic relations and erotic relations can turn into long-term friendships. This also brings us to the “potential friends, potential lovers” sexual scheme that influenced the way in which women of the older generation formed erotic relationships.

In addition, the boundaries between *parees* aren’t rigid, any woman can join more than one *parea* or sit with more than one *parea* at the same night. Below, Alikí, who

works at Beaver, and Maria, a regular at Beaver since its opening discuss the importance of *parea* and lesbian sociality as two fields interconnected with the sharing of food and drinks which also enables the blending of plebeian with queer feminist women.

*Aliki: "I feel it's really important that we have created this space where women come and express their lesbian desire. It has become a point of reference for many women. They have formed erotic relationships, new friendships, and all of a sudden you overhear women over food and drinks discussing about butch/femme identities. I am deeply touched by this lesbian sociality we have created. It makes me so happy {...} My life changed, there is a continuity on many levels, my work space and my personal life create a lesbian consistency which was missing until then."*

*Maria: "Beaver, Beaver, and again Beaver! I went every day once it opened its doors. But the space is now formed, it's interesting to look at how it evolved, some women created it and lesbies formed their *parees* and its dynamics. Initially, women were coming alone or in groups of two or three. Then the basketball group *tsipoures* ("sea bream" basketball team) was formed, we played basketball together, some of us went to Eressos and came back as a larger group of friends. But I stopped going after my relationship with L. fell apart {...} Then it's Lora's group of friends; she enjoys having people around her to worship her, I can't relate with this and I rarely hang out with them. Then it's Zoe group of friends, the snobbish ones, they are all tall, thin, and beautiful, they have the same posture if you notice them. My group consists of plebeian women who are less beautiful, instead we are more childish, loud and laid back. Groups of women relate by organizing trips together, organizing nights out, partying together {...}"*

The following ethnographic snapshot from my fieldnotes gives a flavor of the space's decoration that is nothing like the "*dark and smoky bars*" of the past which politicized lesbies of the older generation classed as less appropriate for socializing.

Beaver was located at the far end of the noisy clubs in Gazi. The first time I went to Beaver was with Lora. We had a beer at Exarchia and she gave me a ride to Beaver. It was less than a month since it opened. When I entered I noticed that the tables were randomly arranged and put together in a DIY aesthetic, it had a high-ceiling and the walls weren't painted exactly but rubbed to give a grey blue color texture that made it look like a construction space. The toilets were colorful. Inside the sink plastic ducklings were swimming and dancing with the running water, a yellow mustard bottle (the kind you see at diners) was used for hand soap, and a plastic pop-style handbag for a toilet bin. The wall was decorated with sporadic legos. Next to the sink were sanitary towels and gloves (used for sexual protection).

From the ceiling, a big disco ball was hanging, I saw it spin on various nights, some I was drunk, others I was tipsy, others I gazed at its light effects. Girls with skirts and trousers climbed up and down the stairs next to the bar to the attic where they stored drinks and food. The building was surrounded with glass, the doors, the external front, the side-entrance, it was all covered with glass, bright and light in the morning, liquid and atmospheric at night. It reminded me of bars I've visited in Berlin and Amsterdam. This is a new world to me and this is a new space for women so I guess it's a great start for my fieldwork.

Fieldnote excerpt, November 2013

In the above interview excerpts, Maria talks about the importance of pareas in the formation of Beaver's spatial dynamics, as well as the latent classed tensions between different pareas of women, the plebeian and the snobbish ones, which however co-exist harmoniously and mingle. Aliki underlines the value of creating a lesvia space where having fun and talking about politics can happen at the same time. Regarding Beaver's materiality, its transparency is enhanced by the use of glass. At this point, I would like to go back to Theodora's thoughts, already discussed in chapter six, where she talks about the lightness of Beaver versus the darkness of lesbian bars (of the 1990s) in terms of visibility/invisibility (transparency/ darkness). In one of our conversations Theodora, who belongs to the older generation of lesbies and socialized at lesbian bars

during the 1990s, tells me that “*no other bar has Beaver’s transparent glass windows which makes it visible inside-out.*”

Beaver operates as a scene where most things happen. Different pareas of women gather in the early afternoon after a basketball match, after work, or after a house gathering. They start drinking, eating and updating each other with what’s new in their lives. Gefou-Madianou (1992a) describes a similar site of all-male gatherings, this time not the coffee-shop (*kafeneio*) but the *katoy* (basement). In the basements of their houses, Gefou-Madianou suggests that “Mesogeia men transcend the confinements of everyday life, become sentimental and open their souls to their friends while sharing generous amounts of home-made wine” (Gefou- Madianou, 1992a: 120). Similarly, women at Beaver perform intimacy and share their anxieties and *kapsoures*. Food and drink commensality facilitates the creation of bonds between the members of the group that transcend the class habitus of snobbish and plebeian women. The following ethnographic snapshot depicts the atmosphere of *parea* gatherings and the bonds created through food and drinking commensality.

Another night out at Beaver. I arrived at 10pm and saw three girls dancing together in the middle of the bar. They had formed a circle. They were caressing and kissing. I was talking with Ninetta, who had just seen the film “Adele” (“Blue is the warmest colour”). While we talked about it, another *parea* of friends entered and I heard her shouting: “*This is the lesbian spectrum nowadays: From Beaver to the Purple House (meaning LOA’s social gatherings and women-only parties) with some trendy bars (meaning lesbian bars) in the middle.*” Later I sat with Lora, she was in a big *parea*, apparently she knew everyone in the bar, she kept bragging about knowing all the lesbians in Athens. Gradually I realized that Lora’s group is the one which is more open to newcomers.

After a crazy night out on a weekday Lora usually said: “*Another regular weekday out*” (meaning a night that unexpectedly turned out like a Saturday night frenzy). Around midnight Rena arrived. She ordered a *carafe* of *raki* and kept filling my glass throughout the night. Rena is of working-class background and before Beaver she hung out at gay and lesbian bars. She

treated me drinks (*kerasma*) and chatted about her love life, women's expectations, her ex-girlfriend, and how it's hard to find a proper femme nowadays. Often she asked me if I was doing well, she wanted to make sure if I am ok with drinking (I need to start smoking again. I can't handle so much drinking. I am either nervous or these girls know how to drink, or both-personal comment). That night, I ended up very drunk, Rena was by my side the whole night. At 4 a.m. she took me home and made sure to put me to bed before she left.

Fieldnote excerpt, March 2014

Papagaroufali (1992) talks about the Women's Coffeehouse, where feminists hang out during the 1980s, and argues that women's drinking practices, for example drinking socially constituted male drinks such as *ouzo* consist "instances of "limited victories" against the Establishment, or of "transitory cleavages" in it, at the same time that these practices are, or appear to be, "enmeshed" in the Establishment" (Papagaroufali, 1992: 51-52). In a similar vein, women drink *raki* and *rakomelo*, a socially constituted male drink. The heavy drinkers (stereotypically working-class women are considered heavy drinkers), the ones that are physically resilient to excessive alcohol consumption, which is also conventionally considered a male attribute, make sure that they are by the side of women who are physically exhausted by it. In the above ethnographic snapshot, women's convivial drinking unravels as an instance of a specific kind of pleasure felt in the process of building emotional bonds and taking care of one another in the "parea." Drawing from Papagaroufali's (1992) argument, I suggest that by drinking *raki* and talking about politics, public culture and relationships, lesbians produce a counterculture against the established male-dominated culture.

The meanings of lesvia collective life and sociality assume various forms at Beaver, which include organized forms of queer and LGBT activism (organized events and open discussions) but also "having fun" with small talk about films, identities, and their meanings in relation to personal experiences. The co-existence of (informal) get-togethers and *parea* socializing with formal (organized) networking in the same space, reveals the blending of different worlds. Women's same-sex lives prior to its post-



millennium organization were conducted in the immediate private house, at lesbian bars, and at Eressos international lesbian community (since the mid-1970s). The proliferation of LGBT activist groups and queer feminist and lesbian collectives altered, yet didn't abolish, past ways of experiencing lesvia community life.

As already noted by Alik, parees of women talk over food and drinks about products of public culture- films, musicians, songs- as well as political themes introduced by queer and lesbian feminist activists. For instance, the film "Adele", which screened in Greek cinemas at 2013, was debated for a long time in different parees of women. Especially after the screening of a Greek television show about the life of two lesbians in Greece, called "Adele of Kolonos"<sup>29</sup>, both the film and the aftermath Greek TV-show (which drew its title from the homonym film) concerned women at activist meetings and at Beaver. A couple of queer feminist lesvies felt deeply offended with the way the show portrayed lesbians and decided to produce their own short film against what they saw as the show's straight male hedonistic gaze to female homosexuality; the short film was called "Namely?" It was produced and performed by "Green tight" ("Prasino kalsonaki" & "Maria F. Dolores", and screened at Beaver (December 2013)<sup>30</sup>.

For more than six months, women discussed "Adele" in relation to their personal lives and in relation to other lesbian films such as "Bound." Some women dismissed "Adele" as something irrelevant to their lives and others approved of it as a film addressed to mainstream (heterosexual) audiences that opened the Greek public sphere to the theme of female homosexuality. In one of those heated debates over food and drinks Lora quiet bluntly told me: *"I am not interested in coming-of-age films with girls who are searching their pussy (meaning their sexuality), if the film dared to show an older butch with a dildo, that would be something to relate with. It doesn't say anything about my life."* Maria, whom I have already presented, added: *"It didn't even represent the mainstream lesvia, the girls had hairless bodies, flawless and very feminine."* In that year's *Dalika* there was an article about "Adele" (*Dalika*, 2014 (8): 48-51) which summarized some of the concerns raised by lesbians in group meetings, online discussions, and parea gatherings. Thus, lesbian feminist discourse is produced through multiple sites and mediums, through scheduled activist meetings, parea gatherings, short DIY films,

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<sup>29</sup> The show was broadcasted on 2013, November 26 at "Protagonistes" with Stavros Theodorakis.

printed activist material etc.

The meanings of queer and butch/femme lesbian identities were frequently discussed at pareas, especially how these identities are performed, what do they mean, and how sex comes into the picture. Many women who were not affiliated with activist groups asked queer feminist lesvies, who worked at Beaver, about the meanings of queer (“*what is queer really?*”) since they have never heard of it. An ongoing debate regarding identities and the meanings of same-sex desire was running between activist lesvies and non-activist women, who preferred hanging out with their para at lesbian bars and Beaver.

Some of the latter identified as “homos” (namely homosexual) and perceived the category “lesvia” as an unnecessary label. These two groups of women differently interpret lesvia entertainment and politicization. Below are two interview excerpts of Poka, a boy-looking lesvia activist, and Lilika, who identifies as lesvia, yet doesn’t like identity labels and prefers socializing with her “para” instead of going to activist groups, express the split between “having fun” and activities aiming at achieving rights- e.g. activism. In many occasions, these two co-existed and collapsed into one. For example, Beaver consisted a space where chatting, flirting and hanging out took place alongside organized debates and activities.

*Poka: “I don’t enjoy the kind of socialization that focuses on consumption and entertainment. I find it gossipy and boring. I find it hard to function, not because I don’t like the people there but because it’s hard for me to socialize with small-talk, it’s better if we are doing an activist thing together. It helps me bond with people. I feel frustrated in social environments and this makes this kind of entertainment harder for me.”*

*Lilika: “I try to help at LOA’s parties and social gatherings but I am not a member...I don’t like labels; I mean I use them but I find them unnecessary. There should be only a human label and not multiple labels under which we try to fit everything. I think that groups can become closed cliques, and I also heard that LOA was more oriented towards offering emotional support...like a group therapy thing...and I didn’t want this, I felt happy as a lesvia {...} Beaver was a*

*lesbian school for me. Here, I met lesbies with whom I liked hanging out and all of sudden I became the mayor of this place, people know me before I actually meet them...”*

Whereas Aliko focuses on the significance of blending informal socializing-hanging out and “having fun”- with organised, activist work and acknowledges the need and importance of both, Poka prefers to keep activist work and informal socializing (“having fun” and hanging out) as separate spheres. On the other hand, Lilika, who didn’t wish to politicize her sexuality by going to the lesbian feminist group but attended LOA’s social gatherings and annual parties, found at Beaver a space where she could socialize, flirt, hang out, and essentially lead a lesvia life. Many women like Lilika, who prefer *parees* to political groups, give prominence to desire over identity; thus, they identify as lesbies or homos (homo-sexual meaning desire for the “ὅμοιο”, for the same) by experiencing their identities less through identity categories and activism, and more through the culture of *parea*.

As I’ve already described, being member of a *parea* involves creating strong emotional bonds between its members by organizing things together from home gatherings, basketball matches, to late nights out at lesbian bars. Alongside the proliferation of LGBT groups in the early millennium, we notice the emergence of queer activist spaces that gradually challenge the terms within and beyond lesvia community making. In the following section, I look at queer spaces as sexual, gendered, and classed spaces which coexisted with Beaver and other lesvia forms of sociality (women-only parties).

## 9.4 Queer spaces

*“In queer spaces it feels as if people are too cool to smile”*

It was the opening party of one of the first self-organized queer spaces in Athens. The space was set up by a queer feminist group which has been producing discursive theoretical/ autobiographical material (zines) for the past eight years. Its members decided after a long period of intellectual labour to craft a queer feminist space, which lasted two years (2013-2015). The space was located on the first floor of an apartment building. There was a doorbell downstairs which had stopped working. It was an open-plan space; there were no dividing walls, pillows, couches, and chairs were randomly arranged. At the far end of the space was hanging a large banner “Freedom for those in cages” and at its bottom were painted the symbols of female and male genders in chains. Next to the entrance was a stand with various zines, leaflets, posters, and self-published/ autobiographical works. The atmosphere was very different to lesbian gatherings in that queers were more “reserved” and needed time to relax. By “reserved” I mean that queers abide to an individualism that’s nothing like lesbian para gatherings, they set out clear-cut boundaries of when and where things are supposed to happen; there is a place and time for meetings, demonstrations, parties, chilled socializing. Very early I noticed that lesbian activist meetings were always followed by food and drinks at a nearby tavern but when queer group meetings ended, queers split and went home. Socializing was meant to take place at another time and place like fund-raising parties and queer “tea and affinity” gatherings.



Figure 13: Invitation-leaflet for the weekly tea gatherings at QV's social space, November 2013 - October 2015

The space indoors was non-smoking at parties and social events but smoking was allowed at queer group meetings. Whoever wanted to smoke during a group meeting, he/she would go at the far end of the space and light a cigarette next to the window. As Graeber noted in his study of direct action groups, “bumming cigarettes from others enhances a constant mobilization of feelings of need, discipline, sharing, and desire. Similarly, queers are dependent on communal good will and sharing what one of them really desires at that moment, tobacco or weed” (Graeber, 2009: 275). The crowd at queer parties was mixed: boys with tight military trousers and pink hair, boys with tattoos all over their bodies, delicate boys who danced slowly, boys who liked Marc Almond and techno/house music, boys dressed as sailors, girls dressed in black with half-shaved hair, girls with athletic trousers, girls with lace gloves, boys and girls who smoked weed or tobacco and danced till early dawn.

When there was a film screening the space was fully packed - some of the films and directors screened during 2013-2014 were Tom of Finland, John Waters, “Madam Butterfly”, “The kiss of the woman-spider”, and the Greek film “Aggelos” featuring the

life of a gay man in the 1980s. Film screenings were usually followed by an open discussion with the audience. Tea gatherings were less busy, yet the sounds of waltz, blues and jazz helped create a homey atmosphere. Parties were meant to end by 2pm but this rarely happened since people arrived around midnight and money for the rent and bills of the space were gathered from these events. Apart from a particular kind of individualism, queers also adopted an anti-social etiquette at parties. It was difficult to socialize with people you didn't know, and opening discussions was less easy in that queers weren't buying into a culture of *parea* as in the case of lesbian gatherings at Beaver and LOA's social gatherings. In addition, queers danced alone to foreign music (disco, techno, house) whereas at lesbian parties, women frequently danced (with Greek *laikopop*<sup>31</sup>) in groups and ended up dancing on the tables with other women gathering around and chanting them.

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<sup>31</sup> *Laikopop* is a genre of modern laiko which mixes laiko music with western influences from international Angloamerican pop music and dance.



Figure 14: This image was posted on Facebook shortly after the closing of the space. QV's parties and tea gatherings were hosted here from October 2013- December 2015. For the next two years (until December 2017), the space hosted the newly formed queer feminist collective, Replica. The message on the wall "we were here" was added on the picture and resonates with my hauntological approach of non-normative sexualities in public space (see: chapter four). "We we here" means that "we, lesbians, gays, trans were here" and "we are still here", that is, we are the ghosts that endure and emerge in the context of harsh political and social arrangements.

Parties were also hosted at the private houses of queer lesbians who usually house-shared. Invitations to queer parties, either in activist spaces or at private houses, circulated via word of mouth and between members of activist groups. House-sharing and informal get-togethers served to enhance queer wellbeing. Amongst other things, house-sharing involved exploring European and Angloamerican queer activism online, reading queer theory, and adopting queer political tools to talk about gender and sexuality.

Lydia, whom I have already presented, spoke a lot about the transformative experience of being part of a queer lesbian house-share in her early twenties: "*On Sundays we gathered together, we watched queer porn and took nude photos of each*

*other.... we organized queer tea parties and invited friends over.... We began reading Butler's Gender Trouble... I got to know queer through books and anarchoqueer groups, I searched online...The whole atmosphere we had created in the house with our discussions and get-togethers made it easy for me to move from one gendered position to the other."* Overall, house-sharing, queer parties, and social gatherings served to enhance community bonds and set the political and emotional framework for an emergent queer feminist scene.

The discussion of queer space "existing in opposition to, and as transgressions of, heterosexual space" (Oswin, 2008: 89) has been widely explored in geographical sexuality and space literature (Oswin: 2008; Binnie: 1995; 1999 Valentine, G.: 2003; 2002; Bell & Valentine: 1995a; 1995b, Retter & Bouthillette & Ingram (eds): 1997). Valentine and Binnie (1999) posit that "the presence of queer bodies in particular spaces and locations forces people to realise that the surrounding space from the streets to the neighborhoods to the cafes, the restaurants and taverns, has been produced as (ambiently) heterosexual, heterosexist and heteronormative" (Binnie, 1997: 18 also quoted in Oswin, 2008: 90). Valentine elsewhere notes that "colonizing and occupying space has proved an important queer tactic" (Valentine, G.: 2003: 417 also quoted in Oswin, 2008: 90). In a similar vein, Binnie points that "the creation of sexual dissident visibility and space in oppressive locations and circumstances" (Binnie, 1997: 230 also quoted in Oswin, 2008: 90). In a similar vein, feminist geographer, Natalie Oswin argues that queer space is mostly conceptualized as "the reterritorialisation of heterosexual space since it purportedly enables the visibility of sexual subcultures" (Oswin, 2008: 90) that are largely rendered marginal, excluded and squashed within the dominant heterosexual order.

In this context, queer parties and social gatherings consist a conscious effort to craft queer space in an heterogendered city. A recurrent problem that preoccupied many queer feminists concerned the "intrusion" of straight anarchists into queer spaces – this was interpreted as a further violation of and obstacle to queer belonging (even though this wasn't easily achieved). The following ethnographic snapshot highlights the crafting of queer spaces as non-straight spaces clearly differentiated from anarchist male-dominated spaces.



It was early afternoon, around 7pm, when queers gathered to prepare for the party. Earlier the same day an anti-fascist demonstration was organized by a number of anti-authoritarian groups and anarchist squats. It was almost a year after the election of the far-right party in the Greek parliament (May 2012) and Golden Dawn was still “ruling” street neighborhoods.

After the demonstration, a straight couple, affiliated to a well-known anarchist squat, arrived at the space, which was still relatively empty since queers had just finished setting up for the party. The couple began kissing in the middle of the venue, which provoked many queers who felt uncomfortable with these overt expressions of heterosexual intimacy. At the other side of the bar, a gay boy began staring at them until his gaze functioned as a weight on their bodies. It was not long enough until the couple left.

Fieldnote excerpt, March 2013

Setting boundaries against straight anarchists was a spatial conquest that established queer spaces as non-straight spaces, as spaces claimed and “colonized” by sexual dissidents. Several days later, Tolis, a queer straight boy, told me that creating queer space is about recognizing one’s privileges before accepting the “other” and this is why the straight couple had to leave. Thus, queer spaces aren’t simply challenging and transgressing the norm, they also seek to extend the norm by urging straights to become conscious of their privileges before entering a queer space.

Queer space as sexual and gendered space is conceptualized as resistance against the heterosexual domination and male entitlement performed in public spaces. Recent studies on queer space and geography have been looking at queer space through the lens of class, gender, and race. More specifically, Nash and Bain in their ethnography on the Toronto Women’s Bathhouse (2007) attest to the fact that queer space operates as a disciplinary space- since queers don’t operate beyond norms and categories. They point out that, while “the claiming of queer space is lauded as the disruption of heterosexual space” (Oswin, 2008: 95 ), and is not often discussed in terms of class

disruptions.

Following Nash and Bain (2007), I wish to look at the class disruptions of queer spaces. Activist lesbians of a working-class background who socialize at Beaver and/ or go to lesbian groups, talk about queer space in terms of a widespread anti-sociality and elitism. By speaking with many women from the lesbian scene I realized that queers were constantly associated with a privileged cosmopolitanism which was often portrayed in opposition to static Greek reality. Queers were mobile and “reserved”, they were the ones who knew about queer theory and cultural diversity; they were despised for their cultural capital as much as they were envied for it. According to Binnie (2004), queer cosmopolitanism denotes a kind of worldliness and knowledge. More specifically, Binnie (2004) argues that “queer cosmopolitanism is based on knowingness and sophistication, with the distinction between cosmopolitanism and provincialism being articulated through discourses of “sophistication.” (Binnie: 2000 quoted in Taylor, 2007: 21; also Binnie: 2004). Similarly, Southerton (2002) suggests that mobility, real or virtual (queer cyberspaces), like cosmopolitanism, is “a feature of high cultural resources because it provides knowledge and experience of “other” cultural orientations and consequently a capacity for critical abstraction (the interpretation of issues such as style and taste beyond their immediate contextual referents)” (Southerton, 2002: 187). In this direction, “others” are less sophisticated and occupy fixed positions whereas queers enjoy the privilege of mobility, that is, queers travel abroad, through cyberspaces, and across Anglo-American queer theory.

