

Demographics and Diaspora, Gender and Genealogy: Anthropological Notes on Greek Population Policy

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Greece's declining birth rate is said to constitute a 'problem of national survival'. The state tries to minimize the impact that demographic weakening will have on the well-being of the nation by downplaying the diaspora and by encouraging women at home to produce more babies. Responsibility for the demographic situation has been placed on women, their attitudes toward mothering and their use of abortion. Maternal pensions have been forwarded by the state as family policy and population policy, and criticized by Athenian women as a means of professionalizing motherhood and perpetuating a limited vision of female adulthood.

Since the Second World War, Greece's birth rate has fallen into a worsening decline. With consistent emigration of Greeks throughout this century to North America, Australia and Germany, Greece has found itself saddled with one of the most rapid population declines in Europe. In 1991, the PASOK government convened a special Parliamentary Commission to 'study the demographic problem and formulate recommendations for its effective confrontation'. The report of this non-partisan commission was released in 1993. Comparing Greece's depressed population growth rates with the flourishing ones of neighbouring and purportedly hostile Albania and Turkey (Albanian women are reputed to have twice as many children on average as Greek women; Turkish women three times), the report claims that: 'The demographic problem is a problem of national survival because a decline

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in the population undermines the territorial integrity and national independence of our country.'¹ Observing that at least half of all pregnancies in Greece end in abortion, the report goes on to attribute 40 per cent of the nation's declining population growth rate to women having repeat abortions (p.19) (see also Conninos 1988: 211). The Greek chapter of the European Forum of Left Feminists, in their critique of the parliamentary report which appeared in a leading Athenian newspaper, summarized succinctly: 'Demographics: Women are Again to Blame'.

The 'demographic problem' has become a political bone tossed back and forth between the major parties, synecdochic of Greek national concerns. During the period of my ethnographic research into fertility control practices and the cultural significance of reproduction, conducted in Athens from 1993 to 1995, locals exclaimed frequently that 'Greece is getting smaller'. One elderly lady pontificated to me about 'people these days' 'not having children anymore', clutching my arm to her side for support as we darted through the traffic on Vasilissis Sofias and trod across the muddy remains of a median torn up by metro construction. A surprising number of Athenians can actually cite the country's fertility rate: 1.4 children per woman of reproductive age (replacement level being sited at 2.1). Everyone has a theory; a popular explanation holds responsible the pollution-filled haze that hangs over the nation's capital for a (probably exaggerated) decline in sperm counts. What is more, nearly everyone I spoke to about it described the low birth rate as a 'threat' to the nation, or to the Greek 'race'. Demonstrating how 'race' and 'nation' are in the Greek purview so closely bound together has been an important contribution of anthropologists to the study of the Greek nation state (Just 1989; Herzfeld 1992). In an interview, one 40 year-old woman who worked as a door-to-door salesperson commented darkly on Greece's underfertility: 'there will not be a next generation... And history will end.' A 30 year-old clerk agreed that: 'A people will disappear if this rate continues.' Although others laugh self-consciously even as they deliver the standard line, their laughter belying awareness of stereotyped exaggeration, Greece's demographic weakness is forefront in the minds of many ordinary citizens.

It is not my intention to argue whether or how the demographic situation constitutes a 'problem' for Greece. That is a subject for demographers, political scientists and historians. As a social anthropologist, what I am interested in doing is to look at the discourse surrounding the demographic problem for what it reveals about how politicians and ordinary Greeks view the relationship between the

nation, the state and its citizens. An operating principle of social or cultural anthropology holds that people, based on their everyday experiences, are qualified to inform the researcher directly about such phenomena as belief systems, cultural traditions, moral values and senses of identity and belonging. In revealing aspects of culture, no one is privileged. Drawing on government documents, newspaper articles and my own ethnographic research among middle-class Athenians, this paper tries to answer three fundamental questions. First, I unpack the symbolic logic underlying the commission report to explain why the declining birth rate – which is, after all, a characteristic Greece shares with the rest of Europe as, for some, a defining feature of ‘modernization’ – is here regarded as such a serious ‘problem’. Secondly, I address why and in what ways women particularly are held responsible for the demographic situation, using ethnographic evidence to uncover covert assumptions and motivations that are generated by the concern, prevalent among Greeks, about whether what they do and think is ‘European’ (Herzfeld 1997; Sutton 1994, 1997). I turn finally to consider why it is that the state, despite the vehemence of its rhetoric, has failed to implement a family policy successful in stimulating the fertility rate.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND THE WELL-BEING OF THE NATION STATE

According to Gerasimos Augustinos (1995: 171), ‘the most significant factor affecting Greek nationalism in the twentieth century has been the demographic transformations and attendant social changes that the country has experienced.’ During the 1960s an estimated 25 per cent of the national work force emigrated (McNeill 1978: 117), and demographers actually predict a population decline by the year 2015 (Parliament of Greece 1993: 11; Emke-Poulopoulou 1994). According to the Parliamentary Commission Report, ‘The people (*o laós*) is the most valuable asset of the state, propelling production, economic and social progress, and guaranteeing its existence and security’² (p.30). Certainly emigration and declining fertility affect deleteriously the productive younger generations, whose members compose the national work force, serve in the army and reproduce new citizens. Since the Greek army comprises men fulfilling mandatory two years’ military service, the size of the Greek army is directly dependent on the number of young male Greek citizens – and refusing to serve casts doubt on one’s ‘true’ Greekness (hence the popular distrust of Jehovah’s Witnesses [Pollis 1992]).

