

LGBTQ+¹ housing practices in Athens

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Abstract

In this paper 'the sexual politics of austerity' are being researched concerning housing. There is an attempt to reflect upon the impact of austerity on housing. In the case of Greece that familistic strategies towards housing are the dominant, it is interesting to investigate in which way this tradition is affecting people from this community. Nevertheless, the family support depends a lot on the family status of the beneficiary, therefore when the later is not complying with the imaginary of the patriarchal heterosexual family, the support might be never offered. Moreover, ethnographic research in the field can reveal some insides of the housing reality that they are facing in a familistic society like the Athenian especially as crisis tend to impose conservative, traditional social patterns all over the world and it may lead them to return violently to past habits like hiding or suppressing their personal life.

Keywords: family strategies, housing practices, crisis, LGBTQ+, Greece

Field research and Hypothesis

- City of Athens
- 13 in-depth semi structured interviews
- LGBQ
- Age: 25-55
- Class: low-middle

Hypothesis:

LGBTQ+ citizens have less housing opportunities in connection with their families' disapproval for their sexual and gender identity status regarding that in Greece there is a strongly familistic culture that 'defines' the individual's housing opportunities.

The Greek case

Housing is depended highly on the family strategies

During the crisis the familistic welfare grew significantly

In some cases, only way of achieving an accommodation

No housing policies for young people

¹ LGBTQ+ stands for the people that identify themselves in the sexual orientation or gender expression of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexual, Transgender, Queers and other. The + symbol is used as new identities or non-identities are added in this community constantly e.g. I for intersex.

Whereas...

there is no recognition of full citizenship rights for LGBT and especially for transgender people

homophobia grew during the crisis simultaneously with the rise of golden dawn and the conservative heteronormative ideals that they promote

Methodology

Set of methods that can lead to ethnographic research

- Participant observation, observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, visual material
- Systematic study
- Insights
- Policy insights
- Housing pathway approach

In ethnography there is no generalization but certain patterns can be depicted as well as inter-subjective practices, cultures and spaces

Ethics

Anonymity of the participants and cover of the geographic attributes

The quotes have fake nicknames, age and 'status of coming out'

Positionality of the researcher, especially concerning the sexual expression

Political interest for recognition of the difficulties and implementation of the right housing policies

Housing and family

Families are crucial in the housing practices of the youth

In every story there is an incident of family strategy/support direct/indirect for housing

"The brother of my father who lives in USA and ended up making a lot of money, bought a house and he granted it to us" O., 31, Open

"(Grandpa) passed away 2 years ago so since he died we rent the house", Alexadra, 29, Hidden

Grandparents' housing strategy impact present conditions

"It belongs to my mother, my grandparents were initially living here, the parents of my mother [...]. We renovated the house and I stayed here[...] Essentially they came (the money for the renovation) from the inheritance that grandpa and grandma left me. [...] Gladly there were these money from the inheritance.", Anthimos, 35, Open

Return to the parental house

Almost all the participants returned for a certain period

Both Athenian and countryside families are part of this process

Both open and hidden participants return to the "nest"

"For these 4 months that I lived again with them (the parents), I was used to live by myself and I did not have a good time, I was not feeling well for this period. Not that they did something bad but [...] while (before) I had freedom to do whatever I want in the house, I was (now) limited in a specific space. I could not bring for example a random person at home easily. I had those issues. [...] It was a bug sock after 7 years (living by himself)", Anthimos, 35, open

"[...] I decided to return at my parents, back home for 8 whole months with the certain social life and sexuality, being old, it was like a refuge. [...] in order for the sirens (of the central Athens social life) to go away and at the same time a financial solution in order to think what I am going to do next", after a year she thought "now we cannot tolerate it any more, I have to continue my life as an adult, I am returning to the center" Olga, 42, hidden

"These were 3 difficult months (when he returned to the family house, to a separate apartment) for our relationship because there was this issue; we were near but [...] he (the boyfriend) could not come like every weekend to sleep at my place" Alex, 27, Hidden

There are not different results than those from the same age participants that are self identified as straight

Support from the family

By providing housing

"As I returned (from abroad), we discussed where I am going to live, what I am going to do and we decided to renovate (the grandmother's empty house)", Anthimos, 35, Open

"... this was the reason that they found a place for me (and paid the rent)", Villi, 25, Open

