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**Contemporary Greek Male Homosexualities:
Greek Gay Men's Experiences of the Family, the Military and the
LGBT Movement**

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Abstract

This thesis provides an ethnographic analysis of how Greek gay men experience the ways in which their sexuality is subject to ‘negotiation’ in the family and the military, how these ‘negotiations’ influence and sometimes even inhibit the creation of an LGBT movement. The experiences of my ethnographic informants produced little material for generalisations but the diversity of their voices suggests that they are constantly fighting between the desire to belong and the wish to remain different. I argue that the theoretical framework of *timi* and *dropi* (honour and shame) can still be a valuable explanatory tool for an understanding of Modern Greek homosexualities. Yet, this thesis offers a critique of this paradigm for its neglect to account for the possible ways in which the sexual contact of the men in a family may occasionally be seen as a threat to the family’s honour. As a result, silence becomes a defence mechanism that many of my gay interlocutors and their families employ to deal with homosexuality. This varied silence often inhibits the sense of pride in the man’s homosexuality and in turn prevents him from joining the movement that would require him to be vocal about his sexual self. The military experiences of my interlocutors, on the other hand, challenge the assumption that the military is a strictly heterosexual space. What they often describe as the ‘homo-social’ environment of the military acted as a catalyst for several of them to come to terms with their homosexuality. The thesis also explores the history of Greek LGBT activism from its inception in 1976 to today and examines the reasons behind its limited success in capturing the hearts and minds of my interlocutors.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Abstract</i>	2
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	4
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	5
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Gay Men's Experience of the Greek Family	48
Chapter 2: Greek Gay Men's Experiences of the Military	86
Chapter 3: The Emergence of Homosexual Activism in Greece	126
Chapter 4: Greek LGBT Activism in the Period between 1990 and 2007	168
Conclusion	211
References	229

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List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Athens Gay Pride 1996 Poster.	9
Figure 2: Irakleidon Street, my main fieldwork site in Thission.	30
Figure 3: <i>Tram</i> Cafe.	32
Figure 4: <i>Kirke</i> Cafe.	33
Figure 5: Yannis Tsarouhis, ‘seated sailor with reclining male nude’.	118
Figure 6: Yannis Tsarouhis, ‘sailor and nude in front of a three-piece door’.	119
Figure 7: The cover of <i>The Ellinika Agalmata</i> .	122
Figure 8: Mr Gay Greece 2000. Front cover of ‘Mr Gay Greece’ magazine.	171
Figure 9: <i>OI</i> article on <i>Factory</i> . Title: “Fucktory – A night in the meat market.”	177
Figure 10: Athens Gay Pride 2005 poster.	190
Figure 11: Athens Gay Pride 2005, pictures from the event.	191
Figure 12: Images from Athens Gay Pride 2006.	192
Figure 13: Images from Athens Gay Pride 2007.	193

Introduction

“We have arrived in the Sexual Tower of Babel where a world of past silences has been breached” (Plummer 1996:34)

A hot summer night in June of 1996 I went with Yiannis, one of my principal gay informants, to *Pedion Areos*, a large park in downtown Athens. For the second time, the park was going to be the venue for the annual Gay Pride festivities. Colourful posters advertising the event had appeared a few weeks prior in several gay bars and in the centre of Athens. Across the middle of the posters [Fig. 1] were the English words 'Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transsexual Gay Pride '96', with 'Gay Pride '96' written in the colours of the rainbow, symbols of the international gay flag. Underneath them, in Greek capital letters, was the phrase *Imera Omofilofilis Syneiditopiisis: Anoixti Prosklisi* (Day of Homosexual Consciousness: Open Invitation). This was followed by the name of the venue, the date and place of the event, and the names of the d.j.s, the sponsors and the organisers. The Gay Pride of 1996 was going to be a significant one, as this was the first time that all the key figures in Greek homosexual activism had been involved in its organisation. The incorporation of the words lesbian, bisexual and transsexual in the posters reflected the all-inclusive, all-embracing spirit of that year's Pride festivities.

Ever since the celebration of the very first such event in 1982, which was held in Zappeion, an open-air park in the centre of Athens, the nature of the annual Gay Pride celebration had been a point of contention among gay activists. The 1996 Pride proved to be equally controversial. Some activists favoured the idea of the festivities taking place outdoors with a public parade similar to those happening abroad, whereas others argued that the event should take place indoors, preferably in one of the city's gay venues. The latter felt that in this way the festivities would attract more participants who would prefer the privacy and security of a gay space. That way there would be fewer chances of the participants being recognized and also of being bullied. The low turn out for the first Gay Pride in 1982 was



Figure 1: Athens Gay Pride 1996 Poster.

subsequently sometimes attributed to the fact that this had been an outdoors event. At the beginning of June 1996, a meeting occurred among various gay activists who discussed the form of that year's event and finalised its venue. The conciliatory mood observed in that meeting among gay activists was short-lived. At the last minute, EOK, the major lesbian,

gay, bisexual and trans-sexual (LGBT) group at the time, withdrew from the organisation of the event.

The reasons still remain unclear, but the presence of Grigoris Vallianatos, a key figure in gay activism, in the organizing committee may have had something to do with it. By 1996, Vallianatos had become a controversial figure among gay activists as he was accused of using his work as of the main spokesperson for Greek homosexuals in order to promote his business ventures. Despite these last minute political complications, the event did go ahead as planned. At the time of our arrival at around ten o'clock, the Pedion Areos Park was relatively quiet. A large banner welcomed us to 'GAY PRIDE '96' – the words were written in English, maybe because English is the most spoken foreign language in Greece or maybe, on the other hand, because, whilst English is a popular language, it is still a foreign one and could, therefore, guarantee a relative degree of secrecy. Then again, 'gay pride' is an English phrase and in using it, the organizers may have wanted to reflect the international character of the event, with other gay prides also usually taking place in June in order to commemorate the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York, thereby connecting the Greek gay activist movement to the international struggle for LGBT rights.

There were a number of stalls clustered together. Members of AKOE (acronym for Liberation Movement for Greek Homosexuals), the second largest gay group in Athens, at the time were selling the latest issues of *Amfi*, their magazine, and were distributing free condoms to the participants at one of these stalls; next to them lesbians were selling *Madam Gou*, their own publication. Beer and soft drinks were available from a different stall, run by people from *Lamda*, one of the most successful gay clubs in Athens at the time. Dance music was projected from two speakers and by one o'clock, there was a good party atmosphere, and the space became rather crowded bustling with noise and activity. People mingled and danced with one another under the bright night sky. The police kept interrupting the event, however, asking the d.j to turn the volume of the music down.

Disturbed neighbours were calling the police repeatedly, complaining about the noise levels. After the seventh time that the police had intervened, at about 4 o'clock in the morning, and while the party was still in full swing, a policeman turned the music off and asked the crowd to disperse.

Compared to the flamboyant, public parades abroad, the 1996 Athens' Gay Pride was a low-key event. Above all, there was no march in the centre of the city declaring one's Pride in being gay. Instead the event took place late at night in a designated area of the park, away from the central part of it. Greek gays did not appear ready to march openly in the streets of Athens, declaring their pride in being gay. Whereas Pride marches abroad attract thousands of gay people as well as their families and friends, few people attend these annual gatherings in Athens. However, the annual Pride event does attract many Greek lesbians and gay men who are not otherwise, or at least not formally, involved in the gay 'movement'. Some of these attend the events for the opportunity of sex, meeting other gay people and for the music. As Antonopoulos, a life-style journalist, commented, rather sarcastically, in this context, Pride and other similar gay events attract a group of techno 'queens', queer-ravers, who attend these events not because they are trying to make a political statement but because of the progressive music being played there (Papaioannou 1996: 57).

According to the organisers, Pride '96 attracted around 1000 participants, and they considered it to be the most successful gay gathering to date. In an article in *COLT*, a lifestyle magazine, another anonymous journalist referred to the '96 Pride as 'the first-truly homosexual Pride in our country' and added that, 'the previous years the free parties that Paola – a Greek transvestite involved in LGBT politics organized attracted mostly a straight crowd and *frikia* (punks) from Exarxeia, but this year the majority of those people who came were sissies and lesbians' (Anon. 1996: 125). With the exception of a brief mention in the gay section of *Colt*, the Greek media preferred to ignore the event

altogether. Although gay demonstrations and gay parades abroad do occasionally become news items, their 1996 Greek counterpart was treated with silence. As far as the mainstream Greek media were concerned, the first Greek Gay Pride had effectively never happened.

Nonetheless, the 1996 Gay Pride demonstrated how far things have progressed with regards to LGBT activism and gay visibility in Greece. This public gathering of homosexuals celebrating their Pride in being gay is in sharp contradistinction to the harsh treatment that Greek sexual minorities experienced during the years of the junta regime (1967-1974). The Pride festivities were possible because of the efforts of Greek gay activists, who have been fighting for the rights of Greek homosexuals since the mid 1970s. Among the main focuses of this thesis is the story of the turbulent trajectory of the Greek LGBT movement, its upheavals, struggles, personal in-fighting, intrigues and successes. It is a story of a movement that proudly attempted to affirm its right to sexual and personal expression, despite the frequent internal and external obstacles. It is a story of individuals who gathered together, refused to gather together, laughed together and fought amongst themselves for their right to be proud of themselves. But, it is nevertheless often the story of individuals who despite being openly gay resisted the movement's attempt to politicize their sexuality. This, however, does not mean that they also wanted their stories to remain secret.

In his 'Intimate Citizenship and the Culture of Sexual Story Telling', for example, Ken Plummer (1996:34) maintains that 'a narrative moment has now be sensed,' a moment that also unleashes new possibilities for communal and political actions. When 'sexual story telling is a political process' (Plummer 1996:45) the recording and highlighting of hitherto silenced voices can create a space where "the 'Gay', the 'Survivor', the 'Recoverer' becomes recognisable, and identity emerges with a sense of past, present, future: history, difference, anticipation. And the narratives of this new personhood start to enter public worlds of talk" (Plummer 1996: 43). As such, this thesis uses this 'narrative moment' in

order to voice the stories of Greek gay men whose lived experiences of their sexual selves often remain both silent and silenced.

The Thesis' Framework

As Foucault (1990) and others (see Weeks 1986; Altman 1982; Epstein 1992; Plummer 1981) have argued, homosexuality has a history. The creation of the 'homosexual as a species' and of homosexuality as a special category, distinct from heterosexuality, is a recent event. The process that led to this has been thoroughly charted by various historians and social theorists of sexuality (Foucault 1990; Weeks 1990; Lofstrom 1997). With reference to the predominant motifs of homosexuality in ancient Greece in this context, for instance, in his *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault (1992: 95) remarks that "one would have a difficult time finding among the ancient Greeks...anything resembling the notion of 'sexuality' or 'flesh'". Although he is writing about the Greeks of antiquity, his comments have at least some measure of contemporary validity as well. The words *omofilofilos* and *omofilofilia*, the Greek translations of the words 'homosexual' and homosexuality respectively, are neologisms, a foreign importation (Faubion 1993).

The term homosexuality was first used in 1869 by the Hungarian Karoly Maria Benkert in a pamphlet which was quickly forgotten until it was rediscovered by Mangus Hirschfield in 1905 (Bullough 1979). In English, according to Jeffrey Weeks, the term "homosexuality" was first employed by the British physician Havellock Ellis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Weeks 1990: 140). According to Colin Spencer on the other hand, the first English use of the term can be found in the 1890s in the work of Charles Gilbert Chaddock who also translated R. von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Spencer 1996). In any case, as far as Germany and England are concerned, the term 'homosexuality' first appeared in the mid- to late nineteenth century. In Greece, the use of

the concepts ‘homosexual’ and ‘homosexuality’ became more widespread from the mid-1970s onwards, through the emerging Greek gay movement and subsequently through the Greek media, which were instrumental in disseminating this new discourse to the wider public. (Faubion 1993; Sioubouras 1980; Yannakopoulos 1995; Yannakopoulos 2001)

Similarly to the Latin American concept of *cochon*, (Lancaster 1992) a gender-based system of sexuality centred around the role one assumes in anal intercourse, (Faubion 1993: 229) before the words ‘omofilofilos’ and from the mid-1980s, ‘gay’ entered the mainstream, the indigenous terms used were and still are those of ‘*poustis*’ and ‘*andras*’. *Poustis*, the Greek equivalent to *cochon*, essentially refers to someone who desires to be sodomised and is closely related to the ancient Greek term of *kinaidos* (Halperin 1990). The term *poustis* is used not only to denote someone with ‘alternative’ or ‘subversive’ sexuality but also someone who is morally ‘suspect’ and morally inferior (Loizos and Papataxiarchis 1991). Occasionally, however, the term *poustis* is also used in a praiseworthy, albeit ironic, manner such as in the expression “*ti oraia pou ta leei o poustis*” – see how eloquently *poustis* speaks. In this case, *poustis* becomes a concept devoid of sexual connotations and is used to denote one’s ease and charm in public speaking or storytelling. Nevertheless, linguistics aside, both the general literature on gender in Greece and the specific, albeit limited studies of homosexuality in Greece that interests us here, commonly fall into one or two analytical traps: either they overemphasize ‘traditional’ perceptions of gender and sexuality, or they under-represent the complexity of gender and sexuality in modern Greece.

In the latter case in particular, most of the relevant literature interprets homosexual relations through the prism of a gendered model of homosexuality in relation to the principles of *energeia* (energy as in activity) and *pathitikitita* (passivity) thereby failing to take into account the myriad of ways in which gay men experience, perceive and express their individual sexuality. In both cases, the analytical problems arise from the fact that homosexuality is usually defined by means of an identification of Greece with a pre-

capitalist society. Whenever I mentioned the topic of my thesis to other people, many immediately assumed that my study would be about homosexuality in ancient Greece. Therefore, before I look at the literature on gender and homosexuality in contemporary Greece it is useful to briefly discuss why the study of 'homosexuality' in ancient Greece cannot fully enrich and illuminate my present understanding of homosexuality in modern Greece.

The expression of sexuality in ancient Greece was centred on a fundamental inequity, not only in male-female relationships, but also between partners in a homosexual relationship. Whereas relationships between equals in age or status were frowned upon, male homosexual activity was, to some extent, perceived as normal, but only if it was kept within certain clearly defined social parameters. In both classical Athens, and in the rather more military context of ancient Sparta, homosexual relationships between a young beardless boy (*eromenos*) and an older mentor (*erastis*) ideally had many of the features of an initiation rite. For the ancient Greeks homosexual relations constituted a ritual phase leading to heterosexuality in a way similar to the findings of anthropologists who have studied male initiation rites in several Melanesian societies (Herdt 1981; Herdt 1984; Elliston 1995). Yet, despite being a possible rite of passage for the younger man, even such relationships were surrounded by etiquette regarding the process of courtship and the giving and receiving of gifts and other signals, while a 'deep-rooted anxiety' about pederasty was expressed in classical Athenian law (Cohen 1991; Dover 1978: 81-109).

Moreover, the ancient Athenian figure of *kinaidos*, the man who actually enjoys the passive role in anal intercourse with men, is represented as a 'scare-figure' (Halperin 1990: 133), both socially and sexually deviant (Winkler 1990). The main distinction in all sexual encounters, heterosexual or homosexual, was presented as being between the penetrator and the penetrated. In fact, "not only is sex in classical Athens not intrinsically relational or collaborative in character; it is, further, a deeply polarizing experience; it effectively divides, classifies, and distributes its participants into distinct and radically opposed

categories” (Halperin 1990: 30); such sexual practice and relationship, in other words, did not entail the same meanings as modern conceptions of homosexual relations.

Although *kinaidos* may initially resemble the persona of the *poustis* in modern Greece and even though both suggest a polarization of the roles of parties involved in sexual intercourse, the whole conceptualization of sexual relations amongst men in ancient Greece was almost always structured according to an age difference that was identified with a clearly defined hierarchy. As was the case with Zeus’ ‘irresistible passion for Ganymede’ (Dover 1978: 6), a mythical *erastis* and *eromenos* relationship between the head of the Olympian gods and a young boy, judging by modern standards, sexual relations between members of the same sex in ancient Greece were certainly pederastic in nature. In contrast, the modern distinction between *poustis* and *kolobaras* establishes a hierarchy along gender and not age criteria. At the same time, in the articulation of male homosexuality in ancient Greece, only the *kinaidos*, the free adult citizen who liked to be sodomised, (Halperin 1990: 45-54) and not the *erastis* or *eromenos* suffered the stigmatization that the *poustis* has experienced and continues to experience in modern Greece. As such, there are few apparent similarities between homosexual practices between ancient Greeks and modern gay men in Greece and elsewhere.

Gender and Homosexuality in Greece: a critical overview

In largely overemphasizing kinship, thereby perceiving Greece as by-definition a ‘traditional’ society and in working in the context of a flourishing literature, from the mid-1970s onwards, on gender (Papataxiarchis and Paradellis 1992), ethnographers and researchers of Greece have placed gender at the centre of their attention. From John Campbell’s (1964) seminal ethnography concerning the values of the Sarakatsani people in mountainous northern Greece, to James Faubion’s (1993) book on modernity and intellectual elites in Greece, virtually all major anthropological monographs on Greece deal

in one way or in another with the construction of gender identity. A number of striking common motifs emerge in these studies: an emphasis on marriage, procreation and house holding; a privileging of the study of married men and women over the young and the aged; and a focus on the study of gender in rural communities (Herzfeld 1985; Dubisch 1986; du Boulay 1994).

In *Contested Identities: Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece*, for example, Peter Loizos and Evthimios Papataxiarchis acknowledge the importance placed on marriage and on the analysis of “a single idea of maleness and femaleness as expressed in the context of conjugal procreation” (1991: 1) in the various ethnographies of Greece. This conjugal or domestic model seems to dominate discussions of the issue. The model emphasises the centrality of kinship in the definition of female and male identities and the relationship of complementarity, interdependence and ideal equality between men and women. Their aim and that of the other contributors’ to this volume is to transcend this kinship-orientated paradigm by examining extra-familial contexts which also build gender identity, such as the coffee-shop and the convent. However, despite assertions that this volume deals with a complex society, kinship remains the predominant theoretical lens through which all other social practices and institutions are viewed and assessed.

Indeed, what is also noticeable in the general literature on gender is the relative absence of articles on the construction of gender in urban contexts. Because of Greece’s comparatively slow capitalist development (Mouzelis 1979), and its hitherto definitions as a predominantly agrarian society, the examination of gender in rural communities has attracted the primary interest of the various ethnographers of Greece, resulting in this way in a neglect of the realities of gender and sexual relations in cities. Despite the fact that the majority of Greeks live in urban centres, the gendered character of life in urban Greece has been largely understudied. In a 1983 article on urban research in Greece, Hans Vermeulen (1983: 129) noted that,

Although urban culture has played a prominent role in modern Greek history, and by 1971 more than 35% of the population lived in one of the three urban agglomerations of over 100.000 inhabitants, few anthropologists have chosen the city as their research site. This neglect of urban areas by anthropologists thus confirms their well-known preference for the often smaller and more isolated villages of the Mediterranean .

This emphasis on the exotic ‘other’ continues to drive Greek and foreign anthropologists alike towards the pursuit of fieldwork in the remote areas of the country. To give but one example, in his *Anthropology through the Looking Glass*, Michael Herzfeld defends the tendency of anthropologists to study remote communities in rural Greece. Herzfeld believes that the argument of those anthropologists in favour of abandoning rural studies for urban ones “merely privileges the ‘predominant, urban Greece’ whose rural roots it represses, while condemning the peasant remnant to an even more terminal obscurity than that to which the urban centers have already subjected it” (Herzfeld 1987: 187). Yet, in light of his vehement critique of the use of ‘exoticizing devices’ in the Mediterranean (ibid: 11), the persistent emphasis on rural communities and the continued exclusion of urban life from the ethnographic monographs of Greece risks perpetuating the very image which Herzfeld rightly criticises – that of the Greeks as exotic others.

Amongst the few such studies that examine how gender and sexuality are partly expressed and manifested in the Greek urban milieu is Renée Hirschon’s (1989) *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus*, a study of a refugee community in Kokkinia, a working-class area in Piraeus in the early 1970s and Faubion’s *Modern Greek Lessons: A Primer in Historical Constructivism* (1993), an ethnographic study that primarily examines modernity and socio-cultural elites in Athens of the late 1980s. Although gender is not the principal focus of either of these anthropological studies

it does receive considerable treatment. Hirschon's ethnography is not about gender per se, although gender features heavily in it. Her book documents the ways through which the refugee population that infiltrated Greece after the defeat of the Greek army in 1922, managed to retain its identity and its sense of knowing how to live in the new situation. As is also the case with one of her earlier articles (Hirschon 1978), Hirschon's emphasis remains upon the construction of female heterosexual identity amongst refugee women with no reference to either gay or lesbian relations.

Faubion, on the other hand, examines a small group of Athenian "reformers", who constitute part of Athens' socio-cultural elite. *Modern Greek Lessons* shifts the attention from the rather extensively studied world of the peasantry to the complexities of 'Greekness' and 'Greek identity' as it lived, experienced and understood by certain key elite intellectual figures of Greece – such as the author Margarita Karapanou and Grigoris Vallianatos, a gay activist, business entrepreneur and television personality – most of whom have socialist, progressive ideas and affiliations. However, Faubion's informants constitute a rather select group of Greek society, mostly representing the concerns and aspirations of an older generation. Faubion's monograph, as in fact most anthropological studies of Greece, has significantly ignored the views and experiences of younger people in the country. As Loizos has explained in this context, "the mature married householders have made the ethnographic running, to the neglect of the other two age categories" namely the young unmarried and the elderly (1994: 68). With the exception of works such as Jane Cowan's *Dance and the Body Politic in Northern Greece* (1990), such limited presence of the voices of the young, especially single, people from the anthropological studies of Greece is striking. Nevertheless, although Cowan examines the construction of both male and female identities in the context of dance as well as in other recreational contexts such as dinner parties or cafeterias, her focus is upon the production of hegemonic forms of gender identity.

As a result, a fundamental problem with most of these ethnographies that touch upon the subject of gender in Greece is their tendency to generalise and write of ‘Greek society’ or ‘Greek men’, for example, as if such labels refer to homogeneous groups and are, almost by definition, meaningful categories of analysis. However, as Loizos very aptly contends with regards to masculinity in Greece “not only there is no single sense of masculinity in that abstraction called ‘Greek culture’, but...from one context, institution, domain or discourse to another we can easily find contrasting ways of being masculine.” In this respect, it is important to talk about masculinities in the plural (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Brod and Kaufman 1994) and the same goes for the analysis of contemporary Greek homosexualities. As I will demonstrate, there can exist different ways that men in Greece experience their homosexuality from that of the gay activist to that of men who identify as gay but have never had gay sex.

My choice to focus on a study of Greek gay men is an attempt to correct both this and a further imbalance in the ethnography of Greece. As is the case with Cowan, the latter is concerned predominantly with the examination of hegemonic notions of gender and sexual identity (Herzfeld 1985), i.e. heterosexuality, to the extent that, if not altogether neglected, homosexuality is reduced only to footnote references. Interestingly enough, such silencing of the issue is also reflected in the absence of homosexuality in official statistics (Kaftantzoglou and Yannakopoulos 2004). With a few exceptions (Loizos 1994; Faubion 1993; Yannakopoulos 1995; Papadopoulos 2002), in most cases, homosexuals are absent from the ethnographies of Greece and can indeed be said to constitute a ‘muted’ group (Ardener 1974). Although there has been a wealth of research and a plethora of treatises on the subject of the sexual life of ancient Greeks, particularly those of the Classical era (Flacelière 1962; Dover 1978; Foucault 1990; Halperin 1990; Winkler 1990), the majority of scholars engaged in the study of Greek culture have paid little if any attention to homosexuality in modern Greece. As such, the modern expressions and experiences of homosexualities have been silenced from most of the literature on contemporary Greece.

One such example of how the study of contemporary homosexuality in Greece is cross-referenced with the paradigm of same-sex practices in antiquity, is Alex Papadopoulos' (2002: 911) argument that, "male same-sex desire in the Greek world never suffered a definitive rupture in expression or ontology from ancient forms." Based on and influenced by Herzfeld's work and in particular his analysis of the dual 'nature' of Greek culture (Herzfeld 1982), which Herzfeld describes as 'Romeic' and 'Hellenic', Papadopoulos argues that in the post-independent Greek nation a similar dualist construction exists in relation to homosexuality. For Papadopoulos, in the construction of the nineteenth-century Greek nation, a process of purification, or 'de-sexing', of the ancient Greek past was deemed as essential for creating a modern nation along the principles of Christian Orthodoxy and the hetero-normative, patriarchal structures also characteristic of other European nations of that era (Papadopoulos 2002). In Papadopoulos' view, therefore, despite the State's attempt to 'divorce' ancient same-sex practices from modern homosexuality, the two are actually interlinked.

Even though Papadopoulos' describes the 'de-sexing' of the ancient Greeks, he does not discuss the possible differences between homosexual relations among the ancients and the modern expressions and experiences of contemporary homosexualities. In general, therefore, accounts of homosexuality in antiquity elucidate the sexual mores and attitudes of Greeks, primarily of the classical period, but they contribute little to our understanding of contemporary Greek homosexualities, which maybe closer to Middle Eastern and oriental rather than classical models. For example, historical studies on gender have uncovered evidence concerning sexual minorities in Byzantine society (Tougher 1999) but from then onwards, there are hardly any scholarly treatises on the subject until the 1980s. The scarcity of sources does not indicate the absence of same sex practices in contemporary Greece but rather, their secretive and underground nature.

Moreover, the few sources which do refer to homosexuality in modern Greece (Loizos 1994; Papataxiarchis 1991) may also be criticised for uncritically reproducing a hegemonic

version of homosexuality based on the polarity between the *poustis* (passive) and *kolobaras* (active man in homosexual anal intercourse), with very little regard as to how the participants themselves perceive and relate to this folk model of homosexuality. As such, the existing literature fails to address how gay men in Greece have possibly transformed and challenged these traditional labels.

Within the folk model of sexual life in Greece, the cultural emphasis is on the relationship between sexual practices and sexual roles – in particular on a distinction between masculine *eneryeia* (activity) and feminine *pathitikotita* (passivity) as central to the organization of sexual reality. As Faubion argues:

the traditional calculus of sexual being is perhaps not entirely incognizant of the objects of intercourse. It grants priority not, however, to the object of sexual, or that matter social intercourse, but rather to the intercourse's mood...The traditional categories of sexual being in Greece are performative categories, not categories of desire or cathexis (1993: 229, 220).

What Faubion implies is that as long as the man is the *gamias* (i.e penetrator), or at least is perceived as such, having homosexual intercourse will not be threatening to his self-image, or to the image others have of him. To be *eneryitikos* (active) in anal sex with another man is subsumed under the more general category of being active, which should characterize male (sexual) behaviour.

In fact, in Greece the principle of *eneryeia* (activity) is considered to be essentially male and ideally it should extend beyond the domain of sex to include all spheres of transaction, both public and private, between and within genders (see Herzfeld 1985). Being penetrated, on the other hand, is seen as demasculinising, robbing men of their masculinity. Thus, by allowing himself to be penetrated the *poustis* relinquishes his masculinity and regresses to the status of the feminine. In contrast, the *kolobaras*, who penetrates but does not get penetrated by other men, displays an appropriate masculine sexual performative behaviour

and retains his masculinity. He is still the *andras* (man), by his being the *gamias* (the penetrator).

In addition, men who have fulfilled societal expectations by getting married and having children may engage in discreet sexual dalliances with other men, provided that the former are the penetrators in these encounters. According to Faubion:

The “active homosexual,” so long as he is a competent husband and householder, so long as he is manly and keeps his dalliances private, may be a sinner. But Greek men are not expected to be overly pious, and the “actively homosexual” but otherwise “proper” man can accordingly hardly be deemed subversive at all...The “active homosexual,” the man who sexually “takes” from another man, is...still unambiguously “a man”...He transgresses only the religious prohibition and does not place into doubt his masculine role...But not even it generates the distinction between what the modern “Occident” calls “heterosexual” and the “homosexual” (1993: 222. See also Loizos 1994: 72).

As I indicate in Chapter One (where I examine the Greek family’s reactions to homosexuality), following their ‘coming out’ some of my informants were encouraged by their parents to get married and to have children and then, if their same-sex sexual attraction persisted, to engage in discreet extramarital affairs with other men. In this respect Greek parents’ attitude to homosexuality mirrors that of British Muslim parents’ who hold a similar ‘faith’ in the ‘curing’ effects of heterosexual marriage on homosexuality (see Yip 2004).

The work of the sociologist R. W. Connell on masculinities and gender can help us to analyse these distinctions. In his extensive studies of gender, Connell (1995; 2001; 2005) has drawn attention to the historically and culturally contingent nature of masculinities and to the hierarchical relations that exist between and within genders. His concept of hegemonic masculinity in particular has become influential in discussions of masculinities,

although it has attracted some criticism (see Demetriou 2001). Hegemonic masculinity is “the most honoured and desired” (Connell 2001: 10) form of masculinity and is “emphatically heterosexual” (Connell 2001: 30), whereas in contrast, “homosexual masculinities are subordinated” (Connell 2001: 30). Anthropologists such as Gilbert Herdt (1981) have also examined the relationship of homosexuality to masculinity and have shown that in some societies, such as the Sambia in Papua New Guinea, same sex acts are part of rites initiating boys into manhood. In Mediterranean and Latin American societies, homosexuality is only seen as incompatible with masculinity or as compromising one’s masculine persona in the case of the man adopting the so-called passive role in anal intercourse (see, among others, Peristiany 1965; Lancaster 1992; Faubion 1993; Murray 1995; Phellas 2002).

Connell’s hierarchical schema of masculinities is useful in so far as it draws attention to the multiplicity of masculine expressions of gender identity and to the power relations that exist between and within genders. However, it is problematic in that it does not take into account the fact that a hegemonic way of experiencing one’s masculinity exists even within the so-called subordinated masculinities. As Gough (1989) and others (Levine 1992; Harris 1997) have indicated, since the mid-1970s gay men have begun to reject camp and effeminate manners in favour of a more masculine style of behaviour and appearance. Donaldson (1993: 648-9) argues that “the “flight from masculinity” evident in male homosexuality, noted thirty years ago by Helen Hacker, may be true no longer, as forms of homosexual behaviour seem to require an exaggeration of some aspects of hegemonic masculinity, notably the cult of toughness and physical aggression” and that “it is not “gayness” that is attractive to homosexual men, but “maleness.” A man is lusted after not because he is homosexual but because he’s a man. How counter-hegemonic can this be?” (Donaldson 1993: 649).

Against this background, I will contend in this thesis that homosexuality in Greece cannot be perceived in isolation but is also influenced by the circulation of discourses of gender and sexuality (Johnson 1997: 13-14). From the mid-1970s, there has been a shift of emphasis from the question of gender to what would be more accurately described as sexuality. This

shift in emphasis has offered Greek homosexuals a radically different frame of reference for organising and understanding their sexual universe, and for constituting their own sexual realities. Among my gay interviewees, for example, masculine men (e.g. gay men who could pass as straight, or, even better, heterosexual men) were considered more sexually desirable as potential (sexual) partners whereas gay men who were effeminate had significantly less sexual currency. Although the political dimension of camp or effeminate behaviour as a strategy of difference (Meyer 1994), was acknowledged by some of my gay interlocutors in relation to the behaviour of effeminate gay men, this did not increase the latter's sexual desirability as the 'cult of masculinity' was embraced by most of the men I studied.

The distinction between *poustis* and *kolobaras*, or the *macho andras* (the macho man), can, more often than not, be attributed to the traditional and popular relation, in the literature, between *timi* and *dropi* – the Greek terms for honour and shame respectively. The majority of my gay informants did not see their homosexuality as compromising their masculinity or as being incompatible with their male gender identity, and most of them rejected the traditional calculus of homosexuality based on the taxonomy between the *eneryitikos* (active) and the *pathitikos* (passive) as being too rigid and too mechanistic. They acknowledged that in most cases what Faubion labels as the sexual "intercourse's mood" (Faubion 1993: 229) changes through time and also depends on each partner's particular mood and preference. The men I studied espoused the so-called sexual object choice perspective, whereby the gender of the person you are sexually attracted to determines one's sexuality rather than the relationship between sexual practices and gender roles. In the former both men are homosexual whereas, as I have already indicated, in the latter only the so-called passive partner is labelled and stigmatised as a failed man. Greek gay men operate within these two sexually distinct universes, each with a different qualitative interpretative framework and labelling apparatus.

The current literature on the ‘honour and shame’ system restricts the application of ‘shame’ only to the perceived ‘passive’ man in sexual intercourse, the *poustis* in the case of Greece. The stigmatisation of the individual may be more pronounced in the case of the *poustis*, but this should not detract from the fact that both the *poustis* as well as (though perhaps to a lesser extent) the *kolobaras* deviate from normative heterosexuality. Although the *kolobaras* is still perceived by many Greeks as conforming to the essential masculine models and codes, and even acquires a ‘hyper-masculine’ dimension and persona, his claim to manhood and heterosexuality was largely questioned by most of my ethnographic informants. This distinction was seen as a relic of the past and as a way to divert attention from the fact that the *kolobaras* was having sex with another man. The pretext of the position gives him an alibi, a cover and a justification in effect for his homosexuality or sexual attraction towards men. As I will show in the following chapters, the family construes homosexuality as a potential source of shame, regardless of the role one assumes in sexual intercourse.

One of the first aims of the newly founded homosexual movement in Greece, in the mid-1970s, was the *apoenohopoiese tis sexualikotitas* – the getting rid of the guilt and by implication, the shame surrounding sexuality and homosexuality in particular. In chapter one, where I discuss gay men’s relationship to their families, it will become evident that many gay men feel guilty about the emotional distress their refusal to marry and have children causes to their families. Some of these men’s narratives deemphasise the potentially oppressive character of kinship relations and the impact they have on their ‘coming out’. Instead, the family is seen as the victim of, and in the most dramatic instances, even the ‘martyr’ suffering because of the children’s sexual conduct. Amongst the most recent works specifically on non-hegemonic forms of sexual expression in modern Greece, Kostas Yannakopoulos (1995, 2001) examines the different contours of sex between men, and Elizabeth Kirtsoglou (2004) discusses how the creation of friendship networks among women who have sex with other women attempt to challenge the family’s restriction of sexual expression.

With his fieldwork in a working-class suburb of Piraeus and in the centre of Athens between November 1990 and December 1992 and through the use of open-ended interviews with fifty people, most of them men, between the age of sixteen to fifty, Yannakopoulos (1995) explores the relationship between gender and sexuality, and in particular the ways in which sexual practices are implicated in the construction of masculinity in contemporary Greece. Yannakopoulos examines how the concept of *kavla* (roughly translated as horniness) is sometimes used as a mechanism or pretext to legitimise sexual encounters with other men.

Having sex purely because one is *kavlomenos* (that is, horny) disengages the sexual act from emotion – the sexual act’s intention is purely to purge the body from *flokia* (the excess of sperm in the body). In operating within the traditional categories of *andras* (man) and *poustis* (passive homosexual), these men do not perceive themselves as transgressing societal norms of acceptable male gender behaviour with reference to their sexual encounters with other men. According to Yannakopoulos this is partly because Greek society incorporates homosexual relations within the context of ‘natural’ sexuality in the case of the *andras* or *kolobaras*, the active man in anal intercourse with men (Yannakopoulos 1995; 2001). Yet, in contrast to my present study of male homosexualities in contemporary Greece, which examines the perspectives of men who identify themselves as gay, for the most part, Yannakopoulos’ work records the views of men who have sex with men without however labelling themselves as either bisexual or homosexual.

In a similar fashion, Kirtsoglou’s *For the Love of Women* (2004), based on ethnographic fieldwork in a Greek provincial town conducted between 1996 and 1998, is a study of a group of women or *parea*, who socialise, flirt and have sex with one another but do not identify themselves as gay or lesbian. Kirtsoglou (2004: 5) defines *parea* as “a group of people (sometimes specifically male) who come together voluntarily (...), usually in order to enjoy themselves through drinking, eating or dancing, but also in other contexts. A *parea* can be stable through time and exist beyond the spatio-temporal bonds of commensality or

not, while in most cases it is (or it pretends to be) an egalitarian schema. The women's narratives and experiences question the notion that 'sexual practices are [...] constitutive of identity' (Kirtsoglou 2004: 1), and both through their performative practices such as dance and alcohol consumption and their discursive strategies, these women challenge the hegemonic construction of gender and sexual identity in Greece in the context of the *parea*. Nevertheless, the women's ultimate aim is to successfully 'pass' as heterosexual, both among the other clients of Harama, the club they use for their recreation, and among the members of the wider community. As such, theirs is 'a politics of concealment' (Kirtsoglou 2004: 7), of retreatism perhaps, one that constitutes their challenge as more individual in character, lacking, therefore, the possible political dimensions or content of the public identification of sexuality.

Although Kirtsoglou's study covers unexplored ground in the context of modern Greece, especially in relation to the frequently silenced voices of women who have sex with, and who love women, offering us this way great insight into the lives of these women, her choice to overemphasize their everyday interactions with each other as well as their own refusal to identify themselves as homosexual prevents us from realizing how their lives are connected to others outside the *parea* and the *parea's* closer social environment.

Despite their significant contribution to the elucidation of sexualities in contemporary Greece, both Yannacopoulos and Kirtsoglou largely ignore the wider social context which shapes the lives of the individuals about whom they write about. As such, they both fail to explain how people's lives both possibly affect, and are affected by greater social, historical and political circumstances. As Adam, Duyvendak and Krouwel have argued, "an approach that ignores social structure cannot account for the ways in which discourses of homosexuality evolve, shift, and reconstitute each other in history" (Adam, Duyvendak and Krouwel 1999: 5). Regardless of whether the analysis of homosexuality has an individual or a more collective emphasis, it is imperative that we do not disconnect the one from the other. However informative their analyses of gender and sexuality may be, Yannacopoulos

and Kirtsoglou offer little if any such in-depth historical insight that would help us understand the local, national and wider social context that may have shaped the emergence and contours of homosexual activism and the expression of homosexual relationships as legitimate in Greece.

This thesis deals exclusively with the experiences of male homosexualities in Greece. During my original fieldwork and in the subsequent research too, there were limited opportunities to observe the interaction of gays and lesbians since the two ‘scenes’ were rather distinct. Very few lesbians frequented the gay clubs of Athens, preferring rather to entertain themselves in exclusive lesbian spaces. Additionally, my male gay informants were not particularly keen on inviting lesbians in their recreational pursuits. This was, as they often told me, because they believed that lesbians would be critical of them, that, just because they are both parts of a sexual minority, it does not necessarily mean that they are the same. Besides or maybe even because of the predominance of such beliefs, one of the characteristics of the gay scene in Athens in the mid-1990s when I conducted my main fieldwork was the lack of integration between gay men and lesbian women, a fact reflected in the obvious physical separation of their recreational spaces and as I will suggest in chapter four in the LGBT movement itself.

In fact, during my research, only on three occasions did lesbians join in the gay men’s nightlife outings. I did not seek out transgender perspectives either, nor did any of the people I spoke to identify themselves as such. The decision not to pursue such perspectives was solely in the interest of keeping this work focused upon the gay men’s points of view and experiences, but also because very few transsexuals and transvestites went to the recreational spaces I frequented during my research. Hence, the experiences and views of my interlocutors concerning other expressions of homosexuality, such as transvestism and lesbianism, also informed my research as well as many of my conclusions.

Setting the Scene: Fieldwork in Athens

Vibrant, full of energy, Thission [Fig. 2] is a residential area in central Athens which is a popular recreational space, and at the time of my original fieldwork in 1996 the main centre of gay life in Athens. The majority of the bars, cafes and clubs are located in two streets, which run parallel to one another. The busiest of the two and overlooking the Acropolis is Irakleidon Street. Because of its proximity to the Acropolis and the restored nineteenth-century mansions located there, Thission has a distinct atmosphere and its environment is significantly different from the anarchic, jungle-like urban planning of much of the rest of Athens. Thission was also the place where most of my interviewees went for their recreational outings in the city. The area appealed to them because of its cosy and intimate character.



Figure 2: Irakleidon Street, my main fieldwork site in Thission.

In recent years Thission has become very popular with a predominantly young, trendy gay crowd, who come to the place regularly for their everyday socialising. Although the majority of the cafes and bars there attract a predominantly heterosexual clientele, most of them have a reputation of being gay-friendly. Apart from these gay-friendly heterosexual spaces, there are also some exclusively gay ones. For example, at the time of my original fieldwork in mid-1990s a few minutes walk from Irakleidon Street one could find *Lizzard*, a popular weekend gay nightclub, and *Kirke* and *Tram*, two predominantly gay-orientated cafes. Out of these three spaces, only *Kirke* still remains open. In addition, the offices of EOK, the Greek Homosexual Community, were moved to Thission in 1996 after a fire destroyed the group's previous premises in Patisision Street. The bridge near Thission train station, which overlooks the railway lines, is a frequent meeting place as well as a popular cruising spot for gays, as are the toilets in the train station (or so I was told). Yet, even though my fieldwork was conducted predominantly in Thission, it was not limited to this place; I often followed the people I studied on their occasional recreational adventures and shopping expeditions around the city as well as attending a number of social occasions, ranging from birthday to Halloween parties, organised by them in different parts of the city.

My fieldwork was mostly conducted in *Tram* [Fig. 3], *Kirke* [Fig. 4] and *Lizzard*. *Kirke* is a popular café housed on the ground floor of a neo-classical building boasting superb views of the Acropolis. Even though the place is not exclusively gay, gay men and lesbian women constitute the most significant part of its clientele, especially during the evenings. Owned and run by a lesbian couple, this café is one of the few gay spaces in Athens where one can see lesbians and gay men socialising in the same space. *Kirke* replicated the style of a *kafeneion*, a traditional male-only recreational space, in its decoration, albeit in a more upmarket and sophisticated way. The decor of a *kafeneion* is usually quite plain and informal: white walls with a few mostly wooden tables and chairs provide its essential, minimal decoration (Photiades 1965). *Kirke* fashioned a similar minimalist décor but the simple wooden tabletops of the *kafeneion* had been replaced by marble ones and the café offers a more varied choice of food and drinks. The space is divided into two levels: a



Figure 3: *Tram Cafe*.



Figure 4: *Kirke Cafe*.

ground floor and a gallery. During the winter, all social interaction takes place indoors but in spring, summer and early autumn, the owners of *Kirke*, as well as those of the other neighbouring cafes in the area, put tables outside for their customers thus allowing the possibility of outdoor cruising.

Lizzard, one the most popular gay nightclubs in Athens in the mid-1990s, occupied the floor above *Kirke*. The club only opened on weekends; every Saturday it hosted a women's only night, whereas Sunday was mixed gay club night, when the small place of the club was filled to its full capacity with clubbers dancing the night away. Additional entertainment was provided every Sunday in the form of a male stripper, who would perform his routine on top of the main bar with the crowd cheering him on.

Situated at the far end of Irakleidon Street, a few minutes walk from *Kirke*, *Tram* was a café/bar/eaterie, owned by Nickos and Michalis, a gay couple. *Tram* was their first business venture and combined Nickos' shrewd business sense and Michalis' artistic and creative talents. Nickos dealt with the business side of the café, running the everyday finances, whilst Michalis, who was an interior decorator, had designed and decorated the space. The latter had designed not only the tables and chairs but also the decorations on the wall: a series of thirteen teapots projecting outwardly from the wall. I spent endless hours there and I consumed copious amounts of coffee and beer in these premises. During the eighteen months of my original fieldwork, I spent more time in *Tram* than in any of the other spaces as this was the *steki* (hangout space) of most of my interviewees. *Tram* opened in 1995 and although particular care and attention had been paid to its décor, the place attracted only a handful of customers every day.