In this context, Taylor (2007; 2004) further argues that “the degree of “comfort” in classed space can be mapped onto the level of comfort and belonging people experience within that particular space” (Taylor, 2004: no page). The need to create safe spaces away from the heterosexual domination of public space produced a fictive cohesion amongst queers, lesbians and trans people. It functioned as a unifying force which created feelings of togetherness. On the other hand, queer spaces operated as classed spaces where particular cultural claims and entitlements were played out. Some forms of encounters with difference were seen as authentic, others were not. For instance, queer parties were seen as a lot more elitist and exclusive than Beaver and the women-only parties organized by LOA (discussed in chapter two).

Many lesbies felt that one form of cultural exchange and consumption of difference is being promoted by queer spaces as authentic as opposed to the inauthenticity and provincialism of lesbian bars. Just a reminder here of Alikí's aforementioned comment regarding the queer criticism of the lesbian bar culture: *"I feel that the queer critique to the mainstream often undermines lesbian environments and this bothers me...in this general critique against the mainstream, lesbian experience in bars is also shoved away, this form of lesbian life is not acknowledged as such, it's lost under the label of the mainstream..."*

Lora, who was my close friend and informant during my nights out at lesbian bars and *parea* gatherings at Beaver, frequently told me that *"queers are snobs and elitists, prone to distribute queer-stripes amongst themselves and against others."* I was shocked with her mocking remark given that she also frequented queer spaces. Gossip surrounding the snobbish and anti-social attitude of queers was so common amongst activist lesbies and lesbies who hang out at Beaver, that I was surprised to see the same women attend queer parties and social events. Gradually I realized that this kind of gossip about queer spaces and attitudes served to question and ambivalently maintain their political authority within the movement. Rena, a butch-identifying lesvia, and Maria, who identifies as lesvia with an *agorokoritso* experience, are both of a working-class background. They grew up in working-class boroughs and their parents worked at a construction site and a textile family business respectively. In fact, Maria lives and works both in and for her family's textile business. In the below interview excerpts they discuss queer spaces and portray them as places where their level of comfort is tested.

Rena: *"Queers have produced amazing texts and I really like that they now have a new space. But there is a part of me which feels uncomfortable there. I feel it is in the atmosphere, I don't know, some cool queers that are so awesome...I am not referring to specific people, I can't easily name it...I feel as if the space is closed and impenetrable...When I was going with my partner last year, the first few minutes I arrived I felt that it would be best if I weren't here. But also I didn't have close friends there. When I go to Beaver there are always people that smile at me. In queer spaces, it feels as if people are too cool to smile."*

Maria: “...When I enter a queer space I feel there are queer-meters coming out. The same was happening in Berlin, if you were femme they looked at you as if you were a vlachaki (culturally plebeian, and of provincial background) that entered the space by mistake. The same goes here at queer spaces and it makes me feel that these are abusive spaces. Queers live in their castle, they don't have contact with anyone, they organize things by themselves just because they can...they are the “enfant gâté” (bourgeoisie) of the LGBT. They aren't in contact with other LGBT groups. They don't want to be. And that's ok, they have every right to act like this but it makes me wonder about the kind of space they want to create.”

Rena juxtaposes two different spaces of sociality- queer spaces and Beaver. She describes the embodied habitus of queers by focusing on emotional expressions- smiling, laughing loudly, hugging, slapping on the back. In queer spaces, self-restraint from emotional outbursts and from touchy-feely attitude is seen as a sign of respect of one's personal space (which is very much valued). On the other hand, Beaver is structured around the parea gatherings that put forward another embodied habitus which involves being touchy with your parea, opening your heart by talking about kapsoures, and sharing food and drinks with others (kerasmata). At the same time, Maria interprets queer anti-sociality as a sign of elitism that creates exclusions since queers are “locked in their castle”. The term vlachaki stems from *vlachoi*, a Latin-speaking population group also called Armanoi who, back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, lived in Greece, Macedonia and Albania, and spoke vlachika. In Greek slang the term is used to refer to somebody who is of provincial background, less sophisticated and backward. The vlachaki (culturally plebeian and from the Greek province) here is posited against the “sophisticated” queer. Maria points out that queers have their own way of acting in public which enhances the distinction between themselves and others who are less knowing. Undoubtedly, the question of what gets to be thought of as worthy and sophisticated rests on some notion of cultural authority which is middle- classed.

In addition, spatial mobility is classed in that middle-class women were the ones who moved across spaces and engaged with different forms of sociality. For instance,

Aliki moved from lesbian bars to queer spaces to the para socialization of Beaver while Maria rarely visited queer spaces, she mostly hung out at Beaver and socialized with her lesbian para. Similarly Rena moved from lesbian bars and cruising as a butch lesvia with her gay friends at Gazi to forging paras with other lesvies at Beaver. Thus, when it comes to moving across spaces, there is a classed exclusivity pertaining to being middle- class. The remarks of younger activist lesvies of a working- class background (Rena and Maria) illustrate the classed exclusivity of spatial mobility. They put forward a middle- classed conceptualization of queer. Thus, to be queer presupposes being (or becoming) middle- class (as cultural authority) and mobile, which are both features of having “high cultural resources”, as well as “knowledge and experience of the “other” (Southerton, 2002: 187).

At the same time, the number of trans people in queer spaces is limited given the fact that trans grassroots politics- queertrans, SYD (Greek Transgender Association)- operate on the basis of sexual difference clearly cut in binary terms (trans man/trans woman) and not in terms of gender performativity and queer fluidity. Below, Moira, a trans activist lesvia, who has transitioned and lives with her partner’s financial support, reflects on queer spaces and underlines academic over-theorization and queer introversion as factors that drive her away from queer spaces.

*Moira: “...How do I fit in a queer group, I don’t feel I can fit in queer spaces. I feel surrounded by people with many privileges, people who have over-theorized their kavla (sexual arousal) to a degree that suffocates me. Theoretical tools are useful to say what and why something is happening to us but I feel we end up using them between ourselves. And I am concerned with this kind of politics. It’s useful to create safe space but on the other hand, I feel that this approach can suppress other things that can come out. Now this is how I feel about it {...} But queer is treated as if it’s ours, meaning that these are spaces shouting “we are so queer.” I don’t find it bad per se but the costs are very different for people who argue they are queer and people who are trans. Different mechanisms of survival are needed in each case. A straight guy can wear skirts at parties and shout that he’s queer and the next morning he’ll go*

*back to work... and these ultraqueer, genderqueer parties where people use and abuse identities only to leave them by their doorstep the next morning.”*

The closedness of queer presented here as something to be owned, to be possessed and cherished what Moira calls “our thing” denotes its elusiveness. It’s an asset to which people attach various meanings, it’s something meant to be “ours” against heterosexist society; however, by becoming “ours” it closes and loses its potentialities for becoming something else. Anti-sociality and knowingness is interpreted here on the basis of privileges. It has to do with being cis gendered and sophisticated enough, with an ongoing commitment to theory. However, the anti-social behavior of queers also stems from their affiliation with the Greek anarchist culture which cultivates feelings of suspicion against the Establishment.

One of my informants, an active autonomist in the anti-authoritarian movement named Petros, who was a cis anarchist man and cross-dresser, once told me “*the state and police force can eradicate queer spaces, thus queers are used to being on alert and not to trusting people easily.*” Moira’s remark about queer spaces as spaces that shout “*we are queer*”, spaces that are too “cool” for other activist lesbians (some of which have a working-class background) to feel at ease, orient us to the attributes of queer sophistication, which is informed by internal power dynamics. In particular, power relations in queer spaces are defined by one’s seniority within the anti-authoritarian movement, avant-garde looks and appearances and skills of critical and reflective thinking, namely the ability to use and instrumentalize theory to talk about feelings, politics, and identities. Thus, queer sophistication entails possessing cultural authority, namely, engaging with theoretical texts, becoming an intellectual activist, being mobile and well-aware of cultural diversity, and staying active in the queer feminist and anti-authoritarian movement for an extended period of time.

The ongoing criticism of lesbians (cis and trans) over queer spaces operates on two levels: firstly, it affirms queer as a cosmopolitan force that opens the way to new political tools and secondly, it delimits the cultural authority of queers in the LGBT movement by denouncing the classed-based character of their spaces. Throughout this chapter, I have tried to show that activist lesbians move across and between differently classed spaces and tie themselves with these spaces in different ways, both classed and sexual.

From feeling uncomfortable at lesbian bars and denouncing the “vulgarity” of working-class spaces; to forming paires at Beaver that transcend (or pretend to transcend) class differences through the egalitarian ethos of food and drink commensality; to feeling resent of and awe towards queer spaces and their degree of sophistication.

## 9.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined lesvia community as a classed process that involves the constant struggle and negotiation over the meaning of specific spaces, of adherence to community terms and of establishing membership. I considered lesvia and queer spaces as sites where cultural claims and authority are played upon them. I argued that queer and lesvia sites are fraught with class disruptions that inform how lesbies inhabit and experience space as well as the kind of claims and gender performatives they put forward. I tried to trace class differences on how spaces were actualized by certain lesbies of different generations and tried to decipher class as cultural capital (from lesvia middle-class respectability to queer middle-class sophistication).

More specifically, the older generation of lesbies dis-identify from the lesbian bar culture and gradually formulate themselves as activist lesbies who create their own political group and lesvia space. Their narratives about lesbian bars draw from a discourse of middle class respectability/working-class vulgarity according to which the flirting practices of plebeian women of the bars and the kind of gender performatives enacted in the context of *kamaki*, are deemed unsuitable, less appropriate. The younger generation of queer lesbies re-enact the same division on the basis of the lack of politicization in lesbian bars as well as on the basis of working-class appearances that can be misunderstood as straight (straight-looking appearances). Since queer feminists embrace gender non-conforming appearances as a sign of lesvia difference, physical appearance becomes a factor that defines the politicization or not of certain spaces without considering whether being visibly lesvia and/or identifying as a masculine lesvia is socially possible for working-class women. At the same time, the culture of *parea* gatherings at Beaver brought together women from different generations and classes, and enabled an illusionary and partial transcendence of class differences on the basis of an egalitarian ethos of food and drinking commensality.

The crafting of queer activist spaces entailed the need to set up clear-cut boundaries against male anarchist entitlements and heteronormative practices; thus queer spaces were crafted as non-straight spaces. At the same time, queer spaces were fraught with class tensions. Queer is a hybrid par excellence, it was partly imported from local academics- who appropriated the western notion of queer- under the influence of



AngloAmerican queer feminist activism, and partly born out of the local struggles of feminists and homosexuals within the anti-authoritarian and anarchist movement. This made it a disputable terrain upon which claims, entitlements, and class were constantly re-negotiated. I looked at queer spaces from the perspective of activist lesbians who claimed to feel as less comfortable. They purported that queer spaces portray themselves as exceptional which presupposes that people there are able to make the best out of their available (virtual) cultural resources, have an ongoing engagement with theory, and have developed nuanced critical thinking.

This chapter considered lesbia and queer spaces as classed spaces where different demands for meaning and content are played out. In the process of building politicized lesbia and queer communities, working- class/plebeian lesbians are “otherized” as vulgar while activist lesbians “otherize” queers as exceptional snobs and elitists. On the one hand, there were those, queers and middle- class lesbians, who needed a space to politicize their sexuality and disrupt the heterosexual and family-centered organization of the urban city. Whilst on the other, there are forces of globalization and western sexualities, which from the moment they enter the Greek cultural sphere, they get absorbed into the dichotomy of western exceptionalism/local provincialism. From all the spaces presented here, Beaver blends creatively the classed aspects of pre-existing lesbia bars and of emergent queer activist spaces. This creative blending- inter-generational and classed- enacted through food and drinking commensality brings to the fore new possibilities which will affect how future classed disruptions within the lesbian and queer feminist scene will be played out.

## CONCLUSION

My research explores individual and collective aspects of women's same-sex sexualities in Athens. It is set out three years after the break of the economic crisis and in the aftermath of massive anti-austerity demonstrations that spread throughout the country between 2010- 2012. By 2013 the discourse of the crisis had shifted from the crisis as a state of exception to the crisis as a normalizing discourse of precarious living within austerity. This was also the time that the extreme right-wing party, Golden Dawn, the far right-wing neo-nazi party, was elected to the Greek parliament (May 2012). The election of Golden Dawn is part of what anti-authoritarian and leftist activists describe as the moral and political fascistization ("ekfasismos") of everyday life.

At the same time, LGBT rights activists introduced their pro-civil union agenda (which dates back to 2007) after the conviction of Greece by the European Court of Human Rights (2013) for the exclusion of same-sex partners from cohabitation contracts. In December 2015, a revised law on civil unions, including same- sex couples, was introduced. Throughout the debate on same-sex civil unions (2013- 2014) recurrent questions about "how do same-sex families work?", and the underlying "how is homosexual identity is produced?", fuelled the public sphere. In this conflictual time with LGBT rights discussed in the public domain alongside the discussion on social fascistization, I set out to investigate lesvia subjective identity, queer feminist and lesvia politics and community- building. Through ethnographic material collected within twenty-two months of fieldwork, I examine the spheres of sexuality and gender, community building, as well as lesvia activism which co-exists with queer feminist discourses and politics.

Following Elisabeth Engebretsen's concluding thoughts on becoming lala in urban China (Engebretsen: 2014), I likewise suggest that becoming lesvia in Greece can be best approached "as a subjective and collective category, or an ambiguous trope with which to think, and where meanings- dominant and alternative- are constantly being produced, negotiated, and challenged" (Engebretsen, 2014: 259). I propose that becoming lesvia involves an ongoing engagement with normative gender regimes, namely an ongoing negotiation between dominant and alternative gender and sexual

configurations across, throughout and within different spatial and temporal domains. Such an approach acknowledges the significance of generational sexual narratives and the generative possibilities of non-linear temporality in the formation of lesvia histories and ideologies. In addition, I suggest that sexual practices and gendered identifications produce paradoxes and incoherencies that constitute lesvia subjectivities. I look at cultural discourses and activism as models of political selfhood (from intersectional killjoys to haunting ghosts) and argue that they are fundamentally interrelated, that they co-constitute each other, and that this brings to the fore partially unresolved tensions within and between the collective identity battles (chapter five) and the individual (gaps between gendered identifications and sexual practices analysed at chapters seven and eight).

It seems insufficient to approach lesvia lives in Athens separately to lesbian feminist activism given the role of the latter in establishing the word lesvia as an identity and community. This does not mean that other positions (e.g. class) and dispositions are secondary, or that lesvia life exists only within the margins of politicized communities, but that the people I encountered construct their notions of lesvia selfhood in significantly different ways to what encountered exclusively in lesbian bar culture (see chapter nine). Based on my research findings, I find that an approach that focuses solely on lesvia subjectivities without considering the role of discourses and social activism would fail to account for the ambiguities, gaps and discrepancies that emerge between lesvia activist life as a contested collage of discourses and lesvia as an embodied and gendered self.

In this context, a multi-faceted approach that draws from lesbian feminist history, discursive cultural schemes and identity battles is set alongside women's narratives of lesvia subjectivity. This approach serves to account for diverse contexts, multiple presentations and diverging engagements that characterize lesbian lives and histories. With this approach I tried to deal with ongoing gaps and discrepancies in my ethnographic material: Between individual stories and collective community-building; between sexuality as identity and sexuality as sensorial experience; between generational narratives and narratives of the self; between social activism and personal experience.

In a similar vein, I examine three intersecting themes of analysis: firstly, temporality, genealogies and politics; secondly, community-building and space-making; and thirdly, the makings of lesvia subjectivity. This concluding chapter doesn't follow linearly the arguments presented in each chapter as building blocks that arrive to an end-point rather it produces a collage of ideas, concepts, narratives that entangle and overlap with each other. By drawing from different chapters and juxtaposing concepts and narratives with each other I seek to discuss queer feminists and lesvies as displaced vagabonds, haunting subjects, crafting nomads, strangers at home, terms that denote transformation, (un) belonging, and movement.

In the chapters on gendered identifications, sexual practices, generational sexual narratives and spatial exclusions/inclusions (Part B), I have shown that multiple gendered and sexual subjectivities are developed along the lines of border-questioning (of the category woman), ambivalence with sexual roles, generational (dis)continuities, and classed habitus. In the chapters on the history of the lesbian feminist (and homosexual) movement, queer feminist politics and identity battles (Part A), I have shown that lesbian feminist history emerges as a spectral constellation comprised of ghostly appearances, ephemeral presences and non-linear times. The multiple terrains of lesvia subjectivity- spatial, temporal, community, individual- are shown to be intimately connected with the interplay between western and local cultural imaginaries of what it means to be lesvia and what it means to be queer. The narratives of becoming lesvia are studied across a range of scales (local histories, western queer discourses, spatial encounters, gendered sexual narratives of the self) and divisions (class exclusions, identity battles over community membership, and generational discontinuities).

In chapter six, I suggest that generational time forged women's sexual narratives which clashed, coexisted, and influenced one other. I discussed the shift from same-sex desiring women to lesvia-identifying women as sexual narratives of similitude and difference that coincided with major socio-cultural changes. In particular, I am referring to the politicization of women's same-sex sexuality in the early millennium (with the creation of the Lesbian Group of Athens- LOA- at 1999) that emerges from but continues to sit discrepantly alongside the lesbian bar culture (roughly from the 1970s

onwards), and the lesbian separatist community of Eressos (early 1980s). By locating women's narratives in generational time, I discuss two culturally informed subject positions, the same-sex desiring woman and the gender discontinuous and lesvia-identifying woman.

The first subject position brings to the fore a narrative of similitude, which entails a desire for the same (woman-to-woman love) as well as loving oneself as a woman (in line with the feminist vision of female empowerment). The second subject position reflects a narrative of difference, which entails women's identification with western identity categories (lesbian identity, butch/femme), with a clear-cut social division between straight (and/or heteronormative) and lesbian (or non-normative) worlds. It also highlights an approach to lesvia identity through the lens of gender discontinuity. The latter relates to feelings of unbelonging, that is, not feeling at home with, yet not denouncing, established gender norms (chapter seven). Throughout this chapter I employ generation as an analytical category (Plummer: 2010) that helps produce contextually-informed approaches to same-sex sexuality.

The idea that generational time orders women's experiences of same-sex sexuality means that sexualities are affected by time and space: The ability to travel (how mobile one is), the development of the autonomous feminist movement in the 1980s (along with its inheritances and losses), the post-millennial politicization of lesvia sexuality, as well as internet and social media cultures, brought lesbies in contact with western queer and lesbian feminist discourses and practices. In chapter six I consider temporality in relation to generational time, in chapter two I focus on the non-linear history of the lesbian feminist movement and finally, in chapter three I am concerned with lesbian temporality in relation to hauntology. In chapter three, I demonstrate that by moving circularly in history, from past to present times, and by locating recurrent feminist practices and claims, lesbian temporality intersects with hauntology, namely lesbies emerge as ghostly historical subjects. In fact, the iterative act of forgetting, remembering, and repeating (by rewriting) lesbian history, constructs its hauntological temporality. Thus, the history of the lesbian feminist and homosexual movement (chapter three) is determined by temporal circles of silences, gaps, and outbursts. The lesbian historical subject appears, disappears, and reappears again across time and across generations.

The notion of ghostly appearance is discussed in chapter four. By looking at LGBT and queer feminist discourses put forward by collectives and individuals (lesbian, straight feminists and trans women), I suggest that the contemporary queer feminist political subject is haunting the present and haunted by its past. In particular, I argue that the queer feminist political subject is haunted by the claims of the autonomous feminist movement of the 1980s, which can be traced in the proliferation of anti-rape claims and demonstrations. In addition, I look at particular acts of appearing and argue that the lesvia political subject appears as an unauthorized ghost or else as an ephemeral presence. For instance, drawing same-sex love slogans at night enacts a ghostly appearance of lesbies in public, an appearance that haunts the heterosexual day life of the city. Similarly, Dora Rosetti's diary-novel for Liza (chapter three), which was written in the 1930s and was published (without her consent) by a group of boys who knew Dora, disappeared for the next fifty years, only to reappear again through the work of the lesbian feminist activist, Eleni Bakopoulou. She managed to find and interview her in the early 1980s. The diary which is written in the form of an autobiographical narrative, located in Athens in the 1930s, depicts Dora's love for Liza (their fallouts, their encounters, Dora's agony and jealousy, her lust, her restraints within the duty of marriage, her ongoing efforts to make sense of her relation with Liza).

The fact that the diary appears, disappears and reappears makes it a ghostly appearance; the diary ephemerally appears to haunt different presents (the 1980s and the early millennium) and then lapses back (or gets absorbed) into normative (meaning straight) history. Other forms of appearing such as kiss-in protests bear the element of surprise. Gays and lesbians appear suddenly in space and give presence to the expression of same-sex love, which serves to point out that until then this form of love was not publically present or was socially undesirable.

The queer feminist political subject isn't only haunted by its past, it also haunts the linearity of Marxist and anarchist political projects which proclaim to be inclusive, yet produce male-dominated spaces fraught with masculinistic fantasies of sovereign mastery. The queer feminist political subject enters these spaces and disrupts the silence by killing the happiness of anarchists who are immersed in an anti-romantic sexual discourse of unconditional love that shames active female sexuality (the scapegoating of the slut) and the melancholic joy of leftists who indulge in fantasies of revolutionary

liberation that will potentially erase gender and sexual oppressions. The notion of the queer feminist political subject who kills the joy in the room, who appears as an ephemeral presence or as an unauthorized ghost across time and space, was discussed (in chapter four) in relation to the time of coincidence that marks the emergence of queer in the Greek cultural sphere. In particular, I demonstrate that the meanings attached to queer by local lesbian activists along with the history of the queer feminist movement, denote that queer is culturally introduced alongside LGBT identitarian discourses (and not against them). In this context, I suggest that the contemporary queer feminist and LGBT movement consists a temporal mosaic of discourses that correspond to different times in the history of the Angloamerican LGBT movement (Mizielinska: 2011).

