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PANAGIOTIS ZESTANAKIS
University of Crete

Gender and sexuality in three late-1980s Greek lifestyle magazines: *Playboy*, *Status* and *Click*

ABSTRACT

This article examines the representational politics of gender and sexuality in Playboy, Status and Click, three Greek lifestyle magazines of the late 1980s. Despite differences in representation, politics, impact and audience demographics, these magazines' politics towards gender and sexuality shared noticeable similarities. Challenging the view that lifestyle magazines one-dimensionally advocated patriarchy, the article argues that their positioning towards gender and sexuality varied. It combined the reproduction of patriarchal stereotypes targeting to the objectification of (mainly) female bodies with challenging and often productive views on gender roles. These magazines often dealt with (mainly male) homosexuality through a liberal viewpoint, opening a space for the empowerment and visibility of gay audiences. Finally, in a period of growing fears about HIV/AIDS, these magazines provided valuable information about the epidemic to their readers.

KEYWORDS

Greece
media
representations
gender
homosexuality
HIV/AIDS

1. A website entitled klik.gr directed by Aris Terzopoulos continues operating to this date.
2. These magazines were among the most expensive, priced at 500, 500 and 400 drachmas, respectively, in 1989 (Zestanakis 2008: 59). Comparatively, the price of a kilo of bread and a litre of gas in 1989 was 82 and 78.1 drachmas, respectively (data from National Greek Statistical Authority as republished in Kathimerini n.d.: 170). The option to purchase these magazines shows the relative value that consumers attributed to them.
3. For analytic audience demographics, see Zestanakis (2008: 52–61). In brief, according to surveys held by Nielsen in 1989, *Playboy's* readers were 80% men and 20% women (75% and 25%, respectively, in Attica region), *Status's* readers were 89% men and 11% women (81% and 19% in Attica region) and *Click's* readers were 65% men and 35% women (exactly the same in Attica). The vast majority of the readers of the three titles were middle- and upper-middle-class urban residents born after the late 1950s. Such surveys were held door to door. Hence the female readers of *Playboy* and *Status* were possibly under-reported, as without anonymity respondents may have been uncomfortable to confirm that they read these titles.
4. For more information on the changing Greek mediascape in the 1980s, see Zacharopoulos and Paraschos (1993).

INTRODUCTION

The publication of *Playboy*, the first Greek lifestyle magazine mainly addressing male audiences, in April 1985 marks a turning point in the history of Greek print media. Following a trend inaugurated in 1979 with the Greek edition of *Cosmopolitan*, a publication addressed mainly to young women, *Playboy* signalled the intensification of contacts between international media and the Greek mediascape (Psychogios 2004: 569–70). A number of new lifestyle magazines contributed to the mediascape's reconfiguration. In this article I examine three titles, all introduced into the Greek market in the second half of the 1980s: *Playboy*, first published in its Greek edition by Attica Media in 1985, *Klik (Click)*, published by Terzopoulos Editions in 1987, and *Status*, launched by Lyberis Editions in 1988. All these titles had long lives: *Click* published its last issue in December 2005, *Status* stopped appearing when Lyberis Editions went bankrupt in late 2012 whilst *Playboy* still survives to this date (late 2016).¹ These titles were not entirely similar in content. However, they all became popular among upper-middle-class male urban audiences. Indicatively, in 1989 *Playboy*, *Status* and *Click* sold 42,534, 20,457 and 74,585 volumes on monthly average (Zestanakis 2008: 59).² *Playboy* and *Status* were mainly addressed at male young urban residents, whilst *Click* was also popular among women and non-urban residents. In terms of age, they were popular mainly with readers in their twenties and early thirties, that is, born after the mid-1950s.³ *Click* was published by Terzopoulos Editions, a publishing house that became prosperous publishing traditional women's magazines such as *Gynaika (Woman)* and children's magazines, such as the Greek edition of *Mickey Mouse*, whilst *Playboy* and *Status* were issued by publishers that appeared in the 1980s.

The magazines examined here were launched in a period of media expansion, as in the late 1980s a number of international franchises came to Greece, leading to the introduction of the Greek editions of *Elle*, *Marie Claire* and *Penthouse*. Entrepreneur Giorgos Koskotas spent an outrageous amount of money for media investments before the 'Koskotas Scandal' (an embezzlement in the companies owned by Koskotas, in which PASOK politicians were implicated) was revealed in 1988. At the same time the state monopoly of radio and television broadcasting was abolished. The first non-state radio station, Athina 9,84 (Athens 9.84), owned by the municipality of Athens, broadcast for the first time in May 1987, and was followed by numerous other private ones. Mega Channel, the first private television channel, went on air on 20 November 1989 and opened the path for many competitors.⁴

This article examines discourses on masculinity, femininity and homosexuality in these particular journals. It aims to outline general trends at the level of representational politics examining them alongside broader sociocultural developments. As historian Baldwin (2004: 11) has argued, effective comparisons are those that, eschewing generalizations, formulate arguments juxtaposing different cases, positioning specific topics in wider sociocultural context, thus illuminating both specific and contextual issues. But why should a local edition of an international magazine such as *Playboy* be examined in comparison with two local magazines? *Playboy* is a hybrid cultural product that usually adapts successfully to the sociocultural environment of each country where it is launched. A new experiment for the Greek media mediascape, it combined material usually found in established media (e.g. interviews of politicians) with frank discussions of sexuality uncommon in Greek mainstream media at