Nickos and Michalis attributed the lack of customers to the café being located a bit further away from the main hub of Irakleidon Street, where the rest of the cafés and bar could be found. Although they had deliberately avoided advertising the space as being exclusively

gay, the majority of its regular clientele were gay, most of whom were their gay friends. Every evening at least twelve gay men, would occupy the central table of the café, drinking and chatting loudly amongst themselves. *Tram* also featured briefly in an article in the entertainment section of *Status*, a Greek male lifestyle magazine, and received a favourable review. Despite this publicity, however, the place could not cope with the competition from the surrounding and more centrally located cafes and bars, and finally closed down in 1998.

Apart from these three spaces in Thission, two other exclusively gay venues in the neighbouring area of Makriyanni, also next to the Acropolis, where a number of gay spaces can be found, provided frequent sites for my fieldwork. Until the centre of the gay scene in Athens moved to the formerly industrial and recently restored area of Gazi, *City* and *Lamda* were the two trendiest gay male night clubs outside Thission and where both popular among my interviewees. Although they both were mixed gay venues, in effect very few lesbian women ventured into them. Greek lesbians used the few exclusive women-only clubs such as *Odyseia* for their socialising. The noise levels in both *City* and *Lamda* precluded the same kind of intense discussions that took place in the more quite ambience of the café but gave me an excellent opportunity to observe ways in which gay men interacted with one another. The extensive views of gay people about the gay scene in Athens were recorded in detail in the more in-depth interviews toward the end of my fieldwork.

Methodology

A range of different sources were used for the writing of this thesis. Research in the archives of the National Library in Athens enabled me to collect information especially with regard to *Amfi*, the first LGBT publication in Greece. The book *Amfi kai Apeleftherosi* (Amfi and Liberation) published in 2005 by Loukas Theodorakopoulos, one of the founding members of the first Greek LGBT group, was particularly useful in providing me

with information about the initial stages of the Greek homosexual movement. Semi-structured interviews and casual conversations with a number of gay men who had participated or are currently still involved in LGBT politics also gave me a more personal insight into the various organisations and their internal mechanisms and operation (see below for more on the interview method used). Finally, since all the main Greek LGBT groups have easily accessible websites with information about their activities, the internet proved a most useful research tool and source of data. Internet sources were read critically, however, and compared with other material, rather than taken at face value. The extent to which the information provided in these websites is an accurate reflection of what actually happens needs constantly to be questioned as organisations sometimes tend to ‘talk themselves up’ in such sources. Websites represent the public face of organisations and the information contained on them must always be contrasted with and compared to data from other sources (particularly about the actual practices of the organisations in question).

Conducting fieldwork in an urban setting poses problems regarding access to one’s interviewees during regular working hours (Hannerz 1980). The unavailability of people to converse with during the day time resulted in finding potential interviewees mainly in the evenings. Moreover, access to the majority of my interviewees was mostly restricted to the spaces they used for the recreational activities. This was also a consequence of the fact that most of the people I studied lived with their family, which meant that most of their socialising occurred in recreational spaces outside their home environment (something which is itself also indicative of family members’ attitudes towards homosexuality). Regardless of the problem of restricted access to people’s homes, conducting my fieldwork in recreational spaces in fact suited my original aims and intentions.

I was interested in looking at alternative contexts, apart from the conjugal or family one, where gender and sexuality are constructed, and thus in moving away from the kinship orientated paradigm so pervasive in most of the ethnographic writings on Greece. It soon became apparent, however, that my desire to transcend this emphasis on kinship was more

of a fantasy than a reality. The topic of the family kept coming up in discussions and in all the interviews with my gay informants. For instance, kinship obligations were perceived by most of my interviewees as one of the primary reasons inhibiting the creation of a viable gay community in Athens and a gay village similar to those found abroad. However, in spite of the predominance and centrality of the family in my gay informants' lives, the focus on our discussions also extended to other, non-family orientated social spheres, and in particular those of the military and LGBT politics.

The choice of conducting my fieldwork principally in Thission, which attracts a predominantly younger crowd, also meant that, although I had the opportunity to socialise and talk with some people over the age of forty-five, I was also able to locate and interview younger people who were born at the same time as the Greek gay movement itself that is the primary focus of this thesis. Whereas Nickos and Michalis, the owners of *Tram*, introduced me to many of their older friends, helping me, therefore, to get a glimpse of gay life as it is experienced by the older generation of gay men in Greece, through discussions and interviews with both older and younger men, I was able to examine their different perceptions of, and reactions to gay activism (amongst other issues) and their varied experiences of homosexuality.

The majority of the men I spoke to were between twenty three and forty five years old and mostly came from a middle or lower-middle class background. Most of them had or were in the process of completing a university degree and a few also had a postgraduate qualification. A number of these men had studied abroad and or had travelled extensively outside Greece whereas others had lived in rural Greece for several years before moving to Athens either to study or to work in the city. For a number of these men their sexuality was a factor contributing to their decision to emigrate to the city (Weston 1998). My interviewees had diverse occupations; they ranged from civil servants, graphic designers and lawyers to journalists and students.

In addition to these men whom I met on a regular basis, I sporadically encountered other men in the various gay and other recreational spaces in and around Thission or in the different social events organised by individual members of the *parea*. Their views also form part of my raw data. At all times, these are the views of men who identify themselves as gay and who regularly frequent the gay scene. There are a number of other men, some of whom are married, who participate in the gay 'subculture', or who have anonymous sex with men in the open spaces of Athens for whom the views represented in this thesis may be of little relevance. The lives of many of these men are compartmentalised in such a way that the various parts are hermetically sealed from one another. The totally hidden nature of their same-sex experiences means that these experiences are not particularly useful to reconstruct socialisation in gay subcultures.

During most weeks, I would meet my interviewees on a daily basis. My identity as a researcher was disclosed to them from the very beginning. Sometimes, I met people on an individual basis but most often I would often meet them in the context of a larger group. The dynamics created among the participants within the group helped them reflect on their experiences and created a basis for support and further elaboration on issues that affected their lives. It was this dynamic interaction that revealed a series of themes constantly emerging from our conversations. In most cases, we would spend the whole evening discussing the day's events but occasionally we would go for a meal to a *taverna* or to a movie but normally return to *Tram* for one last drink before we all went home. In attending various events and in socialising in the gay spaces of Athens, I got to experience aspects of life as lived daily by gay Greeks. In all these sessions I was both a participant and an observer. I also had the opportunity to witness the acting out of these views in these various interactions with people in the different recreational spaces.

The notion of fieldwork as a "situated and negotiated process" (Lewin and Leap 1996: 2) and the "exploration of the links between [the researchers'] own autobiographies and their

ethnographic practices” (Reed-Danahay 2001: 407) have been investigated extensively by social scientists (see, among others, Whitehead and Conaway 1986; Okely and Callaway 1992; Bell et. al. 1993; Lewin and Leap 1996; Reed-Danahay 2001). Okely (1992: 3) in particular notes that “the autobiography of fieldwork is about lived interactions, participatory experience and embodied knowledge” and like Stoller (1989) she argues that fieldwork is a multi-sensorial experience which entails bodily engagement (Okely 1992; 1996; 2007). She writes that since “the experience of fieldwork is totalising and draws on the whole being”, it becomes impossible to disengage the self in the process of the subsequent reflection and analysis of the fieldwork experience (1992: 3). Moreover, she argues that the insertion of “the ethnographer’s self as positioned subject into the text” compels us “to confront the moral and political responsibility of our actions” and in addition “subverts the idea of the observer as impersonal machine” (1992: 24).

In this connection, it is interesting to note Reed-Danahay’s (2001: 416) argument that “for gay and lesbian anthropologists who do research on gay and lesbian issues, there are additional issues about this particular form of ‘insider’ research, or autoethnography”. My work can be considered a form of autoethnography on two counts: as that of a Greek studying his own culture, and of a gay man studying a subculture that he also belongs to. There are distinct advantages and disadvantages to the researcher being perceived by the participants as an ‘insider’, as sharing a common or similar identity with them. The main advantage concerns the establishment of trust and rapport as “it increases the participants’ confidence that the researcher would understand and interpret their lived experiences and perspectives accurately and responsibly” (Yip 2008: 6.2). However, “LaSala (2003) and Naples (1996) argue that being an insider may de-sensitise the researcher to the participant’s unique and nuanced perspective or perception as a result of the researcher’s over-reliance on their commonality” (Yip 2008: 6.3). In my case, my being a fluent Greek speaker, sharing the same language with my informants meant that there were few linguistic difficulties or problems of comprehension during key discussions but made the task of translating their narratives into English a challenging task (see page 45 on the issue of translation). My being gay and Greek also facilitated my rapport with my informants as

most of them felt that my having an ‘insider’s’ first hand perspective on the ‘Greek culture’s’ attitude to homosexuality would make me particularly sensitive to their needs and wishes. The assumption of a common cultural background, of ‘knowing’ as much as they did on the subject meant that in the beginning I had to constantly remind my interlocutors that they should always elaborate on issues rather than assuming that I knew how things were.

Of course, the belief in the existence of a cultural commonality between the native anthropologist and her/his informants and the automatic assumption of an ‘insider/outsider’ dichotomy between the researcher and hers/his research subject have been challenged by social anthropologists in recent years. Through her utilization of feminist standpoint and materialist feminist theories, Naples (1996: 84) for example argues against “the insider/outsider distinction” on the grounds that it “masks the power differentials and experiential differences between the researcher and the researched”. She points to the dynamic, shifting nature and fluidity of these categories throughout the research process and to “the interactive processes through which ‘insiderness’ and ‘outsiderness’ are constructed” (Naples 1996: 84). She also examines the methodological implications of this approach. The rejection of the assumption of a clear-cut dichotomy between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspectives in ethnographic research and the acknowledgment of the fluidity and permeability of “outsiderness/insiderness” imply that ethnographers are “never fully inside the ‘community’” and that the relationship to the community involves constant negotiations and renegotiations “in particular, everyday interactions which are themselves located in shifting relationships among community members” (Naples 1996: 84) .

Yip (2008) provides an interesting discussion of these points. He contends that “in order to appreciate the nuance of Naples’ argument we also need to consider another dimension of this dynamic - the researcher’s own perception of the participants and the research community, which is equally significant to the positioning of herself/himself in the field and the research process” (2008: 6.5). During his research amongst Gay and Bisexual

Muslims and Christians Yip (2008), who identifies himself as both gay and Christian, states that his positionality as an insider or an outsider was “contingent upon context” (Yip 2008: 6.5) and that although his “‘insider status’ greatly facilitated the research process, significant cultural differences structured [his] feelings as an ‘outsider’” (Yip 2008: 6.8) He contends that the “interchangeability of the insider/outsider status” made him sensitive to the fact that sexuality intersected with other factors such as class , gender, ethnicity, and religion in the lives of his research subjects and that “the contextual nature of the insider/outsider status could heighten the researcher’s sensitivity to produce more reflexive knowledge” (2008: 6.8).

In a similar fashion, in my interactions with my interlocutors my sense of being an insider or an outsider changed constantly. For example, when my interlocutors discussed the silence with which their families responded to their homosexuality I was able to relate to them on a personal level as an insider through my own experience of my family’s similar silent response and censoring of my sexuality. However, during discussions with my interlocutors about their attitudes towards the issues of sexual monogamy and fidelity, cruising and casual sex, my divergent perspective and differences of opinion with several of the men I have studied emerged to the fore. Another issue which clearly marked me as an outsider in relation to the majority of my interviewees was my belief that sexuality is political and that it is important to acknowledge the multiple ways in which gay people are discriminated against on a daily basis. On all these issues, my being Greek or Gay was secondary to my personal beliefs and opinions about these particular subjects. These differences of opinion occasionally influenced my relationship with certain members of the *parea* who sometimes accused me of being too conservative or too political. These differences of opinion, however, never created an irrecoverable rupture with the men but pointed to the fact that despite certain commonalities based on our nationality and sexuality, there were still many differences between myself and my informants which were the result of diverse cultural influences which reflected our differences in education, age, political beliefs and our general worldview. What I also became aware of was that, as Okely (1992: 24) rightly points out, “people in the field relate to the ethnographer as both

individual and cultural category” and that my inclusion and acceptance into this particular *parea* would have been much harder if my introduction had not been made through an already established member of this group.

One should not underestimate the role that serendipity plays in anthropological fieldwork (Okely 2003). Had I not met Yiannis by pure chance in *Kirke*, early on in my fieldwork, it would have taken me much longer to establish the same kind of intimacy and level of trust that I did with this particular group of men. My initial introduction to them through Yiannis, an already established member of the *parea*, facilitated the process of getting to know people and of getting them to trust me and tell me their personal details and stories. On several occasions some of these men mentioned that if I had not been introduced to them through Yiannis, it would have been inconceivable that they would have volunteered the same kind of information to me.

The composition of the group differed from time to time. New boyfriends were introduced to the *parea*, men who had been studying abroad rejoined the group on their return to Greece, occasional misunderstandings led to some men boycotting the *parea* for a few weeks or even months. Eventually, I came to know approximately forty men, all of whom identified themselves as gay. The majority of them were rather reticent and careful about whom they disclosed their sexuality to. Their ‘coming out’ was usually a partial one: that is, they were ‘out’ in certain places and to certain people, but these did not normally include their work and family environments. Inevitably, the disclosure of their homosexuality was seen as involving a great amount of risk, so they were always careful to assess a person and his or her potential reaction first before coming out to them.

After the first few months I spent in the company of the *parea*, I was expected to join the group whenever I visited *Tram* or *Kirke* and I was invited to other events such as parties or exhibitions, organised by some of the men, even if Yiannis could not make it. By the end of

my research my identity as a researcher had acquired a secondary status to that of a friend. A significant event that, in my view, contributed to the change of the *parea's* perception of me was the discussion of my personal life history during the course of one evening. The public telling of my autobiography, and in particular of my coming out story which was not dissimilar to their own, consolidated my presence in and belonging to the group and established a bond of trust and connectedness with the other members of the group that perhaps was lacking before. Coming out stories are part of the standard way in which gay people get acquainted (Weston 1991; Zimmerman 1984, 1990). They have also become cultural performances that help gay individuals to elaborate and understand notions of commitment, loyalty, and identity (Lewin and Leap 1996: 13). Furthermore, Plummer has also argued that sexual story-telling, the personal narratives of sexuality in the form of 'coming-out' stories are deeply personal, social and political actions (Plummer 1995; 1996; 2003). Through, dialogue and storytelling, Plummer asserts, we, as humans, promote affectionate solidarity, which arises out of common interests. For Plummer, gay 'coming out' narratives are personal political resources that "can facilitate self-fashioning and self-determination" (Heaphy 2008: 2.7) but also have a significant impact and influence on the creation of new definitions of citizenship which in turn are the result of the changing nature and practices of intimacy (Plummer 2003). Notwithstanding the political dimensions of sexual story-telling, for me the sharing of my 'coming out' story with the rest of the group firmly establish me as one of them and in this particular instance, in their eyes at least, I was clearly an 'insider'.

In most cases, during my socialising with my interlocutors, I tried to limit my contribution and interventions to the minimum. I would sit and listen intently to conversations and note down the details the following morning. In most of these sessions, I would characterise myself as a 'passive' listener. I was acutely aware of the fact that my interviewees felt uncomfortable when I attempted to make some notes during our interaction. I wanted people to discuss and emphasise the things that they themselves considered important rather than for me to set the agenda. I very rarely directed the structure or content of the conversations, although on some occasions I asked people to elaborate more or clarify

something they had mentioned. My instigating an elaboration of the issues I found to be significant was an action that did not change the dynamics between me and the people I was socializing with. On the contrary, prolonging our conversations provided them with a platform where they could express themselves and, at the same time, enriched my data either by providing me with new material or verifying the interviewee's dispositions on the issues already discussed (O'Reilly 2005).

Towards the end of my fieldwork I conducted semi-structured interviews with forty people with whom I had already established regular contact. A few additional interviews – twenty in total – were conducted during subsequent research visits in Greece in April 1999 and December 2004 respectively. These interviews, the majority of which were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed, ran anywhere from twenty minutes to two hours, with most averaging an hour. Despite the contentious nature of tape-recording (Brannen 1988) especially in relation to the study of gay men, who can be perceived as a vulnerable group, I decided to tape-record our interviews as a means of recording my interlocutors' statements in an accurate and efficient manner. Interviewees were given the option of having the tape recorder switched off during the actual interview but most of them, with the exception of ten men who felt uncomfortable with the idea of being recorded, gave their consent for me to record our interview sessions. I think this is a reflection of the sense of trust that had been established between me and my informants by the end of the fieldwork period but also the willingness and eagerness of these men to have their stories told. My aim in conducting interviews at the end of my fieldwork was also to establish the existence of any inconsistencies and discrepancies between the men's comments and opinions which were uttered during the informal group gatherings and those expressed in the more intimate one to one interview context. I wanted to find out whether or not peer pressure made these men express opinions during group sessions which they would not normally have espoused in private.

I did not interview people with a standard questionnaire, because I did not feel that a questionnaire was a very practical way to deal with the variety of issues I was interested in. I would usually arrive at the interviews, most of which were conducted in *Tram* or *Kirke*, with a number of questions, both specific and open-ended, that I wanted to pursue further. This format provided me with the flexibility to focus in advance on issues I wanted to examine, while simultaneously enabling me to explore additional issues and perspectives that arose in the course of the interview (Silverman 2003).

The issue of power dynamics within interviews has been addressed by feminist writers (see, among others, Oakley 1981; DuBois 1983). However, although some feminists, such as Oakley (1981) and DuBois (1983) believed that “women’s common experiences would loom large in interactions among each other and that, for example, reproductive roles would transcend other sources of difference” (Lewin and Leap 1996: 9), there is no universal agreement as to whether or not the sharing of a common autobiographical background would greatly facilitate the interview situation. As Cant and Taket (2008: 4.3) indicate, whereas “Oakley (1981) argued that, because there is a shared identification between women researchers and women interviewees the resulting rapport between them is likely to generate better data than would have been the case with a male interviewer, Wise (1987) argued that there were other dynamics, in addition to gender, at work in an interview situation and Silverman (1993) argued that all data are mediated by our reasoning as well as that of participants”. It was clear to me that in the interview process my informants were as much in control of the situation as I was, since I always gave enough flexibility to reveal or censor any information that they so wished. Although by the end of my fieldwork several of the men I interviewed mentioned that they did not have any problem with having their autobiographical data included in the thesis, all the personal details have been altered in order to protect their anonymity. These men have no control over the use and interpretation of the data, and they may therefore object to the finished product and the ways in which their views have been presented.

Yip (2008: 4.6) concurs with Sieber's argument (1993), that "being an ethical researcher also means being sensitive to the participants' cultural needs and concerns, which may be quite different from those of the researcher's". Throughout my research I was sensitive to my interlocutors' lives and experiences, as well as to the ethical dimensions involved in participatory research. I have refrained from including information in the thesis which my interviewees specifically asked to me omit. The extensive narratives in Chapters 2 and 3 were selected because these men, more so than others, had been comfortable with me using their stories in an extensive manner, but also because their life histories and experiences highlighted the major issues that emerged from the research concerning the men's experiences within the contexts of the family, the military and the LGBT movement.

The Thesis' Aims

This thesis explores Greek gay men's experiences within the family, the military, and the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) Movement. The focus on the social institutions of the family and the military as key arenas in which sexuality is displayed, constructed and experienced reflects the importance of these sites in the narratives of my informants. Moreover, with regards to the family, as I have already indicated on page fourteen, kinship studies have dominated the ethnographies of Greece and have identified the family as an important locus for the construction of a person's identity and personhood. A study of homosexuality therefore cannot overlook the family context and its impact on the building of a belief system which centres on marriage and the reproduction of heterosexuality. However, studies of kinship in Greece have largely ignored the ways in which gay children experience both their extended and their more immediate (nuclear) family environment. A key question that this thesis addresses is how my gay interlocutors negotiate their sexuality within the context of their natal family. What strategies do these men develop in order to remain part of their family of origin while at the same time being gay? The thesis also revisits the theoretical framework of honour and shame and assesses

its usefulness as an explanatory framework for understanding Greek families and Greek gay men's responses to homosexuality.

Furthermore, despite the importance of the military as a site for the reproduction of patriarchy and for the construction of hegemonic forms of masculinity, very few ethnographic studies have explored heterosexual or gay men's experiences in that institutional domain (see, for example, Bérubé 1991; Kay 2006). Given the compulsory nature of military conscription in Greece, and the military's active presence in the socio-political life of modern Greece, the ways in which, on the one hand, the military authorities have dealt with homosexuals in their ranks and, on the other, gay military conscripts themselves have experienced their sexuality within this milieu, which by its very nature can be construed as being conservative and antigay, need to be addressed. My aim is to shed light on these questions through analysing ethnographic vignettes which among other things illustrate the mechanisms that gay men develop in order to cope with their homosexuality in the military and their general perceptions of the military context.

The emphasis in the second part of the thesis shifts from a discussion of gay men's narratives to the study of the history of the Greek LGBT movement, a topic which has also received minimal attention by both ethnographers of Greece and by researchers examining the emergence of global gay activism. In a sense this story represents another experience or narrative of sexuality, albeit a collective rather than an individual one this time. My aim in studying the development of Greek LGBT activism was twofold. First, I was interested in exploring the local conditions that led to the emergence of homosexual politics in the country and the trajectory of the movement, its trials and tribulations, from the mid 1970s to the present. Secondly, I was interested in assessing my gay interlocutors' reactions to and experiences of Greek LGBT activism. Do the ideas and views of Greek gay activists coincide with those of my gay interlocutors or are there tensions and differences in approach between them? If the latter is the case, what is the basis of these tensions? Is participation in the LGBT activist cause the only way of being political about one's

sexuality or can non-participation in gay activism also constitute an alternative form of sexual politics?

Ultimately, the main aim of this thesis is to redress an imbalance in the ethnographic record of Greece which so far has primarily examined hegemonic (i.e. heterosexual) aspects of Greek gender and sexuality and has largely excluded alternative expressions of sexuality which contest and complement these more dominant ways of performing gender and sexuality. This thesis does this by giving voice to Greek gay men who have so far been silenced.

Overview of the thesis

Any study of homosexuality – and sexuality in general for that matter – in Greece cannot overlook the subject of the family, as the family remains one of the most significant social institutions in the country (Maratou-Alipranti 2004). Chapter one addresses the gender-based system of ‘honour and shame’ and its relation to homosexuality. Here, I will contend that the emphasis that the available literature on honour and shame places on heterosexuality in relation to the family and kinship, neglects the effect that this system has on the understanding of homosexuality in Greece. The concept of *dropi* (shame), in particular, is useful in understanding families’ responses to homosexuality but also in examining Greek gay men’s personal feelings towards their homosexuality. *Dropi* will be contrasted to the gay activists’ attempts to instigate the feeling and experience of gay pride. Remaining partly in the context of honour and shame, chapter two focuses on how compulsory military service, itself officially perceived as being related to the ‘building’ of male and national honour, has paradoxically enabled many Greek gay men to subvert the very notion of the military as one of the dominant social institutions for the reproduction of

patriarchal structures. For many of the men I interviewed, their military service was the defining moment of discovering and realising their sexuality. Chapter three engages with an examination of the historical and social circumstances that allowed for the emergence of the first Greek LGBT activist groups in the 1970s' and 1980s. Finally, in chapter four I will discuss the main developments in the Greek LGBT arena, including the rise of individual actors within that arena and the effect they had in the movement as a whole. In the end I will provide a critical assessment with regards to the reasons why the Greek LGBT movement has so far failed to attain many of its goals.

A note on translation

The use of Greek terms throughout the text is intended to highlight the cultural specificity of their content and meaning, avoiding the danger of assuming that the equivalent word in English carries exactly the same meanings and connotations. Müller (2007) has correctly drawn attention to the political nature and subjective dimension of the act of translation and has identified the issue of “adequately grasping the complexity of meaning in the source language and trying to transfer it to the target language” (p. 208) as a particular challenge for translators. Following Temple and Young (2004), he has suggested, as a means of overcoming this problem, “keeping source language expressions as markers of difference in the target language text” (Müller 2007: 210), a technique known in translation studies as *holus-bolus*. According to Müller (2007: 212) “*holus-bolus* translation keeps words in the source language as a visual marker of indeterminacy and helps denaturalize the target language in translation. It facilitates the problematization of the fixation of meaning and helps bring the political element of translation to the fore.” My use of Greek terms in what follows is consistent with this technique and also with the standard anthropological convention of italicising native terms.

Chapter 1

Gay Men's Experience of the Greek Family

1.1. Introduction

The family has often been seen as central in ethnographies of Greek society and culture (Friedl 1962; Campbell 1964; du Boulay 1972; Papataxiarchis and Paradellis 1994). In a similar way to, for example, the Spanish (Brandes 1981) and the Sicilians (Fazio 2004), the Greeks have generally been perceived as placing a very high value on family life and interpersonal relations among family members (Davis 1977: 167-234). As Loizos and Papataxiarchis have argued, in their editors' introduction to *Contested Identities*, a collection of essays analysing other possible sites, outside the family, implicated in the construction of gender identity:

Greece has been described as a society largely based on kinship. Investigators have singled out familism as the most important orientation in Greek life, thus justifying the priority that most ethnographers have given to kinship. Insofar as marriage leads to the reproduction of kinship, kinship has been regarded as a fundamental principle of relatedness and a powerful idiom of action. (1991: 3)

Yet, however important the family can be for an understanding of Greek society, the articles in Loizos and Papataxiarchis' collection critique this persistent focus upon the family 'home' as the principal, if not the only, site for the constituting of one's gender or other identity, and also aim at moving beyond this kinship-dominated analysis through the discussion of alternative spheres such as the convent (Iossifides 1991: 135-155) and the

cafeteria (Cowan 1991: 180-202). Nonetheless, as we will see later, the family remains the single most important emotional hub for many Greeks.

The importance of family relations and the consequent close involvement of Greek families in the lives and affairs of their individual members are not considered by Greek people as a temporary situation associated with youth, but rather as a life-long commitment that connects individuals, even after marriage, to a relatively large and supportive social network of caring and concerned human beings (Papataxiarchis and Paradellis 1992). Living with one's parents long after the age of eighteen, for example, is rather common in Greece both because of the high cost of living and because of the ways in which the financial advantage of staying 'at home' (e.g. allowing a person to spend more money on him- or herself) often outweighs many other restrictions imposed through this kind of arrangement.

For people who come from the provinces, sharing a flat with a friend after the completion of one's university studies is often seen as a transient option, and not an ideal or long-term one. It is expected that such cohabitation will not last long and that eventually each person will get married and will establish a conjugal home of his or her own. Keeping with this general pattern, very few of the men I spoke to lived with their partners. But even when cohabitation could have been possible, in most cases the families of these men would not have approved, especially since, by definition, such cohabitation would exclude the prospect of a heterosexual marriage. Nevertheless, men who had moved to Athens from rural Greece had more chance to cohabit with a partner. Since their families were far away and could not exert the same degree of 'surveillance' they would have possibly exercised had they lived closer to their children, these men had more freedom to live with their partners.

The family certainly remained a pervasive institution in the everyday lives of the Greek men I met in the course of my research. In response to introductory questions, in both group and individual discussions, about the difficulties encountered in their lives the topic of the family was introduced rather early and spontaneously by my gay interlocutors. During the interviews and conversations, I heard many stories of both family rejection and family acceptance and support. The former, however, were typically told compassionately, at times apologetically, emphasizing not the hurt of the rejected son but rather the pain caused by bringing *dropi* (shame), and even *reziliki* (embarrassment), to those they ‘love the most’.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the ways in which Greek families and gay men deal with the issue of homosexuality and, in the process, to revisit the theoretical framework of *timi* and *dropi*, the Greek variant on ‘honour and shame’. The latter has been one of the dominant theoretical perspectives in the study of the Mediterranean, particularly in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s (Davis 1977, Gilmore 1987, Fazio 2004). The idea that ‘honour and shame’ is the foundation for the presumed unity of the Mediterranean basin as a distinct cultural area (see among others Peristiany 1975; Blok 1981; Gilmore 1982) has been criticised by subsequent studies (Gilmore 1987) and so has the notion that this evaluative moral framework is the most dominant within the Greek ‘moral universe’. In a contribution to David Gilmore’s edited collection *Honour and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (1987), for instance, Mariko Asano-Tamanoi contests the view “that the Mediterranean region has a monopoly on honour and shame” (Asano-Tamanoi 1987: 104) and aims at breaking this approach “by analytically linking rural Japan and Catalonia through the shared notion of shame” (Asano-Tamanoi 1987: 105). Similarly, Herzfeld (Herzfeld 1980; Herzfeld 1987) argues that the concepts of *filotimo*, the ‘love of *timi*, honour, (Herzfeld 1980: 343) and *filoxenia*, hospitality, are equally important for our understanding of Greek culture.

Despite the validity of the above criticisms, I will not dwell in detail on these here, but rather, I will study the relevance of 'honour and shame' in analysing homosexuality in contemporary Greece, by examining the relationship between the two phenomena, a relationship that has hitherto been largely absent from ethnographic accounts. In addition, I will provide a critique of the 'honour and shame' framework and argue that its emphasis on female sexuality as a potential 'pollutant' of family honour overlooks the ways in which non-normative forms of male sexuality (i.e. homosexuality) can also result in a loss of honour or in the potential public 'shaming' of the family. Moreover, such social constructions of moral codes of behaviour are in sharp contrast to many male homosexuals' and especially gay activists' efforts to instigate a sense of *perifania* – the *pride* in one's sexuality, that is one of the foundational principles of gay movements around the world (Brickell 2000). In some cases, the feeling of internalised *dropi* (shame), both individual and collective, acts as a deterrent on Greek gay men, preventing them from 'coming out'.

My research has yielded four distinctive facts about Greek gay men's relationships to their families. First, there is an immense sense of respect, affiliation and loyalty to the biological family, even in the face of difficult experiences of rejection and disdain. Family loyalty is manifested mostly by how the men adopt the family's point of view in painful and potentially shameful situations. Second, very few men testify to having experienced "true" family support, that is, support which, for them, would include, among other things, an open and sincere welcome and acceptance of their homosexuality. Whenever it was offered, family support was mostly experienced either as tolerance and parental resignation or as the absence of overt mocking and abuse. Third, the majority of the men I interviewed stated that they usually had the impression that family members knew about their being gay, even though they never talked about it. In fact, for the overwhelming majority of these men, silence about their sexuality was seen as the best way to experience both family and societal support. For many, breaking the silence, even in families who already knew, was seen as the beginning of a serious family conflict that could lead to the disruption of family ties. Finally, as became clear from the men's narratives, regardless of age, the relationship

to the biological family is central to their lives and this relationship has a profound impact on their current sexual lives and homosexual relationships.

1.2. ‘Honour and Shame’ Revisited: Homosexuality and the Family

The shaming aspect of homosexuality is key to understanding Greek families' responses to it, so a discussion of the gender-based moral system of ‘honour and shame’, which has been described “as the quintessential moral code of the Mediterranean” (Mitchell 1996), and its relation to homosexuality, is necessary. Although the honour and shame system is not limited to the Mediterranean alone, as I have already indicated, most commentators argue that the Mediterranean variant is distinct because of its “relationship to sexuality and gender distinctions” (Gilmore 1987: 3). The honour and shame system defines prestige or reputation. Earlier accounts (Pitt-Rivers 1961; Campbell 1964; Peristiany 1965; Davis 1973) emphasised the gendered aspect of this moral system – men were associated with honour and women with shame and with sexual shame in particular – as well as the relational aspects of the two qualities. The honour of men depends upon, and is inextricably linked to the behaviour and sexual conduct of, the women who reside in their household (Campbell 1964). Men are considered responsible for the ‘good name’ of their women whose ‘purity’ “is associated with sexual purity and [men’s] own honor derives in large measure from the way they discharge their responsibility” (Pitt-Rivers 1977: 78).

In the highly agonistic arena of gender and sexuality in the Mediterranean, the failure of a man to control the sexuality of the female members of his household results in his “shaming”, in losing face in relation to other men. According to Gilmore (1987: 10), “the man who is ‘dominated’ sexually through his women, or who is bested in virile performance, is said to be shamed”. A man has to continually strive for the preservation of his honour ” (Brandes 1980; Blok 1981). Honour, in other words, is not an ascribed status

but an achieved one, which is in a constant danger of being undermined or lost. The honour and shame system is also seen as regulating ‘both inter- and intra-sex relations’ (Gilmore 1987: 5). Moreover, the loss of sexual honour can also lead to the negation of one’s masculinity:

When a man is shamed through an erotic defeat or an equivalent social submission he is symbolically emasculated: his physical integrity is dissolved and he succumbs to the ever-present danger of sexual reversal, of feminization. In a sense, he surrenders his own masculine identity and becomes a woman who is victimized and penetrated. (Gilmore 1987: 10)

But the ‘shaming’ of the man can also be a result of his personal sexual conduct and it may be completely unrelated to that of the female members of his household. This is the case, in particular, with the *poustis*, the man who assumes the passive role in anal intercourse. In this context, a man who surrenders himself sexually to another man and allows himself to be penetrated is ‘shamed’.

The fear of public shaming is still very much present in the lives of many gay men in Greece and can help us explore the influence of traditional concepts and their effects on gender and sexuality. We could initially emphasise the societal responses to the passive role in anal intercourse and focus on the effect that this perceived ‘act of submission’ has on the individual. Yet this would be a problematic approach because it would take for granted that the individual concerned actually experiences penetration as ‘shameful’. In fact, this assumed public shaming might not encapsulate the range of emotions felt by the parties involved. Moreover, we should remember that what is at stake here is not merely the honour of the individual. Honour is not simply related to the social standing of individual men but also to that of the social group in which they live (Pitt-Rivers 1965: 35). The ‘improper’ conduct of a member of a household is a source of shame for the whole

family and has repercussions for the collective honour of that household. Thus, the public shaming of the individual may have more effect or significance on the social standing of his family than on himself.

Furthermore, the case of the *poustis* indicates that the honour of the family is also contingent upon the sexual conduct of its male members, a dimension which has largely been ignored in the available literature on 'honour and shame'. The transgression of the acceptable and normative boundaries of masculinity and sexuality has the potential to embarrass the family, resulting presumably in the loss of honour of its members. The emphasis on the relation of male honour to female sexuality ignores the extent to which male sexual conduct plays a role as a potential 'pollutant' of family honour. In the extensive literature on honour and shame there is a preoccupation with the containment of female sexuality. However, similarly to female sexuality in general, when it comes to male homosexuality it is the men's sexuality that needs to be guarded, harnessed and contained in order for the family to avoid dishonour or 'loss of face'. Thus, the non-heteronormative sexual conduct of gay men could be perceived as equally polluting and shaming the family.

Another crucial problem with most of the literature on honour and shame is its main focus on how this moral system operates primarily in the context of rural communities (Campbell 1964; Peristiany 1965; Davis 1973; Davis 1977; Herzfeld 1980; Herzfeld 1987; Goddard 1994; Fazio 2004) where the potential damaging of one's reputation is likely to have a negative effect on both the individual's and the family's societal standing. The experience of honour and shame in rural communities, however, is not necessarily representative of how this system is manifested in either 'Greek society' in general or in 'urban Greek society' in particular. The honour/shame framework is still relevant, albeit to a lesser degree, as a measure of one's moral worth and reputation in Greek cities, but its experience is qualitatively different in the Greek urban centres. Even nowadays, one is likely to encounter a concern among many Greeks, whether those living in rural or urban centres, about retaining one's *kalo onoma* (good reputation) unblemished.

This preoccupation is eloquently demonstrated through the use of a popular saying *kalytera na sou vgei to mati para to onoma* – it's better to lose your eye, than your good reputation. The loss of *kalo onoma*, itself related to the maintenance of one's honour, is still relevant in the structuring of everyday interactions and behaviour of many Greeks. As will be demonstrated in the subsequent narratives of Aristotelis and Stergios, such differences in degree may also be related to one's social class. Hence, although the moral system of honour and shame can serve as a helpful analytical tool, it needs to be related to the different parameters and contours of individual experience in relation to a variety of social contexts. Most of the existing literature does not account for the actual lived experiences of honour and shame, thereby neglecting both agency and the possibility that, however useful a pair of concepts, if juxtaposed with the notion of pride, honour and shame can be contested as a not realized or materialized experience. What the individual, or the family for that matter, may often experience, is the fear of, and not actual shaming as such. What emerges from the narratives is not a concrete sum of cases of public shaming, but rather this constant potentiality of *dropi*.

1.3. Marriage, Reproduction and Homosexuality

In general, the 'shame' that stems from homosexuality is partly the result of the view of many Greek parents that they have produced reproductively sterile children who will not continue the family name, but also partly related to their sense of disappointment at having themselves failed as parents to produce 'normal' children. The reaction of Yiannis' mother, whose story follows, clearly illustrates this disappointment but also another dominant theme, that of some parents – especially mothers – blaming themselves for their son's homosexuality.

1.3.1. Yiannis' Story

Yiannis was an only child and at the time of my fieldwork he was living with his parents in a two-bedroom flat in a middle-class district of Athens. At the time of our first meeting in October 1996, Yiannis was thirty-two years old and was working as an English language teacher at a private school for foreign language tuition. He was rather dissatisfied with his current job and was looking for opportunities to enter the world of theatre. Yiannis told me that he knew he was 'different' from the age of five as he felt an attraction towards his male classmates, although at the time he was not clear as to the basis of this attraction. During his teenage years, he sexually experimented with an older cousin but did not have what he described as meaning 'full' gay sex, anal sex, until the age of nineteen when he met a man in one of the gay bars in Kolonaki. This happened at the time when Yiannis started visiting gay spaces with some gay friends whom he met in the private School of Acting and Directing that he attended after finishing his high school studies.

Yiannis had his first gay relationship shortly afterwards with Michalis, an older man whom he had met through a radio show. Michalis was working as a dj at a radio station and had dedicated a whole show to homosexuality. Yiannis called to express his opinion and had an off-air conversation with Michalis, which led to a meeting and subsequently to a three and a half year relationship. It was this relationship that made Yiannis decided to 'come out' to his mother. His father who at the time was working in the merchant navy, was absent for prolonged periods of time. Yiannis had a very close relationship with his mother whose intensity Yiannis also attributed to the fact of his father's absence. In his own words:

My mother and I have always been close, whereas with my father, well I mean it's not the same. My father hasn't been so much a part of my life

like my mother has. Ok, it wasn't his fault, he had to work but I think that even if he was around I wouldn't be as close to him as to my mother. A few months after meeting Michalis, I told my mother. I was spending too many nights away from home staying at Michalis' place, so I didn't want her to worry. Also, I wanted her to know of Michalis as at the time, he was such an important part of my life. My mother's immediate reaction was to burst into tears. For the first few days she was inconsolable. She kept blaming herself for me being gay and also my father for not being around to provide a masculine role-model for me. She told me that she had had suspicions that I might be gay since I was a teenager, as I was never interested in girls but she had tried to convince herself that she was wrong. My mother was particularly disappointed, and still is, because she won't have any grandchildren. She always thought that one day I would get married and have children. I guess the fact that I am an only child makes it much harder for her, as she knows that she will never see any grandchildren.

Even though Yiannis' mother now knows of him being gay, his being unmarried remains a cause of concern and emotional stress. On another occasion, Yiannis continued his story and told me:

Even nowadays, although she is used to me being gay, whenever she comes home after a wedding she usually cries and is generally upset because she knows that I will never marry. The same thing happens during family reunions, my mother finds it difficult to cope with her relatives talking about children and grandchildren and by the fact that she has to find excuses for my not being married or even having a girlfriend. I know it must be hard for her. After all, she only wants what most Greek parents want for their children, to see them married with children. I mean

I know that, but I am not going to get married for the sake of my mother or my father. In the final analysis, we are talking about my life. My father's reaction is one of silence, either he genuinely thinks that I like being single or he knows about me but he doesn't want to deal with the issue. My mother swears that she hasn't told my dad but I am not sure. What I know for sure is that no one else in either of my parents' families officially knows about my being gay. I mean they are not stupid, they must know. But I certainly won't tell them because it's none of their business and also because I know that my mother will find it extremely embarrassing and shameful. Not to mention, that her in-laws will probably blame my homosexuality on the way my mother has brought me up.

As with Yiannis' mother, for many Greeks, having children is associated not only with security, but equally with a sense of cultural continuity (Campbell 1964; du Boulay 1994). Children are also seen as a safety net for old age. Even though a Greek family's resources are largely harnessed for the well-being and upbringing of their children, this selfless sacrifice of Greek parents also underlines the assumption of reciprocity (Just 1991). In other words, many parents assume that their children and grandchildren will nurse them and look after them when they are old and infirm. One of the worst nightmares of many Greek parents is that they will not be looked after by their children in their old age and that they will be sent to a nursing home to die alone.

A common response that has emerged from the extensive discussions with my gay interlocutors in regards to their families' reaction to their 'coming out' is the family's attempt to persuade or encourage them to get married. Some of my interviewees confided in me that their parents had actually suggested to them to get married and to have children, arguing that, provided of course they were discrete, they could later do as they pleased. What is suggested here is that as long as a man provides for his family and fulfils all his

‘duties’ as a family-man and as the main breadwinner, and as long as the façade of the respectability of marriage and fatherhood is maintained, he can indulge in homosexual or for that matter other relations outside the marital context. The following narrative told by Petros illustrates the above points.

1.3.2. Petros’ Story

Petros, a gay man in his early-30s was a successful lawyer who had inherited his father’s legal practice when the latter passed away suddenly whilst Petros was completing his undergraduate studies. Petros was an only son and at the time of his father’s death was still living with his parents. However, when I met him, he was living in the affluent neighbourhood of Lycabettus in a separate flat but in the same building as his mother. During his military service, Petros had met Stelios, another soldier, with whom he had his first homosexual experience and relationship. Their relationship lasted for the whole duration of their military service, despite the fact that they had to be very secretive about their affair, but it ended amicably shortly afterwards as Stelios left for the United States for postgraduate studies.

After his military service, Petros completed his traineeship at his father’s firm and became its director. Petros explained/recounted that soon after the completion of his military service and his subsequent legal training, his mother but also other members of his extended family started to mention the issue of marriage:

Talk of marriage and settling down had already started after my father’s death really. Both my mother and relatives and friends of the family thought that my mother would recover from my father’s sudden death only when I married and especially when I had my first child. I was

always amazed and amused that these people took my being married and having children for granted. The thought that I might not want to get married or that even if I was to be married either myself or my wife would be sterile didn't cross their minds. Also, the fact that I didn't have a girlfriend at the time didn't seem to bother them in the slightest. Anyway, after I finished my military service and my legal training, my mother started mentioning marriage on a daily basis. She thought that now that my military service was out of the way and my career was going smoothly, it was time for me to start a family. When I told her that I was single, she told me that she could introduce me to a number of suitable brides. Apparently, in co-operation with concerned relatives my mother had already undertaken the task of finding me a wife.

When Petros decided to 'come out' to his mother at this point, she responded as follows:

My mother's advice was to get married and to have children as soon as possible. She also told me that lots of men have affairs with other women after their wife becomes pregnant and has children: 'The only difference with you is that you'll have sex with men'. She also argued that after my future wife had children, I would not have to worry about sexually satisfying my wife on a regular basis, as a woman's libido significantly decreases with childbirth since all her energies will be devoted to the upbringing of her children. She advised me, however, that my sexual dalliances with other men should never take place at my home as this was sacred and that my wife should never find out about them.

Petros' mother response to his 'coming out', however, is hardly an extreme or isolated view. I was told similar stories over and over again. Rather, it reflects an attitude among

many Greeks, especially those of an older generation, who believe that marriage and fatherhood will ‘cure’ homosexuality, which in most cases they view as a passing phase. This could be due to their conviction that the responsibility of raising kids would occupy all the resources of the men who would, therefore, not have any time to think or engage in this type of ‘indiscretion’. Even if marriage or fatherhood did not necessarily ‘cure’ homosexual tendencies, the belief goes that the former would at least protect homosexuals from societal prejudice and gossip. As is often the case, the stigma of married men, and particularly those with children, who have sex with other men is qualitatively different from that of single gay men with distinct and exclusive homosexual identities (Lancaster 1992; Gutmann 1996; Fernández-Alemany and Murray 2002).

