

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF  
LASKARINA BOUBOULINA: FEMINIST  
ALTERNATIVES TO DOCUMENTARY  
FILMMAKING PRACTICES

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When Michael Moore won the Academy Award in 2004 for his film Fahrenheit 9/11, the documentary re-emerged as an important critical discourse in the making of culture. As a political consciousness-raising tool, the documentary fits squarely into the goals of independent media activism. With the development of digital videomaking technologies, a distinctive means through which to explore the issues of culture, class, gender, ethnicity, and nationality that have been neglected in mainstream documentary filmmaking practices has emerged. Specifically, this new methodological approach to collecting, preserving, and analyzing history provides a voice for the stories that have been under- and misrepresented in the consumption and production of biographies of women in film and literature.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a series of social, political, cultural, and economic events convened in Europe which enabled Greece to spark the War of Independence. This national instability provided a space for the emergence of a heroine

who broke all established gender codes in the area of politics and on the battlefield: Laskarina Bouboulina (1771-1825). Over the course of her life, Bouboulina owned a successful merchant fleet, became an international diplomat, and was the only woman to join the Filike Etairia, an underground organization that prepared the Greeks for the war with the Ottomans. She is the first woman in world naval history to have earned the title of Admiral for her command of the Spetses fleet in crucial naval battles. Her life represents an alternative history to the masculinist and nationalistic depictions of the Greek War of Independence, as told in both Greek and Philhellenic literatures. It is a radical re-imagining of gender and the Greek identity in the nineteenth century, and foregrounds the many contributions made by women to modern Greek history. It also provides an alternative to the images of Greek women in the historical imaginary of Hollywood and other dominant media practices. Using historical documents and artifacts, interviews with Bouboulina's descendants and specialists in the fields of Greek and Ottoman History, live footage, music and artwork of the period, as well as contemporary film and media as grounds for cultural comparison, this hour-long documentary video synthesizes multi-media artifacts to create a critical pedagogy that explores the margins of Greek history through the life and times of one of Greece's most important revolutionaries.

THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF LASKARINA BOUBOULINA:  
FEMINIST ALTERNATIVES TO DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING PRACTICES

by

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Advisory Committee:

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Professor Eugene Robinson

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## DEDICATION

To my grandmother, Ourania Kalogeropoulos—thank you for making me Greek.

Σε ευχαριστω που με εκανες Ελληνιδα.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“A career in biography is a costly investment.”  
Virginia Woolf

There is a joke that the credits of an independently produced film often are just as long as the film itself. As filmmaking is by nature, a collaborative art, and because independent production relies mostly on the good will of family, friends, and professionals who are willing to contribute their talents to the cause of the film, usually without asking to be paid, the list here is long. First, without the support of key faculty in the Comparative Literature Program at the University of Maryland, College Park, this film simply would not have been possible. My tirelessly supportive advisor and chair, Dr. John Fuegi, and his documentary film series, “Women of Power” served as the inspiration for my own work. His dedication to film as an important social, political, and academic activity that is absolutely essential for critical and comparative studies in the twenty-first century is a sentiment I whole-heartedly share. His seminar on “Biographies of Women in Literature and Film” was the breeding ground for the idea to make a documentary about Bouboulina, and I am grateful to Dr. Fuegi and the graduate students in the course who provided feedback for the first draft of the script. Other committee members include: Dr. Eugene Robinson, Dr. Regina Harrison, and Dr. Mary Pittas-Herschbach. Dr. Robinson was a mentor during my time as a Teaching Assistant, and he provided me encouragement as a teacher and filmmaker. As acting chair of the Comparative Literature Program, Dr. Harrison encouraged me to teach courses which fed

my desire to make films, despite the challenges of equipment, funding, and support. Dr. Pittas-Herschbach accompanied me on my journey to discover my Greek identity, and her instruction in Greek language and culture was essential to this project. These faculty members not only provided technical and aesthetic guidance, but more importantly, served as pillars of support for the kind of multi-disciplinary work that pushes the boundaries of what we have come to know as “textuality” in the discipline of Comparative Film and Literature Studies.

For lending their insights in filmed interviews, I must thank Dr. Maria Anastasopoulos-Krimigis, former professor at the University of Athens; Mr. Philip Demertzis-Bouboulis, founder of the Bouboulina Museum in Spetses; Mr. Kristos Koutsis, Descendant of the Koutsis family of Spetses; Dr. Mary Pittas-Heraschbach, Professor of Hellenic Studies at the University of Maryland; Dr. Charles Robinson, Director of the Lord Byron Society of America and Professor of English at the University of Delaware; and Dr. Madeline Zilfi, professor of Ottoman History at the University of Maryland, and author of Women in the Ottoman Empire. Their ability to articulate their knowledge about Bouboulina and the period in which she lived forms the foundation of this film.

Dr. Martha Nell Smith and Dr. Neil Fraistat at the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) provided resources, equipment, and an audience for screening drafts of the film. Together with Dr. Fuegi, the Comparative Literature Program, and the University of Maryland Graduate School, MITH contributed funds to the Nagel Travel Grant and the Goldhaber Travel Award, which allowed me to travel to Greece to conduct interviews, complete the primary research, and collect footage for the

film, as well as to screen the film for an international audience at the Armata Festival in Spetses, Greece in September, 2005. MITH also provided the opportunity to work with visiting collaborator and filmmaker, Irvin Kershner, whose expertise and tenacity challenged me along the way. Additional funding was donated with the generous support of my family: George and Kiki Dorer, Dan Householder, and Tom and Charlotte Gardner. For diligently proofreading drafts, I sincerely thank Ms. Cynthia M. Hill.

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## INTRODUCTION

When Rigas Velistinlis, proto-martyr of the Greek Revolution, was captured and executed by the Ottomans in Belgrade in 1798 for spreading Hellenic sentiment throughout Europe, his manifesto and chest full of documents were confiscated by Austrian police. He was arrested and handed over to the Turks at Belgrade and strangled upon orders from Constantinople. He was said to have uttered these final words: “This is how brave men die. I have sown; soon will come the hour when my nation will gather the ripe fruit” (Dakin, 30). Rigas could not have imagined that a then twenty-eight year old woman from the small island of Spetses in the Saronic gulf would actualize his hopes for a pan-Hellenic uprising.

Self-educated at a time when women were discouraged from learning, and even Greek boys were forced to attend secret schools in the caves and underground meeting places organized by rebel priests, Bouboulina transgressed the domestic boundaries of her gender. An example of the circumstances that women faced with regard to education is evidenced by Elisavet Martinengou-Moutza’s autobiography, My Story (1801-1832). In the early 1800s, rich families like Bouboulina’s and Elisavet’s sent their male children to Italian universities, and aristocratic girls were secluded in the home, having no visits from friends, no outdoor walks, not even allowed to attend church, and occupied their time with embroidering. Marriages were legal affairs. Too much reading was considered harmful to women: “They blamed my books for whatever they saw wrong with me, physically or morally” (Martinengou-Moutza, 7). The only escape was to join a convent. Elisavet’s private tutor, Theodosios Demades, a priest from Constantinople, and a

member of the secret underground society, the Philike Etairia, caused her to imagine the role she wished she could take in the events of the War of Independence: “I wished in my heart that I could take up arms... I could give help to those people who did not fight for anything but their religion and their country... but then I looked at the walls of the house that kept me confined...” (Martinengou-Moutza, 9). Transgressing these assumptions about women’s roles in the public sphere, Bouboulina was able to act on the sentiments expressed by Martinengou-Moutza. Because her family occupied a position of wealth and privilege, she inherited a sense of mobility that most women of the period did not possess. In examining the struggles of the woman artist, Virginia Woolf declared that, in order to have true independence “a woman must have money and a room of her own” (Woolf). Taken metaphorically, Bouboulina’s autonomy was a result of the kind of monetary independence to which Woolf refers.

The story of Bouboulina begins with the story of another woman of power in the nineteenth century, Catherine the Great. Catherine infamously claimed the throne in Russia in 1762 when her lover, Gregorios Orloff and his four brothers, all members of the imperial guard, murdered Catherine’s husband, Peter III in a prison in Ropsha. Soon after, Catherine began a campaign to secure parts of the Ottoman Empire for the Russians. Greece became a strategic ally in this endeavor. A crucial part of this plan was to incite the Greeks to revolt. In 1766, Catherine planned a naval operation against the Turks, sending agents to the Peloponese, and delivering a powerful fleet to the Peloponesian coastline. The first Russian fleet arrived with Theodoros Orloff, brother of Alexis and Gregory, bringing with him a wave of enthusiasm to the pre-revolutionary Greeks. The Orloff Brothers had a tenacious reputation, which the Greeks welcomed in

the time approaching the revolution.

The Spetsiots appointed Lazaraos Massaoutis as the captain to accompany Orloff to launch the attack on a Turkish cargo vessel on its way to Nafplion. They slaughtered the crew and captured the vessel, but the Orloff revolt eventually failed, resulting in the retaliation by the Turks, who burned part of Spetses island around the Kasteli church. Despite a mutual mistrust that developed between Alexis Orloff and the Greek locals which led to blaming one another for the loss, the revolt led by Lazarou was seen as a patriotic first attempt to start the Greek revolution. To proclaim this pro-Russian/anti-Turkish alignment, the family of Lazarou renamed themselves as “Orlof”s (Koubis, 12).

The important connection to Bouboulina resides in the fact that after giving birth to Bouboulina in a prison in Constantinople while visiting her dying husband, Stavros Pinotsis, who was imprisoned there for his part in the Orloff Revolt, Skevo Kokoni moved from Hydra and took as her second husband, another sea captain, the Spestiote, Lazarou Orloff. Skevo must have been quite formidable herself, having endured the difficult travel to Constantinople by sea while pregnant, and passing through the Imperial gates at the sublime porte, despite the fact that she was a Christian woman. The act of marrying into not one, but two families who fought against the Turks prior to 1821 demonstrates the political leanings of her family for generations before Bouboulina’s birth. Skevo and Bouboulina moved from Hydra to Spetses when Bouboulina was four years old. Lazarou Orlof would become Bouboulina’s step-father, and according to some accounts (Denisi, Prince Michael, Andritsos,) he encouraged her to participate in the naval activities of the family as a child, quite outside the norms for the socialization of a young girl at the turn of the nineteenth century. Perhaps his sense of irreverence for the

patriarchal model of fatherhood came from his admiration of Catherine, one of the most powerful women of the eighteenth century.

One of the ways Bouboulina broke free of the constrictive paradigm that kept women from becoming self-actualized was that she learned to read. Her home is filled with first edition books in many languages, including many written by revolutionary enlightenment thinkers such as Friedrich von Schiller and Voltaire. The French Revolution, in particular, fueled by statements like those expressed by Voltaire, “Man is free at the moment he wishes to be” served as a model for the Greek revolution. No doubt, these books contributed to her burgeoning revolutionary ideas, and reinforced the political ideals held by her family. She learned to sail with her stepfather and brothers. A stern business woman, she used the money left from her two widowed husbands to create a thriving merchant fleet, and armed her flagship in secrecy in anticipation of the impending revolution. Upon the visit of Papaflessas, an insurgent priest, to Spetses in 1818, and her subsequent trip to Constantinople where she is said to have been initiated, Bouboulina became the only woman of over 1,093 members of the Philike Etairia, an underground society organized to plan the uprising.<sup>1</sup>

Her feats have become the subject of legend; she led the Spetses navy in the blockade and capture of the Ottoman capital at Nafplion, even going on land herself to fight, and survived. Her fifth generation grandson, curator of the Bouboulina Museum, remarked that her decision to attack the impenetrable Palamidi fortress was “suicidal” (Brave). After befriending the Valide Sultana in Constantinople, who quite possibly was

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<sup>1</sup>This number is taken from a list collated by George Frangos in an unpublished doctoral dissertation at Columbia University, The Philiki Etairia, 1814-1821: A Social and Historical Analysis (1971). There are likely many more lost, unreported, and undiscovered names.

the most powerful woman in the world at that time, she risked her life to save a group of harem women upon the request of the Sultana, when her own soldiers threatened to rape and murder them during the battle of Tripolis. As a civil war broke out in the midst of the war with the Ottomans, she was condemned by her fellow islanders as a witch and a heretic, and falsely imprisoned. She was shot dead by a neighboring family during an alleged domestic argument. She was given the honorary title of Admiral by the Greek state after her death, and she remains the first female Admiral in world naval history.

Her image has been referred to by the world's greatest painters, playwrights, filmmakers, and novelists, including Henry Miller, E.F. Benson, Jules Verne, Nikolai Gogol, Mimi Denisi, Costas Andritsos, Rhea Galanaki, and Nikos Kazantzakis, yet she is virtually unknown outside of the Greek diaspora. Even within Greece, she is remembered as a legend more often than as a real historical agent. The Romantic writers and painters of the nineteenth century, known for depicting the Greek conflict in allegorical terms of masculinity and femininity, ironically, missed her completely. As David Roessel observes, English and American writers, like Europeans generally, thought of a regenerated Greece as a female space (Roessel, 68). The most recognizable image of the revolution is Eugene Delacroix's painting, Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi (1827). In it, Delacroix depicts Greece as a bare-breasted woman with outstretched hands, as if about to be crucified, standing on the rubble of classical columns. Looming in the background is a dark-skinned male figure, planting a flag upon the ruins, and looking ambitiously to the West. This romantic ideal repeated itself in the philhellenic literature of the period. "When the Greek War of independence began in 1821, the pump of poetic inspiration had been primed for five decades." (Roessel, 40).

In his study of modern Greece in the English and American imagination, Roessel explains the sexual politics of such imagery:

“The picture of a chained Greek woman who, it is implied, is at the mercy of a Turkish man was one of the most effective as pervasive means of evoking sympathy for the Greek cause. It played upon the fears of a European woman, however denigrated and debased, trapped in an oriental harem, as if Europe were suffering the ravishment of its eponymous ancestor, Europa. This particular form of the feminization of Modern Greece, which had begun decades before Byron’s tales, ensured that the struggle for Greek freedom would almost always be portrayed or discussed in terms of the threat of sexual domination by the Turks and the romantic attraction of the Greek woman for the West” (Roessel, 60).

Even the Greeks themselves tended towards this gendered narrative: “Greeks imagined and portrayed Greece as a young woman because, in the Greek language, every country is a “motherland” (μητέρα πατριδα, χωρα, γη) due to its grammatical female gender. Greece was portrayed in the literature and artwork of the time as a naive, dependent, weak, abused woman under Ottoman rule before ‘she’ gained independence” (Constantinides, 6). In many of the writings, Bouboulina’s image has become fused with these allegorical representations. Mimi Denisi, for example, poses as the young woman originally depicted in the Delacroix painting in the promotional materials for her play about Bouboulina. E.F. Benson’s novel, The Capsina, is a fictionalized version of Bouboulina’s story which ends (inconsistently with the events of Bouboulina’s actual death) with the Capsina’s death at the hands of a Turk. As symbol of victimization rather than as a subject of heroism, the images referring to Bouboulina as a flat, one-dimensional romantic female figure thus account for the masculinist narratives about the war, and the fascination that these cultural producers have with including her in their texts. It also tells us something about why a full-length study of her life had been omitted until now.



Further, although the context of her life can be placed in the theoretical framework of the European Enlightenment and modern national liberation movements, in the American academy, her name is absent from discussions of “postcoloniality” in interdisciplinary fields such as Comparative Literature. She is all but forgotten in the pages of Modern Greek Studies. Women’s Studies, following precedents set in the History and Classics disciplines, tends towards remembering the historical female figures of classical mythology, rather than the modern period in Greece. What remains is a collection of fragmented, sparse, and conflicting materials that exist without definition and context. The goal of this study is to collect, preserve, and analyze these vast sources in order to lay the groundwork for future studies of women in modern Greek history. I see the film as a starting point for a series historical documentary films I will make around the theme of empowered Greek women, entitled, “Modern Amazons.” As a collection, the series will reveal the deep and often interlocking histories of Greek women from classical to contemporary times. Future subjects include Eleni Altamoura-Boukoura, Greece’s first female painter, Manto Mavrogenous, a contemporary of Bouboulina during the War of Independence, and Kalliroe Siganou Parren, an educator, journalist, and the publisher of Greece’s first women’s newspaper in 1888, which ushered in the first wave of feminism in Greece. Also, she founded the Union for the Emancipation of Women and the Union of Greek Women in 1896.

The second film in the series, Lela Carayanni: The Most Dangerous Spy in the Balkans, will investigate the life of the Greek resistance fighter during the German occupation of Greece from 1941-1944. I have spoken with George Pararas-Carayiannis, Lela’s grandson, who has put me in touch with two of Carayiannis’ surviving siblings,

both of whom escaped from the concentration camp where Lela was murdered just one day before. Carayiannis is the great-granddaughter of Bouboulina, and even named her underground organization "Bouboulina," to hide its identity from the Nazis, in the tradition of the Philike Etairia, who used noms de guerre during the War of Independence. Carayiannis planted anti-Nazi German spies in the highest echelons of the S.S. She helped trapped Allied soldiers by hiding them and sending them out of occupied Greece by having them shipped from island to island on a string of fishing boats until they could reach safe passage to the Middle East. One of these soldiers, the Australian-born John Wilson, is still living. When one of her comrades finally cracked under the torture of the S.S., telling the Nazis everything about the Bouboulina organization, Carayiannis was captured and taken to a concentration camp at Dafni. For three days after her capture, Lela was tortured cruelly by her captors who were unable to get a word out of her about additional members of her organization or her on-going activities. Legend says that the free Greeks, who had escaped to the hills near Dafni, watched as just before the execution, Lela sang and led her fellow captors in the Zollagos, a dance of defiance that refers back to the women of Suli who danced themselves off of cliffs, rather than be captured by the Ottomans during the War of Independence. Frustrated and humiliated by Lela's courage and strength of character, the German interrogator Beke finally gave up. He closed the file on the organization "Bouboulina" with the phrase "Lela Carayannis, the most dangerous spy in the Balkans" (Pararas-Carayannis).

I plan to interview the remaining survivors of the "Bouboulina" organization, along with Carayiannis' grandson, George Carayiannis and granddaughter, Lela, who have collected the letters, documents, and personal affects related to Carrayiannis' life.