The time of coincidence becomes more prominent in moments of temporal asynchrony such as the “Γλίτταρ” (glitter) dispute, the last women- only party organized by LOA (chapter five). In this particular party, identities from different times and places are brought together in the same space, at the same time. “Γλίτταρ” (glitter) brings us to the second set of themes: community-building (chapter five) and space-making (chapter nine). What characterizes community-building in the post-millennial era is the proliferation of identities and the never-ending tensions over membership and identity management. The “t-shirt” debate is discussed as an example of these continual struggles over membership and identity management. By considering community in Valentine’s terms as an achievement not as a static entity (Valentine: 2007), I put forward an analysis that incorporates ambiguous margins between spaces and identities: those who belong; those who refuse to belong; those who request (full) membership and criticize the terms of community-building put forward by a dominant majority. I suggest that such an approach is important because it allows for classed exclusions to come to the fore.

In chapter nine, I demonstrate that some lesbies of the older generation, as well as some younger queer lesbies, were unflinchingly negative towards lesbian bars. Lesbian bars are leisure spaces inhabited mostly by working- class lesbies and don’t involve lesvia social activism. I suggest that the lesbian bar culture was culturally exoticized by some middle class lesbies of the older generation as spaces inhabited by dalikes who had “vulgar” behaviours and weren’t conscious of the political implications

of their sexuality (same- sex sexuality as a sexual and political identity). I argued that some lesbians of the older generation disidentified from the lesbian bar culture and that this was a necessary step for the formation of their lesbian political consciousness. At the same time, through the lens of activist lesbians of a working-class background, the recent recent emergence of queer mixed spaces foregrounds people's unequal access to queer social and cultural capital. I argue that queer spaces are defined by a queer exceptionality of middle-class origin which has to do with mobility (literal and metaphorical), with access to academic theory, with a knowingness about cultural diversity and an engagement with western queer discourses. In between these classed divisions, Beaver emerges as a transitional space that brings together divergent discourses and ways of doing politics. I suggest that Beaver is a space where queer feminists, activist lesbians and working-class lesbians of the bars mingle. This cultural mixture is enabled by the notion of *parea* gatherings that involve sharing food and drinks. I argue that Beaver serves to bring together the loosely organized culture of lesbian bars –leisure spaces for “having fun”- with organized forms of social activism. This mixture is reflected in Beaver's relaxing atmosphere, with food and drinking commensality taking place alongside the organization of talks, presentations, parties, and performances.

The third set of themes is the makings of lesbia subjectivity (chapter seven and chapter eight). The gendered sexual subjectivities (*agorokoritso*, boy-looking poustides, feminine- questioning lesbians) both draw on and transgress conventional gender norms. I indicate how *agorokoritso* emerges in women's narratives as a trope of difference against hetero-feminine norms. I examine *agorokoritso* not as an identity but as a term employed by women to talk about same-sex desire in early adolescence. I explore boy-looking poustides as a gender identification that denounces toxic straight machismo and adopts the gay tenderness of a *poustis* “*who loves mandarin facial cream.*” Feminine-questioning lesbians relate less to sexual difference than do poustides while the latter are more seen to translate into gayness than lesbianism. While talking about their femininity (or femaleness), lesbians construct genealogies that link them to, and disassociate them from, their mothers and grandmothers in terms of gendered social roles. These continual negotiations of sameness and difference reproduce normalizing



ideologies about masculine and feminine characteristics and enable new meanings of gender and sexuality to emerge.

For example, the qualitative characteristics of *agorokoritso* appear to incorporate key normative masculine attributes like loudness, emotional untouchability, fury, and counter-argumentative attitudes. Feminine-questioning lesvies go through a phase of denial with hetero-femininity before reclaiming feminine attributes- penetration and passive sexual roles- from a non-normative lesvia position. However, for the older generation of lesvies femininity falls into womanhood. Older lesvies talk about womanhood in terms of female social roles which they challenge by politicizing their lesvia sexuality.

In chapter eight I enquire into sexual roles and pleasure as a source of gender recognition for gender non-conforming lesvies and as a source of affirmation for feminine-questioning lesvies. Sexual passivity and activity are sites where hetero-gendered norms are reiterated and challenged. In particular, penetration becomes the conceptual site where meanings about gender norms are revalued. Similarly to Ann Cvetkovitch's ideas on butch/femme sexualities (2003), I argue that emotional and physical touchability and availability, namely the body's openness/closedness, is shown to adhere to gendered sexual desires. The emergence of ambiguity on the site of the sexual serves to question the gendered attributes of lesvia subjectivities discussed in chapter seven (there are poustides who want to fuck and get fucked, feminine lesvies who want to fuck and agorokoritsa who want to be fucked). Here I argue that the body and its sensorial knowledge becomes the site where lesvia identities and their gendered attributes are actualized, affirmed, and challenged.

In sum, the multiple terrains of lesvia subjectivity- including gendered sexual subjectivity, community, discourses and social activism- are in my thesis shown to connect with spatial and temporal cultural imaginaries which bring to the fore movement and belonging as continual sources of crisis. Following Marinoudi's argument (Marinoudi: 2017) where she suggests that queer feminists are travelling vagabonds, I also propose that contemporary queer feminists lesvies are *displaced* vagabonds. They are vagabond outsiders, vagabonds who craft space, vagabonds who

become nomads, nomads who feel as though they were strangers at home, nomads who were in crisis long before the real economic crisis.

In his work “Postmodernity and its Discontents” (Bauman: 1997), Bauman suggests that the opposition between tourists and vagabonds- as metaphors for social life- is the major principal division in contemporary society which defines the state of the subject in postmodernity. In particular, he states:

“The tourists stay or move at their hearts' desire. They abandon the site when new untried opportunities beckon elsewhere. The vagabonds, however, know that they won't stay for long, however strongly they wish to, since nowhere they stop are they welcome: if the tourists move because they find the world irresistibly attractive, the vagabonds move because they find the world unbearably inhospitable. They take to the roads not when they have squeezed out the last drop of amusement the locals could offer, but when the locals lose patience and refuse to put up with their alien presence. The tourists travel because they want to; the vagabonds because they have no other choice. The vagabonds are, one may say, *involuntary tourists* (my emphasis) (Bauman, 1997: 92-93).”

Drawing from Bauman, I suggest that queer feminist lesbies find themselves in an incessant movement between groups and identity categories. They shift from male dominated anarchist squats to anarchofeminist collectives, to lesbian groups and queer feminist collectives. The need to merge activist life with the domain of everyday conventional life constitutes the main reason for women's movement between groups and identity positions. In addition, some queer feminist lesbies “live perpetually with the identity problem unresolved” (Bauman, 1997: 26), they describe disidentifying from spaces and ideologies and moving between groups and identity positions. Their encounters with western identity categories and queer as fluid, further complicates the process of lesvia identity making. Yet, many of the younger lesbies don't purport queer as an identity but as a political standpoint. Below, Aliko discusses being cast out from anarchist collectives, moving between groups and collectives and forming her lesvia politicized self through this incessant drifting. In many respects, she embodies the

displaced vagabond who later re-crafts herself as a queer feminist lesvia within and beyond communities.

*Aliki: "My presence in anarchism was always from a critical distance, I did not like the machismo there, I maintained a critical position throughout my time there {...} And queer had an affinity to anarchism, it was "flirting" a bit with anarchism. Queers who attended anarchist things had expectations. We would attend but always from a critical distance and occasionally we would feel disappointed by what was said, we were there to critique anarchism and this consisted a form of other-identification {...} the Master narrative stood there like a dome and we were poking it, waiting for it to change...a constant disappointment, apologizing about the revolutionary character of our political views, namely how rebellious we are, how much we ought to be. At some point, I freaked out with the whole thing, I felt that we did not need anarchism as a political point of reference {...} Being lesvia is more revolutionary than being an anarchist, it's much more difficult to lead a lesvia life. I felt that our political identities did not need anarchism to be heard and give us revolutionary credentials. I was in denial, I felt politically disappointed and left anarchism.*

*{...} The lesbian group was everything to me, I learned the meanings of solidarity and care. I left the lesbian group after six years because again there was something missing. I felt there was this limitation, that we are lesbians and this is the only thing that matters. But I love the group wholeheartedly. I did not leave with any hard feelings; I was just searching myself politically, I was looking for things in the anti-authoritarian movement, things that the lesbian group was not offering at the time {...} Later I joined the queer feminist group {...} It gave me many political tools, every meeting was literally a revelation, after every meeting I was full of thoughts. The whole approach was very experiential, our texts, our discussions {...} Together we cultivated common tools to talk about our desires; at every meeting something magical happened between us. Later, I felt the group lost part of its experiential element or at least I lost the lesbian element there {...} At some point in my life I was feeling happy for my desire and I did not feel this was a feeling I could share with the group,*

*it felt as if nobody there wanted to celebrate desire, simply be happy for the fact that we are lesbians, gays {...} I feel there was a huge investment in trauma, so much trauma {...} as if happiness, happiness for what we do in life was forbidden. And this suffocated me. Ok, this is totally my experience now.”*

The incessant movement of contemporary vagabonds like Aliko, who are exiled from anarchist spaces and ideologies entails disidentifying from one position to enter the sphere of uncertainty. The incessant movement of the vagabond means that she never finds permanent residence, she is willingly or unwillingly on the move, touching the borders of lesbia and queer community life and pushing against the limitations of anarchist politics. Aliko travels psychically between identity positions and groups and feels partly displaced or out of place; she lives with the ambiguities of the displaced vagabond that make her functional in her discomfort. In this journey she gathers tools, builds shields and loses certainty, but joyfully, painfully she goes ahead, walks through feelings of unbelonging from one group to the next, from one political narrative to another.

Similarly to haunting ghosts, vagabonds move incessantly across time and slip between past, present and future and appear as uninvited guests that haunt the living present. By surprising their hosts (anarchist spaces, the heterosexual home), they affect the experience of the border that delineates a legitimate home (in terms of gender, sexual and political belonging). In this regard, they indicate the moment of the “possibility of an impossibility” (Athanasidou, 2014b: no page). The latter involves haunting the present as uninvited ghosts of the past, and letting the “impossible”, as conceptualized by Laclau and Mouffe (1983), formulate “the horizon of tension and possibility- or, limitation and promise” (Athanasidou, 2014b: no page) - whilst engaging with the radical potentialities of the “now.”

However, queer feminist lesbians don't consist solely of involuntary tourists in continual displacement, as Bauman suggests, or ghostly appearances living at the margins of social visibility they also visit imaginary places and make use of their imagination to experience something else apart from the living present. Women find refuge in Eressos and forge bonds with women from abroad, queer lesbians surf on websites, listen to music, watch Angloamerican lesbian movies and TV series, meet and

chat with queers from all over the world (Queeruption meetings). Lesvies, who can still afford it or have an extended network of friends (a kind of classed mobility) travel to Berlin, London and other metropolitan cities to get a glimpse of a different kind way of being lesvies. By visiting real and imaginary places, women aren't stuck in continual displacement, instead they invest in pareas, share food and drinks, dance till early dawn at lesbian bars and queer parties and use their imagination alongside available cultural resources to open themselves to different experiences. In this process, queer lesvies become crafting nomads in line with Braidotti's notion of the nomad (Braidotti: 1994). Braidotti considers the nomad as a general way of thinking, a critical self-consciousness, which consists in not taking any kind of identity as permanent. The forcefully displaced vagabond who drifts from one group to the next becomes a nomadic political subject that seeks to challenge socially coded modes of thought and behaviour (Braidotti, 1994: 22-23). Nomads immerse themselves in the art of crafting, they make space for themselves, speak for themselves, demonstrate for themselves, painfully embrace their state of uncertainty.

From the vagabond's traumatic displacement from the lost Marxist, anarchist and/or heteronormative origin to Braidotti's notion of the nomad, who has no desire, wish or longing for fixity (Braidotti, 1994: 22), community-building is depicted as a form of homecoming. When the familiar home becomes too estranged, the journey to another land begins. Yet the absence and loss of home is located in the familial home and doesn't result from the act of leaving home. As Sinfield suggests "home is the place you get to, not the place you came from" (Sinfield, 2000: 103).

In her work "Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post- Coloniality" (2000), Sarah Ahmed underlines "the easy antagonism between "home" as a purified space of complete comfort, in which one is comfortable enough to stop thinking, a way of being that "does not over-reach itself," and nomadism/migrancy as a different way of being, being away from "home," being "strange" or mobile enough to think" (Ahmed, 2000: 87-88). She continues to critique "both the idealizing and metaphorizing of nomadism, as critical consciousness, and the easy dualism between "home" and "away," which makes it impossible to see how "strangeness" or strangers are already at home" (Ahmed, 2000: 87-88). This notion of strangeness as "being already at home" can be used to critically

interrogate the limits of community building that make crafting nomads feel strangers at their own homes. Contrary to Braidotti's approach to nomads as critical thinkers who have relinquished any desire for fixity, I suggest that queer feminists build communities to feel at home, yet in the process some feel like strangers, making them lose their desire for fixity. Below, Lydia (Aris) shows how feeling at "home" within the queer feminist community comes with the price of feeling estranged from your "chosen family."

*Lydia: {...} I felt very unstable with the image others had about me...and my attachment to the community.... I felt vulnerable...I felt... I don't know...nobody had directly told me anything when I was transitioning back to feminine but I felt as if the community no longer contained me, basically I felt like I had done something wrong towards the community. It took me two years to go back... I recall one night standing outside the Purple House and wondering whether I should go inside, to the lesbian group's party...I don't know how to explain it best, I felt emotionally abused by the community {...} Gradually I said to myself that I'll go back to sisterhood with fewer delusions. I think a large part of my disappointment had to do with the fact that I had invested in an imaginary feminist sisterhood, the fantasy didn't work out and I was knocked down {...}*"

Lydia shows how "the achievement of a particular notion of community is impossible as the latter constantly fails to account for all its imagined members" (Valentine, 2007: 73) (as every imaginary ideal ought to). The process of feeling at home, of finding home is fraught with estrangement, community betrayal and personal loss. The moral prescriptions of community membership entail the suppression of difference in identities (Lydia "failing" to inhabit appropriately the identity of a trans man) and affects (Alik's celebratory mood for her desire which did not find a place in the queer group's attachment to trauma). This shows how nomads can feel strangers at home and move not because they enjoy the lack of fixity but because total fixity is an affectively unattainable state in community-building (home-making).

In this context, I suggest that queer feminists and lesbians can be seen as subjects in crisis before the real crisis. What I mean by this is that they have inhabited the place

of the outcast within the Greek cultural and social sphere long before the real crisis. As always already betrayed (by state and society) they weren't surprised with the widespread precarization of everyday life (to which homosexual bodies were already exposed). In particular, queer feminist collectives suggest that the Greek crisis encapsulates the loss of privileges of middle class family men and women and underline the family-centred and heterosexual character of this loss. LGBT people were already living in some sort of precarity- economic, social. In this direction, they argue that the anti-austerity movements that spread throughout the country between 2010- 2012 failed to address a culturally alternative audience beyond the "Greek holy family" (which also entails its reproduction). Below is an excerpt from QV's text entitled "Crisis invisible and weird" (the Greek word for weird is "allokoti" which also means queer).

{...} For us, the crisis isn't an unexpected evil. It's the climax of an ongoing process in which rights and acquired goods were handed over to the state and became privileges. The crisis reflects material relations, conflicts and hierarchies that always existed. At the same time, it consists a context for the restructuring and reformulation of those hierarchies and conflicts in favour of those already in power. In this context, we witness the fast rise and legalization of the extreme right, the prevalence of deep neoliberalism and the enhancement of the cultural triptych: army/police- church- family {...}

{...} It's doubtful whether the economic condition per se changes the fact that gay, lesbians, bi, trans and "allokotes" (weirdoes, queers) are exposed to a smaller or larger extent to the violence and tolerance of the (hetero) normative. Those of us who are vulnerable and exposed to heterosexist violence couldn't find support in the lifestyle individualism of the 1990s (*the gay lifestyle identities- my explanation*). It's no coincidence that SYD, an association for trans women, was one of the first to talk about economic precarity in relation to the social exclusion of trans women due to their gender identity. In this context, SYD created a solidarity fund {...}

{...} Regarding the anti-austerity demonstrations of "the indignants" ("oi aganaktismenoi") we want to focus on what was left outside... the Greek citizen, the Greek family man came to represent the ultimate victim and heroic subject of the crisis. He became the only subject worthy of attention. The focus of various discourses on this subject is problematic to the extent that it condemns those that are left outside, meaning the non- Greeks and those living outside the Greek household. There is nothing revolutionary in supporting this type of citizen as the sole political subject. These discourses, however revolutionary they present themselves, are basically calling the state to fulfil its paternal role by claiming a return to a before- the- crisis normativity. In this way, they hide (or bury) social conflicts (gendered, ethnic and classed) that matter for us.

QVzine (2014, issue 5), excerpt from text about 2012 Athens Pride, pp.49-53

Whether they are seen as displaced vagabonds, crafting nomads or strangers at home, queer feminists (lesbians and gays) consist of subjects who lived in precarity-economic and social- long before the crisis. The crisis served to aggravate power relations that were already structured to the detriment of gays and lesbians; homophobic attacks were happening long before the crisis and trans women were living in perpetual precarity since they were unable to support themselves financially and make money for transitioning. It is no surprise that queer feminists were also discussing the idea of a



solidarity fund. In their work “Dispossession: The performative in the political” (2013), Athanasiou and Butler suggest that the crisis as a regulatory regime produces dispensable and disposable populations, “deprived of a future, of education, of stable and fulfilling work, of even knowing what to call home” (Athanasiou & Butler, 2013: 197).

Queer feminist politics is premised upon the fact that some bodies- ableist, female, migrant, refugee, trans, lesbian, gay- are rendered dispensable and disposable or even dead. Queer gays and lesbians are cultural outcasts, which means that they don't have a home in which to fit and build their histories through loss and estrangement. For instance, the suicide of an arrested gay after the police raid at the club Spices in the mid 1990s, the innumerable arrests and social stigmatization of gays and travesti in the late 1970s-early 1980s under the 1976 law for “protection from sexually transmitted diseases” and finally the lynching to death of a gay HIV-positive activist by male shop-owners (September 2018). Thus, gays and lesbians have formed their identities in the context of a pre-crisis notion of disposability that made them invisible, exposed them to violence (even death), and rendered them second-class citizens deprived of social rights (the right to marry, the right to have children, the right to cohabit, the right to mourn)<sup>32</sup>.

Against the backdrop of anthropological studies produced on life within austerity (Knight: 2015; Theodosopoulos: 2013; Theodosopoulos: 2014; Athanasiou: 2012; Dalakoglou & Aggelopoulos: 2017), queer gays and lesbians point to the fact that life is experienced differently based on one's vulnerability and exposure to threat and violence. Life within austerity produces different registers of disposability and resilience. Queer lesbians have experienced some form of self-dispossession, they feel displaced from normative gender regimes, they rebuild their identities from scratch, they are exposed to the violence of the patriarchal (hetero) normative, and thus, they have produced resilient bodies long before the real crisis. Their bodies have been

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<sup>32</sup> I have already discussed how the 1976 draft bill on the “protection from sexually transmitted diseases and the regulation of relevant issues” along with the dehumanizing discourse of the AIDS epidemic condemned gay and travesti lives to social and physical death. By looking at the magazines *Kraximo* and *Amfi* of the era (late 1970s) one reads about various arrests, detentions and beatings. At the same time, this gave rise to forms of agonistic agency that led to the emergence of a gay and travesti community based on feelings of collective responsibility for one another (see also chapter three). Forty years later, the right to mourn, to commemorate this traumatic past, to secure access to mourning for future generations, becomes the affective register upon which the law on cohabitation contracts for same- sex couples is evaluated by queer feminist collectives (QV's text for Athens Pride 2015 on “Family Affair”).

beaten, scorned, mocked, confused and re-crafted.

By this I wish to point to the (perhaps obvious) fact that precarious life brings to the fore different registers of disposability and precarity based on one's economic background, familial support network, political affiliations, and last but not least one's affective repository. The discourse of austerity has constructed the "new-poor"<sup>33</sup> (neo-poor, "neoptoxos") subject (Panourgia: 2018), which is expected to possess certain qualities: be resilient, courageous and find the strength to continuously adapt in conditions that don't grant her any sense of security (or survival for that matter). From the perspective of queer feminist lesbians, who have been cultural and social outcasts for a long time, I would say that they have the unlucky benefit of being less easy to surprise (crisis or no crisis whatsoever).

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The time of my fieldwork coincided with the aftermath of anti-austerity demonstrations (2013-2015), the election of Syriza (2015), the debate on same-sex cohabitation contracts (and its voting on December 2015 just after I left the field), the completion of ten years from the first Athens Pride (2005), the last women-only party organized by the Lesbian Group of Athens- LOA (February 2015), the opening of a queer social space (November 2013), the opening of Beaver (October 2013), the unprecedented proliferation of anarchofeminist collectives with an anti-rape agenda and LGBT thematic groups (about homophobia in education and same-sex parenthood), especially in Athens and Thessaloniki. However, at the time of completion of this thesis, most of the collectives I got to know have dissolved. Activist lesbians of LOA left the Feminist Centre where they held their meetings for the past fourteen years (see Appendix D). A drag scene emerged in the last couple of years and a new drag club opened in central Athens. The notion of queer as a political identity that "flirts" with anarchism has given its place to queer as a type of cultural activism with body performance and queer as gender fluidity and self-identification gaining more prominence. In 2015, the Athens Museum of Queer Arts, a self-organized queer art activist space opened by queers of the diaspora in collaboration with local queer feminists (the same year of the dissolution

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<sup>33</sup> A term used to indicate the rapid and drastic deterioration of both income and quality of life of previously middle-class persons.

of QV).

In 2016, activist lesbians left the Purple House after allegations of sexual harassment. Beaver remains a vibrant space for women's socializing. And last but not least, on September 2018, a well-known HIV gay activist and drag queen was brutally lynched in broad daylight at central Athens. His death caused the outcry of the queer and LGBT community with series of protests all over Greece and the support of queer feminist communities from abroad. The queer feminist and LGBT community has its first "recognizable" loss to mourn. Rage and mourning seem to give shape to a strong queer feminist consciousness.

