

PART 2

Women of the Mediterranean



ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΕΡΕΥΝΩΝ ΓΙΑ ΤΙΣ ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ ΤΗΣ ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΟΥ

مركز الأبحاث عن أحوال المرأة في حوض البحر الأبيض المتوسط

INSTITUT D'ETUDES DES FEMMES DE LA MEDITERRANEE

MEDITERRANEAN WOMEN'S STUDIES INSTITUTE

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«BUILDING STRATEGIES FOR MEDITERRANEAN WOMEN»

WOMEN'S STUDIES SUMMER PROGRAM

June 22 - July 6, 1986, Spetses, Greece

منظمة التحرير الفلسطينية - البحر المتوسط ΚΥΠΡΟΣ - ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΟΣ العراق - البحر المتوسط FRANCE - MEDITERRANEE الجزائر - البحر المتوسط
- البحر المتوسط ΕΛΛΑΔΑ - ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΟΣ تونس - البحر المتوسط ESPANA - MEDITERANEO لبنان - البحر المتوسط AVIJA - MEDITERAN
JUGOSLAVIJA - MEDITERAN البحر المتوسط JUGOSLAVIJA - MEDITERAN ليبيا - البحر المتوسط ΕΛΛΑΔΑ - ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΟΣ تونس - البحر
العراق - البحر المتوسط FRANCE - MEDITERRANEE البحر المتوسط ΚΥΠΡΟΣ - ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΟΣ العراق - البحر المتوسط ΕΛΛΑΔΑ - ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΟΣ
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JUGOSLAVIJA - MEDITERAN البحر المتوسط JUGOSLAVIJA - MEDITERAN تونس - البحر المتوسط ΕΛΛΑΔΑ - ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΟΣ سوريا - البحر المتوسط
ITALIA - الجزائر - البحر المتوسط ESPANA - MEDITERANEO لبنان - البحر المتوسط JUGOSLAVIJA - MEDITERAN مصر -
JUGOSLAVIJA - MEDITERRANEE البحر المتوسط FRANCE - MEDITERRANEE سوريا - البحر المتوسط ITALIA - MEDITERRANEO بوليساريو - البحر المتوسط
منظمة التحرير الفلسطينية - البحر المتوسط ΚΥΠΡΟΣ - ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΟΣ العراق - البحر المتوسط FRANCE - MEDITERRANEE ليبيا - البحر المتوسط
ITALIA - ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΟΣ منظمة التحرير الفلسطينية - البحر المتوسط ΚΥΠΡΟΣ - ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΟΣ المغرب - البحر المتوسط
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Overview of the First KEGME Women's Studies Summer Program

By Eleni Stamiris

When a few Dutch feminists from the Universities of Erasmus, Amsterdam and Groningen came to Greece in October 1983 to present a week-long seminar on Women's Studies, as part of the Cultural Festival of The Netherlands in Athens, little did we all suspect at the time that this first encounter would evolve into a fruitful 'exchange program' between KEGME and the Dutch feminists, and that in less than three years it would flower into a full-fledged Summer Program of Women's Studies, organized by a handful of feminists from KEGME and held for the first time on the island of Spetses, from 22 June to 6 July 1986.¹

The translucent landscape of Spetses island — two hours by hydrofoil from Athens — provided an alluring background. The KEGME program was located at Corialenios Campus by the sea, an once-conservative and élite boy's boarding school now turned mini-Forum, an international women's space, and a promising future 'think-tank' for Mediterranean women (as it later came to be known).

In spite of the sluggish pace of the tourist island at high season, the KEGME program was Spartan and vigorous, beginning each day at 9:00 a.m., and continuing until about 9:00 p.m. — allowing only a few hours of "free time" to languish in a combined swim-sunbathing-lunch-siesta break during the mid-day blaze.

Notwithstanding the austere schedule, the seminars were surprisingly lively and well-attended throughout the two weeks, belying the admonitions of those who had warned us that we would be "picking off the feminists from the beach." The extremely tight schedule, however, was continuously giving rise to spontaneous meetings and workshops — Forum style — set off by the exciting ideas and arguments that emerged in those seminars that needed more time for full exploration in smaller groups. These impromptu workshops were ingeniously put together during any time of the day or evening, and held in the campus under the shade of the pine trees in the day, or under the brilliantly starred sky at night. The intimate ambiance of the evening workshops often turned them into fascinating consciousness-raising circles, unifying women of different ages, nationalities, cultures, and language-groups into just being WOMEN, sharing a common lot in a patriarchal world. Sometimes the night meetings were suddenly interrupted by strong emotion brought about by the sad narrative of a woman whose tragic tale of war or deep personal loss would be profoundly felt by the entire group. A more jovial mood often gave way to eruptions of singing and dancing until all hours of the morning, accompanied by the guitar and sweet voice of a talented sister. Poetry nights under the stars, and 'ethnic' evenings with special delicacies and wine

brought from back home, added to the strong friendships and bonds that developed during those two weeks together.