John Wilson will provide a first hand account of her heroic deeds. The story of Lela Carayannis brings the legacy of Bouboulina full circle and emphasizes the importance of biography in preserving women's history and matriarchical heritage and thus confirms the statement that the personal is indeed the political. Taken together, these women represent a vast and untapped knowledge base that has been overlooked and underpublished, and they embody a profound means for changing our historical consciousness about the role of women as agents of social and historical change.

The Brave Stepped Back: The Life and Times of Laskarina Bouboulina

premiered at the Armata Festival in Spetses, Greece on Septmeber 8, 2005, and has also been screened and collected by the Albin O. Kuhn Library at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, by the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities at the University of Maryland, College Park, and as part of an exhibit entitled, "Peneolopeia: The Other Jouney," at the Hellenic Museum and Cultural Center in Chicago, Illinois, where it is housed in the permanent collection.

(My)Steries

It is well noted that if you look into the subject of a doctoral student's dissertation, you can see the unconscious sufferings of a person who is struggling to work out, intellectually, some unresolved emotional or spiritual dilemma. This project is no different. As any piece of art is inevitably the product of the politics, psyche, obsessions, and heart of its maker, I must begin by shedding some light on my own life-long personal relationship with Bouboulina. My responses to the stories, literature and images about Bouboulina that have informed this film are influenced by my own experiences as a

Greek-American, my gender, and my background in the politicized environment of the Comparative Literature discipline within a highly politicized historical moment for the academy itself. I make no pretense of approaching this subject as a disengaged or “objective” observer. Objectivity for the filmmaker is a myth. A text, according to the infamous statement made by Roland Barthes, “is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation... We know that to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow the myth. The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author” (Barthes). As I am deeply committed to the goals of feminism, the first goal of the film is to interpret Bouboulina and her times through the lens of gender, and attempts to paint a feminist encomium of her life. This task requires avoiding the pitfalls of stereotyping her in the ways that have plagued representations of women in film. The “gaze” of the film therefore is meant to oppose the sexualized, otherized role Bouboulina has been given in mainstream historical accounts of her life.

As a Greek-American child in a family fully assimilated into American culture, I had always heard Bouboulina’s name in passing, but never knew her story. I was intrigued by this woman whose name was evoked in situations where a woman’s bravery was needed. Why had my mother, an immigrant who traveled for three weeks alone on a boat at the age of ten to land in a foreign place, identified herself with this woman? How had she retained the image of Bouboulina? Where had she learned this missing piece of history? Someone, somewhere must have taught her of the heroic actions of Bouboulina, probably thanks to the emphasis that early childhood education in Greece places on figures from the Greek War of Independence. Walking through the hallways of our

church's Sunday school as an adult, I now see how these historical figures are prominent, their images plastered on posters that line the hallways. Because if their status as quasi-religious icons, they are heroes in a way that the figures of the American Revolution are not, for American children. There is even a series of Greek comic books called "Klassica" dealing with the story of each hero, including Bouboulina, General Kolokotronis, and others. They are real-life superheros in the minds of Greek children. I am grateful to this tradition of remembering, for the Greek penchant for iconography, and for the Greek sense of pride that instilled the image of Bouboulina, no matter how flawed, into my mother's subconscious.

Anticipating my first trip to Greece as an adult, in the summer of 2001, I also began to dig through the archeology of my maternal Greek heritage, linking me to Greece through my mother, and leading to my grandmother, Ourania Kalogeropoulos, who died before I had the privilege of meeting her. My grandmother's seldom talked about early death has always been a source of mystery and pain for me. Visiting her grave in Thessaloniki, I was forced to confront my own identity. Later that summer, I made sure to visit Spetses, the island known for having a small museum inside the mansion of Bouboulina. That visit gave me a new history to unearth. These two tragic maternal figures remain linked in my mind. Like many Greek women of the diaspora, I look to my maternal heritage to discover who I am. Together, my grandmother and Bouboulina have become a symbol of my own identity as a Greek woman.

I also have been deeply inspired by women authors of the Greek diaspora, especially Rita Boumi-Papas' poem, "If I Go Walking With My Dead Girlfriends," and Catherine Temma Davidson's novel The Priest Fainted, who both contend that women

need their mothers' and other women's stories in order to understand who they are.

Although Papas' poem was written to commemorate the women of a more modern era, namely the massacre of female students at the Polytechnic University in 1967 during the military junta, it resonates with the life of Bouboulina and her war:

If I go strolling with my dead girl friends  
crowds in amazement will see  
that no lighter column stepped on earth  
no more sacred litany ever paraded  
no more glorious and bloody resurrection—  
If I go strolling with my dead girl friends.

Davidson contends that looking to History will not necessarily reveal anything of relevance to women. We are abandoned in the history books, and even from our family's personal histories. Our mothers take their husbands names, and our children, their fathers. Davidson writes: "Your grandmothers and your great-grandmothers gave up their names to their husbands, went inside their houses, and were never heard from again. If you wanted to trace the story of their lives, you could not look into books or history. You would have to start with secret clues" (Davidson, 4). Digging up these clues about my grandmother and later, Bouboulina, is a sort of personal archeological expedition, and one that I experienced personally that first summer in Greece:

She was always there: mother of my mother, dead before I was born,  
the one who came from Greece, who started the new world story.  
I never questioned why my grandmother seemed to exist in silence,  
why I knew her in only such tiny fragments. If my mother's story  
was broken, my grandmothers was in even smaller, more jagged shards.  
To find her, I look in the fields. Picking up what looks like a memory  
from my childhood, I brush across the surface, blow off the dirt.  
Underneath, the black brush strokes emerge, a picture of a woman...

Unearthing Bouboulina's story and bringing it to the world is thus both a personal and political project. I see this study as not unlike many feminist biographies, whose mission

is not only to inform and entertain, but to create social change. According to Kathryn Sklar, “One reason historians of women have succeeded in transforming large areas of the discipline is the missionary zeal with which they approach their work. They write for today, but they also write for the eternities. A group without a history is a group without an identity. By creating a history of women... they transform the possibilities in women’s present and future” (Sklar quoted in Alpern, 21).

Further, my commitment is to make visible the ongoing creative work being done in the area of film production at the University of Maryland, despite the de-funding of the Radio, Television, and Film Studies Program that has bewildered our flagship campus since 1994. In the wake of the September 11 attacks, and the militarizing of the nation under the Bush administration, budgetary constraints have meant the virtual demolition of small humanities programs like the graduate program in Comparative Literature. This study comes out of a tradition within Comparative Studies, to resist these trends, and to work creatively despite the unspoken ban on “production” at the university. It follows in the footsteps of important multimedia doctoral dissertations such as those created by Joseph Schaub and Katrein Jacobs, which highlight live, digital, and filmed performances. These scholars have re-imagined the concept of textuality, and challenged the traditions associated with literary studies not only in context, but in the form with which they expressed their analyses. Also, I am deeply committed to the discipline of Comparative Studies and to the teaching profession. The intersections of these three loves (feminism, film, and teaching) have shaped my life and my politics, and it is inevitable that they are present within the film. The comparative model has allowed me to integrate them in complex and engaging ways.

The film asks the comparative question: what happens when feminism collides with history? Who are the women we remember? What are their stories? How have these stories been told, and by whom? What do their lives and experiences tell us about our own contemporary lives and experiences as women, as Hellenes, as political entities who continue to struggle to define boundaries, both personal and national? The partitioning of Cyprus in 1974 and the recent Kofi Anan plan to hand the island nation over to Turkey in exchange for the use of their military bases during the war with Iraq is a testament to these ongoing questions of national identity for Greeks and Turks. The “cross versus the crescent” tension, which informed the context of the War of Independence is also a theme that has returned in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks. In 1821, Ottoman Muslims occupied Greece and parts of the West, and a revolution proved the dissatisfaction of those living under this form of colonialism. Now, in a bizarre reversal, the U.S., representing the interests of the (Christian) West, occupies Muslim Iraq, committing some of the same crimes against freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and the erasure of culture that Bouboulina experienced in the Greece of 1821. What can Bouboulina’s story tell us about these ongoing struggles of cultural imperialism, between the cross and the crescent?

Biographical documentaries about the lives of women, have been plagued by under-funding and the lack of careful, interdisciplinary research, much less a sense of aesthetic integrity and panache. If the main complaint of audiences has been that they do not patronize documentary films in the marketplace because they are “boring,” then films made about women have a double curse in that their content may be as unfamiliar as the pacing and other formal qualities of the traditional documentary film for audiences who



have been raised on the fast-paced editing and oversimplification of sex and gender portrayals in Hollywood fiction films. These assumptions inherent in my perspective account for the formal nature of this work, the kinds of questions it addresses, and the issues it chooses to ignore.

The film does not assume, as many writers have, that Bouboulina's actions were motivated by greed or lust. Further, it does not occupy itself with questions of Bouboulina's physical beauty, or her romantic relationships. These personal questions, the film argues, are always subjective, and therefore unanswerable by a single document such as a film, which can only collect images for the viewer to decode and interpret. Without any autobiographical documents (or perhaps even with them), it is impossible to speculate about Bouboulina's sexual relationships, even though many historians have coupled her with Tsar Alexander I, a Turkish soldier, whom she is said to have post-coitally beheaded, and even her own brother-in-law, General Kolokotronis. The assumption in these pairings is that Bouboulina's interactions and influence could have only been achieved through a sexual encounter, an assumption that is typical of women's history in the nineteenth century. Political aggressiveness is almost always coupled in the androcentric imaginary with sexual aggressiveness. Sexual dominance is a sign of women's power, and men's fear of it. To quell this fear, women are narratively fetishized as sexual objects (Mulvey). One has only to remember the myth of Catherine the Great's death (crushed while having sex with a horse) to confirm this paradigm.

Feminism itself is a highly contested term, and far from monolithic as a theoretical position. The term is used here in its broad meaning as an intellectual commitment to transforming androcentric structures of knowledge and history. This study has been particularly influenced by psychoanalytic feminist film theory, postmodernism, and Queer Theory, all of which have transformed the ways in which film is studied in the academy by dismantling the ways in which gender is constructed in the semiotics of the cinema. These postmodern theories fit surprisingly well with Bouboulina's pre-modern Greece. Because the year 1821 represents a time of national instability and transformation in the identity of the Greek nation, it opened up a space for the contributions of women in areas which previously had been highly patriarchal. Using this comparative methodology, we can look at history in new ways. On March 13, 1821, Bouboulina's flagship, the *Agamemnon* raised the first revolutionary flag in the Spetses harbor, and fired cannons announcing the fight for independence had begun. Bouboulina's revolutionary act pre-dates the "official" start of the revolution by twelve days, and thereby re-writes the common perception that the revolution began with the religious and all-male uprising at Agia Lavra, which places Bishop Germanos as the heroic central figure.

Despite all her passion and influence during the war, and her admiration by the Greek state, in the form of donated houses, and placing her image on commemorative stamps and the drachma, Bouboulina's story has been forgotten by many non-Greek historians in recollections about the events of the war. These writers have had a global influence on the discourse on the Greek War of Independence. When she *is* included in these histories, she is subject to the stereotypes that women have endured in all forms of

representation, as a vicious war-monger, and as a mannish, over-sexed creature: "...A redoubtable woman, mother of six and twice widowed... She could drink any man in the fleet under the table, and she was so unattractive she had to seduce her lovers at pistol-point" (Howarth). Often, she is grouped in discussions of the war that are tangential, as in David Howarth's study, The Greek Adventure: Lord Byron and Other Eccentrics in the War of Independence. Both contemporary books written in English on the war, Peter Paroulakis' The Greek War of Independence, and David Brewer's The Greek War of Independence: The Struggle for Freedom from Ottoman Oppression and the Birth of the Modern Greek Nation contain only one sentence each on the heroine, where she is described only in dependent terms, as "the wife of" her more important, albeit dead husband, Captain Bouboulis.

Elsewhere, historians like Brewer have been openly hostile in their writing. In his review of the Encyclopedia of Greece and the Hellenic Tradition, for example, Brewer writes: "Bouboulina is prominent in legend rather than reality, and the eulogistic account of her here ('waxing tall, dark and athletic') needs to be balanced by a judgment such as that of George Waddington, the English traveler who met her: 'I am brought to confess that this warlike lady, the Hippolyta of the nineteenth century, is old, unmannerly, ugly, fat, shapeless and avaricious'. In any case Bouboulina hardly deserves to have an entry to herself..." These histories have nothing to do with Bouboulina's accomplishments, and more to do with her physical appearance, a telling remnant of the ways in which women have been (de)valued as historical agents.

In opposition to these negative depictions, The Brave Stepped Back begins with a simple quotation from the ancient lyric poetess Sappho: "I say someone in another time

will remember us.” It speaks to the collective “us” of women’s history. In a way, the film confirms Sappho’s announcement, that the woman warrior will be remembered (by Bouboulina, who consciously embraced her role on the continuum of ancient Greek history, and now, by the film, which remembers Bouboulina for a contemporary audience). The ancient poet Sappho figures prominently in Greek feminist poetry, with allusions to historical fragmentation, as in the poem by Ioanna Zervou, “Underground Currents”:

Come my dearly loved girls  
to inundate my life  
Pythia, Sybil, Diotima  
Corrina, Sappho, Telesilla  
and you other anonymous  
feminine layers of history.

I seek your fingerprints, O Silent Women  
I seek the mystical wisdom of Mothers  
in underground rivers.

Films are a way of preserving, collecting, and experiencing history, and one of the goals of this project has been to document important people and places that are knowledge bases for the Bouboulina legacy before they are gone. The lack of government funding for the upkeep and expansion of the Bouboulina and Koutsis mansions on Spetses add to this sense of urgency. As a preservation method, the film attempts to bring to life the chronicle that Zervou refers to as “anonymous feminine layers of history.”

Considerable thought has been given to the title of this film. It originates from a quote by the historian Ioannis Filimon in his Study of the Hellenic War of Independence: “Against her, the unmanly were ashamed, and the brave stepped back.” The quote recalls the main theme of the film, namely Bouboulina’s undying bravery, in a time when

women were not thought of as possessing this quality. She is, therefore, a unique figure of her time, and certainly worthy of comparison to other male figures of the war, who have been given much consideration in print and in film. It also speaks to her gender-defying image (“more manly than a man”) and thereby destabilizes the compartmentalized roles of female identity.

The subtitle is another way of preserving the identity of the film in the context of Greek literary traditions and culture. After considering the admittedly subjective, “A portrait of”, the fictional, “The Story of”, and the falsely objective/historical, “Bouboulina and the War of Independence,” I concluded that the title should reflect a formal connection to Greek cultural forms of storytelling, namely *synaxarion*:

“Βίος και πολιτεία του Λασκαρινας Μπουμπουλινας”(“The Life and Times of Laskarina Bouboulina.”) “*Synaxarion* are tales, often entitled ‘The life and times of...,’ and have a link to a particularly Greek literary form. They had, throughout the middle ages and beyond, “been the principal form of prose narrative in Greek. A *synaxarion* was in part the life story of a remarkable man or woman; it was also an exemplar of the good life, and at the same time represented an important strand of popular, traditional narrative in the Greek-speaking world” (Beaton, 176-77.) The most recognizable *synaxarion* in Greek literature is Nikos Kazantzakis’ infamous novel, The Life and Times of Alexis Zorba. “*Synaxarion* claims the status of a modern, secular saint for its hero, and at the same time reclaims the purpose of Greek narrative traditional much older than that of the novel” (Beaton, 177). Zorba remains a popular symbol of a unique semi-historical figure, and is perhaps the best example of how the genre utilizes the secular hero in order to turn him into a kind of ethnic representative who borders on a national saint. The film

includes a reference to Zorba, in the form of a clip in which even he recalls the heroism of Bouboulina. Kazantzakis' larger-than-life Zorba, perhaps *the* quintessential figure of modern Greek identity, "steps back" to give Bouboulina the spotlight in this crucial scene.

The supplementary writing that accompanies the film is meant to provide a context for viewing, understanding, and teaching The Brave Stepped Back. The Survey of Sources introduces the sources used in researching and making the film. It highlights the lack of information available about Bouboulina, and exposes the contradictions of the writing that does exist. As Paula Backscheider notes, "Just as a scientist knows that no evidence is evidence, biographers know that with each book, manuscript, museum visit that turns up nothing, there is meaning in the experience. It drives one to find some scrap of knowledge to legitimize your subject, making her life even more important to tell" (Backscheider, xix ). Every scrap of information, positive or negative, is an act of interpretation, and these fragments raise a series of questions that are an integral part of the film: How do oral histories play a role in re-mapping cultural history? Whose narrative can be trusted, and who should be exposed for their subjective motivations? How does the image of femininity figure into the romantic ideology of the period in which Bouboulina lived? What comparisons were made by the people who encountered and wrote about her during the war? What are the archetypes for historical women as the subjects of biography, and how does the biographer resist these narrow roles? How does Bouboulina's image play out in contemporary iconography?

In terms of "evidence," the difficulties of discovering important manuscripts I couldn't read, were written in a language I couldn't translate, or finding sources I

couldn't access, or quote, was a challenge. Then there is the trial of discovering that you have made wrong assumptions, discovering that your sources are flawed, or finding that you loathe or are bored with the subject. For me, this meant coming to terms with the fact that a thorough search would include a survey of sources in Russian, Italian, German, the Ottoman archives, and that my piece of the Bouboulina puzzle would have to serve as a starting point, from which other researchers may be encouraged to deepen the research. It meant accepting the oral history told to me through the island's descendants, despite their own interests as propagators of the Bouboulina tourist industry on Spetses. And finally, it meant having to answer questions in my own personal value system about the significance of the story and its endorsement of a military heroine, despite my political commitment as an anti-war pacifist.

In the discussion of Structure and Methodology, the project is placed within current debates about feminism and the documentary, specifically the historical biography, and what it means to write and film a woman's life. If biography is an art, what are its poetics? How does one define the intimate relationship between the biographer and her subject? What constitutes "evidence", and at what point do elements of fiction storytelling enter the structure of biography? In terms of feminism and film, theoretical questions emerge, such as: is there a feminine aesthetic in documentary filmmaking? What are the shared histories between the documentary tradition and the feminist movement? What are the paradigms of the filmed biography? In particular, how does narrative and the idea of linearity as a formal structure influence the ways in which we interpret Bouboulina's life? How is imagery used, and what is its relationship to the "gaze" of the spectator?