## Appendix A

### ---Notebook of another thesis---

This: That it might be possible (for me) to write the book of a kind of displacement. Think nothing of it. The labyrinth has carried me, carried me out, with little regard for the consequences. Now that this effort has exhausted itself, now that (academic) language has spoken to me to the point of exhaustion- poor for having believed in it, feeble for not having believed enough (Nathanael: 2015)- now I prefer the labyrinth's orange lights and Cassandra's pale pink eyes to the quotidian. I prefer her passageway letters to writing. Through displaced letters I tremor against "the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of another in me- the other that I am and am not, that I don't know how to be, the gap between us, the other that gives me the desire to know" {Cixous, (1986), 1992: 85-86}, and "finally the other of academic knowledge that opens up to possessing me by dispossessing me of myself." (Manesi: 2018, conference abstract, Retrieved from: <https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/easa2018/paper/44387>)

In this book, there are no research participants in the strict sense of the term, but rather instants of being or better yet presences that account for the fragmentary character of being, a feminine perpetual displacement in relation to the self and to the other. I am speaking here of writing femininity and ethnography "as keeping alive the other that is confided to me, that visits me, that I can love as other" {Cixous, (1986), 1992: 85-86}. "Influenced mostly by Sedgwick's approach on queer "as a peculiar literary figure, a trope that can have a disruptive effect on discourse" (Kornac, 2015: 137), but also by early French feminist writers, and mostly Helene Cixous, who supported an "écriture feminine", namely the art of "singing the abyss" as she describes it, I tried to develop a form of political lyricism while working on the edge of theory, personal diary, poetry and political manifesto." (Manesi: 2018, conference abstract, Retrieved from: <https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/easa2018/paper/44387>)

I implement a methodology of drainage. It's the only way to make room. Like Nathanael (2015), I am not interested in the accumulation and archiving of knowledge, people, thoughts, but in their removal. In this way I facilitate the movement between different genres of text; diary entries, poetry, theory, ethnographic field notes, life histories; all exist simultaneously "to support a writing that is doubting empirical approaches to knowledge and treats the text as something daring and disfigured" (Manesi: 2018, conference abstract, Retrieved from: <https://nomadit.co.uk/conference/easa2018/paper/44387>), yet their simultaneity provokes in me a dizzying paralysis.

My indifference to chronology, causality, academic curricula and deadlines is linked to a predilection with moments. This book is just a moment of writing. To arrive to this moment, it is necessary for my previous academic writings to have left me. She arrives shortly. Days, weeks in the labyrinth. Me: Cassandra you ride of my name; you pull my body under the weight of you. You become my queer feminist endeavour to carnally and politically construct an immanent feminine subject in-becoming through lacking desires, feminist discourses and utopian cruising, you criss-cross the labyrinth, taken away by women's multiple voices, amazed by my own attachments.

To translate it differently: If the Symbolic is defined in terms of man as universal, by identifying him with the One, and to a certain extent with the phallus, then on the other side, there is an absence, an otherness that cannot be identified collectively with a signifier. This is what is expressed by Lacan's aphorism "the woman does not exist". This absence cannot be referred to a second signifier, as if we could use the signifier "one" for man and "two" for a woman. It is impossible to write a sexual relation between the one and an Other characterized by the fact that there is no existing signifier to identify and thus by an absence, a gap (Morel: 2010 ). It is this absence that Luce Irigaray touches upon in her discussion of a virtual feminine "symbolic", which both theoretically and ethically, attempts to find a transmissible form for this feminine voice (Irigaray: 1985).

I tell myself that the labyrinth is my queer Derridean book of questions. Once the labyrinth lightens, once its alleys roll themselves up, once femininity is affirmed, "its identification with itself gathers an imperceptible difference which permits me

efficaciously, rigorously, that is, discreetly, to exit from closure” (Derrida, 1978: 295). The labyrinth signals my anxieties and disorientations in returning to Athens. Sometimes it got hard to follow the city’s masculine predispositions and prescribed normative rhythms. Last night I was telling Cassandra that when I collapse in Athens, the city collapses too, when I am sad the sunny sky is inside my throat. By the time I gather my courage and make my way towards Athens, I become a moving target, the city looks like the end of the world and the houses look like cages, however there is a path if you know how to look. It takes you to an alley, and that meets a winding black lane, which runs to the arches of the railway line going to Thessaloniki; and from one of those arches next to the noisy gay clubs of Gazi— I won't say quite which arche, though I could— leads another, darker, lane that takes me, very quick and inconspicuous, to the land of wounded attachments, here identities are invested in pain and loss, eternally displaced. Breathing in and out. This is the land where Sappho has been taken captive, rescued and saved, altogether.

The labyrinth is filled with parodies, promises, fairy tales, sonnets, and poems. Parallel universes, violent straight gazes, queer heterotopias, while queer people draw lines and embark into its maze. Here, you never seem to find your way around, even though you pass by the same place, you are never aware of it, there are bright alleys in which you are visible and shadowy ones where you can barely see yourself. Choking. Movements are always slow, in need of manoeuvres, in a different notion of time I let go of the delusional warmth of the heteronormative line, and slowly, yet tenaciously, I take the path that seems “less oppressive” but still isolated and absurd in its utopianism.

I take my letters and move to the labyrinth with her, obstructing the stupidity of Anglophones, who decided to simplify a text that was in their opinion too complicated. Here in the labyrinth, or what academia quiet unimaginatively likes to call the “field”, the only horizon is a spiral of desire, and I had no time to hold on to academic logos, and yet it existed quiet vaguely in written language- what academia calls field notes- because it is there that I decided the thoughts that settle the questions and answers springing throughout this trip.

But I am unwilling to retrace my steps in a linear narrative since in this very beautiful labyrinth of the solstice night, I owe it to myself and to others- my participants as academia blissfully calls them with colonial guilt- not to erase the memory of this

path, not to erase the strategies we had to invent in order to survive the phallic events of life. Thus, well before the solstice night began and I went cruising the labyrinth, knowing that I would risk once again all for everything, hysterically my analyst says, and that I would look at the same sky which would mold my skin a hundred times; overwhelmed and solitaire, in that afternoon night I took the precaution to fail again and again without being afraid of becoming an anthropologist unworthy of her name.

...

I wanted more again. I wanted to denounce him again and again. I wanted the phallic torus to hand me over her drawings. I wanted a drawing like that on the book I hadn't written yet.

...

This is a story of a girl who left home to see the night. I did not see the night. I entered the night one solstice day in Athens. Exiting the tube, I walked side by side with the voice of Lena Platonos to the gates of labyrinth park- *"I live in the joyful gardens, with no money and sins; I live in the joyful gardens, adaptation is not only for the strong ones. I live here...we all eat fruits<sup>34</sup>..."* I did not climb; I crawled filled with fear and expectation. My knees covered with stardust. I was speaking non-sense. My mouth could not utter a "single" word. If I cannot utter it then singularity may not be my style. The labyrinth leaves me perplexed. To search the same within the other, the other within the same, instead one could have said that I wanted to be here and there at the same time (Brossard: 1995). My fingers caress the keyboard to craft a body in search of its innate sensations. There is a part of the real that can never and will never- thank God- enter logos because sensations are multiple, because beauty and freakiness are demanding, because reality is not sufficient. And yet how to embrace life through words? I was not alone. There among the voices and eyes that have loved so many books as I have, I walked between Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf. I did not see the night, only the tender buttons slipping from Gertrude's dress. Then other women appeared. I saw

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<sup>34</sup> Ζω στους τρισχαριτωμένους κήπους, εκεί που δεν υπάρχει χρήμα ούτε κρίμα. Ζω στους τρισχαριτωμένους κήπους εκεί που η προσαρμογή δεν ανήκει στους δυνατούς. Ζω εκεί...που όλοι τρώνε μόνο καρπούς...

but the white of their skirts, their nipples pressing against the names of Elisabeth Bishop, Frida Kahlo and Anne Sexton.

Farther off, queers declined existing pronouns with mysterious signifiers in the curve of their lips. Going far and beyond the essential. I followed them in what became our unbecoming. Feelings resisting against rigidity, we stand touched by memory, grounded in our disappearance. I felt less exiled in this pastiche of signifiers. Gradually the sound of voices fades away. I am left alone. The night is silver. No longer do I seek for its centre. I do not mind if there is no exit; I do not worry for the “right” word. I turn my eyes to the labyrinth, oscillating in all its mystery, amplifying my senses with no surface underneath to hold me. No ground subsists. No figure, line remains long enough for me to stare. I found myself on an island of proud failures, where everything is worth exchanging, nothing is refused and nothing is privileged by default. I follow Brossard’s “Green Night of the Labyrinth Park” (1995: 128-137) as I write this text and I found myself walking on thin ice, questions adding up, making a pile, addressed to art, love, epistemologies, the feminine. Our questions create new islands, our answers help us move from one to the other, making amazing leaps that no grand narrative seeking to explain the world could ever imagine, our leaps are soon transformed to melancholic flights from one island to the next, from childhood to adulthood, from orthodox politics to queerness, with the joyfulness of the moment, and its ever lasting pain.

My academic other instructs me to be docile in this trip, pay my respects to His disciplines, wear His clothes, clean His glasses, sit on His coach, craft my body in His shape. “*What a counter-rebellion!*” my old leftists’ comrades would shout holding their red/black flag. Our queer vision is aerial, diverting the normal course of tranquil explanations that epistemology has once given about life, art, human relations. The island of dreams posits its own imaginary, never congealing or solidifying, remaining as flux as can be expected for each leap, open to be cast away by the foggy wind, naked and wounded to find each other. The academic other shivers, it’s too windy for him to stay still. Let’s hurry and invent our own phrases worn out by repetition in search of fissures, assemblages, signifiers worn backwards, recurrent dreams. So that everywhere and nowhere we can place our two palms against each other and energize by the raw material of desire. As an old lesbian saying goes “*we are your worst fear and your best fantasy.*”



O my dear other, academic other from now on I shall call you Mister A, you will be my interlocutor, a mouth speaking inside me, a paternal figure animating my two sided lips. I shall discuss with you discordantly, affirming my inscription in your discourses and at the same time introducing an absence that signals another type of jouissance not yet inscribed in your academic language. So may I begin by saying Mister A when it comes to your methodology try to leave common sense behind, it's nothing but a well-tuned music tone persuading people of the rightness of any given set of coercive ideas. Don't be afraid to let go of your prescriptive methods, your fixed logics that lead you towards "problem-solving knowledge or social visions of radical justice" (Halberstam, 2011: 17). Life does not come through the neutral, you have to be able to stand, stand still, as still as possible. There, at the far end of great fields of interfused signifiers and signifieds each queer generation marks its horizon, eyes filled with tears, arms filled with myths.

...

"Let her speak her true journeys, hear her true songs. She can make her sorry tale right soggy truth, the ever beating waves; What cursed fool girl grimly be shipped, couldn't get marks, *differing and deferring of presence and identity (my adding)*, during the storms, she got caught between what's gone ok and what's coming on, *crossing the abyss (my adding)*, too close to the cliffs,  
blow wind,  
blow,  
*she and her otherness... (my adding)*"

(Bergvall: 2014)

...

I began to stumble, then slowed down, the light was turning into orange. I was at the labyrinth, its sunrise is so omnipotent, it's impossible to miss. It is infinitely open, infinitely reflecting upon itself. This seems like a very apt place to think about belonging, some try to belong, some take their belonging for granted but these yearnings to fit in, to create pathways, to hold hands is sheared in layers; these layers are implanted in the concrete structures that surround us, in the same way that faith is implanted in ideology, madness in reason and vice versa {Cixous (1983) 1991}.

I walk and think of the places I have seen, the places I have left, the names put on me, the thought of her comes upon me hard and fast. I am taken aback. Is this a love? I saw her strolling around the field, she would become my lover. Her: *"I feel like a modern Cassandra, at work, at home, as if my words have less value. I do not know if you have felt it but it is as if I am deprived of any speech with value and significance. I am constantly trying to gain it."* In one of his phallic games Apollo gave Cassandra the power of prophecy but when she refused him, he spat into her mouth to inflict an unforeseeable curse, nobody would ever believe her prophecies. Since then she is wondering around the city shores. Alongside Cixous's *Promethea* (1983), my Cassandra presents herself: "I am her champion. I fight for her, to make her right- her presence, her reality, her grandeur- prevail. I am armed with love and care" {Cixous, (1983), 1991: 14}. We, Cassandra, me, the author, the whipping girl (Serano: 2007), the angry girl, the seductive girl, the ones I met and caressed in the labyrinth. Cassandra, the lesbian; Cassandra, the trans; Cassandra, the queer girl dreaming her way back home.

- Her: *"I am too much of a lesbian for the anarchists and too much an anarchist for the lesbians."*
- Me: I do not inhabit my own body. I have no desire.

She teaches me dispossession. Dispossessing herself of all her reserves. She did that with a sort of wild, maybe scared, intoxication. This way: "closed behind her all the secret ways out: now she could only go forward. Like this: closed, sealed every opening into the past" {Cixous, (1983), 1991: 87}. So passionately, less and less things from yesterday were to have a present, she decodes flows, invents non figurative breaks and fissures that produce new flows always breaching the coded wall, affirming its necessity for her existence.

So many times I chose the same wall instead of the door.

The act of leaving is transformative and seeks translation, transposing her from "what was" to "what would become". A nomadic turtle, reenacting Meredith Monk's

discontinuous sounds, cyclical moves and rhythmic displacements, like her, I am capable of recreating my home everywhere, I carry everywhere our essential belongings. We both know how to read invisible maps or maps written in the wind, on the sand of fleeing emotions and on the stones of trauma.

...

The thing: is it found or given or taken that which is already lost

...

The word exile expresses a lot: “ex signifies precisely one that once was and has stopped being. That is to say of a separation” (Peri Rossi, 2003: 10). It is also the story of a wound that cries out, a moving and sorrowful voice, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound; this voice brings me back to my pain, and my pain to my language where I wish that letters would take the form of bodies, or else the bodies, of letters, irretrievable forms, broken, in other words, no words.

- Her: *“My desire was always in the next room, when the other leaves, I am devastated, I am losing myself in a way, I wanted to keep desire alive, to keep me alive; you see desire was no game for me, the fear of dissolving under her strong butch arms paralyzed me.”*
- Me: I cannot give any part of my desire, endlessly in agony, given over to the other’s wishes and despairs.

Constitutive loss is too difficult to bear. From time to time exile frustrates her and she lives with rose colored longing for what is gone.

- Her again, this time so nakedly naked, she becomes impenetrable because of her nakedness: *“I had no desire, or better I could not allow it, my body shivers in every touch, I want to disappear, the other’s gaze makes me visible and that scares me. But with her, my body effortlessly woke up, I remember leaning towards her, it was wide awake...But still, it hurts, it hurts so much this desire for disappearance.”*

If it is true that “desires are unbearable in their contradictions, unknown in their potential contours, yet demand reliable and confirming recognitions” (Berlant, 2012: 111);

it may be that one must agree to be finished, to be here and nowhere else, to inhabit the labyrinth in all its potentialities, to become an ethnographic poet, yet, as Derrida notes (1978), “the anxious desire of the hole awaits, tenacious, and loving and breathing through a thousand mouths that leave a thousand imprints on my skin, a polyp, ridiculous, plunging into the horizontality of a skin which represents itself from detour to detour, a reflection of the other without exit, referral, return, and detour of the labyrinth” (Derrida, 1978: 298). A feminine arrival knocks the labyrinth’s door. The door this time is not a door that closes. This unsettling arrival makes my desire speak in another language, a glass of water that submerges me without touching a thing, it becomes my new way of breathing in the world.

I watch her move, decoding flows, leaving, escaping the normative, causing more escapes, her pain is present, she cannot avoid replicating what she partially destroys; however, her desire to live, and not merely wait, translates into new creations, leaping over becalmed seas. Lacking break- flows, leaps, and groundings. We live together like this for a moment, we lie down uncovered, naked and vulnerable, we bark together, the dog is enclosed in our voices. I say “we” because I have mistaken myself for a person and her for an enchanting queen. Loss is unavoidable. I draw my open chest and the purple that comes out of it, a postmodern Goya enclosed in my past. “Long ago when I was a child and very lonely I tried to kiss her. The glass was between me and her- hard, cold, misted over my breath. Now they have taken her away” {Rhys, (1966), 2000: 107}. “What am I doing in this labyrinth and who am I?” {Rhys, (1966), 2000: 107} I feel so minor, I am too old to know, I feel vulnerable to the violence of the world, of the collective (grassroots groups) but also exposed to another range of touch, a touch that includes the eradication of my being but also the physical support for my life.

...

I think it is also a strength to go towards desire  
It is an analyst’s chair; it’s the space of the world

...

From the chair to the labyrinth to the chair to the labyrinth

Failure

Melancholia

Abjection

Self- loss

Metamorphoses

What is femininity?

The psychoanalyst's room became the space of my queerying par excellence. There were times it offered protective shields so I could stand still against the labyrinth's stiff breeze. I was surprised with the generosity of this love affair. Never had I willingly lost my passport to become a queer explorer, possessed by a desire to move and be moved. Like any love affair it resembles no other and is an essentially queer act of creation. Here, I found myself surrounded by vulnerable whales, mourning beasts and a flock of fantasy- seagulls. The room and the labyrinth are no longer two distinct spaces; the labyrinth's waves hit the room's doorstep and vice versa. Blurring the "here" and "there" of my life, challenging the symmetrical movement of time flows, I was left feeling curiously dispersed, torn by conflicting doubt. No longer had I a safe port where my feelings would return to rest in a gentle breeze with the unexpected vitality provided by certainty. I observed myself gathering traces of things shattered, some memorable, others forgotten and others forever untraceable, I opened up my symbolic universe, deeply anchored on words, pronouns, ideas, and structures of thought, to the labyrinth's pathways. I gasped in astonishment. I learned how to bleed, wander, improvise, fall short and move into circles. I learned how to lose my way, my agenda, possibly my mind, and cry but not punish myself about my "shortcomings."

...

"Within the trees I no longer can see any trees" (Backmann, 2005: 34)

...

In the labyrinth I was advised to jump on a seesaw, the other and me swinging back and forth, touching and drifting away. Whatever her chosen research method- multi-sited, embodied, visual, digital, participatory ethnography- every anthropology department urges her to perform discipline, moving within that balanced position between distance and proximity, in a smart or sloppy way. To allow myself to immerse within the labyrinth's flows but never forget my anthropological status. But I would

have to say I merged. There was no balance to preserve, only remnants of a lost struggle, a struggle condemned to die up front. Being allowed to enter another in all their strangeness is an art in itself. Letting another being, let alone an “anthropologist”, with all His strangeness enter your proximity is “a wounded act of merging, interior light is always mixed with exterior light, seeing to be seen and see” {Cixous: (1983) 1991: 54}.

I merged with others and got psychically lost, mirroring my fears and desires, making my attachments. I could only be open to floating bodies, counting the zone of sounds; I enter into the torment of human shapes, swimming suddenly in my rising desire to breath the beaver’s frenzy dance floor. No boundary was there to sustain, or simply I failed to preserve it. I listen her talk, her mouth resembles mine. In the past and present she constantly shapes me. Our love of the labyrinth speaks in the tongue of an imaginary, transcendental perhaps, unsubjected.

This sweet jouissance of identifications, an endless merging and submerging, a perpetual pleasure dance with the other bounded me in an ecstatic anagram with cryptic clues that at first sounded absurd. This “stepping out” of my presumably bounded self came with a price. Cassandra, the trans woman made me wonder whether I was deluded.

- Her: *“You cannot see me even though you may think you can take a glimpse through the looking glass. Notice how you lean towards me, sliding down the stairs; you elegantly try to dance closer to me. Be aware how you may otherize me and make me whip on your behalf.”*

This melancholic flight from one island to the next has its inner hierarchies; we do not jump together; I cannot transcend the lines; I should never forget them or they would chase me, seize me down. But I was dazzled by the ecstatic jouissance of an unlimited merging with the other.

The labyrinth that enters me through the beauty of its alleys and its shared night is a country with male politics, where the same is performed over and over again until the other disappears, until every trans woman is wiped out by her cis alleys. I failed or perhaps I did not perform well enough to sincerely touch Cassandra’s trans existence.

Maybe I should have taken an anti-relational stance, negating any possibility of touching her...or did I serve patriarchal logocentrism and its oppositional practice? I fear in typing my thoughts, trying to put myself in the text...through my gestures. Yet the boundary was set there and was necessary for both of us. Cassandra, the whipping girl<sup>35</sup> would teach me how politics of anger and mourning are practiced. I was taken away by her fierce facial expressions;

I can still hear her shouting: "All the trannies in the square!"

...

"I would like for you to take my photograph with your wide angle lens" (Nathanael, 2015: 54)

...

Somehow "as if she wasn't her self" was broader than if she were- a self proclaimed invisible possessed her entirely, her femininity was revealed in the photograph, when the negative was developed, something else was captured by the snapshot: when the negative was developed her femininity was too absolute and flawless to seem real, though it was real, "as was her habit to shrink in shadows and disappear, she would see disappearance walking, progressing like a dream figure" {Lispector: (1964), 2012: 65}

- Her: *"My features were becoming sweeter, as if my face was touched again but still I did not notice the changes until after some time. I remember closing the window and for a moment there I did not recognize my own reflection."*

She was seeing, with fascination and fear, the pieces of her mummy clothes falling dry to the floor, her face, firm and angular was dipped into honey, a face "entirely" new was emerging, giving her a pleasure, slipping away joy.

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<sup>35</sup> Term borrowed from Serano's autobiographical account on female transgenderism, "The whipping girl."

- Her: *“When I get dressed and look at myself in the mirror I finally see the reflection I have been imagining all this time, at that moment fear crumbles in; what if I do not like what I see after some time. Beauty can scare you.”*

What is wrong with this beauty? It is absolute. Therefore, absolutely innocent, it has no other law, no other memory than its own. Hesitation reigns outside the doors of sexual difference. This room is fueled with motions of cutting or adding, faces, objects, bodies, dresses, lipsticks, emotions, mirrors, school plays, princess costumes.

- Her: *“I woke up in the middle of the night and colored my chest pink- brown to get the breast’s sense of depth, then looked at myself in the mirror.”*

She revisits her imaginary morphology with solitude, it is the solitaire being which speaks and stands against the mirror staring at the Other, another who is something strange to her, although she is at the heart of it. It is that moment of mirror gazing, which leaves a trace of a break in her being.