The ‘unorthodox’ sexual behaviour of married men does not attract the same amount of social opprobrium as that of single, and in particular the more effeminate, gay men, because the latter are seen as totally rejecting normative societal rules and gender structures. Having children, especially male ones, is also often seen as a sign of a man's virility (Campbell 1964: 56). Thus, as far as dominant perceptions go, a married man with children has demonstrated his virility, but a childless gay man is a ‘failure’ in more than one respect.

1.3.3. Haris's Story

Haris was in his late 30s and had been living with his English partner, Edward, for the last fifteen years. Although his partner was always included in both family and work social functions, Haris was not officially ‘out’ to his family and in his work environment. Haris’ father had died when the former was twelve leaving behind his mother as a young widow with two young children. Haris’s mother took over the upbringing of the children, with the help of her own and her late husband’s extended families. Until the age of eighteen, when he went to Thessaloniki to study at the University, Haris lived in his family home in a small

rural town in Northern Greece with his mother, his younger sister and his paternal grandmother. As a teenager he had experimented sexually with other boys of his age but, he maintained, this 'never moved beyond the act of mutual masturbation'. During his student years, having sex with men in parks and cinemas became a frequent experience. Haris described that while he was an undergraduate in the early 1980s, certain parks and cinemas in the city were full of men 'cruising'.

Even though those charmed by the picturesque analyses of rural Greece might assume that such experiences were unknown to 'traditional' Greece, Haris actually reveals a rather widely known secret. These erotic possibilities of 'cruising' in Thessaloniki's parks and cinemas had already been a subject matter of the work of the Greek homosexual poet Dinos Christianopoulos, which I will discuss more extensively in chapter three. To stay with the subject of 'cruising' which Haris mentions in his narrative, Christianopoulos has remarked in a recent interview that the choice of *Nekri Piazza* (Naked Piazza), as the title for his 1990 poetry collection, refers to the fact that these 'cruising' spaces have been mostly deserted as a result of a number of factors which include the more intense policing of, and the introduction of more lights in these spaces (Chronas 2003: 11). The word *piazza* in Greece means the place where one normally hangs out, but the expression *kano piazza* is literally translated as 'cruising'. Prostitutes also *kanoun piazza*. Although some other gay men would avoid cruising both on the grounds of the dangers and lack of emotion of anonymous sex, Haris argues that in frequenting such spaces, he came to accept himself as gay as well as create a network of gay friends.

Shortly after the completion of his studies, he went for graduate studies to Britain where he met his current partner. Haris lives and works in Britain but visits his family in Greece regularly. His partner frequently accompanies him on his trips to Greece and normally stays with Haris' mother and stepfather whilst they too occasionally visit the couple in the UK. When Haris' mother visits him and Edward, the two men continue sleeping in the same bed and she sleeps in an adjacent room. When in Greece, on the other hand, the two

men sleep in separate bedrooms. Haris is certain that both his immediate but also his extended family know about his sexuality but the issue has never been discussed openly among them. In fact, Haris' mother still hopes that one day he will be married and have a family:

My mother still doesn't want to believe that her only son is a homosexual. I think she is in denial but she does know really. I have never lied to her as such but I guess I have been economical with the truth. I mean, my view is why state the obvious? I mean she comes and stays with us and she knows that Edward and I sleep in the same bed. My mother treats Edward as part of the family and always sends him a present for his birthday and for Christmas. Our presents to her are always from both of us. So you see, I am not lying to her, I just never officially 'came out' to her. The same goes with my sister. She has never asked me but she knows. Of course, it is none of her business. I don't really care about my stepfather's view. I think he is homophobic but he has never expressed his disapproval about my lifestyle. However, on one occasion when we were watching a programme on television about homosexuality, he was very negative calling homosexuals *arrostous* (sick) and *dieftharmenous* (perverted). My mother wants me to marry and occasionally she does raise the issue with me. One summer when Edward and I were visiting, my mother took us to my family home which was being rebuilt to show us around the place. She pointed out to us the master bedroom where my future wife and I would sleep in, but she had clearly thought of Edward as well, as she casually observed that the room next door was for Edward. I almost burst into laughter. I mean what was she implying? That once I fulfilled my marital duties in the bedroom, I can leave my wife's room and go and sleep with my lover? What she was suggesting was funny and ridiculous at the same time but also shows how desperate she is for me to get married.

Like many other men I spoke to, Haris' and his family's silence with regards to homosexuality serves as a defence mechanism that helps both parties to deal with this issue. From the parents' perspective, marriage is seen as compatible with one's expression of homosexual desire, as an effective strategy for integrating one's non-normative sexual practice within the context of one's family. At the same time, marriage in this context is assumed to secure the respect that the wider community will presumably express for a family man. Neither Petros nor Haris succumbed to their families' wishes to get married, but some of the men I interviewed actually followed their parents' advice and got married though their marriage had sometimes ended in divorce a few years later. Stathis' story falls in this category.

1.3.4. Stathis' Story

When I was introduced to him through Costas, another of my gay interlocutors, in the summer of 2001, Stathis was in his early thirties. The two of them had met at their place of work and although they were not living together, they had been a couple for over a year. Their courtship period lasted for about four months before they finally started dating, as establishing that they were both gay took them some time. This was partly because Stathis was previously married for two years and had got divorced only six months prior to meeting Costas. During his marriage, Stathis lived in a flat owned by his wife and worked in a company which belonged to his father-in-law. After his divorce, he left his old job and got a new one in the same firm where Costas worked. Whereas Costas was in his late 20s and was still living with his parents and older sister in a working-class neighbourhood in Piraeus, Stathis lived on his own in a rented flat near the centre of Athens. Costas' family did not know that he was gay and although Stathis had met Costas' family, he was formally introduced to them as a work colleague. Stathis had told his mother, the only person in his

immediate family who knew that he was gay, about his relationship with Costas, but she had refused to be introduced to him.

Stathis had not disclosed his homosexuality to his mother voluntarily. Stathis was twenty seven years old when this happened and he had just started working in Athens when he had to have his appendix removed. Whilst he was recovering from his operation, his mother went to stay with him and while she was cleaning his flat, she came across his diary and read through it without his permission. Stathis used the diary as a means of dealing with his sexual desire for men so the diary contained many intimate and personal stories about his sexual encounters. In the past, Stathis had also been in a long term relationship with Ioanna, a fellow student whom he had met during his final year at University and whom he had introduced to his family. To their disappointment, as they had grown quite close to Ioanna, Stathis ended the relationship after four years because of the increasing pressure to get married. As such, the revelation that Stathis also had sex with men came as a complete shock to his mother, putting her in this way in an awkward position with respect to the rest of the family. According to Stathis,

After reading my diary, a big drama ensued where my mother accused me of wanting to send her to an early grave, of disgracing my family and told me that I should stop being foolish and come to my senses. My mother couldn't comprehend how it was possible to be with a woman and sleep with men at the same time. I was totally unprepared for my mother's reaction. I mean I did know that if she were to find out she wouldn't be happy about it but the intensity of her grief overwhelmed me. At the same time, my mother was worried that my father might have a more violent response if he were to find out and therefore decided that she wasn't going to tell him. I know that this [not telling him] cost her a great deal emotionally as she had never kept any secrets from my father before. She also advised me not to tell my older brother as he too was

likely to react negatively. I had no intention to tell my brother anyway as I don't think he would have understood.

Similarly to other men of his age who had grown up on a tourist island, Stathis had his first sexual experience with a foreign female tourist. He was fifteen at the time and met this woman while working as a waiter at a local restaurant. As Sofka Zinovieff (1991) has indicated, at least until the 1980s, having sex with foreign women was a typical part of the sexual awakening and experience of many men who lived in rural tourist places of Greece where local girls may not have been as available for sexual contact due to the moral codes that required women to remain chaste before marriage. Having already experienced such a heterosexual relationship, Stathis had his first same-sex encounter shortly afterwards with an older cousin who used to visit the island for his summer holidays:

My cousin was a few years older than me. He had just finished high school and had come to spend the summer with us. In the summer, our house used to be full of relatives from Athens. My brother and I had to give up our room for some of these relatives and we had to sleep on the roof. My cousin also used to sleep with us. One night, when my brother was out with his friends, we were just fooling around and one thing led to another and we ended up sleeping together. I mean we didn't have full sex that night, but that was the first time I had kissed or had oral sex with another man. Although we didn't talk about it, my cousin and I had sex regularly that summer. My cousin is now married and has two kids but I think he still has sex with men, even though we have never discussed what took place that summer between us.

Stathis describes this early sexual experimentation with a man as being 'part of the journey of his sexual discovery' and with the exception of this one instance, until he left for Athens,

he only had sexual relations with women. It was during his first years in Athens that he first went to a gay bar where he met with men who identified as exclusively gay. Whereas before that Stathis' viewed himself as a bisexual, Stathis now believes that although he was always gay, he was not ready to accept his sexuality.

Stathis explained how his upbringing had socialised him into seeing marriage and fatherhood as an inevitable aspect of growing-up and as being the only way to lead to an individual's self-fulfilment:

Living in a small village in rural Greece until you are eighteen gives a different sense of family. From a very early age I was surrounded by family. Not just my parents and older brother but also my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins lived in the same village and so I came to see family as the most important part of my life. My grandparents always used to tell me how lucky they felt to have a large family and to have so many grandchildren. They used to say that 'my child's child is twice my child.' The thought that I would grow old and alone scared me.

Stathis expressed the difficulty of disengaging himself from the idea of creating a new family of his own. At the time, his view of the family was a conventional one and he had not yet imagined the possibility of a gay family or a 'family of choice' (Weston 1991; Weeks et al. 2001). Even though he did admit that the decision to marry was partly the result of his own sense of fear and ambivalence towards his sexual preferences, Stathis actually suggested that the most significant factor in his decision to get married was the fact that he did not want to let his family down, thereby causing them unnecessary hurt and grievance. In effect, Stathis saw marriage not merely as one option but rather as the only satisfactory course of action that would guarantee his family's happiness. As he explained,

I guess part of the reason I decided to get married has to do with my own sense of not being comfortable with my sexuality, of being afraid of being seen as a *poustis*, of being discriminated against because of my sexual preferences. However, if I felt that my family would not suffer because of me I could have dealt with all that. Living in a village where everybody knows each other's business, making myself known as a homosexual would inevitably place my family at the centre of malicious gossip. I also felt that I owed it to my family to at least try and make things work with my marriage. I felt that, with time, I would find sex with my wife pleasurable and believed that things could work out. My desire for men was secondary to the happiness of my family.

What is implied here is that the individual's happiness, Stathis' in this case, is once again secondary to the well-being of the family. Following his desire would have been identified as a selfish act that would have had a negative impact on the family's social standing and would have led to its 'losing face'. A chance encounter with Ioanna rekindled their affair and eventually led to their marriage. Once their honeymoon was over, Stathis realised that he had made a mistake, but it took him two more years before deciding to break up. Once more, this was primarily because he did not want to upset his family. Yet, he eventually realised that he could not cope emotionally with being in an unhappy relationship and he filed for a divorce. Nonetheless, Stathis feels that his marriage was a positive experience and argues that, more than anything else, it was his marriage that made him come to terms, once and for all, with who he 'truly was'.

In some cases, pressure to get married does not come only from one's family but also from the work environment. Some of the men I talked to had been explicitly told by their employers that their chances of promotion would increase if they were to marry. This is especially the case for people who work in the Greek civil service, which operates on a

points system, according to which married people and especially those with children, get incremental points and are therefore promoted much sooner to its upper echelons.

1.3.5. Thanassis' Story

Thanassis, a highly ambitious gay man in his early forties and a senior manager in the Greek civil service, had been bypassed for promotion a number of times because of his being single. Thanassis was not 'out' at work and his employers were actively encouraging him to get married.

I am working in the civil service and when I applied for a promotion my manager basically told me that my being single was a significant obstacle to my getting the promotion. I was effectively told "get married and the promotion will soon follow". All the senior managers in my work place were I fact married. I thought and still think that this is a fascist and rather outdated policy, because promotion does not depend upon one's *aksia* (merit) but rather upon their marital status. But this is Greece after all.

When I first met him, Thanassis was actually engaged to be married, despite the fact that he had had sex with men regularly and was also involved in an on-off relationship with Apostolos, a gay man in the *parea*. Both Apostolos and the other men in the *parea* were desperately and repeatedly trying to convince him to break off his engagement. This had led to tensions within the group and in one instance an argument between Thanassis and the rest of the *parea* became so heated that physical violence between Thanassis and Apostolos had to be averted by the swift intervention of the rest of the group.

This argument was the result of Thanassis' having invited his fiancée to the opening of a new *ouzeri* – the equivalent of a Greek tapas bar – where she was effectively the only heterosexual person in the group. During the course of the evening, Thanassis proceeded to dance on the table with some of the men, including Apostolos, hugging and kissing them in full view of his fiancée. Thanassis' behaviour infuriated the group and led to the argument on the following day. After this argument, Thanassis was effectively ostracised from the *parea* and his successful rehabilitation, which occurred three months after the altercation, was the result of his decision to break off his engagement and to apologise to the group.

1.4. Greek Gay men's attitudes to their biological family

The majority of my gay interlocutors were proud of the central value and role that their biological family played in their lives but they were also aware of the negative effects that it had on their living out their homosexuality. Some of them used their close family ties as a way of defining themselves and they often referred to what they described as the distance and coldness of relations among family members in Northern European and American families. In addition, they expressed puzzlement as to how children in these societies "leave their families behind when they turn eighteen" or how "even some of them talk bad about their parents."

Many of the men I interviewed experienced their family as a haven of security, as an "inside world" that served as a refuge from what they termed a sometimes 'hostile homophobic world' and a 'superficial and vacuous' gay scene. Nickos, a thirty-six year old gay man who was living with his family, talked about the emotional support he received from his family as he was growing up:

Being a gay male, of course, I was the target of a lot of jokes and things. So I guess what helped me kind of continue growing was just kind of finding refuge in my own family because being in contact with the outside world, it always kind of meant teasing or mocking, things like that.

However, on further inquiry it became apparent that stories about family support were mostly stories of tolerance and non-abuse rather than what these men would define as 'true acceptance'. As already indicated, in most cases tolerance was achieved only at the price of silence about their homosexuality. The interview with Nickos continued as follows,

Nowadays with the family, we don't talk about it, even though it's kind of understood. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that they all know about my life, but we don't talk about it. And it's basically with my family that I'm more reserved but with friends it's different. All my friends know and I can be very open about it.

When I asked him what made him so certain about his family knowing that he was gay he replied:

I was a very effeminate little boy. I think I stopped being effeminate as I kind of developed into adolescence but I never had a girlfriend like the rest of my peers but I was more in touch with my own desires and sexuality. And when I was sixteen years old, I kind of started my gay life and I was never ashamed or embarrassed to bring my gay friends home and sometimes they were pretty obvious. My family just kind of allowed it to happen and for me to be myself but it's never been openly discussed.

A handful of men were able to tell stories of family acceptance achieved mostly through a courageous breaking of their homosexual silence. In these cases, men confronted their family firmly about their sexuality. Such was the case with George, a twenty-nine year old man, who came out to his mother when he was in his late teens.

I always knew I was different, but it was during our *eksaimeri* [the six-day excursion of all Greek sixth-year secondary school students before graduation] that I had my first gay sexual experience. Upon my return to Athens, I told my mum that I was gay. [George's father had died when George was ten years old]. Of course she reacted in the normal way, acting hysterically and crying you know. She said: 'You will embarrass me to relatives and the world', that she would never leave the house again because of her *dropi*. I was unapologetic and let her process these emotions and did not allow all this drama to bother me. Now, my boyfriend stays with me in the flat when my mum is there and she sort of accepts it. I do not think she is completely comfortable, but she knows. I have introduced her to all my gay friends. I haven't discussed my sexuality with most of my relatives as I know that this would hurt my mother but if someone asks me directly I won't lie. Anyway, I don't have much to do with my aunts, uncles or cousins so that hasn't been much of an issue for me. My mother says that occasionally my aunts ask her if I have a girlfriend and that she deliberately remains vague saying things 'you know how children are, parents are the last to know about these things'.

Like Yiannis' mother, as discussed earlier, although not totally at ease with her son's sexuality George's mother does provide excuses for him to justify him being single, by not

disclosing the fact that he is gay. Maybe this is done in order to protect her son from possible gossip or disapproval but it could also suggest how she too is trying to evade the potential blame of turning George 'gay' or the embarrassment she could face if such information was leaked to the wider family.

In other cases, acceptance came when the family, against all kinds of cultural prejudice, rose to their children's challenge. These families valued strong participation and inclusion in their son's life more than what the rest of the world would say. With time, these families would become more and more involved with their children's lives, including their boyfriends and lovers, and in some instances their gay activism. This handful of cases reporting family acceptance typically involved militant, activist men who were very articulate about their experiences of oppression. Most of them came from affluent backgrounds and from educated households. These men were well aware of the damaging effects of silence in their lives and in individual and group discussions stated that sometimes the fear of 'coming out' to one's parents is unfounded. As Aristoteles, one of the most articulate participants in the earliest stages of my research, told me: "I thought my father was going to die of a heart attack if I told him, but he didn't. The big problem is not talking about the problem."

Among the few to live with his boyfriend Loukas, Aristoteles, a young man in his early thirties, came from an affluent background. Both his parents had received university degrees, at home and abroad, and had successful careers. Aristoteles describes his upbringing as privileged, having attended a prestigious private high school in Athens and subsequently an American university for his undergraduate studies. Although he had his first gay experience in Greece, it was not until he went to the United States that his contacts with the gay scene and the gay activist movement intensified. When he returned from the United States he decided to come out to his parents:

Their reaction was mostly that of concern, that I would not be able to experience family warmth. They were open and said that I could always bring and introduce my friends and boyfriends to them. I think that this was partly because they wanted to exert some control over my life. My father in particular, always wants to know everything about everyone in the family.

However, Aristoteles' experience of his 'coming out' remains an exception and not the rule. For some of my interviewees, family values can also represent something other than an asset when families perceive their children's homosexuality as sinful and immoral. The following narrative illuminates these issues.

1.4.1. Stergios' Story

Stergios, the youngest of four children, had been brought up in a town near Athens. His father worked in the shipyards, whereas his mother occasionally worked as a domestic helper. He had gone to the University to study mathematics and it was during that time that he met other gay men. He had told his older sister, who was married, that he was gay, but despite his sister's advice not to tell anyone else in the family, when he fell in love with Dimitris, he decided to come out to his mother, because he "did not want to live a lie." At first, his mother asked him if homosexuality was an illness and actually suggested that he should go to a doctor. When he tried to explain more about homosexuality to her, her reaction was that sleeping with another man was *amartia* (sin), that he would go to Hell. Since then, he has not discussed his homosexuality with his mother, and he is certain that his father still does not know about it. Although his sister knows, she refuses to be introduced either to any of his friends or to his occasional boyfriends. In other words, his personal life is disconnected from his family:

Although it is not my choice, I feel that this is the best way to deal with my sexuality. I am afraid that my father's reaction could potentially be violent. My father works in a very macho environment and having a *poustis* for a son wouldn't go down very well with his colleagues and the same goes for my brothers.

However, despite his mother's strong reaction to his 'coming out', Stergios did not have any negative feelings towards her. In fact, he told me that he actually regrets 'coming out' to her as he has caused her 'unnecessary grief' and has also placed her in a position where she has to keep a secret from her husband:

My mother has never lied to my father, and I know that she is uncomfortable with keeping my secret from him. However, she does that to protect me, as she is worried about how my father will react. I had always been close to my mother, that's why I thought that she would eventually understand and forgive me. I mean in a way she has accepted me, but maybe telling her was a mistake. She is constantly worried about me, you know, that I will become infected with AIDS and die.

The strong ties within some Greek families, and the major role that families play in the care and support of Greeks that are evident in Stergios' story, remain a principal source of conflict and tension for many gay men. Support within families which completely reject homosexuality, acceptance by and connectedness to these families are achieved and maintained in the majority of cases only at the price of silence. The conflict is experienced as a painful choice within a no-win situation, a choice between self-emancipation and family love. Families, however, can react to their children's 'coming out' in different ways and these reactions may sometimes be bound up with concerns about class or status as well as sexuality (Savin-Williams and Dubé 1998).

For example, Aris had been in a gay relationship with Andreas for over eight years and had met while cruising in a park. When they first met they were both in their early thirties and living with their respective families. Aris lived with his mother in a large penthouse apartment in the north of Athens. His father had died when the former was in his late thirties. Andreas, on the other hand, lived with his elderly father and his two unmarried sisters in a rented flat in Pangkrati, a district close to the city centre in Athens. Andreas' mother had been dead for almost a decade. Aris had a privileged upbringing and had lived and studied abroad whereas Andreas had never gone to University and always had low paid jobs, mostly involving working as a shop assistant in large department stores. Both men were 'out' to their respective families, but the reaction to their being together was drastically different.

Aris was always included in Andreas' family social occasions and Andreas' extended family recognised Aris as his partner, thereby treating him as one of its members. Wedding and other types of invitation were always addressed to both Andreas and Aris. By contrast, Aris' mother was less willing to incorporate Andreas into her kinship network. Andreas mentioned that Aris' mother's reaction to his presence was polite but reserved and totally lacking in warmth. Similarly, Aris' family repeatedly failed to include Andreas in family gatherings and on some occasions even made it clear to Aris that Andreas' presence was not welcome. Both men argued that this inhospitable attitude may be less the result of homophobia and more the result of inherent snobbism as Aris' family considered Andreas' background as being far beneath them. Aris suggested that, in a sense, their censorial approach towards Andreas might have been a protective device on behalf of his family who think that he can do better. The attitude of Aris' family towards Andreas was a constant source of friction between the two men, and one of the factors that eventually led to the dissolution of their relationship.

However, although equally strong among Greek homosexuals as among other Greeks, the emotional attachment to one's family usually prevents gay men from denouncing the

family's negative reactions to homosexuality and fighting for acceptance. Instead, for the sake of psychological connectedness and identification with the family, this 'homophobia' (Greenberg 1988: 463) tends to become internalised in a self-punitive way. This can partly explain why, in interviews and conversations alike, my gay informants seldom complained about being rejected by their parents or other family members. Most of the men interviewed spoke with great sadness about the pain that their homosexuality caused or could cause their family. They seldom expressed anger at the families for the pain that they themselves had experienced, and were perhaps still experiencing due to possible rejection by their families. Despite his mother's adverse reaction to his homosexuality, for example, Stergios believed that: 'It's hard for her because she thinks that the only way that one can be happy is to marry and have children. That's what she has known all her life'.

What also emerges from the gay men's narratives is a preoccupation with ways of containing the knowledge of a child's homosexuality within the boundaries of the immediate family and a concern over the potential dissemination of such information to others. It can be argued that, for many Greek gay men, keeping silent about their homosexuality is an important expression and manifestation of family loyalty and family values, regardless of how abstract and difficult to define these values are. Because coming out to the family involves the risk of hurting or losing them, it happens only partially, only with selected people, and often in selected places that have no direct connection to, or contact with, the family. As becomes evident from the following narratives, this wish to contain such information concerning the child's 'coming out' within the immediate family is not dependant upon social class in the same ways that acceptance of homosexuality might sometimes be.

Pavlos, for instance, came out to his parents when he was twenty one. He was the elder of two children and had been raised in an affluent suburb in Athens in an educated household where both his parents held University degrees and worked as professionals. Pavlos, however, was uncertain as to how his parents would react to his 'coming out':

My parents are educated but they are also Greek. Family, and that means a man and a woman and two point five children, has been an *iero* (sacred) thing for my parents' generation. According to my parents, *erotas* (love of a sexual kind) is a feeling only possible between a man and a woman; for them the possibility of a man being in love with another man was *afysiko* (un-natural) to put it mildly.

However, despite his reservations Pavlos did tell his parents. Their immediate reaction was one of shock:

My mother had a more extreme reaction than my father. After a brief period of silence she burst into tears. My father, on the other hand, appeared to be much calmer. He only suggested that I was probably confused and that it would be useful to see a psychotherapist. My mother agreed that this was a good idea. However, both my parents agreed that at this stage there was no point telling anyone in the family about any of these things. They made me swear that I wouldn't discuss my homosexuality with our relatives and with any of their close friends. It was not necessary to upset more people. At the time, I didn't see any problem with that. I felt that it wasn't all that much to ask after all but now I am less inclined to think that. I don't really understand how my homosexuality would upset all these people. Is it because they are feeling sad on my behalf because I won't have children?

Ironically, even in cases where a man himself decided to 'come out' to a member of the extended family, the latter's reaction was similar to that of the immediate family. When

Christos, a twenty-five year-old man, came out to his aunt, she advised him not to tell other family members.

My aunt told me, why wound and cause hurt to other family members?
Why cause them worry? She told me that maybe I was going through a phase and that until I was sure I should keep this [i.e. the fact I was gay] to myself. In her view, my lack of interest in women may have been the result of my not having met the right girl just yet.

Although the narratives point, in most cases, to the potential marginalization of the family if their children's homosexuality is disclosed, such fear concerning the social exclusion of the family is often not realized. None of the men I spoke to told me stories about the family's 'shaming' because of their homosexuality. What exists and persists in most cases, is precisely a constant fear that this might happen. Yet, however unrealised this fear, for the individuals who remain in close connection to their families, identification with, and participation in family-life often requires that their sexual lives, their lovers and their gay friends be excluded from the social, affective network of the family. In other words, in several instances there is a forced separation between an individual's sexuality and his social, affective life. Most of my gay interlocutors who still lived with their biological family thus met their gay friends outside their home environment, primarily in recreational spaces.

As such, rather than always being a protective mechanism, strong loyalty to family – and its expression in sexual silence – has a detrimental impact on the well-being, and sexual behaviour of Greek gay men. Even though their own emotional and psychological being too might be compromised (Meyer 1995) many of my gay interlocutors saw staying 'in the closet' as a way to preserve the well-being and, above all, the unity of the family. It is no surprise that for many Greek gay men who try to keep a strong and active connection to

family life, sex and relationships become progressively disconnected, sexual behaviour is pushed towards the context of anonymous, hidden encounters and out of the affective, social domain of 'home'. The majority of my gay informants, even those who were 'out' to their families, stated that they were not allowed to bring sexual partners back home when their parents were there. Some even stated that their parents viewed gay sex as unnatural but also dirty. Thus, the home must remain 'untainted' by what most parents see as an aberration.

For example, the only time that Yiannis had ever brought Michalis, his former boyfriend, or other casual sexual partners for an overnight stay was when his parents were away. Yiannis' mother had explicitly told him that she will not tolerate him bringing men in their home. She was not comfortable with the idea of two men sleeping together and Yiannis respected his mother's feelings. There were times, Yiannis confided to me, where he ended up having sex with men in parks simply because neither he nor the man he had met were able to go to each other's home and because of the fact that they sometimes did not have enough money to go to a hotel. Similarly, before Petros eventually moved into his own flat, he had been clearly forbidden by his mother to bring men home since she considered gay sex to be *aidiastiko* (disgusting) and *arrosto* (sick). The image of the home as wholesome, sweet and squarely heterosexual must not be contaminated by association with activities that still inspire shame and revulsion in many Greeks.

The prohibition on bringing sexual partners home means that several of my gay informants' sexual encounters took place in parks, public toilets, cinemas or hotels thereby exposing them to potential dangers such as physical assaults, and embarrassment if they got caught. Some of the men I interviewed stated that they preferred having casual, anonymous sex as a way of concealing and managing their sexuality. Among the *parea*, for example, primarily because of jealousy as he was very popular with men, Spyros had a reputation as being promiscuous rather than relationship orientated. Spyros argued that this 'promiscuity' was primarily the result of not being 'out' to his family. He was in his mid-twenties and

still living with his family, whom he described as being very conservative and quite religious, adding that not just his father, but other family members too regularly made homophobic remarks whenever there was an item on homosexuality in the media. 'If I had a long term boyfriend', he said, 'then it would be more difficult to hide the fact that I am gay'. For Spyros, casual sexual encounters did not pose the same problem. Wherever the man he picked up for sex did not have a place of his own, they either had to rent a hotel room or Spyros occasionally had to rely on close gay friends to put them up for the night.

When the majority of the gay men I interviewed participated in family reunions, family dinners, weddings and other social engagements that involved the participation of their biological family, they felt that their homosexuality had to be covered up in order to please their parents. On occasions, female heterosexual friends were drafted in as girlfriends for the night to keep up the pretence of heterosexual orthodoxy. Several of my gay interlocutors who had a long term partner also mentioned either their family's inability to include their partner in those events or the former's insistence that if their son's partner was to be included, the latter would be introduced to the rest of a family as a friend with the precondition that any affectionate gesture between the two men should be strictly avoided.

Unsurprisingly, these interviewees mentioned the different treatment that their sister's long-term boyfriends received in the same events. After the 'exposure' of his homosexuality to his parents by their neighbours, Markos has tried to include Manolis, his long term partner, in his family's gatherings, something which was originally met with vehement resistance from both his parents, but the intervention of his sisters resulted in a compromise whereby Manolis could be invited as long as he posed as Markos' friend and not as his lover and as long as they were both accompanied by a girlfriend. Hence, for many Greek parents, homosexuality is the domain of the secret and the forbidden, mentally and functionally disconnected from affective and social relationships that take place in the sphere of 'home'.

Many of the men I interviewed had decided to leave their place of origin and to remain permanently in Athens in order to lessen the impact of their family's control over their personal life. Studying, work opportunities or the call for national service made the move to the city feasible. Ioannis' narrative illustrates how, for some men who come from rural Greece, remaining in the city is the best way to experience their sexuality more fully and undisturbed from the controlling gaze of their family.

1.4.2. Ioannis' Story

Ioannis, a twenty-seven year old man, first went to Athens when he was eighteen to study Greek Literature at the University. He originally came from a small village in mainland Greece and had never visited the capital until the age of eighteen. It was during his second year at University that he had his first homosexual experience with an older student who also introduced him to the gay scene in Athens. Ioannis described his student years and his subsequent military service as the most sexually active times of his life to date. Prior to his move to Athens, Ioannis' sexual experience had been limited to just kissing a few girls and he attributed this first to the fact that he was living in a small conservative place and secondly to his growing attraction for men. Ioannis' original plan was that, after the completion of his studies and his military service, and in order to be closer to his elderly parents, he would return to the area where his family came from to work as a secondary school teacher. Other plans also included him getting married and having a family. However, coming to terms with his sexuality made him realise that a return to rural Greece would be detrimental to his personal happiness. As with those of other gay men, Ioannis' decision to stay in Athens also had to do with protecting his family honour:

Living and working in a small rural town in close proximity to my parents' village would have been a backward step for me. The chances of meeting men in *eparcheia* (rural Greece) are very limited and there is

always the danger you will be found out because everyone knows each other's business. My family wouldn't have been able to cope with the *dropi* that my homosexuality would bring upon them. Managing my sexuality and keeping my parents happy is made much easier by me being in the city.

Similarly with other gay men who had they not been gay may not have chosen to live in Athens, Ioannis raises the point of the protective anonymity of cities and urban life. In her discussion of the 'imaginative processes associated with gay migration from rural to and suburban areas to cities' (Weston 1998: 33) in the US in the 1970s and 1980s, Kath Weston argues that 'the city represents a beacon of tolerance and gay community, the country a locus of persecution and gay absence' (Weston 1998: 40). For several of my informants too, the move to the city represented an "escape from surveillance into freedom", in which the anonymity of city life becomes a precondition for coming out and "being gay," or at least expressing "gay feelings" (Weston 1998: 44).

Another consequence of the close allegiance and loyalty of Greek gay men to their biological family is that the building of a gay community in Greece can, as we will see later, become a difficult endeavour. For many gay men in other parts of the Western industrialised world, support for their gay self – and social identification – has been found within the context of a strongly gay community, in some cases coupled with the visible presence of gay neighbourhoods, gay establishments, and gay organisations. Help with issues following one's 'coming out', such as re-negotiating one's position in the family, as well as support for working through personal shame due to internalised homophobia, is typically received in the context of membership in the gay community (Altman 1982; D'Emilio 1983a; Weeks 1990: 207-230). Such membership, however, requires a shift of referent group from the family to the peer group, which is a re-working of social support systems and personal loyalties away from the family of origin.

From the interviews and conversations with my gay informants, however, although 'gay friendships' (Nardi 1999) often provide the locus for emotional sustenance with regards to issues and problems related to their sexuality, a support that the family usually refuses them, the general feeling among these men was that there was no gay community as such in Greece. As we will see later in chapter five on the LGBT movement, this feeling of a lack of a gay collectivity was and perhaps remains also one of the problems for the viability and success of such a movement in Greece. In turn, both because of the majority of the families' negative responses to their children's homosexuality and because of this absence of a larger gay community, these early narratives that I have presented here demonstrate that there is no sense of pride among most of my gay interlocutors. Rather, what appears to predominate is anxiety about shame.

1.5. Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined gay men's relationships with their families, the latter's responses to their children's coming out and the consequences that allegiance to their biological family has on the life of Greek gay men. I have emphasised the key role that the honour and shame system plays in understanding Greek families' response to homosexuality and have argued that the honour and reputation of the Greek family also depends upon the behaviour and sexual conduct of the gay members of a household, a fact that has been largely ignored in the available literature. As it becomes evident from the analysis of the narratives of my gay informants, their primary allegiance lies and remains with their family. Many of these men feel guilty about the emotional distress that their 'failure' to marry and have children causes to their family of birth and de-emphasise the oppressive character of kinship relations and the impact they have on their coming out. The family is seen as the victim of the children's sexual conduct, and not vice-versa.

What also emerges from these narratives is an effort, on the part of the family to contain the information and knowledge of a child's homosexuality within its closed boundaries. In addition, there is an evident preoccupation with the consequences that a public acknowledgement of the children's homosexuality would have on the social standing of their family and not just on the individual involved. In other words, what is at stake here is not just individual but potential, albeit rarely realized, collective 'shame.' Silence is seen, by both the family and the gay child, as the best strategy to deal with homosexuality. Having explored my gay informants' experiences within the context of the family, in the next chapter I will turn my attention to the military, another dominant site for the reproduction of patriarchal values and for the building of national honour, and discuss the ways in which my gay interviewees' narratives disrupt the view of the military as a heterosexual masculine domain.

Chapter 2

Greek Gay Men's Experiences of the Military

2.1. Introduction: 'The Brigadier with the Red G-String', A Story of Public 'Shaming'

On Sunday 27 February 2007, the Greek newspaper *To Proto Thema* printed an article under the headline 'The Brigadier with the red g-string investigates the Chinook crash (*O Taksiarhos me to kokkino string...eksihniazei tin ptosi tou Chinook*)'. Published anonymously, the story concerned a senior officer of the Greek Air Force who had a profile on *gaydar*, an international internet-dating gay site (*To Proto Thema* 2007: 49). In his profile and following the standard detailed information concerning sexual preferences, the Brigadier stated that he was using drugs socially. The story was uncovered by a journalist who had contacted the Brigadier via the above website and posed as an interested party. Without disclosing the man's name, though his initials were included in the article, the journalist reported that during their first on-line chat the officer sent a photo of himself posing in front of a mirror wearing only a red g-string and displaying an intricate tattoo on one of his buttocks.

The journalist recorded a subsequent telephone conversation, excerpts of which were included in the newspaper article. Because of the officer's statement, in his *gaydar* profile, concerning occasional drug use, the article questioned his effectiveness in dealing with such a sensitive case as the crash of a Chinook helicopter which cost the lives of seventeen Bishops and military officers, including the Patriarch of Alexandria. The leadership of the Hellenic National Defence General Staff, for its part, had been informed a few days prior to the publication of the article and the organisation's internet-related crime team, together with the Ministry of Public Order, had begun investigating the case. Following the

publication of the article, the Public Prosecutor requested the lifting of the secrecy with regards to the content of the telephone conversation between the two men.

Although the officer's name was not disclosed in the article, other information was supplied, in addition to the obvious reference to his rank and duties at the time. This included the exact time of his promotion and the nickname '*Mussolini*' given to him by his colleagues because they saw him as one of the 'toughest' and 'strictest' officers in the Hellenic Air Force. According to Greek Law the press cannot reveal 'personal data'. Yet, even though the newspaper was operating within the limits of the legislation, the information provided was more than enough for the Brigadier's colleagues, superiors and inferiors in rank, to identify him. Moreover, apart from causing him public embarrassment (at the very least), the article also accused the officer of not fulfilling his duties because "he preferred his vices and sexual games".

As I have already established from the earlier analysis of the narratives of my gay interviewees, cases of actual public shaming, that is, shaming that transcends the boundaries of one's immediate or extended family, are rather rare. Given this, the Brigadier's case becomes all the more important, also because of the specific context in which he was 'shamed'. On the one hand, the newspaper exposed his personal life to its readers. On the other hand, and this will become crucial for the subsequent discussion, his reputation was tarnished within his work environment. And this was no ordinary work environment; it was the military, which prides itself on the glorification of national honour. Indeed, the newspaper article concluded that 'sexual peculiarities' raise a 'major moral issue', especially when senior military officers are concerned. It presented the Brigadier's sexual preference – defined by the journalist as 'kinky' – as the prism through which his professional ability and status should be judged.

In spite of the fact that it was written during the military junta in Greece, George Andrew Kourvetaris' (1971) study of officers' perceptions of their professional identity finds a contemporary resonance in the Brigadier's story. Kourvetaris' findings suggest that 'from the officer's point of view, "ethics and character" constitute the primary qualities of a good officer' (Kourvetaris 1971: 1050). At the same time, 'in the officer's opinion, when a Greek loses his *philotimo* he ceases to function as a social and constructive human being' (Kourvetaris 1971: 1047). In other words, in losing his *philotimo*, defined by Herzfeld (1980) as love of honour, the man, the agent of *timi* [honour] and ethics (the Brigadier in this case) becomes as morally suspect and a social outcast. For Kourvetaris this love of honour, 'finds its fullest expression in the self-image of the Greek officer' (Kourvetaris 1971: 1047).

Nevertheless, the military's power to define honour and to build a uniform portrayal of masculinity does not go unchallenged. With reference to literary depictions of the military in such works as Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*, D.H. Lawrence's *The Prussian Officer* and Carson McCuller's *Reflections in a Golden Eye*, Roger Austen points to 'the irony that while the military setting requires extremely "butch" behaviour, at the same time it often fosters affections and passions that will, of necessity, be directed towards members of the same sex' (Austen 1974: 352). Taking this into account, the present chapter examines both official discourses and unofficial counter-discourses which challenge or reiterate the official version of the military as a site of heterosexuality and of the reproduction of patriarchal structures. The military views itself as intrinsically heterosexual and heterosexual masculinity plays an important part as an organising ideology in dominant power and administrative relations within this milieu (Lehring 2003). The narratives of my gay interviewees reveal potential military homoeroticism as offering the possibility of homosexual expression to men who, had they not joined the military, may have not departed from the normative heterosexual script. Men who already had strong homosexual feelings prior to conscription describe how they found that the military, despite its anti-homosexual stance, actually helped them to shape a stronger gay identity.

I will begin by providing a brief historical account of the central role the Greek military has played in the country's political and social life, as the defender of the nation against foreign, and some times internal 'enemies', as a vehicle for the fulfilment, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of nationalist expansionistic aspirations and as the defender of the traditional values of Hellenic Christians, particularly during the military dictatorship of 1967. After a short discussion of the social impact and meaning of military service in Greece, I proceed by examining the Greek military's attitude to homosexuality. The next section explores some themes that emerged from Greek gay men's narratives about their military experiences, with an emphasis on how these men challenge the dominant definition of the military as a thoroughly heterosexual sphere. This is followed by an analysis of various representations of the conscript in contemporary Greek culture, focusing on the paintings of Yiannis Tsarouhis, the writings of Dinos Christianopoulos and a collection of photographs of military servicemen from the 1950s and 1960s.

2.2. Social and Historical Meanings of the Greek Military

Following the 1821 Greek revolution and the inception of the modern Greek state in the late 1820s, the Greek military assumed the role of defender of the nation and instigator of a sense of national pride, reaffirming the relationship between the military and nationalism that was a common feature of nation-building in nineteenth-century Europe more generally (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Calhoun 1993). Once Greece was liberated from the Ottoman rule and its boundaries were delineated to a greater and more definite degree (Koliopoulos and Veremis 2002: 327-348; Papageorgiou 2005), the military established itself as the medium on which the attempt to realise the irredentist *Megali Idea* – the Great Idea – was carried out (Skopetea 1988; Clogg 2004: 98-105).

Because of compulsory conscription, introduced in 1909 and its central role in defending the nation's boundaries for the first century after the establishment of the modern Greek state, the Greek military assumed an increasingly influential and instrumental political and social role (Mouzelis 1979: 105-110; Veremis 1997; Koliopoulos and Veremis 2002: 152-156). Yet, from the 1930s and the Metaxas dictatorship that followed the restoration of the monarchy after the first short-lived republican government in modern Greece (1924-1935), the military ensured the protection of bourgeois order (Mouzelis 1979: 111). The political aspirations of the military to assume the primary political role in the country were most violently manifested at a time when the country was recovering from the wounds of the Second World War and the consequent civil war that ended only in 1949 with the rise of the right-wing conservatives (Mazower 2000).

On Friday 21 April 1967, another dark chapter was added to the already turbulent history of modern Greece. As Helen Vlachos, editor of a major daily Greek newspaper wrote in 1972, on that morning "the majority of Athenians woke up without realizing that they had slept right through from democracy to dictatorship" (Vlachos 1972: 59). Since the fall of the seven-year junta (Mouzelis 1986) in July 1974, the 'rehabilitated' Greek military has once more been de-politicized and undertaken the role of the protector of democracy in the now republican Greece.

However, as is the case with other nations, such as Turkey (Sinclair-Webb 2000), Bolivia (Gill 1997) and Israel (Klein 1999), in which military service is compulsory, the military continues to play a central role in Greek society. At the same time, in sharing certain affinities with a 'siege mentality', (Klein 1999: 49) which implies the constant threat of a foreign invasion that may be found in Israel (Klein 1999; Kaplan 2000) or in Turkey (Sinclair-Webb 2000), in Greece, the figure of the conscript remains important, in the way that Sinclair-Webb (2000: 70) has suggested:

As the defender of the Greek nation against foreign enemies – primarily Turkey, but also from time to time other neighbouring countries – [the conscript] presumably occupies a significant place in the national 'imaginary' and establishes a military version of exemplary manhood as inescapable and a marker against which other masculinities get measured.

Not only is the conscript the defender of the nation, therefore, but he also emerges as the prototypical Greek male. Moreover, in the context of the conscript as the figure who defines the absolute heteronormative masculinity, although Sam Pryke refers to the 'crude', 'fragmentary' and 'fugacious' character of national sexual stereotypes (Pryke 1998: 536), and even though Greece and Turkey are not in active combat as is the case with Israel and Palestine, he argues that among the "numerous [...] perceptions of enemy sexuality [...] the most vivid notion of a national sexuality amongst the Greeks is the Turkish" (Pryke 1998: 358).

The military serves as an all-Greek melting pot bringing men from different regional, class, educational, religious and sexual backgrounds together, but its aim is to 'iron out' these differences and to mould all men in a uniform guise of masculinity through an organisational culture that encourages ideal assets of soldiery such as physical strength, endurance, self-control, professionalism, sociability, aggressiveness and heterosexuality. As I will demonstrate later, these traits are contrasted with images of 'otherness' such as femininity and homosexuality in order to enhance masculine performance.