The script and study guide are included as pedagogical instruments for screening, teaching, and discussing the film. Contextual information is included on pre-revolutionary Greece, Spetses in the nineteenth century and the institution of the harem, and other important figures of the period, as well as the influence of Greek metaphor and myth on the visual aesthetics of the film. As the main goal of this project has been to increase the public's awareness of Bouboulina's life, these tools serve as a guide in raising important philosophical questions about the film. The study guide is aimed at a university-level audience, and is intended to be used as a part of a curriculum focused on the topic of representations of women in the media. My hope is that the film will be useful as a cultural tool, to be used by libraries, institutions in the U.S. and abroad such as embassies, museums, churches and galleries, and as a teaching instrument for the classroom. In this way, the remarkable story of Bouboulina's life may educate beyond the confines of the academy, and put this history into a public sphere where different kinds of discourses can be created.

George Seferis wrote in Mythistorema, his infamous poem about the anxiety of influence of the classics in Greek and English poetry:

I woke with this marble head in my hands;  
it exhausts my elbows and I do not know where to put it  
down.

All too often, history is about men and violence. In the case of Greece, there is the added obstacle that the study of history and culture often stops with the classics. By drawing attention to Bouboulina as an icon of modern Greek history, this film will help to undermine these institutional biases concerning history, gender, and value.



## SURVEY OF SOURCES

### Print Sources

Conducting research about the 1821 war has been a complicated task, especially for collecting visual data about a subject who pre-dates the invention of photography. As a point of entry into the historical information about Bouboulina, the publications of museums on the islands are usually done by the municipality itself, as books are often made so that they can be sold at the *peripteros* (street kiosks) and museum shops to tourists, in order to promote the island and whatever historical claim they have in the foreign imagination. As such, the historical information contained in these books is often a mix of history, myth, folk stories-- novelistic accounts, with no propriety for historical accuracy, and without bibliographic information. The conditions of the museums themselves also are quite dire. The Bouboulina museum, which functions on the money it makes from charging five Euro for the tour, and which receives little money from the Greek state for its upkeep and promotion is without a formal system of organizing and cataloging its holdings. In fact, the artifacts are not even protected from the environmental hazards of the island. The building remains as it was when it was built in 1771-- without a security system, no air conditioning, and no control over the sun and wind which pour through the open windows, especially in the hot summer months. Items in the museum are not labeled, so the tour is a guided one, narrated by Philip Demertzis-Bouboulis himself. Therefore, the information tends to be quite subjective. The museum is the main repository of original artifacts, documents, and personal items owned by the

Bouboulis family, and therefore the principal source of primary information.

On the islands (some of which no longer have functioning schools,) local historians are easy to come by. Therefore, the experience of conducting research in Spetses has been quite informal. For this project, however, it has been a beneficial way to work because of the un-charted nature of the subject. I was able to hear the stories of Bouboulina from the inside-- through the oral traditions of each family, and thus have a comparative framework against the more “official” histories reported by people such as the European Romantics, and contemporary historians such as Brewer and Paroulakis. Secondly, because most of the primary documents related to the war are stored in Archives in Nafplion and Athens, are written in a form of Greek (katherevousa) that is not used in the modern language, most have proved to be inaccessible to the non-specialist. Fortunately, some of these sources have been translated, and snippets are even available in English in collections printed by the municipality of Spetses. The sources consulted for the present study can be broken down into three categories: a) primary sources, written by Greeks and Philhellenes who witnessed the events of the war firsthand, translated from French, Italian, Russian, German, and Turkish, as well as non-print artifacts, documents, visual art, music, and oral histories; b) secondary sources in the form of contemporary literature, media, and filmed interviews conducted for the making of The Brave Stepped Back; and c) sources that influenced the making of the film as an aesthetic object.

No diary or memoirs written by Bouboulina herself have been discovered. However, there is a plethora of primary sources in the form of letters written by and about the Kapetanissa, and in first-hand accounts from those who came to Greece from

all over Europe to help the cause during the war. This includes the philhellenic literature of the nineteenth century by Byron, Shelley, and the travelogues of those who came into contact with Bouboulina and her environment. Secondary sources that interpret the primary information, mostly written after 1950 by English and American writers, form a second wave of literary philhellenism. Finally, the fictional texts about Bouboulina or with reference to her form a third category. All of these sources span the course of four centuries. The one thing that these vast sources have in common is that, whether written in 1830 or 2003, the information about Bouboulina contained in all three types of these literatures is highly subjective and almost always contradictory.

The most important primary Greek source, Alexander Soutsos' History of the War of Independence is available only in the Greek Archives, but the portions relating to Bouboulina have been extracted and translated by Philip Demertzis-Bouboulis in his museum publication. There is an annotated bibliography of excerpts from European writers who wrote about their impressions of Bouboulina compiled by Manoulis Tasoulas in an unpublished manuscript, and later reprinted by Mimi Denisi in her script for Ego Y Laskarina with quotes about Bouboulina taken from Pos Eidan oi xenoi thn Ellada tou '21 (How Foreigners Saw Greece of 1821) by Kyriakou Simopolous, and The Spetsiotes by local historians Andreous and Ioannous Hatzi-Anargyrous and Ioannous G. Koutsis (1830). Much of the film's re-enacted dialog emanates from these sources. The poems, folk songs, and oral stories of the island collected by the Mexis museum and the Bouboulina museum, are published by the Municipality of Spetses; the documents and artifacts housed at the Bouboulina museum, the National Historical and Archeological Museum in Athens, the Benakis Museum in Athens, the Walters Art Gallery in

Baltimore, and the Koutsis mansion in Spetses also served as primary sources. The paintings of the Romantic period in Europe, are invaluable referents to Greece and the near East in the nineteenth century, albeit orientalist in their approach. My hope is that future scholars with knowledge of the languages and dialects of the time can investigate other primary resources housed in the Greek National Archives in Nafplion and Athens, in the Seraglio court records in Istanbul, and the British, French, German, Italian, and Russian archives where Bouboulina's name is sure to appear.

Among other primary sources are the letters and journals of such figures as Theodoros Kolokotronis, Lord Byron, Samuel Gridley Howe, Thomas Gordon, Robert Walsh, George Finlay, John Trelawny, and General Makriyanis. C.M. Woodhouse reports on the Philhellenes in action: Thomas Gordon, Jeremy Bentham, Sir Richard Church, W.H. Humphreys, George Jarvis, Frank Abney Hastings, John Hane, Colonel Stanhope, William Perry, George Finlay, John Trelawny, Lord Cochrane, and Sir Edward Codrington. The Spetsiot historians Orlandos, Anargyrou, and Filimon wrote about the war and document Bouboulina's involvement.

Secondary sources include books, articles, paintings, films, plays, poems, comic books, and interviews rendered in Greek or English in the twentieth century. Secondary sources which draw upon these originals include the work done by modern philhellenes, including Clogg, Dakin, Howarth, St. Claire, and C.M. Woodhouse. Riding on the heels of the tourism boom in Greece in the 1960s, and on the popularity of Greece in the American imagination in such films as Zorba the Greek, Stella, and Never On Sunday, there are a number of books published in the 1970s that continue the philhellenic literary tradition that provide tangential accounts of Bouboulina, in the most negative terms.

From this collection, a patchwork of contradictory impressions emerges, as some of the sources treat Bouboulina as a great heroine, and others seem to refute this characterization. Depending on the interests of each subjective observation, Bouboulina has been portrayed as a spinster:

“The Spetsiotes, on the other hand, had a distinction that must be unique in naval history: they had a lady admiral. Her name was Bouboulina, a redoubtable woman, mother of six and twice widowed, whose exploits are still remembered in her island with a mixture of pride and rude masculine humor. They say she could drink any man in the fleet under the table, and that she was so unattractive she had to seduce her lovers at pistol-point. But they also say, and truly, that she was a brave and genuine leader; and perhaps her only defect as an admiral was that she often went ashore and appeared on horseback at battles on land, leaving the Spetsiote fleet to its own devices” (Howarth, 42).

Also, she has been portrayed as greedy and self-interested. Howarth recollects the battle at Tripolitza:

“So all the leaders gathered round it with their gangs, Colocotronis, Petrobey, a dozen or so of lesser brigand captains, Bouboulina from the Spetsiote fleet, and Hypsilantes himself. All of them were intent on booty. Bouboulina herself went in and out of the town by night to persuade the Turkish ladies to give up their jewels. And while there was no money to be made in this disreputable trading there was no hurry to start the assault, when the loot would go to the quickest and most ruthless of the soldiery” (Howarth, 58-60).

“There were always good stories told about Bouboulina, so improbable that they almost had to be true: She was said now to be spending her time, since there were no Turks to fight, in stealing brass guns from the fortresses and making counterfeit money with the help of an ex-employee of the Sultan’s mint” (Howarth, 172).

William Humphreys comments on Bouboulina’s femininity, conflating it with his ideas about her incompetence as a military leader:

“The Grecian Amazon Madame Bouboulina arrived at the camp of Ydra of which island she is a native. This modern Amazon has nothing interesting about her as she is a vulgar masculine woman. But she has fitted out several vessels and possesses a great authority among her countrymen, while at the camp she quite

assumed the command. She had two or three damsels in her train, who with herself were dressed little better than the common peasants. During the journey she went into the town of Tripolitsa and received presents from the principal families to engage her to protect them. After she had accumulated considerable sums in this manner she went back to Ydra leaving them to their fate (Humphreys).

In contrast, there are many competing histories that depict Bouboulina in a more positive light. According to Lieutenant Von Bollmann, a German volunteer at the battle of Tripolis who wrote in an article published in a Stuttgart newspaper in May 1822, she is quite beautiful: “On Bouboulina’s face, one can see vestiges of the great beauty that she once was. She rides a wild ebony horse, wears clothes which bring to mind a courageous Amazon, and is more daring than all the captains put together” (in Denisi, 129). Karl Theodor Stiebeck, an officer who was a volunteer in General Normann’s army at Nafplion remarks, “Her coarse appearance has nothing to do with her tender feelings... I saw her in Argos, surrounded by her men who run after her like happy rabbits. A true Capetanissa!” (Denisi, 130) Spetsiot historian Anagyros Hatzi-Anargyrou’s eyewitness description of the blockade and battle at Nafplion stated: “On December 4, 1821, as I remember, on board her own vessel, she alone gave orders for the boats to attack the fort. For this reason, she herself lands with her forces and stays until the fall of the fort on November 30, 1822. She was indeed lion-hearted...Like and angry Amazon, she shouts, ‘Are you women then, and not men? Forward!’” (Demertzis-Bouboulis, 2001) The historian Orlandos writes, “Nowhere...any woman found in the uprisings of nations having such a character and able to induce the world’s admiration” (Demertzis-Bouboulis, 2001). The Greek historian Filimon wrote: “Against her, the unmanly were ashamed, and the brave stepped back” (Demertzis-Bouboulis, 2001).

Allusions to the figure of the Amazon in the above quotes and in other sources are prevalent in literature about Bouboulina. Historically, Amazons were portrayed as beautiful and strong. They were trained in combat and were revered as fierce warriors. They were honorable, courageous, brave and represented rebellion against sexism as a woman-centered society. It is not surprising to see Bouboulina mentioned alongside the Amazons in the above quotes, as the authors of those quotes were caught up in a literary romanticism that relied on the ancient idea of classical Greece to construct an image of a free modern Greece in the 1820s. The other comparison that resonates with her image is the reference to Joan of Arc. Henry Miller, for example, in *The Colossus of Maroussi*, describes his interaction with a character he calls Kyrios Ypsilon, a political exile on Spetses during the Second World War. The room he describes is located in the Yiannouzas mansion that belonged to Bouboulina's first husband and was the scene of her tragic death: "He escorted us to his room in a big deserted house, the very house in which the famous Bouboulina had been shot. Talking of love, Bouboulina's name came up. 'How is it we don't hear more about Boboulina?' I asked. 'She sounds like another Joan of Arc.' It was an extraordinary story he told me and I have no doubt that most of it was true" (Miller, 65-66). He continues:

"Everywhere you go in Greece the atmosphere is pregnant with heroic deeds. I am speaking of modern Greece, not ancient Greece. And the women, when you look into the history of this little country, were just as heroic as the men. In fact, I have even a greater respect for the Greek woman than for the Greek man. The Greek woman and the Greek Orthodox priest— they sustained the fighting spirit. For stubbornness, courage, recklessness, daring, there are no greater examples anywhere. No wonder Durrell wanted to fight with the Greeks. Who wouldn't prefer to fight beside a Bouboulina, for example, than with a gang of sickly, effeminate recruits from Oxford or Cambridge?" (Miller, 37)

Even Howarth and St. Clair, hostile towards Bouboulina in their writing in general, can not help but make the comparison: “One journalist got his period wrong and called Bouboulina a second Joan of Arc, a comparison that would have delighted the ample matron of Spetsai” (Howarth, 74.) “News from Greece was often misleading.... When stories appeared of a woman of Hydra, Boubolina, leading the Greeks in battle, she was dubbed the Modern Artemisia or the Greek Joan of Arc” (St. Clair, 24). The paradoxes of this image continue, as Raybaud observes,

“Being French, I had images of Bouboulina as if she were another Joan of Arc: young, beautiful, graceful, a true patriot as her reputation was. Nevertheless, Bouboulina’s age, appearance, and manners had nothing to do with what I saw. I admit that Bouboulina had titles and had won the gratitude of her patriots but I am not too sure that this patriotism was completely pure and innocent, and that the sacrifices she suffered were completely altruistic and honest... It is true that in Bouboulina there existed a daring and courage uncommon for women accompanied by a relentless thirst for profit, a thirst which makes her more of a man than a woman” (Denisi, 128).

The evidence in Bouboulina’s home tells us that she was reading works by Voltaire and Schiller, both of whom wrote dramatic works about Joan of Arc, namely, Voltaire’s The Maid of Orleans, (1756), and Schiller’s romantic rebuttal by the same name, in 1801. It is possible then, that Bouboulina was aware of her public image as the medieval saint Joan. This idea is supported by the French General Oliver Voutier’s description of his interaction with her, after meeting her in Astros, Kinouzia: “We call her the ‘Greek Joan of Arc’. When we told her that in Paris pictures of her had circulated which present her with a wide leather belt, guns and swords on both sides, she burst out laughing” (Denisi, 129).

In Greek poetry and folksongs, Bouboulina is depicted as a romantic heroine:

“Η Μπουμπουλινά”, Anonymous



Η Μπουμπουλινα ητον ωραια.  
Ειχε τα βηματα στιβαρα,  
Και ως η Αρτεμισ κολοσσαια  
Επεριπατει και φοβερα.  
Μεγαλα ειχεν ομματα Ηρας  
Και βλεμμα σπειρον γοργουσ σπινθηπασ  
Το χρυσκεντητον ενδυμα της  
Ζωνη συνεσφιγγεν αργυρα,  
Και απο ταυτησ εισ τα πλευρα της  
Σπαθη εκρεματο ηξηρα  
(From Alex Soutsos, Tourkomaxos Ellas, p. 212).

“Bouboulina”

Beautiful woman,  
big heart  
powerful body  
good soul  
for their country  
others go  
for her country  
she too went.

Born of the sea  
manly woman  
and lady captain  
she was true  
with pleasure she gave  
her own boat  
and her humility  
lives forever.

Other achievements  
of Bouboulina’s  
when in Tripolis  
they looted  
she saved  
whomever she could  
to their harem where  
The Turks turned.  
Her four  
ships armed and paid for  
with her own money

The Agamemnon  
named  
as her flagship  
these she held.

In the foamy waves  
the Archipelago runs  
and from her flag  
and driving  
she had her faith  
she had a flame  
her freedom will be seen to arrive.

Shining example  
One Greek woman  
one patriot  
A Spetsiot  
she is the decoration  
of every patriot  
she is the pride  
of all women.

Taitbout DeMarigny, a Dutch Ambassador who served in the Peloponnese from 1821 to 1822 gives a very revealing first-person observation about the controversy that surrounded Bouboulina, even during her lifetime. It is a way to contextualize the contradiction of the writing within the framework of personal bias that accompanies the image of the woman warrior. It also is the strongest evidence to suggest that her death was in fact, a political assassination. He writes,

“I met Bouboulina in Spetses. She is tall, husky. Her beautiful face makes up for what her physique lacks... She is a passionate woman... easily becomes enthusiastic about things in general. I had long discussions with her in which I had a feeling that she was dissatisfied and disappointed with her homeland. Some jealous Greeks had even shot at her house. She was afraid of being poisoned and so she prepared her meals herself” (Denisi, 130-31).

Continuing the tradition, many fictionalized accounts of the Bouboulina story can be found in contemporary literature. Rhea Galanaki spends the first chapter of her

recently published book about Eleni Altamoura, Greece's first female painter, and a Spetsiot, Eleni or Nobody, recalling the image of Bouboulina in the inner thoughts of her title character. Galanaki's novel is an attempt to re-value the historical lives of women who may have been forgotten by history. Altamoura shares many connections to Bouboulina, and these links are woven throughout the novel in allusions to the heroine in visions, dreams, and conversations: "I thought that maybe she'd climbed out of one of her paintings to keep me company and to grow old with me in the vagueness of my time and of hers" (Galanaki, 59). The bonds continue: Altamoura was born in Spetses in 1821, the year of the Greek Revolution, as the daughter of a wealthy sea-captain. Inspired to be a painter at a time when women were not admitted to the art schools in Europe, she decided to cut her hair and dress as a man, and make the journey to Naples to be trained as an artist. Galanaki wonders about the paintings of Bouboulina, which depict her wearing cumbersome women's clothes, even in battle. "She could neither handle her weapons properly nor think properly. And what's worse, in these unsuitable women's clothes, she presented a target to the enemy... Lascarina boarded and left her ship in her skirts and her gold kerchiefs, but while she was captaining the ship, she must have been wearing men's clothes, sometimes those of her first husband, sometimes of her second, both of them having been killed." (Galanaki, 52). Galanaki continues an on-going literary fascination with Bouboulina for a contemporary audience. Other fictional accounts of Bouboulina's life include the novel The Archipelago on Fire by Jules Verne, and E. F. Benson's novel, The Capsina, written in 1899. The Russian author Nikolai Gogol alludes to Bouboulina in his novel Dead Souls, written in 1842.