This was also the room where I’d locate myself within limits. At the corner of my green-lighted room was a plastic bedside table beside a wooden-framed bed, and next to that, an Ikea wardrobe, the kind bought anywhere, anytime. Now I think I need to look against the glass without bothering about the colors of my eyes, I need to be exempt from myself in order to see, to be moved by the gaze of the Other, to be molded by that other existence of mine that is deeply anchored in the glass. “We looked at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers” {Rhys, 1966, (2000), 29}. It was as if I saw myself. That pain, inexplicable, yet existent, is what probably gave me the assurance of a split person, at the other side Cassandra was murmuring a song, that song would be my cryptic path towards the world of the labyrinth. Why she looked so sad? There was a thick glass curtain between everything and me that was going on there. An eruption. It can’t be held back. I can’t help it. She can’t help it. Her lips touched my lips, in an act of narcissistic love, therefore we were separated to avoid our destruction but we were still objecting to the mechanics of near solids that reduce our fluids to a closed circuit of rationality (Irigaray, 1985: 33), our vessels of desire did not transform fluid into solid, it was always pink powder on our breasts longing to turn into blood.



O Cassandra, I want to tell you everything while sleeping, do not wake me up too fast; I want to tell about that day, that mirroring day. Thanks to the labyrinth my memory is now here, along with fragments of past lives, my burning childhood life, I look at her with new eyes, trembling also, I rejoice that mirror gaze, a moment of imposture. "When a handwritten figure encrypted itself" {Cixous, (1970), 1999: 24}. "I do not think it is my handwriting, perhaps it's a disguised one" {Cixous, (1970), 1999: 32}, a feminine masquerade, the male gaze would make its senseless projections. I start to think about it when dissociations between things, between bodies and their names begin; in the inside there are bodies, in the outside there are words, all these dissociations take hold of the mirror.

In the utterance "femininity is finite, universal" versus "femininity is infinite, particular", there is pinching, "femininity is not", there is no meaning to exchange, no contradictory oppositions to solve, femininity is indeterminate, it wakes up in the evening, goes to bed in the morning, it enjoys smoking, all these oral fixations, it wears high heels or martins, it goes on and on and on...inhabiting, forming, performing, deforming the heteronormative; foolishly trying to grasp fantasies that continuously slip away, wanting to pin herself down in history, language, culture. She remains ungraspable and yet with no inner essence to be found.

There I was in my burning years: "I was wearing a royal blue dress, which slipped untidily over my shoulder and seemed too big for my age" {Cixous, (1970), 1999: 45}, pinching my cheeks in front of the mirror to make them rosy, sneaking into my mother's vanity case to make my lips flowery red. I step back, and pull in the looseness of the dress behind me, so it fits my ribs and my waist, I look back at the hazel eyes in the mirror. It's been a long time since I heard myself talking to Cassandra, "*I have told you everything I knew. I have tried to make you understand. But everything has changed and nothing has remained the same*" {Cixous, (1975), 1986: 56}. I laughed. I would feel the lack of something that should have been mine. I look like a seaside girl. Those girls, those feminine girls speak fluid, not- "like", not the "same", not "identical to" any One, their mirror gazing disconcerts any attempt at static identification...living on ellipsis...

With you the game of beauty becomes a continuous transmutation, a perpetually displaced estrangement. It sounds naïve in terms of how humans act and live but yet you my dear inhabit that space of energy released when a little girl masturbates for the

first time secretly, you travel through time and relieve her from guilt. I am loved by you. I am. I know it. Your love is taking root inside me with no shadows, no doubts, you are endowed with that astonishing power of bringing me back to life. Your gaze fills me with wonder, I love guiding you through my years, my frozen years, my burning years, my childhood years, my solitary years...Start, come, see, stop; in my room, there, take me away from the looking glass, it is big enough for me to leap inside it, into the void.

...

Whether love comes as a girl with boyish limbs (Nathanael, 2015: 24)

...

She arrived with a firm, yet clumsy walk, and sat by the bar. I watched her slowly roll a cigarette, lick it with care and place it behind her ear. "Her eyes were dark brown, her figure was slim and athletic. Her hair were making a knot on top, yet porous and ready to unleash itself to all directions, her suspenders loosely touched her breasts. I caught myself staring. I blinked and looked steadily across the narrow street. I was tired. I found it pleasant to let go a little, and spend my time with my hands folded on the chair. I leaned my head backwards; the word beaver was going round and round in my head. I was feeling her eyes on my neck. I looked at her, she nodded with a smile. She then gave me an intense look that made my body feel exposed, dispersed all over the place, I felt shy and unable to assert myself, which made me even more anxious since I knew I could not hide my mood swings. She took a quick zip from her beer, lit her cigarette and strolled towards me, a modern flaneur. She sat next to me, there was a pause for the sake of our uneasiness. "Well", she said, "*what star- sign are you?*" "I am a *gemini*", I answered, a bit surprised with her question. "*You know what they say about geminis? They cannot make a choice easily, they are always wondering what is the right thing to do- it is a question of ethics for them- whereas virgos...they simply change their minds all the time. My ex-girlfriend was a gemini...oh god...she drove me crazy... So I hear you are the straight academic who came to study the lesbians?*"

...

"Together, with our tongues, we will learn again.

It may not sound plausible but we are not impossible"

(Nathanael,2015: 43)

...

Life teaches us to use words well, arranging them in order, juxtaposing them when necessary; they interpellate us, act upon us while forming their ideological apparatuses. I am learning the alphabet again: not by putting letters down but by taking them out. Extracting letters from my mind to untidily twist them, recognize them and immerse them within metonymy, metaphor and occasionally to a sort of cunning lingua I was developing to mobilize the display of eroticism. Breasts, tongues, mucus, fingers locate themselves in language to write an eroticized body with the signifier of the phallus constantly slipping away. I am breathing in rhetoric, in the never-ending process of feminizing pronouns, nouns like so many feminists before my time.

I enter the political life of pronouns, my tongue softly unravels, unlearns its linguistic habits, suddenly the weight of pronouns in Greek language becomes unbearable...I watched them on their meetings; they would sit in a circle of tenderness, light a torch in the vast labyrinth and seek to verify the meaning of words. It was done very openly. It was done very vigorously. It was a bloodbath. I had a sense of an ambivalent, still frightening, well-being in the presence of their linguistic pathways. The shadow of the straight letter "I" which like a giant beech tree cast its shade all over the labyrinth had to be blocked or else nothing would grow within Cassandra's lesbian circle of sisterhood. It appeared as an obstacle, an impediment that captured creative energy and kept it in its narrow shores. Mister A, the academic, does it on purpose. "He does it in protest. He is protesting against our difference and the loss of His superiority. Mister B, the radical anarchist, no longer communicates. His mind is separated into different revolutionary chambers, not a sound is communicated from one chamber to the next" {Woolf: 1929, (2018): 153}. "It is all half lights and profound shadows, each one of us goes with a candle peering up and down, not knowing where we are stepping" {Woolf: 1929, (2018): 127}, we set the trail of the ellipsis....

I did not waste my time, I followed the trans whipping girl, she loved wandering in the labyrinth with all plebeian virtues of vitality, anger and courage to fight the beasts of her language. I see it coming, a queer pink duckling- @@@@. "She reaches out for it, she has to devise some entirely new combination of pronouns, so highly developed for other purposes so as to absorb the new into the old without disturbing the infinitely intricate and elaborate balance of the textual whole" {Woolf, 1929, (2018): 127-129}". "A text is not made of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built into arcades and

domes” {Woolf, 1929, (2018): 117}. “And this shape has been made by straight- minded men out of their needs and for their uses.” {Woolf, 1929, (2018): 117} She is also unable to verify herself in the lesbian circle. In this predicament, what can she do? She looks at the duckling’s tempting curves. It proved to be a life-changing gaze, moving the duckling from the keyboard to her pen. The duckling reaches out beyond binary- nouns, pronouns, genders; animating a kind of linguistic revolt. However, the duckling would never quack” in Greek. A mute, silent sign trapped in its textual form. Nobody could utter it. Its trans existence lays bare and indeterminate. For the time being it cannot be a phoneme, it occupies that internal limit in textual representation, at the margins of text and speech. But it also reveals traps, shadows and limitations within signification- something written- @- that cannot be said, something said- he/she- that cannot be uttered in Greek.

...

“With dynasties of negative constructions  
darkening and dying around you,  
with grammar that suddenly turns and shines  
like flocks of sandpipers flying, please come flying.  
Come like a light in the white mackerel sky,  
come like a daytime comet  
with a long unnebulous train of words,  
from Brooklyn, over the Brooklyn Bridge, on this fine morning, please come flying”  
(Bishop, 1987: 67)

...

The sea is high with a thrilling flush of wind. In the midst of desire, she can feel the inventions of spring. She has escaped to this bridge. I do not know why I use the word “escape”, it was a bridge in which the roots of her identity were still shifting with unbearable silence, and it’s the silence of the world looking at her. She is crossing my breast, she enters and goes straight into my life now, already so much further than the world, my turtle art follows her steps, redirecting my body, my desires towards her {Cixous, (1983), 1991: 56}.

- Her: *"It felt like crossing a bridge. There is no return. A wall is demolished, the wall of the heteronormative. And it is a medieval wall, its weight burdens my earthly body. So I went to meet the lesbians, to see them, seeing to be seen and see"*.

For this gate was a gigantic wall, whose top she doubtlessly could not see because she was at the bottom without any real horizon. She re-orientates her relation not just towards women, but also to a world that has already decided how bodies should be "orientated" in the first place. The bridge becomes a sort of breaking point in her lifeline, the place where she refuses her genealogical inheritance that connects her line of descent between her father and her prospective children with the affinity of the heterosexual dream (Ahmed: 2006).

The labyrinth with its wind-carved dunes has now given place to a map of lesbian genealogy with the slow dances of complaisant fingers and tempting dildos. Here and there Cassandra drifts away from the invisible glass of the hetero-singular. Her amazing leap at the other side of the bridge is accompanied by fragments of her past lives, ideas reassembling under silk feminist banners; colorful pride banners making vulnerable leaps and carrying her far out of her depth, throwing her in mid-ocean.

- Her: *"Feminism made me love people again. It gave me words, explanations about life. It opened a pathway towards my body and its desires. The kind of sisterhood I experienced during the 1980s with all these women, building different kind of relations, creating space for us, exploring a self beyond the male gaze made me who I am today."*

In the labyrinth she was searching, she was searching, she was trying to understand...they hailed her from the other side but she did not turn back, resisting the straightening devices. Having not turned around, who knows where she might turn now, the contingency of her lesbian desire led her to a corridor. Not night or darkness but a corridor with amber light full of inconsistent noises. She enters this corridor, without walls, without presence, invisible, she walks along the imperfection of her silence and breaths heavily, yet calmly, to support this new love affair.

-Her: *"It was a relationship that lived in silence. We never talked about it. It was a*

*relationship with no name. And it hurts...It hurts so much... She pretended I did not exist as a lover. In the house there was passion; out we were strangers."*

- Me: "I open the door and walk into the world. It is, as I always knew it, made of straight cardboard" (Rhys, 1987: 148) a world already in place; it forms the background of how colors and objects are arranged, of what is perceptible and which objects are reachable. I try to hold her hand. It becomes more and more apparent that lesbian contact involves a different movement of my body in space. Sneaky kisses, intense gazes and holding hands make different lines of connection and association that are invisible to others.

"In this cardboard world everything is colored grey or dark brown or a red that has no light in it." (Rhys, 1987: 148) She walks along the heterosexual passages like a nomadic turtle, she wishes she could see beyond the cardboard.

- Me: I feel the beginnings of closed structure.

- Her: "*But there is relief once you find that alley with less shadows. There you can just be. You can just be your lesbian self, there is no need for these ins and outs.*"

She tells me I am in Athens. I do not believe her. "We lost our way to *Athens*. When? Where? I don't remember but we lost it." (Rhys, 1987: 149) And it is such an exhilarating thrill. When today I speak of the beaver, I am thinking of the one that must be created with powers we do not have, ones we must invent; I think about the queer heterotopias, the love poems that must be written, the tears, the hugs, the laughs, the transgressive spaces, her intense gaze among the unsuspected crowds...the boy-like curve of her hips.

And of course Cassandra's song at Beaver: "*Come to the dance floor, kaleidoscopic bodies touching, lighters come out to lit your cigarette, tequila snapshots for your beautiful gaze. Oh! The disco ball is so drunk tonight, let me grab a pair of rubber gloves in the toilettes to touch your beaver.*"

...

Departing, getting going, going on, getting on, getting by...rhyme with Cassandra's desire, a desire to sit and watch planes float in; their bellies swaggering, lights flashing, they descend and are gone. From where she is, all is descending, arriving, returning. She closes her eyes and feels the brightness of that white city whose pearly

skies are broken at midnight by the flashing disco balls turning in clouds of pink and amethyst; their power is exemplified in movements, wounds, inky reflections, touching and overlapping against the yellow metal of the white city which breaks open at a sunset like a rose (Probyn, 1995: 1-19). This is her painting of what can and perhaps may be. Her queer utopian memory...losing certainty, joyfully, painfully going ahead, walking through deserted beaches, doing the simple duties of a household that lacks a mother. On the roof, clothes hanging and floating, she lays under the starlit sky, watching planes descend, watching the lines of flight, she wonders where does her longing take her.

...

Between the airport and Athens, we both realize the effects of displacement: with the first threshold crossed we set off an inevitability of departures that are impossible to undo.

- Her: *“After that trip all the strings to my past were cut off, all my attachments seemed meaningless. I turned and looked back upon my life. I realized I am nothing of what I left behind. I left a repressed straight girl with existential issues and returned wondering who am I since I no longer believed in my old self. I began my life all over again. I got involved into lgbt groups and started dating women. Basically, that trip changed my life.”*
- Me: London’s sky hid, contained and dissolved me a thousand times. I had the weird feeling of the beginning of a farewell in my gut. Thank you for the flame. I am now 34.

It is a multiple departure that will never change back to what she was, no single-even definitive- place will make her installation feel definite. She inhabits another place and begins encountering her life as coming from different sides, as well as having different sides. Far from our respective homes, our beds, our kitchens, crossing thresholds at distant places, speaking face to face, meeting at different doorsteps, it seems as though we just began learning to speak (Nathanael). These cities mark her youth; these astonishingly subdued pages of remembering, inheriting, producing catch her in memorial abyss.

- Her: *“I have this anxiety not to reproduce the same things I witnessed in my family, namely relationships formed around harmful notions like women’s self- sacrifice. I try to imagine myself in different situations, to experiment with different forms of relationality...what we are or what we want to become is constantly under assertion. I have to remind myself that these things need to be constantly claimed and challenged.”*
- Me: I am my mother’s daughter. I was sitting on her lap, I hanged onto her and reached out for her necklace, I wrinkled and said: “I want it.” And she said with a corrective voice. “We don’t say I want; we say I would like this please.” She believes the son will save us, she shouts, she cries, sometimes she murmurs in her sleep. With no knowledge of existence of the son, the daughter waits in her gut like the mother does in hers. What isn’t said is the silence of the father, no judgment will be pronounced, no painful exacerbation. My inheritance.

Cassandra proposes the proliferation of singularities and the diffusion of proper names imbuing the marks of her transgressions with her salty tears; all gloomy associations, all sad feelings forgotten, movement all day long, traversing the galleries, once so hushed, scattering round her the contents of a basket of flowers she carries on her arm; there were flowers everywhere, roses; camellias, red and white, seasonal hyacinths, mimosas, all with her shape, her tears, her grief, her smiles, all of them in this unique basket, her inheritance to the universe.

- Her: *“I felt I was nothing, nothing, nothing...like my mother, and my grandmother before me, I did not think I had the right to make any sort of claims. They made their small, everyday breakthroughs but they sacrificed so much, my mother locked away her violin and grabbed the duster overnight.”*

I enter the front chambers of the gallery and pass by an old family photograph, not too old, not too recent, the room in the picture was flooded with early lamplight, and one could feel the grey, chill winter twilight in the streets outside. There stood my father, slender body with a natural elegance, bold, weak constitution, fragile temperament, frigid, possessed by neurotic repetition, origin: middle class education, childhood in the countryside, confident, liberal, diplomat. My mother was standing



right next to him, a big woman in stature, virile, clear eyes, plain and beautiful with her fur and bonnet, origins: middle class education, childhood in the city, insecure, left-wing. I felt uneasy in their presence; I stood face to face to my inheritance...I was as impersonal as I knew how to be; so impersonal that my voice was free, for a while, even of the usual undertone of irritation, she then, quite naively, shouted with me "I shall not replicate your life."

- Her: *"I tried to understand her and give her the love she was never given because everyone supposedly loved her but nobody showed it to her, she was just the doormat for us to clean our shoes."*
- Me: At night I lay on my stomach to avoid a miscarriage, I want to extract the flowers from deep inside and offer them to my mother. I came very close to strangling her that night. I left despite a voice inside me, I left, telling myself, you again, with your inability to leave.

We were sitting on dentist's chairs in the middle of the kitchen floor. I objected when they told me "we are proceeding with the blood transfusion". After all this was not something I have given consent and why should go on with it, it's against my father's principles. My departure opened the door to Cassandra, she spread her flowers all over the untidy kitchen. I watched her circulate knowledge effortlessly without the possession of mastery. I listened her sing a litany for the ambivalent balance between inheritance and reproduction, one that would rewrite the author's relation to theory and queer women's profound struggle to invert...convert...reverse...subvert, admit power.

...

"There is no return  
time flies  
space changes  
everything spins in the infinite circle  
of cruel absurdity"

(Peri Rossi, 2003: 15)

...

The labyrinth, half imagined, yet wholly real, begins and ends inside her, roots lodged in her memory. The color of her eyes when she swam across the bridge, “across the blue waters and the red waters was milky: it was that pale pink that does not reflect the light yet but wants to drink it in” {Cixous, (1970) 1999: 95}, the color of origins that fades as a girl races to find her way “home” and passes across the gutted foundations of her culture. Walking slowly home through the dark avenue of trees, tasting the brackish harbor wind, I remember her staring at the drizzling air with its revolutionary breaks. She used axes to cut down the ones she loved. They never really got her politics, you see she was an oyster in the mornings, every question begins with an oyster, a question that waits to be asked, one that asks itself, she gathers a series of questions and opens up to Cassandra’s algorithm. She went through groups that slammed doors behind her, others that pretended to share her anxieties, cruel hierarchies, unspoken and obscure. At such times it was impossible for her to speak to anyone. A superwoman’s effort to explain, every question asked requested an apology to the revolutionary scheme, to social structures, to what it was that made her exceptionally aware of her body limits on the soggy, damp ground of the everyday rebel man.

- Her: *“It felt as if there was an ideal to which I had to fit, and it was bad that I did not fit, I had to fit, it was compulsory. But I was incompatible to anarchism’s ideals. The narratives they had for women were predetermined, women were considered politically inadequate. It would go like this: you may be educated but what do you really know of real politics that happen on the street. There was no place for cuteness or any sort of femininity; you had to be macho to gain some respect. You could say that our feminist group developed some resistance against these hierarchically gendered narratives.”*

A kind of stripping bare of her body which needs to breath; for the sake of it let’s name displacement as the act of looking that is not seeing itself. To say this one immediately denounces absolute projects and post-apocalyptic promises, the act of knowing does not correspond to the other’s look in the mirror, there is no need to be

sure about this, this sort of knowing helps her draw her flight to another place inside her (Nathanael).

I feel for her, being mute, such a hysterical feeling of dismay, the oyster seals, the red hammer swings and demands integration, the purple ink on her skirt mutilates her figure for history encrypted by the anarchist stepfather. She drifts to the borders; it was time to leave him. As a poet of feminist consciousness she is bound to see the labyrinth as a field scribbled by the signatures of men and epochs of oppression. Perhaps it was the realization of this which made me select this place in the labyrinth to live for the next two years, surrounded by history on all sides, at odds with the city's wishes for happiness, with a feminist past which only but a few can share with me, but which love itself cannot deprive me of it.

There were the traces...three, "not because the duplicity of everything and nothing, of narratives and bodies, of absent presence, of the black sun, of the open torus, of the eluded center, of the elliptical return, could be summarized and reduced in some dialectic, in some conciliating final term" (Derrida, 1978: 299). Nothing but the alleys and the white of her skirt, her pink nipples pressing against the torus. It's Cassandra, living in ellipsis. She had set herself the task of trying to recover the pieces of her identity in words, reinstate them in memory, and allot them to each of her positions from which she was forced to flee, "having been uprooted by a force too powerful to resist and often too mysterious to decipher" (Bauman, 1997: 92).

- Her: *"The split was obvious to me, it existed within me as two desires foreclosing one another. The feminist group and the anarchist squat had both their demands about how I should lead my life. After a certain point they could not coexist. This twofold sense of belonging was part of my life journey. It was a flight from familial attachment to the Other of anarchism, from absolute repression to absolute freedom, a freedom within which I felt an orphan since I did not know what to do with it. I did not exist for myself. I lived locked in a fish bowl, at some point its layers were piling off and underneath there was an "I" that was building identities, romantic and glorious identities, all alien to me."*

- Me: Once I stepped over a red hammer, “how can one discover truth I thought but that truth led me nowhere. No radical leftist would tell me the truth. Neither my father nor my mother, certainly not the boy I was supposed to marry” {Rhys, 1987: 75} “I stood still, so sure that I was being watched that I looked over my shoulder” (Rhys, 1987: 77) There they were again, the traces...three dots.

A thousand faces of the political whose reverberating expressions I do not understand and out of them all there is one only I am burning to see, the glowing face of Cassandra. How does a woman look when she is in love with her own sense of freedom? My eyes no longer know where to look, to the labyrinth’s alleys, to the river, to the rhythm of the waves, to the emotional outbursts, the fights, the hugs, the tears. My eyes seek the hair extensions of M., the piercing eyes of N., and the athletic body of I. Right now, on this very page, on this very moment, I have discovered what I would really like to write someday. I wanna write about her daring moves, my darling when you were a bit wild, “I want to, I feel some wind inside me, better go easy on him, not wake him, *voodoo dolls on Greek orthodox politics*, O how nice I said *whatever I had in mind, my period*, who knows is there anything the matter with my insides or have I anything growing *inside me* getting that *itching*” {Joyce, (1922), 2017: 1597-1600}, every week when he served compliments on the family dinner, I assume the burden on behalf of my father, looking after my mother, O yes, the three dots, I knew what was coming next, I would look at the door he slammed, each dot offers kindling, for her steps, O I want to, I wanna marry her to smell coconut oil forever.

