

Barren States
The Population "Implosion" in Europe

Edited by
Carrie B. Douglass

 **BERG**

Oxford • New York

Underfertility's Challenge to Family and Gender Relations in Urban Greece

Heather Paxson

In Greece, the notion that motherhood "completes" a woman is professed by demographers and policy-makers, and by middle-class woman alike. Yet despite the persistent idealization of motherhood, Greece's total fertility rate (average number of children per woman of reproductive age) fell below replacement level in the early 1980s, plummeting to 1.28 in 1999 (Council of Europe 2001; see also Figure 7.1). During ethnographic research into fertility control and motherhood, I encountered the recurring theme of Greece's "underfertility" (*ipoyenitikótita*). The "demographic problem," as Greeks speak of, is perhaps especially palpable in Athens, where I conducted fieldwork between 1993 and 1995 (Paxson 2004). In 1951, 18 percent of the national population lived in the nation's capital, but following mass urban migration in the wake of the Second World War and Greece's subsequent Civil War, by 1991 well over 30 percent of the population resided in Athens (National Statistical Service of Greece (NSSG) 1992). Urban migration produced an aging rural population, such that fertility rates in urban and rural areas have fallen at much the same pace (Parliament of Greece 1993). Nationwide, deaths outnumbered births beginning in 1998 (NSSG 2002). Athenians share widespread perception not only that "Greece is getting smaller," but also that this constitutes a legitimate cause for concern when compared with neighboring Turkey, Greece's political rival, whose fertility runs at three times Greece's.

For many Athenians, the future strength of their nation would seem to depend on the continued production of Greek bodies, on the reproduction of larger families. This pronatal imperative has been given a gendered charge, not only through a belief that motherhood completes a woman, but by the fact that Greece's declining birthrate was first brought to public attention following a 1960s study into women's birth control practices (Valaoras and Trichopoulos 1970). This state-sponsored study also disclosed a common incidence of repeat abortion (Paxson 1997, 2004; Halkias 1998). A decade of war, famine, poverty and urban relocation pressured Greeks to have smaller families; by the 1950s middle-aged mothers "discovered" medical abortion as a means of family limitation. By the 1980s the

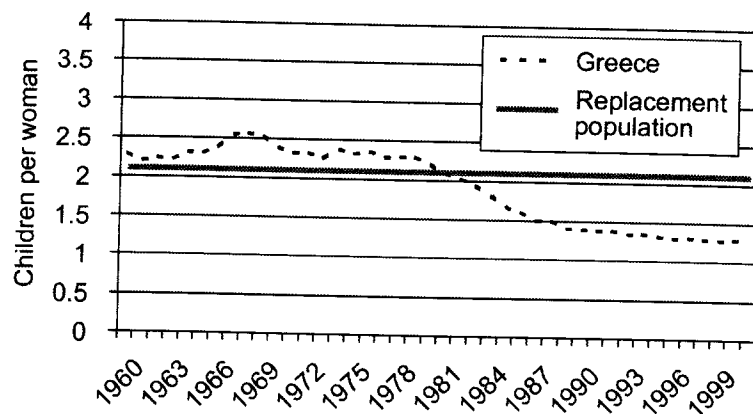


Figure 7.1 Total Fertility Rate, Greece, 1960–1999.
Source: Eurostat 2003.

abortion rate had climbed to three times the live birthrate. Ever since the 1960s study explicitly blamed women's repeat abortions for much of the country's demographic weakening, discussion of Greece's underfertility has made continued reference to the attitudes and behaviors of the nation's women.

Parliamentary transcripts and letters to newspapers have voiced by now familiar recriminations that "modern" – that is, urban middle-class – women are to blame for selfishly "refusing" to have traditionally large families (Halkias 1998). I heard similar complaints at medical conferences and public symposia addressing family planning and demographic issues in Athens. But in my research I found that this officialized recrimination by no means reflects consensus among the urban, middle-class populace – the very group targeted by family planners. Middle-class Athenian women do not describe themselves or their peers as being *selfish* for delaying starting families or for limiting family size. Rather, they depict this as *responsible* behavior, regardless of unfortunate national consequences. A dichotomous model of gender roles as either traditional or modern, often presumed by Greek politicians, obfuscates the economic and cultural factors that impede couples from realizing desires for larger families. It also obscures women's own nuanced, often critical understandings of how, in daily life, people – and "a" people – navigate and embody conflicts between the so-called traditional and modern at the margins of Europe.