Beyond such quantitative concerns, when we note that the purpose of the state and its institutions ‘is to guarantee the survival of the people as

a unique entity’ (Augustinos 1995: 170), we can begin to recognize how demographic change also challenges the supposed cultural homogeneity of the nation which the state must try to embody. According to the official narrative of Greek history, a continuous line can be drawn between ancient Hellenic traditions and contemporary national identity, as contemporary Greeks are said to be the rightful ‘heirs’ of classical Greek civilization (see for example, Herzfeld 1987). An appeal to historical continuity has been fundamental to the relationship between the Greek *ethnos* and the modern state from its inception, as the very existence of the Greek state has been justified – at home and throughout the West – as a ‘natural’ extension of an age-old Hellenic tradition (Herzfeld 1982, 1991; Jusdanis 1991; Clogg 1992). The defining features of Greekness are presumed to be passed down from each successive generation to the next in a legacy of custom, language and religious tradition such that national and ethnic identity have become conflated in the ideology of Hellenism, a phenomenon facilitated by the fact that, in Greek, both meanings are contained within a single word: the adjective *ethnikos* refers to both ‘national’ and ‘ethnic’ criteria.

Ideology often exaggerates. Owing in part to considerable demographic movement, national and ethnic criteria have not actually overlapped as cleanly and continuously as the rhetoric would suggest. The re-drawing of national boundaries following the 1912–13 Balkans War marked the beginning of this century’s demographic upheaval as Greece gained land equal to 70 per cent of the state territory held to that point, and the state population nearly doubled from 2.8 to 4.8 million (Clogg 1992: 47). These new citizens constituted a mixed population of Greek, Bulgarian, Serbian, Albanian, Turk and Vlach peoples. Then came 1923, and the ‘exchange of populations’ mandated by the Great Powers following the Greek-Turkish war, when one-and-a-quarter million Greek Orthodox from Asia Minor were forced to migrate to Greece and nearly as many Muslim Turkish speakers were uprooted from Greece and relocated in Asia Minor (Clogg 1992). The Second World War initiated a devastating period of famine, warfare and emigration, which carried over from Axis occupation into the consequent Civil War (1946–49). Thessaloniki’s vibrant Sephardic Jewish population was annihilated. Massive internal migration from rural areas to the cities ensued in the 1950s, continuing through to the 1980s. In 1951, 18 per cent of the national population lived in Athens and 4 per cent in Thessaloniki; forty years later, a massive 30 per cent of the population had settled in Athens, 8 per cent in Thessaloniki (NSSG 1993). The 1960s also witnessed a second wave of out-migration during the *Junta* period (1967–1974), and the 1970s saw the subsequent return of many Greeks, bringing with

them continental and North American sensibilities. Today, demographic movement is largely characterized by the immigration of political and economic refugees: Greek and non-Greek peoples from Albania, regions of the former Yugoslavia and the Black Sea, East Africa and the Philippines. Urbanization, emigration and foreign immigration all challenge the rural foundation of many traits associated with a 'national character' which name ideal inhabitants of the nation state. Such traits, including language, patriarchal custom and Orthodox cosmology were implicitly referred to the late former prime minister Andreas Papandreou in a 1966 tract, where he proclaimed, in his flamboyant style, that; 'There exists something called a Greek character and Greek ideals and which express our common origin in the Greek earth. Also, there exists a way of being and thinking which is clearly Greek.'³

In a successful effort to deflect attention from all the demographic movement happening on the ground, nationalist rhetoric, fuelled by both the state and the Greek Orthodox Church, has appealed to the apparently transcendent nature of the Greek 'spirit', or *ethnos*, viewed as a set of cultural ideals believed to inhere in the person of a Greek. At any moment that Greece feels itself under attack by either its Muslim 'enemies' (Islam and Turkish identity tend to be conflated in Greek representations) or European 'benefactors', out come reminders that democracy was a Greek invention. Alexander's triumphs are dusted off and paraded as evidence that 'the Greeks' are to be taken seriously. When one talks about 'Greece' as a transcendent ideal, one is exonerated from talking about the ambivalently welcomed 'return' of Pontic Greeks, or the less ambivalent reception of Albanian and Sudanese refugees or Filipina domestic workers. The *ethnos* viewed as an everlasting 'spirit' (*pnévma*) is transcendent of the particular messiness of history (and of the gendered foundations of national identity, as we will see below). Guided by an ageless national ideology, what Herzfeld has dubbed Greece's 'telescopic' view of history has proven convenient for generations of policy makers. Consequently, when Greeks today (and not only politicians) talk about populations and nation states, the diachronic horizons are large indeed. It is written in the Commission Report, 'The demographic ageing of classical Greece and of Byzantium, according to reputable witnesses, drove Hellenism into subjugation for centuries and virtually to complete extermination' (p.30). In this dramatic statement of the Report rings a warning to contemporary Greeks that they are responsible to and for the distant past, as well as the future.

The contemporary demographic 'problem' is so pervasively framed as a threat to a millennia-old Greek nation that it surfaced in a medical

lecture on contraceptive technology given as part of a panel on 'Women and AIDS' at an Athens conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (12 February 1994, Caravel Hotel). At this meeting of physicians, medical researchers and healthcare workers, a leading physician and researcher prefaced his presentation on the latest advances in contraceptive technology by comparing the population size of Greece as it has progressed throughout this century to the 'Greek' population under Alexander the Great. He projected a slide comparing population figures for the modern state relative to what 'the Greek population' was at the time of Alexander:

POPULATION OF GREECE SHOWN AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE GREEK
POPULATION DURING THE EPOCH OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT

1928	3 per cent
1971	2 per cent
2000	1.2 per cent

His intention was to acknowledge the validity of the demographic problem and to reassure patriots that family planning practices do not further imperil the national situation by suppressing the birth rate, but can in fact actually help by enabling couples to have the children they want. I offer this rather striking choice of analogy, in which a modern state is juxtaposed with an ancient empire thus begging questions about who gets counted in demographic calculations, to illustrate how the time frame within which contemporary Greek national and demographic interests are discussed is the monumental, almost evolutionary, time of millennia. When this happens, the actual twentieth century events that can help explain the current demographic situation get drowned out by rhetorical appeals to an age-old Greek nation.