...

## Acknowledgements

In certain places, the text converses with, responds to, appropriates certain lines and ideas found in the work of Helene Cixous, Virginia Woolf, Nathanael, James Joyce, Kathy Acker, Nicole Brossard, Luce Irigaray, Christina Perri Rossi, Caroline Bergvall, Clarice Lispector (amongst others). References here diverge from prescribed academic citing since they follow the flow of poetic textuality. Along with the interview excerpts, my amendments on others' texts are also in italics.

---notebook of another thesis--- is for the queer women I met and shared moments in the labyrinth.

## Appendix B

### Autonomous antifascists and queer feminists: The politics of impossibility and disidentification

The politics of antifascism and anti-Greekness and their links to queer, both conceptually and politically, is worth exploring through the published material of the collectives, Antifa negative and Terminal 119. Autonomous antifascism produces a discourse that attempts to talk openly about Greece's structural racism - "*Racism is not a theoretical problem but a problem of the Greeks*" (Antifa negative: 2013)- and challenge ethnically cleansed understandings of Greekness by recognizing the silence and oblivion that marks historical "dark spots" in the Greek nation- building project with anti-Semitism<sup>36</sup> being the most prominent. "Antifa negative" and "Terminal 119" attempt to demystify the normalizing forces of Greek nationalism by creating power assemblages between anti-Semitism, rape culture and Greek racism addressed mostly against Albanians, Turks and Pakistanis. In this context, anti-Greekness becomes the nodal point that quilts an anti-fascist ideology fraught with ambivalence, likewise in any

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<sup>36</sup>On February 7, 2014, Theodoros Karypidis, Syriza's candidate for governor of Western Macedonia, wrote on his facebook page the day Antonis Samaras visited the synagogue in Thessaloniki that "he is lighting the candles in the seven branches candelabra of the Jews and lighting Greece on fire...He is organizing a new Hanukkah against the Greeks..." ("Greek politician says", 2014). By end of 2014, Panos Kammenos, the founder of the small right-wing party "Independent Greeks", appeared on a television show and said that Greek Jews don't pay taxes- "a remark denied publicly by a government official, who called it "conspiracy theories, lies and slander" that had become a part of "the dark side of the Internet" ("Greek politician panned for", 2014: no page). Besides the anti- Semitism in party politics, many Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated {Kos, July 19, 2013 ("Cemetery desecrated", 2013); Thessaloniki, October 30, 2011 (Antisemitic graffiti on a cemetery", 2011); Kavala, June 13, 2010 ("Greece- Cemetery desecrated in Kavala", 2010)}. At 2011, the Holocaust Memorial, recently built in Thessaloniki, was desecrated ("Holocaust memorial desecrated", 2011) as well as a synagogue was sprayed with anti-Semitic hate speech. In particular, the words "Jews, you will die" "You should be hanged" were written ("Synagogue desecrated", 2011). On June 2014, a threatening graffiti was found on the Athens Holocaust Memorial. "The graffiti included a purported quote from the Talmud saying that Jews who convert should be put to death and threats that the synagogue in Athens would be destroyed" ("Threatening graffiti", 2014: no page). By the end of 2014, two more anti-Semitic graffiti were found in Thessaloniki and Larissa, respectively. In particular, the Jewish cemetery of Larisa was desecrated "with swastikas and threats such as "six million more" ("Jewish cemetery desecrated", 2014: no page) and in Thessaloniki "a monument dedicated to the old Jewish cemetery was covered with "killer" slogans" ("Jewish cemetery monument vandalized", 2014: no page). These are some indicative anti-Semitic attacks in Greece that took place at the course of this study. On 2015, the ADL, the anti-Defamation League, published the findings of a global study on Anti-Semitism around the world. According to this study, in Greece, 69% harbour anti-Semitic views with 47% purporting the following statement "People hate Jews because of the way Jews behave" and 74% agreeing with the statement "Jews have too much control over global affairs" ("ADL Global", 2014: no page).

ideological formulation that seeks to work within, through and against Greek national identity.

Most importantly, their perception of self-organization, influenced by the discourses of a network of self-organized immigrants in Germany, displaces, as Jaspir Puar (2007) observes, “queerness as an identity or modality that is visibly, audibly, legibly or tangibly evident as sexual identity” (Puar, 2007: 215) (or the transgression of gender norms) and points towards an agonistic subject that, as Athanasiou notes (2014b), asserts to “the political performativity of becoming possible or making-possible (instead of being-possible or being-impossible)” (Athanasiou, 2014b: no page). In particular, it enacts a kind of displacement that does not render itself to the assimilationist rhetoric of capitalist realism but “remains accountable to the aporetic trace and the structure of the arrivant” (Athanasiou, 2014b: no page).

The following is one of antifascists recurrent reference taken from the self-organized group of immigrants in Germany:

“Self- organization means something different for us: To deny the entry into the vicious circle they have constructed for minorities and employ a discourse that will make it difficult for them to classify us in any minoritarian identity. For us a distinctive minoritarian position is not defined by its orientation to a non-Germanic origin and ancestry but through our appearance as misfits, as sources of improper knowledge. We do not wish to create affinities by narrating stories about uprooted people that struggle for recognition in a foreign country. We prefer to appear as uninvited guests that know more about the hosts than the regulatory mechanisms of assimilation actually permit” (“What to do”, 2017)

These arrivants do not come to a place named or determined in advance but rather wish to affect the experience of the threshold. By surprising their hosts, they affect the experience of the border that delineates a legitimate home. In this regard, they indicate the moment of the possibility of an impossibility, which doesn't refer, as Athanasiou suggests (2014b) to an event yet-to-come or a time that is not-yet-here but will suddenly reveal itself but to the ongoing agonistic presence of the “here and now”,

which affirms new political potentialities and “lets the impossible form the horizon of continuous agonism and infinite justice” (Athanasίου, 2014b: no page). Following a Derridean and post-Marxist thinking, Athanasίου argues that “at this horizon of promise and limitation, tension and possibility” (Athanasίου, 2014b: no page) the political implications of enduring, persisting and imagining in the “here and now” the impossible can be traced. From this perspective, I relate the immigrants’ search for a non- minoritarian identity with queers’ construction of “identities- in- difference.

The politics of impossibility involve processes of disidentification. Disidentification is perceived as the remaking of identification or else strategic exercises of otherness with which both autonomous antifascists and anarchoqueers engage. In this context, identity is perceived as a process that takes place “at the point of collision of perspectives” (Munoz: 1999). Connolly conceptualizes identity “as a site at which entrenched dispositions encounter socially constituted definitions” (Connolly, 1991: 163). In this direction, Munoz notes that collision consists “the moment of negotiation when hybrid, racially predicated, and deviantly gendered identities arrive at representation” (Munoz, 1999: 6). Thus, identity consists a site where human dispositions and desires encounter socially constituted definitions, it’s the point of meeting, interacting, clashing, diverting and negotiating.

Following Connolly& Munoz, I suggest that anarchoqueers and feminists form their “identities-in-difference” (Munoz, 1999: 7) by problematizing the points of collision with anarchism and producing meaning out of their troubled interpellations by, within and against anarchist political structures. One of my informants, Kirki, reflectively describes the points of collision with anarchist “master narratives” and the process of building empathy as a relational affect which radically disturbs relations of proximity to our selves, bodies, and pasts:

*Kirki: “...For me these were not only ideas but relations with people that were falling apart, entire worlds collapsing...because relationships were collapsing. And I blamed the structures of anarchism that nurtured masculinistic militant lifestyles. Others rendered me spiteful, accusing me of bringing my sexual relations into politics. But it was really the opposite. I support this with my life not with a battle cry...I could continue living in this*



*alienation...among the various identities available out there, you can move from one to the next without self-reflection, literally climbing over bodies. For me when something hurtful occurred, I would always wonder how did this happen, how was this made possible, always with a feeling of historical responsibility I would displace myself through empathy, because if I permit it then others will also be hurt after me.”*

In his battle for a world of reciprocal recognitions, Fanon (1967) and then Butler (2013) interpret self- reflection “as an interrogative openness that emerges from the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to the self” (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 81). In line with Butler& Athanasiou, I perceive self-reflection as an interrogative inquiry that is not merely an inward turn to the self but also a mode of address that surrounds our efforts and longings to touch, address the other, and in this process build a self-consciousness that can open up to the other’s precariousness (Butler & Athanasiou, 2013: 75-91). Anarchoqueer and feminist collectives and to a certain extent autonomous antifascists engage with self-reflection as both self-questioning and a political tool to achieve Fanon’s proclamation for a world of reciprocal recognition.

With this approach in mind I suggest that the strategic deployment of self-reflective exercises of otherness becomes an integral part of solidarity- building. In one of their texts autonomous antifascists clearly state that:

“{...} we do not perceive solidarity in the form of a prosthetic model of struggles that talks on behalf of others; solidarity requires a deep work on otherness, on the feelings of the uncanny...we find it fruitful engaging with the demands of other movements that may seem self-evident or even reformist but are crucial for these “others” and touch upon the core of Greece’s national agenda...when it comes to the binary foreigner/ indigenous, man/ woman, straight/ gay, we believe that the binary should remain and should not disappear under a universal revolutionary ideology. This binary reveals the function of power and forces us to position ourselves against it. Resistances become stronger when power is visible and antagonism escalates...in the dilemma “universal” vs “particular” we believe that the problem does not reside

in either side, yet the division per se needs to be problematized and become a source of knowledge” (Terminal 119: 2008).

This notion of the binary as a source of knowledge, which entails self-awareness and intensifies social conflicts, involves an antagonistic configuration of the political (Laclau & Mouffe: 2001 {1985}) in which differences are the starting points for agonistic confrontations- not the stumbling blocks. Breaking with the symbolic representation of society as an organic body and social movements as mechanisms of social transformation, autonomous antifascists point to particular contested sites and questions of identity- “*the particular against the abstract*”, “straight/gay”, “man/woman”- and find radicality in the historicization of categories. The model of solidarity put forward clearly differs from the Greek leftist approach. As suggested by Terminal 119 (2011), the left’s melancholic attachment to the “people of the margins” cultivates an ethics of exclusion based on which the marginalized are ethically superior (and worthy of our solidarity) as long as they remain marginalized. Thus, the feeling of ethical superiority is more important than the actual exit from marginality (Terminal 119: 2011).

Terminal 119 deconstruct the voyeuristic gaze of the Greek left against the “people of the margins”, otherwise called “those without voice.” Through a critical reading of “kalliarða” (an argot/ subcultural homosexual dictionary written by Ilias Petropoulos in 1971) antifascists problematize the ways in which the Greek left resorts to a practice of romanticization that aestheticizes “underground people”, creating a clear analogy between victimization and provisional solidarity. And they continue to argue:

“Solidarity towards homosexuals is analogous to their victimization. As long as they are represented as victims of power structures they are worthy of solidarity, when they create their own spaces and articulate an independent discourse, then solidarity is set under particular terms {...} Homosexuals should not dress too much, embrace fashion, pop lifestyles, or get sponsors for their prides etc” (Terminal 119, 2011: 88-89)

On the contrary, autonomist antifascists put forward a mode of solidarity that resonates with Connolly's notion of agonistic respect, which lays in the recognition of "our shared struggle for identity and of our existential finitude" (as reviewed by Mouffe, 2013: 48) . No doubt, respect is necessary amongst those involved in an agonistic struggle. It represents the "cardinal virtue of deep pluralism" as stated by Mouffe (2013: 48) and is depicted in the engagement of autonomists with otherness in their solidarity-building project. Overall, autonomous antifascists and anarchoqueers perceive "the public space of politics as a field of dispute" in the post-Marxist sense, whereby the central question is not only "what we should do" against the narratives that weave together various aspects of Greek national identity but also "who we are" (Mouffe, 2013: 47).

### **The politics of intersectionality: Don't call me Greek!**

Until now I have tried to present the queer feminist critique of traditional Marxism in terms of ideas, temporalities, different signifiers and practices (privilege and self-reflection). Anti-nationalism and anti-Greekness consist both a product of self-reflection and an ideological framework that differentiates queer feminist politics from Greek left-wing politics. This relates with the fact that talking about gendered identities and homosexuality in Greece means also talking about Greek national imaginaries that prescribe particular gendered roles as preconditions for becoming a fully realized Greek citizen. To further illustrate this, I shall discuss a poster produced by QV around 2012 for one more homophobic attack. Since 2008 Greece was declared in "a state of emergency" by the previous government, which promoted border controls, militarization of the country, and the construction of large detention camps for immigrants all over Greece. On October 2, 2012 various groups of Orthodox Christians and Golden Dawn members, monks from Mount Athos, the Bishop of Piraeus, and several Golden Dawn MPs, attacked the premier of the play "Corpus Christi" by Terrence McNally in Athens (Bambilis: 2012). As described by Bambilis, a large crowd of people made it inside the theatre, stopped the performance, assaulted and threatened both actors and audience, despite the presence of police force which had surrounded the theatre (Bambilis, 2018: 63). The director and the actors were accused of "blaspheming"

against the Orthodox religion and “hubris”, “both accusations with juridical force in the Greek legal system” (Bambilis, 2018: 64).

In the midst of the attack at “Corpus Christi”, the number of homophobic attacks intensified- more than 100 homophobic attacks were recorded in 2014- and QV filled the streets of Athens with the following poster which came to be known for its slogan: “Proudly the nation’s shame.”

Την Πέμπτη 25 Οκτωβρίου στην πλατεία του μετρό στο Γκαζι, το βράδυ που (χριστιανο)φασίστες επιτέθηκαν στην παράσταση Corpus Christi στο θέατρο Χυτήριο, τέσσερις μάτσο μαλάκες χτύπησαν τον Α. και τον φίλο του Π., μπροστά σε κόσμο που άραζε στην πλατεία, αφότου τους έκαναν την ερώτηση «είστε πούστηδες».

**Η ερώτηση** «είστε πούστηδες ρε;» είναι μία από τις ρατσιστικές αυτές ερωτήσεις που με αυτοπεποίθηση οι ομοφοβικοί ελληνόρες απευθύνουν όλο και πιο συχνά σε διάφορες κοινωνικές ομάδες. «Είστε πακιστανοί;», «από πού είστε;», «τον παίρνετε;» αναρωτιούνται τα πλήθη των ρατσιστών της μεγάλης οικογένειας του ελληνικού έθνους. Τελευταία βιάζονται να περάσουν μέσα στο διάχυτο ρατσισμό που ενισχύουν τα ΜΜΕ και τα επικοινωνιακά τρικ των χρυσαυγιτών.

**Εμείς** οι λεσβίες, οι αδερφές, οι τρανς, οι περίεργες και ό,τι άλλο θες, τις ξέρουμε αυτές τις ομοφοβικές ανησυχίες τους από παλιά. Από τότε που ήμασταν οι «ακατανόμαστοι», από τότε που με θράσος μας κοιτούσαν σαν να είμαστε άρρωστοι, από τότε που οι πατεράδες μας με ντροπή πληροφορούσαν τους συγγενείς «όχι, δεν έχει άντρα η Μαρία».

**Επειδή** λοιπόν τώρα μας ρωτάνε μέσα στα μούτρα μας

**Επειδή** είτε απαντήσουμε, είτε όχι, η ελληνική κοινωνία έχει ασκήσει και συνεχίζει να ασκεί βία στα σώματά μας

**Επειδή** ο φόβος φυλάει τα έρημα

**Και επειδή** εμείς δεν είμαστε «έρημα», απέναντι στο φόβο έχουμε η μία την άλλη

**Απαντάμε:**

**Ναι ρε, είμαστε πούστηδες**

**Υπερήφανα  
η ντροπή του έθνους**

**Queericulum Vitae**  
[www.qvzine.net](http://www.qvzine.net)

Figure 15: QV poster, some time after October 2012.

The poster reads as follows:

On Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> October at the square of Gazi, the same night that (Christian) fascists attacked the performance Corpus Christi at the Chytirion theatre, four macho assholes attacked A. and his friend P. in front of other people in the square after asking them “Are you poustides (faggots)?” The question “Are you poustides?” The question “Hey, are you faggots?” is one of these racist questions that homophobic Greeks address more and more often to different social groups. “Are you Pakistani?” “Where are you from?” “Are you taking it [from behind]?”, ask the racists that consist the larger family of the Greek nation. And QV replies at the bottom of the poster: “Because even if we do reply or do not to this question, Greek society has exercised and still exercises violence upon our bodies...And because...against fear we have one another [in female gender], we reply: Hey, Yes, we are faggots. With pride, the nation’s shame.

translated by Eleftheriadis, 2015: 1044-1045

The performative force of the slogan “Are we poustides? Yes, we are poustides! Proudly the nation’s shame” actively demystifies heteronormative narratives of Greek machismo as the intimate citizenship regime and challenges gendered discourses of national honour and shame. This poster can be read as a way of aggressively achieving dignity in the straight world, engaging in what seems an aggressive self-naming that underlines the processes of interpellation imbued within power structures (Eleftheriadis, 2015: 1046). By calling them out loud, by asking them to respond to the questions: “Are you Pakistani?” and “Are you taking it from the ass?”, they are naming them while also performatively constructing them as the objects, the border-inhabitants, the outcasts of the Greek national body, those that inhabit the zone of the “unlivable”, the “unhabitable”, the detested and negated image of Greek citizenship.

The Greek case offers a vivid illustration of how narratives about sexuality are deployed in the process of negotiating an essence of Greekness and how particular notions of what it means to be Greek are deployed in the process of performing and naturalizing a distinct register of sexuality. In her study “The empty cradle of democracy” Alexandra Halkia (2004) deciphers some vital parts of being Greek that operate symbolically as significant emblems of the production of gendered nationality. Having an abortion and straight sex come to be seen as natural; they also become vital

parts of being Greek (along with eating meat for men). In the midst of the 1990s, biopolitical discourses on the demographic crisis accentuated, as noted by Halkia (2004), “a cultural emphasis on reproductive heterosexuality and motherhood as the civic and moral duty of the Greek Orthodox female citizen” (Halkia, 2004: 315). In this context, morality and Greek national identity are essentialized to harmonize with a uniform and unitary image of the nation in which homosexuality is expelled as a shameful remnant of the Ottoman past and Greek male body once penetrated is symbolically debased within the Greek national fantasy and embodies that which strikes against the pride of the Greek national identity-building (Apostolidou, 2010). The disdainful Ottoman past (vividly represented in the contemporary phrase “the Turks were fucking us for 400 years”) is linked with orientalist discourses that feminize the nation, just as “Turkish forms of emotional disorder belong to the “nature” interior of the Greek national character” (Herzfeld, 1997: 90).

In the 1950s and 1960s, as noted by Charles Stewart (2015), social anthropologists studying Mediterranean societies and cultures developed the analytical concepts of honor and shame. The cultural framework they developed around the notions of honor and shame, very much in line with the Durkheimian tradition of the discipline, considered them as “collective representations” (Stewart, 2015: 181). For the following decade, most anthropologists approached the honor-shame scheme as a static and gender-based system throughout the Mediterranean until Herzfeld (1980) in the 1980s pointed out in his research on the poetics of manhood in Crete (1988) that honor and shame related to a socially appropriate behavior (“being good at being a man”, “being good at being a woman”) (Stewart, 2015: 182). For the most part, studies around the nexus of “honor and shame” do not adequately address the fact that these gender-linked ideals are products of a particular national imaginary. What I wish to argue is that cultural stories of gender and sexuality are never just about culture as they cannot be dissociated from particular gendered national conceptions of Greek citizenship.

In this context, homosexuals as illegitimate others bring shame to the Greek nation since they fail to reproduce its form and its offspring- they do not fit in the form of the good Greek Orthodox citizen. The slogan “*Yes! We are proudly the nation’s shame*” consists a queer moment of overidentification, “when the failure to reproduce norms as forms of life is embraced or affirmed as a political and ethical alternative” (Ahmed, 2004:

146). By overidentifying with shame (since this is not an act of reclaiming an identity but identifying with shame's negativity) they embrace the consequences of their identifications and queer desires. Such an affirmation is not simply about converting shame into pride, turning your back to the social burden of shame. It's about finding the strength to face the stigma of shame. It's about turning upside-down that which designated you a "shameful" figure within Greek normativity (and its gendered underpinnings of honor and shame) (Barber & Clark, 2002: 22-29 in Ahmed, 2004: 146). Bringing shame to the Greek nation entails being considered less of a Greek, instead it's somebody who lacks morals and is open to evil dispositions imported from external forces (and subsequently is considered less human).

An integral part of QV's anti-nationalist rhetoric consists in directly confronting its audience, that is, aggressively naming and negating its legitimacy by pointing invisible fingers back at the Greek nation. From this perspective, the slogan of another poster: "*Dangerous are not HIV- positive but the racists and misogynists of this country*" (QV, 2014: 47) that accompanied the support rally for the HIV-positive women attacked by the Ministry of Health in 2012, consists an act of calling out the forces of Greek racism, which, in the midst of a morality of securitization, condemned these women's bodies to physical injury and social death.

The politics of intersectionality involve the strategic use of overidentification, which can potentially shift prescribed gendered roles and notions of Greekness. I will be drawing from the discussion of overidentification as a cultural art practice introduced by the BAVO collective (BAVO: 2007). Overidentification entails that artists strategically give up their will to resist and instead capitulate to the status quo and apply the later's rules even more consistently than the rest of society. Even though overidentification is examined as an artistic practice, I am concerned on the overidentifying subject that emerges from particular activist practices and discourses within the queer feminist movement. As argued by Stafylakis (2013), the overidentifying subject is one who accepts that it's fully imbricated in the social bond, interwoven "within" and "by" discourses (Stafylakis, 2013: 134). By overidentifying with what we wish to exorcise, we reenact its inconsistencies, its lack of transparency. All in all, overidentification works to refuse the closure enacted by the existence of roles and positions and enables us to reflect on the dangers involved in every totalizing fantasy



while also interrogating established modes of political engagement (Stafylakis: 2013). In addition, it makes space for the paradoxicality of certain subject positions to emerge and at the same time, challenges the affective registers whereby Greek nationalism reproduces itself.