### Non-print Sources

The most authentic and carefully crafted filmed artifact about Bouboulina's life is the 1959 film directed by Costas Andritsos, starring Irene Papas, Bouboulina. Although it is played on Greek television religiously every March 25th to commemorate Greek Independence Day, the film is no longer in print and is not available for rental or purchase by the public. I was able to view the film with a special request to the National Cinematographic Museum in Athens on a one-time basis. Although this was an extremely helpful visit, it is impossible to digest any film on a one-time screening basis. I would have loved to include a clip from this well-made film in my own work, or even to interview Irene Papas, who portrayed Bouboulina in the most truthful of any performances I have seen. In my discussions with Philip, he has told me many stories of the making of the film which was shot at the Bouboulina mansion when he was living there as a child. One of my favorite stories is how he vividly remembers the director asking him to fetch a packet of cocoa powder from the kitchen, so that Papas could place it in her bra for the final scene. When she is shot by Koutsis' bullet in the film, Papas clasps her chest, and the packet explodes, releasing the cocoa powder, which spreads over her shirt like blood. Since the film was shot in black and white, the "special effect" gives the appearance of a gun shot wound. The scene also is a testament to movie-making inaccuracy, as the legend says that the bullet actually struck Bouboulina in the skull, not the chest. This "fact" seems to be predicated on the visible hole in Bouboulina's skull, which can be seen in the Spetses museum where her bones are on display. However, a DNA study would need to be done to prove that these are indeed the remains of

Bouboulina, and a forensic study conducted to determine if the entry hole is in fact consistent with the wounds inflicted by a nineteenth century musket. Until these proofs can be made, I remain suspicious about the veracity of the box of bones promoted in the museum to its tourist industry.

Bouboulina is referred to in Niko Katzantzakis' novel The Life and Times of Zorba the Greek, made into perhaps the most recognizable film set in Greece, Zorba the Greek by director Michael Cacoyannis in 1966. Interestingly, the character who Zorba refers to in the film as "Bouboulina, a great sea dog" is played by Lila Kedrova, in the role of Madame Hortence. Hortence is a former prostitute, hopelessly in love with the free-wheeling Zorba, and unhappy because she is without a man. Both female characters in the film are narrowly defined classical archetypes of the tragic widow. Madame Hortence is an older, sentimental figure who is a sexual spinster. Zorba jokes that she has "killed off" her many lovers. Her melancholy state revolves around the fact that she is without a man. When Zorba enters her life and promises to marry her, Madame Hortence is given hope that she will once again be happy. Like Penelope, she waits for Zorba to return from his journey abroad, where he has since taken up with another woman named Lola. The promise of marriage is so important to her, however, that she would rather believe in the false hope of his love than face a life without a husband. She follows all of the stereotypes about women described above, as set forth by classical depictions of women. The myth persists that without men, women are unhappy to the point of not wanting to live. Even though Madame Hortence is a woman with her own historical importance (she is compared to Bouboulina for her efforts in stopping the war,) without Zorba, she admits that she would rather die. During this conversation, she is relegated to

the space of the boudoir, and she is constantly associated with a decaying sexuality in the baroque mise-en-scene surrounding her. An allusion to Lysistrata is also present in her monologue about her involvement with war, "I stopped the boom-boom and got nothing, no medals." In love and war, Madame Hortence's subjectivity goes unrecognized by her male counterparts.

Mimi Denisi's more recent play, Ego Y Laskarina (1999), has a more popular agenda. Denisi is known in Greece as a television actress, and her adaptation of the Bouboulina story tends towards the sensational aspects of the serial melodrama. Ignoring most of the factual information concerning Bouboulina's involvement in the politics of the time, Denisi's play focuses on the early years, her (undocumented) interpersonal relationships with her bickering family and the jealous islanders, and especially her romantic relationships with her two husbands. This is not surprising, considering that the character of Bouboulis, Bouboulina's second husband, was played by Denisi's former boyfriend, actor Pashalis Tsarouxas. The play reduces Bouboulina to a tragic character of melodrama, caught up in the private sphere of domesticity in which women are often placed, and ignoring her public, military, and political achievements. Denisi gets some of the history and iconography wrong, as with the fictionalizing of the origins of Bouboulina's name, the allusion at the end of the play to the existence of a diary, and the visual iconography, which shows Denisi as Bouboulina in the iconic pose of Eugene Delacroix' painted allegory of a young woman as Greece enslaved, "Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Messolonghi," which also serves as the main image on the advertising that accompanied the production. Delacroix' image appears on the cover of Prince Michael of Greece's equally sensational novel, Bouboulina, Heroine of the Greeks, published in

French and German. Also, it is worth noting that the two videos available in English, March 25<sup>th</sup>: Greek Independence Day, produced by Greek Orthodox Telecom video, and History of Modern Greece, Volume I, produced in New York by Greek Music and Video, contain no mention of Bouboulina. She is given a similar treatment in the two contemporary English-language printed books.

The music used in The Brave Stepped Back is a collection of contemporary historical pieces. Many of the songs have been compiled by the Early Music Workshop in a collection called Songs of the Greek's Independence War, Vols. 1 and 2. Founded in 1980, the workshop is composed of professional singers and musicians, members of Greek Radio Chorus and Orchestra, and conservatory professors. Their project is to perform the music of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Baroque eras, and to research musical archives and private collections in order to discover unknown Greek composers from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. They uncovered the war march used in the film, "What Are You Waiting for Friends and Brothers?": "What are you waiting for friends and brothers/being inactive in words and sword/our time has come/the day of glory downed/rush up killing and shouting our war clamor/ Do not condescend to be a slave/ thinking freely, fighting bravely/seize your weapons/and tear up your enemies." The workshop also performs the folk song of Lady Frossini:

Have you heard what happened/at Iaonnina in the lake  
where they drowned the seventeen girls/and the Lady Frossini?  
Oh! Frossini, so much-praised/ what evil has befallen you!  
None other ever wore/Lahorian silken shawl,  
only Frossini put it on/ and went to the hamam  
Oh! Frossini, so much-praised/ and to the world renowned.  
Hadh't I told you my Frossini/not to wear that ring?  
Ali Pasha heard of it/ and threw you in the lake.  
Oh! Frossini, my lady/ you have broken my heart.

Your home weeps for you, Frossini/ your children weep for you  
All Iaonnina weeps for you/ weeps for your beauty.  
Oh! Frossini, so much-praised/ lying in the lake.  
(Songs of the Greek's Independence War Vol. 1, p.  
35).

The Hellenic Music Archives Ensemble produced a collection entitled The Greece of Rhigas Pheraios, which contains his patriotic songs, ode to Byron, and the Thurios, Rhigas' revolutionary hymn and call to arms. The Greek Archives' series features folk songs, music of the Greek Orthodox Church, and revolutionary songs of the Klephtes. Klephtika songs were largely created by rhapsodists, singers who performed at celebrations and festivals to praise historical figures and events, and to document the lives of the Klephtes as social outsiders. "The Kolokotronis Family" is perhaps the most exemplary piece used in the film. The song that plays over the final scene and the end credits places Bouboulina in the context of international influence. The song is by the Argentine rock band, La Maquina De Hacer Pajaros, "Bubulina" (1976):

Navidad an el cielo  
Bubulina se llevo mi amor  
El tiempo exacto entre los dos  
Nunca murio.  
Mascara de luna  
Esa puerta no debiste abbir  
Pero ya abierta es tan real  
Como se resuele re, do, si, sol, la...?  
Para hacer esta armonia, es preciso un  
Nuevo ser  
Capaz de nacer mil veces sin crecer  
Cuatro notas separadas y la oscuridad total  
Ya no queda tiempo de mirar atras,  
Pero veo el horizonte esta manana  
Y de pronto todo parece estar bien  
Es que no hay nada que pueda hacer?  
Es que no hay nada que pueda ver?  
Dama de colores, lavame la cara y llevame



Tan alto como para vertodo mi mal  
Diosa y heroina dejame la llave antes de ir  
No esperes a la muerte aqui.

Translation:

Christmas in the heavens  
Bubulina carried away my love  
the precise time between us  
never died  
Moon's mask  
that door you should not have opened  
but now open it's so true  
how do you resolve re,do,si,sol, la?  
to get this harmony, what's needed  
is a new being  
capable of being born a thousand times without growing up  
four notes separated and total darkness  
now there's no time left to look back  
But instead I see the horizon this morning  
and soon, everything seems fine  
there isn't a thing I might do?  
there isn't a thing I might see?  
Colorful maiden, wash my face and carry me  
so high up I can see all my faults  
Goddess and heroine leave me the key before you go  
Don't wait for death here.

(translation by Regina Harrison)

The interviews conducted for The Brave Stepped Back were recorded from 2002 to 2005. They include Philip Demertzis-Bouboulis, founder and curator of the Bouboulina museum in Spetses, and her fifth generation grandson. Mr. Demertzis-Bouboulis established the museum in 1991, and gives guided tours in Greek and English to visitors. He lives with his family in the mansion, and the second story is the site of the museum. He is responsible for discovering, organizing, and contextualizing the artifacts on display, as well as narrating the tour. He also provides the upkeep and repairs for the

mansion which he obtained as a family inheritance. He is perhaps the most authentic link in the oral history of the Bouboulina story, and he remains interested in the on-going research around her life. Mr. Demertzis-Bouboulis explains the significance of artifacts, documents, and the architecture of the Bouboulis mansion, and he narrates the details of Bouboulina's story, providing the linear backbone of the film.

Mr. Kristos Koutsis occupies a similar position as a keeper of family history, and his insights into the events surrounding the elopement of Eugenia Koutsis and Bouboulina's son which led to Bouboulina's death are particularly telling about the trials his family has suffered as a result of her murder. The Koutsis family was one of the wealthiest and most influential merchant families during the early 1800s. His is the first generation in the Koutsis lineage to reconcile the family's position on the island as one of prestige and respect, rather than blame. He and Philip Demertzis-Bouboulis have since resolved the issue of Bouboulina's murder, and Mr. Koutsis remains supportive of the museum's endeavors. But as the film reveals, the friction between the two families can still be felt in discussions over who was responsible for Bouboulina's death.

Madeline Zilfi, professor of Ottoman History at the University of Maryland, College Park and author of Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era gives a balanced perspective on the fall of Constantinople, life under Ottoman rule, and provides informed speculation about the interactions between Bouboulina and the Valide Sultana. She is the leading expert in the field of Ottoman studies as it relates to women's experiences. As many of the sources written from both the Greek and the philhellenic perspectives about the war tend to be racist in their language towards the Ottomans and the portrayal of the four hundred years that they

occupied Greek soil, her presence in the film demonstrates an effort to include voices on both sides of the conflict.

Mary Pittas-Herschbach is a professor of Hellenic Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park and a member of the Modern Greek Studies Association. Her research covers the classical influences on Modern Greek literature and culture. She provides insights into how Bouboulina is perceived by contemporary Greeks, the struggles she faced, and how her image fits into the romantic depictions of Greece as an enslaved classical female figure. Both Dr. Zilfi and Dr. Pittas-Herschbach comment on the patriarchal paradigm that governed the period in which Bouboulina lived, placing their observations within a framed discourse on Bouboulina's unique achievements as a proto-feminist icon.

Dr. Charles Robinson is Professor and Chair of English at the University of Delaware, and Director of the Lord Byron Society of America. In the film, he articulates the overlapping histories and influences of the French and American Revolutions with Greece's struggle with the Ottomans. His expertise in the area of philhellenic literature helps define the struggle as an international cause, and his recitation of important passages from the writing of Lord Byron places the film's discourse about Bouboulina's contributions in a romantic, literary, and ultimately global framework.

Dr. Maria Anastasopoulo-Krimigis is a retired Professor from the University of Athens and member of the Modern Greek Studies Association. She continues to publish articles on Greek women novelists, and recently authored the biography of Calliroe Singanou-Parren, Greece's first feminist writer and publisher. She is one of the few nineteenth century literary historians to consider the contributions of women to this

period in Greek history. Her crucial work fills an on-going void in the discipline of Modern Greek Studies. In the film, she discusses the paradigms of the dowry system; nineteenth century conceptions of the widow; the on-going female slave trade in Greece; the colossal figure of Ali Pasha and the legend of Lady Frossini who he is said to have drowned in the lake at Ioannina; and the difficulties faced by women of the nineteenth century to gain independence. Taken together, these voices fill out the portrait of Bouboulina's life and the times in which she lived.

## Aesthetic Sources

One of the recurring images in the film is the symbol of the tree. The tree is referenced in conjunction with Bouboulina's family history. It also appears after her second husband's death, when a tilt shot reveals a burned, blackened branch from the island's pine forest. Margaret Alexiou elaborates on the significance of the Tree of Life and the Cosmic Cycle in her book After Antiquity: Greek Language, Myth, and Metaphor: "Throughout Greek culture, there is scarcely a more powerful symbol of the sanctity of life, death, and rebirth than the tree" (Alexiou, 260). Her explanation of the Tree as it relates to Greek metaphor may explain why many feminist writers use it as a symbol of fertility of mind and body in their writing: "The tree is bisexual, self-engendering, and polysemic. While its inner spirit may be female, its juice is sperm. Magical instruments are made from its bark, and enchanted dances are performed beneath its branches. Nuts and dried fruits have regenerative and protective powers" (Alexiou, 260-61). As a powerful symbol of survival and possibility, the tree provides a link to generations of women in the film. Because of its polysemic nature, it is a blank slate onto which to write and preserve these histories. According to Alexiou, tree imagery also operates in the songs of love and marriage as a symbol of woman's fecundity with their bushy shape, juicy fruits, and edible produce (Alexiou, 399). In this sense, the Tree is a particularly female space, alive with the reproductive powers memory, mysticism, and the act of writing, all productive functions of the womb itself. In the film it represents the widowed Bouboulina.

Another important symbol to Greek iconography, and relevant to the narrative

about Boboulina and her role as a woman of the nineteenth century is the image of the mother. Patricia Storace observes,

“There are, it seems, more movie archetypes of Greek mothers than of Greek wives, and it is surprising to see how developed this mythology of the mother is. One is a plump, impeccably bourgeois lady in a hat, who interferes with her son’s personal and professional life and dominates him by mercilessly feeding him... The second is a cat-eyed, hawk-nosed woman the sadistic mother, who bullies and slaps her son capriciously, and tries to drive off his girlfriends by paying them off. The third choice is a woman self-absorbed to the point of madness, who sees her child more as a character in an ongoing story she is acting out. Four shouts ‘you anathematized on’ when she wants her son to do chores, and teaches him from childhood that life is hellish. The final choice is the sentimental favorite, the *laiki* mother, the mother of the son of the people, who is good hearted and ignorant, an object both of tenderness and condescension (Storace, 115-116).

In various sources, it seems that Bouboulina has been depicted as each of these stereotypes when it comes to her image as a mother. Avoiding these narrowly defined archetypes is a deliberate choice in making the film.

Another enduring symbol of female subjectivity in the Greek imagination about womanhood is the figure of the widow. In mainstream representations, as Alexander Karanikas observes in his book Hellenes and Hellions: Modern Greek Characters in American Literature, “... All widows are voluptuous. They are depicted as sexually desirable, more so than other women, including wives. Liberated from their marriage vows by death, and seasoned veterans in bed, widows poses pent-up emotions that turn volcanic when released by a wild lover. She is taboo for the married men who lust for her. Their wives fear, hate, and often envy her freedom. For these reasons, Nikos Kazantzakis dooms the widow in Zorba the Greek. In a grim and cruel scene the townspeople stone her to death” (Karanikas, 338). This scene from Zorba the Greek is used in the film as Dr. Anastasopoulos-Krimigis discusses Bouboulina’s role as a widow,

and the perceptions that the islanders must have had about her status in the social sphere. Mothers, wives, widows, Amazons, trees, and water are symbols employed in the film to reference distinct Greek aesthetic traditions, and in some cases, to confront and overcome them.

## STRUCTURE AND METHODOLOGY

“Documentary” can be no more easily defined than “love” or “culture.”  
--Bill Nichols

“The media must operate as an historical reclamation project for the term *independent film*, a rerouting of the current commodification of the term...”  
--Patricia Zimmermann

### Definitions

For the first thirty-one years of the existence of cinema (1895 to 1926,) there was not a word for what we now identify as “documentary.” And since the term was coined by the father of the British documentary, John Grierson, to designate a non-fiction filmmaking practice, one with its own history, evolution, and modes of reception, it remains a practice without clear boundaries for production and analysis (Grant, 12). The documentary calls for specific techniques, it has its own visual rhetoric, and requires a unique kind of ethnographic engagement. It encompasses an ethics of responsibility towards its subjects. And more than any other media practice, it embodies a politics of representation.

But the documentary seems to have been absent from both popular discourse and academic discussion within the field of Film Studies except for a few spots on the map of film history: its heyday in the 1920s and 30s with films like Nanook of the North and Triumph of the Will, a brief stint in the 60s with Titicut Follies, This is Spinaltap, Don't Look Back, Helter Skelter, and the French New Wave, who theorized cinema verite for the cinephilic academy and made films that crossed the boundaries between fiction and



non fiction. In the discipline of Film Studies, the documentary has been understudied as an aesthetic practice. But ironically, when we look at contemporary media culture, we seem to be surrounded by documentary at every turn- from the Rodney King tapes to the O.J. Simpson chase, from The Blair Witch Project to news coverage of the war in Iraq, and now, “reality television.” When Michael Moore broke box office records in 2004 with his Academy Award-winning film, Fahrenheit 9/11, it seemed that the practice had finally made its way back to the center of American film culture. But when we look at the subjects of these breakthrough moments for the documentary film, we find a pattern that mimics trends in the larger, commercial world of fiction film: heroic explorers surviving the arctic; savage dictators coming to power; unwieldy rock stars and creative geniuses; victims and murderers. One thing they all have in common is that their stories have been about the lives of men. As an alternative to mainstream fiction film, the documentary form has failed to live up to its “independent” status when it comes to its choice of subjects. This project has been an exercise in examining what kinds of documentaries have been made by and about women, what formal characteristics they embody and how those qualities relate to their content, and what happens when one attempts to make a film about a woman’s life.