A second point I wish to draw from the physician's rhetorical flourish is that this conceptualization of the Greek nation encompasses at the same time an unbounded cultural empire and a bounded state territory. The Greek Nation comprises a paradox in that it refers both to a diasporic nation of persons sharing a common language and cultural heritage, and to a modern state delineated by national borders whose supposedly homogeneous population is in reality not so homogeneous as official ideology would have it (Tsoucalas 1991; Pollis 1992; Karakasidou 1993).

The Dilemma of the Diaspora

Historically, many of Greece's most important cultural figures – important both in codifying a national character at home and in

exporting positive images of Hellenism elsewhere – have been *omogeneis* (literally, 'of the same origin or birth'), persons who identify as Greek – who 'are' Greek – but who live outside the borders of the state as citizens or residents of other states. When the modern nation state was formed in 1828, fewer than one-third of all Greeks under Ottoman rule were living within the territory originally allotted to the new state (Pollis 1992: 178). Today, one-third as many Greeks who live in Greece live elsewhere. Melbourne, Australia, boasts the highest Greek population of any city after Athens. The contemporary relevance of the Greek diaspora was spotlighted in the 1996 Centennial modern Olympic Games in Atlanta where at least two of Greece's four gold medal winners were born outside state territory, including a weightlifter born in Albania and a gymnast born in Germany. (on the contemporary diaspora see Prevelakis 1989 and Jusdanis 1991). In recent history, many of Greece's most important literary and cultural figures, Poet Laureate Serefis among them, hailed from the eastern coast of the Aegean. So, as Augustinos (1995: 204) writes, if 'Hellenism for the Greeks has been the imperative to maintain their country's territorial integrity and cultural uniqueness... That uniqueness in cultural matters, paradoxically, has been best served by remaining open to varied influences from abroad.'

In speaking of the Hellenic past, the diaspora is often depicted in the exalted terms of 'empire', as in that of Alexander. The diaspora once represented territorial expansion and cultural dispersion, but now the rules of modern nation statehood dictate that members of a nation should ideally live within that nation state's borders. That the perpetuation of the Hellenic character depends upon the contributions of people who belong to the nation but are not citizens of the state poses potential problems for the nation state, which is fixed by borders that are still being negotiated (Cyprus), and that are still vulnerable (Macedonia and the eastern Aegean islands). In an effort to obtain a better fit between the nation – that constellation of cultural characteristics – and the state, the state's institutions have worked to consolidate a reified Greek 'culture' within its borders.

Since the formation of the modern state, domestic policy has tried to diminish its reliance on outside examples of Greek character by exercising what amounts to a cultural purge of those elements within the nation state that have origins outside of the Greek ideal (that is, almost anything reminiscent of Ottoman occupation). Thus, being Greek has meant embracing those elements that highlight cultural uniqueness: speaking the Greek language and adhering to the Greek Orthodox faith (see for example, Tsaousis 1983). Furthermore, when being Greek has meant doing as a Greek, great emphasis is placed on cultural training.

According to the 1952 Constitution, education should propel the 'development of the national consciousness of the youth on the basis of the ideological directions of Hellenochristian civilization' (quoted in Augustinos 1995: 190). Although that Constitution has been multiply superseded,⁴ the nation's education continues to be overseen by the Ministry of Education and Religion (on the Church's role in Greek nationalism see Dubisch 1995: 164-74). As a result, the nation state is charged with artificially reproducing cultural elements that are supposedly 'natural' to its members. As Michael Herzfeld has put it, 'nation is a metaphorical construction [that] brings together two superficially unlike entities – genetics as nature and national statehood as culture – and insists on their commonality' (1997: 41).

While domestic policy has worked to produce and protect the nation's cultural uniqueness, the foreign policy of the fledgling state was driven by an irredentist plan, referred to as the *Meghali Idhea* ('Great Idea'), to take back from Ottoman Turks 'The City' of Constantinople and coastal territory stretching to Smyrna. The *Meghali Idhea* flickered out on the shores of Asia Minor as the Greek-Turkey War drew to a bitter end. Military failure showed up the Great Idea as more an intellectual exercise than a practical military strategy. In this war's aftermath, many of Greece's diaspora, far from being embraced by an expanded state, were forced to move and re-root themselves in Greek – but to them foreign – lands (Hirschon 1989).

Today, the wider-flung diaspora represents within Greece the residue of demographic change and economic weakness. Diasporic Greeks in Albania or Australia may display many or even all the characteristics of 'national character' – Greece is commonly regarded as a diasporic nation – but yet, since diasporites do not live within the state, they do not count. They are not counted in demographic statistics except, perhaps, as lost 'seed'. Here it is revealed that demographics are not, after all, a measure of the strength of the nation – if the state really reflects ideologies of national belonging. Observers who are subjects of other modern states are not surprised that the diaspora gets dropped out of demographic calculations. What I am interested in pursuing is the way in which Greek national ideology tries to erase this loss – even as it perpetuates a paradoxical vision of nationhood.

From Territorial Expansion to Biological Reproduction

What has happened in this century is that the state, its dreams of territorial expansion put to rest, has shifted national focus. Since the 1920s, the field of Hellenism has moved from the sphere of empire to the bedroom and maternity ward. By reducing the demographic field at

home to matters of reproduction and regeneration, this again skirts the internationally tricky issues of migration and movement.

Bearing this in mind, it makes sense that in 1985, at the height of the debate over legalizing abortion, author Irini Dorkofiki was able to claim in her polemical treatise, *Abortion: The Annihilation of the Race*, that 'Demographics are the most underhand enemy of our race and the first national order, the *Meghali Idhea* of today' (1985: 3). If exaggerated in its rhetoric, Dorkofiki's extensively documented yet popularly written book condenses the stereotypes of patriotic Greeks during this time, when political tensions with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were beginning to mount. In her statement, Dorkofiki foreshadows the 1993 Parliamentary Commission Report where, after citing statistics on the increasing numbers of Greek women who have 'only one child', it is declared:

In order to put a stop to the reduction of births and to ensure the rejuvenation of the population and the survival of Hellenism, performance of the goal of the third child must be given great importance.⁵ (p.11)

The regeneration of contemporary Hellenism, or today's Great Idea, counts primarily on the creation of larger families. As Haris Symeonidou of the National Centre of Social Research said to me in an interview; 'Usually when you speak demographically [in this country] you speak about demographic policy having to do with family allowances and with the care of children and mothers, with housing for families, with incomes and taxation – all to improve and attenuate the situation of the family with many children.'