To learn where professional and lay theories converge and diverge on questions of reproductive politics, I conducted open-ended interviews with health care and social science professionals as well as with thirty-eight women about their own lives, many but not all of whom are mothers, aged 20 to over 70, living and/or working in the middle-class neighborhood of Pangrati. Some interviews were

conducted in English but most were in Greek; translations are mine. Thanks to a fortuitous introduction, I attended several meetings of an Athenian feminist group whose members were concerned about the xenophobia and sexism implied in the reproductive-based demographic model of national well-being that characterized a widely circulated parliamentary report on the country's "Demographic Problem" issued in 1993.

I approach the politics and problems of Greece's supposed "barren state" from three angles. After summarizing state rhetoric and policy, I consider what low birthrates mean to the segment of the population often held accountable for them, middle-class working and professional families, and I do so by attending to class inflections of Athenians' sense that they cannot afford to raise as many children as they might like. Second, I discuss repercussions of personal and national underfertility for how urban Greeks perceive gender difference, especially what it takes to enact proper femininity in this modern era. Finally, taking my cue from a leftist feminist group in Athens, I offer a critique of how framing of the demographic problem as such is founded on xenophobic, often racialized understandings of how national populations are, or should be, constituted. Looking at demographic issues through a triple filter of class, gender and ethnicity (see also Krause 2001), I argue that to think of Greece as a "barren state" – as do many Greek demographers – obscures how this perception depends on unacknowledged apparatus of economic, sexual and nationalist ideologies that constitute the modern Greek nation-state. It also belittles the practical concerns of Greek citizens who aspire to larger families.

Politics and Policy

Since 1990, Greece's most substantial pronatal policy has been to award large families with cash incentives. As of 2001, monthly allowances of about US\$150 were given to married couples having a third child, until this child reaches 6 years of age; to families with four or more children, small allowances are offered per unmarried child under the age of 23. While awarding families for meeting the pronatalist goal of a third or fourth child, state policy fails to aid couples in having a first or second child (Paxson 2004).

Following a significant 5.33 percent fall in the national birthrate (number of births per 1,000 of the population) during the decade of the 1980s, in November 1991, a non-partisan parliamentary commission was convened to study the country's demographic situation and recommend relevant policy measures. Issued in 1993, while I was in Athens, their report notes that a range of factors contribute to demographic measurements – migration, population distribution between rural and urban areas, the age spread of the population, deathrate, birthrate. But instead of viewing social and economic factors as having direct impact on the sorts of things demographic statistics purport to measure, and therefore as fair game for

policy intervention, authors focus on reproductive attitudes when outlining policy recommendations, which aim at encouraging women to have larger families. No significant changes in policy have been implemented following this report, which nonetheless remains instructive of nationalist and reproductive ideology.

Beyond raising monthly allowances and tax breaks for large families, the report calls for reform of state-operated family planning clinics. Presumably unaware that these clinics, few in number, are used primarily by working-class women for routine gynaecological examinations (Margaritidou and Mesteneos 1992), politicians advocate revamping family planning not to be "identified solely with contraception, abortion and sterility," but so it would aim to "protect the family" and embrace the "support of motherhood, which," the report states, "must be forwarded as a supreme social value" (Parliament of Greece 1993: 19). Policy recommendations are also directed at state education, asking it to "stress at every appropriate moment Greek tradition [of family] and religious sentiment" (Parliament of Greece 1993: 36).

In the 1993 report, parliamentarians depict "motherhood protection" as a national need occasioned by urban modernity: "The new notion of family and society that urbanization occasions (a notion that the countryside is also adopting), housing problems, the cost of education, the lack of appropriate childcare centers, etc. lead to smaller families and the postponement of marriage" (Parliament of Greece 1993: 15). But if socio-economic conditions contribute to demographic outcomes, it is the modernization of women's attitudes that are held accountable for them. Specifically, women having abortions are figured at the heart of Greece's demographic weakness. The report claims that by correctly informing women that abortion can damage their future fertility, and by "forwarding the national and religious traditions of our people, it is possible that forty percent of women will decide not to resort to abortion" and – the implicit corollary – the country will gain more planned children (Parliament of Greece 1993: 19).