Given the documentary form’s long-standing association with progressive social movements, the opposition of both documentarians and feminists to the dominant commercial cinema and the interest of both in developing and supporting alternatives to it, feminism and the documentary have much in common (Waldman, 3). The development of the documentary in the 1960s, with the introduction of light weight, hand held cameras, and more affordable means of editing and distribution, also coincided with

the critique of language by French feminists such as Julia Kristeva, and the connections with the modernist avant garde, especially the political avant garde of Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Bertolt Brecht, and the French New Wave, including Jean-Luc Godard, Francios Truffaut, and others involved in the Cahiers du Cinema group. These artists and theorists challenged narrative as a formal device. Along with the significant social transformations in the form of protest and student movements, and the rise of films studies in the European and American academy, “documentary studies championed nonfiction film as an alternative representational practice while feminist film studies criticized the depiction of women in dominant commercial cinema and sought to develop feminist alternatives (Waldman, 3). What makes a documentary a “feminist alternative practice?” What are the means of production, distribution, and exhibition that make it oppositional, and what does it oppose? What are the formal characteristics that make a feminist documentary film challenge traditional narrative forms? And finally, how does The Brave Stepped Back fit into these definitions? Moreover, why, especially in the context of an academic study, choose to make a film about Bouboulina, rather than write and article or a book, construct a website, or create some other print-based text?

The answer to this last question can be found in one of the most enduring legends of early film culture. When the Lumiere Brothers projected their actualite film, L’Arrivee d’un train en gare (Arrival of a Train at a Station) to an audience in a rented a basement room in the Grand Café in Paris on December 28, 1895 the “3-D”effect of the moving image of the train coming at them scared audiences so badly, that they are said to have fled the café for fear of being run-over. That is the way that most film goers, even with today’s sophisticated media palates, experience the cinema: as a deep psychological

connection to the images on the screen. Film is a powerful story-telling medium, and one that is suited for a powerful story such as Bouboulina's. As an active, alive artifact, her story therefore, may reach more people in more profound ways than if it was written in the static pages of a book. As a method of preservation, the documentary form is a fitting way to record oral histories and interviews with descendants and specialists. As a method of collection, a film can pull together scattered information and artifacts in one single document. As a tool for analysis, multiple connotations and abstract themes are best represented in a medium such as film, where sound, image, voice, and montage come together in complex layers of meaning. Further, the natural dramatic arc of Bouboulina's life and the sumptuous visual nature of the artwork of the period makes her story appropriate for the medium. Lastly and quite simply, no documentary film had been made about this remarkable life.

But what is the feminist documentary up against? "We are poised on a crumbling, frightening precipice as we edge into the enigmatic morphing media landscapes of the twenty-first century. Whether stationed in the academy or outside of it in nonprofit media sectors, we have been defunded and deligitimated. We urgently need a new world image order. We need to think differently about independent documentary" (Zimmermann, xv). Thus begins Patricia Zimmermann's book, States of Emergency: Documentaries, Wars, Democracies. For independent media artists, it is indeed, a time for both despair and hope. Zimmermann goes on to point out the contradictions of the current media environment, including the changing transnationalized economic sphere of commercial media versus the emerging new technologies, new subjectivities, and new strategies for creating media discourses and ambushes.

These contradictions became amplified when, in 1989, the media sector made a radical shift towards transnationalization, merging media across industries to converge radio, cable, satellite, new digital media, film, video, and theater, beyond the scope of anti-trust laws, and without state regulation. But it was also the year that the World Intellectual Property Organization was formed. “Democracy– if defined as access to the means of production and for the production of engaged public spaces– seems suffocated by media transnationals larger than most nation-states” (Zimmermann, xv). Media democracy is diametrically and ideologically opposed to the current operating system of the capitalist marketplace. Corporate media, in the perpetual quest to maximize profits, requires geographical expansion in search of new markets, raw materials, and sources of cheap labor. It works within a system of globalization that is historically linked to trade and migration, missionary conquest, military conquest, imperialism, and neo-imperialism. The media market in America embodies this neo-imperialist attitude, and Westernizes the world through the exporting of films, and thereby its values, priorities, and ways of life. One only has to look at a movie marquis in a foreign country to notice the overarching reach and control of an industry like Hollywood, even though a list of the top movie-producing countries does not include the U.S.<sup>2</sup>

Some recent media economic phenomena have also encouraged a profit-based filmmaking: In 1989, Sony bought Columbia Studios, Time merged with Warner Brothers, ( and now Turner Broadcasting, and AOL.) Later, Viacom inherited Paramount, Disney merged with ABC/Captial Cites, and Newscorp got Fox, and

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<sup>2</sup> A 2001 study conducted by UNESCO shows that the U.S. is out-produced annually by India (839), China-Hong Kong RAS (469), and the Philippines (456).  
<[www.unesco.org/culture/industries/cinema/html\\_eng/survey/.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/culture/industries/cinema/html_eng/survey/.shtml)>.

branched into cable and satellite realms. These “Big Boys”, or Hollywood majors, according to Janet Wasko, regularly receive over ninety percent of the revenues from the domestic theatrical market. They are: Paramount, Twentieth Century Fox, Warner, Universal, Disney, and Columbia, and they are vertically integrated to control all aspects of production, distribution, and exhibition from the ground up. Time/Warner, for example, has subsidiaries which include magazine publishing (Time, Fortune, Life, Sports Illustrated, People, Money). It’s movie tie-in, Entertainment Weekly magazine, is said to provide “reviews and reports on events in television, movies, video, music, and books” (Wasko, 49). It participates in the book industry, through ownership of Little, Brown, and Co., Warner Books, Time Life Books, Book-of-the-Month Club. It distributes over 400 books and magazines for other companies, and publishes over 60 regularly issued comic magazines such as Superman, Batman, Justice League International and owns DC Comics. It distributes music under a wide range of labels (Reprise, Sire, Tommy Boy, Maverick, Paisley Park, Atlantic, Interscope, Elektra, Mute), and remains the largest record company in the world. It owns the largest and oldest pay-television service in the U.S., HBO, and also Cinemax and the Comedy Channel, as well as sixteen percent of the Black Entertainment Channel (Wasko, 50). It produces primetime network series, mini-series, and made for television movies. Warner also owns the Licensing Corporation of America (LCA) which “acts as an agent in the licensing of rights to names, photographs, likenesses, and logos,” with trademarks on characters ranging from Bugs Bunny to J.R. of Dallas. It owns fifty percent interest in CinAmerica Theaters, which operates the Mann, Festival, and Translux chains, and operates globally, with theaters in the UK, Germany, Denmark, Australia, and the Soviet Union. Following

a new trend, Time Warner now owns video game companies, and sixty percent interest in Six Flags theme parks, where their company's characters and films are promoted to children.

The Media Education Foundation's documentary, Behind the Screens: Hollywood Goes Hypercommercial articulates these trends, showing how promotional tie-ins, merchandising, cross-advertising, product placement, and even writing dialog about products and companies into the scripts of its films effects the kinds of films that get produced. Products begin to form ideological alliances with audiences, as with the 1982 film Missing, where the "evil" Pinochet regime is constantly associated with Pepsi, while the Americans, "the good guys", drink Coke, and are photographed around Coke machines. It's not surprising that the film was produced by Columbia Pictures, which was purchased by Coca-Cola in the 80s. Showing actors using a product is perhaps the ultimate plug, as evidenced by the enormous popularity with products like Reese's Pieces, after they were used in E.T., the .44 magnum, in Dirty Harry, Starbucks, and AOL's email program in You've Got Mail.

Defenders of the practice will often argue that placing products in a scene make the film more "realistic." However, Behind the Screens contends that it is the use and photographing of these products that make it quite unreal. Products are glamorized by lighting, labels face the camera, and sometimes, products are featured as the climax of a film, as with Fed Ex delivering the script of a lifetime to a character in Bowfinger. Merchandising toys, tee-shirts, backpacks, and other items along with the release of a film is another way that studios create a brand loyalty among film viewers. At this point, a film can make more money by marketing all of the products around the film, than the

actual revenues of a film itself. A film like Star Wars: Phantom Menace cost \$115 million to make, but made over \$3.5 billion in merchandising deals. Even if a film flops, the studio is guaranteed revenue due to the merchandising. What happens to the world of independent film production in this kind of corporate climate? Is there any room for originality, creativity, integrity? What happens to filmmakers who are just starting out? And what are the social effects of an industry that avoids making films about real people and events, in order to ensure their profits with tried and true formulas for making films, which often rely on the sensational images of sex and violence to sell themselves? What is to be done in the media arts field when Hollywood films like Titanic amass a \$200 million budget, and their computer-generated effects cost more than the entire film and video budget for the NY State Council on the Arts?" (Zimmermann, xviii)

Feminist film theory pioneer, Ann E. Kaplan discusses how feminist documentaries differ from commercial films in their intentions to instruct, rather than provide entertainment or profit. "Made on a very low budget, and in a collective mode, the films are necessarily rough, often sloppy; but this reflected merely the over-riding aim not to produce aesthetic objects but to create powerful organizing tools" (Kaplan, 126). Most importantly, the aesthetics of these movements called for a use of self-reflexive techniques that "fostered not certainty but a critical consciousness. ...privileging the voices of subjects resonates differently in the history of representation when those subjects are women whose voices have been suppressed from mainstream histories" (Waldman, 21). They often use reflexive techniques that demystify representation, and forefront the idea that texts are constructions that promote specific ideologies: they draw attention to themselves through focusing on the cinematic apparatus, the they refuse to

construct a fixed spectator, they replace the pleasure of fetishistic scopophilic narrative arc with the pleasure of learning, and they use real life events and on-location shooting, non-actors, and working class people for their subjects. Historical nonfictions are where the potential for a feminism and documentary come together as counter-history.

According to Kaplan, profound contradictions must be overcome if alternative film practices are to truly challenge the dominant media as a cinematic strategy:

- 1- Filmmakers will have to learn not to rely on funding from the very system they oppose.
- 2- Directors will have to use cinematic strategies that are not difficult for the majority of people who have been raised on narrative and commercial films.
- 3- Having made the films, directors have not had any mechanism for the distribution and exhibition of their films on a large scale. Innovative ways of independently distributing and showing films must be found.
- 4- The culminating contradiction is that filmmakers whose whole purpose was to change people's ways of seeing, believing, and behaving have only been able to reach an audience already committed to their values. The goal now is to expand the consciousness of mainstream viewers (Kaplan, 196).



### Formal Characteristics of the Feminist Filmed Biography

Paula Backscheider addresses the gendered assumptions about women as the subjects of biography in Reflections on Biography: “Unlike the reading of the classics- or of men’s lives, or of women’s lives as events in the destinies of men- reading women’s lives needs to be considered in the absence of a structure of critical or biographical commonplaces. It all needs to be invented, or discovered, or resaid” (Backscheider, 18-19). Inventing, discovering, and re-articulating the life of Bouboulina in film form therefore requires the maker to abandon the idea that the documentary is an objective method. Subjectivity is the mode of the feminist documentary. Roland Barthes has referred to biography as “a novel that dare not speak its name,” declaring that biographies are fictions constructed by a subjective, involved biographer. These personal questions, the film argues, are always subjective, and therefore unanswerable by a single document such as a film, which can only collect images for the viewer to decode and interpret against their arrangement within the film’s montage.

On the topic of women’s biography, Backscheider attests, “While biographies of men have been challenged on the ‘objectivity’ of their interpretation, biographers of women have had not only to choose one interpretation over another, but far more difficult, actually to reinvent the lives their subjects led, discovering from what evidence they could find the process and decision, the choices and unique pain that lay beyond the life stories of these women.. The choices and pain of the woman who did not make a man the center of their lives seemed unique because there were no models of the lives they wanted to live, no exemplars, no stories (Backscheider, 31). What Bouboulina’s

story does then, is not just present a vital missing History to the canon of nineteenth century studies, but completely overthrows the concepts of womanhood that tell the story of gender for generations of women. It stands in contrast to the many competing stories which trace the lives of women, only to undermine their value with the underlying fantasies about gender. Recently, there has been a trend in the fictional filmed biography, to sell the stories of women's lives, but only if they end in tragedy. This phenomenon resounds with a long tradition of stereotyping women, from the damsel in distress to the femme fatale.

Laura Mulvey and other feminist film theorists writing for the British film journal, Screen, have discussed narrative cinema in psychoanalytic terms of sexual metaphor. Her groundbreaking "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (published in Screen, 1975) insisted on a break with dominant cinema which would provoke a conscious reflection on the part of the spectator and the rejection of pleasure as a radical political weapon. Reprinted more than any other piece of writing on film, Mulvey's article remains the most influential thesis on the topic of women and the cinema. It changed the way that critics approached film criticism by shifting the focus from text-based analyses to raising questions about the construction of meaning *between* the spaces of the screen and the spectator. In examining classical narrative films of Hollywood in the "heyday" of the 40s and 50s, namely Alfred Hitchcock and Joseph Von Sternberg, Mulvey applies the psychoanalytic approaches of Freud and Lacan to her analysis of the female image in film. She uses psychoanalytic theories about identity formation and the Oedipal cycle to investigate the construction of pleasure for the implied male spectator of narrative film.

Mulvey says that woman is the bearer of the three “looks” of the cinema: the camera as it films the event before it, the characters as they gaze at one another, and the viewer to the screen. Identification with the phallic structuring lens places women as the object of the gaze, and male spectators as the ordering subjects. Because most mainstream Hollywood films are written, directed, and photographed by men, and because they usually feature a male protagonist at the center of the narrative, the “gaze” is decidedly “male.” As the maker of the seamless story on the screen, the director is the ultimate voyeur. The viewer, sitting in the darkened theater, becomes sutured onto his vision as he watches. Using Lacan’s mirror stage as a starting point, she theorizes a male spectator who identifies with the male director, and the male protagonist of classical Hollywood cinema, as an “ego ideal”. In short, the male spectator receives a narcissistic pleasure from the fantasy of projecting his own image onto the male protagonist of the film, all reinforced by the extra-cinematic star system. Because male characters are given dynamic roles where they can be almost anything-- adventurers, detectives, super heroes-- spectators tend to identify with their values, goal, and ideals. Audiences receive pleasure from the fantasy of leaving their own dull lives behind for the ninety minutes that they sit in the darkened theater, and are presented with a larger-than-life protagonist who they wish they could be in real life. Women, who are often defined by narrow, one-dimensional roles, embodied by the virgin/whore dichotomy, can only occupy a marginal place within the frame. The male spectator and actor, therefore, occupy the active position within the diegesis, as the maker of meaning, while female characters are “to-be-looked-at”. As an erotic spectacle, women are objects-- the bearers of meaning, and therefore passive. These active/passive positions can be found in the pin-up, striptease,

and the Busby Berkley musical, as well as classic films such as Hitchcock's Vertigo and Rear Window, and Von Sternberg's Morocco.

In these films, woman represents the Oedipal "lack," which poses the threat of symbolic castration of the male spectator. In order to quell this anxiety, Hollywood films neutralize the threat by fetishizing the female form. Fetishistic scopophilia is the voyeuristic pleasure in looking which is reinforced by the cinema. It turns women into one-dimensional body parts: long hair, high heels, red fingernails, bulging breasts. As an object, female sexuality can be compartmentalized, contained, and ultimately punished within the narrative. Phallogocentric narrative structure, complete with the pleasure of narrative climax, is the manner in which Hollywood films deal with the mysteries of the feminine sex. Narrative structure itself, promotes a kind of phallic (linear) pleasure, where the build up (rising action), climax, and resolution neatly come together to create a feeling of satisfaction, or narrative pleasure. It also represents a kind of symbolic violence against women, as Mulvey's commentary track to the slasher film Peeping Tom asserts. Influenced by the writings of the French New Wave, Mulvey concludes that radical filmmakers must eschew traditional narrative techniques of filmmaking ( the 180 degree line, shot-reverse-shot, etc.) in order to undergo a "passionate detachment" and involve spectators in new ways of seeing (Mulvey, 33).

In Reflections on Biography, Paula Backscheider refers to the structure women's biography has traditionally taken, which relies on tragedy as the culminating narrative moment as 'A Good Death'. When considered with Mulvey's observations about narrative climax as a pleasure-producing moment for the (male) spectator, the biographies of women that have been produced buy Hollywood are quite sadistic indeed.

Backscheider writes, “When it comes to biographies of women, it seems that the gallant death of a young, attractive woman, the tragic, flawed woman who takes her own life, or a woman who is abused, driven insane, or murdered is high on everyone’s list of ‘good deaths’” (Backscheider). From the Virgin Mary to Emily Dickinson to Marilyn Monroe, women have long been associated with the archetype of the martyr. Consider Hollywood’s most recent fascination with female subjects of biography, and their “good deaths”: Sylvia Plath (Sylvia, 2003)-- suicide by gassing; Virginia Woolf (The Hours, 2002)-- suicide by drowning; Frida Kahlo (Frida, 2002)-- dies of complications from a bus accident in which her spine is broken and her uterus impaled; Joan of Arc (The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc, 1999)-- burned at the stake as a heretic; Eva Peron (Evita, 1996)-- dies of uterine cancer at the age of 33. In these examples, Hollywood seems to be a fascinated by women who have taken their own lives or who have been afflicted in the womb- the very site of their womanhood.

The Brave Stepped Back attempts to evade this “good death” model of narrative closure by extending the film beyond the description of Bouboulina’s death. The narrative ends, not with the finality of her murder, but with an exploration of the legacies she inspired. This includes introducing the subject of Lela Carayanni, a descendant who became a heroine in her own right during the World War II German occupation of Greece; footage from Greek Independence Day parades in the Greek-American diaspora; the work of artists who have paid homage to her story; and footage of the Armata festival, held each September in Spetses to commemorate the role that the island played in the Greek War of Independence. The lasting impression for the viewer then, is not one of despair over Bouboulina’s untimely and tragic death, but a remembrance of her deeds

and the people she has inspired.