DEMOGRAPHICS: 'WOMEN ARE AGAIN TO BLAME'

Of course, the state is less interested in sheer numbers than in generating the right sort of numbers. The state wants Greeks – defined by a cultural tradition that is seen to inhere in people as if some national birthright – to live in Greece. If Greeks living outside of Greece are problematic to the conceptualized nation state, non-Greeks living in Greece are even more so. The Parliamentary Report acknowledges that the successful repatriation of 'political refugees' and the mass arrival of *omogeneis* (Greeks leaving homelands in the Pontus and 'Northern Epirus') can have a 'positive effect' on the Greek demographic situation: 'The common cultural roots and Orthodoxy help greatly in their adaptation to and assimilation into Greek society' (p.15). In contrast, 'other' immigrants, 'chiefly Muslims from Afro-Asiatic countries', are said to

'create serious socio-economic problems' since 'they cannot adapt to Greek society because of the completely different culture of Islam, which is not only a religion but a way of life' (p.15).⁶ In their newspaper statement, the European Forum of Left Feminists (EFLF) directly challenged Parliament on this point, charging that 'the report's direct incitement is racist, that we birth children in order to replace the economic migrants with a pure national labour force, when a migration policy that would include the equal recognition of foreign migrants in Greek society with the same rights and obligations would be able – according to the logic of the authors of the report – to invigorate our country demographically.'⁷ While I was living in Greece, people routinely witnessed on television screens thousands of Albanians – illegal, destitute immigrants – corralled in shipyard warehouses outside Athens to await being packed into military buses, driven north, and dumped at the border. By focusing on the reproductive aspects of demographics and of national expansion, as the Athens' Chapter of the EFLF notes, the Greek state obfuscates the racism that underlies migration issues (see also Seremetakis 1996). When being Greek means doing as a Greek, politics of inclusion and exclusion are based on a cultural racism that is best avoided by reproducing one's own kind.

The modern assumption that a 'nation' should map onto the boundaries of a state and be coterminous with its citizenry is in reality rarely realized; the problems discussed here are not endemic to Greece (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992: 21). But in Greece, since after the 'exchange of populations' more than 97 per cent of the population list their religion as Greek Orthodox, and when, worldwide, all who speak Greek as their first language identify ethnically as Greek, the appearance of homogeneity (from the Greek *omogeneia*, literally 'same birth or descent') is so pervasive that nationalist visions of purity are particularly persuasive (Herzfeld 1987, 1997; Dubisch 1995). As we have seen, cultural characteristics and biological essence are conflated in Greek nationalist ideologies of belonging. The symbol of this union – lending itself to notions of purity – is blood. Anthropologists such as David Schneider (1969) have pointed out with regard to various Judeo-Christian traditions that membership to a kindred, race and nation is in each instance secured by metaphors of 'sharing' blood tracing common descent (see also Linke 1985; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995; Herzfeld 1992, 1997: 41). Because kinship bonds, bonds of blood, are seen to be 'natural' and biologically given, they appear unbreakable, permanent and even sacred. In Greece, kin groups (organized by regionally various systems) share bonds to be fought for; bonds that are a matter of pride (du Boulay 1984; Herzfeld 1985;

Lossifides 1991: 138-39). Under the legal ideology of Greek family law, 'kinship by blood' as opposed to affinity 'can never cease to exist' (Koumantou 1985). In terms of Greek nationhood, blood provides the biological counterpart to the transcendent, never-ending and morally charged, Greek 'spirit' (Just 1989; Herzfeld 1992: 22-32).

As Michael Herzfeld (1992: 42, 1997: 40) has argued, when Greeks refer to early leaders of national independence (whose US counterparts are remembered as 'forefathers') as 'Teachers of the *Yenos*', not only do they signal the naturalization of culturally learned national characteristics ('the mind directing the blood'), they also reference the specifically agnatic character of Greek kinship and hence of national identity. The word *yenos* (in classical Greek *genos*), Herzfeld notes, originally referred to agnatic groups (usually of the aristocracy) from which contemporary Greek notions of 'stock' 'race' and 'a national people' derive. In other words, continuity in national culture, as in kinship, is reckoned through the male or paternal line. Trace of this patriline is recognizable in the very word 'diaspora', meaning 'the scattering of seed'; the diaspora extends the masculine, culturally enlightened 'spirit' of the *ethnos* through the scattered seed (*spóra*, whence 'sperm') of its 'sons'.

Beyond referring us to a kinship system traced through men, as anthropologist Stefan Helmreich notes, the word 'diaspora' 'suggests the questions of legitimacy that paternity generates' (1992: 245). Whereas maternity is apparent, paternity must be inferred and protected through female sexual exclusivity (Delaney 1986, 1991). While the symbolic meaning of blood makes a romanticized petition to some 'natural' and precious bond, as Foucault reminds us, blood is at the same time precarious; it is 'easily spilled, subject to drying up, too readily mixed' (Foucault 1990: 147). Within the symbolics of (agnatic) kinship, blood requires careful definition and protection. It is for this reason, as Foucault writes, that historically at the heart of population studies lies sex: the necessity for states to analyze birth rates, legitimate and illegitimate births, ways of making people sterile, the impact of contraceptive practices.