In 2010, the members of QV entered the National Warfare Museum and stood in front of the portraits of Laskarina Mampouchina and Lord Byron and re-enacted them. These mythic heroes refer to particular historical times in the Greek nation-building project, namely the war for independence against the Turks (1821) and an English poet, who was notorious for his philhellenistic inclinations at the eve of European romanticism<sup>37</sup> which nurtured the war for independence. These figures are systematically taken as the necessary triggers for the Greek nation's imaginings and aspirations in order to give modern Greece something to revive and admire in its current defensive nationalist struggles as the pariah of Europe, bankrupt and in-debt.

This act of mimicry is theatrical inasmuch as it imitates and renders hyperbole and alien the national symbolic ritual that it reflects upon. In one of its texts QV writes about this over-identification exercise:

{...} we decided to imitate the images of these heroes portrayed at the National Warfare Museum; we took their representations quite literally, thus we stood in front of these images that construct different aspects of our gendered national identity and tried with our daily bodies, gazes and clothes to re-represent them, to imitate them, to be them. We realized that these heroic postures are unnatural and uncomfortable and our effort to look like them was paradoxical and funny. But of course we can assume these positions. We perform them daily, to silence someone, to exercise power, to resist somebody else or when we want to stop feeling afraid. Finally, we would say that this process of literal mimicry managed to expose the national symbols that these body postures uphold.

QVzine (2014, issue 5): 23

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<sup>37</sup> A romantic Hellenism that grew to epitomize the genealogy of European culture and formulated a dual nationalist discourse for Greece either as primordial ancestor or a corrupt bastion of the East; likewise, the concept of eroticism in ancient Greece was instrumental in venturing on a paradoxical "history of the modern homosexual" (Halperin, 2004: 5).

By exploring the gendered postures of Greek national myth-figures, QV members reflect upon their effects on daily life while also negotiating affectively trauma and systemic violence. Through this exercise of mimicry, they play with over-identification in order to activate self-reflection in multiple and unprecedented ways and began reflecting around the gaps between national narratives of Greek identity, gendered positions, and their affective experiences in daily life. And it's precisely the entry into gaps that is made activated through self-reflection and exercises of overidentification.

### **The politics of intersectionality: Don't call me Marxist!**

Autonomous feminism had deeply put into question many assumptions of classical socialism, notably its implicit identification of universalism with male vision and agency. It also stressed a conception of revolution as global liberation that transcended class exploitation toward a complete reconfiguration of gender relationships and forms of human life. In many respects, it redefined communism "as a society of equals in which not only class but also gender hierarchies were abolished, and in which equality implied the recognition of differences" (Traverso, 2018: 44-45). While feminism is granted validity within Marxism, queer and identity politics are commonly seen as regressive (Traverso: 2018), that is, as if they emerged in response to the "failure" of class struggle, implying that they rushed to fill the vacuum left by the Marxist Left and the labor movement. From this perspective, identity politics are perceived by Greek leftists as a western- imported discourse that is too neoliberal, too divisive, too individualistic, and too glossy to be incorporated more centrally in the left's rhetoric.

The Greek left's position against feminism, gender and sexuality is exceptional in that historically it has always rendered them secondary to labour relations. More specifically, feminism has been historically articulated by the Greek left either as a harmful and disgraceful notion of the political or as an ambiguous form of doing politics that cannot perform well enough "in the arena." According to Papadogiannis (2015) , the pro-Soviet Greek Communist Party (KKE) has been accusing feminism for being a "bourgeois ideology" (Papadogiannis, 2014: 25) that draws from Western individualism and places greater emphasis on personal needs and desires over collective struggles. For

the pro-Soviet Greek communist party, feminism promotes “a schism between men and women that undermines working-class solidarity and popular struggles” (Papadogiannis, 2015: 145).

During the 1970s the women’s group of the Communist Party (OGE) perceived “motherhood as a core and desirable component of such relationships founded on “true love”, adding that housekeeping activities should be “equitably distributed” to both spouses.” (Papadogiannis, 2015: 26). Both, the Youth of the Communist Party (KNE) and the Greek Communist Party (KKE) perceived women’s autonomy in the articulation of political discourses and the organizing of grassroots mobilization as secessionist and disruptive of working-class struggles and ideals (Papadogiannis, 2015: 25). Regarding homosexuality, the Communist Party (KKE) does not acknowledge gay and lesbian rights as individual rights or as a “normal” expression of sexual desire since it exceeds forms of biological reproduction and corrupts the values of the heterosexual familial unit.

In December 2015, the Greek Communist party voted against the law for same-sex civil partnerships. Below are presented two excerpts from Aleka Pappariga’s speech in the Greek parliament for same-sex partnerships and an article at Rizospastis about identity politics. They demonstrate the ongoing suppression of gay rights, women’s liberation under the rubric of a class- based conquest over the means of production that exceeds “particularistic claims.”

Homosexual rights cannot be perceived as individual rights since there hasn’t been provided adequate scientific explanation for same- sex sexual orientation. It’s rooted into long-term social problems that have to do with the relations between the sexes, domestic violence, childhood experiences in the family, at school; thus, it cannot be depicted as an individual choice regardless of social settings...We don’t believe that sexual orientation or domestic partnership produce social rights...Rights and obligations emerge from marriage, which legally binds familial relations. It also includes the social protection of children that are biologically reproduced from the union of a man and a woman.

Extract from the speech of Aleka Pappariga, president of the Communist Party (KKE) at the Greek parliament for same-sex civil partnerships (“The analysis of Aleka Pappariga”, 2015)

At the core of this conversation rests the idea that gender is not defined by biological characteristics and instead by the superstructure, basically individual opinions, personal choices, behaviors and acts. These sort of theories attempt to present every social, political or class division that objectively exists as a result of one's social conscience and not of reality. They seek to present contemporary society not as a class- based society where exploitation and inequalities exist but as a society of "equal opportunities" which some take advantage of and others don't, "individual freedom" and all the rest {...}

(Chaintouti, 2014)

The relation between feminism and Eurocommunism is hard to grasp since it has been ambiguous. Papadogiannis & Gehrig (2015) in their overview of gender and sexuality within the European Left during the 1970s argue that the emergence of the feminist movement in the mid seventies especially affected "the rhetoric and actual practice of the left-wing Greek youth of the Communist Party- Internal (Rigas Fereos)" (Papadogiannis & Gehrig, 2015: 4). More specifically, Papadogiannis suggests that the discourses of the radical left- language and themes of analysis- were influenced by the interests of women's groups: "Relevant congress decisions and other official texts no longer orbited solely around the position of women in the workforce" (Papadogiannis, 2015: 29). They also included abortion, contraception and rape in their political agenda.

In addition, Papadogiannis points to the fact that an important number of women affiliated to the Greek Youth of the Communist Party- Internal (Rigas Fereos) participated in the Movement of Democratic Women (KDG). This worked "as a testing ground for the left's capacity to respect the political autonomy of its own feminist activists" (Papadogiannis, 2015: 28). Ever since the institutionalization of feminist demands and the hegemony of PASOK (from 1981 to 1989 and from 1993 to 1996) which adopted a populist rhetoric putting forward the demands of the "non-privileged" for social justice, gender and sexuality were again rendered secondary within the leftist agenda, which focused throughout this time on reconfiguring collective action (Papadogiannis: 2015).

The discourses of the Greek radical left, the "Youth of Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left)" and its branches until its partial dissolution in 2012 (following the rise of

Syriza into power after 2010) managed to open the signifier “class” to broader considerations by incorporating post Marxist readings (Althusser, Foucault, Lacan, Benjamin and Laclau). In this context, power was perceived, at least in theory, as an assemblage of relations, bound by racial, economic, gender and sexual restrictions, both repressive and productive of the subject and its relations to power. Drawing from my personal experience as a member of the Youth of Syriza for more than five years, there was an unspoken tendency to debunk, in practice, issues of gender and sexuality as less important to economic disparities and labor relations. In addition, radical leftists did not perceive self-reflexivity as a political tool that could potentially shape a more open form of political subjectivity and challenge masculinity and its imprint in the Youth’s decision-making processes (assemblies, congresses). The politicization of personal experience was considered less valuable in that it reduced political matters to the emotionally contingent sphere of the personal.

The discourse of sexual liberation that emerged within the European Left during the 1970s had influenced the “Youth of Syriza.” I recall writing articles about the May 1968 rebellion at the Youth’s magazine “Enebra” and reading Marcuse’s texts about sexual liberation. In addition, the Youth’s annual summer camps sustained a culture of intensive liberation of Greek sexual mores (one night stands and casual sex without commitment). In practice, this meant that under the pretext of sexual freedom, gender inequalities were sustained and reproduced and structural homophobia wasn’t discussed. Papadogiannis & Gehrig (2015) note that “the discrepancy between the rhetoric and actual practice” (Papadogiannis & Gehrig, 2015: 4) can be traced within left-wing groups of Mediterranean countries (the Maoists in Italy and Spain and the orthodox Soviet communists in Greece). In those organizations, as argued again by Papadogiannis and Gehrig (2015), “ephemeral premarital relationships and sexual flings served as a source of prestige for male left-wingers whereas women who were sexually assertive were regarded light-minded” (Papadogiannis & Gehrig, 2015: 4) or they were slandered as “sluts.” By 2008, a small number of women were hesitantly trying to articulate a semi-independent feminist discourse within the “Youth of Syriza.” At the same time, the “Committee of Human Rights”, which functioned within the Youth, wanted to address vulnerable social groups (“those without voice”) in the name of which it put forward struggles for inclusivity and social justice (the key word here being “in

the name of” which denotes the Youth’s principles of representational inclusivity). The public/ private divide was sustained to define the field of the political, yet it would lose its rigidity in cases of police brutality and state- orchestrated (or paramilitary) attacks against women and homosexuals (like the case of Konstantina Kuneva).

Nowadays, the economic crisis which has affected the world since 2008, a debt crisis that started from assets bubbles that affected banks, but then was transferred to sovereign states constitutes a mode of neoliberal governmentality that regulates forms of living and being. People are differentially faced with economic and social precarity and are exposed to the political violence of authoritarianism (with heightened police control). In the Greek case, economic disparities and dispossession, the normalization of poverty (the new-poor subject), and the widespread condition of precarity are combined with a morality of securitization that targets gendered and homosexual bodies such as the attack at the Bulgarian migrant woman Konstandina Kuneva (2008), the arrest of 17 women (2013), who allegedly worked as sex-workers, were forcibly HIV-tested and accused of spreading the virus, and finally the police detention of trans women at Thessaloniki in order to “beautify and clean the streets” (May 2014) (Athanasίου: 2018).

The crisis as a normalized state of exception (crisis-oriented normalization) that governs differently racialized and gendered bodies has brought to the fore the homophobia and sexism already structurally embedded in Greek society. Against these stories of homophobic violence and precarious living LGBT groups and feminist collectives have been intermittently articulating their own discourses. The discourse of the crisis brought to the fore and enhanced an “already there” morality of biopolitical securitization that has been abjecting different modes of sexual and gendered being for the past years. In the midst of neoliberal policies of austerity, which meant cuts in pensions, benefits, increased unemployment, the dissolution of healthcare system, loss of labor, house evictions, and a widespread state of precarity, which was profoundly gendered and racialized, QV introduced an important text on intersectionality at the Communismos festival in Thessaloniki. It was 2011, three years after the attack at the Bulgarian migrant worker, Konstandina Kuneva, and two years before the Minister of Health, Andreas Loverdos, arrested 17 migrant women, presumably sex-workers, who were forcibly tested and accused of spreading HIV to the Greek family, calling them

“health bombs” (Jacobsen: 2013). In the following text, QV offers a critique of the traditional Marxist model that renders gender secondary to labor relations, either in rhetoric or in practice and suggests the need to approach identity and concomitantly precarity intersectionally. The text reads as follows:

Class difference cannot be fixed as the main or primary difference. Not only because this is not supported empirically and analytically - i.e. there is no "principal or primary" difference deriving out of specific social contexts, but also because, even more, this signifies (symbolically) a non-confrontational approach against the existing order, a rather reactive confrontational direction, which does not threaten neither the capital nor the order of things, as they are arranged within liberal capitalist democracy.

QVzine (2014, issue 5): Excerpt from the text “Who are the communists? Aren’t-we communists?”, pp.10-11 (translated by Elefteriadis: 2015)

The submission of gender differences into class struggles by orthodox Marxists is not simply a neutral position. It orchestrates the silencing mechanisms that generate and reproduce the violence of gender inequalities. Wendy Brown in her article “Resisting left melancholy”(1999) draws from the work of Benjamin and Freud to talk about the melancholic attachment of the contemporary Left to its historical losses that obstructs an active engagement with power relations with the aim to effect change in the here and now (Brown: 1999). In Benjamin’s work left melancholy represents not only “a refusal to come to terms with the particular character of the present, that is, a failure to understand history in terms other than “empty time” or “progress” ” (Benjamin, 1994: 51-52).” It signifies, as Benjamin notes, “a certain narcissism with regard to one’s past political attachments and identity that exceeds any contemporary investment in political mobilization, alliance or transformation” (Benjamin, 1994: 51-52). This melancholic attachment (and the fear of its loss), Brown argues, is reproduced in the left’s longing for “formations and formulations of another epoch, one in which the notion of unified movements, social totalities and class- based politics appeared to be viable categories of political and theoretical analysis” (Brown, 1999: 26).

On the other hand, Enzo Traverso (2018) perceives left melancholy less as a conservative tendency, like Brown suggests, and more as the necessary premise of a

mourning process, a step that precedes and allows mourning for the end of utopias, instead of paralyzing it. In this context, left melancholy is “a refusal to compromise with domination”<sup>38</sup> (Traverso, 2018: 141).

For the vanquished Greek leftists, the process of mourning their defeat at the Greek civil war, a communist ideal which was so close, yet never came, along with the trauma of the detention camps and the years of resistance is repetitively re-enacted at commemoration ceremonies, remembrance days (28<sup>th</sup> of October) and nostalgic leftist songs. Those days the city is haunted by its past ghosts, enacting particular types of spectres, which Giorgio Agamben calls “larval spectres that do not live alone but rather obstinately look for people who generated them through their bad conscience” (Agamben, 2011: 39-40 quoted in Traverso, 2018: 77). The Greek left has been collecting for years the objects, images and stories of a past waiting for redemption, yet in this mourning process it maintains imperishable the glory of the Greek left spirit. Defeat had turned communism into realms of Greek national memory. The structural dependency of Greece to external forces of history (in this case, the Soviet Union) results in more complex processes of mourning, which are always articulated through the lens of Greek nationalism and feed into narratives of (Greece’s) victimization from external forces along with internal acts of national treason.<sup>39</sup>

In many respects, the politics of intersectionality offer a different language of inhabiting the realm of politics where privilege as nodal point (instead of class) and self-reflexivity as political practice become the building blocks of an ongoing queer counter-discourse against precarity and neoliberal governmentality. The fact that class, labour relations and economic disparities remain the nodal points (the privileged signifiers) that quilt the left’s ideological formations relates also to the contradictory emergence of late/post modernity in Greece. From 1974 to mid- 1980s, according to political scientist Yiannis Voulgaris, a left- democratic discourse was prevalent in Greek society.

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<sup>38</sup> According to Traverso, melancholy means “memory and awareness of the potentialities of the past” (Traverso, 2016:156) that is, identifying with lack and not with loss. In a Freudian line, he argues that identification with the lost object entails identifying with the enemy, lost socialism replaced by accepted capitalism (Traverso, 2016: 156).

<sup>39</sup> The song of Lena Platonos “Child of Eve” depicts in the best possible manner the realms of left national memory as a haunting past, sealed and frozen and less oriented in the workings of the present. But the glimmering figure of the child of eve marks both the repetitive death of left melancholy and the persistence of a different kind of politics that recognizes the uncertainty of the political and builds on inconsistencies, tenderness, on that which survives out of the repetitive leftist national drama.



Its key elements were the claim to represent “genuine patriotism”, the veneration of the collective and the dismissal of entrepreneurship (Papadogiannis: 2015).

In his work “Militant around the Clock: Left- wing youth politics, leisure and sexuality in post-dictatorship Greece, 1974- 1981” Nikos Papadogiannis (2015) argues that a late or post modern condition in Greece was not necessarily incompatible with collective action. In this context, he argues, meta-narratives were not rejected per se but were incorporated in hybrid and indeterminate ways by a broad range of Greek left-wing youth, especially by Eurocommunists and autonomous young left- wingers (but not by an “alternative” milieu as was the case in the coming of post-industrial modernity in North/western Europe). Thus, the left’s melancholic attachment to traditional forms of collective action is yet another testament to the fact that key aspects of late modernity, in the domains of sexuality and leisure, were also processed collectively by Greek left-wingers, albeit perhaps that they did not eventually become hegemonic in the radical left (Papadogiannis: 2015).

By embracing the political in its antagonistic dimension (Laclau& Mouffe: 2001 {1985}), that is, rendering visible the “us/them” relation, the queer feminist discourse of QV brings to the fore traces from acts of exclusion that govern the constitution of ideologies and political subjects. In what follows QV discusses the relation between privilege as nodal point and self-reflexivity as ongoing political practice in the building of its trajectory.

We estimate that the ideological hegemony of some discourses has excluded other possibilities for identities to be visible, for relationships and struggling communities, which are submitted stereotypically within dominant patterns defined by others. Those who are established by the same discourses in a privileged position should be more conscious on how discourses and power structures produce them in relation to others to whom they project their fears of losing control of their privileged position. Power is imaginary; it does not exist before the results generated by the institutions we have internalized. However, its effects clearly exist, for which they are systematically trying to convince us that they exist before and outside of us. Still they preserve the illusion that we just need to win them (the institutions) in order to eliminate their violent effects, without the need of freeing ourselves from tales of conquest and control, without self-organization that constantly produces new meanings of struggle.

QV zine (2014: issue 5), Excerpt from the text “Who are the communists? Aren’t we communists”, pp.10-11 (translated by Eleftheriadis, 2015: 1045)

Drawing from Mouffe’s work (along with Ernesto Laclau) on “radical negativity” which “impedes the full totalization of society and forecloses the possibility of a society beyond division and power” (Mouffe, 1993: 1-3) I also approach QV’s reflection on power along these lines in that it aims to critique the essentialist underpinnings of Marxist ideological discourses. In particular, the above excerpt seems to suggest that when power is perceived as the manifestation of “a deeper objectivity that is exterior to the practices that brought it into being” (Mouffe, 1993:2) then we can read through it “a logic of the social based on an essentialist conception of “being as presence”” (Mouffe, 1993: 2). The later entails that objectivity resides within things themselves and is not necessarily produced by what we do with them. In this context, “what we do” with things is subsumed in “what things are” (acting is being) and thus, differences in actions, practices and performatives are effaced for the sake of unitary sameness (Mouffe: 1993).

Queer feminists and lesbian feminists engage with an agonistic politics of performativity, which “doesn’t rely to representing and reproducing “what” we are, yet agonistically generates “who” we are by producing new identities” (Honig, 1993: 149)- similarly to the argument put forward by Terminal 119. This enables the possibility to explore subjectivity beyond the established ontologies of the hegemonic human subject (male, able-bodied, heteronormative, self-willed, Marxist and/or capitalist subject).

Self-reflexivity as an individual and collective political practice opens the realm of the political to ambiguity and the acknowledgement of “the existence of an original lack at the heart of the social” (Stavrakakis, 1999: 135). By actively engaging with the structures of power the queer feminist subject acknowledges its complicity in generating and reproducing them and therefore, witnesses their limitations. It seems that self-reflexivity as a queer feminist political practice enacts “the very conditions for maintaining the visibility of constitutive lack and the contingent nature of every structure” (Stavrakakis, 1999: 132- 135). In Laclau’s scheme this means “making visible the external conflict between different political projects that purport to fill this constitutive lack and also making visible the internal split between their function as representatives of universal fullness and their concrete particular content” (Stavrakakis, 1999: 135). To put it otherwise, self- reflexivity entails reading political projects as inherently limiting and limited and at the same time occupying a position that makes visible the force of totalizing fantasies and their particular content.



## Appendix D

### Visual Intermission

Feminist Centre

(1999-2014)

The following photos were taken at the Feminist Centre. The center closed down at the summer of 2014. Since the space no longer exists, its historical significance is visually recorded. After 15 years the lesbian feminist group (LOA) held its meetings here along with various other feminist groups. It was a meeting space for feminist/LGBT groups and the formation of political affiliations between them. Queertrans also held its meetings for the last three years (2011-2014). The following photos include flyers, leaflets, posters from various talks, events and demonstrations organized by various groups within the past 15 years. There are also foreign feminist and lesbian posters gathered from women's trips to major European cities.



Figure 16: LOA's group photo, March 2014, one Tuesday afternoon



Figure 17: The writing board at the Feminist Centre for spreading information about events and facilitating the management of the space.