In Greece, all able-bodied male nationals over the age of eighteen are eligible for military service. Even though they are not conscripted, Greek women have been permitted to serve in the military since 1979, if they wish, but only in administrative positions and not as combatants (Micheloyiannakis 2004: 363). A Greek man should have fulfilled his military obligation by the age of thirty-four at the latest. For those studying at university, working

abroad or having a serious illness there are ways of delaying military service. *Anavoli*, the deferment of military conscription depends upon a complicated bureaucratic procedure that has to be strictly adhered to. In general, although most conscripts now serve in the military for one year, the usual period of military service used to differ between the infantry, the air force and the navy. Conscripts with special circumstances, for example an only child whose father is over the age of seventy or a man who has children, may still serve a reduced term. Evasion of military service or non-compliance with military regulations incur prison sentences of varying lengths – such punishments fall into a variety of categories under the Greek Military Penal Code. (Stratiotikos Kanonismos 1984: 13-19)

Important aspects of the social meaning of military service are in fact revealed by the combination of practical sanctions that apply to those who have not fulfilled their ‘duty’ to the nation. In some respects, the Greek state still views a man who has not completed his military service as an adolescent not yet capable of being granted full adult rights or the ‘responsibility’, for instance, of holding a post in the state’s civil services. *Kalos politis* – be a good citizen – is the wish that people give to men who have just completed or are currently serving in the armed forces, the implication being that these men are not yet ‘complete citizens’.

Moreover, a belief that the military may or will have a beneficial effect in improving the behaviour of unruly ‘male’ children is still largely prevalent among Greeks, especially those of an older generation. In perpetuating ‘heteronormative ethnosexual stereotypes’ (Nagel 2000: 113), the parents of several of my gay interviewees had often expressed the conviction, or hope, that the military would have a ‘normalising’ effect on their children’s homosexuality and that the discipline of the strict military regime would be instrumental in ‘toughening’ their boys, thereby presumably turning them into real ‘full-blooded’ heterosexual men. In Greece too, therefore, ‘conscripts collude with hyperaggressive notions of masculinity that demean women, “weaker” men, and civilians in general, and that conjoin maleness with citizenship’ (Gill 1997: 528).

What is also important about compulsory military service in Greece is that both heterosexual and gay men undergo a similar process of socialisation into manhood. As such, military service largely fulfils the criteria for being considered an initiation rite that establishes and vouchsafes acceptance of a young man as a mature male (Kaplan 2000: 127; Van Gennep 1929; Turner 1975; Klein 1999: 47-65). By entering the world of the military barracks where different rules and regulations apply, the Greek men who go to the military are spatially and physically separated from the rest of society. The men's separation is further enhanced by their wearing of a military uniform which also obviously demarcates them from ordinary civilians. The actual period of the *thiteia* – the Greek word for military service can be perceived as an 'anti-structure' (Turner 1967) since the men are under the specific – jurisdiction of military authorities and laws. As my informants often noted for example, whilst under military law conscripts are not allowed to travel abroad. Upon completion of one's *thiteia*, the man once again re-enters civilian society and the limits imposed on his mobility are lifted. As he has served his 'duty to the nation', his full citizen rights are restored. Sometimes, however, as will be seen in the narratives of my ethnographic interlocutors discussed below, the 'anti-structure' or artificially created environment of the military allows the possibility of homosexual experiences to men who, under different circumstances, would in all likelihood have only engaged in heterosexual practices.

2.3. The Greek Military and Homosexuality

Although homosexuals were never officially accepted in the Modern Greek military, the years of the junta in particular were especially difficult for political dissidents as well as sexual minorities, who suffered humiliation and abuse from the police, the military and the country's political despots. During that period, homosexuality was illegal and any reference to it was officially banned from the Greek press. According to Roufos (1972: 150),

‘authoritarian regimes with a conservative outlook tend to be pillars of religion and morality.’ The 1967 *coup d’état* in Greece was no exception (Mouzelis 1979: 115-133; Mouzelis 1986). Some members of the regime, such as its mastermind Georgios Papadopoulos, believed that they had the mission to preserve the traditional values of Greek society against ‘alien’ Western and secular influences, related to the rapid pace of social and economic change in the post-war period (Woodhouse 1998: 291).

The orchestrators of the coup saw the military as the embodiment of this moral order that they were trying to implement. According to First Deputy Minister Stylianos Pattakos, for example, the army in particular had cherished, “sacred love towards the Motherland, belief in Christ, devotion to the institution of the family [...] the love and sacrifice which Christ taught us on the cross” (cited in Clogg 1972: 37). In addition, Georgios Papadopoulos’ himself had launched the slogan of *Hellas Hellenon Christianon* – ‘Greece of Christian Greeks.’ The military also codified the hegemony of chauvinist values in its slogan of *Patris, Threskeia, Oikogeneia* – Fatherland, Family, Religion (Stamiris 1986), thereby according the patriarchal family with a central position in the junta’s vision of ‘ideal’ Greece. During the junta, as Eleni Stamiris (1986: 103-104) explains,

The ‘honour’ of the family was still represented by female chastity, which was entrusted to the vigilance of fathers and brothers against the corruptibility of women’s nature. Women’s work outside the home - or, for that matter, participation in a larger extra-familiar role (public life, community affairs, etc.) – was seen as a serious threat to this system of male honour and family status.

Papadopoulos’ ‘Greece of Christian Greeks’ was authoritarian, patriarchal and squarely heterosexual. In the continuous striving for the preservation of ‘moral order’, homosexuals were seen as an anomaly. If family was central to the regime and the nation, the non-procreative character of homosexuality ‘violated’ the norm.

As Loukas Theodorakopoulos (2004) has demonstrated, the regime's repugnance for homosexuals was quickly made public. A key figure in the persecution of homosexuals was Yiannis Ladas, the Secretary General at the Ministry of Public Order. Before the advent of the 'Colonels' (as the junta leaders became to be known collectively) to power, Ladas was the commander of the Military Security Police (ESA) whose members conducted regular night raids in the parks largely frequented by prostitutes and homosexuals. Under his leadership, and with the official approval of the regime's leaders, the persecution of sexual minorities intensified through the introduction of *Epeixirisi Areti* – Project Virtue. The public sweeps in parks and public lavatories became a routine operation and a common method of rounding up 'antisocial elements', including homosexuals. These were made on the pretext of protecting the public from 'venereal diseases' but also from exposition to 'obscene acts' performed in public spaces (Theodorakopoulos 2004). In view of their 'unnatural' sexual practices homosexuals were considered 'unhygienic'.

Parallel to these raids, the attitude of the junta regime towards publications on homosexuality was particularly harsh. On one occasion, for example, Colonel Ladas himself beat up both the author of an article on homosexuality and the editor of *Eikones*, the magazine where the article was published, for having suggested that many famous ancient Greek men were homosexuals. When the BBC's Greek service reported the incident, Ladas ascribed this to solidarity among homosexuals. Clogg suggests that this episode did not destroy Ladas' career, but simply led to his being placed under the close surveillance of Pattakos (Clogg 1972: 41). As Peter Loizos notes "the official construction of Greek, conservative, nationalist, military masculinity was, it appears from this, neither chaste nor virginal, but squarely heterosexual" (Loizos 1994: 71). Another author, Elias Petropoulos, was persecuted by the regime in 1971 when he published a dictionary of *Kaliarda*, the gay argot employed by Greek transvestites and homosexuals. The court sentenced him as a pornographer and he was later sent to prison for almost a year (Petropoulos 1993: 207-212).

In this respect, and against the background of the military regime's adherence to the triptych of *Patris, Threskeia, Oikogeneia* (Nation, Religion, Family), the notion of 'Greece of Christian Greeks, and the Church's influential role in Greek politics (Koliopoulos and Veremis 2002: 140-151), the attitude of the military resembles that of the Greek Orthodox Church. The latter's attitude is consistent with the general hostility of many Christian Churches against homosexuals (Greenberg and Byrstin 1982). In the early 2000s, Greek Church officials started to be more vocal in their public condemnation of homosexuality. For example, television talk-shows now offer a forum for gay people to speak out, but they also offer a platform for Church authorities to reiterate their rejection and critique of homosexuality. A Church spokesperson (be it a priest or a lay Church official), by definition almost always a male as there are no Greek female priests is invariably invited to participate in these televised debates.

On an institutional level, close links also exist between the Greek military with the Church. First, the religious authorities are among the invited dignitaries during the various military parades in Greece. Second, following their elementary one-month training periods all new conscripts must take an oath of allegiance to *Patrida* (the country/nation) and obedience to the Constitution, in the presence of a religious leader. At the same time, all Greek government officials also have to take an oath in the presence of the 'Archbishop of Athens and All Hellas'. After a priest's prayer and blessing, the oath of the new recruits ends with their declaration to "live and behave as loyal and *philotimo* conscripts." (Stratiotikos Kanonismos 1984: 2) As with the Brigadier whose sexual life constituted reason for the military to doubt his *philotimo*, exposure of his sexual preferences may also presumably compromise the homosexual conscript's sense of honour, *philotimo*, and by implication, love of *Patris*, his country.

Given the compulsory nature of military conscription in Greece, however, it is safe to assume that albeit silenced because of fear of persecution, homosexuals were present

within the ranks of the Greek armed forces even during the seven-year junta. Interestingly, despite the harsh treatment of sexual minorities by the regime, at the time there was no official legislation with regards to the issue of homosexuals serving in the Greek military. In fact, long before a similar policy was put forward in the US by President Bill Clinton to deal with the issue of gay men and women serving in the US military (Lehring 2003), and up until 2002, Greece operated a 'don't ask, don't tell' policy with regards to Greek gay men serving in the regular army. However, according to the provisions of Paragraph 189 of the Presidential decree 1333/2002 (Leontopoulos 2006), which deals with the judgement of the physical ability of the conscripts enlisting in the Armed Forces and of military personnel in general, all persons 'suffering from psycho-sexual or sexual identity disorders' are excluded from military service.

In principle, Presidential Decree 133/2002 does not apply to those gay men who keep silent about their sexuality but only becomes applicable to them if they choose to 'come out' to the military authorities. In this latter occurrence and following an examination, the military doctor decides the outcome and the suitability of the gay man for service. The military defines such 'suitability' on the basis of a five-category classification system (ΦΕΚ 2002: 1667). Whereas an I1 form, for instance, certifies the excellent physical and mental health of the conscript, 'unsuitability' for military service may lead to an I5 discharge. The I5 form, the last category in this classification index, denotes the inability of a man to fulfil his military obligations due to either mental health problems or other reasons, including psychosexual disorders.

Up until the introduction, in Greece, of alternative civilian service in 1998 (Sinclair-Webb 2000: 67) people refusing to serve, such as conscientious objectors and Jehovah witnesses were sent to a military or agricultural prison for the equivalent duration of their respective military service. The introduction of the civilian service does not, however, really constitute a viable alternative, as those opting for it have to serve a period twice as long as the normal military service (*thiteia*), plus an extra month. When not imprisoned and

admitting some psychological illness, conscientious objectors and political dissidents receive an I5 discharge. Transvestites and transsexuals, whom the military authorities label as the ones primarily suffering from 'gender-identity disorders', receive an immediate I5 discharge. On the other hand, as long as the conscript does not openly declare his homosexuality and is physically able, his sexuality does not constitute a reason for discharge if it remains hidden.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of the Greek military authorities, homosexuality is considered as a mental illness and those who 'come out' whilst conscripted are subject to an I5 discharge. Alongside the degrading nature of physical examinations, an I5 discharge on the basis of homosexuality is often accompanied by a possible social stigma (Goffman 1963; Plummer 1975). All I5 military discharges used to be filed and saved in a State record until 2001 (Leontopoulos 2006). Such a discharge creates distinct disadvantages for its recipient: the latter is not only excluded from employment within the Greek civil service sector but also from other procedures such as renewing and obtaining official documents.

The repercussions following an I5 discharge were highlighted, in March 2006, through the case of Panayotis B., a member of the Greek LGBT group EOK, whose application for a driving licence in October 2005 was rejected by the Ministry of Transport because of his recorded I5 military discharge in 1988 on the grounds of homosexuality. The Ministry of Transport requested that the applicant reported to a special committee which in turn asked him to provide a certificate from a State hospital psychiatrist, ascertaining that the applicant was psychologically healthy. For his part, the psychiatrist argued that in order to supply the certificate he would need the applicant to spend six months as a patient in a State Psychiatric Hospital where his emotional behaviour could be closely monitored (Leontopoulos 2006). The case remains unresolved to-day. Because of the negative consequences of a 'dishonourable' I5 discharge, few Greek gay men decide to avoid doing their military service by openly declaring their homosexuality. From the perspective of the Greek military authorities, the silence and invisibility of homosexual men in the armed

forces demand no further action from them. As far as the Greek military is concerned, all its physically-able conscripts are heterosexual.

In his article 'A broken mirror: Masculine sexuality in Greek ethnography' Peter Loizos (1994) identifies and discusses certain aspects of sexuality as seen from the point of view of the Greek army. First, with the introduction of periods of leave due to 'natural reasons of bodily health', the military in modern Greece implied that, in escaping hitherto 'ideals' of virginity, the conscripts were given free time to pursue heterosexual escapades. (Loizos 1994: 70) Second, the physical inspections that aim at examining if the conscript is a homosexual also serve "as an effective degradation ritual which throws the conscript off balance and suggests that he is subject to the total power of the institution, down to and including control and surveillance of his body and its functions" (Loizos 1994: 71). Therefore, such inspections may reinforce the belief that the conscript's body belongs to the military. In a sense, with the shedding of his clothes, the conscript sheds his individuality and privacy.

Moreover, according to Papataxiarchis "what survives in the memory of the candidate soldier is the physical comparison with the rest of the men sitting naked in a row, and the examination of the anus to diagnose signs of homosexuality" (Papataxiarchis 1991: 173). The 'diagnosis' of homosexuality through the inspection of the anus first emerged at the end of the eighteenth century when homosexuality was perceived as a physical illness susceptible to clinical examination (Aries and Bejin 1985). As Spencer (1996) and Bérubé (1990) indicate, the physical examination of men for bodily signs of homosexuality was also part of the US army and Navy screening process for identifying male homosexuals. Throughout World War Two, the US Army and Navy both described homosexuality as a 'constitutional psychopathic state' and homosexuals as 'sexual psychopaths'. Screening tests were set up so that the services should not admit 'such people'. It listed three possible signs for identifying male homosexuals: feminine bodily characteristics, effeminacy in dress and manner and a patulous or expanded rectum.

2.4. The Greek Military and Homosexuals

Military authorities view gay sex not as a source of pleasure but as a means of feminising men and as an instrument of the power of certain 'masculine' men vis-à-vis other less 'dominant' men. The process of turning 'boys' into 'men' sometimes involves derogatory and sexist remarks concerning ways in which the conscripts' behaviour resembles that of women (Loizos 1994: 71). This point also emerged from the men's narratives I collected. In the following extract Thanassis describes how his training officer constantly kept comparing conscripts to women:

Our training officer was a complete sadist. If you showed a sign of fatigue, he singled you out and made fun of you in front of the other men. I remember once I was not feeling well and I stopped half-way through the exercise, I grunted as I was in pain, so the bastard called me and told me to stand *prosohi* (on guard) and then proceeded yelling at me saying ironic things like 'Stop whingeing like a woman and start behaving like a real man, not like a schoolgirl. Is this how you'll behave if you go to war?'

Occasionally, officers compare conscripts not to women but to homosexuals. Henning Bech discusses how the signifiers man/homosexual are used in the training of new recruits as seen in *Thy Neighbour's Son*, a Danish film about torture under the dictatorship in Greece:

A recruit is commanded to stamp on the picture of his girlfriend, to fornicate with a sack in front of the others; 'a man should fuck and fight' is the officer's maxim (that, it seems, is the definition of a man); the

word homosexual (more precisely: Greek slang for a man who lets himself be sodomized) is an indispensable prop in all relationships of violence and humiliation between officers and recruits as well as between torturers and victims; it is what one is *not* and may not be; what one disavows, makes use of in training, uses as humiliation, uses to legitimate the humiliation (Bech 1997: 117)

The use of homosexual remarks as a means of humiliation is also reflected in the language that officers sometimes use during the training of new recruits. From the recollection of my own training in the Greek navy and also from the military narratives of many of my informants, it is evident that the sexualised expression *tha se gamiso* (I will fuck you) is still regularly used by military personnel in the disciplining of unruly soldiers.

Another of my interviewees, Aristotelis, recalls how some of the training officers constantly compared conscripts who showed signs of fatigue in military exercises as *adelfes* (sissies) and *gynaikoules* (weak little women). He describes his emotional dilemma of having to put up with what he considered as ‘degrading remarks’ about homosexuals:

I was really angry with him for suggesting that homosexuals are lesser men but I knew that had I confronted him and had told him that I was a *poustis*, I would create unnecessary troubles for myself.

Conscripts, too, also use terms with homosexual connotations to refer to their unwilling submission to a superior officer in cases where they had contravened military regulations. Terms such as *me gamise* (he fucked me) or *mou piase ton kolo* (he touched my ass) are employed by conscripts who have been officially disciplined by their superiors. Like the example provided by Bech above, the power aspect of sex is emphasised in these latter

episodes. Furthermore, sometimes military superiors force male servicemen displaying overtly effeminate behaviour to conform, at least to some extent, to the image of the 'active' masculine man by modifying their movements and speech. Nickos' experience is a clear example of this.

When he was enlisted for the navy, Nickos was twenty-two years old. His effeminate voice, which according to Nickos 'gave [him] away as gay', became a source of mocking during his *thiteia*, both by some of the other conscripts but primarily by his training officer and subsequently by his immediate superior. After his one-month preparatory training he was sent to serve on a destroyer ship where he faced constant harassment from one of the petty officers, who was responsible for the sailors' discipline,

The petty officer *me eixe sto mat apo tin proti kiolas mera* (kept a close watch on me from day one), *den m' afine se hloro klari* (he was constantly on my case). He would say to me things like *mila san andras* (talk like a man) and don't talk *adelfistika* (don't talk like a sissy). Of course, he always said that he was doing this *gia to kalo mou* (for my own good).

A few other conscripts also followed the example of the petty officer so, for a while, being on the receiving end of mocking became part of Nickos' everyday routine. Gradually, however, this mocking stopped after the petty officer was reassigned to a different unit and after the senior conscripts turned their attention to the new recruits. When Nickos himself became *palios*, (a senior recruit) he gained some relative protection. Yet, overall, Nickos describes his military service as a time of stress and worry:

For me, my *thiteia* was one of the worst experiences I have had so far. I was constantly used as a figure of ridicule. By the time I went to the army I had accepted my homosexuality, but still, it was hard for me to be the butt of jokes all the time. In the beginning, I often found offensive graffiti on the wall next to my bed: things like *tha se kseskiso poustara* (I will savage you, you queer) or *o Nickos pairnei ta kalytera tsiboukia* (Nickos gives the best blowjobs). My predominant feeling of the military was that it was a lonely experience and one that confirmed for me, once and for all, that I was different from the other men, or at least that I was perceived as such.

Despite, all this overt mocking, however, Nickos mentioned that on a few occasions he was propositioned by some of the men to perform oral sex on them or even to allow him to be penetrated by them. Although with different undertones, Thanassis, Aristotelis and Nickos testify to the relationship between the military, nationalism and the construction of a particularly heterosexual identity (Nagel 1998), according to which any other sexual expression is seen by the military as an ‘anomaly’ (Mosse 1982).

Nonetheless, by describing their *thiteia* as a highly eroticised period, the narratives of my ethnographic informants often contest the notion of the military as a predominantly heterosexual institution actively involved in the construction and perpetuation of patriarchal structures. For many, the possible homosocial character of the military was the catalyst for their emotional and homosexual awakening. Indeed, according to a popular life-style magazine, *thiteia* for gay men can be defined as: “for some Heaven, for others Hell” (KLIK 1991: 184).

2.5. Greek Gay Men's Military Narratives

Overall, in both the popular imagination (Orfanos 1996: 46-60) and my informants' narratives, the *thiteia* is largely described as a period of heightened sexual desire. When I served my *thiteia* in the Greek navy between 1988 and 1990, I regularly noticed the sexually charged atmosphere in the conscripts' dining-room, whenever 'hard-core' heterosexual porn was screened during the evening meals. This was normally the case during week-long naval exercises during which we would be away from 'dry land' and home. I was usually responsible for collecting and returning these tapes, normally selected by an officer, but on occasions I too would be responsible for choosing the videos. When that was the case, an 'embarrassing situation' for me, I usually had to call the duty officer and read the video titles to him over the phone. Listening to many of the men's overtly sexual comments during the screening of those films, I could not but consider that after watching them, some of the men would not object to the idea, at least, of engaging in sex with another man. In some extreme cases some of the men would exhibit their erection for the rest of us to watch. But even in less sexually intense situations, talking explicitly about sex – that is heterosexual sex – was a favourite pastime of conscripts and officers alike.

As has also been the case in Britain (Houlbrook 2003), in Greece there exists a popular stereotype concerning the conscript's presumed insatiable sexual desire and animalistic nature, his being in a permanent state of arousal and having a voracious sexual appetite. Invariably, the sexuality of the serviceman is perceived to be heterosexual. This stereotype is also sometimes used in films depicting military life in Greece as was certainly the case with *Loufa kai Parallagi* – Variations on Skiving – a popular film of the 1980s (Perakis 1984), and with *Loufa kai Parallagi*, a 2006 television series. The film's story takes place during the junta years and provides a satire on the junta's authority. A great part of the story revolves around the sexual lives and desires of a group of soldiers who are involved in the production and filming of a porn film during their *thiteia*. Another occasional reference among some of my gay informants was to the pornographic cartoon *Taratata*,

popular among recruits who served in the military in late 1970s and early 1980s. The cartoon revolved around the story of a soldier named *Taratata* and his sexual exploits during his military service.

Christos, one of my interviewees, whose unit was stationed in a frontier town in Northern Greece in the late 1970s, recalled one particular instance when a fellow soldier had bought the latest issue of the cartoon and all his fellow soldiers grouped together to read it. Apparently, this particular issue was eventually borrowed individually by the majority of the men, fuelling their masturbatory fantasies. *Taratata* was a virile man who was always successful in his sexual pursuits. An analogy can be drawn here between success in the military and success in the sexual arena. Needless to say, all the sexual exploits of both *Taratata* and the soldiers' in *Loufa kai Parallagi* were strictly heterosexual.

The view of the military as an exclusively heterosexualized space is, however, undermined by the experience of several of my gay interlocutors. Some of the insights I collected from the Greek gay men's narratives about their military experiences illustrate the tension between the popular image of the military as a heterosexual masculine institution, where 'little boys become men', and Greek gay men's own experience of it as an institution which is imbued with homoeroticism and where gay sex is perceived to be rampant and easily available. Since *thiteia* also marks the period when many men leave their family home for the first time and for a prolonged period, for some, the military provided both the context for discovering their homosexuality and a place for meeting other gay men away from the pressure of the family. A significant number of those interviewed identified the period of the military service as their 'defining coming out' moment.

The men's narratives also demonstrate how deeply homosexual tensions, rumours, jokes, advances and teasing permeate many aspects of military life. Yiannis, for example, referred to the first-month preparatory military training during which he was surrounded by

‘*oraios gomenous*’ (hunky men), as ‘*o Paradeisos tis adelfis*’ – the queer’s Paradise. One of the main ironies in these narratives is that, despite the cover of its ‘unadulterated’ heterosexuality, efficiently though inadvertently, the military sometimes serves as the vehicle through which young gay men are actually enabled to ‘find themselves sexually,’ to experience a greater acceptance of their homosexuality and to discover more sexual opportunities than they could have known before. Nevertheless, considering the context, some of my gay informants initially saw such new experiences as ‘inappropriate’.

Once during his night patrol, for example, Iraklis caught two men having sex whilst on duty and was torn between his formal responsibilities as a non-commissioned lieutenant to report the men to the disciplinary office and his loyalty as a gay man to protect these men from punishment.

I was actually angry as these men put me in a moral dilemma. I told them they were stupid and that if they wanted to have sex they could rent a room in a hotel during their leave of absence and *na bgaloun ta matia tous* (fuck their brains out) but when they are on duty to behave like soldiers.

It is interesting to note that from Iraklis’ point of view the men’s behaviour was ‘unsoldierly’ and that he was annoyed with the men for displaying such behaviour. For Iraklis, one’s sexuality should not impact or interfere with one’s sense of duty or work ethic.

I would never have considered having sex whilst on duty. That’s against my principles and beliefs. How I behave outside the *stratopedo* (the

barracks) is a different story but whilst on duty my sexual preference becomes secondary.

In the end, Iraklis did not report the men and in fact became good friends with both of them, and eventually ended up having a short-lived relationship with one of them after the completion of their *thiteia*. But whereas Iraklis thought that the two men's behaviour was 'unsoldierly' other men, such as Iakovos below, told me that the military experience made them come to terms with their sexuality. But like Iraklis they also met other gay men who eventually became their friends or lovers.

Iakovos was in his mid-twenties when he was conscripted and then assigned to an Infantry Unit in a north-eastern Greek town. He had just finished his Law degree at Athens University and had to complete his military obligations before he could be eligible to start his legal apprenticeship. Until the age of eighteen, when he went to Athens for his University studies, Iakovos was brought up in a small town in the Peloponnese, the youngest son of a family of five. As both his parents had only acquired the primary school education, they placed an emphasis on the education of their children. Iakovos never had a relationship with either a man or a woman during his adolescence and in fact admitted that his interest for sex did not begin until he went to Athens. All his efforts up until that point were focused on gaining entry to University and moving to Athens. According to Iakovos, his lack of interest in sex and his not having a girlfriend was actually encouraged by his parents, as they both thought that interest in sex or a relationship would distract him from his studies.

It was only during his second year at University that Iakovos had his first heterosexual experience with a woman. Although he also felt sexual attraction towards men, at that particular time Iakovos perceived of himself as a heterosexual. He was particularly attracted to one of his best male friends at University but he believed that it was normal to

feel close and to love your best friend. Yet Iakovos now believes that the love he felt for his friend was not platonic but that he actually desired him sexually. When Iakovos went to the army, it became obvious to him that he was sexually and emotionally attracted to men in general:

For me the army was really the place where I finally realised that my attraction towards men was strong, and where I also realised that I wanted to have sex with men. It's hard to suppress your desire for other men when you work, eat, bathe and socialise exclusively with men on a daily basis. For me, that was the first time I saw so many naked bodies on display. Obviously, I didn't and still don't find all men attractive but believe me, there was lots of flesh on offer. At times I had to struggle to hide an erection because the whole situation was rather *kavlotiki* (sexually arousing), especially in the communal showers.

Although Iakovos became aware of his homosexuality during his military service, he deliberately suppressed it because of fear of being caught and, therefore possibly punished. Yet, in admitting that 'there was lots of flesh on offer' he did acknowledge that, had he wanted to, the opportunities to act on his sexual desires with other soldiers were readily available. In contrast to Iakovos, other men I interviewed met other gay men in the military. Some became friends and some others became lovers whereas others found their future partners whilst serving the country.

Achilleas, for example, was in his mid-20s and was living alone in a rented flat near the private college he was attending at the time. He originally came from a Greek island and was the oldest son in a family of four. From the age of thirteen onwards, he started working as a waiter during the summer months to supplement the family's income. Prior to being conscripted, Achilleas had not spent any long period away from home. As he told me, he

realised he was ‘different’ during his teenage years. Achilleas was called for service in the Greek infantry and he mentioned that he was apprehensive about going to the military, both because he did not particularly enjoy physical exertion but also because he was afraid that his homosexuality ‘might be discovered’ by other conscripts and his superiors alike. In the end, none of these fears were materialised and instead the military was the place where he actually met Miltos, a gay man with whom he became friends:

Until I went to the army, I hadn’t really met a gay man of my age. The majority of gay tourists whom I had met in the summers in the restaurant where I was working, were normally older than me, most of them in their fifties, so meeting Miltos was really important for me and also quite unexpected. Miltos was a year older than me so he had already been in the *monada* (unit) I was sent to after my training for the past eleven months so he was a *palios* (someone who has been longer in the unit). The first time I spoke to him, Miltos was sitting by himself reading a book by Cavafy. For me that was the first hint that he might be gay. Just like me, he didn’t really join in the other men’s discussion about girls and sex. We started hanging out together and eventually he told me he was gay.

Achilleas admitted that the opportunities to have sex with other conscripts were readily available as they were based in a remote unit in a frontier area where the nearest city was ten hours away by car.

The men in the unit were in a constant state of *kavla* (horniness). I mean they talked about sex all the time. I was too *komplexarismenos* (had too many hang-ups) to do anything but had I wanted it, I could have had sex. Miltos had slept with several men who of course claimed they were

heterosexual. Nothing was said the next day, in fact these men were deliberately avoiding him but at night they went to him for sex.

For Achilleas, this close proximity with men made him realise that he was attracted to men not just sexually but also emotionally.

The *thiteia* is an intense experience. You share everything with men who, under different circumstances, would never have either been emotional or talked to other men about the most personal things.

Similarly to Achilleas, Yiannis also met Dimitris, his best gay friend, during his service in a small unit based on an Aegean island. But, in contrast to Achilleas, Yiannis described his *thiteia* as one of the most sexually active periods in his life. According to Yiannis, especially during the summer months, sex was plentiful. Gay foreign tourists, but also some local Greek gay men would loiter outside the camp. Yiannis too speaks of the physical and emotional intensity of the *thiteia*.

You are drained physically but the emotional aspect is even more pronounced. You really love and hate men at the same time. You meet *malakes* (wankers) and *kala paidia* (good boys). I used to joke when my father told me *o stratos einai ena megalo sxoleio* (the army is a big school), but now I know he was right. You meet all sorts of people. When I went to serve in the unit, well that was a bonus, because it was such a small unit, it was as if we were constantly on holiday. Our officer was a really cool man, so when it was hot we were allowed to take our tops off.

Yiannis did not officially disclose his homosexuality to all the rest of the men in his unit but he believes that the other men knew but did not seem to mind.

Sometimes I would just sit and obviously stare at them. I just couldn't help it but they were ok with it, or at least they never complained. Maybe I was flattering their ego, or they didn't feel threatened. I mean it was great, I was surrounded by all these semi-naked men, it was fantastic but I knew I was lucky.

Dimitris noticed the way Yiannis was looking at other men and 'came out' to him. The two men became friends and their friendship is still ongoing. Whereas Yiannis and Achilleas met their best friends in the military, the intense emotional and physical experience of the military training acted as the backdrop for the blossoming romance between Petros and Stelios who met on the first day of their training and instantly became close. After their initial training, the two men spent the whole week of their *adeia* (leave of absence) with each other and then continued their affair throughout their *thiteia* despite the fact that they had been assigned to different posts. Petros recalls:

If somebody had told me beforehand that I would not only have sex but I would also fall in love with a man in the army, I would have replied that they were delusional. And yet, it did happen. I guess I was ready by that time to meet someone and I was instantly physically attracted to Stelios but I think the strong feelings you experience during the training also brought us closer together.

As is demonstrated from the above narratives, the emotional bonds and forms of attraction that may develop between men during their military service may vary. They do not necessarily lead to consummation, but may be entirely platonic. The men I interviewed emphasised the importance of friendships developed during their *thiteia*, especially among those who are in/belong to the same *sira* (rank). In this context Papataxiarchis writes that, ‘*sira* refers to the actual quarter of the year one is conscripted, as well as to the group of men who serve together. [...] Friends who have been in the army together may refer to each other with “He is my *sira*” or may call each other *sira*’ (Papataxiarchis 1991: 172-173).

Stathis, another gay man, also mentioned his own experience of the existence of strong emotional bonds among men of both the same *sira* and in general, as a result of their close physical proximity in the barracks.

I mean you become so familiar with other men’s bodies. You see these men naked in the shower daily, you see them undress before going to bed every night, you sleep in adjoining beds and you become familiar with the sound of their breathing when they are sleeping, you share jokes with them, you share your frustrations with them. You even go to the toilet together. There were no partitions or doors in the unit’s toilets, so sometimes you will have a conversation with another man while you are taking a shit. I mean, how much more personal can you get?

Stathis did not actually have a sexual experience with another conscript but his identity as a soldier was an added bonus in his sexual encounters with men outside the military context.

I mean, men loved it when I told them I was a soldier. I think that had to do with the fetish some men have for the military uniform or also by the idea that you are deprived of sex while in the army. Anyway, I am not complaining as I was popular with gay men in some of the gay bars.

Here, Stathis touches upon the idea of the soldier generally and the military uniform in particular as constituting objects of desire for many gay men who attach an erotic content and significance to both. Such fetishisation of the conscript (Zeeland 1995; Zeeland 1999) and especially of the uniform (Houlbrook 2003: 364-371) has been underlined both in the narratives of other of my gay informants and in cultural representations of the Greek conscript.

2.6. Sexualising the Conscript

As already indicated, many of my gay informants had a very active sexual life with fellow servicemen. Sexual encounters occurred not only with other gay men, however, but also with men who identified themselves as heterosexual. My interlocutors vigorously debated the 'true sexual nature' of the latter conscripts. Whereas some argued that men who have sex with men are by definition gay, others were convinced of sexual partner's heterosexuality and discounted these sexual acts that occurred within the military context as a kind of 'situational homosexuality', possibly devoid of deeper emotional attachment.

For instance, Aris, who frequently had sex with fellow soldiers who identified themselves as heterosexual, told me that,

In the *Stratos* (army) different rules apply. This is not your normal life. You are away from home, away from your girlfriend. You are young, lonely and sometimes desperately *kavlomenos* (horny). You live in close proximity with men so it is not surprising that one may seek out or submit to pleasures they might not even have dared to think before.

In reinforcing the idea of military service as a kind of 'anti-structure', Aris suggests that the *thiteia* may create a place where men can behave in radically different ways. As is the case with the distinction between the *poustis* and the *kolobaras* discussed earlier in the introduction, the heterosexual men who engage in sexual activities with other men in the military do not necessarily perceive of themselves as transgressing the normative definitions of masculinity, provided of course that they assume the active role in anal intercourse.

The heterosexual soldiers engaged in homosexual sex-acts often employed strategies to keep their heterosexual identity intact by imposing ritual limitations on the relationship. As Aris explained, "most of my heterosexual sexual partners in the *Stratos* refused to kiss me on the lips or anywhere else, to give me a blowjob, or to let me fuck them." On the other hand, some of my gay interviewees identified their heterosexual sexual partners as 'bisexual' whereas others were happy to allow such men their 'straightness' – as long as the latter 'stuck to the rules', thereby always assuming the active role in sexual intercourse.

The majority of the gay men I spoke to, however, regarded these heterosexual men as 'closeted gays'. Most of my informants rejected the idea that homosexual intercourse may be a possibility for men who clearly identify themselves as heterosexual simply on grounds of the absence of women in the military. In fact, many of my informants argued that such a justification was unacceptable, because the unavailability of women was not as much a cause of, but an excuse for, sexual intercourse with other males. As for those who asserted

the heterosexuality of their sexual partners in the military, when asked about why the latter engaged in such a sexual relationship, many said that such men were generally ‘turned on’ by the idea of a man in a uniform.

The rugged, masculine soldier as an object of homoerotic desire is a familiar theme in gay literature, gay porn, and perhaps the sex fantasies of many gay men around the globe (Simpson and Zeeland 2001). Gay pornography, in particular, has capitalised on the eroticisation of the army experience and has created a specialist niche of videos, DVDs and magazines with an explicitly military theme which caters for the sexual fantasies of gay men (Burger 1995). The majority of these commodities are produced in the US and recently in Eastern Europe but are easily accessible to gay men around the globe, including of course to Greek gay men, via the Internet or through mail order. But even before the Internet era, the conscript was already eroticised in Greece where such erotic representations of men in the military were already evident in the late 1940s.

Yiannis Tsarouhis, a painter and author who died in 1987, remains one of the most respected and critically acclaimed artistic figures in Greece. Tsarouhis was openly a homosexual, although his homosexuality is never mentioned in critical evaluations of his work as having either shaped or influenced his artistic output. The latter, ranges from oil paintings to stage settings and designs for the Greek theatre. Greek soldiers, especially those serving in ESM, the Greek military police, and sailors feature extensively in Tsarouhis's oeuvre, as Tsarouhis himself served in the Greek infantry and was sent to Albania during the Second World War. His depictions of soldiers and sailors range from individual portraits to paintings of soldiers or sailors in their military uniforms and more overtly homoerotic paintings portraying soldiers in different states of undress.

In his ‘seated sailor with reclining nude’ of 1948 (Fig. 5), Tsarouhis portrays a dressed masculine and moustached sailor with his arms crossed, sitting on the bed and intensely

observing a naked, fully exposed reclining man. Similarly, Tsarouhis' 'sailor and nude in front of a three-piece door' (1948-1949) (Fig. 6) depicts a fully naked reclining man with a sailor sitting on the opposite side of the bed, wearing the Greek navy's white, summer informal uniform. Both men seem relaxed, with legs apart and although not looking at each other, seem rather comfortable in each other's company. In both pictures, Tsarouhis invites his audience to determine the nature of the relationship between the two different pairs of men. In both cases, one of the two parties involved is a sailor in his uniform.

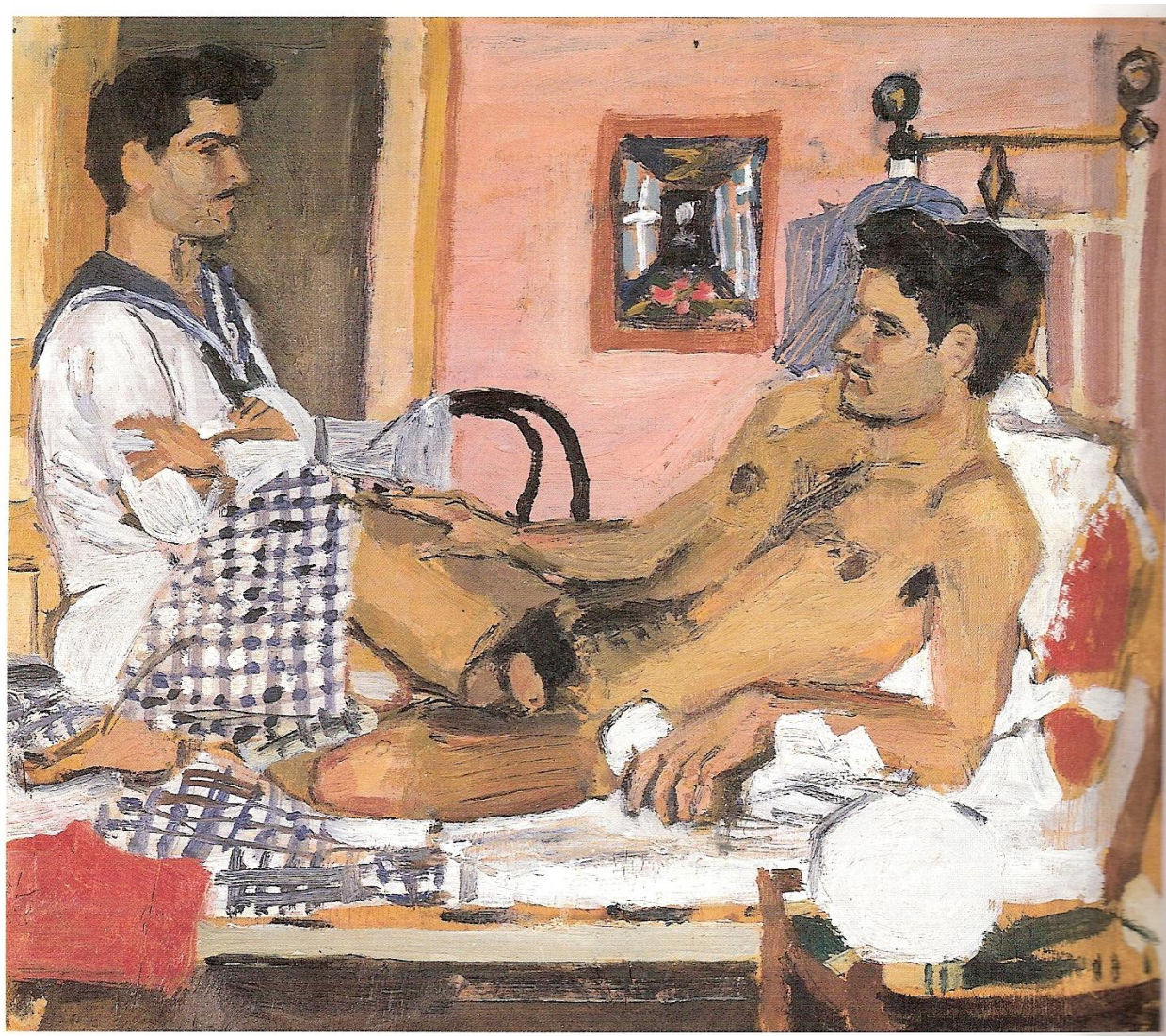


Figure 5: Yannis Tsarouhis, 'seated sailor with reclining male nude'

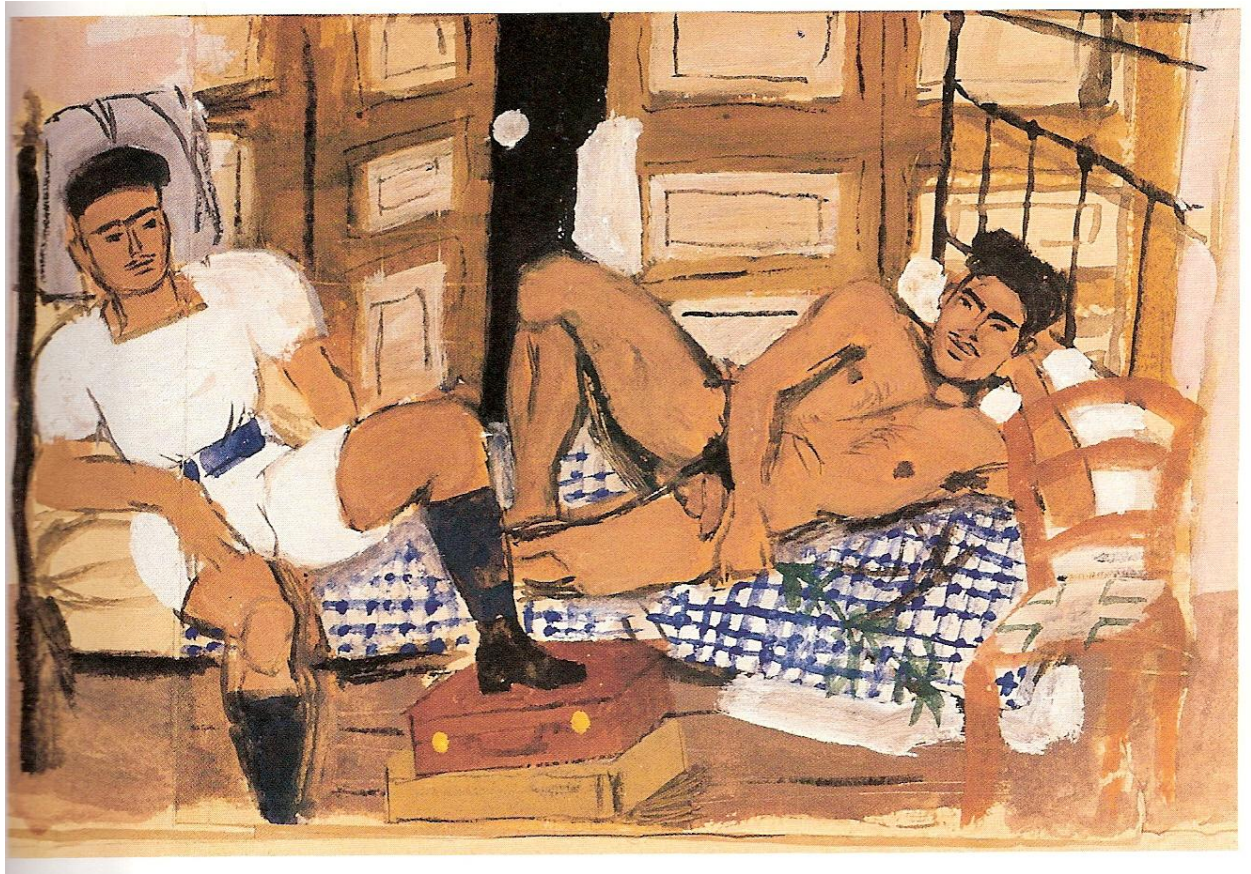


Figure 6: Yannis Tsarouhis, 'sailor and nude in front of a three-piece door'

Openly a homosexual and part of the Second World War generation of artists (Van Dyck 1998: 61), Dinos Christianopoulos is a prolific writer who has written several poems but also short stories with an explicit homosexual content. In a number of his poems the figure of the soldier features prominently as the object of the poet's lust and indeed often as the quintessential object of desire of homosexual men. A number of his poems concentrate on a fetishistic theme: for instance, in his poem 'Hymn to a Boot' Christianopoulos talks about his attraction for military boots and his sexual excitement whenever a soldier ordered the poet to remove his (i.e. the soldier's) boots. In another poem, entitled 'Military Uniforms', Christianopoulos laments the changes in the soldiers' uniform, which have resulted in the appropriation of the military style by the mainstream culture:

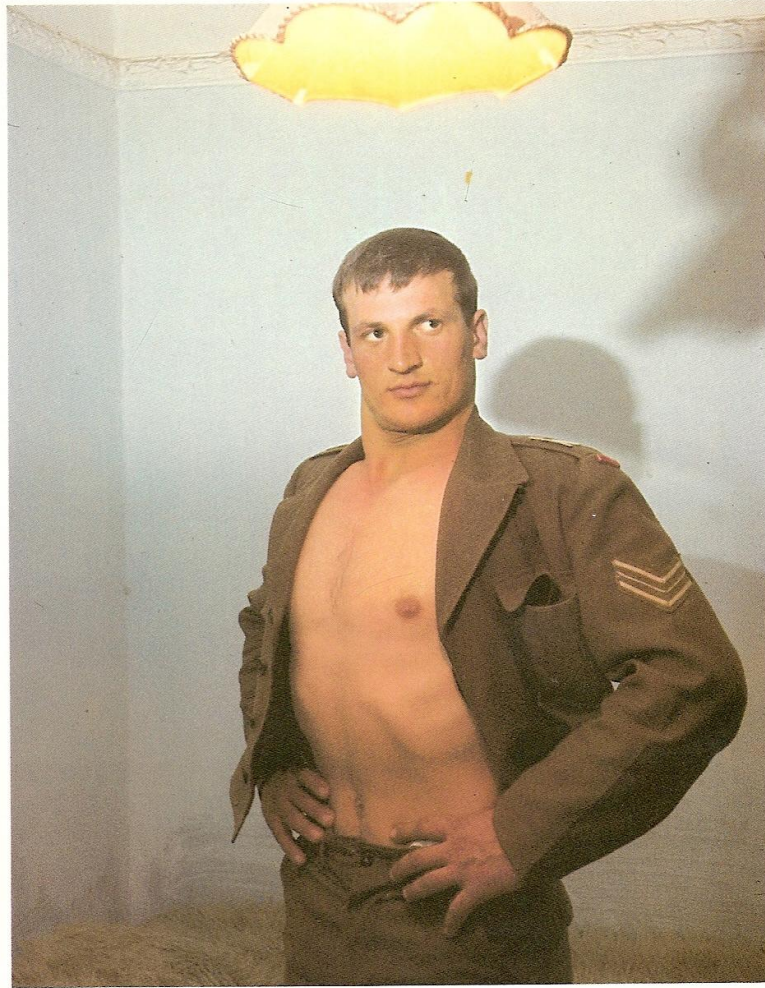
There was one beautiful thing in this world, a military uniform, and even that was slowly destroyed. First gaiters were abolished, then the boots were concealed under the trouser legs, finally they too were replaced with short pseudo-boots. Along with them there also disappeared that air of manly vigour which was nourished by the ferocity of war and that smell of virility which came from living in barracks. For that matter, first people went to ruin, then the uniform. What do these puny little men in the khaki suits and unsuspected forage caps have in common with those moustached men of '49? The old MPs with their fierce faces have survived only in the paintings of Tsarouhis. And Egnatia Street, which in the past would perk up at dusk, now sorrowfully discovers boots on the feet of arty fellows (sic) (Christianopoulos 2000: 45).