This is where women are held responsible for demographics: national identity is born of women. What I mean is not simply that women are seen to 'make' babies, but that the science of demographics, the tool of the state in defining its population, examines the reproductive productivity of women, and not of men. In demographics, there are two measures of the 'natural' population growth rate, the rate of population increase occurring through births, and that occurring through immigration or territorial expansion. The birth rate measures the

percentage by which live births exceed deaths in a given year. But the fertility rate is a raw measure of the number of children per women of reproductive age (15-49) within the population. A quick glance at the research supported by and published out of such institutions as the (now-defunct) Athens Centre for Demographic Research and the National Centre of Social Research reveals that the vast majority of state-sponsored studies of sexual behaviour and reproductive outcome take as their subjects women and adolescent girls. When you look at demographic studies you are looking at women: do women practise contraception? do women have abortions? how many children on average do women produce? (The exception to this has been studies that focus on AIDS awareness and HIV-risk.) If the nation state as *patrida* represents the land of the 'fathers', in proper patriarchal style the *patrida* is founded upon the control and compliance of the 'mothers'. In this way demographics quantify what nationalism qualifies.

It is instructive in this regard to note that in Greece the demographic problem was first identified as a 'problem' following the publication of a study into women's birth control practices conducted in the mid-1960s by the University of Athens Centre of Demographic Research (for example, Valaoras *et al.* 1970; Siampos and Valaoras 1971). This massive survey of 6513 married women throughout Greece found that, since the Second World War, abortion served as the one known, available and effective method to avert an inopportune birth, functioning as a reliable backup to withdrawal. In urban areas, the abortion rate was reported to have overtaken the live birth rate (Comninos 1988; Naziri 1991; Emke-Pouloupoulou 1994). This research concluded that the fertility decline in Greece is 'the consequence of fertility control within marriage' including the practice of abortion (Siampos 1975: 359). It is this study which the Parliamentary Commission Report cites in attributing the low birth rate to women having abortions. When Parliament debated legalizing abortion in the 1980s, the most prevalent terms of debate concerned the potential consequences of legal abortion for the demographic situation.⁸

When the strength of the nation state can be measured in terms of fecundity, as it is when demographics are effectively reduced to the fertility rate, a 'fertile' Hellas can be represented by – as it depends on – the fertile *Ellinidha* (Greek woman). Thus, demographic policy can be framed as a 'women's issue', an issue for which women are held responsible (see also Horn 1991 on interwar Italy). I turn now to examine how the familiar maternal symbols of nationalism get played out in the formation of Greek population policy whose legislation reinscribes a 'traditional' societal practice of scapegoating women as the 'objects of blame' (see Herzfeld 1992).

FAMILY PLANNING AS DEMOGRAPHIC POLICY

Chapter Eight of the Parliamentary Commission's Report on the Demographic Problem is entitled 'Aims of the Greek Demographic Policy', and it begins by stating:

There are ... measures that can influence the size and structure of the population, such as social policy programmes for the protection of the mother and child, for the confrontation of family burdens, for the encouragement of education, for the position of the woman in society, for the regulation of the number and spacing of children within the family, etc.

Although these programmes are situated more in family planning and less in population policy, this is not to be underestimated because of the positive effect that it has.

The problems of population *pass from the family* and bring about social consequences that, for our country especially, have a direct relationship to our territorial integrity and national independence. (p.33) (*emphasis added*).⁹

Demographics, said to be consequential to the well-being of the nation, are here distilled to matters of reproduction, while reproduction is situated in 'the family' and reduced to the maternal function.

Later, the Report advocates a family policy which would ideally encompass a range of measures: national health insurance coverage for couples 'facing serious problems of sterility' to pursue 'the contemporary fertility methods';¹⁰ a housing policy which would provide free housing for larger families of the lower social strata; the establishment of more child-care centres and with expanded hours to accommodate working mothers; tax breaks for each child; and simplification of the current law governing adoption (pp.38-41). All measures focus on enabling couples to have more children than the current average. The idea is that Greek women should birth more babies.¹¹

In the course of my research, I spoke with dozens of Athenian women who say they would like to have more children than they have or expect to have (also see Symeonidou 1990). These women know of Greece's *ipoyenitikótita*, or low birth rate; they shake their heads that they live in a 'country of aged people'. One woman told me, 'We should all have children, but...' and then launched into a litany of economic and social reasons why this was an idealistic, impractical pronouncement on her part. This woman, the only one I interviewed who began with a strident pro-natal line, was aged 20, a university student who was living with her father and had clearly not begun to think about starting a family herself.

The litany of constraints, however, became almost boringly predictable in my interviews.

Maria and her 35 year-old daughter Niki, who is married but unhappily childless, told the story. The plot begins like this: 'Today both the father and the mother work and it is not enough for them to live on.' Maria concurred with her daughter. 'They cannot go out. Here things are very expensive.' 'What can they do?' asked Niki rhetorically. For her own part, Niki explained to me that she cannot even consider having a child now since she is currently unemployed and her husband's income alone is insufficient to raise a child properly. In a separate interview, Maria's elder daughter picked up where her sister had left off:

As soon as we talk these days about working women there must be centres where a woman can leave her child, so she doesn't have to pay her whole salary to a woman to look after the child at home or to some private centre. There are very few day care centres. We're talking about a city of 4 million people! Those we do have are nothing for the needs that exist.

Aliki and Sofia, 27 year-old graduate students, take up another thread:

Aliki: I think that the basic change in the Greek family is that its members are decreasing, mostly for economic reasons. Since after the War people got used to living with less money, most had two kids, or even just one.

Sofia: – and because they don't have enough time to devote to their families.

Aliki: – and because there is not enough money. Because now a family that has one child wants to give it everything. Education, English, French. It goes to the gymnasium, piano lessons, etc. They want their kids to have everything that they need for when they leave home. This doesn't happen abroad, but it happens here. The dowry still exists. The same goes for the boys.

Sofia: This is part of the problem. Parents want to provide for their kids. In the old days, families had three, four, six, even more kids. Now the majority of families who have come to the cities cannot have more than two kids.

Today, parents are concerned to have only the number of children that they are able to provide with material goods and opportunities for social advancement so that their children can have a 'better life' than they did. This perception was seconded by a child psychologist, who told me:

The mentality is that for a child to be satisfied, it must go to a private school and have a lot of clothes, a lot of toys, etc. And consequently, we can't do this. Our money doesn't allow us to offer them all these things. So we don't have kids. And they don't understand that these things are not what makes a child satisfied. Unfortunately, they have given a great significance to material goods, and because of this people aren't having kids.