Not surprisingly, this government projection has not been realized. Despite an absence of new policy measures, the abortion rate *has* fallen since the early 1990s (although it remains above the live birthrate). Health care professionals interpret this as a result of men's increased condom use to prevent HIV transmission. But contrary to government predictions, the birthrate continues to decline. Fewer abortions have not translated into more births. In forwarding as pronatal policy a family planning agenda aimed at encouraging women to "choose" not to have abortions, Greek policy-makers mistook the *means* of birth limitation – abortion – to be the *causes* of birth limitation. Birthrates in Greece will not rise without comprehensive economic and family policy directed at what urban Greeks perceive as the primary reasons for their own reproductive decisions.

Class and the Making of Modern Families

Depicting the nation's declining birthrate as a matter of economic and historic circumstance, rather than the outcome of individuals' desires, middle-class Athenians are themselves attuned to socio-economic causes of small families. They agree it is "more difficult today" to decide to have children. Niki, a 35-year-old married woman who says she cannot afford children, contextualized her dilemma: "The middle-class Greek, I believe, thinks much more about raising a child. Do they have the economic capability? How will they manage? How to raise it, how to school it? They think about all this a lot, whereas past generations didn't think about it so much." I heard many women voice desires for larger families they felt thwarted by contemporary circumstance.

Women as well as social scientists I interviewed cited the fact that children "cost too much" as the primary cause of the nation's low fertility. In an interview, a midwife told me that Greek women "spend a lot on their children," more than

in other European countries [where] they don't have to pay for their children's education, [where] they don't think to bequeath a home and money for their children. In Greece people want to educate their children very well, to give them the best clothes, to give them everything. And also to leave them something [as an inheritance], a home. And so they don't have more than two or three [children].

Anna, a 31-year-old administrative assistant and mother of an 8-month-old baby who during the day is looked after by Anna's mother, told me, "I would *like* to have another child. I would like at least one more. But it's difficult because I'm working, and because now we want to have everything for our children. You don't decide easily to have more children because you want to provide them with everything." Middle-class Athenian women tend to discuss their own reproductive agency – a self-reflexivity concerning whether and how to raise children – by claiming hard-won achievement or by stressing external parameters beyond their control.

Demographer Haris Symeonidou's (1990) research has shown that Greek women's employment does not directly affect fertility level. Indeed, that dual incomes are considered necessary for having children helps account for simultaneous low rates of fertility and female employment (Symeonidou 1990). Symeonidou's research reveals that wage-earning Greek women pursue one of two strategies when they have a first child. Many leave the workforce after marriage or childbirth; for these women, waged work appears as a functional precursor to motherhood (Vaiou 1992: 255). Alternatively, they return to work very shortly after birth, finding caretakers for their infants. Beyond state guaranteed six months' unpaid parental leave to supplement four months' paid leave for childbirth in the public (not private) sector, there is little informal job security for women (Papadopoulos 1998), meaning that once women leave the job market for

a year or more it is very difficult to return. The labor activity rate of Greek married women between 25 and 49 years of age has been the lowest in the EU, at 40 percent compared to the EU average of nearly 60 percent (Eurostat 1994, cited in Papadopoulos 1998: 55). Women complained to me that part-time work that would bring extra income but without creating insurmountable childcare demands is difficult to come by. In 1995, 8.4 percent of Greek female employment was part-time, compared with a European Union average of 31.3 percent (Papadopoulos 1998). Women noted, too, that since the overcrowded public school system is organized on a split-day schedule, so that their children can attend school in the mornings one month and afternoons the next, part-time work would be tricky to negotiate.

Lack of quality, affordable daycare is of great concern to working mothers and aspiring parents. Private daycare centers in the mid-1990s charged as much as 600,000 drachmes (US\$2,575.00) a year per child, about 50,000 drachmes (US \$215.00), a month. This is more than the state provides families to help support three or more children. If a couple has two young children, the fee approximates the monthly salary of a secretary or clerk. And only some of the expensive private centers will accept children under the age of two and a half. Within the few state-run daycare centers in operation it is not uncommon for a sole childcare worker to have as many as fifty small children in her charge. For many families, such conditions are unacceptable. The working mother of a 7-year-old, Litsa, told me, "This is very difficult, where to take your child. I had him at daycare until he went to school. I paid such money! Now he goes to [public] school. But he gets out at twelve-thirty, and someone has to stay with him until three o'clock when I come home. I have anxiety." In Athens, female employment does not reduce women's desire to have children so much as it is the case that the infrastructure cannot accommodate the needs of mothers who work outside the home.