Besides his widely expressed interest in the soldier-hero, Christianopoulos also explores another theme in a short story entitled *O Ypoloxagos* – The Lieutenant – which deals with a chance encounter between two men after several decades of not having seen one another: the older man was the other man's superior during the latter's time in the military (Christianopoulos 2004: 42-44). Now a successful writer who appears regularly on TV, the younger man, the main hero of the story, is congratulated by the older man who tells him that 'he always thought that some day he would become *spoudaios* (great/famous)'. This remark triggers the younger man's memory and he recounts an incident that took place during his first month as a new recruit under the leadership of the older man towards whom the hero felt attracted. One day, while the rest of the group were out training, the lieutenant, described by the younger man as *oraios* (handsome) but also *agrios* (wild), assigned the hero to be one of the guards at the men's barracks, a job usually assigned to those men who were feeling unwell.

The hero tried to avoid the other guard, *ena oraio magkaki* (a handsome tough guy) with big dark eyes, a thick moustache and sunburnt arms. This description clearly suggests the masculine nature of the second guard and the sexual attraction that the hero feels towards him. The moustache is a symbol of a virile man and the sunburnt arms can allude to an outdoor occupation: perhaps he is a construction worker. But the man immediately struck up a conversation with the hero and suggested that they should make the most of their time together and have sex, a proposal that is not stated explicitly but is clearly implied by the other man's innuendos. The hero responded that the man had misunderstood him and that he did not like things like that. 'Why?', the other man replied, 'One has to try everything in the army' (Christianopoulos 2004: 42-44).

The threat of telling the lieutenant about his attempt to make a sexual pass at the hero was taken rather lightly until the hero made it clear that he was even determined to discuss the issue with a superior. The man then apologised to the hero and informed him that the lieutenant himself had asked him to make a 'proper' pass at him because the lieutenant thought that the hero was a homosexual – the slang term *digi-dang* is used in the text. The lieutenant advised the man that if the hero pulled his trousers down then he should fuck him, because the lieutenant wanted to know 'how many *gynaikes*' (women but implying effeminate men here) existed in his *lohos* (the group under his command). In the present day the hero left quickly before he was overcome with disgust, leaving the man who had once tried to find out whether the hero was a 'woman' or not rearranging his dentures (Christianopoulos 2004: 42-44).

Another, more explicit example of the eroticisation and sexualisation of men in the military is provided by two collections of photographs under the title *Ta Ellinika Agalmata* [Fig. 7] (Odos Panos 1992; Odos Panos 1995). Starting the former publication in 1992, Yiorgos Chronas, a well known gay literary figure in the Greek cultural milieu, the owner of 'Odos Panos' bookshop and the editor of a literary journal with the same title, published the first volume of *Ta Ellinika Agalmata*, which contained a series of military men, Greek and



ΤΑ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΑ ΑΓΑΛΜΑΤΑ

Φωτογραφίες Ἀνδρῶν τοῦ 1950-1960

ΟΔΟΣ ΠΑΝΟΣ

Figure 7: The cover of *The Ellinika Agalmata*.

foreign ones alike, posing nude in various forms of undress. A few months before he died, a private collector donated these photographs to Chronas. In both the 1992 and the subsequent 1995 collections the majority of the photographs depict these men in the nude with a visible erection. In a number of the photographs, the men are only naked from the waist down and are still wearing part of their military uniform, with their erection still visible.

Once more however, although Tsarouhis, Christianopoulos and Chronas' *Ellinika Agalmata*, all imbue the military experience with the erotic content to which many of my ethnographic interlocutors refer, the eroticisation of the military and the sexualisation of the conscript is not necessarily the belief and experience of all the gay men I have spoken to. Markos for instance, begun by discussing how sex was constantly on the minds of many of his fellow servicemen and how sexual banter but also exchange of pornographic magazines was part of the everyday life in the *stratopedo* – the military camp.

Talking about sex occupied most of our time, the rest was talking mostly about football. Of course, in all these discussions I had to pretend that I was showing interest. I mean, I like sex but not with women and football is really not my thing. Several men used to bring porn magazines regularly, not just things like *Playboy* but hard core straight porn magazines as well, and quite often we would sit around reading the magazines together. I was looking at the men in the photos of course but it was obvious that some of the men were *anamenoi* (turned on) and *kavlomenoi* (had an erection). I do think that when some of these men were looking at these magazines, they were ready for anything. But I wouldn't take the risk. I wanted to finish my *thiteia* as soon as possible and get out of there and I wouldn't do anything to jeopardise this. I know other gay friends who did that and they weren't caught but I think they were foolish.

However, Markos concluded by stressing the fact that, in contrast to other gay men, his experience of the military was not an erotic one and that it was rather dominated by other features of military life, such as the strict discipline and rigorously constructed behavioural structures of military routine from salutes to parades. For him, the army may encapsulate certain erotic aspects, but overall as a result of the above his libido was suppressed and the army was not a subject of erotic fantasies or practices. As he told me,

Lots of gay men, including quite a few of my gay friends, *goustaroun to strato* (fancy the army), *o stratos einai fetix gi' autous* (it is a fetish for them) but not for me. Yes, I did feel attracted to some of the men there but overall I didn't find the military experience as erotic as some of my friends did.

What at first emerges from the men's narratives about the military is a plethora of apparently contradictory experiences. Whereas some argued that the military was a negative and sexually oppressing experience, others saw it as 'the queer's Paradise'. But if nothing else, these narratives also demonstrate how, whilst in the military, these men struggled with the *Soma* – the collective body of the military – and in the process discovered their own individuality.

2.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the chapter has provided a discussion of the ways in which the Greek military, a dominant institution in Hellenic affairs, deals with the issue of homosexuality and examined a particular construction of the military as a prevailing heterosexual site where all its personnel, conscripts and officers alike, are considered as 'fully fledged' heterosexuals. Despite the introduction, in 2002, of legislation that excludes men suffering

from various kinds of ‘psychosexual disorders’ from serving in the Greek armed forces, the homosexual conscript can still fulfil his military obligations. That is, however, only if he remains silent about his sexuality.

In a way, this silence of the homosexual conscript reinforces and legitimises the silence of the military establishment. From the point of view of the military authorities, the homosexuality of the conscript will, more often than not, pose a problem, if the conscript voluntarily discloses this information. If this does not occur, then for all intents and purposes, the military assumes the conscript’s heterosexuality. The open acknowledgment by a man of his homosexuality would most likely lead to him being declared as unsuitable for service and therefore discharged with an I5. Yet, a classification, such as the one suggested by the I5, leads to discrimination against the individual, a possible reason behind the fact that few gay men decide to ‘come out’ to the military authorities.

The gay men’s narratives, however, contest the view of the Greek military as an exclusively heterosexual site. The very existence of these narratives indicates that far from being absent, homosexuals and homosexuality are part of the Greek military context. My gay interlocutors’ diverse and multiple responses to, and experiences of the military make it difficult to generalise. Similarly to the experience of heterosexual conscripts (Papataxiarchis 1991), the greatest majority of my ethnographic informants established strong friendships which survived long after their *thiteia*. Most of the contradictions between the narratives, on the other hand, emerged when the men described their sexual or non-sexual experience of the military. Whereas the majority challenged the hetero-normative structure of the military, they did not always adopt the same means to contest it.

Nickos, the one who suffered the most abuse because of his effeminacy, had an entirely negative experience. Iraklis, a conformist, saw gay-sex in a military context as being incompatible with the duties of a ‘loyal and *philotimou*’ conscript. Iakovos had no sexual

experience in the military primarily because of fear but came to a definite realisation of his emotional and sexual desire for men. Yiannis had an active sexual life with conscripts and tourists alike and also met his best gay friend. Achilleas too met a Greek gay man of similar age for the first time with whom he still retains close emotional ties. Petros met his lover and had his first same-sex experience with him during their one-month training. Stathis did not have sex with other conscripts but indicated that his identity as a soldier made him popular in gay bars. Aris had several sexual experiences with other male conscripts who identified themselves as heterosexual and argues that, given the particular character of the military experience, it is possible for heterosexual men to have sex with other men without the former necessarily compromising their heterosexuality. Markos, finally, sees the military context as devoid of eroticism.

Despite the multiplicity of these men's experiences, however, certain common patterns do appear. As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, the public shaming of a man's family as the result of his homosexuality rarely materialises. Rather, what seems to be the issue in most instances is the experience of a constant fear of its possible materialisation. In the context of the armed forces, there also exists a similar fear, only this time, initially implying the loss of the individual's honour. On a second level, from the official perspective of the military authorities, when this honour is translated as *philotimo*, the individual's sexual conduct in the military context is assumed to have repercussions for the collective honour of the 'Army'. But, in sharp contrast to the often non-materialisation of these fears when it comes to the family, although varied in degree, occasions of public shaming, like the ones experienced by Nickos or the Brigadier, are a regular occurrence in the military.

Once again, therefore, silence returns as a dominant theme and a common experience among many gay men in the military. Both the perpetuation of such silence and the contrasting 'dishonourable discharge' that is the possible outcome of the breaking – deliberate or not – of this silence, contradict the gay activist movement's aim to establish a

sense of *perifania* (pride) and to encourage gay men to ‘come out of the closet’ once and for all. In the mid-1970s Greek gay activists tentatively began to challenge the patriarchal structures of Greek society and to establish an awareness of homosexuality in the country. In the next chapter I will sketch the history of the Greek LGBT movement, situating it within the wider socio-political context of post-war Greek society.

Chapter 3

The Emergence of Homosexual Activism in Greece

The emergence of homosexual activism in Greece cannot be seen in isolation but needs to be contextualized within the wider processes of democratisation that followed the end of the dictatorship. These processes also saw the legalisation of the communist party, which had been outlawed since 1949, and the renewed efforts of Greek feminists to pursue their politics of equality. In fact, collective homosexual activism was almost inexistent in Greece until the time of *metapolitefsi*, the shift from a military dictatorial regime to a parliamentary democracy which occurred in 1974. Even before the advent of the Colonels to power in 1967, the conditions were not present for the creation of a movement centred on homosexuality. For example, whereas in the United States the 1950s were a time of relative political and economic stability and witnessed the proliferation of gay activist groups (Cruikshank 1992: 66-67; Miller 2006: 223-334), Greece during the same period had to confront the devastating effects of World War II and the ensuing civil war, which polarised the nation and destroyed its economic infrastructure (Mouzelis 1979; Mazower 2000).

Against this background, the following chapter will sketch the history of the LGBT movement in Greece, providing an outline of its emergence and the key moments in its development from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s. This is not intended to be the definitive account of Greek LGBT activism but rather an attempt to provide the first comprehensive study of its trajectory. The LGBT movement in Greece has so far received very little attention in the limited number of Greek studies which explore non-hegemonic forms of sexuality (Yannakopoulos 1996; Papadopoulos 2002; Kirtsoglou 2003). The few studies that have examined the global emergence of the gay and lesbian movement have also ignored the Greek case (Adam 1995; Adam, Duyvendak & Krouwel 1999). Even among the gay men I interviewed there was little awareness of the history or details of the first steps of the Greek LGBT movement. The Greek gay press also pays little attention to this subject and either concentrates more on issues related to gay consumption and lifestyle or

focuses primarily on the international dimension of the LGBT movement. For example, *10%*, a gay internet-based magazine, which is currently only one of two available Greek LGBT lifestyle magazines, published an article in its June/July 2004 edition with the title ‘Out & Proud: *Afti einai I Istoría mas* (This is our history/story)’ (Alexandrianos 2004: 21). The article discussed the events that led to the Stonewall Riots in New York on July 27, 1969, an event which has acquired a symbolic significance for the determination of LGBT people to fight the oppression inflicted upon them by state apparatuses as a result of their sexual orientation (Altman 1996:2).

What the reader will discover in the following pages is the story of LGBT activism in Greece, examining the local conditions that led initially to the creation of AKOE, the first same-sex activist organisation in the country which effectively planted the seeds for the idea of LGBT politics in Greece, and subsequently to other LGBT groups which followed after AKOE. I will start with a brief discussion of the legal status of Greek homosexuals since 1834 and will then examine the position and treatment of homosexuals during the period of the military dictatorship (1967-1974), since the persecution of homosexuals during the junta years and the quest for democratic procedures after its eventual overthrow largely provided the context for the emergence of homosexual activism in Greece. With specific reference to the ways in which the junta pursued an authoritarian and interventionist approach in spheres long considered private, Faubion (1993: 233) contends that:

The junta was distinctively racist and distinctively fascist in its conflation of social with moral and moral with political rectitude. It must, precisely for its confluences, be held historically responsible in part for the transformation of “sexual deviance” from a once largely socio-cultural to an explicitly socio-political matter.

As such, sexuality was gradually politicised and as result many Greek homosexuals began to understand their sexual identity more in relation to a political one. As in the case of the Argentinean and Spanish LGBT movements (see Brown 1999; Brown 2002; Llama and Vila 1999 respectively), homosexual mobilization in Greece came about as part of a larger wave of activism that reasserted democratic rights against repressive regimes.

Shortly after the overthrow of the military junta, Greek homosexuals found fertile ground amidst the wider process of democratisation to create an organisation whose aim was to provide a support mechanism and a source of education and awareness for both homosexuals and the wider public. After the junta, both gay men and women who returned from abroad and many of those who had suffered humiliation and persecution, identified the need for the creation of such a collective body of action that would fight for the equal rights of gay people as citizens of Greece. The second part of the chapter emphasizes the symbolic and political significance of Greece's entry into the then European Economic Union and the ascendance to power of PASOK, the socialist party, which promised a structural change that would liberate homosexuals from the restrictions imposed by the heteronormative definitions of gender. This chapter closes in the late 1980s with the processes that led to the dissolution of the first gay group in Greece and the consequent emergence of other LGBT activist organisations.

3.1. The Pre-Junta Years: Homosexuals and Greek Law

There is very little information about the experiences and lives of homosexual people in modern Greece, especially in the decades preceding the junta. Yet, as far as male homosexuality is concerned, literary representations were not entirely absent. The writings of homosexual authors such as Constantine P. Cavafy (1863-1933), Napoleon Lapathiotis (1888-1944), Kostas Taktsis (1927-1989) and Dinos Christianopoulos (b. 1931) provide a glimpse of the life of homosexuals in these decades but give a rather incomplete picture of

all the various expressions of homosexuality (Taktsis 1988; Cavafy 1989; Taktsis 1997; Lapathiotis 2001; Christianopoulos 2004). As far as female homosexuality is concerned, on the other hand, the literary writings focus almost exclusively on male homosexuality, with very little information on lesbian eroticism, although this situation is now changing (Kantsa 2002; Kirtsoglou 2004).

In conjunction with literary writings, representations of homosexual ‘characters’ in Greek films from the 1950s to the 1970s also give us insights into some of the mainstream perceptions of homosexuality of the time, but once again these are partial, focusing on male homosexuality and also usually tend to caricature the homosexual as an effeminate and at times ridiculous type (Kyriakos 2001: 64-70). In all other respects, it could be argued that whenever homosexuality became an official question it was almost always not merely ignored or ridiculed but rather treated with hostility. The presuppositions and expressions of such hostility were already prescribed by law with the foundation of modern Greece in the early nineteenth century.

After the establishment of the monarchy and the enthronement of the Bavarian prince Otto as the King of Greece (Woodhouse 1998: 154-155; Clogg 2004: 46-55; Koliopoulos and Veremis 2004: 49-50), the newly implemented penal code was laid out by the Bavarian administration in 1834, only two years after Greek independence. In reflecting the Bavarians’ perceptions of ‘Greekness’ and their own presumed identity as the descendants of the ancient Greeks (Woodhouse 1998: 157-166) and in the general context of a nineteenth-century nationalism that “stripped the Greek ideal of its eroticism while emphasising its harmony, proportion and transcendent beauty” (Mosse 1982: 227), the Bavarian administration penalised homosexual relations among men. According to article 282 for instance, “a person guilty of licentiousness against nature [*para fysin aselgeian*] is punished with at least a year in jail and is subject to police surveillance”, whereas article 274 prescribes an additional punishment for *apoplanisi anilikon* – the seduction of minors (Costopoulos et. al. 2000: 6).

The de-criminalisation of consensual homosexual relations between men was not realised until almost a century later, in the inter-war era. It was finally implemented in 1951 with the introduction of the new penal code of 1950 (Patakias 1962). The age of consent for homosexual relations between men was set at seventeen, as opposed to fifteen for heterosexuals. In contrast, without distinguishing this time between homosexual or heterosexual, the age of consent for all women was set at fifteen. According to Christos Patakias, a Greek Public Prosecutor, amongst the key arguments put forward by the legal experts of the time for achieving the decriminalisation of gay sex was the view that homosexuality was usually the result of a *psychiki astheneia* (a mental illness) and as such, a different, non-legal intervention was recommended (Patakias 1962: 382). From the 1950s onwards, in classifying homosexuality as a mental illness the Greek legislators argued that the ‘treatment’ of adult consensual homosexuality should be the subject of medical and not legal provisions. In this way, Greek legislators attempted to avoid touching upon the issue. The homosexual individual would be subjected to psychological assessment and testing. As I have indicated in the previous chapter with reference to Panayotis B whose I5 discharge prevented him from obtaining a driving licence, this psychological evaluation of the homosexual is still sometimes employed by the state authorities in order to ascertain the individual’s physical and mental ‘stability’.

Nevertheless, whereas the “modernisers” among the Greek legislators supported the belief that homosexuality should be decriminalised, others considered this to be a “socially dangerous” innovation. In the general context of the right-wing government’s conservative policies, including the preservation of records about political dissidents and their families in the 1950s, Costas Gardikas, a Rector of Greek Criminology, wrote in *Pinika Hronika* (Legal Annals) that “other scientists object to this reduction of the punishment of these licentious acts against nature, which they consider a true poison (*lathes delete ion*) in the social organism” (Gardikas in Costopoulos et al. 2000: 6), whereas Georgios Magakis, a lawyer and politician argued that, because homosexuality was not generally widespread in Mediterranean and ‘Latin’ countries, suppression of homosexuality was to be accomplished by both legal and cultural means (Magakis in Costopoulos et. al., 2000: 6). Both the

‘modernisers’ and the more openly conservative legislators of 1950s Greece failed to acknowledge the possibility that homosexuality might constitute a legitimate form of sexual expression.

Despite this failure of the Greek legislators to reach a unanimous decision, certain types of sexual relations between men remained under the jurisdiction of the law and could still incur a jail sentence, ranging from 3 months up to 5 years, depending on the severity of the crime (Article 347 of the Greek Penal Code in Costopoulos et. al., 2006: 6). These included the seduction of a minor by an adult male and sexual acts based on abuse or coercion. The law also made special provision for male homosexual prostitution, which was deemed illegal. Apart from a jail sentence the court may dispense other punishments to the perpetrators of this latter offence, including their containment in a rehabilitation centre where they have to work for up to 5 years and also a prohibition on residing in a particular area for five years (Article 252 of the Greek Penal Code in Costopoulos et. al., 2000: 6). Furthermore, although Greek legislation makes such specific provisions for certain sexual acts between men, female homosexuality in general remains outside its jurisdiction. As far as Greek legislation is concerned lesbians remain invisible (Batsioulas 1998: 59).

The omission of lesbian sex on the part of the Greek legislators follows the example of other European countries whose Penal Codes also ignore the issue. For example, Weeks suggests that an attempt in 1921 by the British Parliament to criminalise ‘Acts of Gross Indecency by Females’ was rejected in the House of Lords on the grounds that lesbians were sick and thus not responsible for their actions (Weeks 1990: 106). Earlier, in the eastern boundaries of the Continent, the Legal Code of 1832, under Tsar Nicholas I, criminalised male homosexual activity but did not include lesbianism (Healey 1993:28). As becomes evident from such legislation in Britain and pre-revolutionary Russia, and to some extent in Greece too, the concern rests primarily, if not exclusively, with male homosexuality.

Having discussed briefly the legal status of Greek homosexuals until the 1950s and 1960s, I will now move on to describe the ways in which homosexuals were perceived and treated during the seven years of the junta, as this period largely provided the impetus for the emergence of a Greek LGBT movement in the mid-1970s.

3.2. Escaping the Junta Years

Before the late 1970s, there was no organised gay scene in Greece. Parks, certain cinemas, the ports, and the spaces around brothels became some of the sites in which a homosexual activity developed. Some of the cheaper hotels around Omonoia, a main square in central Athens, often used by prostitutes as places to ‘entertain’ clients, also provided refuge to gay men seeking a few moments of pleasure. However cheap these hotels were and despite the fact that they were also often frequented by heroin addicts, many hotel owners were quite happy to accommodate the needs of some of my older gay informants, provided that the latter were prepared often to pay double or even triple the hourly charge of the room. Yet, this atmosphere of relative freedom was soon to change with the *coup d’état* of 1967.

In the context of ‘Operation Virtue’ and the raids in parks and public lavatories, the police employed diverse methods for punishing the unlucky men who got caught. These included the total shaving of their heads, physical and verbal abuse, psychological blackmail and exposure of their homosexuality to their families (Pavrianos 1991: 161; Theodorakopoulos 2004). A common theme in all these forms of punishment was an unprecedented official public shaming and humiliation of the ‘sexually deviant.’ Some homosexuals also suffered a similar fate to that of political dissidents by being sent into exile to designated concentration camps on barren islands of the Aegean (Kenna 2004).

As most authoritarian regimes have done, the military despots employed a form of censorship in all spheres of everyday life. The arts and publishing did not escape their attention. The chief weapon for the implementation of this policy in the fields of literature, learning, films and the theatre was pre-censorship. No book or magazine could be printed, no lecture delivered, without prior scrutiny and permission of the censors. Films and plays could be presented to the public only with the censors' approval and subject to cuts ordered by them. Existing books were taken care of by means of an 'Index' drawn up by the authorities and containing several hundred titles of books that could not be sold, bought, displayed, discussed or consulted in the public libraries (Roufos 1972: 149).

In this context of absolute censorship, it was difficult for any information on homosexuality to be easily accessible and widely circulated to interested parties. Although censorship was imposed on the Greek press, the circulation of foreign-language publications was allowed, regardless of content (Roufos 1972; Vlachou 1972). Soon after the *coup*, the Colonels and their advisers estimated that the harm done to their image by censorship of foreign-language publications was far greater than the dangers involved in their free circulation: in fact these dangers were negligible, as only a limited number of Greeks could either afford to buy such publications or understand foreign languages (Roufos 1972). Hence it came about that even when the witch-hunt over Greek publications was at its height, one could find Marx, Lenin, Marcuse or the Memoirs of Fanny Hill for example displayed quite freely in English or French. The same applied to *Le Monde* and *The Guardian*, even when they were carrying strong denunciations of the Greek dictatorship. Thus, whilst the bulk of the population was still protected from 'spiritual contamination', tourists and the Greeks who could speak foreign languages could read whatever they liked (Roufos 1972: 155).

Some of my older informants argued that these non-censored foreign newspapers provided information on developments, including news about the growing level of homosexual activism, around the globe. Another source of information on gay issues at the time, also mentioned by some of my older informants, were the letters that gay friends sent from

abroad, informing their Greek counterparts about developments in the gay arena. These were sent mostly by Greek students or political dissidents who were living in self-exile and who were experiencing the growing struggle for social – including homosexual – liberation and emancipation in the major capitalist countries of the West, such as Britain, Italy and the United States.

The exposure of Greek students and political dissidents abroad, as well as that of the self-exiled, to all sorts of radical politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s was to prove influential for the subsequent development of a Greek homosexual movement in the late 1970s (Theodorakopoulos interviewed by Palamiotis 1992). Of course, one can understand that there was a certain danger involved in sending letters of this sort because the police had the right to open all forms of correspondence. Despite these dangers, different information was disseminated to other gay men in informal clandestine gatherings in people's flats. In an interview I conducted with him, Argyris, a man in his mid-fifties, remembered how,

At the time, our thoughts and efforts were directed to the future. This was the only way to cope with reality. We began to think of creating our own association. In parties we would discuss the latest developments abroad. I remembered that in one party one of the men read out a letter that from a friend who had witnessed the Stonewall events. After the letter was read out, there were cheers and laughter: Homosexuals were fighting back.

Overall, very few of my interlocutors had such first-hand experiences of either the harsh treatment or the occasional optimism of gay men during the junta. Yet, as most of them were born either during or shortly after that period, they were all aware of the circumstances surrounding the dictatorship as well as the more specific plight of Greek homosexuals during the junta. Older gay men, such as Argyris and Antonis, some of whom

had experienced the full severity of the regime, had told them their stories in the gay bars of Athens after the collapse of the dictatorship.

Antonis, a gay man in his 50s, was one of the few of my informants who had personally experienced the wrath of the military police. His story provides a compelling account of the brutality of the regime towards homosexuals. The interview took place one November afternoon in 1996 in his flat in Athens. In this section of the interview, Antonis recounts the events surrounding his arrest, his night in jail and the subsequent outcome of his ordeal:

It was around 3 o'clock in the morning. I was coming back from a birthday celebration. I hadn't had sex for a long time, so as I was approaching *Zappeion* (a park in Athens), I slowed down. I parked the car, and walked along one of the side streets leading to the park. It was very quiet. I walked to the usual place and there were a number of men there. Some of the regulars were there, so we waved at one another. The game was very silent. There was hardly any talking when cruising, just sign language. I saw someone I fancied, so I approached him and we went round the bushes. We were in the middle of having sex when we heard a lot of commotion, and someone running towards us, yelling 'Police, Run, Run.' In no time, everyone dispersed around. I pulled my trousers up and remained hidden. As I was hiding behind the bushes, I could hear and see people running, chased by policemen. It was pandemonium. I didn't know what to do. I was confused. As I was about to leave, two policemen appeared and grabbed me. They called me *poustis* and forced me onto the ground. They handcuffed me and led me to a police van. I noticed there were two police vans full of people. I saw that some of the men I knew had also been arrested. We were taken to the station, and then the real torture began.

At this point I noticed Antonis had tears running down his eyes and I waited for him continue his story:

‘It’s still painful’ he told me, ‘the memory is still there. It is like a nightmare. At the police station some policemen were harassing us, calling us *poustides*, *adelfes* (sissies), *diestrammenous* (perverts). A policeman kicked a man who objected to this behaviour hard in the stomach. I remained quiet. The policemen asked for our identity cards. They put us in a cell. The next morning a policeman called my name. I was taken to a room where to my surprise I saw my father waiting for me. I later discovered that this was another way that the police used to ridicule homosexuals. They notified your relatives about your homosexuality. Let’s not forget that at the time, during the day, most of these men, like me, would be respectable heterosexual citizens. The discovery of your homosexuality by your family would result in more abuse from the family and coercion to get married in order to cover up the issue. I wonder how many lives the dictators ruined this way. I became very afraid when I saw my father. I did not know how he would react. The first thing he told me was ‘*pousti*, you have shamed our name.’ In the car my father told me that he had bought me a ticket for Paris. He had decided to send me away. My father said that he was not going to tell my mother about what had happened. I agreed. This was the last time that my father spoke to me about the incident. A couple of days later, I boarded a plane for Paris. It’s been 28 years since that day. I have never returned back to Greece to live permanently.

But such persecution of homosexuals as the kind experienced by Antonis was part of a larger suspension of civil liberties. Another junta decree authorized searches in private houses or public buildings, by day or night, without restrictions and without a warrant. The

dictators also prohibited public or private gatherings involving more than five people for fear that they might represent attempts to subvert and undermine their authority. For example, Evangelos Averoff, a conservative politician and the leader of the New Democracy Party between 1981 and 1984, was briefly sent to prison for having invited more than five people into his flat (Woodhouse 1991: 35).

In this atmosphere of constant surveillance and terror, homosexual activities had to be clandestine, and involved a great amount of risk. Manthos, a sixty year old man, recalls the secretive nature of his homosexual encounters during the military regime's rule of terror:

It was like the first Christians. The only thing we could do, at great risk, was to gather in houses and to have a party where everybody would contribute and bring something or go to the parks or to the ports for sex. Nowhere was safe.

Manthos also recounted that at times even men with whom he had had sex would sometimes turn against him after the sexual encounter was over. But even the space of one's home, where such secret private parties took place, was not safe.

In November 1968 Ladas, the man behind 'Operation Virtue', invited journalists to his office to announce something 'very important' to them, as he called it. In the context of *Epeixirisi Areti*, undertaken by his ministry, thirty homosexuals or '*anomaloi typoi*' (perverted types), as Ladas referred to them, had been arrested in a house in Kalogreza, because according to him 'they were preparing to engage in orgies'. The minister gave the journalists the names and photographs of those arrested, threatening '*oloi ston Kaiada*' (to have them all thrown off) Kaiadas (Sioubouras 1980: 159; Theodorakopoulos 2004). *Kaiadas* was a cliff, a chasm in mount Taygetos where the ancient Spartans supposedly

used to throw off criminals, prisoners of war, sacrilegious people, and according to some accounts, sickly and disabled children. In a metaphorical sense the word implies the harshness that 'society' has in store for people, who are at a disadvantage (Babinotis 1998: 235).

The situation began gradually to improve, however, with the fall of the dictatorship in July 1974. The police raids and public sweeps in the parks did not stop immediately after the restoration of democracy but they were neither as frequent nor as intense as they used to be during the seven years of the dictatorship. Soon after the overthrow of the military regime the first gay bars opened in Athens, in the area of Plaka. The desire to organise into a movement now began to be consolidated. The restoration of democracy and the consequent abolition of the monarchy provided a new space and vocabulary for those seeking social liberties, including gay and lesbian rights. The rapid re-organisation of the feminist movement provided an example to be imitated.

Greek feminists acted swiftly in order to take advantage of the climate for change and democracy at the time and created active groups to promote the feminist agenda. This was not the first time that Greek women had attempted to organise as a group. Their efforts go back to the mid-1920s (Stamiris 1983; Kaklamanaki 1984). However, previous attempts to create a strong and viable feminist movement had been curtailed and women's voices had been silenced by other political issues and by issues of national security and territorial integrity. For example, the struggles of Greek middle-class women in the inter-war period for better educational and vocational training, improved working conditions and the right to vote were halted by the repressive dictatorship of General Metaxas in 1936, followed by the long cycle of German occupation and the civil war (Stamiris 1983: 100). By the end of the civil war in 1949, all progressive movements in Greece had been crushed. It was not until the 1960s that a militant women's movement re-emerged but this was suppressed by the dictatorship of 1967 (Stamiris 1983: 105; Kaklamanaki 1984: 53).

As a result of the military regime, Greece was once more excluded from major social and innovative trends and was unable to follow the massive wave of feminist mobilisation of the 1960s and early 1970s. Feminism was at odds with the regime's inherently conservative patriarchal ideology, and the state apparatus perceived feminism as a threat to the institution of the family and as a challenge to men's authority and domination. After the fall of the junta, Greek feminists re-organised themselves into a new women's movement which, this time, had a more structured character based on a constitution, a centralised and hierarchical leadership, work in committees, an electoral system and a spreading network of branches (Stamiris 1983: 107). In contrast to the case of the women's movement in Greece, there had been no previous attempt to create a gay activist voice in the country. Since there was no precedent for a homosexual movement, from its very inception the Greek lesbian and gay movement looked abroad for inspiration and key models of activism. An event in the early months of 1976 accelerated the process of Greek homosexuals formally organising into a group.

3.3. The Law on Venereal Diseases and the Emergence of AKOE

In March 1976 the Karamanlis administration, the first democratic government of the post-junta years, announced that it was intending to implement a new law concerning venereal diseases, a law, however, that had been initially devised by the Colonels. Among other things, the new bill proposed severe punishments for homosexuals and prostitutes. Homosexuals arrested having sex in the parks, for instance, would be punished with a year in jail, and in the case of a second conviction, even with exile for up to a year. In addition, the names of those convicted would be included on a record kept by the police, which was going to have the primary responsibility for the enforcement of this new law (Nicolaidis 1976: 1).

The announcement of the government's plans encouraged a group of men to act. The general atmosphere of optimism at the time made them more resilient and determined to fight against prejudice. Some of these men had studied abroad, mostly in France and Italy, had witnessed the May 1968 student uprising in Paris and had also come into contact with gay organisations in these countries (Palamiotis 1992). For example, a couple of them had participated in *Fuori*, the organisation of the Italian homosexuals. One of the first steps was to contact prominent gay Greek personalities and ask for their support. With this aim in mind, Andreas Velissaropoulos, a representative of the above group, met with the author Kostas Taktsis.

Taktsis was born in Salonica in 1927 but grew up in Athens where he experienced first the German occupation and then the Greek civil war that followed. Both events had a profound influence on his life (Taktsis 1989). Taktsis studied Law before becoming a full-time author and translator and between 1954 and 1964 he lived outside Greece, moving between Western Europe, Africa, the US and Australia. By the mid-1970s Taktsis had become a rather well-known figure in the Greek intellectual and cultural milieu especially after the publication, in 1962, of his *To Trito Stefani* (The Third Wedding Wreath) which incorporates a number of homosexual episodes. In spite of the fact that he was open about his homosexuality, Taktsis had a devoted heterosexual audience. His desire to dress up as a woman and to work as a transvestite prostitute, a fact known by few people, became common knowledge in August 1989 when he was found dead in his flat, strangled by one of his regular clients.

Taktsis opposed the idea of homosexual mobilization, refused his help, and in fact he tried to convince Velissaropoulos to abandon such an attempt. Taktsis felt that the issue of the oppression of homosexuals could only be solved as part of a wider social liberation and he specifically objected to the incorporation of transvestites into any attempt to promote homosexual activism. He argued that the presence of transvestites would undermine the credibility of homosexual politics and would alienate the wider public which, he thought,

would be generally unsympathetic towards the plight of transvestites (Taktis 1992: 111; Theodorakopoulos 2005: 168). His reaction reflects the opinion of other intellectual Greek gays of an older generation who objected to the creation a homosexual movement in Greece. For instance, on one occasion, the poet Dinos Christianopoulos referred to gay activists as “syndicalists of the ass” (Antonopoulos 1999: 92).

Taktis’s refusal did not discourage the group, however, and they continued their efforts to bring about homosexual mobilization. The group decided to write a declaration outlining their demands. This declaration, signed by a group identifying itself as the founding committee of AKOE, the *Apeleftherotiko Kinima Omofilofilon Elladas* (Liberation Movement of Greek Homosexuals), was published in October 1976 in most newspapers and magazines, and distributed in gay bars, in cinemas and even in some main streets and squares of the capital, and effectively marked the beginning of AKOE (Theodorakopoulos 2005). The fact that these men were able to distribute their leaflets relatively free of harassment in public spaces was a sign that in post-junta Greece, minorities, sexual or otherwise, were more able to express themselves freely and to engage in dialogue with the wider public.

AKOE lacked a formal hierarchy and constitution and was not a legally registered organisation. This meant that it was primarily an informal group. Shortly after the distribution of this declaration, Andreas Velissaropoulos contacted Loukas Theodorakopoulos and invited him to join AKOE. Theodorakopoulos is a poet and the writer of *Kaiadas*, published in July 1976, the book that analysed the events surrounding the arrest of the thirty homosexual men in November 1968. Theodorakopoulos assumed the task of becoming the first unofficial spokesman of Greek homosexuals and later wrote about the impact that the distribution of this declaration had on the Athenian public:

This declaration [...] was accepted with surprise and curiosity for its unusual content. It became the subject of discussion, it was commented upon extensively (in some cases in a very favourable way) but at the same time it faced a strong reaction, irony and mockery from a large share of the daily newspapers and magazines. The surprise was mostly the result of the structured and scientific discourse of the declaration [...] but at the same time of the manners or image of the young people who distributed the declaration. Having got used to the homosexual caricatures in the comedies of the old Greek cinema and on TV [...] people suddenly saw “normal” boys wandering amongst them, without mincing, declaring explicitly and seriously that they are homosexuals, that they are not ashamed about it and that in fact they demand equal treatment and rights like all other citizens (Theodorakopoulos 2005: 4).

AKOE’s declaration called for a meeting to discuss the issues. The meeting took place in a theatre near the centre of Athens in order to protest about the impending bill on venereal diseases and to discuss the problems that Greek homosexuals and transvestites experienced in their everyday lives. In an effort to increase homosexual visibility members of the Greek press were specifically invited to the meeting. Around one hundred homosexuals, mainly transvestites, attended this event, the first of its kind in Greece. The fact that transvestites predominated in this first meeting is not surprising as they would have felt the effects of the law on venereal diseases more acutely. The majority of these transvestites worked as prostitutes and were exposed almost daily to potential physical and verbal abuse and harassment from the police.

The novelty of this kind of gathering was such that Sioubouras referred to it as ‘an earthquake in Hellenic givens’ (Sioubouras 1980: 9). The effects were immediate. As Sioubouras contends, before the meeting at *Louzitania* “the Press but also most of the people used only the words *diestrammenous* (perverted), *anithikos* (immoral) to refer to

homosexuals. “In Greece the words homosexuals, transvestite, *ekdidhomenes gynaiques* [prostituted women], *enhirismenes* [transsexuals] began to be used substantially from April 1977” (Sioubouras 1980: 8-9). This is a significant shift, signaling a move away from the widespread use of words that stigmatise the homosexual both as sexually and morally deviant to ones which describe the sexual preferences of an individual and not necessarily their moral character.

The exposure of some of its founding members such as Andreas Velissaropoulos to all sorts of radical politics and ideologies, whilst studying abroad, was significant for the development of AKOE’s main principles and is evident in one of Theodorakopoulos’ statements in which he outlined the aims of the organisation. Among other things the charter indicates that,

AKOE fights against the System that maintains and reproduces the fear against sexuality – the patriarchal family, the school, the urban society – and struggles to abolish the androcentric ideology with which the ruling class oppresses the whole social body. More specifically, we fight against the institutionalised perception that the heterosexual couple, marriage and reproduction constitute the sole purpose of sexuality [...]. A sexual revolution is essential for the abolition of taboos and patriarchal manners that constitute the oppressive sexual ideology, as well as for the abolition of the ideological categories homosexual-heterosexual and the differentiation of sexual roles active-passive (Sioubouras 1980: 161)

One can detect a Marxist tone in AKOE’s declaration, through their constant use of words such as system, oppression, ruling class and sexual revolution. The ideology of the left has played a significant role in the emergence of the gay movements abroad as well. (D’Emilio 1983a; Weeks 1990: 144-150; Tamagne 2006: 268-276) As D’Emilio (1983a: 233) has

maintained for example, Marxism exerted a strong influence on the movement: inspired by revolutionary rhetoric, activists no longer feared being known as homosexuals. AKOE, however, was not espoused by the Greek communist party at the time, and in particular by the Greek Communist Party of the Exterior, which followed the party line and directives prescribed by the Soviet regime. In fact, the Greek Communist Party of the Exterior (KKE Exoterikou) explicitly condemned homosexuality and demanded that its members respect this decision (Poustrix 1997: 2)

Given that the Greek Communist of the Exterior took its party-line directly from Moscow, it is not surprising that the former was such a vehement critic of Greek gay activism in its early stages, especially due to the attitude of the Soviet authorities towards homosexuality. Following, an initial decriminalisation of homosexual sex in 1922, shortly after the rise of the Bolsheviks to power, homosexuality was re-criminalised by Josef Stalin in 1937 and purges of homosexuals soon followed (Healey 1993; Healey 2001). So, the attitude of the Greek Communist Party may have been related to Moscow's antipathy towards homosexuals and the Greek communists' desire to emulate it. The Greek communists' opposition to any attempt at homosexual liberation was not only limited to verbal expositions. In February 1981, members of the Communist Youth invaded an amphitheatre at the University of Thessaloniki where a public debate about homosexuality was going to take place, and prevented the event from happening (Poustrix 1997: 5).