In their writings, politicians – who are also citizens in their own right – seem to realize much of what their fellow Athenians complain about. Even the Parliamentary Report recognizes that 'the child is not only an issue of the parents, but also of legislation and other social agents (*foriéon*)' (p.24). 'The new notion of the family and society that urbanization occasions (a notion that the countryside is also adopting), housing problems, the cost of education, the lack of appropriate child care centres etc, lead to smaller families and the postponement of marriage' (p.15).¹² But when it comes to actual policy, Athenian women repeatedly told me, 'the state does nothing'.

Or, so far as they are concerned, what the state does do is misdirected. For one thing, there is little help for young couples starting out. A few state-subsidized child-care centres in Athens are available where parents can leave their child for free, but at many of these places 50 young children will be under the care of a single adult provider in a cement-walled institutional building. For many parents, this is not an option. Furthermore, because of the poor child-to-adult ratio, most state-run 'child stations' do not accept children under the age of two-and-a-half. Private day care centres can eat up the entire salary of a mother if she works for, say, the electricity company or as a bank teller. Still today, many parents leave their child during the day with a grandmother (*yiayia*); one woman shook her head at this practice, saying to me 'today the grandmother is twice a mother', suggesting that this younger generation of mothers is not fulfilling their part of the parental bargain. However, as families are becoming more geographically dispersed, as women are delaying childbirth into their thirties widening the generation gaps, and as grandmothers are themselves working in the labour market, fewer couples can count on this cost-effective and trustworthy child-care arrangement. In Athens, the '*yiayia* institution' may be a dying one.

Granted, the state does provide its numerous employees with several months' parental leave leading up to and following a birth, but such a leave policy offers only a temporary solution to child-care woes. Young couples are caught in a Catch-22 situation: in order to afford the clothes,

medical bills, furniture and so forth required of a baby, the family must take in a double-income; but when both parents are at work, who is going to look after the child? Matters are complicated by an inflexible occupational infrastructure. For instance, given the split-day schedule that public schools follow to ease overcrowding, a child might go to school mornings this month but afternoons next month, or one sibling might be at home in the morning and another in the afternoon, making it difficult for a woman to organize any kind of part-time work, if she is fortunate enough to find some that is adequately paid (Symeonidou 1990).

Middle-class Athenians, who 'think carefully' before having a family, cite additional reasons for the declining birth rate which are indirectly related to the economy. On more than a couple of occasions, I heard people lament that 'before' people had sex more frequently; for them, less sex translates into fewer babies. Today, it is generally accepted in Greek cities that many people must hold down two or even three jobs to make ends meet, and when they come home at 10 o'clock at night and go to bed, as 27 year-old Phoebe said to me, 'you have to go to sleep!' They are, she is telling me, too tired to have sex. In addition to a full-time day job in a hospital, Phoebe has a part-time night job in a bar: 'I don't even have time to have a relationship,' she says. For a young couple, it takes quite a lot of careful planning and creative household management to have even one child. Little wonder that most simply throw up their hands at the thought of having a second or third.

Politicians and others see this throwing up of hands, and for reasons of convenience and economy interpret it as an attitude problem. At a public symposium organized by the NGO Family Planning Association of Greece, a state representative from the Finance Ministry's Department of Population and Occupation stated confidently; 'As research tells us, young couples and women are refusing to have children or are refusing to have the third child, which is exactly the goal of demographic policy.'¹³ Irini Dorkofiki, never one to mince words, laments in her book that today 'they speak about the child and not about children [due to] the famous "emancipation" of women.' Ignoring the concerns of their constituency as well as the best advice of their own demographers (cf. Symeonidou 1990), the state persists in focusing its pro-natal moneys and energies to reach the 'goal of the third child', thereby leaving the majority of people to fend for themselves on numbers one and two. So dizzy are legislators made by the ever-decreasing numbers generated by demographers that the most significant policy the state has implemented to date begins and ends with offering rewards to women who produce that third child.

Instead of investing significant funds into providing adequate subsidized child-care, or overhauling the civil service to offer part-time job options, or re-vamping the split-schedule public school system, the state's major family policy – and its major demographic policy – is to offer monthly allowances to women following the birth of a third child. *Polytekni*, or 'many-birthed', these mothers are called. Allowances have not been impressive. Athenian women I know laughed at them, calling the monthly US\$150 and free Easter lamb a 'joke'. That is \$150 to support three or more children. Considering that private child-care for one child costs more than the rent on a three-room apartment in a neighbourhood near downtown Athens, we can begin to see their point. Even a former director of the National Statistics Association of Greece conceded to me in 1994 that; 'inflation has played its role on these allowances, and it seems that that measure has not played any important role in affecting the families that have more children.'¹⁴

It was in the early 1990s that the conservative New Democracy government established that *polytekni* mothers be given not only the monthly allowance, but also old-age pensions – retirement pensions, if you will, for 'professional' mothers in gratitude for their service as employees of the state.¹⁵ I quote the following from a press release sent out by the Ministry of Health in 1993, on Mother's Day:

On the occasion of the Mothers' Day holiday, as propitious for family policy as for the mothers of many children, I send to all Greek women warm greetings.