### The Biography as Art

Although Mulvey's and Kaplan's call for the "destruction of pleasure" as a radical weapon for filmmakers to challenge the formal characteristics of narrative film has been a valuable tool for feminist artists, The Brave Stepped Back does not choose to follow this anti-narrative strategy. One reason for sticking to the traditional look of the narrative documentary is to avoid alienating audiences from the subject matter. As a figure already steeped in controversy, Bouboulina's story may have been lost in a non-narrative rendering of her life.

The sheer amount of information presented in the film may have also been too difficult to organize in a more avant garde format. Further, using the "master's tools" may be a strategy for changing the consciousness of viewer. It is for this same reason that the film also features a male narrator. The film takes on the authority of traditional form and voice in order to "pass". The political project of The Brave Stepped Back is not to challenge audiences on the basis of their narrative expectations, but to change their consciousness about the subject, from the inside. Acquiescing to familiar aspects of viewers' visual literacy is used here as a different kind of feminist strategy.

To propel the story, the biographer must also rely on narrative devices borrowed from the fiction model. Biography, like life, is linear in nature: its subjects are born, experience the sufferings and triumphs of living, and they die. Narrative linearity may therefore be the most appropriate structure for understanding a life. However, as Paula Backscheider has rightfully declared, "Biography is an art." As such, biography embodies a poetics. This begs the question: when is it acceptable for a biographer to

borrow from the techniques of fiction, particularly in the context of an academic study? “For an academic to be accused of ‘making up things’ or ‘conflating’ quotations and evidence is the most serious charge that can be leveled against him or her and may discredit that person forever” (Bacscheider, xix). Is the biographer then, an objective researcher/collector/inquirer, or a subjective interpreter/critic/artist, or worse—an opinionated commentator/essayist/propagandist? The relationship between the subject and the voice of the biographer must necessarily be made somewhat visible. Every act in the process of the making of a film is an interpretive one, from the choice of the subject of the film, to the selection of people who are interviewed, to the writing of the script. The formal techniques of shooting, editing, and the inclusion of music, dialog, and text, are all active choices on the part of its maker. Placing a camera or making a cut are subjective choices that are rendered every thirty frames per second. “Those who turn life into art are always vulnerable to some degree to such charges, and biography is art” (Bacscheider, xix).

Bill Nichols defines the intimate relationship between the biographer, her subject, and the “evidence” through which biography is told as the “triangle of communication”: “For every documentary there are at least three stories that intertwine: the filmmaker’s, the film’s, and the audience’s” (Nichols, 61). It is what makes Triumph of the Will a controversial film to this day- do Riefenstahl’s ambitions to make a well-crafted, emotionally powerful film free her of the accusation that her intent was to create Nazi propaganda? Can the film be judged outside of the context of the Nazi party who commissioned it? Can it be viewed without a consideration of the ideologies it passed on to its audiences?



Backscheider explains how a biographer can feel that they *know* their subject so intimately, that they are tempted to speculate about their subject's life, especially when it comes to personal relationships for which there are no "hard" explanations. When writing her biography *Daniel Defoe: His Life*, she recalls, "I became convinced, for instance, that Defoe had a romantic relationship in 1722 with a Colchester woman named Mary Newton. I found documents that the two of them had both signed and half a dozen pieces of circumstantial evidence, but so few Essex records survive that I could never find either a single piece of hard evidence or forge a chain strong enough to bear what would be a controversial assertion" (Backscheider, 88). Forging a narrative chain is where the biographer's craft becomes an art. Backscheider's theory about Defoe and his mistress may have more to do with a gut feeling-- a result of the intimate relationship with her subject and a feeling of being able to almost sense the same desires that Defoe would have felt, rather than an empirical, provable fact.

I am similarly convinced that Bouboulina may have found a romantic relationship with Nakshidil Sultana, and even more convinced that to make such a claim would surely be controversial. The circumstantial evidence: The two women, more powerful than any man in their respective parts of the world, occupied a unique position of autonomy and choice. As a twice widowed mother of seven, Bouboulina became active in the public sphere when she was able to free herself from the shadow of her husbands, and this is exactly when she seems to have come into her own and began to fulfill the major accomplishments of her life. Echoing Virginia Woolf, Backscheider observes, "As I read the lives of women, I realized what a defining moment the realization of financial independence is for women" (Backscheider, 142). Similarly, the Valide Sultana, a French

girl from Nantes, who was kidnapped, raped, and taken to Istanbul to be given as property to the Sultan, may have felt a similar relief in claiming her own power, undefined by her relationship with a man. In many ways, neither woman had a choice in her public heterosexuality- the Sultana was forced into the world of the harem, and Bouboulina following the prescripts of her Orthodox Christian surroundings in a highly charged religious environment married into the families that her fathers chose for her. The “favors” that the women exchanged were certainly part of a protocol for their time: gift giving was a sign of mutual respect, and a way of greasing one’s palm so to speak, in the high stakes world of trade and politics during the Ottoman rule of Greece. Both women learned how to “pass” in order to gain access to power. As a “closeted” Christian, when the Sultana died, a Catholic priest was allowed to pass through the gates of the Imperial Palace to perform her last rites. Similarly, Bouboulina would have had to disguise herself as a Muslim woman in order to gain entry to the Seraglio on her visits to the Sultana. But the story of how Bouboulina kept her promise to rescue the women and children of the Pasha’s harem at Tripoli has always haunted me. Why would Bouboulina have kept her word? What was she so grateful for? Why, in a time of war, despite reports that she was a greedy, selfish woman in search of personal financial gain and self interest, why would she stay so true to a promise to an Ottoman queen so far away? Why risk her reputation as an Orthodox soldier to rescue a bunch of harem girls, even by threatening her own men? Further, Bouboulina’s gender transgressions as a child and as an adult have been commented on repeatedly by historians, and those who met her. Although her “masculine” attitude and physical characteristics are no way to determine her sexual identity, they do make room for some delicious speculations.

Perhaps my speculations about Bouboulina and her relationship with the Valide Sultana is wishful thinking on my part. Despite the fact that it has been well documented that lesbianism was a normal and accepted part of social life in the harem, and that Bouboulina's own sexual identity as heterosexual comes only by way of her roles as a wife and mother, to make such an assertion would surely bring a firestorm of debate to an already controversial figure. It would cloud her accomplishments, and it would open up a space for criticism of the other evidence about Bouboulina's extraordinary life within the film. Not to mention that the largely homophobic Greek audience would discredit the claim, given that there is no "hard" evidence. But is there ever "hard" evidence of love? The only way that romance can be "evidenced" comes by way of heterosexual models: of marriage certificates, property holdings, children's birth certificates, and perhaps the ultimate form of evidence of a sexual relationship, offspring. If the relationship existed, there would be no remnants other than to consider the possibility that it may have. Other than a letter or a journal in which it was overtly written about, historical lesbian relationships don't exist as documented realities. And even if I had unearthed a letter, there is no guarantee that my interpretation would have sufficed as evidence. It would not have been a relationship that was not unhidden to begin with. Imagine how long it has taken, for example, the community of Emily Dickinson scholars to accept the letters and poems of Emily Dickinson and Susan Huntington Dickinson as evidence of their discourse of desire.<sup>3</sup> And if not for the queer scrutiny of gay and lesbian researchers like Martha Nell Smith, who have scoured the manuscripts for evidence embodied one single

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<sup>3</sup> See Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson, Ed. Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith. Paris Press, 1998. Also, the Dickinson Electronic Archives: [www.emilydickinson.org](http://www.emilydickinson.org).

word- that Susan signed her letters to Emily differently than those she penned as a wife and mother- the possibility of queer histories would not exist. But to make those claims takes a focus and a politic which is perhaps separate from the project at hand.

## SCRIPT

*The Brave Stepped Back:  
The Life and Times of Laskarina Bouboulina*

**Title:**

*I say someone in another time will remember us.*

--Sappho

**Narrator:**

May 11th, 1771. Skevo Kokkoni, nine months pregnant, begins a difficult journey from her home on Hydra, a quiet Aegean island, to the bustling European capital in Constantinople. Her husband Stavros Pinotsis, a Greek ship captain, was imprisoned there for his part in a failed revolt against the Ottomans. He lay dying when she arrived. In the very cell where Stavro drew his last breath, the revolution would take its first.

The child, Laskarina, would go on to become the first female admiral in the world, leading Greece in the War of Independence from the Ottoman Turks. Her naval victories initiated the end of one of the most powerful empires in history. Despite her accomplishments, her name remains an enigma in the pages of Western history.

**Title:**

THE BRAVE STEPPED BACK: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF LASKARINA  
BOUBOULINA

**Narrator:**

Upon her remarriage to Captain Lazarou Orloff, Skevo and her four year old daughter then moved to Spetses. Spetses, known in ancient times as "Pityousa", or "pine-covered," lies fifty nautical miles South of the port of Piraeus, and marks the gateway to the mainland of the Peloponnesus. The people of Spetses have been described as tough, intelligent, and industrious, having descended from the "Arvaneetes", the Greek Orthodox Albanians of Asia Minor.

Laskarina, fiercely independent, and known as the cacophonous leader among her siblings, spent many days playing in the sea and helping on the decks of Lazarou's boats. She listened to the sailors talk about freedom for the nation, which had been suffering under the domination of the Turks for nearly 400 years.

At its peak, the Ottoman empire reached from the doorstep of Russia in the North, to the rim of Africa in the South, and from India in the East to the brink of Napoleon's empire to the West.

When the Ottomans sacked Constantinople on May 29th, 1453, churches were pillaged and refugees slaughtered and taken into slavery.

At Agia Sophia, the greatest church in all of Byzantium, Sultan Mohammed II proclaimed from the pulpit that there was no god but Allah. Mosaics and icons of orthodoxy were covered by wooden floors and Moslem tapestries.

**Dr. Madeline Zilfi, Professor of Ottoman History:**

The declaration of who is now in charge is definitely at this colossal church, which really hasn't been surpassed to this day in terms of its monumentality, its position. And although I think most people recognize that the Ottoman Sultans are a lot more pragmatic than they are ideological, there's no question that they played the game of putting Islam in the forefront. And certainly, the first thing you do to demonstrate that you are sovereign is that you take Agia Sofia, and you convert Agia Sofia into a mosque. And this sends a signal world-wide, of course. I mean, this is the name of the game East and West, after all, Rome is long-gone.

**Narrator:**

While the Ottomans allowed the wealthier merchant islands like Spetses relative autonomy, and a less arbitrary taxation than the peasants on the mainland, Laskarina witnessed many injustices.

Pedhomazoma, child collection for the purpose of slavery, had taken one million young boys to serve as military janissaries in Istanbul.

They were indoctrinated there to become fanatic Moslems before being sent back to Greece to enforce oppression against their own people.

Greek men, like those from other parts of the empire, served as eunuchs, castrated at a young age to ensure fidelity to the Sultan as they guarded the harem gate.

**Narrator:**

Laskarina's home was fortified with secret hiding places and quick escape routes.

**Philip Demertzis-Bouboulis, Founder, Bouboulina's Museum:**

Up there, they used to hide arms, guns, etcetera, for the war. And it is said that sometimes, in case of danger, and I mean pirate attacks or Turks, even women and children would go up there and hide so they'd have a chance not to be found and to survive, if their house was raided by the enemy.

**Narrator:**

Because children were not permitted to attend school, the only way of preserving Greek history and language was through local churches which were used as secret schools. These "kryptho schoolio" convened under the cover of darkness.

Greek girls received no education at all. It was rare to find a woman, even one as rich as

Laskarina, who could read or write.

Instead, she received instruction from a private tutor. She took an interest in reading, learning many languages, including the international language of the time, French. This enabled her to read books by revolutionary thinkers of the European Enlightenment.

She was encouraged by her step-father, captain Lazarou, who allowed her to sail with the men. As a teenager, the dapia became her second home. She soon developed a passion for the sea and for ships, and spent afternoons at the port listening to the sailors tell romantic stories of battles with invading pirates, of far away places, and of revolution.

**Narrator:**

The sea had become her obsession. She was ridiculed by the other women on the island for adopting such masculine interests. The American surgeon, Samuel Gridley Howe, observed these women in his journal:

**Voice of Howe:**

“During my stay in Greece, I saw that among the common people, the women work like mules. They bring in the water from fountains in barrels, which they lash over their backs; they go into the country to collect and bring in wood; in fact, they do all the labor. The burdens which they carry on their backs is enormous, and I have sometimes met a woman with a child in her arms, and carrying a load of wood on her back which I could not carry myself.”

**Dr. Maria Anastasopoulos, University of Athens:**

“The dowry was whatever a family could give to their daughter— traditionally, the house went to the first boy, but it was money, clothes, blankets, whatever a new house would need.”

**Howe:**

“They often, before they are married, wear a string of money around their neck, or in their hair. I have seen hundreds of dollars on some of them. A girl will never part with one of these pieces, which go as her marriage portion. Nothing short of absolute starvation would induce her to spend one of them.”

**Christos Koutsis, Descendant, Koutsis Family of Spetses:**

“There was a habit, a custom, that there would be inter-marriages between these families. Love was not involved at the time, it was just the fathers would decide who would marry whom.”

**Dr. Maria Anastasopoulos:**

“Greece was and is a patriarchal society. According to law, the man was the head of the family, and a woman would have to gracefully submit.”

**Narrator:**

At the age of seventeen, Laskarina married Dimitrios Yiannouzas, and over the next nine years, her family tree grew to include three children: Yiannis, Maria, and Yiorgo.

When Yiannouzas was killed at sea by invading pirates in 1797, Laskarina became a widow at the age of 26.

In the nineteenth century imagination, Greek women were the victims of men's affairs. Widows were expected to mourn their husbands for the rest of their lives, not to remarry, and to remain celibate.

**Dr. Maria Anastaopoulos:**

"The widow and her fortune had to be protected by the next male kin to her husband. And it would take a lot of dynamism for a woman to say, 'No, I'm taking my life into my own hands.' They would wear black for the rest of their lives. The black garments marked her. If she were young, everybody was afraid of her sexuality, for sure."

**Narrator:**

They were like the Suliot women who danced themselves off of cliffs to lament their men who had died in battle. Bouboulina was none of these. As a young woman, she looked to the long-held beliefs about the role of women as passive, domestic creatures with contempt. She had sailed with her step-father and brothers, and knew the sea better than any of the men. She was surrounded by family discussions of politics, and was educated by the priests and tutors supplied by Lazarou. What role then, could she play in the liberation of her country?

At the Ottoman center in Constantinople, a very different kind of education for women was taking place.

**Dr. Maria Anastasopoulos:**

"The other problem that was characteristic of the time, although it is characteristic of all times, I would say, was the trafficking of young girls from the islands and villages, they would find themselves in the Middle East or Constantinople."

**Narrator:**

The women were surveyed and traded at the large slave selling posts in Algiers and Egypt. Joseph Pitts, an English slave, witnessed the harem slave trade in Cairo:

**Voice of Joseph Pitts, an English slave in Cairo:**

"The professional auctioneers had the liberty to view their faces, and to put their fingers into the mouths to feel their teeth; and also to feel their breasts, and further, they are sometimes permitted by the sellers to physically examine whether they are virgins or not."

**Narrator:**

Everywhere Laskarina looked at the start of the nineteenth century, she was surrounded



by a heart-broken Greece in ruins.

**Dr. Mary Pittas-Herschbach, Professor of Hellenic Studies:**

“We have so much poetry, so many verses with images of slavery and chains, and dungeons, and oppression, and Bouboulina fits right in there because she was born in a prison and yet she broke her chains and became powerful.”

**Narrator:**

Laskarina was familiar with these cruelties brought about by the Turks. She was also struck with hardships of a personal nature. At the age of 30, she was remarried to the sea captain, Dimitrios Bouboulis. As the wife of the well-respected Bouboulis, Laskarina became known as “Bouboulina”.

They lived together in the Bouboulis mansion in Spetses, and had two sons, Nicolas and Yianni, and two daughters, Eleni, and Bouboulina’s own mother’s namesake, Skevo.

The family prospered for ten years, and became one of the leading families on the island.

**Narrator:**

On May 10, 1811, tragedy struck for a second time, as Bouboulis was killed in a battle with pirates.

**Philip:**

“So maybe Bouboulina ordered this icon after his death. All the little icons show the miracles of St. Nicolas, who is the saint of the sailors. And every captain in those days, and even nowadays, had a icon of him on the ship or in the house for protection from the sea.”

**Narrator:**

Twice widowed, and the mother of seven children, at the age of forty, Bouboulina was alone again. But this time, her duties as a wife and mother had come to an end. Having inherited over 300,000 Spanish tallara, she found a new kind of independence.

**Philip:**

“Tallara was Spanish golden sovereigns. In order to understand what kind of money that was, let me tell you that when Bouboulina built her flagship, the first and biggest Greek fighting ship during the War of Independence, a ship that was built here in Spetses, a brig, it cost Bouboulina 75,000 tallara, so you can imagine how much 300,000 was for those days, plus everything else that she had inherited.

**Narrator:**

She used this money in successful trading ventures and soon built three of her own vessels. Her love of shipping and her strong will as a business woman enabled her to amass a fortune.

A highly visible figure on the island, Bouboulina and her fortune attracted the suspicion of the Turkish authorities. Gossip was ripe.

**Voices reading negative comments:**

She is so ugly and old she must seduce her lovers at pistol point!

And so manly, she can drink any sailor under the table!

I hear, she steals jewelry from the Turkish ladies, and melts it down to make gold. How greedy!

Two dead husbands? She must be a witch!

**Dr. Mary Pittas-Herschbach:**

“In general there is a tendency, and not just in Greece, to mistrust women who are powerful and have a lot of wealth, and who have control of their lives, and I think that stuck a little bit to Bouboulina. Maybe that is why they were so harsh towards her, because she was not only a leader, but she wielded power as well. She’s bound to have alienated some people.”

**Narrator:**

In 1814, she penned a letter to the Italian chancellor, seeking permission to sail to Constantinople in order to speak with the authorities in anticipation of this growing hatred.

Her intuition was correct. Two years later, the Turkish government attempted to confiscate her fortune, using as an excuse the fact that her second husband had taken part in the Turko-Russian wars. With permission, she sailed with her ship “Coriezos”, where she met the Russian Ambassador, Count Stroganoff, a known Philhellene.

When Bouboulina submitted a document listing all of the services that her late husband had provided while sailing under the Russian flag, Stroganoff had no choice but to recognize his valor.