AKOE established its offices in a basement on Zaloggou Street in Exarheia, a central district of Athens. Almost simultaneously with the founding of AKOE, the first gay bars opened in the neighbouring affluent area of Kolonaki which was the primary centre of commercial gay life in Athens during the 1980s. Educating the Greek public on issues of homosexuality and sexuality became a priority item on AKOE's agenda. According to Theodorakopoulos:

One of the most basic ambitions of AKOE and of *Amfi* [AKOE's magazine] is the informing of the social body on the issue of homosexuality and sexuality in general – issues that, [even] until a few years ago, remained taboo in our country in contrast to European countries, to America and virtually to the entire world (Sioubouras 1980: 162)

Talking about sex in general and homosexuality in particular was thus seen as one of the main factors for the de-stigmatization of homosexuality.

During the first year of its life AKOE included only gay men and a few transvestites as its members. Greek lesbians did not formally join the organisation until 1978 since they had initially participated in women's organisations. From then until their eventual withdrawal, lesbians used to gather in AKOE's premises every Friday evening to discuss their issues. However, their presence there was short-lived. Frustrated by the misogynist attitudes and behaviour of some of the male activists and feeling that their problems were sidelined by gay men, lesbians left the group to join the other feminist organisations at the "House of Women" in Romanou Melodou Street and to pursue their issues within the women's movement (Theodorakopoulos 2005; Petropoulou 2005). The marginalisation that Greek lesbians faced both within the gay and the feminist movements was not a unique phenomenon but rather has been a common experience of lesbians elsewhere. For example, the female members of the London branch of the Gay Liberation Front, founded in 1970, left in 1972 due to both the side-lining of their issues and their experience of sexism from the gay men in the organisation (Weeks 1990: 200). Similarly, D' Emilio writes that several U.S. lesbians in the post-Stonewall era opted to create separatist organisations as a result of what they saw as chauvinism and the hostility they experienced in gay groups and in women's movement respectively (D'Emilio 1983a: 236).

Parallel to meetings, in the spring of 1978, AKOE began publishing *Amfi*, a quarterly

magazine, which provided a forum for discussion and dissemination of information mostly on gay men's issues. The first issue was an instant success and the demand was such that it had to be reprinted. *Amfi* literally translates as 'bi-', but also refers to *amfisvitsi* (contestation). What AKOE and *Amfi* were contesting were the current oppressive, patriarchal discourses of Greek gender and sexuality (Theodorakopoulos 2005). Following the break-up of AKOE in 1989, due to internal conflicts that I will discuss later in the chapter, *Amfi* soon ceased publication.

Yet, after the re-emergence of AKOE in 1992, the magazine was re-launched, and the first issue of the revamped *Amfi* was in circulation in June 1996. No more issues have been published since. The June 1996 issue of the magazine was distributed all over Greece and could even be purchased from several mainstream bookstores, thereby showing the gradual acceptance and legitimation of homosexual expression. *Amfi* was radical for its time and attracted both friends and enemies. Issue B2 of the summer of 1979 was confiscated on the pretext that it offended public morals and its editor Loukas Theodorakopoulos was prosecuted.

The offending item in that particular issue was a poem by Nickos Spanias which made reference to a *fourioziko kavli* (a 'boisterous prick') and to a *dynato kavli* (a 'strong prick'). During the following year's court-case, many Greek and foreign celebrities, including the singer Tom Robinson, appeared as defense witnesses. At the end of the trial, the editor of *Amfi* was unanimously acquitted and cleared of all charges. It was obvious from this trial that the publication of *Amfi* was offensive to a number of Greek officials who were not comfortable with this visibility of homosexuality. Homosexuals were tolerated as long as they lived their life in silence and 'in the closet.' Once they broke this silence and were out in the spotlight, their presence became threatening to the authorities who had long prescribed the rules of silence.

However, despite the trial of *Amfi*, by the end of the decade the seeds of gay activism in Greece had been planted and the process of homosexual liberation and visibility had started. The initial fight of Greek homosexuals against the implementation of the bill concerning venereal diseases was successful. Faced with adverse publicity and open protest, Spiros Doxiades, the Minister of Social Services, sent a letter to the Action Group for Homosexuality (*Omada Drasis gia tin Omofilofilia*), and to Antonis Santis, the Secretary of the Greek embassy in Bonn in which he stressed that, “the current government and I personally have every intention to respect the personal life of every person in our country. We have absolutely no intention to police the sexual life of any citizen” (cited in Sioubouras 1980: 159). The pressure exerted on Greek politicians from the members of the newly founded AKOE led to the government’s decision to withdraw the controversial legislation. In post-junta Greece, the freedoms of those suppressed under the military regime were to be respected. This was a temporary victory, however, and AKOE’s fight against this bill had soon to be re-launched in the opening months of the new decade.

3.4. Homosexual Activism in the 1980s: From Liberation to Disintegration

Homosexual activism in the 1980s developed in the shadow of two events in the political sphere, both of which occurred in 1981: first, Greece’s official entry into the European Union and, second, the election of PASOK, the Panhellenic Socialist Party, under the leadership of Andreas Papandreou (Woodhouse 1998: 318-322; Clogg 2004: 166-200; Koliopoulos and Veremis 2004: 105-107). It was under these conditions that the First Gay Pride took place in Athens in 1982. The Greek mainstream media also turned their attention to the coverage of homosexuality, fuelled among other things by the AIDS epidemic and the screening of the film *Angelos*, whose main character is a homosexual man who murders his male lover after the latter forces him into prostitution (Katakouzinis 1983). During Grigoris Vallianatos’ unofficial leadership of AKOE in the mid-1980s, homosexual activism enjoyed an unprecedented level of media coverage but bitter rivalries between competing fractions within the movement led to the undermining of AKOE and its

dissolution in 1989, thereby bringing the first phase of homosexual activism in Greece to an end.

The dawn of the 1980s offered fresh challenges and an increased visibility to Greek gay activists. In early January 1980 the new conservative government of Georgios Rallis, who had succeeded Karamanlis' transitory rule, decided to unearth the controversial bill regarding venereal diseases, albeit in a slightly modified form (Sioubouras 1980; Vassilas 1984). Although it legalized transvestite prostitution for the first time in Greek history, other clauses were still maintained, among them the possible exile of homosexuals in case of repeated convictions on the grounds of sexual solicitation in public areas. Once again, the police were given the duty of patrolling these areas and the right to implement the law. This led to a renewed effort to pressure the government into abandoning this controversial legislation. AKOE organised its first open public gathering outside the *Propylaia*, the gates of the old University in the centre of Athens, on 26 January 1980 to protest against the proposal (Vassilas 1984).

The morning before the protest AKOE had invited journalists from the major Greek daily newspapers to their offices for a press conference. Approximately one hundred and fifty people attended this event. The participants, apart from the members of AKOE, some of whom wore balaclava helmets to avoid being recognized, and the media representatives, included the Greek gay author, Kostas Taktsis, a number of transvestites and a few individual members of leftist groups who supported AKOE's actions. Speeches were made by AKOE activists outlining their demand for the abolition of the law. A petition was agreed, signed and later that same evening, it was handed over to the Greek Parliament (Taktsis 1989). The pressure on the Greek government to abandon the legislation intensified abroad as well. Foreign gay activists demonstrated outside Greek embassies abroad and international personalities such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes offered their support to Greek homosexuals. (Sioubouras 1980)

The 1980s also ushered in a new era for Greek gay activists characterised by optimism and the promise of change. This renewed sense of optimism is a constant theme that emerges from the interviews I conducted. This is how Alkiviades, a gay man in his forties, who was a member of AKOE, described the general atmosphere at the time:

We were very optimistic then. A few years before we could never have even imagined that an organisation such as AKOE could have existed in Greece. It was a time of great fun. There was a huge appetite and enthusiasm for work. Adversities did not scare us. Even the prosecution of *Amfi* was seen in a positive way. Anything that helped us publicise our existence, our cause, was thought to be positive.

The enthusiasm referred to by Alkiviades was also related to the context of wider social developments within Greek society, as I will now explain.

3.5. The rise of PASOK to Power and Greece's Entry to the European Economic Union

On 1st of January 1981 Greece became an official member of the European Community (Close 2002). For many Greeks the inclusion of the country in this organisation consolidated Greece's position as an undeniable western 'European' nation (Clogg 1996: 177). In October of the same year PASOK won the general elections. Andreas Papandreou used the word *allage* (Change) as his main political motto during the electoral campaign. The *allage* that PASOK was promising to offer was multifaceted: political, economic, social and this appealed to many gays, especially to gay activists who were also struggling to change the existing sexual and gender status quo. Amongst many of the gay men I spoke

to, PASOK was seen as a progressive party, willing to embrace issues of diversity. PASOK's commitment to gay activism had been demonstrated earlier during the trial of *Amfi* when members of PASOK had offered their support, and the lawyers who defended *Amfi* and its editor, free of charge, were senior members of PASOK (Antonopoulos 1999).

Another member of the socialist party, the Greek actress Melina Merkouri, was also seen as a staunch ally, as she was one of the few members of the Greek parliament to raise the issue of the continuing raids and arrests of gay men in the public parks of Athens. These arrests were made under the pretext of identity checks. The Greek police had, and still have, the right to arrest someone if he or she is not carrying an identity card, a practice that goes back to the days of the military junta. The prospect of a PASOK victory filled many Greek gay individuals with great expectations for the future. George, a gay man in his late 30s described how he and his gay friends reacted to Papandreou's victory:

We had gathered at my place to watch the result of the elections. When it became obvious that PASOK was going to win we opened a bottle of champagne to celebrate. We drank and danced until the late hours of the morning. We believed that PASOK would be supportive of gays. After all, Melina [Merkouri] was part of it. We wanted a change, and PASOK promised us that. We were fed up with the *Dexia* [the Right].

The impression that PASOK would be an ally to Greek homosexuals was further reinforced when, a few days prior to his electoral victory, Andreas Papandreou stated his commitment to respecting the rights of minorities:

It is evident that within the context of our general principles, which concern the rights of the citizen, discrimination against minorities will be abolished. Their members will be treated like normal citizens and they

will have the same rights and the same obligations before the Law and the State as all Greeks (Stathopoulos 1981: 12).

With the advent of PASOK to power, the topic of the venereal diseases legislation resurfaced. The new socialist government decided to abandon the bill and to replace it with a different one. For this purpose it formed a committee for its drafting and AKOE members were invited to participate in it. What remained, however, even after PASOK's victory, were the sporadic raids of public spaces where homosexuals were congregating, and the occasional persecution of transvestites. Transvestites organized a rally to protest outside the Prime Minister's residence in *Kastri*, and as a result of this rally there ensued a meeting with Yiannis Skoularikis, the then Minister of Public Order. During the meeting, attended by members of AKOE, the minister referred to the low educational level of the policemen and asked for the activists' leniency and understanding (Antonopoulos 1999). The Minister reassured the activists that the government's aim was to implement a series of measures to raise the educational and cultural standards of members of the Greek police force.

In spite of the government's efforts to raise these standards, occasional raids of gay spaces and public parks by policemen still take place. During my fieldwork in Athens, two incidents occurred involving gay people and the police. In April 1996, members of EL.AS (the Hellenic Police) invaded the *Lizzard* club, interrupting the party of the lesbian group 'Cyberdykes' (Tzivitzili 1996: 122). A few months later, fourteen gay men were taken to the police station in Kolonaki for questioning for no apparent reason. The men were sitting on the benches outside the entrance to *Zappeion*, a well-known cruising spot among gays in Athens. The majority of the men had shown their identity cards to the police. Among those arrested were three members of the new, post-1989 AKOE, including its spokesman Manthos Peponas. At the police station, the men were bodily searched and they were later released (Yeorgiou 1996:125).

Nevertheless, in general, this was a period of relative stability and promise, suitable for the emergence of social movements. The feminist movement too re-gained its impetus in the 1980s and campaigned for women's rights. The process of gender reform in Greece was largely facilitated by the fact that the President of the Union of Greek Women (E.G.E), the largest Greek feminist group in the 1980s, was Margarita Papandreou, the American-born wife of the Prime Minister (Kaklamanakis 1984; Stamiris 1987). Women's demands, such as the alterations of the family law that would include a woman's right to abortion – a right not yet granted – were put firmly on the agenda and a number of reforms, which aimed to rectify the unequal treatment of women at work and at home, were introduced during this decade. On the homosexual front on the other hand, these new liberties were also encapsulated in the organisation of the first Greek Gay Pride.

3.6. The First Greek Gay Pride

Amidst this greater sense of optimism for the future, the first ever Gay Pride in Greece took place in Athens in 1982. The American classicist John Winkler, a witness to the event, wrote a few years later that, “the first Gay Pride demonstration in Athens [...] was a surprising silent gathering which after a short time spontaneously broke up into discussion groups between the demonstrators and the numerous by-standers who were taking their evening stroll” (Winkler 1990: 1). Less than one hundred people attended this event, most of them members of AKOE. It received no acknowledgement from the Greek press at the time but marked the beginning of annual Pride celebrations in the capital to commemorate the Stonewall Riots. Parallel to the gay activists' relative success in the public arena and with the first Gay Pride symbolizing the official breaking, on the part of homosexuals, of a silence that had long suppressed their right to difference, gay activists became all the more openly eloquent and vocal. From 1978 and the publication of *Amfi* onwards, silence was the enemy to be confronted.

3.7. The Gay Press of the 1980s

The Greek gay press received a boost in the early years of this decade with the appearance of a number of gay magazines. In fact, one can argue that the early part of the 1980s was the most productive period of gay publishing in Greece. In spite of the controversy surrounding it earlier, AKOE continued producing *Amfi* as a means to disseminate their information, while another gay magazine appeared in the Greek news-stands in 1981 edited by the Greek transvestite Paola. *Kraximo*, the magazine's title, literally means 'bird calling' but also refers to the verbal abuse that homosexuals occasionally receive in public. The aim of *Kraximo* is to ridicule and to shame the homosexual person by publicly drawing attention to him as he is walking down the street. By using a term of abuse and informal public shaming, as the title of this publication, Paola imbued the word with a positive meaning and used it in a subversive way.

The mixture of soft-core pornographic imagery and a witty commentary ensured the magazine's appeal. Like *Amfi*, *Kraximo* was prosecuted in 1983 for 'offending public morals.' This time the offending article was a drawing by Jean Cocteau. During the trial, the judge, who presided over the case, famously asked, "Who is this Cocteau guy anyway?" (Antonopoulos 1999) Paola was sentenced to four months in jail and also fined 30.000 drachmas. Her imprisonment was avoided thanks to the rapid mobilisation of foreign gay organisations and the interest expressed by Amnesty International, *Kraximo* continued publication until the winter of 1993. Greek lesbian activists soon followed and contributed to this flourishing gay publishing. Shortly after joining the feminist movement, they began producing *Lavris*, the first lesbian publication in the country. The strong trade competition from the Greek publishing market and lack of money did not permit the magazine to remain in circulation, however, and it stopped after only three issues (Petropoulou 2005).

Along with the expanding gay press of the 1980s, LGBT activism was kept in the spotlight by a series of other events such as the screening in 1983 of the film *Angelos*, made by the Greek director Georgios Katakouzinos. The film opened to great acclaim and won the praise of the cinema critics as well as the first award at the Annual Film Festival in Thessaloniki, but gay activists reacted against its dark and gloomy portrayal of homosexuality (Kyriakos 2001: 58). Based on a true story, in the aftermath of the junta, the film is a harrowing account of Angelos, a shy young man, who comes from a troubled family – both his parents were alcoholic, his younger sister was mentally and physically disabled and his grandmother was a former prostitute. Following a brief relationship with an older and wealthier man and after meeting a macho sailor, perfectly fitting the stereotype of a *kolobaras*, Angelos, the ‘angel’ of the story thinks that he has at last found ‘true love’.

Their relationship soon becomes abusive, however, with Angelos being subtly but persistently lured by his lover, a member of a macho group of pimps, into becoming a transvestite prostitute on the streets of Athens. Angelos’ hopelessness and humiliation soon ends in violence. During the day he is a heterosexual soldier, whilst at night he is a transvestite prostitute. One night whilst prostituting, he is arrested and taken to the police station. The officer in charge informs Angelos’ father about his son’s homosexuality and Angelos was dishonourably discharged. The officer yells at him: “shame on you. Soldier and Sissy?” Upon their return home, his father gets drunk and murmurs: “my son is poustis?” He takes a kitchen knife and kills himself because of shame. Having his father’s death on his consciousness, Angelos is only to experience even more violence. When his lover and pimp neglects to follow him and his client, the truck driver who picks Angelos up abandons him in the middle of what seems like a mountain of garbage. Angelos returns home bruised and covered in blood, his lover rapes him and after Angelos recovers, he stabs his lover to death. The film helped publicise the plight of Christos Roussos, the real ‘Angel’ of the story, who was sent to prison in 1975. At the time of the film’s screening, Christos Roussos was serving his life sentence in the Hallicarnassus prison, and soon afterwards he went on a hunger strike.

Roussos' successive attempts to be granted a presidential pardon had failed. He and his supporters claimed that his punishment was extremely harsh and that 'extenuating circumstances' had led him to kill his partner. His health was rapidly deteriorating and for the first time, the mainstream Greek press was sympathetic towards and supportive of a homosexual. A campaign was launched by AKOE for his release and rallies and demonstrations were organised in front of the entrance of the Old University, right in the heart of Athens. Eventually, a Presidential pardon was granted and Roussos was released from prison (Faubion 1995). But whereas Roussos' case gained the sympathy of a great part of the wider heterosexual public, the Aids epidemic and the consequent death of well-known Greek gay men brought homosexuality back to the centre of arguments demonising same-sex practices and relationships.

3.8. The AIDS Epidemic in Greece

The AIDS epidemic also increased the visibility and public awareness of homosexuality in Greece during the 1980s, and in the latter part of the decade AIDS issues were added to the agenda of Greek gay activists. In the mid-1980s, AIDS made its presence felt in the country and claimed its first victims. Among the latter were two high-profile celebrity figures: Iolas, a socialite and antique collector and the first patron of Yiannis Tsarouhis, and Billy-Bo, a successful fashion designer. Both of these men were open and rather flamboyant about their sexuality. The deaths of Iolas and Billy Bo and the publicity they received helped increase public awareness of AIDS, but also contributed to the labelling of AIDS as a 'gay disease' (Chliaoutakis et al. 1993; Tsalicoglou 1995).

The issue of AIDS was conspicuously absent from most of the narratives of the gay men I spoke to and only featured slightly in conjunction with the decade of the 1980s. At the time

of my fieldwork, none of the gay bars in Athens, even those which possessed a darkroom which people could use for sex, offered free condoms or any information regarding AIDS. With the wider public gradually becoming aware of the actual nature of HIV and its possible infection of heterosexuals as well as homosexuals, AIDS related education has since become an important element of the Greek LGBT movement. Yet, while these developments were taking place, internal strife among members of AKOE soon became a recurring feature of the Greek LGBT movement and eventually undermined its effectiveness.

3.9. The Demise of AKOE and the Creation of EOK

By the mid-1980s, the enthusiasm and energy that characterised the early stages of gay activism in Greece had dissipated, leaving the existing members rather frustrated. Lack of funding as well as an inability to attract and recruit prospective members had contributed to this mood. The AIDS epidemic also dealt a blow to the morale of gay activists. Friends, lovers and colleagues were dying as a result of the virus. Key contributors to the activist gay cause in Greece, among them Andreas Velissaropoulos, were among the first AIDS victims. The novelty of the gay activist project had worn off by this time and many men had left the organisation, leaving behind only a handful of members to continue the project of homosexual visibility and liberation. In the mid-1980s AKOE was facing an identity crisis and was desperate for a change of direction. The arrival of Grigoris Vallianatos, a new face on the gay activist scene, gave AKOE the necessary boost and ushered in a new, optimistic phase. In the latter part of the 1980s homosexual activism in Greece was largely synonymous with Vallianatos, and he remains one of the few instantly recognizable faces of gay activism in the country, among both gay and heterosexual Greeks.

Vallianatos came from an affluent family and was very well educated both at home and abroad. His background was in Law and Political Sciences and in 1986, the time of his

assumption of the role of the principal spokesman of AKOE, he was working in the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, alongside Georgios Papandreou, the son of the Premier. Vallianatos's role in the Ministry was that of the senior public relations officer. Previously, Vallianatos had worked in the Ministry of Culture where he had also held a senior post. Lifestyle magazines soon took interest in Vallianatos with his good looks, masculine outlook and mannerisms dispelling dominant stereotypes of the homosexual as the effeminate type. Vallianatos was very much 'the boy next door': a masculine man who also happened to be a homosexual.

An article published in the gossip newspaper *Loipon* referred to Vallianatos as the 'marriageable type', the kind of man that a woman's parents would be happy to be introduced to as their future son-in-law. Vallianatos was well educated, articulate, good looking, a successful entrepreneur, all in all the epitome of success. He possessed all the essential qualities of manhood, but he was also gay (Loipon 1987: 5-6). Vallianatos presented a novel image of a homosexual, antithetical to the one of the effeminate and unmanly '*poustis*.' George, a homosexual man in his early 30s, discussed how Vallianatos had changed his perception of what a homosexual looked like:

Vallianatos is not a *kragmenos* omofilofilos [a visibly effeminate homosexual]. He is a *sovaros* omofilofilos (a serious homosexual), who is masculine, handsome, and wealthy. He is very different from the stereotypical image of your average homosexual. Before him, when we thought of a homosexual in Greece, we thought of Marinos [an effeminate performer] or one of the caricatures of the effeminate homosexual found in the movies of the old Greek cinema. Vallianatos differs from these. He has no trace of *thiliprepeia* (effeminacy) in his behaviour.

In contrast to the previous two generations of gay men, the men I interviewed were the first to be able to immediately recognise the faces of the most polemical among gay activists. This was largely due to the new AKOE of the mid-1980s and Vallianatos' incessant efforts to publicise and advertise gay issues. Vallianatos' masculine persona also had an impact on how many gay men in Greece perceived themselves. Several of the gay men I spoke to mentioned Vallianatos as a positive role model for them and also talked about the personal effect that his image had on coming to terms with their own homosexuality. Aris was seventeen at the time when Vallianatos started appearing in the Greek media, campaigning for gay issues:

I was very confused when I was that age. I didn't know anyone else at school who was gay. In my family, the word *poustis* was an anathema. I thought that in order to be gay you had to be effeminate. I didn't want to be like that and I wasn't like that. I was always very *androprepis* [masculine]. No one could have suspected that I was gay. I thought that I was heterosexual, and for a time I dated girls but the sex was never that good. Then one day, I saw Vallianatos on television talking about homosexuality. He made me realize that you don't have to be effeminate to be gay and made me feel good about myself. After watching that show, I plucked up the courage to go along to one of the meetings at AKOE. This was my first meeting with other gay men. I wasn't interested in gay politics. I just wanted to meet other gay men and this is where I met the first man I had sex with. I stopped going to the meetings once I felt comfortable with myself, and once I started going to gay bars. I am not interested in politics. I just want to have fun...

However influential for many younger gay men, Vallianatos' presence in AKOE only lasted from 1986 until 1988. During this period, Vallianatos used all kinds of publicity to promote and enhance homosexual visibility and he sought every opportunity to publicise

gay issues: he wrote articles in newspapers, gave interviews to lifestyle magazines, and appeared on television. With the advent of Greek private television in the late 1980s, Vallianatos also produced and presented his own talk show *O Thiroros tis Nychtas* (The Night's Porter) on Seven X, one of the smaller private channels, dealing with sexual issues.

According to many of my informants, Vallianatos remains one of the few visible faces in Greece who exemplifies what they define as a 'Western concept' of the gay activist: someone whose identity and whole life revolves around and centres on his homosexuality and who experiences his sexual identity in a political sense as well. In an interview that Vallianatos gave in the early 1990s, he described his whole work as 'political', and added that, "it has to do with an alternative viewpoint and for this reason I use different means: I use business, I use Politics with a capital P, I use the mass media, which I think are currently the most suitable means for politics" (Tsoutsias 1994: 10).

In spite of all his efforts to actively promote a gay agenda and to enhance the visibility of gay issues in Greece, Vallianatos' honeymoon period did not last very long and he soon became the target of criticisms and attacks by other gay activists, both within and outwith AKOE. Vallianatos believed that *Amfi* should become more commercial in its outlook in order to be able to continue its existence and to be competitive. His suggestion caused controversy among a number of the older AKOE members, including Theodorakopoulos, who resisted any attempt to alter the character and intellectual rigour of the magazine (Petropoulou 2005). Several gay activists also accused Vallianatos of being a 'professional' gay, of using his gay identity for publicizing and promoting his forthcoming business ventures which included the opening of *Factory*, a night club that became very popular in the early 1990s. These accusations led to divisions within AKOE, between those who supported Vallianatos' style of gay politics and those who opposed his presence in and leadership of the organisation (Petropoulou 2005)

As a result of these bitter rivalries and recriminations, a number of AKOE members, including Vallianatos himself, left the group and formed a new organisation with the aim of continuing the struggle for homosexual liberation in Greece and offering a ‘fresh start’ and an alternative to AKOE. The Hellenic Homosexual Community (Elliniki Omofilofiliki Koinotita) EOK was formed in 1988 and would largely dominate the arena of gay politics throughout the next decade. It was during this turbulent moment that a group of Greek lesbians decided to return to AKOE and Irini Petropoulou assumed the editorship of *Amfi*. However, their arrival was not enough to rescue the organisation from its demise. AKOE’s resources, financial and otherwise, were seriously undermined by the departure of key members and their supporters. In March 1989, one year after the foundation of EOK, AKOE ceased to function officially as a group. The divisive tensions and the internal dissent amongst the various protagonists of gay activism brought about an irrecoverable rupture and led to its dissolution.

3.10. The Creation of EOK and the Rise of Vangelis Giannelos

EOK was founded as a non-profit, urban-based organisation and Grigoris Vallianatos became its first President. In a leaflet handed out to prospective members the purpose of EOK was stated as being, “the contribution to the study and projection of homosexual expression through the planning and application of displays of information and questioning”. The subheading of EOK was ‘movement for the freedom of homosexual expression and the right to difference’. Intended to provoke discussion about the group and to attract more attention, the acronym of EOK was the same as the one used for the European Economic Community. But EOK’s aims were reformist rather than revolutionary. The group did not advocate the overthrow of the current status quo but rather the carving out of a niche, where homosexual rights would be respected, alongside the existing ‘system’:

EOK is firstly a reform movement. This means that in contrast with revolutionary homosexual movements, which aim also for the demolition of the system generally, we believe that oppression can occur everywhere. Social exclusion has appeared in all systems, from left-wing to right-wing. That's why EOK centers solely on the problem of discrimination against homosexuals (EOK Leaflet n.d.)

EOK pursued an integrationist approach to gay politics and embraced lesbian issues in its manifesto. In the same leaflet EOK members stated that they believed that,

The struggle for our rights is common for homosexuals, men and women. We know that lesbians face an extra problem because of their double oppression as women and homosexual. That's why we intensify our effort more for the projection of this reality. As a rule, however, our measures and activities have the common problems of both sexes as a starting point. (EOK Leaflet n.d.)

This approach was different from the way that lesbian activists were treated within the ranks of both AKOE and the Greek feminist movement. The activities of Greek lesbians had actually received a setback in the early stages of the 1980s. The Greek lesbians' participation in the feminist movement, which they had joined in 1979, only lasted for four years. Conflicts and problems with the other feminist groups led to the withdrawal of the lesbian group from the House of Women in Romanou Melodou Street in the summer of 1983. (Petropoulou 2005) During their brief participation in the feminist movement Greek lesbians discovered that they had to face the 'lesbophobia' of some of its heterosexual members and also that they had to struggle to incorporate their issues within the feminist agenda.

Many of the heterosexual middle-class women members of these feminist groups felt that the presence of lesbians in the movement would undermine its success and its credibility. Above all, they were worried that people, and especially men, would equate feminism with lesbianism (*Amphi* 1984; Ksenou-Venardou 1980). At the end of 1984, some lesbians, who had participated in the first lesbian group which joined AKOE, started yet another “House of Women” in Veikou Street, which acted both as a meeting point and as a consciousness-raising group. Lack of funding, absence of a cohesive and coherent agenda, lack of members and leadership conflicts inhibited its creative activity and led to its eventual break-up three years later. EOK provided a new opportunity to Greek lesbians to renew their activism within what was seen as a more inclusive space (Petropoulou 2005).

EOK members had to pay a monthly membership fee of 1000 drachmas (approximately £2), giving them the right to participate in all general meetings and to vote and be voted for in the general elections which, according to the group’s constitution, would be held every three years. EOK became a member of ILGA (International Lesbian and Gay Association), becoming the first Greek gay group to join its ranks. In 1989 EOK organized, with great success, the European Regional Conference of ILGA, with the participation of one hundred delegates from around the world. Amongst EOK’s demands was the end of ‘all types of discrimination’ against homosexuals in Greece for example in the law, at work, in the army, and the lowering of the age of consent for homosexuals from seventeen to fifteen years to correspond to that of their heterosexual counterparts. They also demanded the legalization and recognition of homosexual couples and the recognition and legalization of gay parenting. To date, none of these demands have been adopted by the successive Greek governments. Gay activists’ pressure on Greek politicians has had very little effect.

However, similar to the resistance which Vallianatos confronted in AKOE, his presence in EOK was short-lived due to disagreements primarily with Vangelis Giannelos, another of

the founding members of the group, who questioned Vallianatos' strategies and challenged his automatic assumption of EOK's leadership. Stefanos, one of the few among my informants to have joined EOK shortly after its creation, recalls how the mood of optimism was soon transformed into one of disunity, bitterness and personal arguments and gives his version of what went wrong:

During the first period everyone was very pleased with Vallianatos. He couldn't do anything wrong. However, when he started appearing on TV and making plans about opening a gay club, people's views changed. I think there was lot of jealousy and resentment by some people that Vallianatos was taking all the credit for the work that we were all doing. We were the unseen heroes but he was all over the place. People felt that he became too self-centred. Towards the end there were many accusations against him. It was almost impossible to have a normal conversation without shouting. People forgot what our aim was all about and became embroiled in petty politics. It was about taking sides. There was a very unfriendly atmosphere. Gradually, this situation put lots of people off. Meetings attracted fewer and fewer members. I decided to leave because I could no longer cope with all these. I have never been involved in gay activities since then. The experience in EOK left me with very bad impressions.

As would be expected from Stefanos' comments, such disappointment led both to the departure of many members and to the emergence of further rivalries and conflict among the various protagonists of the movement. By mobilizing support from other EOK members, Giannelos effectively ousted Vallianatos from the position of being the group's president and during the elections that followed the former became the organisation's new leader. Vallianatos left EOK and begun pursuing a separate course in gay politics. Thus, in the initial stages the efforts of EOK's members were primarily focused on sorting out in-

group dynamics and politics rather than in constructing cohesive strategic policies. The efforts of gay activists, however, were not limited to the capital alone. In spite of the fact that Athenian groups attracted, by definition, more attention and members, homosexuals in other cities too began a process of mobilisation.

3.11. Homosexual Activism outside Athens

The first LGBT group to emerge outside Athens was AMO, the *Autonomo Metopo Omofilofilon Thessalonikis* (Autonomous Front of Homosexuals of Thessaloniki) in November 1979 composed mostly of gay University students and gay anarchists in Thessaloniki, the second largest Greek city. The group was radical and in a statement they published in the short-lived publication *Bananes* (bananas) wrote, among other things:

AMO opposes the gay ghetto. AMO individuals cruise everywhere for sex. [...] AMO shits on parties' co-operation with *poustides*. [...] AMO individuals discuss about making love only with those who make love. [...] AMO opposes hormones in cattle and transvestites; instead we recommend silicon. [...] AMO fights against priests, politics and culture. [...] AMO detests eunuchs, the castrated homosexuals. (Poustrix 1997: 1)

However promising and militant, AMO was short-lived and was soon replaced by another, less radical LGBT group. In November 1988 a number of gays and lesbians in Thessaloniki formed O.P.O.T.H, *Omada Protovoulías Omofilofilon Thessalonikis* [Homosexuals' Initiative of Thessaloniki], a new activist organisation. The aim of this new LGBT group was to provide support and to act as a source of information to homosexuals in Northern Greece. Until that time there was a noticeable absence of support networks for

homosexuals outside the boundaries of Athens. Earlier attempts, such as AMO's radical activism to establish a gay group in Thessaloniki had produced few results.

O.P.O.T.H remains one of the most active and vocal gay groups outside Athens and shares similar goals with other gay groups in Greece: it 'fights for the right to homosexual desire,' (O.P.O.T.H leaflet n.d.) and one of its major aims is to change people's negative perceptions and attitudes toward homosexuals. Both through its own weekly radio programme, axed in December 1996, and through its own annual publication, *O Pothos* (Desire), the group attempts to do exactly this. Interviews on television, radio and newspapers, repeated contacts with political parties, as well as displays at book exhibitions, contribute to the visibility of homosexuality in Northern Greece. The Thessaloniki groups became the first larger-scale organized attempts of LGBT activism outside Athens and introduced a trend for the subsequent appearance of other non-Athens based groups, which will be discussed briefly in the next chapter.

3.12. Conclusion

With an emphasis on sociopolitical developments from the 1960s to the present, this chapter has examined the processes that facilitated the emergence of homosexual activism in Greece in the latter part of the 1970s and also provided an account of homosexual activism in the 1980s, a period which proved to be rather eventful. After discussing briefly the ways in which legislators in Greece have dealt with homosexuality, I proceeded by describing the junta's perception of and reaction to homosexuality as this acted as one of the main catalysts for the creation of an LGBT movement after its overthrow. In the wider context of social and political mobilization of the post-junta period, Greek gay activists initiated the process of homosexual liberation in Greece. However, what started as a promising and optimistic effort ended in something quite different: the break-up of the first gay organisation in the country. In the beginning of the 1980s, no one could have predicted

AKOE's fate during the latter part of the decade. Empowered with the belief that the country's entry into the EU and the new socialist government would allow for homosexuals' voices to be heard, gay activists at the time appeared to be united and fighting for a common cause. Yet, in the latter part of the decade, personal disputes among the various Greek gay activists undermined the cause of homosexual liberation.

At first, for example, the presence of Vallianatos in the arena of gay politics in the mid-1980s altered the face of Greek gay activism and his contribution to the growing awareness of homosexuality in Greece should not be underestimated. Although homosexual activism in Greece had started before his arrival on the scene, Vallianatos contributed to a greater visibility of homosexuality through his public persona, both as an advisor to PASOK and as a media personality. His personal looks also had a positive effect on instigating an image of respectability for the homosexual man and for changing the public's, including gay men's, perceptions of homosexuality. At the same time, however, he became a controversial figure who divided the movement into opposite fractions. This rupture between Vallianatos and other activists, including his successor Vangelis Giannelos, continues to this day.

From the late 1980s, AKOE's struggle for the liberation of Greek homosexuals was taken up by EOK, the new gay forum founded by former members of AKOE. In the 1980s there occurred a greater mobilization of homosexuals outside the boundaries of the capital with the creation of AMO and O.P.O.T.H, which gave a voice and visibility to Greek homosexuals living in the north of the country. However not always as fertile as the founders of the groups would have hoped, the seeds of gay activism had nonetheless been planted and strongly rooted in Greece. This appeared to be the case in spite of setbacks and personal rivalries. The Greek LGBT movement was here to stay.

On the other hand, despite the flourishing publications and the gradual creation of different groups that provided alternative approaches to gay politics, as became evident from the

interviews with my informants, none of the groups of the 1970s or 1980s managed to attract a wider population, one that would suffice to create a more collective gay consciousness. At first glance, this can be attributed both to the fact that the first LGBT movements in Greece were themselves still too young to manage a larger-scale mobilisation and to the fact that the majority of my informants were also too young to engage with politics at the time. But the problem remains as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, that my informants' scepticism concerning the groups which they could have joined may be rooted in deeper social factors, including both the nature and structure of Greek LGBT movements and the influence of the family and the continuous perpetuation of silence with regards to the expression and conduct of individual sexuality.

In the next chapter, I will focus on recent developments in Greek homosexual activism by examining the 1990s and the first few years of the twenty-first century. In the 1990s, EOK emerged as the most dominant vehicle for the promotion of homosexual rights and for the fight against the silent or more verbal homophobia in Greece. Vallianatos on the other hand remained a visible presence in the gay activist arena through his founding of the Greek branch of ACT UP, a global gay AIDS organisation, and his interviews in the Greek media. A number of other groups, both within and outside the metropolitan areas of Athens and Thessaloniki, were formed during this period as alternative means of promoting and establishing gay and lesbian rights.

Chapter 4

Greek LGBT Activism in the Period between 1990 and 2007

The first Mr Gay Greece contest was held in Mykonos on Saturday the seventh of September 2002. Originally intended to be an annual event, in fact it only ran until 2005, no such contest took place in 2006 and 2007. According to the first issue of MR GAY GREECE MAGAZINE (2002) [Fig. 8], which was published in both Greek and English, apart from opening up professional opportunities to men who were interested in modelling, the beauty contest also had a charitable purpose since part of the proceeds were given to support campaigns against AIDS (Mr. Gay Greece Magazine 2002: 7). The second Mr Gay Greece contest was organised on Sunday the 28th of September 2003, this time in Athens. The 2004 and the 2005 contests returned to Mykonos with the latter introducing for the first and last time two more prizes, one for 'Mr Mediterraneo' and one for 'Mr Gay Cyprus'. Whilst the 2002 contest invited all 'good-looking' men over the age of eighteen to participate, (Mr Gay Greece magazine 2002: 2), the invitation for the 2005 Mr Gay Greece was open specifically to gay or bisexual men between eighteen and thirty-five years old (http://www.mr.gaygreece.gr/requestA_el.html). Although it was not fully successful in its aspiration to become a long-term annual event, 'Mr Gay Greece' suggests both certain changes and a number of drawbacks with regards to the conditions for the creation of a generally proud homosexual in Greece.

First, even though the second contest was organised in Athens, the return of the event to the popular gay resort of Mykonos primarily suggests that the contest was perhaps less attractive for homosexuals in Athens. However willing to participate in the night 'gay-scene' there, the gay population in the capital did not support the event. On the other hand, and given the success of the contests in Mykonos, many Greek gay men seem to have preferred to support 'Mr Gay Greece' as long as it took place in Mykonos where they could go for a holiday and where they could express their sexuality more openly, day and night,

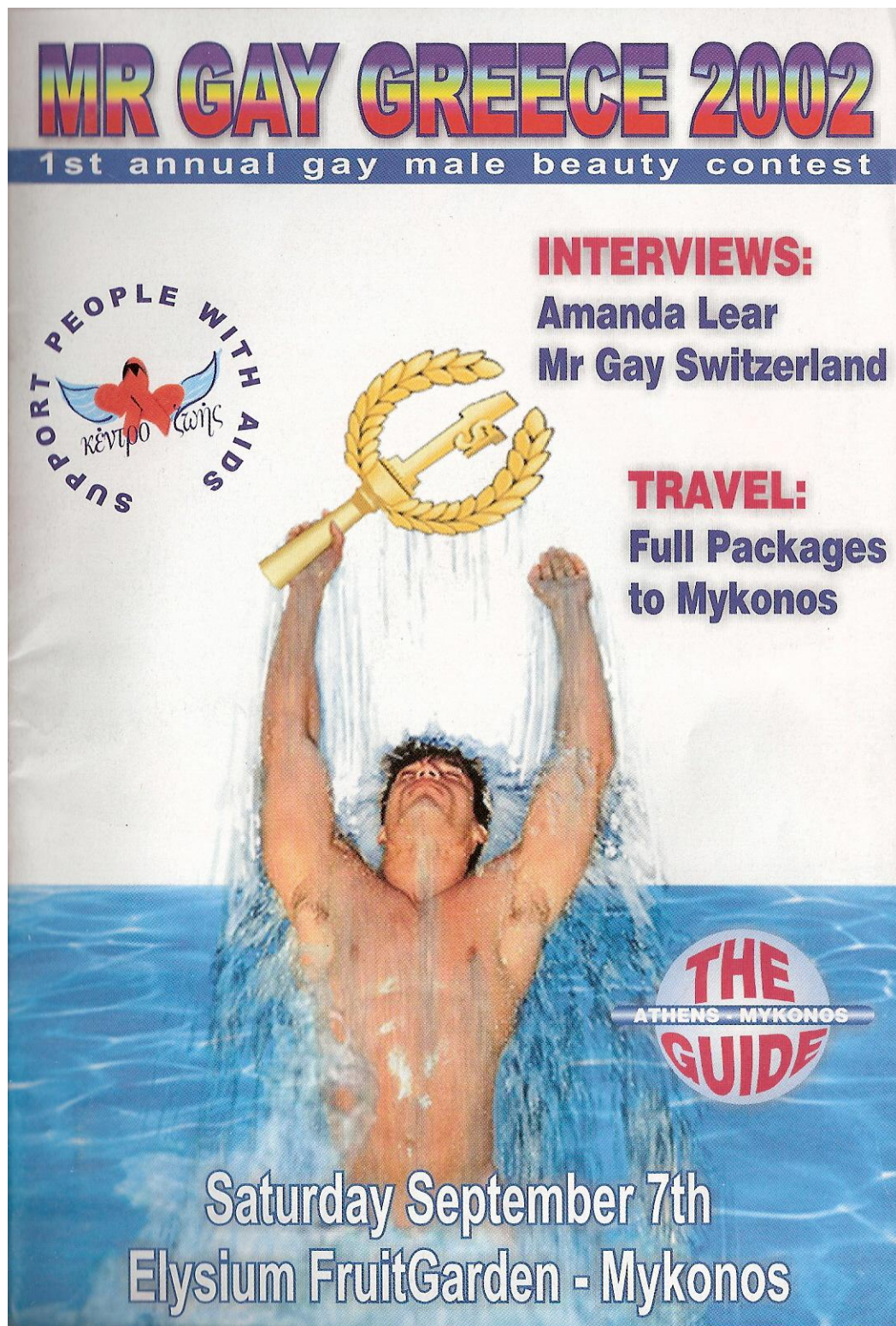


Figure 8: Mr Gay Greece 2000. Front cover of 'Mr Gay Greece' magazine.

both in the streets, bars, restaurants and in the infamously gay ‘Super Paradise’ nudist beach of the island. At the same time, the success of the 2002, 2004 and 2005 contests in Mykonos could also be attributed to the strong presence and interest shown in the events by gay foreign tourists. Indeed, although the reasons for returning the event to Mykonos are nowhere specified on the contest’s official web-site, this last hypothesis may be intricately linked to the success and drawbacks of the Greek LGBT movement itself in the late 1990s and early 2000s. A gay beauty contest requires the visibility of the contestants and to a lesser degree of the audience too. This visibility which is an important ingredient for the ‘coming out’ of individuals who will participate in the LGBT movement, remains a problem to be tackled in Greece.

In the second half of the 1990s we have for the first time an attempt to create a Pan-Hellenic gay movement by incorporating the various homosexual groups into an umbrella organisation in order to co-ordinate campaigns and lobbying more efficiently. Once again, however, due to personality clashes among various activists, little came out of these attempts and the current state of homosexual activism consists of different groups working largely independently from one another. During the 1990s and the first years of the new millennium there was a proliferation of discourses around homosexuality in Greece, and gay culture has experienced an unprecedented degree of visibility. This visibility took many forms, ranging from the participation of LGBT candidates in mainstream politics to public discussions of homosexuality in the Greek media. Mainstream coverage of gay life became commonplace and reality programmes devoted entire shows to the discussion of homosexuality. Lifestyle magazines ran more, and rather favourable, stories on gay issues (Papadopoulos 1996; Mihalitsianou 1999; Antonopoulos 1999).