The formal program was intended as a crash-course that provided a general overview of the major fields of Women's Studies in this first international program for the Mediterranean region. Each day was focussed on a specific area of study: psychology, politics, religion, education, health, art and literature, economics, development, mass-media, etc. The major themes covered were: Mediterranean Women and Their Roots; Theoretical, Historical and Cultural Perspectives on Women; Women in Culture; Women in Development/Alternative Development for Women; Women and Health; and Women and Politics.² More than 150 women scholars, activists, teachers, researchers, policy-makers, artists, students, housewives, etc., attended from 28 countries. From the Mediterranean and surrounding region, women came from Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Bahrain, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Western Sahara as well as Greece. Women participated from other countries as well, including England, Ireland, Norway, Denmark, The Netherlands, India, Australia, U.S.A., Canada, Ecuador and the Dominican Republic. About 40 scholars gave lectures or made presentations on a panel; another 30 researchers presented their recent studies,

mostly on women's issues in the Mediterranean. In fact, two whole days were given to the presentation and discussion of current research studies, including some discussion on theory, methodology and research techniques. More than 15 women's organizations across the Mediterranean sent delegations which presented reports on the goals and activities of their organizations and displayed their 'wares:' books, posters, photographs, and handicrafts. Some groups illustrated their presentations with interesting slides and film.

Noon and evening breaks were used for audio-visual presentations. A number of films were shown, such as *Winnie Mandela* by the International Solidarity Committee for South Africa and the United Nations Committee Against Apartheid; *From the Children's Eyes: The Turkish Invasion of Cyprus*, as seen and drawn by Cypriot children; *The Dynamic Dimension of Development* by INSTRAW; *Women Journalists* and *Women and the Mass Media* by Jeanne Wickler from The Netherlands; *Anastessarissa* (women that walk on burning charcoals in a ritual custom at a Greek village) and *Gynecocracy* (a customary one-day rule of women once a year in a Greek village) by Maria Mavrikou; *Polisario Refugees*, and others.

Strategies and recommendations for social action emanated from all the discussions, and included a vote taken to fully support the Declaration of the International Coalition of Women for a Meaningful Summit, which called upon President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev to use the 1986 Summit Meeting as the most significant opportunity to reverse the arms race and improve relations and cooperation between the two nations.

The Summer Program was also a 'first' in hosting a Women's Art Exhibition in Greece. Thirty-one women artists participated and displayed their art for two weeks. A full day was dedicated to the examination of feminist art through lectures and workshops, followed by the formal opening of the Exhibition.

A day-long cruise to the medieval town of Monemvasia provided the needed respite to the exhausting program of the first week. But the visit to the prehistoric site of Mycenea, where the female figures of Queen Klitemnestra, Ifigenia and Antigoni loom large, provided a fascinating journey through prehistory from a women's perspective. However, the crowning glory of the extracurricular activities came with the night perform-



Participants at 1986 KEGME Summer Program

ance of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* — the renowned 'feminist' play of antiquity — viewed at the open ancient theatre at Epidavros.

Finally, the two weeks came to an end and we were all faced with the inexorable task of parting. Escorting our old and new friends to the gates of the campus, we could not say goodbye: we just embraced and whispered, *see you next year...*³

Perhaps the best way to close this brief evocation of these memorable times together is to restate the vision of the organizers as set forth in the Women's Studies Program Announcement of KEGME:

We are in the process of searching for our cross-cultural past from which we can learn and on which we can build our future. We need to study our participation in, contribution to and benefit from the socio-economic development of our countries, to develop ourselves, our own feminist values and culture and project our own positive alternatives for the future... We women must define our own reality; we must plot and build our own course of action, we must create and disseminate our own knowledge, and most important of all, we must convert this knowledge to power and action for the purpose of changing the position of women in the Mediterranean countries and for the social transformation of our societies on the basis of equality, social justice, peace and liberation for all.

The first KEGME Women's Studies Summer Program at Spetses for the Mediterranean region — the crossroads of North/South and East/West — was only the beginning of realizing this vision.

¹ This program received the kind support of a number of international and national organizations, such as the United Nations Development Program, UNESCO, INSTRAW, EEC, as well as the Greek General Secretariat of Equality, the Greek General Secretariat of Youth, the Greek Ministry of Culture, the Foundation of Mediterranean Studies, and others.

² KEGME is considering that in future programs only one or two main themes will be studied in depth through an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approach. KEGME is also planning to develop, with feminists from other countries, a special pedagogy for international Women's Studies to be used at Spetses.

³ Although all the participants at Spetses urged that the program be established on a permanent basis and held every year, as organizers of the program involved in the minutiae of preparations and hard logistics, we feel that every two years would be a more realistic possibility. However, KEGME is now planning to separate the Women's Studies 'teaching' and 'research' components of the program to be taking place in alternate years. Thus, in 1987 KEGME will be holding its Winter Program on Research in Athens, 17-20 September, on the theme "Mediterranean Women in Development/Alternative Development." The Summer Program on teaching Women's Studies will take place at Spetses in 1988. Interested readers can receive more information by writing to: KEGME, 192/B Leoforos Alexandras, Gr-115 21, Athens, Greece.

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