The government, honouring the mother, valuing the difficulties that she faces and wishing to ease what is becoming very heavy and institutionally imposed work [will offer]:

- monthly allowance of 34.000 drx. for the third child (US\$150)
- life-long pension to women with four or more children

And all this is because we believe that the mother is the foundation of the Nation. Without her there would be neither manna nor future, nor Greece.¹⁶

In punning here (intentionally or not) on *mana* (mother), the bureaucrat evinces my argument that women are held responsible as mothers for the production of national identity by reproducing citizens. Since the *polytekni* pensions are offered regardless of family income or economic need, they can be regarded as an amount paid for services rendered – or even as the state's attempt to 'buy the wombs' of women¹⁷ – rather than as a form of economic assistance to those who need it. A 70 year-old

retired schoolteacher said to me that she believed the state should motivate women to stay at home and have more kids, but that politicians have yet to find the best way to do this. 'My sister takes 35 thousand [drachmes a month] because she has four children. But one is a lawyer, the other a forestry commissioner, the third a translator for the EU, the fourth is married. And now my sister gets a pension which she does not even need. She has a kid who's a lawyer!' Dina is not alone in this complaint. The Under Secretary of Health for the socialist PASOK party, which succeeded New Democracy to power in the autumn of 1993, has voiced public disapproval of the 'unjust' structure of the national insurance system that doles out benefits regardless of need, calling for reform of the *polytekni* pensions.¹⁸ The non-partisan Parliamentary Report, for its part, simply advocates an increase in the size and duration of these monthly allowances and supports the full pensioning of *polytekni* mothers, to reward them for this ultimate 'offering' to the nation.¹⁹

To conclude, I wish to suggest an understanding of why the state has so far failed to implement a comprehensive family policy, despite the national importance that is read into the birth rate. First, a family policy that is done properly – done as even legislators seem to realize it ought to be done – costs money. The state has other priorities with which to concern itself, and child-care is, as usual, relegated to the back burner. In terms of what this means for Hellenism, simply by inciting general awareness of Greece's declining population growth rate, and by feeding off cultural stereotypes that Muslim Turks 'reproduce like rabbits', the state can rally the patriotic support of the public.

Second, because demographics have been reduced to reproduction, and reproduction is seen as the domain of women, it is not surprising that family policy will reflect ideologies of motherhood. And, as cultural notions change, official forms of power must negotiate these developments and adapt to shifts in cultural ideology. Today in Greece, motherhood is supposed to be a matter of women's 'free choice'. Family planning, which by Law 1036/80 was institutionalized in the early 1980s in select state hospitals, holds that women should be able to have the number of children they want, when they want. It also posits reproductive 'choice' to be a basic human 'right'. Although a petition for individual human rights holds wide political appeal these days, resonating particularly well with women struggling to throw off the domesticating yoke of the patriarchal family, it also plays into the hands of conservative demographers. When reproductive practice is regarded as an inalienable right, the family as a social institution is brought into the realm of rights to be ensured by the state. Here, the state can

legitimately record and regulate the development of the family, and it can use women's fertility control practices as a scapegoat for legislative inadequacies. If reproduction is a woman's 'choice', then all the state can do (or all it has to do) is encourage women to make that choice. This is precisely the aim of current family policy, working toward that 'goal of the third child' by rewarding women for 'choosing' motherhood over any other sort of employment or livelihood. Meanwhile, women are asking alternatively for infrastructural measures which would allow them more easily to 'choose' motherhood and a career.

Athenian women want to be mothers, but in being mothers they do not want to be exclusively defined by motherhood. The patriarchal state, however, continues to assume that women either 'are' mothers or they are not; for many politicians, motherhood subsumes a woman's adult character – she is the *mana/manna* of the nation. If motherhood is seen to constitute a choice, policy makers regard this as an either/or choice. So long as a woman is going to 'be' a mother, this logic continues, she may as well produce many babies. In this strange partnership of gender essentialism and faith in abstract rational thought, the real life situations and practical constraints that women themselves cite as reasons why they delay having children, or decide that one suffices, or even to not have any children, get erased. It is a fallacy to regard reproductive practices as the outcome of simple choices made rationally according to available information or in the interest of material gain. This assumption inverts the rather obvious fact that the well-being of the nation and the national economy directly informs women's 'choices' to have children, and not the other way around. By not adopting the views and concerns of mothers and potential mothers, legislators have yet to consider seriously the policy options open to them that might actually make a difference to Greece's demographic situation – and to the lives of the women and men who are their constituency. The ideology of 'free choice' which prompts legislators to provide economic encouragement for women to realize their 'natural' desires to mother large numbers of children, at the same time justifies the state's easy reliance on a combination of nationalist and superficially progressive rhetoric. In this way, we can make sense of the apparent contradiction between a pro-natalist government and legislation which legalizes abortion and makes available modern family planning methods. Liberal family policy measures are implemented with the aim of enabling women to achieve fully their 'biological mission' as women and reproduce for the nation. It is the specific task of anthropology, in the setting of the modern nation state, to provide the means of identifying how popular perceptions link up with official policy, providing a more powerful explanation of such apparent

irrationality than is possible by examining the demographic figures alone.