The personal infightings of the previous decades among the various protagonists of Greek LGBT activism also intensified during this time, largely continuing to undermine its effectiveness and leading to further divisions within existing LGBT groups. Furthermore, for the most part, successive Greek governments and political parties of this period

effectively ignored LGBT issues. However, things began to change in 2005, with the involvement of some political parties in the debate concerning the recognition of same-sex couples initiated by Greek LGBT groups. The attempt by Greek politicians to deal with the topic of same-sex marriage has perhaps more to do with external factors rather than with internal ones. Given the fact that the issue of gay 'marriage' had been addressed by the governments of many other European Union Member-States (Vlami 2005) the conservative Costas Karamanlis' New Democracy government and the leaders of some of the other main political parties in Greece could not ignore or bypass it. Rather, for the first time, the Greek parliamentary political parties had to take a stand on the matter.

This chapter will focus on the main events of LGBT activism in Greece from 1990 to 2007, a period characterised among other things by the emergence of several new LGBT groups both in Athens and in other metropolitan areas of Greece, by an intensification of the personal clashes among some of the main individuals involved in Greek gay politics which undermined the attempt to construct an effective nationwide LGBT organisation, and by the country's first public LGBT Pride Parade. I will first provide an account of the main events in the arena of LGBT activism in the 1990s and in the early part of the new century and then explain the reasons behind my ethnographic interlocutors' unwillingness to become active participants in the campaign for homosexual rights in the country.

4.1. The 1990s: From Localism to a Pan-Hellenic LGBT Organisation

In the 1990s, under the leadership of Vangelis Giannelos, EOK emerged as the principal LGBT group in Greece and quickly filled the void created after the collapse and disintegration of AKOE. Vangelis Giannelos assumed Vallianatos' role as the 'official' spokesman of Greek homosexuals and made occasional appearances on television and the rest of the Greek media. EOK members used diverse strategies to disseminate information about homosexuality and to increase the visibility of gay issues. EOK also established its

own internet website (www.eok.gr), where people can find out more both about the organisation and about other issues relating to gay life. In 1995, in cooperation with Dora Raftopoulou, a lesbian activist, Giannelos started broadcasting *Oi Roz Panthires* (The Pink Panthers), a weekly programme on 94.0 Epikoinonia FM, a municipal radio station in Athens.

According to the information provided by EOK in a leaflet advertising the radio programme, “the show deals with issues that preoccupy the average homosexual: how to come out to his relatives and friends, where will he or she entertain himself or herself, what happens with AIDS, what happens in the rest of the world, etc” (Roz Panthires Leaflet n.d.). In 2000, the *Roz Panthires* was renamed into ‘Athens Gay and Lesbian Radio Show’ and, following a fine of 5000 euros issued by the National Council for Radio and Television in December 2004, it was finally axed in January 2005. The regulatory agency denounced the show as ‘degrading’ and ‘undoubtedly of bad quality’ and among other things, objected to the broadcasting of advertisements for gay bars and condoms during the programme. The radio station argued that it was forced to cancel the show as it did not have the funds to risk more fines (Eleftherotypia 2005).

In May 1997, EOK, Taxiarchis Potamianos, a member of ACT UP, and Paul Sofianos, a new face in the Greek LGBT activist arena, jointly launched DEON, a gay internet-based magazine (www.deon.gr). The magazine covered local and international news about the gay community as well as other matters pertaining to topics such as fashion and travel particularly constructed to satisfy the recreational pursuits and life style of many gay people. DEON was published twice a year and its last issue appeared in the Summer of 2006. The magazine was re-launched in early 2008 (www.deon.gr). Moreover, during the 1990s, the members of EOK made concerted efforts to draw attention to the discrimination of gays and lesbians in the workplace and employed their resources to highlight this issue.

The case of Isavella Aktipe, who was expelled from the Pan-Hellenic Gymnastics Union in 1994 following a television appearance in which she openly discussed her lesbianism, was used as an illustration. The members of EOK led a local and international support campaign, with little success. Gay activists could not pursue a legal battle because there was no law prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. Despite the hundreds of letters of support, the athlete was not reinstated. The official excuse for her dismissal was that, in reacting negatively to her being a lesbian, the parents of the children whom Ms. Aktipe was coaching threatened to withdraw their children from the Union if she continued to be a coach (Panagou & Stagakis 1995: 44). Nevertheless, despite the fact that their efforts to effectively help Ms. Aktipe did not have the results they would have wished for, EOK continued to fight for homosexuals' rights in Greece. EOK faced a setback in 1996 when, as a result of a fire, the group's archives were completely destroyed. EOK then moved its offices to the top floor of a Neoclassical building in the area of Thission in Apostolou Paulou 11. The new offices were located above *Lizzard* and Kirke. In being located next to these gay spaces – the same spaces that I used for my fieldwork – EOK gained the opportunity to be physically closer to a greater number of gay people. Whilst EOK was continuing the struggle to incorporate a homosexual voice into the public domain, one of its founding and more widely-known members, Vallianatos, followed his own, alternative route to gay politics.

4.2. Vallianatos' Role in Gay Activism in the 1990s

After his departure from EOK in 1990, Vallianatos continued promoting LGBT issues through interviews in the media and his efforts were now primarily directed towards questions related to AIDS in Greece. In having already founded the Greek branch of ACT UP in 1993, Vallianatos now also assumed the role of the representative of the Greek non-governmental organisation on AIDS. However, unlike its American counterpart, whose members follow radical and sometimes disruptive and aggressive procedures to make their points heard, under Vallianatos supervision the Greek branch uses a more peaceful, non-

aggressive approach. On World Aids Day, for example, members of ACT UP hand out information leaflets promoting safer sex, containing details about Aids and a condom, to passers-by on the main streets of Athens. The group also aims at liaising with government officials on issues regarding the prevention and treatment of AIDS, as well as on ways in which the message of safer sex could be spread to both the heterosexual and the homosexual population in Greece. Around the same time of the assumption of his ACT UP role, Vallianatos became a member of the board of the Greek Helsinki monitor for Human Rights, which approaches the gay issue through the human rights agenda, and also published *Gay*, the first and only issue of a magazine which focused on issues of both gay politics and lifestyle. In 2002, Vallianatos became the chairman of the Greek Helsinki monitor for Human Rights and his activism is nowadays conducted primarily under the aegis of this organisation.

In 1990, a new dimension was added to Vallianatos' version of gay activism: clubbing. Regardless of whether Vallianatos was right when he argued that such an initiative revealed political undertones, a point to which I will return shortly, the opening of the club would soon signal the creation of a space that welcomed, for the first time, a mixed population of both homosexual and heterosexual clubbers. Initially a gay night-club, Vallianatos' Factory [Fig. 9] was opened in the centre of Athens and became an instant success. A journalist in *KLIK* wrote that 'Factory...brought an air of London and Ibiza to the Athenian night life' (Antonopoulos 1999: 94). Another journalist from the lifestyle magazine *OI* observed the following about the 'darkrooms', where people could have sex in Factory:

Formerly you could eat a good steak in Factory. Not in Factory exactly, but in the restaurant that operated at the same spot until last year. Now you look at the meat. You touch it, and if you are hungry, you can even bite it in the basement. There, the inner sanctum (and the top innovation of the club) can be found: empty, industrial fridges used by butchers to

store meat, inside which the night-clubbers ejaculate in brief processes (Laimos 1994: 47).

According to some of my informants, such spaces, initially introduced in Northern America and Northern-Western Europe, did introduce a kind of a ‘meat market’ in which men’s flesh was on offer, a space in other words that offered plenty of opportunities for ‘raw sex’, defined by my informants as ‘lacking in emotional content’. For others, however, this was a ‘brave’ move towards the celebration of non-normative sexual expressions and practices. The ‘darkrooms’ in Factory provided both a safer space than parks for sexual encounters and one that guaranteed and safeguarded homosexuals’ right to unashamedly engage in same-sex acts.



Figure 9: *OI* article on *Factory*. The title reads, “Fucktory – A night in the meat market.”

In being thus advertised by mainstream magazines such as *KLIK* and *OI*, and in attracting, therefore, the attention of a non-sexually specific and greater number of people, the club's success soon spread outside the Athenian 'gay crowd' and Factory became fashionable among a number of heterosexual clubbers who went there for the trendy music that was played on its dance floor. But the club also attracted curious heterosexuals who wanted to see for themselves the 'infamous' darkrooms that Factory became associated with. Factory was predominant in setting the trend of heterosexuals frequenting gay spaces but in this way also managed to alienate a number of gays who refused to accept what they sometimes defined as the gradual overtaking of their 'spaces' by heterosexual clubbers. To the dismay and dissatisfaction of some gays, soon after *Factory*, *City* and *Koukles* [Dolls], two other gay clubs, both of which featured shows of drag queens, had also become popular among heterosexuals. Even though the gap between gay and heterosexual spaces in Athens appeared to narrow down in the 1990s, many of my gay informants who had started clubbing at the time did not see this as a welcome change but rather usually defined it as an intrusion.

For example, Yiannis objected to the presence of heterosexual people in gay spaces because he 'felt like a guinea pig being observed', whereas Petros expressed the opinion that 'the majority of heterosexuals come to gay spaces to make fun of us and to view the circus-freaks'. Others, like Markos thought that heterosexuals should be banned from kissing and hugging in gay spaces in order to experience how gay people feel whenever they go to a straight bar. 'Heterosexuals always want it their own way', he told me. 'It's about time to learn that they cannot have everything'. This view is also echoed in Stefanos' words 'why should straights come to our spaces and have fun with their partners when we cannot do the same in their spaces?'

The opening of Factory led to the resurfacing of accusations against Vallianatos for exploiting gay people and for his blatant commercialism. Once again, Vallianatos remained

unapologetic and defiant in the face of these criticisms. When a journalist asked him if he had coped with the criticism he received, Vallianatos replied:

The issue is – and this is my complaint – that when people criticise me, I want this criticism to be made to the point. That is, I discuss with someone criticising me if it's good for men to cruise one another in a basement. I discuss this. I discuss the content of my articles. I do not discuss the fact that I chose television or the clubs in Mykonos and Athens as a way to earn my living. When you have devoted your days and nights to this job [gay activism], neither can you live through charity nor live poorly, when you are used to living well. And you should not be so stupid as to give your money to strange, anonymous, irrelevant or hostile professionals, who will allegedly organise better than which you already know best. I don't understand why we have been giving our money to heterosexual businessmen all these years. Makis Psomiadis [a Greek night-club owner] opened a gay club. Why does he have the right to have such a bar and we don't? (Tsoutsias 1994: 10-11)

Vallianatos did not consider this business venture to be against his political aim for gay liberation. For Vallianatos, even clubbing is political. 'The clubbing I promote is essentially politics', he told another journalist (Vallianatos cited in Pavrianos 1996: 92).

Two years after this interview, during the 1998 Municipal elections, Vallianatos unsuccessfully attempted to enter the mainstream political arena as a candidate of Synaspismos, a Coalition of Leftist Parties. This was only the second time that an openly gay person had run for office during the Greek elections and that a Greek political party had included openly gay people in their electoral campaign and list of candidates. The first time was in the 1990 Parliamentary elections when the transvestite Paola, the editor of

Kraximo, was unsuccessful in gaining a seat in the Parliament as a candidate of the Green Party. Vallianatos still remains an unofficial spokesman of LGBT issues in Greece and is the most recognisable face of LGBT activism in the country. But whilst in the 1980s and especially after the early 1990s, the gay movement in Greece had already presented two alternative routes to politics, AKOE's and later EOK's attempts to promote a more collective form of action and Vallianatos' rather primarily individualistic gay activism, Greek lesbians were from the start dedicated to the former. Nevertheless, their desire to be incorporated into more inclusive collective bodies itself often encountered many obstacles.

4.3. Greek Lesbians and Activism in the 1990s

In the 1990s, Greek lesbians have followed a more integrationist approach to gay politics than before and this time co-operated more closely with the other existing gay organisations in Athens. Younger lesbians, active in gay politics, felt that companionship and unity between gay people was the only way that could bring satisfactory and effective solutions (Petropoulou 2005). For that reason, they became largely incorporated into the ranks of EOK, with the Greek lesbian activist Petropoulou, who had assumed the editorial role at *Amfi* after Vallianatos, becoming the Vice-president of EOK in 1990. A year later Petropoulou was brought to trial for refusing to publish personal advertisements from heterosexual men directed to lesbian women in *Amfi*. She was sentenced to five months in prison and had to pay a fine of 50.000 drachmas (approximately 100 pounds) (Vassilas 1984).

Nevertheless, despite some Greek lesbians' participation in EOK, others pursued a more independent course of action. Two new groups of lesbians appeared in the Athenian gay dance scene in the early 1990s: META – the acronym stands for 'Must Eternity Tough Alternative' – and Cyberdykes. Yet, unlike the previous lesbian groups, which were primarily devoted to gay and lesbian activism, META and Cyberdykes initially appear as

primarily dedicated to partying. As an expression of their radical politics, close to Paola's earlier choice to use *Kraximo* as the title of her magazine and wanting to show their allegiance to other homosexual women abroad, these women preferred using the foreign slang and originally derogatory term 'dykes', rather than 'lesbians' (Roz Mov <http://www.qrd.org/QRD/www/world/europe/Greece/roz.mov/rmmain.html>). In choosing to create their own distinctive spaces, they organised 'women only' nights with great success, which they advertised by handing out flyers in the various gay bars and clubs. Meta and Cyberdykes also published *Madam Gou* – Gou meaning lesbian in *kaliarda*, the Greek gay argot – which was the only Lesbian magazine in Greece in the 1990s.

Apart from these two groups, there also existed another smaller, active group of lesbian activists, which also worked outside the boundaries of EOK. This group, whose name is not mentioned in the ILGA bulletin on Greek lesbian activities, consisted mostly of women who had participated in AKOE and who, after its disintegration, had sought refuge at the "Bookshop of Women," a feminist bookshop run and owned by women. The main activity of this latter group of lesbians was to publicize issues regarding lesbian visibility in Greece. For this reason, they had articles published in foreign newspapers, edited pamphlets with a lesbian content and identified the lesbian and feminist meeting points in Greece. The group also acted as a meeting point and support group for Greek lesbians (Petropoulou 1990 in ILGA Lesbian Bulletin 2/1990). Concurrently with the Greek lesbians' attempt towards collective homosexuals' action, the LGBT movements outside the capital also gained ground.

4.4. LGBT Activism outside Athens

The effort of gay activists outside of Athens also continued and intensified from the 1990s onwards with the creation of two new groups, the one based once again in Thessaloniki,

and the other on the island of Crete. First, *Sympraxis kata tis Omofilofovias* (Co-operation against Homophobia) was founded in November 1995. According to their mission statement the organisation aims “to contribute to the extinction of homophobia and to improve the quality of life and relations between homosexual, bisexual and even heterosexual men and women in our society. The objective is information and discussion in a society that remains ignorant” (<http://www.geocities.com/sympraxis>). To achieve this aim, the group organised public discussions, gave interviews to the media and started a monthly radio show. In addition to these activities, the group also maintains a small library of Greek books on homosexuality in its office and a 24-hour support and communication line. Finally, they introduced the publication of *Vitamin O*, a monthly bulletin which is also available for browsing on the Internet (<http://www.geocities.com/vitaminio/>).

In the following year a small number of lesbian and bisexual women formed a new gay group, the *Omada Gynaikon Kritis* (Team of Cretan Women), in both Rethymnon and Irakleion, the two largest urban centres in Crete. Their first meeting occurred in Rethymnon on the sixth of June 1996, to discuss the tentative short-term strategy of the group. A few weeks later, the group published its first article in a local newspaper to commemorate the Stonewall Riots, while the First Greek Lesbian Week was arranged to take place in September of the same year with the co-operation and support of a local travel agency. The invitation was extended to foreign lesbians and to Greek women-members of other feminist organisations, but the event failed to attract a large crowd and Greek lesbian activists were conspicuously absent from it. Both *Sympraxis* and *Omada Gynaikon Kritis* participated in the meeting to discuss the formation of a Pan-Hellenic gay organisation, which will be dealt with below.

4.5. An Attempt towards a Pan-Hellenic LGBT Organisation

Up until the mid-1990s a characteristic of the gay movement in Greece was its localised

nature. Even though there was a clear proliferation of gay groups in the middle of this decade, these groups were usually quite limited in size and worked independently from one another. Some had an elected core leadership and some peripheral activists who did volunteer work and often participated in public gatherings. As a whole, from its inception, the gay movement in Greece pursued its own agenda and had limited contact with other activist organisations in the country.

More specifically, in Greece, there was no substantial relationship between the feminist and gay movements and their agendas remained distinct. Middle-class heterosexual feminists, for example, viewed the inclusion of lesbians in the feminist movement with scepticism, fearing that it might jeopardize the credibility of the movement (Petropoulou 2005). Overall, for the most part, the various gay organisations that had been established in the country by the mid-1990s tended to follow an isolated path with little or, in the most extreme cases, no co-operation with one another. EOK was the first gay organisation to liaise with other social movements in Greece thereby trying to build bridges with them. For example, in 1997 EOK took the initiative to establish a Forum of social organisations and youth groups for human rights protection with the name “EVERYBODY DIFFERENT, EVERYBODY EQUAL” and held the chair of the first presidency in the Forum (<http://www.eok.gr/index>).

During a meeting in Thessaloniki a decision about the formation of a Pan-Hellenic LGBT association was taken as early as November 1992. The meeting was initiated by the local group OPOTH, with the participation of Paola and Vallianatos, as a representative of AKOE (Kraximo Issue 12, Winter 1992: 6). Once more, the presence of Vallianatos, as the delegate of a then defunct group, caused some controversy and led to the abstaining of EOK members. For their part, EOK members objected to Vallianatos’ participation in the forum and disagreed with the meeting taking place in Thessaloniki, instead of their preferred place of Athens.

In the mid-1990s, a new initiative for the convergence of all contemporary Greek gay groups into an 'umbrella' association was promoted by the *Sympraxis* which became the EOK branch in Thessaloniki in March 1996. This ambitious project for the creation of an 'umbrella' LGBT movement would have involved the dissolving of all current organisations and their integration into a Pan-Hellenic Homosexual Organisation with a common legal framework, encompassing all the major gay groups in different parts of Greece. Offices were going to be established in Athens, Thessaloniki, and Heraclion, the three biggest Greek cities. The principal aim was to establish a more coherent and centralized strategy to combat homophobia and to campaign for homosexual issues in Greece.

These initiatives for an all-encompassing gay organisation were realised for a brief period in 1999 but they were eventually abandoned as yet again, the personal differences between some of the key LGBT activists made co-operation among the various groups almost an impossible task. Once more, personal, individual politics and motives obscured the benefits of a more coordinated, centralized LGBT politics. Indicative of this problem, for example, was that both the 1992 and the 1996 attempts to create a nation-wide LGBT movement were initiated in Thessaloniki and not in the capital. Although they had already expressed their belief that the core of such an association should be in the capital, as was argued by EOK, the more visible protagonists among the activists in Athens remained preoccupied with increasingly bitter and open personal vendettas.

4.6. Greek LGBT Activism in the New Millennium: New Groups / New Directions

At the dawn of the new millennium LGBT activism in Greece witnessed the emergence of a number of new grass-roots groups, the majority of which had an informal character and in

some cases a short lifespan. These included, first, the creation of two new lesbian groups, the *Lesviaki Omada Athinas* (Athens Lesbian Group) and the *Sapphites*, second, the foundation in the same year of POEK (Homosexual Initiative against Oppression) a university-based web of radical leftist gay groups, third the onset of Synthesis, a group dedicated to AIDS issues, and finally, the creation of OLKE, a more formal association. With the exception of OLKE, which was founded in 2004 and was the only organisation to have a legal status and charter, all the other groups were founded more or less simultaneously in 2000.

In the meantime, from 2000 until 2003 EOK remained actively involved in Greek LGBT activism and successfully organised the 2000 Athens Pride which was a two-day event that included a series of talks and discussions about the problems, discrimination and homophobia faced by LGBT people in Greece. Three months earlier, in March 2000 the group also joined the European branch of ILGA. One year later, in September 2001, together with Synthesis, POEK, and the newly founded Greek Sexual Identity Branch of Amnesty International, EOK participated in a renewed attempt to form a collective action plan.

However, in spite of all these initiatives and actions, in 2003, EOK found itself in the midst of a controversy. Allegations emerged in Deon that despite the fact that the group's founding charter explicitly states that elections should take place every three years, no elections had occurred since Giannelos became President in 1990. Giannelos became embroiled in a legal dispute with the magazine's editor and owner Paul Sofianos. Since 1997, when he was instrumental in launching Deon, Sofianos had used other means to attract LGBT visibility in the country, including the organisation of the first Mr. Gay Greece. In adopting Vallianatos' more commercial approach to gay politics and visibility, Sofianos believed that a gay male beauty-contest in Greece would promote LGBT tourism in the country as well as make Greek gays feel more comfortable and proud about their

sexuality (Mr Gay Greece Magazine 2002). Indeed as far as the attraction of foreign LGBT tourists was concerned, the contest was by all accounts successful, bringing more and more gay men into the island in order to participate in the events and parties surrounding the contest. In particular the 2005 Mr Gay Greece beauty contest introduced yet another prize, that of Mr Gay Tourism. In the same contest, Mr Gay Mykonos was from Lebanon, whilst Mr Mediterraneo was Italian (<http://www.themister.org/2005>). Even though it was the last, so far, Mr Gay Greece contest, the 2005 beauty pageant did satisfy Sofianos' aspirations in regards to the greater visibility of gay men in this part, at least, of Greece.

Still, as far as the internal gay politics between Giannelos and Sofianos are concerned, it is unclear when the dispute between the two men began and what its exact nature was. Sofianos accused Giannelos of slander and argued that Giannelos had tried to mobilise other LGBT groups such as SATTE against him. Indeed, when Giannelos posted an anonymous attack against Sofianos in EOK's website, he presented it as part of a general critique. SATTE, *Somateio Allilegiis Travesti/Transsexual Ellados* (Solidarity Union for Greek Transvestites/Transsexuals), which was founded in 2003, soon posted their own disagreement to EOK's critique and distanced themselves from the dispute between the two men (<http://www.gaygreece.gr/news/satte.html>). For his part, Sofianos posted these accusations made against him on EOK's official web site, argued that the author was none other than Giannelos, the then spokesman of EOK and soon filed for restrictive measures against the latter. Among other things, for example, the anonymous author had written against Sofianos: "By the way, does anyone know what this Sofianos person does for a living? That is, except from bringing various foreign porn stars and escorts, and trafficking them as a pimp?" (<http://gaygreece.gr/news/eok2.html>).

As for EOK itself, at the end of 2003 and during the disagreements between Giannelos and Sofianos, Petropoulou resigned from the vice-presidency of the group effectively leaving Giannelos as EOK's only formally elected member. Petropoulou accused Giannelos of

irregularities such as the failure to adhere to the group's charter with regards to elections, as well as taking the initiative to post the 'anonymous' accusations against Sofianos on the group's official web site (Petropoulou 2005:32-33). In a way, therefore, the dispute between Giannelos and Sofianos initially appeared as one between EOK and the man responsible for the organisation of Mr. Gay Greece contests. However, in the eyes of the majority of homosexuals who did not know exactly what was going on between Giannelos and Sofianos and who were not as 'active' in gay politics, the dispute between the two men could also be translated as one stemming from personal antipathies rather than as a difference between the strategies employed by the two men in order to promote gay visibility in Greece. In other words, the dispute between two men alone threatened the image and actual content of the Greek LGBT movement. This problem was soon to be solved with the creation of yet another LGBT group.

After EOK's internal problems, which had effectively damaged the only hitherto large LGBT organisation in Greece, the consequent lack of a visible LGBT representative would be rectified in Autumn 2004, when OLKE *Omofilofiliki kai Lesviaki Koinotita Elladas* (Homosexual and Lesbian Community of Greece), a new gay activist organisation, made its appearance in Athens. The group was formed by departing members of an earlier group, POP, the *Protovoulia Omofilofilon Politon* (Initiative of Homosexual Citizens), a small informal network of gay people founded in early 2003. Once more the creation of OLKE caused a controversy among LGBT activists. Following the Press release that announced the creation of OLKE, the remaining members of POP produced a statement, in which they noted their surprise and indignation at how OLKE's press statement had announced POP's breakdown, in spite of the fact that POP continued to function as a group.

POP members also accused two of the departing members – not named in their statement – of using the group's post-box address as their own. Giannelos also expressed his objection to the similarity between EOK's and OLKE's names, arguing that the only difference between the two was the inclusion of the word lesbian in the latter's title. Finally, feeling

that its efforts had been sidelined, SATTE also objected to a press release by OLKE where the latter referred to itself as the representative group of Lesbians, Homosexuals, Transvestites and Transsexuals of Greece. Despite these controversies, OLKE established itself as an active group and organises regular discussions on several issues that concern the LGBT community, such as 'cruising in parks', 'homophobia in the mass media', 'discrimination due to sexual orientation', 'HIV and Gays,' with the aim of creating a feeling of community and belonging, but also of providing up-to-date information about LGBT issues, exchanging views and establishing a constant dialogue on issues that concern the LGBT community'. Finally, a weekly social gathering is organised as a means of getting to know people in a friendly environment and providing a space for the discussion and exchange of view (www.olke.org).

One of the first steps taken by members of the newly formed group OLKE was to organise a debate about same-sex partnerships, a priority topic on the agenda of Greek LGBT activists at the beginning of the new millennium. The debate on same-sex partnerships included a discussion of the legal provisions in Greece with regards to civil unions (Greek legislation defines civil marriage as the 'legal union of two people' without specifying their sex) and of possible strategies that can lead to the granting of this right in Greece. One of the decisions taken was to send a letter to Alexandros Papaligouras, the Greek Minister of Justice, to encourage him to act on the issue. Not surprisingly, gay marriage attracted the attention of the Greek media, with articles and television programmes dedicated to the issue.

In July 2005, Alekos Alavanos, the former leader of Synaspismos, a coalition of leftist parties, met with LGBT activists in Athens and offered his support. This was the first time that a leader of one of the main political parties in Greece included an LGBT issue on the party's political agenda and campaigned for the implementation of relevant legislation at the Parliament. Alavanos actually suggested the formation of a parliamentary committee to examine the possibility of civil partnerships for same-sex couples but his proposal was

ignored by the government. In fact, in December 2005, Alexandros Papaligouras, the Greek Justice minister, announced that although the government was thinking of granting more rights to unmarried heterosexual couples the bill would not be extended to include gay and lesbian couples. Papaligouras argued that 'any legislative initiative cannot exceed the tolerance and the sentiment of what is generally accepted in any society' and that 'every change has to mature in society before it can be decreed as law.'

The debate about the recognition of same-sex partnerships was renewed in April 2006 with the publication of PASOK's legislative proposal for the recognition and protection of unmarried heterosexual and same-sex couples. A few days after the announcement of PASOK's proposal, in his capacity as EOK's representative Vangelis Giannelos issued a statement which raised a number of criticisms centred on the use of terminology in this document. In particular, he objected to the use of the term 'sexoualika diaforetikoi' (sexually different), used in PASOK's proposal to refer to gay people, because it implied 'a stereotypical and false division between normal and different to normal'. PASOK's use of the term *Symfono Symviosis* (Co-habitation Register) instead of *Symfono Syntrofikis Shesis* (Partnership Register) was also criticised, as it treated the couple as symviountes (co-habitors) rather than as syntrofous (partners). Finally Giannelos expressed his indignation, as PASOK's proposal introduced an explicit denial of the right of homosexual couples to adopt children. It is interesting to note that both parties which have been vocal in their espousal of gay civil unions are opposition parties. Thus, there is little political cost involved in their decision to offer such a gesture of good will to homosexuals which may be a token rather than a substantial one. If the same parties were in power, then their attitude to the same issue may have been a completely different one. Amidst all these various developments both within and outwith the LGBT movements in Greece, in 2005 homosexuals in Greece paraded in the capital for the first time. This was the first time when all the major LGBT groups joined together in a common effort.

Athens Pride 2005 [Figs. 10 and 11] took place on Saturday the 25th June under strong police presence as there were fears that members of the group Chrisi Avgi (Golden Dawn), a neo-fascist organisation, would cause trouble. Anonymous members of the organisation had previously made threats of bomb attacks in the press. The evening prior to the event Chrisi Avgi members had thrown leaflets in the area where Pride was going to take place with the slogan '*Poustides* leave Athens'. In the end the event took place peacefully and with no violence. The 2005 Athens Gay Pride was a significant event for LGBT visibility in Greece as, for the first time in the history of Greek LGBT activism, the Pride festivities, which started with a series of public talks and an art exhibition, culminated with the first ever public Pride march in the centre of Athens. Approximately three hundred people marched outside the Greek Parliament in Syntagma Square carrying banners with statements such as 'come out of your closet', 'gays are not just images on TV' and shouting 'love, desire and life deserve respect', and 'war against any kind of racism'. The marchers also distributed leaflets to onlookers which stated 'love is written with the same letters for all of us' and 'love, desire, and life deserve respect'. The Rainbow flag, symbol of the international gay community, was carried at the beginning of the parade. All the major LGBT activist groups in Athens were involved in the organisation of the event, temporarily leaving their differences aside. Ilias, a 35 year old man who was present at the event, described it as 'a magical Mardi Gras, a cornucopia of colours and sounds'.



Figure 10: Athens Gay Pride 2005 poster.



Figure 11: Athens Gay Pride 2005, pictures from the event.

Similar events have since taken place in Athens in 2006 [Fig. 12] and in 2007 [Fig. 13] with great success. LGBT groups in Athens estimated that around two thousand people attended the 2007 Pride Festivities. The number of those who marched, however, was estimated at five hundred, a number significantly smaller. Attempts to secure the support and official sponsorship of the Athens municipality for the 2007 Pride Festival were unsuccessful. But the 2007 Gay Pride also met resistance from LGBT activists themselves. Sofianos, a sponsor of previous Pride events, abstained from the organisation of the 2007 Pride. After the event took place, Sofianos published a vitriolic editorial in which he argued that the 2007 Athens Pride, a ‘counterfeit pride’, had failed miserably and that it resembled more a Festival of Communist Youth rather than a celebration of LGBT Pride. For Sofianos, instead of organising an event against discriminations that would exclusively concern the rights of homosexuals, those responsible for the Pride festivities



Figure 12: Images from Athens Gay Pride 2006.

“organised a fiesta full of discriminations in a square full of the kiosks of leftist and anarchist groups whilst the presence of purely gay kiosks was minimal” (Sofianos <http://www.gaygreece.gr>).

To date, the 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century have been the most significant in terms of LGBT activism in Greece, with a number of new groups appearing in Athens and in other major Greek urban centres. This proliferation of groups attests to the fact that the spirit of activism is firmly entrenched in Greece. However, despite the apparently vibrant and dynamic nature of the LGBT movement in Greece, its impact has been fairly limited.

4.7. Greek Gays and LGBT Activism

The 1996 Greek Gay Guide, subtitled ‘the Erotic Geography of Greece’, published by Paola and dedicated to information concerning gay spaces in the country, makes the following reference with regards to the attitudes of Greek homosexuals about gay politics:

Unfortunately, young Greek gays seem prone to gather in cliques and show indifference to matters of everyday survival; meanings such as “solidarity” and a “sense of community” are virtually unknown to them. Most prefer not to announce their sexual preference to all and sundry, and would probably be dismayed by manifestations, such as gay Mardi-Gras, which take place in the West (Greek Gay Guide’96: 75)

Despite the proliferation of LGBT movements in the Greece in the 1990s, during my fieldwork I met only a handful of men who had any connection with these various gay organisations in the country. The great majority of the gay men I spoke to showed very little interest in the activities of these organisations. Very few of these men had any substantial knowledge about the nature and character of homosexual politics and only a small number of them could identify another protagonist of Greek gay activism apart from Vallianatos. Moreover, some of these men were even oblivious to the existence of EOK and the other LGBT groups and were under the impression that AKOE remained the main body of homosexual activism in the country.

In general, the comments I collected during my fieldwork suggest that the Greek LGBT movement has very little relevance in the everyday life of Greek gays. As for the few gay men who knew about the mobilisations and changes within the different groups and the even fewer who had actively participated in one group or another, their reactions were usually negative, if not hostile and derogatory. Apart from the movements' public protagonists, such as Giannelos, Sofianos and Vallianatos, there exists a limited number of gay activists who fight for the rights of homosexual people in Greece. But these latter activists remain the anonymous heroes of a Greek gay movement which has largely failed to attract the support of the majority of Greek homosexuals. For their part, most Greek homosexuals display an apathy towards and disinterest in gay politics.

Gay activists may accuse 'closeted gays' of timidity and of hindering the activist cause with their preference to stay in the closet and for not 'coming out' to claim their rights. A strong viable homosexual movement requires a number of dedicated and committed members, but gay activist organisations in Greece have problems attracting prospective members who are willing to employ their resources to the 'gay cause'. Of course, this is not to say that the inability to motivate the majority of the gay populace to be involved in gay activism is a peculiarly Greek phenomenon. On the contrary, this has been a repeated trend

that most gay liberation movements have experienced at some point. For example, Bronski mentions a similar problem occurring in the United States in the 1970s:

Gay rights organisations played a very limited role in the lives of most gay men and lesbians. The groups remained small and were unable to garner much financial or organisational support from the community [...]. Gay men and lesbians, as did most heterosexuals, drew upon popular culture for recognition and validation of their existence (Bronski 1998: 74).

Nevertheless, I believe that, as it derives from the opinions of the gay men whom I interviewed and had discussions with, certain features which prevent and inhibit the mobilisation of Greek homosexuals are related to internal processes and factors which have more to do with a number of different circumstances. Some of these circumstances are internal to the Greek LGBT movements themselves whereas others suggest an antagonistic interaction between these movements and the general wider context of Greek 'culture'. The problems internal to gay activism in Greece are, first, the obvious perceived association of Greek gay activism with the liberation of transvestites, second, the lack of a unanimously agreed agenda or plan for action and third, the incessant infighting among the various protagonists of the different LGBT groups. The problems related to Greek 'culture' on the other hand are, first, the allegiance of Greek gay men to their families, second, many gay men's actual de-politicisation of their homosexuality and third, the prevalence of the belief that sexuality is a private and not a public matter.

4.7.1. The Obstacles to a Greek LGBT Movement

Gender norms constitute a factor influencing the extent to which people may be willing to visibly participate in LGBT politics. Most of the ethnographers of Greece, Faubion (1993), Loizos and Papataxiarchis (1991) among them, have written extensively about these norms. To summarise these arguments: for both a man and woman, gender non-conformity to gender expectations in Greece has distinct social consequences for the individual's moral character. Yet, it appears that, in general, it is more acceptable and non-stigmatising for women to behave in ways befitting men if they are acting as surrogates in times of need. The "strong woman" matriarch holding the family together is an example of such a role. In line with my informants' perceptions, Faubion (1993) notes that one of the reasons Vallianatos made such an impact was that whilst he was vocal and open about his homosexuality, he nonetheless exhibited typically and desired masculine traits, thereby conforming to certain dominant gender expectations about men.

Despite Vallianatos' success in projecting and displaying the masculine 'face' of homosexuality, the first and greatest problem the majority of the men I spoke to experienced was the dominance of the general identification of homosexuals with the image of the effeminate *poustis*. Homosexual emancipation in Greece still tends to be closely linked in the minds of many people to the liberation of transvestites. Regardless of whether they actually assume an active or a passive role in sexual intercourse, and regardless of the degree of bodily modification, transvestites are generally considered to represent the stereotypical effeminate homosexual, the ultimate male gender non-conformist. This perceived association of Greek gay activism with the liberation and emancipation of the transvestites still functions as a deterrent preventing many gay men from joining the existing homosexual groups. The question of the incorporation or not of transvestites into the homosexual movement was a contentious issue from the very beginning (see Taktis 1989: 84; Palamiotis 1992: 29; Theodorakopoulos 2005: 102).

As I have already highlighted, in the early years of homosexual liberation in Greece, transvestites were particularly involved in the gay activist cause. Greek transvestites formed the majority of the participants in the first meeting against the forthcoming Law on Venereal diseases, a meeting which marked a significant moment in the history of Greek gay activism. Transvestites were also very active in helping to publicize the plight of Greek homosexuals and to make sexual minorities visible to the wider heterosexual community through various activities. One such activity was the staging of the first beauty contest for transvestites in April of 1980, twenty-two years before the first Mr Gay Greece (Sioubouras 1980). Finally, with the publication of *Kraximo*, transvestites have long found a well-known, active and dedicated activist in Paola.

But the inclusion of transvestites within the Greek gay movement undermined, initially at least, its credibility amongst gay men who saw themselves as being both separate and different from transvestites. For many gays in Greece, this visibility of the transvestites was seen as further promoting and strengthening an unwanted association of homosexuality with effeminacy and deviance in the minds of some heterosexuals. As a result, many gay men saw the increasing visibility and participation of transvestites in gay movements as a factor which led to the denial of a masculine status for the homosexual men and thus to their subsequent marginalization. The image of a homosexual as a transvestite and as a sexual invert was prevalent in the past and remains so especially among older generations. Michalis mentioned that when he ‘came out’ to his mother, she exclaimed, ‘Good heavens, where are your frocks?’ In her mind, a homosexual both dressed and behaved as a woman. Michalis, who was anything but feminine, did not fit into his mother’s expectations of what a homosexual should look like.

In recent years, however, the public profile of transvestites in gay activist politics has decreased significantly. The current character of gay activism does not justify or accurately reflect those men’s perceptions of the Greek gay movement. But even in the earlier stages,

when transvestites still co-operated with other LGBT groups, their own issues, such as police harassment and the right to sex-work were subordinated to those of gay male members. As I have already explained, this was also the experience of lesbians within the LGBT movements. In a way, therefore, transvestites and transsexuals were marginalized by gay men in much harsher ways than for lesbians. They were denied their 'gayness' and were often treated as the 'freaks' among male homosexuals.

The role that Greek transvestites and transsexuals play in the current LGBT groups is rather limited as transvestites and transsexuals largely operate within SATTE their own separate union. The idea of creating a separate group that would deal specifically with issues that affect transvestite and transgender individuals in Greece goes back to 1997 but was finally realized in 2003. The views of the men I spoke to are rather misconceptions than reality, but point to their potential ignorance about the state of affairs in homosexual activism. Notwithstanding my informants' frequent failure to accept transvestitism and transsexualism as potential expressions of male homosexuality, there are, I believe, other underlying reasons for the unwillingness of many of my interlocutors to join the various homosexual groups.

The actual extent to which people avoid sexual politics for fear of the social exclusion that might be the result of the identification of all gay men with more effeminate men remains unclear. Despite the increasing number of LGBT organisations in Greece, there appears to be a tendency towards separatism and the pursuit of different goals on the part of the gay men, the lesbians and the transvestites and transgendered individuals who, had they successfully united their powers, might have managed to create an all-embracing viable and strong LGBT movement in Greece.

The assumption of leading roles by male gay activists often meant the subjugation of lesbian, transvestite and transgender issues. In spite of their own rivalries, all successive 'official' spokesmen and heads of both AKOE and EOK, the leading LGBT groups, were men. Even when Petropoulou represented the lesbians in EOK, she was second in command to Giannelos. Hence, the logical strategy for lesbians, transvestites and transsexuals was to form, as they indeed did, their own separate groups and unions. As a result, with the exception of OLKE's present integrationist attempts, which it is still too early to evaluate, there has not yet been a common agenda, action plan and 'vision' for all gay men, lesbians, transvestites and transsexuals in Greece. The mere reference to an abstract and vague homosexual liberation proved inadequate when it came to the solution of everyday problems related to prejudice, discrimination, homophobia and various kinds of intricate legal impediments.

Moreover, as far as the gay male activists themselves are concerned, the alternate 'leaders' consumed themselves and the resources of the groups in their interpersonal fights and vendettas. Many of my interlocutors pointed to the existence of these various spokesmen or 'presidents' of LGBT groups not as a sign of success of the struggle towards the granting of the rights of homosexuals, but rather as a sign of the kind of fractioning among the Greek gay population. It is not simply that these people do not like each other, and therefore work against each other, although there may well be such personal antagonisms. Rather, each is seen as carving out a space of personal fame and each is engaged in the creation of his social edifice. It is commonly said about these personalities that they are 'selfish'. The term is not meant to simply underline narcissism, although this can be among the less generous implications. It is rather that none of the best-known personalities involved in the Greek LGBT arena wish to 'have their thunder stolen by another'. They are each seen as wanting credit for forging LGBT politics in Greece. This perspective is shared both by those who have met these figures socially, and by those for whom they remain the public face of gay activism in the country.

Taxiarchos had worked under Paul Sofianos in *Deon* for almost a year, and he told me that the latter was a ‘self-publicist’, who was not really interested in LGBT activism as such. Rather, Taxiarchos believed that:

Paul loves publicity and is an attention seeker. I don’t think of him as a serious person. I mean I did think that creating *Deon* was a great idea but when he started this Mr Gay Greece staff he moved to the ridiculous. I mean why do we actually need crap like that? I think he used this event to advertise his business. Of course, he hasn’t done anything that Vallianatos hadn’t done earlier. I don’t know, Paul might have got his inspiration from Vallianatos. Paul sees himself as a saviour of LGBT activism.

In contrast to the GLF – the Gay Liberation Front in Britain – for example, where the personal conflicts of 1971 to 1972 were the result of ideological disagreements between the ‘social revolutionaries’ and ‘those who put sexism and sexuality first’, between the ‘radical lesbian feminists’ and ‘male chauvinists’ and finally between the ‘radical feminist men’ and ‘single-issue civil rights activists’ (Power 1995: 247), the conflicts between Greek LGBT activists were anything but ideological. The personal idiosyncrasies of the key figures in these groups inhibited the creation of a conducive environment, where that co-operation could have been achieved. With Giannelos fighting with Vallianatos and later with Sofianos and with both Vallianatos and Sofianos using more commercial means to politics whilst being continuously attacked by Giannelos, in the eyes of most of my informants’ gay activism largely appeared as a comedy. And obviously, they were not willing to ‘risk all’ in order to become themselves ridiculed as part of this comedy. Once again, my informants might have chosen to ‘expose’ themselves publicly had the conduct of the protagonists of the movement been more ‘professional’. In their own different ways, Giannelos, Sofianos and Vallianatos have contributed to gay visibility. But, this was not a collective visibility and as such, in the view of many of my informants, they often did more

harm than good to the movement. In the end, if these three men were the public face of the gay activist in Greece, none of my informants aspired to be part of it.

The success of the gay movement abroad was predicated on the notion of 'coming out,' of publicly declaring one's homosexuality. The process of 'coming out' was essential in instigating a sense of political identity and pride in one's homosexuality. However, despite the efforts of gay activists who occasionally encourage Greek gays to come out of the closet, gay identity and gay consciousness in Greece is still to a large extent concealed from the wider public. Although this situation is gradually changing, both gay and lesbian activists and non-activists who are nonetheless 'out' are still only a fraction of the homosexual population in Greece and tend to appear mostly in urban areas. The majority of Greek gays remain 'in the closet', unwilling to take the risks associated with the public admission of their sexuality. As I have already indicated, very few gays in Greece are 'out' in all spheres of their lives. The workplace, and most of all, the family environment are usually contexts where a person's homosexuality is suppressed, silenced and remains hidden.

One of the primary reasons why most of the gay men I spoke to kept their sexual orientation a secret from colleagues at work and from family members was because they were afraid of the potential consequences of this disclosure. Once again, as I have already demonstrated in the analysis of these men's relationship to their family, several of these men cited the homophobia of the 'general public' and the negative response of their family as the factors underlying their reluctance to 'come out'. Most of them had a story to tell about the homophobic treatment that gays still received in the various spheres of their lives. Some of them had even personally experienced the negative effects of 'coming out'. Lambros, a thirty-two year old man, was one of them. When he disclosed his homosexuality to the mother of one of his pupils, he was informed of her decision to discontinue his services because 'he was not a suitable role model for her son.'