In his effort to protect her, Stroganoff sent Bouboulina to the Crimea, to a fort, given to her for her use by Tsar Alexander I. The retreat was a secure escape.

Taken by her strong will, and sharing the same religion, the Russians were not the only ones who were seduced by Bouboulina’s character. Nakshadil Valide-Sultana was caught by her resourceful persona.

**Dr. Madeline Zilfi, Professor of Ottoman History:**

“Women become very powerful as queen-mothers. So you get a sense that their imprint on the realm is pretty strong, and even under Mahmud II, he’s got a formidable mother also. If we assume that they met over some period of time, it’s not unusual for them to

have a kind of connection as strong women, who are respectful. That's a role that Bouboulina has to play, and she has got to be very conscious about what the rules of protocol are in terms of being able to push exactly the right buttons with this woman, and that means that she knows what the rules are, and how to behave. She clearly has a sense when she's sailing, because I don't think that she would have taken off from Spetses if she hadn't had the notion that she was going to be getting into some door, and that door was going to lead her into some kind of protection."

**Narrator:**

With an imperial glance, and overriding her son's authority, the Sultana issued a special declaration by which Bouboulina's fortune was saved. When Bouboulina emerged after three months from her place of silence in the Crimea, she returned to Spetses and was protected from arrest. In return, Bouboulina made a promise to the Sultana to protect the harem women living in Greece in the inevitable war to come. The tight bond formed with the Sultana was Bouboulina's first victory.

While in Constantinople, Bouboulina was surrounded by ideas that reinforced her long-held beliefs about emancipation for the Greeks. French thinkers like Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu, and Rousseau had been translated into Greek in the 1750s, and circulated among the educated company she was keeping at the European capital. They promoted the ideals of the French Enlightenment: of liberty, freedom, and democracy, the same values Greece had founded over 2,000 years earlier.

**Title:**

*"Man is free at the moment he wishes to be."*  
– Voltaire, 1764

**Narrator:**

The artwork of Delacroix and Gericault showed at the salons in Paris and featured the figure of liberty in the ideal image of Greek femininity and strength. As Kolokotronis observed:

**Kolokotronis:**

"The French revolution and the doings of Napoleon opened the eyes of the world."

**Narrator:**

In 1790, a Vienna newspaper, "Efimeris," circulated in Greece, Serbia, Bulgaria, and the Balkan principalities, and published the writings of Rigas Pheraios.

**Voice of Rigas:**

(In Greek) "Sons of the Greeks, arise! It is better to live for an hour that is free, than forty years of slavery."

**Narrator:**

Adamantios Korais encouraged rich merchants to spend their money promoting

education, and urged,

**Korais:**

“I had learned that the increase and spread of education in the French nation gave birth to the love of liberty.”

**Dr. Charles Robinson, Director, Lord Byron Society of America:**

“The three important dates, from the Greek point of view are 1776, 1789, and 1821, with the beginning of the Greek revolution. And I think there is a trajectory there, just as the French helped in the American Revolution and were guided by some of the principles, likewise the Greeks were guided by some of the principles of the American and the French revolutions.”

**Narrator:**

Back in Spetses, the words of Lord Byron reverberated throughout the island.

**Dr. Charles Robinson:**

Another memorable Byron lyric is embedded in Canto 3 of Don Juan, namely, ‘The Isles of Greece.’ ‘The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece, where burning Sappho loved and sung, where grew the arts of war and peace, where Delos rose and Phebus sprung.’ And perhaps the most memorable of the stanzas: ‘The mountains look on Marathon and Marathon looks on the sea, and musing there and hour alone, I dreamed that Greece might still be free. For standing on the Persian’s grave, I could not deem myself a slave.’”

**Narrator:**

When Byron arrived in Tepelene for his first pilgrimage in 1809, he visited Ali Pasha. He later wrote about the fallen nation and observed its ugly leadership:

**Byron:**

“His highness is 60 years old, very fat and not tall, but with a fine face, light blue eyes, and a white beard. His manner is very kind and at the same time he possesses a dignity which I find universal among the Turks. He has the appearance of anything but his real character, for he is a remorseless tyrant, guilty of the most horrible cruelties. Brave, and so good a general that they call him the Mohammetan Bonaparte.”

**Dr. Maria Anastasopoulos:**

“During the occupation it was very common that if a Turk liked a Greek woman, there was no way that he couldn’t have her. And of course, Ali Pasha was a very powerful figure in Epirus, and it seems that Kyria Frosini did not submit to his demands. So she had to die. And she was subjected to a very cruel death that was very common in those days- they put women into sacks, and they drowned them.”

**Dr. Madeline Zilfi:**

“On the one hand, the central state is unable to realize its goals and its dreams and its aspirations and so it lets local officials take over. Sometimes those officials are rogue janissaries and you want to bring them back into control- or Ali Pasha of Ioannina is one who really gets way too big for his britches in terms of the way that the Ottomans, as central governors see it. Although, there are arguments about why Ali might have been just fine for the area he was in- better than the Ottoman central regime.”

**Narrator:**

His threats to wrest Ioannina from the control of the empire opened up an opportunity for Bouboulina. Distracted from preparing to fight the Greeks, the Sultan focused his energies on sending an army to contend with his own Pasha.

**Dr. Charles Robinson:**

“The Greece that Byron visited is in many ways like Afghanistan in which there are different religious, political, social, and martial interests dividing the country.”

**Narrator:**

Like many others, Bouboulina began to think of herself as a noble Hellene, not a member of the denigrated Romaioi colony of the Byzantines. Inspired to act, she joined the Philike Etairia, a secret society organized to prepare the Greeks for revolution. Based on the masonic lodges of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the society was started in the international town of Odessa, in 1814, by three expatriate Greeks living in Russia.

In 1818 Bouboulina was Christened for a second time in Constantinople, this time as a freedom fighter. She swore by god and nation, and adopted a secret nom de guerre. She was the only woman of over 1,093 members allowed in the all-male society.

She consulted with the society’s leader, Alexander Ipsilantis, on a plan for Spetses. She began buying arms from foreign ports, and hiding them in her home and on the island. She was encouraged by Papaflessas, a rebel priest and a fellow Philike Etairia member, who came to Spetses to convince other leading families to revolt:

**Papaflessas:**

“We need action! Talk while warming yourselves by a stove is not work. The fault is yours. If the skies are dark now, they may be darker still in the future.”

**Narrator:**

Bouboulina’s first action was to oversee the building of her flagship. Unknowingly, the Turks issued a license and plan for the flagship that would seal their fate in the war to come.

**Philip:**

“This is the Turkish licence, or authorization for Bouboulina to build her flagship, The Agamemnon. Now don’t be surprised that the Turks gave her such a document, as it was given for a merchant ship. And what Bouboulina did was that she armed the

Agamemnon with much heavier canons than what she was supposed to.”

**Narrator:**

By giving a bribe to the Turkish shipbuilding inspector, the construction of the “Agamemnon” was completed in the Spetses shipyard in 1820.

**Title:**

Original mast head of the “Agamemnon”

**Narrator:**

Bouboulina chose this name as a tribute to the mythical King who sacrificed his daughter in order to convince the gods to carry his ships into battle at Troy.

**Philip:**

“The Agamemnon was a ship armed with eighteen heavy canons. Turkey was allowing the Greek merchant ships some small armaments due to the pirates that were in these waters. However, these canons were small and few- for defense purposes only. And on the contrary, the Agamemnon was a ship armed in secrecy for war, with heavy canons. Bouboulina has a fleet of five vessels, all heavily armed, and has assembled her own small private army, made of Spetsiotes, whom she calls “ta palikaria mou”, whom she pays for a number of years, and looks after their families. She also pays her crews. Later on she spends a lot of money on food and ammunition.”

**Narrator:**

Bouboulina discussed with Patriarch Gregorios 5<sup>th</sup>, the timing of the uprising and the actions her crew of “brave lads” would take to start the war at sea.

But, what was it that fueled the rage which ignited Bouboulina’s actions to go herself, into battle? The answer may be related to the stirring service at St. Nicholas church and the news which came on Palm Sunday, 1821.

That morning in Constantinople, as a dramatic response to the rising Greek rebellion, Sultan Mahmud II had overseen the public execution of her friend and fellow patriot, Father Gregorios. Hanged by janissaries from a clasp which fastened his own cathedral’s front doors, a statement was attached to the body listing all of the priest’s so-called treasons. The gruesome description by Walsh:

**Walsh:**

“His person, weakened by abstinence and emaciated by age had not the weight sufficient to cause immediate death. He continued for a long time in pain, which no friendly hand dared to lessen. The darkness of night came before his last convulsions were over.”

**Narrator:**

Father Gregorios’ body was taken down after three days, and as a final insult, dragged by a group of Jews through the filthy streets, and thrown into the harbor.

The body was later recovered by a ship from Kephallonia and taken to Odessa where, under the instruction of Tsar Alexander, a proper funeral was conducted by members of the Philike Etairia. Appalled by the incident, Count Stroganoff broke off all diplomatic ties with the Turks.

**Philip:**

On March 13, 1821, which is twelve days before the official beginning of the revolution as we know it from our history books, Bouboulina raises her own flag on the main mast of the Agamemnon, and salutes it with canon-fire in the Spetses harbor. On the flag, you can see an eagle with its wings folded downward, which is supposed to be Greece in slavery, and it's holding in one leg an anchor, and in the other, a phoenix, the legendary bird that was reborn from its ashes. The meaning of Bouboulina's flag was that Greece was to be reborn from its ashes, like the phoenix, with the help of the naval forces, represented by the anchor. Bouboulina has taken this flag from the Byzantine flag, which was more or less the same.

**Narrator:**

Hydra and Psara joined the struggle a few days later. Bouboulina was fifty years old.

The cry "Eleftheria Y Thanatos" --- "freedom or death" resounded throughout the islands. On the mainland, another battle was about to begin.

The Klephts, a brigade of robbers who had fled to the hills to escape the tyranny of the Turks, organized around Theodoros Kolokotronis. The outlaws were known for their debauchery and lawlessness. To the rebellious Klephts, everyone was an enemy. Anyone with money was a victim.

**Gordon:**

"It would be impossible for a painter or a novelist to trace a more romantic delineation of a robber-chieftan than the figure Kolokotronis presented. Tall and athletic, with a profusion of black hair and expressive features, his eyes lighted up with bursts of gaiety, or were darkened by bursts of passion. Among his soldiers he seemed born to command, having just the manners to gain their confidence."

**Narrator:**

Out-manned and out-armed, it seemed that the Greeks would surely fail at the battle at sea. But they had two advantages: Sea-sick and confused, nautical skills did not exist among the Turks. Second was their will to be free.

**Narrator:**

March 28<sup>th</sup>: Ipsilantis and Kolokotronis surround the Palamidi fortress at Nafplion by land.

**Philip:**

“On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, twenty days after Bouboulina’s uprising, Spetses island revolts, and Bouboulina, commanding her own ships, sails towards Nafplion and begins its naval blockade. Nafplion is a port further down the Peloponnesian coast. It used to be the first capital of Greece, before Athens, and it has one of the biggest forts, built by the Venetians, armed with 300 canons. To attack such a place was suicidal, believe me.”

**Narrator:**

Historian Anargyros’ eye-witness account:

**Anargyros:** (translation of Greek voice-over)

“On December 4, 1821, as I remember, on board her own vessel, she alone gave orders for the boats to attack the fort. For this reason, she herself lands with her forces and stays until the fall of the fort on November 30, 1822. She was indeed lion-hearted.”

**Narrator:**

After days of fighting, the fortress was captured, and returned to the Greeks.

A few months later, a campaign to take Tripolis, the Peloponnesian capital city, which served as the headquarters for the Pasha, was beginning. Just as the battle was about to begin, Bouboulina arrived to loud cheers at the Greek camp, just outside the city. Legend has it that she rode into the camp on a white horse, accompanied by her warriors, and met with general Kolokotronis. But Lieutenant Von Bollmann, a German volunteer and an eyewitness at the battle tells us:

**(German) Lut. Von Bollmann:**

“On Bouboulina’s face one can still distinguish traces of great beauty that she once was. She rides a wild ebony horse, wears clothes which bring to mind a courageous Amazon and is more daring than all the captains put together!”

**Narrator:**

In the markets in Russia, wooden icons circulated with her image. In France, her clothing style had become a fashion trend. Bouboulina had become an international celebrity.

**Von Bollmann:**

“We call her “The Greek Joan of Arc”. The French General, Oliver Voutier, agrees:”

**Oliver Voutier:**

“When we told her that in Paris pictures of her had circulated which portray her with a wide leather belt, guns and swords on both sides, she burst out laughing. She then presented to us her 12 year old son, demonstrated to us how well she can shoot, never missing her target, not even once, then she grabbed her son, jumped on her black horse, and disappeared.”

**Narrator:**

Organizing at Tripolis, she was addressed as “Kapetanissa,” or “Lady Captain”, and



“Megali Kyria,” “Great Lady,” and was given an equal place in decision-making.

The impatient Greeks began an invasion of the city. But when Bouboulina suddenly gave orders for the soldiers to stop, the battle at Tripolis was halted for three days. This enabled her to make good on a promise she had given to the Sultana many years before.

**Philip:**

“There, after she received a request for help from the Turkish Pasha’s wife, for the lives of the women and the children of the Pasha’s family there, his harem, Bouboulina manages herself, among a terrible massacre I’m afraid, to save the women and the children, taking them under her own protection, even by threatening her own men in order to bring them back to order, and escorts them to the Pasha of Corinth, where she delivers them all safe to the Turks.”

**Bouboulina:**

Do not be afraid harem women! Neither your life or your honor is in danger! You offer me jewelry in exchange for your lives? Keep your precious stones- I don’t need them!

**Narrator:**

On the way to the battle, Bouboulina’s horse was shot dead by an enemy bullet. Climbing onto another horse with her son in law, Panos Kolokotronis, her faithful fighters then abandoned her, preferring to possess some of the spoils lying around. By the time they arrived at the central door of the harem, it was surrounded by fire and smoke. Rage filled Bouboulina’s voice, and she commanded:

**Bouboulina:**

Shame on you Greeks! I never imagined you to be so vulgar! Our victory should not be spoilt by even a single drop of innocent blood. Our final victory should be as white as lilies and as shiny and beyond reach as the sun!

**Narrator:**

The troop finally obeyed. The women and children of the harem were ushered off to Moustafa’s palace in the hills. Once the women were safe, the battle resumed. For two days the Greeks looted and burned the city. The streets filled with 30,000 corpses, and the plague set in.

The Turkish retaliation for the fall of Tripolis was the most destructive event of the war. 50,000 dead Greeks filled the streets and another 50,000 were sold into slavery on the island of Chios. The rivers ran red with blood.

The Chios affairs brought a wave of sympathy among the Europeans. The salons of Paris were shocked by the gruesome realities of the war. Newspapers and journals like The Greek Chronicles, started by English Lieutenant Stanhope reported on the extermination at Chios. A Greek poem describing the tragedy was translated to French by Victor Hugo. Shelly wrote “Hellas” for Mavrochordatos, and in the introduction, made a romantic plea

to Europe:

**Shelly:**

“We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their roots in Greece. The Modern Greek is the descendant of those glorious beings whom the imagination almost refuses to figure to itself as belonging to our kind. He inherits much of their sensibility, their enthusiasm, their courage.”

**Narrator:**

The war dragged on. At another strategic fort along the Peloponesian coast, Bouboulina again lead the blockade and capture of Monemvasia.

At Pylos, she brought supplies to the coastal town of Galaxidi. And at Argos, her first born son, Yiannis Yiannouzas was mortally wounded by a fatal blow from the sword of Veli-Bey. No Spetsiot survived, but their sacrifice gave the civilians of Argos enough time to escape to the nearby hills. Not a tear of Bouboulina’s was shed in public over the death of her son. Instead, she ordered her soldiers to take revenge of his death. Three Turks were killed.

**Bouboulina:**

“My son may be dead, but Argos is ours now.”

**Narrator:**

After the Turks left, she buried what was left of Yiannis’ corpse, and cut off pieces of clothing from the dead Turks and kept them as relics of what had happened. Facing Yiannis’ death, she carried on. As Kolokotronis recalls:

**Kolokotronis:**

“We formed a government with the chief people from Hydra, Spetes, and the Peloponese. Later, I sent Panos and 150 men to seize Mylos and gave orders that his mother in law, the heroine, should come near. I was unwell, and stood aside.”

**Narrator:**

Early attempts to organize a government exposed the conflicting interests among the Greeks. Bouboulina, with her close ties to Kolokotronis, and her reputation as a “guerilla warrior” sided with the Klephts and their leaders. But often, fighting the Turks, not organizing a platform, was their strength. Ill-equipped to become the intellectual leaders of the emerging nation, the rebels gave way to the Phanariots, a wealthy and internationally-minded group of administrators, who set forth the Constitution of Epidavros on January 7, 1822. Rather than an act of heroism, Bouboulina’s actions in the Tripolis/Chios affair were interpreted as suspicious by her new political opponents.

To avoid controversy and to escape the growing resentment of the Spetsiots who sided with the new leaders, she stayed at Nafplion in a house given to her by the state, as a reward for her services. The chaotic scramble for leadership continued, and a civil war

erupted.

Panos Kolokotronis, Bouboulina's son in law, who was running the newly freed capitol at Tripolis, was assassinated. His father, the general, was arrested and nearly killed by his political opponents, and imprisoned in a monastery in Hydra. The claims brought against Kolokotronis stated that he only aimed at freeing the Morea in order to become its ruler. After hearing of his twenty year sentence, Kolokotronis defiantly remarked,

**Kolokotronis:**

"I shall cheat the regency for I shall not live the twenty years."

**Narrator:**

Bouboulina's affiliation with the general and her own strong reaction to the news of his incarceration led to her own arrest. It was even rumored that she was having an affair with the general, her own brother-in-law.

