CONTESTED AUTHENTICITY
IDENTITY AND THE
PERFORMANCE OF THE
ANASTENÁRIA

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This thesis is submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Adelaide, April 1999.
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Synopsis

This thesis is the outcome of eighteen months fieldwork undertaken in Lagadhás, a town in the north of Greece, examining the Anasterária ritual. The ritual is most famous for its performance on the 21st of May when it celebrates the Saints Constantine and Helen. The ritual performance includes music, dancing, prayer, the sacrificing of animals and a firewalk. As the ritual has become a popular tourist attraction, this thesis primarily examines the cultural commodification of the ritual and the ritual objects. My objective is not to simply discuss the influence and effects of tourism on the Anasterária, but also to discuss the ways in which the phenomenon of tourism has affected the identity of the Anasterária community and the identities generated individually.

My methodology lies with my understanding that all social practice occurs within different sites of struggle where individuals and groups compete against each other for particular types of resources which accord them a dominant position. In these struggles, identities are generated in opposition to each other. The Anasterária has entered into the economic and political fields, thus into new sites of struggle, as a result of its involvement in the tourist industry. Within these new fields, new forms of opposition have been made available and, therefore, the possibility of the generation of different identities has been created.

I argue that the development of the Anasterária into a cultural product has not witnessed the demise of the ritual as a significant religious celebration but, rather, has introduced additional meanings, widened its effects and appeal and has consequently remained a significant dynamic in the generation and negotiation of the Anasterária identity.