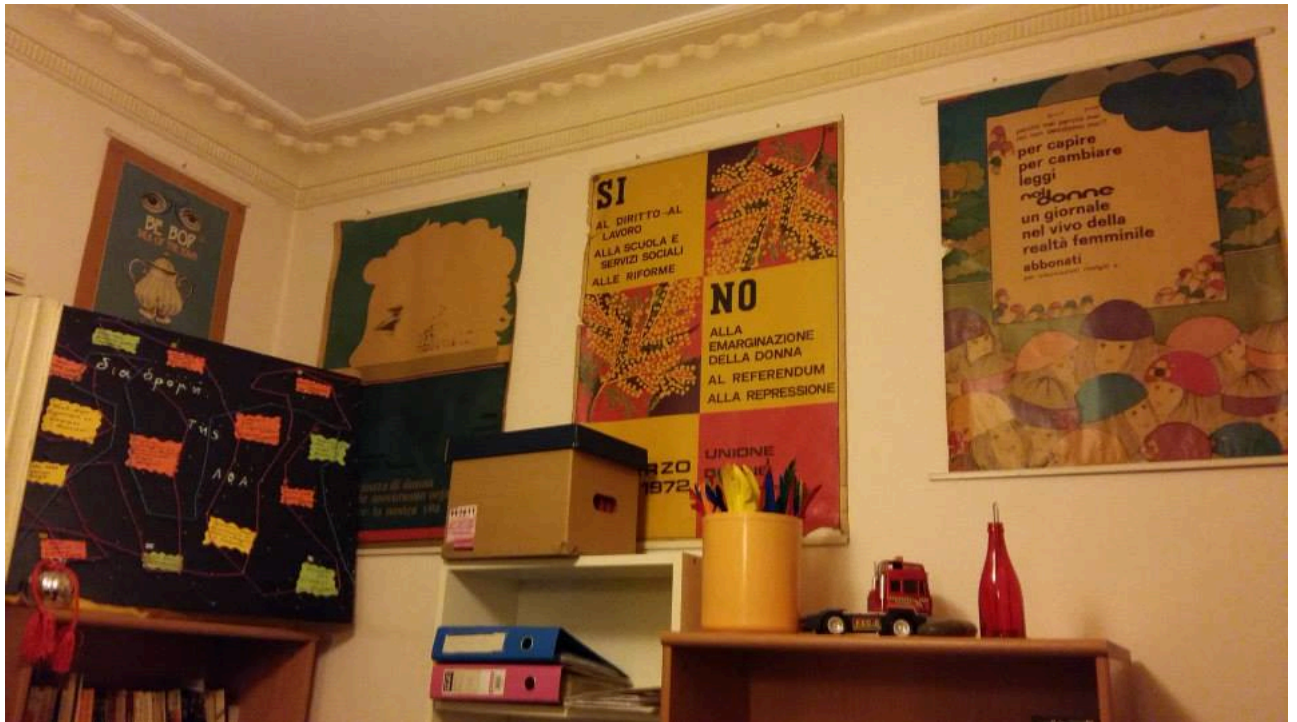


Figure 18: Posters in the Feminist Centre



Figure 19: “Whoever walks at night...mud and shit at KELPNO”, stencil denouncing the arrest of seventeen women (May 2012), who were accused for spreading HIV and allegedly worked illegally as sex-workers.

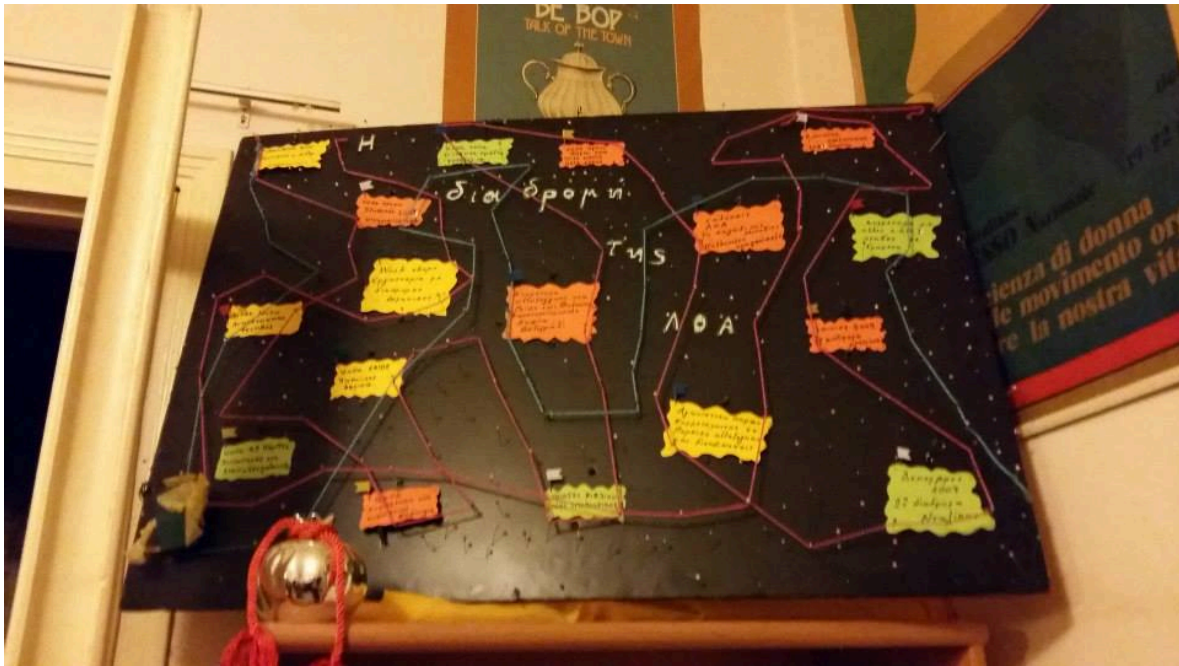


Figure 20: A map of LOA's history



Figure 21: The scattered bathroom figures, used in a past event/demonstration on the International Day of violence against women.





Figure 22: Posters in the Feminist Centre



Figures 23: Posters in the Feminist Centre



Figure 24: One of the many invitation- posters for LOA's monthly meetings at the Purple House every second Thursday of the month

Η Λεσβιακή Ομάδα Αθήνας  
σας καλεί στο

CONSTANTINAC  
&  
ELENIC

*pempti 21/5, 20.30-01.30...*



Figure 25: Another invitation- poster for LOA's monthly meetings at the Purple House, every second Thursday of the month



Figure 26: Beaver, view from the top, June 2015

# WHAT QUEER FEST



ΠΑΡΑΣΚΕΥΗ 26/11

## Εθνικισμοί

18.00 - 19.00 ΠΡΟΒΟΛΕΣ

*Pink Camouflage*, της Sarah Bracke, 2009, 60'

19.00 - 22.00 ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΗ Έθνος, φύλο, σεξουαλικότητα: Τα όρια της ταυτότητας και η διαπλοκή των συστημάτων εξουσίας

22.00 PERFORMANCES

Dr. D: Είμαστε όλοι μετανάστες. A lecture performance

Nesrin DraGuerilla (Istanbul)

Goodoubets (Istanbul)

ΣΑΒΒΑΤΟ 27/11

## Επιστημονισμοί

12.00 - 14.00 ΠΑΡΟΥΣΙΑΣΗ - ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΗ

*Γυναίκες στην πυρά. Το κυνήγι των μαγισσών στην Ευρώπη, οι περιφράξεις και η ανάδυση του καπιταλισμού* (Μαβί Καφενείο)

14.00 - 16.00 ΕΡΓΑΣΤΗΡΙ ΑΥΤΟΕΞΕΤΑΣΗΣ *BirdWatching*

15.00 - 17.00 ΣΥΛΛΟΓΙΚΗ ΧΟΡΟΦΑΓΙΚΗ ΚΟΥΖΙΝΑ

17.00 - 20.00 ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΗ Ιστορίες έρωτα και τρέλας. Περί επιστημονικού κύρους και ψυχιατρικής

20.00 - 22.00 ΠΡΟΒΟΛΕΣ

*Transvestites*, του Aykut Atasay, 2008, 12'

*Born Queer Dear Doctors*, της Shorona se Mbessakwini, 2003, 5'

*L'ordre des mots*, των Cynthia Arra και Melissa Arra, 2007, 75'

ΠΑΡΑΛΛΗΛΑ Έκθεση: Ιστορία της υστερικοποίησης του γυναικείου σώματος

22.00 Party

ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ 28/11

## Κινηματα / Κοινότητες

12.00 - 16.00 ΕΡΓΑΣΤΗΡΙ *We are born naked, the rest is drag*

Εργαστήρι παρενδυσίας, βόλτα στην πόλη και πικ νικ

17.00 - 19.00 ΠΡΟΒΟΛΕΣ

*Travel Queeries*, της Elliot Graney - Saucke, 2009, 60'

*Queer Beograd*, 30'

19.00 - 21.00 ΣΥΖΗΤΗΣΗ Φτιάχνοντας κινήματα, οργανώνοντας κοινότητες:

Φύλο ⇄ Σεξουαλικότητα ⇄ Πρακτικές ⇄ Θεωρίες ⇄ Στρατηγικές & Συλλογικά Εγχειρήματα

ΠΑΡΑΛΛΗΛΑ Χώρος με υλικό ομάδων που έχουν κάνει πολιτική τα τελευταία χρόνια με άξονα το φύλο και τη σεξουαλικότητα

21.00 Συναυλίες

στην κατάληψη Πατησίων 61 και Σκαραμαγκά

*La Libela*

*Ms Ratter*

*Alex C and Who Fucks the Others*

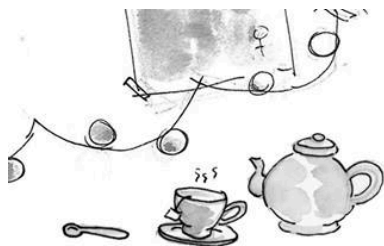
Τρεις μέρες με συζητήσεις, περφόρμανς, προβολές, συλλογική κουζίνα και συλλογικές αντιστάσεις, με στάσεις τις επιθυμητικές μας αναζητήσεις και τις έμφυλες απορίες, στις απόψεις του προσωπικού που γίνεται πολιτικό, τρεις μέρες με συναυλίες, πάρτι και εργαστήρια, χαρτογραφούμε τις εμπειρίες μας, ξανασκεφτόμαστε πάνω στα πολιτικά μας εργαλεία, αυτο-οργανωνόμαστε, επιθυμούμε, χτίζουμε κοινότητες και δίκτυα, σμιλεύουμε τις οικειότητες αλλά και τις διαφορές μας και διασχίζουμε τους ιστούς της πόλης.

Όλα τα φύλα και όλες οι σεξουαλικότητες είναι ευπρόσδεκτες.

Οι αλλόκοτες και οι φεμινίστριες,  
οι λεσβίες και οι αδερφές,  
τα φρικιά και οι ανώμαλες,  
οι τρανς και τα αγοροκόριτσα  
της συνέλευσης

[www.whatqueerfest.espivblogs.net](http://www.whatqueerfest.espivblogs.net)

Figure 27: Poster for the first queer festival “whatqueerfest”, 2010, organized by an open queer feminist assembly- including some QV members- in different anarchist squats and social spaces.



Ο χώρος αυτός δημιουργήθηκε από μια κατάφωρη ανάγκη: να υπάρξουν και να δραστηριοποιηθούν ενεργητικά μέσα και γύρω από αυτόν οι άνθρωποι που δεν είναι ορατοί, που δεν έχουν τις κοινωνικά αποδεκτές και αναμενόμενες επιθυμίες. Δηλαδή για να μιλάμε με ονόματα, μια που όσο μας ορίζουν οι λέξεις πρέπει να τις ορίζουμε κι εμείς: λεσβίες, πούστηδες, μπάι, τρανς, ανώμαλοι στρέιτ κάνουν αυτό το χώρο το «φυσικό» τους χώρο. Μ' αυτή τη σκέψη/επιθυμία ξεκινήσαμε να χτίσουμε τις βάσεις και τα προαπαιτούμενα για την επικοινωνία μέσα και έξω από την ομάδα, δρώντας και παρακολουθώντας τη διαδρομή των ίδιων μας των επιλογών, προσπαθώντας να δώσουμε περιεχόμενα στο χώρο μας.

Τα χαρακτηριστικά αυτού του χώρου περιφρουρούνται με όρους που δημιουργούμε κάθε φορά εμείς οι ίδιες καθώς στους περισσότερους από τους εσωτερικούς και δημόσιους χώρους αυτής της πόλης μπορούμε να υπάρξουμε μόνο υπό προϋποθέσεις. Όμως αυτή η διαδικασία αυτοπροστασίας δεν είναι χωρίς κόστος. Οι καταναγκαστικές μεταμορφώσεις στις οποίες υποβάλλουμε καθημερινά τα κοινωνικά μας σώματα μπροστά στους άλλους, στους χώρους δουλειάς, στη γειτονιά, στους γονείς, στις τυχαίες κοινωνικότητες, δημιουργούν μια περίσσεια συναισθημάτων που δεν μπορούμε να διαχειριστούμε. Θέλαμε να την κάψουμε αυτή την περίσσεια καταπιεσμένων αισθήσεων, να την ξεδέψουμε, να ξενυχτήσουμε, να χορέψουμε, να φλερτάρουμε με σημασία ή χωρίς, να φασωθούμε χωρίς να απειλούμαστε, με όρους ασφάλειας και με σεβασμό προς τον άλλον και την άλλη, χωρίς αστυνομευτικά βλέμματα. Αυτές οι ανάγκες και επιθυμίες μας οδήγησαν στις εξωστρεφείς εκδηλώσεις του περασμένου χρόνου.

Μετά τις γιορτές και το Ξεφάντωμα όμως, η πραγματικότητα είναι λίγο αλλαγμένη, αλλά παραμένει εκεί. Και συχνά μας επιβάλει να καταφύγουμε στους μικροκόσμους μας. Γιατί τα τελετουργικά μιας κοινότητας, όπως είναι η μέθεξη σε ένα πάρτι, έχουν τα όριά τους, φτιάχνουν ψευδαισθήσεις ενότητας χωρίς απαραίτητα να έχουν χτίσει τις σχέσεις, φτιάχνουν λαμπερές εικόνες και νησίδες εναλλακτικής διασκέδασης που μας βοηθάνε να αντέξουμε αλλά και να συνειδητοποιήσουμε ότι το ζητούμενο είναι να σχετιστούμε διαφορετικά. Και για να το κάνουμε αυτό χρειάζεται να πάρουμε δύναμη, χρειάζεται εγγύτητα, τριβή, ζύμωση για να φτιάξουμε κοινούς κώδικες επικοινωνίας αφού τίποτα δεν είναι αυτονόητο εδώ, αφού είναι δύσκολο να διαχωρίσουμε τι αφορά τις επιθυμίες μας, που συχνά είναι φορτωμένες με ενοχές, και τι τις σχέσεις εξουσίας που έχουμε ενσωματώσει και μας φαίνονται οικείες. Χρειάζεται να δούμε τις διαφορές μας, να τις γεφυρώσουμε ή να τις σεβαστούμε, να κάνουμε πολιτική, να αλληλεπιδράσουμε, να εκθέσουμε τις εαυτές μας και να γνωριστούμε καλύτερα. Οι συναντήσεις της Πέμπτης έχουν αυτούς τους σκοπούς, να παραμένει ο χώρος ανοιχτός για να γίνουμε διαφορετικές, περισσότερες και πιο πραγματικές.



Figure 28: Invitation for the weekly tea gatherings at QV's space, November 2013- October 2015, the other side of the leaflet of figure 13.



Figure 29: Poster-party invitation for the bar openings of QV's social space, January 2014



Figure 30: Poster- old party invitation from the first queer parties organized in Athens, some time around 2008-2010.



Same-sex love wall slogans and political graffiti in central Athens (2013-2015)



Figure 31: Hatred ek-fylo macho patriots, to national unity always traitors



Figure 32: Fire to unfulfilled erotes



Figure 33: My pussy is hotter from your Molotov cocktail



Figure 34: Gianni, you are *kavla*, Takis

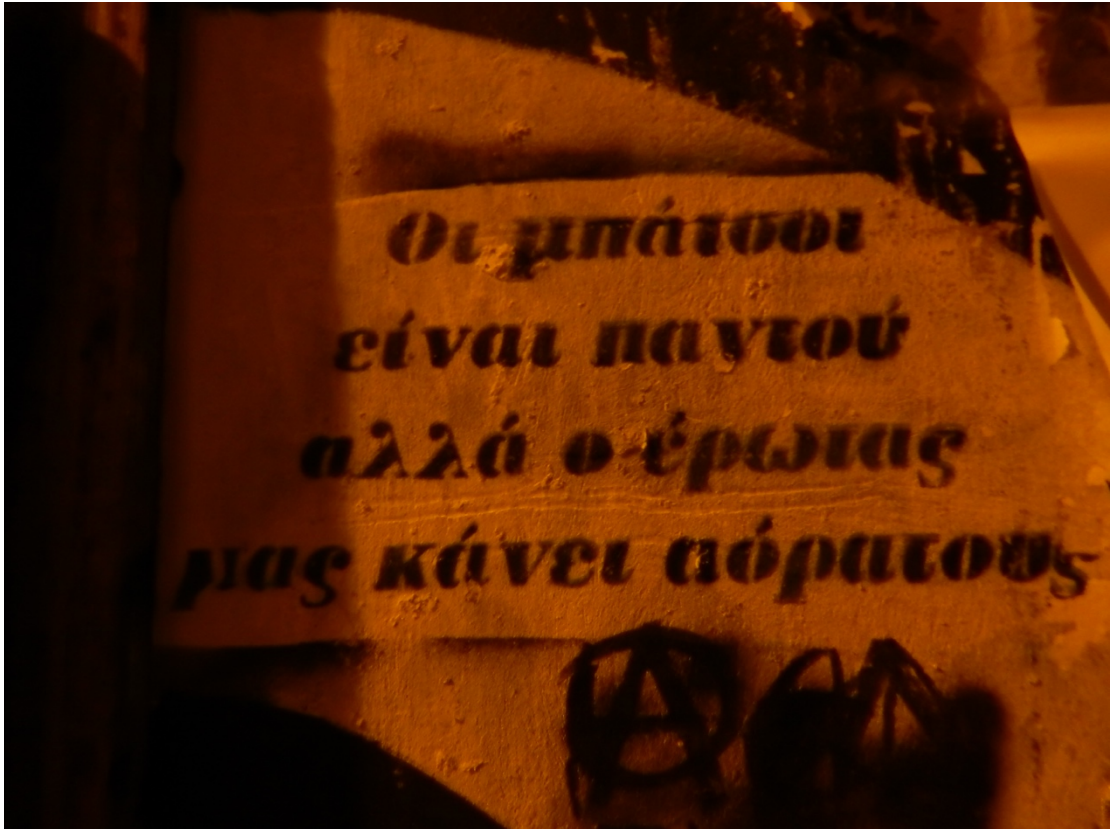


Figure 35: Cops are everywhere but *erotas* will make us invisible

## Appendix E

### The effect of the autonomous feminist movement on contemporary feminist groups

The effect of the autonomous feminist movement (of the 1970s- 1980s) can be traced in the discourses, practices and strategies of contemporary queer and feminist collectives that draw from queer theory and radical feminism to produce a discourse that focuses on male privilege, anti-nationalism/ anti-Greekness and the relations between patriarchy and globalized capitalism. By selectively adopting organizational and ideological tools of autonomous feminist groups, contemporary feminist groups build on the feminist movement of the 1980s to comprise synchronic and diachronic elements (Simitis, 2014: 194). Their ideological affiliations span from Marxist feminist to anarchist feminism. *Migada*, a women-only feminist group formed at 2009, appears to adopt an ideological discourse that is very close to autonomous feminists. The aim and goals of their magazine (*Migada*) are stated in the very first issue: “A magazine with the aim to address women’s exploitation in contemporary society is nothing more than a minefield. Many reasons have contributed to the reduced interest on women’s issues nowadays: Firstly, the institutionalization of the feminist movement which flourished 40 years ago; secondly, the common belief that women’s exploitation has mitigated through time as our societies progressively move forwards without setbacks; thirdly, the general feeling of growth and development during the ’90s which nurtured a very individualistic approach, namely that whatever affects us politically and emotionally must affect us solely as individuals (*Migada*, 2011 (1): 1).”

The magazine hosts articles from the archive of the autonomous feminist movement (KAG), translated foreign texts, along with articles focusing on body politics, the sexual economy of women, women and immigration, antinationalism, sexual violence, and globalized capitalism. It maintains a strong anti-institutional stance which is clearly stated in the editorial of the first issue: “we are against academic feminism and its ideological products as well as women- orientated NGO’s that seek to sugar-coat the harshness of our realities...women’s issues cannot be left on the hands of the “experts”- state institutions, lifestyle magazines, NGOs (*Migada*, 2011 (1): 1).” Building on the

tradition of autonomous feminists *Migada* articulates an anti-nationalist/ anti-racist discourse that talks about the experiences of immigrant women in Greece, the regulation of women's bodies according to beauty standards imposed by patriarchal capitalism, and the relation between class and women.

In the following excerpt, the group describes its perspective on the interconnections between class, women and racism in Greek capitalist society: "Talking about women's issues from a class perspective means seeing women's exploitation as intrinsically linked to their position in the capitalist redistribution of labour...we draw here from Italian autonomous feminists that perceive capitalism, outside the labour market, as an expanding social factory where women are exposed to hidden, unpaid exploitation...our relation with autonomous antifa groups from 1990s onwards helped us realize how the statist regulation of immigration, namely the illegalization of immigrants' labour, changed the relations between state and society. In this context, the relations between men and women are nurtured within a violent male culture (*ntavatziliki*) since this is what has been tested on immigrant women for the past years."

The autonomous feminists of *Migada* stress the decisive role of racism in the reproduction of patriarchy by emphasizing the role of the state in regulating the bodies of immigrant women-workers. The arrest of seventeen migrant women, presumably sex-workers, who were potentially HIV-positive and spreading the virus all over Greece, brought together QV, *Migada*, and gender asphyxia in a common rally against state violence in the midst of the so-called financial crisis. The anti-nationalist stance of these groups indicates an ideological shift from the 1980s Greek feminist movement in which nationalism and racism were not at the forefront of its ideological agenda.

The theoretical links between *Migada* and the autonomous feminist movement are reflected in its themes (sexual violence, rape, women taking control over their bodies, reproductive politics, the exploitation of women's labour) principles (autonomy, collectivity), and strategies (anti-institutional politics, grass-roots activity, information network based on personal contacts). Other feminist groups that draw from the autonomous feminist movement in their discourses and practices is *Brastards* (2015), a small-size women's group, which was formed by women that left the anarchist assembly of *Zografou* squat calling out its leading anarchist members for their sexist and macho behaviours. And finally, *Beflona* (2017), which is the newest feminist group to be formed

in Athens.

These three groups coordinated in organizing a weekly festival and demonstration against rape culture (in 2016 and 2017 respectively). Accordingly, the structure of these groups follows the principles of autonomous feminism: they are anti-hierarchical; consciousness-raising is associated with self-learning and work on theoretical issues; they focus on challenging representational models of organisation and promoting direct democracy while co-operation with other groups is defined on the ideological level. I will not reflect more on these groups since I did not witness their activities and did not build rapport with them. Also given their anti-institutional/ anti-academic stance I feel they would not want me to engage with them any further.

My analysis was based on their discursive material (magazines, pamphlets, posters) and its purpose was to reveal the ideological links, continuous or discontinuous, formed through time around feminist principles and values- autonomy, sexual violence, anti-hierarchy, self-organization- as well as the new ideologies on radical feminism that reflect socio-political changes in Greek society- antiracism, antinationalism/ anti-Greekness, rape culture, the position of immigrant women in Greek society.

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