**Philip:**

"No. There was nothing going on between them. Let us not forget, they were very old, and Bouboulina was very fat, according to some sources. They respected each other as fighters. Bouboulina's daughter, Eleni, married Kolokotronis' son, Panos, so they were in-laws. Panos Kolokotronis was murdered by the Greeks in an ambush during the civil war. That was their relationship. They were on the same political side- the pro-Russian side, they were against the pro-English side, who was mainly Hydra, the Koundouriotis family, and all those who formed the first government of Greece. Kolokotronis never liked the foreign officers because they kept telling him what to do, and he didn't like that, so a lot of foreign writers about the War of Independence were quite bitter about Kolokotronis because in a way he insulted them with what he was saying to them. And because Bouboulina was on his side, somehow the shots were directed at her also."

**Narrator:**

Born in a prison, and now dying in one, Bouboulina decided to fight a battle against her own countrymen. She penned a written protest and was finally released, returning to Spetses.

February 25, 1825. Disorganized and distracted by internal conflict, Greece was facing a second civil war. Bouboulina had spent her entire fortune fighting the Turks. She was tired of fighting, and disappointed in her countrymen.

When the Egyptian Admiral Ibrahim, landed, virtually unnoticed, with 4,400 Turko-Egyptian troops on the Southern Peloponese, the Greeks did nothing. The result: the re-capture of most of the Peloponese and the massacre of its population for another three years. Bouboulina was disgusted with the news.

Hydra formed a society to demand the release of Kolokotronis. Only after Ibrahim's landing did the desperate Greek authorities free him and offer him leadership of the

national army.

Back in Spetses, Bouboulina was busy making plans for the next battle. One evening, she was called to the Yiannouzas house to settle a family dispute involving her son, Yiorgos Yiannouzas.

**Philip:**

“The story says that her son with Yiannouzas, her first husband, he falls in love with the daughter of the Koutsis family of Spetses. The Koutsis family was very rich and powerful, and they did not want the wedding with Bouboulina’s family to take place, because by then Bouboulina had spent the big fortune that she had, during the war, and must have been quite poor for their standards.”

**Koutsis:**

“Secondly, because the Yiannouzas family was not one of the... how should I say? “top” families– Yiannouzas was just a seaman. So, if it were the son of Bouboulis, maybe something might have worked out. But the insult was too big to be swallowed.”

**Maria Anastasopoulos:**

“Families were very protective of their daughter’s virginity. And they were very overprotective.”

**Philip:**

“However, the two young people were in love, and they eloped. And so Bouboulina’s son takes, or kidnaps the Koutsis daughter... willingly, of course, and takes her to his father’s house, the Yiannouzas house. Later on, the Koutsis family arrives there-- an angry mob, a company of men, to try to take the daughter back.”

**Koutsis:**

“It was just an impulsive reaction of the family, who went out demanding, maybe hoping that Eugenia was not married already. But apparently, Bouboulina had taken care of that. And she had a priest on hand and there was a hasty marriage. So, there was no way to un-do the deed.”

**Philip:**

“There was a very big argument between Bouboulina and the Koutsis family, and one of them– we’re not sure exactly who, because it was getting dark at the time, so nobody really knows for sure– we believe though, it was the old man Koutsis, the daughter’s father, and while Bouboulina was shouting or swearing at them through an open window, he draws his pistol and shoots her straight in the forehead, killing her instantly.”

**Koutsis:**

“Our family’s side of the story, which maybe is true, is that nobody really wanted to kill Bouboulina, because there was just one shot fired, and the feeling is that it was just like a warning shot– I mean, ‘Stop!’ And, you know, with these guns they used, it was

impossible to aim, no matter how good a marksman you were. But fate decided that this one shot went just through Bouboulina's skull. And that was the end of Bouboulina."

**Narrator:**

A political assassination? A personal vendetta? A misfired shot in the dark? The mystery surrounding Bouboulina's death may never be solved.

**Koutsis:**

"As far as I know, there was a court held in Nafplion, and nothing was proved."

**Narrator:**

Bouboulina did not live to see the end of the war, which came on October 20, 1827, when the combined fleets from Britain, France, and Russia destroyed the Ottoman-Egyptians in the Armada at Navarino. It wasn't until 1833, with the ascension of King Otto of Bavaria to the throne that Greece's national identity began to take hold.

It has been speculated by historians that if Kolokotronis could have avoided political conflicts with the emerging government, he may have risen to be the first president of Greece. Could Bouboulina, the Megali Kyria, who refused to be held back by tradition, have done the same?

Her name can still be heard throughout Spetses island, and all over the world. It is forever linked with the struggle for justice, the liberation of Greece, and the birth of the modern Greek nation. The historian Orlandos writes:

**Orlandos:**

"Nowhere and in no other time has any woman been found in the uprisings of nations who has such character, and the ability to induce the world's admiration."

**Dr. Charles Robinson:**

"At July 4<sup>th</sup> celebrations, particularly in Washington, there were toasts that were given to Byron and Botsaris, who were toasted in the same voice, and by the same person, and people like Ipsilantis and Byron were invoked. So if this was happening in America, very remotely from Greece, I'm certain that when Bouboulina dies at least the Greeks and the people that knew her would have celebrated her. And the alliteration there- Byron and Botsaris... I'm certain someone stood up with a glass of wine- Samian wine, perhaps, and said, 'Byron and Bouboulina- our Great Saviors.'"

**Narrator:**

Each September, Spetses hosts the Armada festival, a week-long celebration commemorating the naval battle that took place in the Spetses straights. Thousands watch from the quayside as cannons, fireworks, and a re-enactment of the burning of the Turkish flagship tell the story of the war. The folk festival also features dancing, music, and costumes from the island.

Since 1991, the Mansion of Bouboulina has been open to the public as a museum. Her fifth-generation grandson, Philip Demertzis-Bouboulis oversees the museum and gives guided tours to visitors from around the world.

**Philip:**

“I feel this place to be my fort, my castle. I really feel safe here. I feel safe because if there is something here, there’s no way it can hurt me, because I’m looking after this place. I love it. It’s my purpose in life. It’s my highest security.”

**Koutsis:**

“I am happy to say that today we are very good friends with the Bouboulis family. And we have founded this museum together with Philip Bouboulis, who is a descendant of Bouboulina. And bygones are bygones.”

**Philip:**

“Women in those days were suppressed- it was quite a rare thing for a woman, that her sole purpose was the kitchen, the house, to raise the children, to cook the food, etc. Suddenly, a woman like Bouboulina, to be a leader of men, to lead her men in battle, was something incredible. So, all the Greek visitors that come here are very proud after listening to her story and seeing the house. And you can see all that from the comments that they write in our visitor’s book.

**Narrator:**

Her story has been re-imagined in poems and folk songs, painted by artists, retold in books, and performed on stage and in films.

**Zorba the Greek clip:**

Bouboulina! Blow, my Bouboulina.  
Who was that? Bouboulina?  
She was a big hero in the war against the Turks. Huh, Boss?  
Yes, madame, she was, like you... a great sea dog.

**Narrator:**

In 1985 a statue was erected in the Spetses square. Until 2002, when the Euro was introduced, her image appeared on the drachma.

Her family members remain a prominent part of the island. Her descendants have served as high-ranking officials in the Parliament, and have been heroes in their own right, in subsequent conflicts. One important descendant is Leyla Karayiannis, a spy who undermined the Nazis in their occupation of Greece during World War II.

In many ways, Greek Independence Day, celebrated in Greek communities throughout the world, is a reminder of her actions.

Her vision speaks to contemporary conflicts between East and West, Muslim and

Christian, men and women, and shines as an attempt to reconcile these different worlds. She is an emblem of the proud, post-colonial Greek character. Her legacy survives as a symbol of freedom and democracy, founded by the Greeks, and resonates throughout the world. The historian Filimon writes:

**Filimon:**

Against her, the unmanly were ashamed, and the brave stepped back.

**Dr. Mary Pittas-Herschbach:**

“Do people think of Bouboulina as a beautiful woman? No, I don’t think she comes down as a beautiful woman, even when you’ve never seen a picture of her. I don’t think that Bouboulina is famous for her beauty, and that’s maybe why people like her. She’s just Bouboulina. You don’t need to say anymore.

**Koutsis:**

“To lead an army or a navy, or a boat for that matter, maybe needed just guts. And I’m sure Bouboulina had guts.”

**Dr. Charles Robinson:**

“I think there has been a revolution in the re-making of cultural history. And in the process women are figuring more for their important contributions artistically, culturally, and now with Bouboulina, even politically.”

**Dr. Maria Anastasopoulos:**

“Yes, we have come a long way, and of course Bouboulina was among the first ones- she was a pioneer in the history of independent women. Bouboulina would be a prototype, a role model for Greek women.”

**Philip:**

“Yes, of course, she’s the idol, or the symbol of every Greek woman, nowadays.”

**Narrator:**

Watching over Spetses Island, her unrelenting gaze is still directed towards the castle at Nafplion.

A complex and necessary war gave birth to an unlikely hero. She, in turn, gave birth to a modern nation.

**Philip:**

She was a warrior; she was a mother; she was everything. She was the mother of Greece.

END CREDITS

**Title:**

For my mother and my grandmother. Thank you for making me Greek.

## STUDY GUIDE

The purpose of this study guide is to provide questions for discussion, written assignments and non-print projects, and essay prompts for university undergraduate students within a curriculum focused on the topic of women in the media. The guide is intended to foster critical thinking skills by asking students to apply concepts and theories to the analysis of The Brave Stepped Back and other materials. The desired outcome is to encourage reasoning and the ability to conduct a close analysis of the text. Other objectives include: understanding the narrative and cultural functions of a text; developing cultural and historical contexts for reading, watching, and listening; understanding the problematics of canon formation; developing critical thinking skills and demonstrating them through writing and Socratic dialog; connecting different cultural forms such as literature, music, and film; uncovering the power and global reach of technology and transnational institutions; understanding ideology, language, and narrative structure; acquiring historical, formal, and aesthetic critical skills; and developing analytic film language skills and an appreciation of the medium.

Studies have shown<sup>4</sup> that students learn more effectively when challenged with critical thinking exercises that encourage them to not only absorb information, but process it in the form of applied analysis. By engaging students with new teaching methods, including using the internet, working in groups, and generating creative projects that go beyond the printed page, the goal here is to promote a deeply engaged and rich

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<sup>4</sup> Researchers find that students recall only 42 percent of the information in a lecture by the time it ends and only 20 percent one week later. The average student will be unable to recall most of the factual content of a typical lecture within fifteen minutes after the end of class. For a thorough discussion of the importance of critical thinking and student learning, see Derek Bok, Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should Be Learning More (Princeton, 2005).



experience of the material that fosters progress not only in their understanding of the issues at hand, but in the very morality of students' relationships with media culture. The Brave Stepped Back can be used as a point of entry for discussions of women and film, Modern Greek studies, and postcolonial studies themes.

### **Discussion Questions**

I. Read Julia Lesage's article, "The Political Aesthetics of the Feminist Documentary Film" and respond to the following questions:

A. In what ways do the "talking heads" in the film encourage a politicized "conversation" among the speakers?

B. In what ways does the film challenge traditional visual iconography of female figures in film, including the archetypes of: mother, child, granny, old maid, ingénue, good wife, and siren?

C. How does the epilogue situate the film within the context of history? How does the quote relate to the theme of the film?

D. What aspects of Bouboulina's life are given the most weight within the film? Which aspects are given less time, or omitted entirely?

E. Describe the collection of speakers interviewed for the film. How do their comments interact with one another? Are there any places where they contradict?

F. What do the voice-overs, spoken by off-screen "characters" add to the narrative?

G. Explain the use of film clips within the film.

H. Why isn't Bouboulina given more first person dialog?

I. What does the editing style of the narration of Bouboulina's death tell you about the objectivity of each narrator's perspective? Is the death sequence conclusive?

J. The film begins with Bouboulina's birth. Why does it not end with her death? What does this continuation signify?

K. Discuss the filmmaker's intention in choosing to make a film about Bouboulina. What do you think the filmmaker hoped you would take away after seeing this film?

L. Discuss the themes of power and survival and how they relate to Bouboulina's life.

M. How would you describe the film's structure? Select a particular scene from The Brave Stepped Back and discuss how the imagery, editing, and/or music affects your interpretation of the text.

N. How is the film an artistic analog to the structure and function of a feminist consciousness-raising group? In what ways does it strive to find a new way of speaking about what we have collectively known about history? Does it wrest back any aspect of women's identity in women's terms?

O. How does the film challenge the accepted idea of "male superiority" and of women's supposedly "natural roles"?

P. How do the details of Bouboulina's life offer a broader range of complexity among women characters as cinematic subjects?

II. Read selections from Margaret Alexiou's After Antiquity: Greek Language, Myth, and Metaphor and respond to the following:

A. What visual ties does the film have to classical Greece? Where else in the film are the Classics evoked? How is the story of 1821 tied to other histories? How does the film challenge depictions of ancient Greece?

B. Comment on the final statement spoken in the film: "She was the mother of Greece."

C. Describe the use of the water imagery throughout the film.

D. Describe the use of tree imagery in the film and its relation to Greek metaphor.

III. Read Nancy Sultan's Exile and the Poetics of Loss in Greek Tradition and respond to the following:

A. The domestic sphere, except in melodrama, is rarely depicted in film as an interesting place, or the locus of socially significant relationships or activities. In this sense, the home is "out of history;" cinematic heroes go out into the public sphere to achieve their status as hero. How does the film treat domestic space and what does it say about women in the public sphere? How does this differ from

traditional Greek male heroes?

IV. Read Chapter 2, "Greeces of Byron and Homer" in David Roessel's In Byron's Shadow: Modern Greece in English and American Literature from 1770 to 1967 and respond to the following:

A. Explain the relationship between Bouboulina and the Valide Sultana. Why is this relationship given so much attention in the film? How does it propel the narrative? What does it say about the conflict between Greeks and Turks; Christians and Muslims; and men and women?

B. Describe the allegorical paintings used in the film that show Greece enslaved. What is the main metaphor for the 400 years of Turkish domination? Does the film support this metaphor, or critique it? In what other historical paintings or artwork are women's bodies used as national metaphors in the film?

V. Use John Berger's Ways of Seeing and Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" to answer the following:

A. Use John Berger's essay on the gaze in chapter 3 of Ways of Seeing to analyze the images at the end of Act I. Explore the juxtaposition between the image of the Suliot woman, who looks off-screen just before jumping off the cliff to her death, with that of Bouboulina's image, as she stands holding a child, and staring back at the viewer. Compare these two images to Berger's analysis of Manet's painting, Olympia (1863) and Titian's Venus of Urbino (1538) and his treatment of the ways in which women have been pictured in the visual arts from antiquity to modern times.

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B. Naked vs. Nude. Romantic portraits of harem women from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century often show women who are either unclothed, or whose bodies otherwise are on display. They connote passivity, romanticism, shyness, exoticism. Their gaze is often directed away from the viewer, and they often are shown in a reclining position. They are a version of the modern-day centerfold. How are 19<sup>th</sup> century French Romantic paintings used in the section of the film addressing the sex slave trade in 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece? How does this section stand in contrast to the rest of the narrative? How does it provide the "motivation" for the main character?

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"The Naked and the Nude,"  
by Robert Graves

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For me, the naked and the nude  
(By lexicographers construed  
As synonyms that should express  
The same deficiency of dress  
Or shelter) stand as wide apart  
As love from lives, or truth from art.

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Lovers without reproach will gaze  
 On bodies naked and ablaze;  
 The Hippocratic eye will see  
 In nakedness, anatomy;  
 And naked shines the Goddess when  
 She mounts her lion among men.  
 The nude are bold, the nude are sly  
 To hold each treasonable eye.  
 While draping by a showman's trick  
 Their dishabille in rhetoric,  
 They grin a mock-religious grin  
 Of scorn at those of naked skin.  
 The naked, therefore, who compete  
 Against the nude may know defeat;  
 Yet when they both together tread  
 The briary pastures of the dead,  
 By Gorgons with long whips pursued,  
 How naked go the sometime nude!

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## VI. The Hollywood Harem

**A.** View the video “Hollywood Harems” and compare the images of harem women in The Brave Stepped Back with the thesis of Tania Kamal-Eldin’s video.

## VII. Comparative Questions

**A.** One character compares Bouboulina to Joan of Arc, and another refers to the image of the Amazon. Elaborate on these comparisons. What does Bouboulina have in common with these historical women? **Of what** other historical figures are you reminded?

**B.** One of the purposes of feminist criticism is to rediscover women’s history and culture, and the often neglected or forgotten histories produced by women. Thus, it forges an alternative historical tradition, a canon that better represents the female perspective by better representing contributions made by women to History. How is The Brave Stepped Back a politically activist film, and where does it fit into the canons of historical studies **and** Film Studies?

## **Exercises for Research and Writing**

1. Go online and search for stories about other women who were involved in

revolutionary wars. Who are the figures? Was it easy or difficult to find information about these women? What do their stories have in common? How do they compare with Bouboulina?

2. Do a review of the Guerilla Girls' book, Bitches, Bimbos, and Ballbreakers: The Guerilla Girl's Illustrated Guide to Female Stereotypes. How does Bouboulina fit with the stereotypes mentioned?

3. Do an analysis of your high school's History text book. How often are women mentioned as active participants in history? How is the historical period covered in the film treated in the textbook?

4. Look at the timeline of women's history. Write an outline for a script for a documentary film about one of the women on the timeline. What elements of her life will you include? What aspects of her life are un-researchable? Who are the people that you would involve in the production?

5. Consider the following statement by Paula Backscheider: "Sometimes integrating consciousness of gender is an essential part of the story they have to tell. Whether a woman faces obstacles because of her gender, whether she finds that being a woman was important to the way she thought about her life, or whether or not femininity was an issue in her life or not, all women are often reminded that they are women. The biographer must decide to what extent she will investigate these questions of gender and to what extent she will emphasize them in the film" (Backscheider, 142).

View a contemporary fictional film that features the biography of a female figure. Analyze the ways in which the character's life story is told. What are the important moments in this woman's life, as defined by the film? How does the theme of "independence" play out in the film and how is the woman's autonomy defined? Describe the narrative arc- the rising action, the climax, the death sequence. Some films to consider: Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc, Frida, The Hours, Sylvia, Evita, Mona Lisa Smile. Films directed by women: The Notorious Betty Paige (Mary Harron), I Shot Andy Warhol (Mary Harron), The Virgin Suicides (Sofia Coppola), Marie Antoinette (Sofia Coppola).

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