By providing small financial aid

"(My) parents are supporting financial the children both of them (her and her brother) by providing 'pocket money' [...] there is pocket money up to 400 euros for the brother and 200 to me. [...] If it remains something (from their incomes) they give it to the children to survive", Olga, 42, Hidden

Symbolic

"For now, she (the mother) is buying for us sheets, she is buying various things (for the house he and his partner live) [...] she helps in some way with small presents and stuff like that", Michalis, 29, Open

Coming out

8 Open, 5 Hidden participants

Unveiling depend a lot on the family

Uneasy upbringing for all

In case that the family is situated in the Countryside is easier to remain hidden, moreover countryside is more conservative rendering coming out a more difficult process

Parents connive

Strategies concerning housing

"This year I want to start (repairing) one house in the village, for which I am pressuring them (parents) to renovate it [...] so I am thinking not to come out yet because they are going to disinherit me and not to put the money, so first to fix the house (of grandfather, in the mountains) and then this ancestor's weight will go away (and I will come out) ", Olga, 42, Hidden

Not always their choice:

"My sisters and my brother were more or less ok [...] the important for them was not for the parents to find out like ever. Because they assume that because of their age [...] and their ancestry [...] they will not get along with it", Alex, 27, Hidden

"She stops me and asks me, [...] are you a lesbian? I look at her and I say yes. And

she replies 'really now! Tell me' [...] I say 'I am talking seriously, I am a lesbian'. And she says 'Come on, you are joking, be serious' and because I saw her really upset [...] I told her 'Come on, I am kidding'.”, Alexadra, 29, Hidden

Direct Impact

Not found in every story

Various impacts:

“It impacted, I think that one reason that my mother left and found a job away from Athens it was my sexual orientation because we did not get along after she found out about me [...] and essentially she did it to punish me, to go and live with my father”, “My father [...] has a new family and because I presume that they could listen to conversations on the phone and they may not have liked all of this and because I had a younger sibling [...] they may have worried that ...yes...I do not know...it has been never expressed all of this, so I cannot be certain but I believe that that basically this was the reason that they found me a house (to move out)”, Vili, 25

“...from my last home I left because...It was a 3-storey, small, it was not a block of flats, which belonged to a family and in all the apartments except mine there were relatives. [...] I was the only stranger. [...] in the second year they saw me during the morning, dawn, to return from the show where I was the drag and they saw me like this, so since then and until my contract to expire [...] a war began like we do not want you here, go away.”, O., 31, Open

Indirect impact

They tend to hide their housing situation from their family

“His parents (boyfriends’) were not aware that [...] I was contributing myself in the rent”, Michalis, 29, Hidden

“My parents do not know where I live and with whom. [...] My parents never came and they do not know where I live.”, Elli, 34, Hidden

Family house is prohibited because of the sexuality for both hidden and open LGBTQ+ children

“[...] I have seen his house (his boyfriend’s house) only when his parents were at the village and I have never slept there”, Alex, 27, Hidden

“Before my boyfriend was coming to my house with my parents present, but now that I was hiding that (her sexuality) from them it could not be done. So [...] instead of waiting and waiting someone (from the parents) to leave for the weekend [...] finally we had home”, Olga, 42, Hidden

Even as a guest

“My parents will never know who he is might actually be (his boyfriend). Because if I do it (reveal it) I could not stay at their home with my boyfriend in case I come to Greece”, Alex, 27, Hidden

Geographical Limitation

They are excluded from countryside and Summer houses

“I have taken friends (in the vacation house)[...] I would surely like to go with my partner [...] I am not sure for now but I believe in the future [...] it could be done”, Michalis, 29, Open

“Until now, I did not feel free in X (the small town that she is from), when I go

with me girlfriend we are not a couple, we are like friends”, Elli, 34, Hidden
This can be also a parents’ wish/demand.

“When I told her (to his mother) what if [...] I introduce you a boy for my partner? She said that ‘ok, it is not my favourite option but [...] if it is in a bigger city like Athens, it would not bother me so much. Because here in X(a small town of Greece) you know how is the situation””, Alex, 27, Hidden

Discussion

Family houses - common in Greece- can be suppressive for strangers/tenants
It is more crucial the ‘Passability’/Cis appearance rather than the sexual orientation.

“I do not think we should come out to everybody or to all the parents necessarily. I assume that we have to evaluate the pros and cons. So you observe if a relationship with a person of yours is going to meliorate or change.” Kostas, 28, Open

Socio-economic class is more important than sexual orientation in housing pathway
Also, gender identity issues can be more crucial than sexual orientation