Rather than talking about the oppressive nature of the 'closet', my ethnographic interlocutors emphasised the recurring theme of the protective nature of staying in it. As was earlier the case with silence in both the family and the military context, their 'politics of invisibility' were seen as empowering and not as oppressive. This coming in and out of the closet allowed them to reap the benefits of both the heterosexual and the homosexual worlds. Staying in the closet was seen by most of these gay men as a strategy for survival. The closet was seen as protecting them from homophobia and discrimination. Moreover, many see 'coming out' as an unnecessary and divisive action threatening an individual's multifarious ties to his family and community as a whole.

Antonis was a twenty-six year old man and nobody in his family or working environment knew about his homosexuality. He was still living with his parents and his younger sister, but he was saving up money to buy his own flat. This is what he told me, when I ask him about his reasons for not 'coming out' and for not participating in gay politics:

I have a good job and a comfortable life. No one bothers me, why risk it? What do I have to gain? You risk too much by being openly gay. I love my career. If my bosses found out that I am gay, they may fire me. Their attitude will be, we do not want a *poustis* working among us. I have heard the comments they make about gays, and they are not nice, believe me. I also love my family too much. It would be a selfish thing to hurt them. They have always been there for me. I do not feel oppressed. It's my choice [not to come out]...When you are a member of one of these groups [the LGBT groups], you are required to participate in rallies. I can't do that. What if my parents or someone else show me? What will I say to them? It's too difficult.

Thirty-two year old Petros gave a similar response to the same question:

You have to think about the effect that this will have on the people around you. My family has sacrificed everything for me. Telling them I am gay would be too devastating for them. They won't understand. They think that someone who is gay is acting like a woman...I wouldn't consider joining a gay organisation. The risk is too great. I try to keep my private life separate from my work and family life. Being an activist means combining the two and I am not prepared to do that.

Following from my informants' experiences and attitudes towards it, the family re-emerges as a significant factor in their decision to stay in the closet and to abstain from membership in gay organisations. The family was seen as a barrier to their 'coming out' and to their subsequent participation in the gay movement. Although my gay interlocutors sought emotional support with regards to their sexuality among other gay men rather than within their family, they still acknowledged the importance of their family as a material and affective support-unit and were aware of the 'debt' they owed to it.

This sense of obligation to their families and the possible exposure of their homosexuality through their involvement in gay activist events such as demonstrations and public debates prevented many men from becoming members of these groups. Even men who have disclosed their sexuality to their families mentioned that one of the primary factors for not joining in the activism movement is the effect that their possible exposure might have on their families' social standing. Twenty-two year old Giorgos makes this point in a very explicit manner:

It's not just my feelings and wishes that I have to take into account. My parents have asked me to keep my sexuality to myself. It took them a long time to accept my homosexuality. It's an agreement between me and my parents. No one else in my family knows apart from my parents and my sisters. It would be hard for my parents, if other relatives and their friends found out about me. It is a question of honour for them: Your only son, to be a poustis. It would be too difficult for my parents to cope with the criticisms and the gossip [...] You cannot be a gay activist, without taking the risk of being recognised. Being an activist means you become involved, you go to demonstrations, you speak publicly about your sexuality. I can't do that. It wouldn't be fair for my parents, after everything they have given me.

But whereas their allegiance to their family remains important in some men's decision not to get involved in homosexual politics, this is not to say that had their families approved they would actually have participated in gay activism. The notion of homosexuality as a political identity is still largely unknown to Greece (Kaftantzoglou and Yannakopoulos 2004: 534). At best, most of my ethnographic informants believe that their homosexuality refers to a sexual orientation and a sexual lifestyle rather than to a whole identity whose legitimacy requires political action. Hence it is their potential failure to, willingly or unwillingly, acknowledge the political dimensions of their sexual identity and the ways in which the state discriminates against homosexuals that also obscures LGBT action in Greece. Even when they discussed, for example, how homophobia in the workplace created problems in their everyday lives, they still preferred to remain silent and assume the guise of heterosexuality thereby enjoying the privileges of gender conformity. Indeed, whereas such strategy could highlight a defense mechanism, the fact remains that they prefer to insist upon the non-political aspects of their homosexuality.

The efforts of Greek gay activists to instigate a sense of political identity among the homosexual population of the country have largely failed. The absence of a great number of homosexuals in the 2005 pride march testifies to this failure. Active in the Athenian gay night life but inactive in LGBT mobilizations, the men I spoke to were more interested in the politics of 'pleasure' rather in activist LGBT politics. Sexuality was seen by these men as a form of recreation which ought to be divorced from the domain of politics. The notion of 'fun' was a theme that kept coming up in our discussions. Petros told me that, "having sex with another man isn't and shouldn't be about politics, it is but about having fun. One should try to avoid mixing love and politics." Similarly, forty year old Pavlos mentioned: "I come to the gay spaces to have fun, to relax, to socialize with my friends and to have sex. I do not come to talk about politics. I am not interested in politicising sexuality. Things are complicated as they are and we do not have to complicate them any further." In the same context and rather more eloquently, thirty-three year old Michalis declared to the group:

I enjoy the physical aspect of my sexuality. The tremendous erotic sensations I feel when I am making love with another man. This feeling has nothing to do with politics, but everything to do with pleasure. Sex is about pleasure, not politics. Let's leave sexuality outside politics.

As a consequence of such de-politicisation of their homosexuality, many of my interlocutors also opposed the notion of a 'gay identity' and the idea of sexuality as the defining core feature of their self. For these men their homosexuality was one of the many facets of their personhood, which included a multitude of other characteristics, and not the sole source of their identity. In a group discussion, Costas, Dimitris and Sifis agreed that homosexuality was not the sole but only one feature of their personal identity:

Costas, twenty-eight years old – Yes, I am gay, but I am also a son, a friend, a teacher, a fan of classical music. You can't be so reductive. It's not that simple. My homosexuality is only an aspect of myself. I want people to view me as a *kanoniko* (normal) person, who happens to be gay. I don't believe there is a fundamental difference between straights and gays. The only difference is what we are attracted by members of the same sex. That does not make us necessarily a different species.

Dimitris, thirty-one years old – I relate to my friends as a human being. I do not relate to them based on their or my sexuality. My sexuality is only one part of me and not the only one. It does not define my whole sense of being. That would be too simplistic. I do not like *tabeles* (labels). They divide people and create more problems.

Sifis, twenty-five years old – I do not want to make a big issue of my homosexuality. Why should I? What I do in bed is my own business. One has more than one identity. Being gay is one of them. For some people this [being gay] is the most important one, but not for me. I do not like the idea of defining myself through my sexuality.

The apathy about and disinterest in gay politics on the part of many homosexuals in Greece may be considered as both symptomatic and a reflection of a wider disengagement of the Greek public with the sphere of politics. Although, after the fall of junta there has been a resurgence of political interest and activities and a growth of movements centered around the rights demanded by the feminist and gay movements, for example, in the late 1990s there was a mood of saturation with regards to political life and political participation in general (Close 2004: 123).

Indeed, whilst my informants were generally indifferent to politics, their belief that sexuality in particular is not a political issue was often closely related to the ways in which their statements secretly reflected a rather largely dominant view, in Greece, that the sexual self is a private concern, one that is not and should not be open to public scrutiny or consumption. This may also partly explain why, for some people at least, ‘outing’, the public declaration of a person’s sexual orientation without his or her consent, is relatively unknown in Greece. Whilst Tsarouhis’ homosexuality was ‘common knowledge’, for example, nobody ever publicly mentioned the painter’s sexual preferences in the context of the analysis of his work and life. Hence, the topic of silence that I continuously confronted during the interviews and discussions with my ethnographic interlocutors is also related to what Greeks in general may define as subject for public discussions. *Ta en Oiko mi en Demo* (What is of the house is not of the Demos – the public) is habitually said by Greeks when they want to denote that certain details of family and of an individual’s life ought not to be disclosed in public. As such, what happens behind close doors is a private affair and ‘nobody else’s business’; sexuality is the first such element of the strictly private domain, a belief that may further partly illustrate why many Greek parents still urge their gay sons to get married and then to do whatever they want in their private, sexual life.

In spite of the overwhelming appeal of such a belief in Greece, for both homosexuals and heterosexuals alike, when it comes to gay politics such a distinction between what is public and what is private creates a serious impediment in the creation of a larger gay community itself. As Richardson (2004: 404; see also Richardson 1998; 2000a and b) has explained, notwithstanding the fact that the distinction between public and private – itself a social construction – may be central to definitions of citizenship and largely impact on ‘the production of sexualities’, the ‘public’ is more often than not related directly to a heterosexual space and by implication,

In this approach, homosexuality is defined as a matter of individual moral conscience of (consenting) adult citizens, tolerable only as long as it did not leak across the boundaries of the private into the public. The public sphere is here identified with heterosexuality, where homosexuals may 'pass' through.

In other words, however generally perceived as democratic in Greece for allowing everybody to secretly do whatever they want, the distinction between the private and the public spheres may also perpetuate the silence that is counterproductive for the emergence of an effective gay community and politics. But whereas Richardson (2004: 405) maintains that "lesbian and gay liberation movements challenged this presumption of heterosexuality in the public sphere through 'coming out of the closet' and claiming their right to public visibility," in Greece, no gay politics and no gay community have succeeded in bringing about the same challenge. Amongst the few of my informants to have participated in gay activism, Aris first got involved in LGBT politics in the early 1980s. When I asked him about his experience of participation in Greek LGBT politics he told me that,

There is no gay community in Greece. There are small dispersed ghettos here and there that play the role of a club and where it's very difficult to see what's happening behind their closed doors. There are big and very big ghetto-clubs, but these have suddenly become fashionable and you will meet even straight couples dancing in them. The chances of meeting a Greek gay activist are few. The Greek homosexual continues to experience a private rather than a public freedom and in no way does he have a collective consciousness of his community. The liberation is superficial, if not merely stylistic.

With silence overcoming pride, the additional factor that the largest number of the men I studied still lived with their family also precluded the formation of a collective sense of gay consciousness and impaired the development of a gay community based on the concentration of a large gay population in one area. As Murray (1995: 45) has indicated with regards to Latin America for example, “the common practice of living with your family until you marry also eliminates the possibility of the same kind of residential concentration that in the United States and in other Western European countries preceded and enabled the development of a gay village and a sense of gay community.” As it appears from the interviews and discussions with my informants too, there is a minimal awareness of a sense of a community among the wider gay population in Greece. With the exception of Aris’ comment on the subject, the concept of a gay community (Weeks 2000: 151-193) was hardly ever mentioned in the narratives of the gay men I collected. When it is mentioned, it is usually with reference to the situation abroad and never in conjunction with the gay scene in Athens or elsewhere in Greece. My informants’ adoption of the belief that sexuality in general belongs to the domain of the private and the fact of their cohabitation with their families may have led to the de-politicisation of their sexuality and to their conviction that sexuality should be about ‘fun’.

4.8. Conclusion

Greek LGBT activism has expanded and diversified in the 1990s and in the first years of the new millennium. Old and new LGBT groups, both within and outwith the capital have continued their efforts for homosexual rights and visibility. Yet, the successful implementation of a nation-wide agreed agenda and course of action among these various groups has been constantly undermined by the bitter rivalries between a few individuals who have sometimes used the movement as a platform for promoting their own personal interests and aspirations. The in-fighting among the movement is itself of course only one of the reasons for its being rather unsuccessful in building momentum and in instigating a sense of ‘Gay Pride’ among the very population it hopes to represent. Perceptions of

homophobia, of gender non-conformity and fear of coming out might also discourage the activists' homosexual audience from responding. For the greatest number of my ethnographic interlocutors, the desire to join in LGBT politics was non-existent and, instead, a recurrent theme was the de-politicisation of sexuality and the prevalent view that sexuality belongs to the domain of the private.

The adoption of this latter viewpoint inhibits the breaking of silence that is so central for the LGBT activist cause. Once again, the identification of many of gay interlocutors with their biological family also acts a repressive mechanism against 'coming out' and against participating in the public arena of LGBT activism. The fear of hurting or potentially 'shaming' their family with their 'coming out' is a reason for some of these men's preference to 'stay in the closet' and to maintain their silence about their homosexuality. Most of my ethnographic informants also rejected the idea that their homosexuality is or should be the main feature or the dominant prism through which they define themselves.

To begin with, by largely failing to attract the hearts and minds of the wider gay population, the relatively young LGBT movement in Greece has so far failed to be identified as a movement. What most of my gay informants discussed was fragmentary, separationist, conflicting and ineffective organisations. And more often than not, they could not affiliate themselves with either of these different organisations. Whereas as I will suggest in the conclusion to the thesis, the creation of a variety of groups instead of a single LGBT organisation is not necessarily particular to Greece, the reasons why the different groups have so far failed to co-operate remains a Greek paradox. My informants are not the only ones who advocate a de-politicisation of sexuality. With their actions and arguments, some 'leaders' of the movement in Greece, Giannelos, Sofianos and Vallianatos above all, demonstrated how the Greek LGBT actions lacked the political agenda and professionalism that would secure the foundations of a social and political liberation movement.

In recent years the area of Gazi has acquired the reputation of being ‘the gay village’ of Athens, with the greatest concentration of gay commercial establishments, attesting to the fact that there is a vibrant and diversified gay scene for entertainment. This however does not also necessarily testify to a Greek homosexual community as such. According to the introduction to the 2000 Greek Gay Guide, “apart from Athens and Thessaloniki, there has not been developed a “gay scene” or “community” [in Greece] in the American or Western European meaning of the terms. Mykonos is nothing but a sweet Summer’s sin” (The Greek Gay Guide 2000). Apart from bars and clubs, a variety of other services are available to gay men and women in the capital. Homosexuals in Athens are now able to enjoy a number of businesses catering for their needs ranging from saunas and porn cinemas to gay sex lines and gay sex shops. However, the situation is different in rural Greece, where there is a noticeable absence of an organized gay recreational scene.

Outside Athens, only in Thessaloniki, and on the islands of Mykonos, the gay ‘sweet Summer’s sin’ and Lesbos in the summer, can one find an alternative gay scene. Overall, whether in Athens or elsewhere, the majority of these services are centred on the commercial, recreational side of homosexuality. A century after the emergence of the department stores that first gave an ‘excuse’ and allowed women to walk alone in the city (Friedberg 1995), in the late twentieth century homosexuals were allowed to ‘express themselves’ freely. But as with women, homosexuals too were addressed as consumers of a specific gay ‘culture’, of specific gay commodities, of a specific gay language, of specific advertisements for gays and of a specific gay ‘life-style’. When capitalism gradually ‘advanced’ in Greece from the mid-twentieth century onwards, as long as they were consumers and not political activists homosexuals became progressively more ‘accepted’.

CONCLUSION

“Civil Union can accommodate us too: Two women are planning to marry next week in Kaisariani.” This was the headline of an article published in the Greek newspaper *Ta NEA* on Thursday March 13th, 2008. The story is about the imminent civil union of two lesbian women, the first of its kind in Greece, who are planning to get ‘married’ by cleverly exploiting a legal loophole in the legislation. Law 1250/82 which introduced civil unions in Greece in 1982 does not specify the gender of the persons involved in such unions, and thus it is open to interpretation and possible contestation. In an interview printed in the newspaper on the same day, Spiros Tzokas, the Mayor of Kaisariani, the Athenian suburb where the ceremony will take place, stated that he was willing to perform the ceremony as it is within the parameters of the Law. The fact that the Mayor is a representative of the political party SYRIZA, the first political party in Greece to support gay civil partnerships, adds extra poignancy to the situation. If the ceremony goes ahead it would be the first civil union of two women in Greece

Evangelia Vlami, representative from OLKE, is also quoted in the main article as stating that another gay civil union between two gay men this time is due to take place on the same day in a municipality in Thessaloniki, adding that the group is still waiting for the response of a Mayor (this time a member of PASOK) from an unspecified Aegean island who suggested that gay civil unions could also be performed on his island. Representing OLKE, Evangelia Vlami and Grigoris Vallianatos had an earlier meeting with Sotiris Hadjigakis, the Minister of Justice during which they informed him about their intention to take legal action against the government if the latter intervened to prevent these unions. In this way, gay activists are trying to pre-empt the government’s intention to introduce a new partnership legislation whose implementation will be discussed in the Parliament later in the year and which will effectively extend legal rights to unmarried couples, without it being immediately clear as to whether or not gay couples will also be included in this new

law. Ieronymos, the newly appointed Archbishop of Athens and of all Greece, has apparently raised no objection to the granting of legal rights to unmarried couples when Ministry of Justice officials visited him to discuss the impending law. Instead he responded that ‘there is a need to change with the times’.

Thus, the introduction of civil union for gay couples in Greece may be the result of the discovery by the gay activists of a legal loophole rather than of the concerted efforts on the part of Greek politicians to implement such a measure. State officials have still to respond publicly to the above. If the gay civil unions succeed to proceed as planned, such success will mark both an important change in the history of the Greek LGBT movement and a significant milestone for the granting of gay rights in Greece. As far as gay visibility, liberation and rights are concerned, it will also illustrate how such change was possible only five years after the authorities were ‘offended’ by a mere kiss.

Five years prior to these current developments, the National Radio and Television Council (ESR), the body responsible for radio and television ethics in Greece, imposed a fine of 100.000 euros (approximately £70000) on the private television station MEGA Channel for showing two men kissing in the late night series *Close Your Eyes*. This kiss was the first of its kind to be broadcasted on Greek television. Justifying the hefty fine imposed on the MEGA Channel, Ioannis Laskaridis, the Chairman of ESR, maintained that “there have been unacceptable and extreme dialogues which prepared a vulgar atmosphere and led to an event which might happen in society but it is not usual. It could damage young people by making them too familiar with vulgarity. [Homosexuality] is a peculiarity which is outside of the reproductive process of life”. MEGA Channel announced its intention to appeal against the ESR’s decision and take the case to the State Council, the country’s highest legislative body. Some media critics also voiced their opposition to ESR for penalising a kiss on the grounds that it involved two same-sex individuals. Popi Diamandakou, a television critic in *Ta Nea*, argued that “the council tells us that it is ok to be tolerant but we shouldn’t go too far” (Diamandakou 2003) and accused the ESR of

hypocrisy and double standards as no such fine was imposed on television channels which a few weeks earlier had repeatedly broadcasted a kiss between pop stars Madonna and Britney Spears during a performance at an MTV awards ceremony.

For their part, gay activists accused the ESR of institutionalised homophobia and described the fine as “despicable and racist”. A few days following the ESR’s ruling, a group of about thirty gays, lesbians and trans-sexuals staged a kissing protest outside the offices of the ESR to protest about the fine. This was timed in order to coincide with the 8 o’clock evening news programmes. One of the protestors declared that “we believe [that] a kiss is an act of, love, tenderness and courage” whilst Marina Galanou, a member of the Transvestites and Transsexuals’ Union argued that: “This decision [concerning the fine] is despicable and racist [...] what I most hate is the hypocrisy we have to deal with everyday.” Vallianatos suggested that “they want to tell us who we can kiss and what time kissing is appropriate,” concluding that, the members of the Radio and Television Council should resign: “we’d like to think of Greece as a tolerant country.” For his part Giannelos explained that, “due to European Union pressure, Greece will pass a law against discrimination for all persons, but that’s not what happens in practice” (GHM 2003).

The protest was reported by two daily newspapers, the Greek daily *Kathimerini* and the conservative *Apogevmatini*. Of those two, only the *Kathimerini*’s English edition included a photo of protesters kissing whereas *Apogevmatini* published a photo of demonstrators outside the ESR building without however any further kissing demonstration. In responding to Laskaridis’ references to vulgarity for example, Marianna Tziantzi wrote in *Kathimerini*, that, “it’s far more vulgar to repeatedly show the effeminate gay stereotype, of the shrill-voiced and foppish man, on ‘family oriented’ programmes.” The story was also reported in the international media, which also published photos of gay activists kissing and which also made sporadic references to a similar British case concerning the first gay kiss to be screened in the UK in the popular soap-opera *Coronation Street* (GHM 2003).

The UK Independent Television Committee rejected all the 21 complaints it had received (GHM 2003). In Greece where the television gay kiss had provoked more official complaints, on the 13th of June 2003, Mr. C. Ramos, a State Councillor proposed the annulment of the fine and referred to homosexuality in terms not of morality but rather of difference, as “erotic sensibilities different to those of the majority of the population.” For Mr. Ramos, Greece is a country where all people are equal. In agreeing with Dimitris Haralambidis, the vice-president of the ESR, and the only person in the ESR to have maintained that, “a kiss, no-matter who gives it, is something good,” the State Council finally annulled the fine (Aggelidis 2006) and things gradually appeared to change in Greece for the best.

Summary

In the introduction I defined the originality of the approach adopted in this thesis and the unusualness of its subject matter by contrasting these with the dominant tendencies of historical and contemporary ethnographic studies on gender and sexuality in Greece that this thesis attempts to redress. The latter include a primary focus on rural communities, an emphasis on the discussion of hegemonic, hetero-normative forms of gender and sexuality, an examination of the ‘home’ as the main context for the construction of personal and gender identity and a study of mostly the mature, middle-aged and married householder rather than the single unmarried person and the elderly. Until fairly recently, when not entirely neglected, the study of homosexuality in modern Greece had only been the subject of footnote references. This is in contrast to the attention that scholars have shown towards the sexual practices of the ancient Greeks but, as I have indicated in the introduction, such work does little to elucidate the various ways in which homosexuality is experienced and expressed in contemporary Greece.

Against this background, chapter one discussed the ways in which my ethnographic interlocutors dealt with their sexuality in the context of their family environment. The family remains a pervasive institution in the lives of most Greeks. The theoretical framework of *timi* and *dropi* (honour and shame) which was a dominant paradigm for the study of Greek, or perhaps a more general Mediterranean, culture primarily in the 1960s and 1970s can still be a valuable explanatory theoretical tool for an understanding of homosexuality in modern Greece. More specifically *timi* and *dropi* in this context can also help to provide a fruitful examination of the reasons why some men may choose to remain silent and in the closet rather than ‘come out’. Primarily, honour and shame is a moral evaluative framework that assigns status and reputation based on the proper conduct of females and the control of female sexuality by the male members of the household. Inability to control the ‘proper’ sexual conduct of the women is traditionally perceived as ‘shaming’ the ‘man of the house’.

However, this thesis provides a critique of the above paradigm for its failure to account for the possible ways in which the sexual conduct of the men in a family may also occasionally be perceived as a threat to the family’s ‘good name’ and, by implication, its honour too. Despite references in the relative literature to the ‘out-of-dateness’ of arguments in favour of the significance of feelings of shame and pride, the fear of bringing ‘shame’ to their families is one of the primary and persistent reasons that my informants’ offered for not disclosing their homosexuality. As a result, silence becomes a defence mechanism that both many of my gay interlocutors and their families employ in order to deal with the issue of homosexuality. The family, however, was also seen both as oppressive and supportive. When a member of the family knew about the child’s homosexuality, they urged him not to tell anybody else. When more members in the family knew, the immediate response was that the child should not ‘come out’ to the ‘rest’, that is to the extended family. And when all the family knew, they all agreed that the rest of the world need not ever know that their boy is gay. However an effective defence mechanism, therefore, this varied silence often inhibits the sense of pride in the man’s homosexuality and in turn, prevents him from joining a movement that would require him to be vocal about his sexual self.

Chapter two explored the diverse experiences of my gay interlocutors in the military, another dominant site for the reproduction of patriarchal structures. The Greek military largely maintains a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy with regards to homosexual conscripts serving in the Greek Armed Forces and assumes that all of the military personnel are heterosexual. Homosexuality becomes an issue for consideration and action by the military authorities, only where the conscript deliberately chooses to ‘come out’ to them. In silence, *Timi* is here translated into *philotimo* (roughly, the love of honour) and, in case the man decides to ‘come out’ *dropi* results in an I5 dishonourable discharge. Yet, the military experiences of my ethnographic interlocutors’ challenge the assumption that the military is a strictly heterosexual space. What they often described as the homo-social environment of the military acted as a catalyst for several of my informants to come to terms with their homosexuality. Regardless of whether they saw other conscripts as erotic objects or not, most of them defined the period of their *thiteia* as their defining ‘coming out’ moment, the period in which they actually decided what kind of men they really were. Although none of them ‘came out’ officially during their *thiteia* (military service) and although even fewer became political about it, most decided they were gay whilst serving in the armed forces.

Chapter three has provided a historical narrative of the creation of LGBT activism in Greece. I have argued that it is helpful to place and therefore understand the emergence of gay activism in the wider context of politicisation that followed the restoration of democracy after seven years of a repressive dictatorship. Large-scale political and social organisation around gay issues was not possible prior to 1974 as the continuous wars and the junta did not allow such forms of organisation. In this specific sense, it might be said that the gay and lesbian movements in Greece had a ‘late’ start compared, for example, to the prototypical paradigms of the United States and France. Prior to 1974, many of the intellectuals who could have participated in gay and lesbian political circles were expatriates. Effectively, their return to Greece after the fall of the junta marked the beginning of social organisation around LGBT issues. Much of that organisation began to occur along the lines of movements and organisations that these returning intellectuals had

seen during their exile from Greece. Of course, gay activism did not occur in a social vacuum in Greece. The initial stages of this organisation occurred in conjunction with the articulation of other social movements, such as the Greek feminist movement.

Despite the fact that the idea of homosexual mobilisation faced resistance from older gay men such as the writers Taktsis and Christianopoulos and hostility from the Greek Communist Party of the Exterior, the creation of AKOE in 1976 laid the foundations for LGBT politics in Greece. Through the publication of *Amfi*, the first Greek gay publication, AKOE began the process of homosexual visibility in Greece. The first ever Gay Pride took place in 1982, amidst the wider euphoria and optimism marked by the official entry of the Greece into the European Economic Community and the rise of PASOK, the socialist party, in power. The screening of the movie *Angelos*, concerning Roussos' story and Vallianatos' masculine presence in the gay activist scene in the mid-1980s originally gave a necessary boost to AKOE, gaining the gradual sympathy of more heterosexuals as well as positively influencing gay men who could not identify themselves with the stereotypical effeminate homosexual. But divisions within AKOE soon began to appear, leading the way to the creation of another LGBT group, EOK.

Chapter four considered the trajectory of the LGBT politics in Greece in the 1990s and the early years of the new millennium. This was a dynamic period in the arena of gay activism as we witness the creation of different groups in different parts of the country. In the second half of the 1990s there was the first attempt towards the creation of a Pan-Hellenic LGBT movement but the personal disagreements among various activists, which had manifested themselves since the mid-1980s, interfered in this process and led to its eventual abandonment. Vallianatos' introduced clubbing as an alternative form of gay politics. META and Cyberdykes, two lesbian groups which made their appearance in the early 1990s, also followed a similar approach. OLKE, a new group founded in 2000, has currently become the leading LGBT group in Greece and was the first to initiate a debate around same-sex marriage, the results of which might be materialising now. One of the gay

men who intends to get married in Thessaloniki is Nikos Hatdjitryfon, a member of *Sympraxis*. However, despite the existence of all these various groups, the majority of my interlocutors were oblivious to most of them and appeared largely disinterested when it came to the issue of homosexual mobilisation.

By considering their sexuality as a private issue, not open to public consumption, most of my informants preferred to be silent about their sexuality and chose to stay in the closet. For most of them 'the closet' was seen as protective and not as oppressive. Concealment and silence about one's sexuality is counterproductive for the activist cause which demands a breaking of the silence and a celebration, Pride, in one's sexuality. The de-politicisation of their homosexuality by many of my ethnographic informants and their view that sex should be about fun and not politics has direct implications for the building of gay community and a viable LGBT movement. It is not a surprise then that the majority of my interlocutors did not feel that they were part of a wider gay community but experienced their homosexuality primarily as consumers of a gay lifestyle.

Another factor that must be accounted for is the social, cultural and political influence of the Orthodox Church. The Church's perspective on sexual mores tends to interlock both with the family and with the military, at least at the level of the official rhetoric. Indeed many of my interlocutors spoke as if the Church, the family and the military may be treated as a single unit with regards to sexuality. At the same time, my interlocutors were aware that same-sex behaviour is present in all three institutions. This knowledge is not seen as a contradiction to the official rhetoric. Rather, it is seen as part of a social reality that all three institutions have an interest in attempting to control. Even though measured against my informants' opinions, experiences and views, the Greek LGBT movement seems rather unsuccessful, in reality it often has to fight against the official, at least, Orthodox Church. When the issue of an actual gay 'marriage' became a news item in the second week of March 2008, priests were the first to respond. On Monday the 17th of March 2008, the Holy Synod met in order to address the issue of the forthcoming legislation concerning civil

partnership granting legal rights to unmarried couples. With the impending gay civil ceremonies arranged for Thursday the 20th of March 2008, the Greek LGBT movement is also fighting to negotiate with and struggle against the prejudices of the ultimate official agent of morality in Greece.

When the debates concerning the separation of State and Church bear actual results and define Greece as a thoroughly secular state, the LGBT movement will perhaps be liberated from the association of homosexuality with immorality. However a pervasive institution, from baptism to military oaths, the Church has often been the silent partner of the family and the military in this thesis. When some parents perceived their sons homosexuality as a 'sin', they silently made a religious implication that both they and their sons understood. The current possibility for a gay 'marriage' and the legislation concerning the legal rights of unmarried couples is not clearly rejected as 'immoral' by all the clergy today. Before the meeting of the Holy Synod, with the exception of Metropolitan Bishop Anthimos who argued that the forthcoming legislation will "solemnise prostitution and immorality", most bishops kept a low profile with some, such as Metropolitan Bishop of Corinth, Dionysios arguing however that the legislation reflects the efforts of the E.U to create an atheist and secular state (Kiouisis 2008).

But whereas Ieronymos, the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece had advocated the 'respect of people who want something different from what the Church wants' (TA NEA 2008), when the Holy Synod met and made its decision, rejecting the legislation on the cohabitation covenant, he too signed the decision which defined any marriage or cohabitation outside the Orthodox Christian ceremony as 'prostitution' (Papachristos 2008, Haralambakis 2008). Once the Holy Synod made its decision public, the government through its representative, the Minister of Justice, maintained its respect to the Church but insisted on its intention to pass the legislation. More specifically, the Minister of Justice, Sotiris Hadjigakis said that although the Church's opinions are 'respected and recorded', the legislation will pass because it is a necessary step towards the settlement of pressing

social circumstances such as the legal protection of both the non-married partners and of their children, as well as of single-parent families. To the dismay of the Bishops who attack the 'atheist West', the Minister also suggested that such legislations are already in effect in other European Union member States. If the legislation passes, Greeks who do not wish to get married, in a church or otherwise, will finally be granted legal protection. In effect, and given that the Greek law has already established an anti-discrimination clause, Greek homosexuals too will be able to choose between a civil ceremony and cohabitation. Whether the legislation will actually extend to homosexuals however also remains to be proven in the near future. Nevertheless, this does appear to testify to the fact that changes are gradually happening with regards to how the dominant Greek institutions perceive homosexuality.

The Globalisation of Gay Identity: The Case of Greece

In the context of a growing understanding of the 'changing conceptions of male homosexuality' (Marshall 1981) and the 'birth of the modern homosexual' (Plummer 1981; Lofstrom 1997), including the changing images of homosexuals (Gough 1989), a body of literature has emerged exploring how Western conceptions of homosexuality are incorporated in nations which have a different articulation and organisation of same-sex practices (Altman 2001; Altman 2004; Binnie 2004). The emergence of a gay identity, in particular, is usually seen usually either as a "rupture" or a "continuity" (Altman 1996: 88) in the sex/gender system of the society in question (Rubin 1975). On the one hand, "rupture" arguments tend to represent gay identity as a non-indigenous and imported category that overruns or corrupts a 'traditional' sex/gender system. 'Gay' is thus a global irruption into the local. On the other hand, "continuity" arguments tend to represent 'gay' as a category that, whilst not indigenous to a given sex/gender system, is to some extent deliberately adopted into that system because there was already a place for it; 'gay' is thus a local adoption of something locally available. Usually, both rupture and continuity arguments are grounded in examples that may be assumed to have operated with non-

Western sex and gender systems. So for example, they are commonly illustrated with an analysis of countries such as Thailand (Jackson 1997; Morris 1994) or the Philippines (Tan 1995). Yet, whereas Thailand and the Philippines are always explored outside the western paradigms, Greece's ambivalent status as simultaneously Occidental and Oriental (Herzfeld 1995) provides a potentially clarifying counter-example, where the emergence of 'gay identity' can be clearly related to global-scale processes without however establishing any simple pattern of Westernisation or modernisation.

In addition, 'rupture' and 'continuity' approaches equally recognise the relevance of political economy arguments, particularly in regards to the social changes accelerated by the intertwined processes of capitalism, urbanisation and industrialisation (D' Emilio 1983b; Adam 1985). The political economy model discusses the development of gay identity in terms of dependency upon the capitalist market forces that bring about a chain of social structural changes. Industrialisation leads to the urbanisation of the workforce, which in turn leads both to the dissolution of kinship structures and to the creation of opportunities for social organisation based on sexual behaviour rather than on 'traditional' kinship. This process creates a new urban market of a mutually identifiable lesbian and gay clientele in need of gathering spaces, services and media. Whilst this argument may have been originally addressed with developed with reference to Northern America and Western-Northern Europe, discussions of global capitalism have extended similar criteria for judging the development of lesbian and gay communities across the world (Altman 1996; Parker 1999; Altman 2001; Binnie 2004).

Yet, to return to Greece and to what constitutes it an irregular case with regard to this political model, it is important to note that 'gay' has emerged as a social category even though Greece deviates from the pattern that this model provides. For example, whereas Greece too can be analysed as belonging in an international capitalist system, its economy was never completely based on the same kind or degree of industrial developments that the political economy model stipulates. Rather, for the most part, the Greek economy depends first on the civil service and the general service and tourist industry, second on agriculture

and third on small family or individual businesses; heavy industrial production was never a primary economic determinant in Greece (Mouzelis 1979; Pirounakis 1997). Furthermore, many sectors of business and government have often been inflected with clientelism and patronage in ways that mirror kinship alliances (Charalambis and Demertzis 1993; Markou, Nakos and Zahariadis 2001), suggesting therefore, that kinship structures remain relatively strong (Gilmore 1982; Chliaoutakis et al 1994). Although urbanisation has long been recognised as a force reshaping Greek society (Vermeulen 1983) and even though Greece has now ‘adapted’ to advanced market-based capitalism, the lack of heavy industry production has so far suggested that the country never developed the same capitalism as, for example, the United States or Germany (Mouzelis 1979).

Thus, whilst political economy models may provide part of the framework necessary to analyse the structures that impinge on and influence the practice and performance of gay identity in Greece, they cannot function as an uninterrupted causative model. Despite the ways in which the Greek case deviates from the criteria of the political economy model, homosexual identities in Greece concentrate ‘syncretistic’ elements suggesting therefore the incorporation of both a modern ‘gay’ identity and the use of more traditional sexual categorisations. As such, with these new developments in mind, future research can explore how capitalism and its global expressions have influenced the transformation of the traditional organisation of homosexuality based on *poustis* and *kolobaras* into the contemporary model of gay identity as well as the possible creation of a Greek gay community and a Greek LGBT movement in the context of an international gay community and movement. Such emphasis, however, will also presuppose an examination of Greece’s role within the expanding European Union.

The greater process of ‘europeanization’ (Borneman and Fowler 1997) is one of the modes through which Greeks are playing out long-standing ambivalences in their identities as simultaneously Western and Eastern, European and Oriental (Herzfeld 1995; Gefou-Madianou 1999). As a member of the European Union, Greece is party to the Treaty of

Amsterdam which would give the European Commission power to craft legislation regarding sexual orientation discrimination that would apply to all member states (ILGA 1998). As yet, there is no ethnographic work that addresses the impact that the European Union has on Greek homosexuals. With the Greeks generally supporting the idea of a European Constitution, the opinions of Greek homosexuals, or foreign homosexuals for that matter, could offer us great insights as to the possible existence of a specifically European LGBT community. In turn, such research could be interrelated to issues such as the mobilisation of homosexuals across the European Union member states, either as tourists or as citizens consuming the same culture.

LGBT Consumerism and Tourism

Future research can also examine the now developing gay spaces, places and culture in Greece, how homosexuals perceive these places and how their identities shape and are shaped by the changing face of the production and consumption of these spatial and cultural formations. In turn, tourism, which now constitutes over one tenth of Greece's gross national product (Pirounakis 1997), can also provide valuable information in relation to the creation of new 'gay' spaces. In particular, with the general literature on tourism beginning to realise that gay travellers make up a significant portion of the international tourist-market in Greece, future research could also discuss how these tourists also tend to come from the wealthier Northern and Western European nations and the United States, places with established LGBT movements (Hughes 1997; Pritchard et. al. 1998; Clift and Forrest 1999). Whereas most studies focused on domestic or international tourism in Greece have ignored lesbians and gays and have instead, examined the economic (Haralambropoulos and Pizam 1996) or the socio-cultural effects (Tsartas 1992), a focus on gay tourism could also argue that certain places in particular, for example Mykonos, have actually exploited their commercial reputation as specifically gay destinations.

When sexuality is discussed in the context of Greek tourism, it is usually related to how a 'moral permissiveness' for which foreign tourists are held primarily responsible, affects and degrades the 'local culture' (Apostolopoulos and Sonmez 2001). There is a belief for instance that AIDS is not really a Greek problem, but a foreign one associated with tourists (Zinovieff 1991: 214; Chliaoutakis et al 1993; Tsalikoglou 1995). None of these studies provides any ethnographic data on how Greeks of any sexual orientation have responded specifically to the presence of international or domestic lesbian and gay tourists. There is further scope for research to fill this gap in the ethnographic record by paying attention to the ways that Greeks connect tourism and tourists to changes in the social categories of same-sex desire and to the ways those changes are locally legitimised.

Media Representations and LGBT Publications

A characteristic of the Gay publications in Greece is that they are quite unstable, in terms of their longevity, their consistent availability to a reading public and the regularity of production. In Britain for example there is an array of publications in the national market which are widely available and regularly produced (Gay Times, Attitude, AXM to name but a few) some of which have been in publication for more than twenty years. What I am referring to here are primarily news and events publications as well as lifestyle magazines and not primarily erotic or pornographic in nature: the pornographic market requires an entirely different analysis. In contrast, the Athenian scene is rather limited. Other gay publications available today are imported gay pornographic and lifestyle magazines (mostly British and American). The sense I got from many of my interlocutors was that the absence of a steady gay press was not much of a problem. On more than one occasion I was told 'we hear about the things that really matter from our friends'; the implication being that they see no need for a gay news magazine. Future research can examine both the proliferation of gay publications from the 1990s especially onwards as well as the changing representations of homosexuals in the mainstream Greek media.

Coda

As the Greek gay community begins to take shape, future work will undoubtedly offer new perspectives on the issues examined in this thesis. Further research needs to be done in order to produce a more complete picture of the history and experiences of homosexualities in modern Greece, and, as a result, of the complex and heterogeneous nature of contemporary Greek culture and society in general. The emphasis on heterosexual gender, masculinity and sexuality and the systematic marginalisation of the gay perspective in most of the existing literature on Greece gives the impression of a monolithic and rather hegemonic version of 'Greek culture.' The incorporation of a gay discourse within the wider academic literature on Greece will therefore also contribute to a more dynamic and more diverse representation of 'Greek culture'. Against this background, what I have provided here is a comprehensive analysis of how Greek gay men experience the ways in which their sexuality is subject to 'negotiation' in the family and the military and how these negotiations influence and sometimes even undermine the creation of an LGBT movement that requires them to be proud of that which, in the family and the armed forces, is often seen as a source of shame.

The interplay between shame/silence/invisibility and honour/pride/visibility has been a central theme running throughout this thesis. The silence about homosexuality so prevalent within the institutions of the family and the military, both of which are arenas in which patriarchal values are constructed and reproduced, contrasts sharply with and co-exists alongside of the sense of Pride that Greek gay activists have and are still trying to instill in gay individuals in Greece. Emerging in 1976 within the wider context of political activism following the overthrow of a repressive dictatorship in 1974, the Greek LGBT movement has tried relentlessly since then to educate the Greek public about homosexuality and to increase the visibility of gay issues. Following the example of Western feminists who, in the 1970s, argued that the 'personal is political', gay activists, both in Greece and abroad, have similarly advocated that the 'sexual is political' and therefore that sexuality is and

should be part of the public domain. Gay activists have seen ‘coming out’ as a strategy to increase ‘queer’ visibility. However, the Greek gay activists’ call for gay people to ‘come out of the closet’, to take pride and celebrate the fact that they are gay has not found much resonance, certainly not amongst the great majority of my interlocutors who prefer to experience their sexuality in a more private fashion. This is largely, but not solely, the result of my informants’ fear (most often an unfounded one) of the potential shame that their homosexuality could bring upon their immediate family.

A point of contention amongst Greek gay activists and the majority of my interviewees is the former’s belief that sexuality is political and as such that it forms part of the public domain. For most of my informants, however, sexuality was perceived as a private matter, as belonging to the private sphere, and thus not something which should be open to public consumption or scrutiny. In their view, sexuality should remain depoliticised. Most of my interlocutors did not see their sexuality as the grand narrative of the self or as their master status (Hughes 1945) but instead as constituting only a part of their overall identity. In this respect my interviewees can be considered as either what Brekhus (2003), in his classification of ideal types of gay men in suburbia, labels as “gay integrators” (p. 74) or as “gay commuters” (p. 48).

According to Brekhus (2003: 73), gay integrators are those gay men whose “gayness is not the leading component of the self” (p. 74) but is instead “a *complementary* status” (p.75, emphasis in the original). Gay integrators “dilute the salience and importance of gayness with other ingredients” (Brekhus 2003: 75) by combining it with other identity attributes without any one of these taking particular prominence. Gay commuters, on the other hand, “live in heterosexual space and commute to gay space to ‘turn on’ their gay selves” (Brekhus 2003: 50). The gay commuter’s gay identity is contextual, fragmented and constantly shifting. In contrast, again using Brekhus’s categorisation of ideal types, gay activists’ can be considered as “gay lifestylers” for whom gayness is “the essential defining feature of who one is and how one lives (...) a master status, a virtual *identity monopoly*” (Brekhus 2003: 35, 36).

My interlocutors resist the gay activists' approach of being gay, centred around the notions of Pride and visibility, and construct their own 'politics of the closet'. Their decision to 'stay in the closet' or to 'come out' partially and selectively should be seen as being equally political and as an alternative approach to experiencing and 'living out' their homosexuality. Their silence with regard to their sexuality is a conscious political strategy that minimises the potential tension that the public declaration of their sexuality could produce between themselves and their families and the risk of a possible rupture of their kinship ties with their blood relatives. My informants were clearly aware of their choice to create families of their own with members of their own sex, based on social rather than biological ties, but for most of them these 'fictive' forms of relatedness were secondary to the ties they had with their blood family. For my interlocutors their biological family is their family of choice.

Silence is also a mechanism that Greek families employ to 'cope' with the homosexuality of their offspring. It is thus a mutually accommodating strategy which takes into account both the emotional needs of the family and, to a lesser extent perhaps, those of my interlocutors. Even for those of my interlocutors who consider their silencing of their sexuality within the family context as oppressive, it was still a 'sacrifice' that most of them were willing to take in order to protect their family from undue emotional stress/strain. The individual's needs were seen as secondary to the overall well-being of the family unit.

My study of Greek male homosexualities and the narratives of the gay men I interviewed offer new insights into understanding the articulation of gender, masculinities and sexualities in contemporary Greece. The experiences of my informants suggest that they are struggling between the desire to belong and the wish to remain different. This thesis is an attempt to break the silence that is so often the dominant everyday experience of these men with regards to their sexuality and to make their voices public. Here too, "there can be no Grand Conclusion – no final story to be told [...]. What we are left with are fragments

of stories. What seems to be required is a sensitivity to listen to an ever-growing array of stories and to shun the all too tempting desire to place them into a coherent and totalising narrative structure” (Plummer 1996: 50). Ultimately this is an exploration of both the beautiful and the painful experiences of the Greek gay men who have decided, at least this once, to talk to me about the variegated contours of their own homosexualities.

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