NOTES

1. Δημογραφικό: Οι Γυναίκες και πάλι ένοχες (Demographics: Women are Again to Blame), The Greek Chapter of the European Forum of Left Feminists, appearing in *Mesimbrini*, 12 December 1993.
2. Ο λαός είναι το πιο πολύτιμο κεφάλαιο του κράτους που προωθεί την παραγωγή, την οικονομική και κοινωνική πρόοδο και εγγυάται την ύπαρξη και την ασφάλειά του
3. Andreas Papandreou, 'Exoteriki Politiki kai Ethniki Anagenisi,' in *Dimokratia kai Ethniki Anagenisi* (Athens, 1966: 72-79). Translated and quoted by G. Augustinos (1995: 168).
4. Article 16, line 2 of the current Constitution reads, 'Education constitutes a basic mission for the State and shall aim at the moral, intellectual, professional and physical training of Greeks, the development of national and religious consciousness and at their formation as free and responsible citizens'.
5. Για να ανακοπεί η μείωση των γεννήσεων και για να εξασφαλισθεί η ανανέωση του πληθυσμού και η επιβίωση του Ελληνισμού πρέπει να δοθεί μεγάλη σημασία και να τεθεί ως στόχος το τρίτο παιδί.
6. This claim is not even based in fact; many African refugees in Greece come from Ethiopia, an historically Christian nation. This reveals the dubiously thin line between 'cultural' and 'biological' racism.
7. Και είναι ρατσιστική η έμμεση παρότρυνση του πορίσματος να γεννάμε παιδιά για να υποκαταστήσουμε τους οικονομικούς μετανάστες-τριες με αμιγές εθνικά εργατικό δυναμικό, όταν μια μεταναστευτική πολιτική που θα περιλάμβανε την ισότιμη αναγνώριση των ξένων μεταναστών-τριών στην ελληνική κοινωνία με τα ίδια δικαιώματα και υποχρεώσεις θα μπορούσε εκτός των άλλων να τονώσει, σύμφωνα με τη λογική των συντακτών του πορίσματος, δημογραφικά τη χώρα μας.
8. Abortion was legalized in 1986, and Greece now boasts one of the most liberal abortion laws in Europe. Since then, the number of abortions per year has dropped (due largely to increased condom use to prevent transmission of HIV). Since legalization, the vast majority (90–95 per cent) of abortions continue to be performed in the private sector. Despite a decline in abortions, the fertility rate is still dropping, evincing the family planning claim that abortion has never been a cause of the declining fertility rate, but provides a means for this to occur.
9. Υπάρχουν επίσης μέτρα που μπορεί να επιδράσουν στο μέγεθος και τη δομή του πληθυσμού, ως είναι προγράμματα κοινωνικής πολιτικής για την προστασία της μητέρας και του παιδιού, για την αντιμετώπιση οικογενειακών βαρών, για την ενίσχυση της εκπαίδευσης, για τη θέση της γυναίκας στην κοινωνία, για τη ρύθμιση του αριθμού και της θέσεως των παιδιών μέσα στην οικογένεια κλπ.
Αν και τα προγράμματα αυτά εντάσσονται περισσότερο στον οικογενειακό σχεδιασμό-προγραμματισμό και λιγότερο στην πληθυσμιακή πολιτική δεν πρέπει να υποτιμούνται, λόγω της θετικής επιδράσεως που έχουν.
Τα προβλήματα του πληθυσμού πέραν από τις οικονομικές και κοινωνικές επιπτώσεις που επιφέρουν γενικά, για τη χώρα μας ειδικά έχουν και άμεση σχέση με την εδαφική μας ακεραιότητα και εθνική ανεξαρτησία.
10. The Report is referencing particularly *in vitro* fertilization (IVF). As of 1994, some health insurance programmes offered partial coverage for IVF. The National Electricity Company's health insurance programme, for instance, covered less than 50 per cent of each cycle. A woman I interviewed was billed 300,000 drachmes (approx. US\$1300) per IVF cycle in the early 1990s; her insurance paid 120,000 of this, plus 25 per cent of the cost of the hormones. In all, after three cycles of IVF, she and her husband ended

- up paying 1,200,000 drachmes (US\$200,00) – far less than in the US or the UK, but still a sizeable amount by Greek standards.
11. I understand that in the northern regions of Florina and Thrace the reproduction propaganda is most visible. The Union of Polyteknon distributes nationalist pamphlets aimed at encouraging the birth rate, with the Church participating in some areas. In Thrace, the nationalist slogan is 'Give birth and don't sell your land' to the Muslims, who are said to 'reproduce like rabbits' (Anastasia Karakasidou, personal communication).
 12. Η νέα αντίληψη για την οικογένεια και την κοινωνία που προκαλεί η αστικοποίηση (αντίληψη που υιοθετείται και στην επαρχία), τα προβλήματα στέγης, εργασίας, επαρκούς εισοδήματος, εκπαίδευσης, η έλλειψη κατάλληλων βρεφονηπιακών σταθμών κλπ, οδηγούν σε ολιγομελείς οικογένειες και σε αναβολή γάμων.
 13. This was at a public symposium on 'Contemporary Demographic Trends and Family Planning in Greece' held in Athens on 21 January 1994.
 14. Interview with George Siampos, 4 March 1994.
 15. According to Law 1892/90 (Article 63) provision is made for the allocation of a monthly allowance to the mother who has obtained her third child. The mother who is considered *polytekni* is paid a monthly allowance equivalent to one and a half times the daily wage of an unskilled worker, multiplied by the number of her unwed children under the age of 25. This allowance is paid until the *polytekni* ceases to have unwed children under the age of 25. In addition, a life-long pension is provisioned to the mother who is no longer entitled to the above allowance, equivalent to a quarter of the daily wage of an unskilled worker. The *polytekni* allowance is paid to the mother independently of any other allowance, salary, pension, compensation, and so on (from Εθνική και Ευρωπαϊκή Νομοθεσία για τη σύγχρονη Ελληνίδα', General Secretariat of Equality, 1993, p.18).
 16. Press release of 8 May 1993, from the ND Ministry of Health, Under-secretary Fanni Palli-Petralia.
 17. At the Family Planning Association's symposium on 'Contemporary Demographic Trends and Family Planning in Greece (21 January 1994), N. Loizos, from the Department of Population and Occupation, proposed that women receive 5 million drachmes (nearly US\$22,000) a year for her third child. Although this generous offer met with a rousing response from the crowd, one woman rose from the audience in indignation. She challenged the state employee: 'I heard with astonishment that the state is ready to buy the womb at 5 million! Who will speak to the ambitions of the child so that I can get 5 million! We [women] are being confronted by the state as small machines!'
 18. 'Escalation of Insurance', *Ta Nea*, Friday 1 April 1994, by Nana Daoudaki. Phoebe Ioannides was then Under-secretary of Health.
 19. In an article featured in the March 1991 issue of *Goneis* (Parents) magazine entitled 'Allowance to the many-birthed mother', the president of the Athens' Union of Polyteknon, Vasilios Theotokatos (a surname which, fittingly, means, 'birth of God'), is quoted as saying, 'It's known that our country is in danger of becoming a country of old people, since the low birth rate has today reached a very dangerous point and the demographic problem of our fatherland is the number one national concern. For this reason... a minimum allowance must be given to the *polytekni* mother, for her offering – that is a national offering – to solve our demographic problem.'

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