While middle-class urban Greeks are beginning to join other Southern Europeans in employing African, Filipina, and Albanian immigrant women as domestic workers and nannies (Anderson 2000; Lazaridis 2000), most continue to rely for childcare on the unpaid labor of family members. This arrangement suits people not only economically, but because they prefer not to have "strangers" (*kséni*, meaning non-family and/or non-Greek persons) looking after their children. Even professional women rely on the informal social institution by which grandmothers (*yiayiádhēs*) in particular are available and willing to help with the social reproduction of their own children's families and thus contribute to their upward socioeconomic mobility. But with women delaying childbirth often into their thirties (the mean age of Greek women at the birth of a first child in the late 1990s was 27) the generation gap is widening, compromising couples' preferred childcare arrangements; even if grandparents are at home during the day, they may be quite elderly. The *yiayía* institution may be waning (Symeonidou 1990: 149).

Athenians depict additional constraints impinging on parental desire as symptomatic of Greek modernity. I heard of couples, wary of bringing up children in the overpopulated, polluted city of Athens, who decided not to have kids until they can afford to move to tree-lined suburbs. Indeed, a popular explanation for national underfertility blames the pollution-filled haze that hangs over the nation's capital, which, as a symbol of the toxic side of modernity, is held responsible for a (probably exaggerated) drop in sperm counts. Nadia, who tours the city streets as a door-to-door salesperson, believes people are especially vulnerable to modern pollutants of television radiation and car exhaust because the stress (*ánchos*) of "modern life" is making people "soft". Critiquing modern technology and a pace of life for damaging humans' "nature," she sees Athenians drained of virility and fertility: "People aren't as tough as they were when they ate wild foods. And television has radiation – did you know? – which taints the potency of the person. The person has lost sex because of this culture, they don't have sex with the frequency they used to. You hear of couples who have sex every five days, every two months!" The less frequently couples make love, she concluded, the fewer children they make. Two women in their twenties also complained to me that, with people working two jobs to make ends meet, they are too tired at the end of the day to even think about having sex. No wonder, they concluded, "we have underfertility"!

Other women emphasized that maternal obligations – what it takes to be a good mother – are compounded as children are regarded as consumer projects. Galena, a grandmother in her sixties, said, "Before, the family had children to work with them, to help as hands. Now this has changed. The baby is a mouth to feed, a body to clothe. It is not hands. We change as a society, we are not as we were before. Greece now has the same problem as Europe, other developed countries." Indeed, Athenians encounter the sorts of class-inflected attitudes favoring reduced family size and more "conscious" fertility control strategies that anthropologists have identified in a variety of developing economies as important means and measures of individual and national modernity (Schneider and Schneider 1996; Kanaaneh 2002; Krause 2001; Gal and Kligman 2000; Krengel and Greifeld 2000). Social and cultural values concerning how people think about having families and raising children frame these as fiscally expensive undertakings.

Currently a mother's success is dependent not merely on bringing forth children who will inherit the family's name and assets, but on raising *successful* children – children with advanced degrees, who speak two or three languages and can succeed in a competitive job market. Education in Greece, as throughout Southern and postsocialist Eastern Europe, is superseding accumulated inheritance and business connections as the prime mover of social ascent, the securer of high status occupations (Collier 1997; Kligman 1998). Athenian parents routinely send their teenage children to *frontistiria*, private institutes offering foreign language and other classes after public school hours. Parents feel they must push their children

in high school since entry into the ten fully subsidized state universities is based on competitive examinations. Many young Greeks study in Britain, Germany, the United States; foreign-trained professionals may never return, creating the "brain-drain" that contributes to Greece's demographic profile. In either case, "quality" children are produced through the acquisition of cultural capital attained through considered parental consumption.

When personal achievement comes to signal social status, reputation is largely based on how one chooses to spend money. Litsa astutely applied this to mothering, explaining that if parental obligations have always been directed at enabling children to get ahead, today Greek consumerist self-fashioning translates being a "good" mother into providing "the best" material goods for one's children, rather than, say, spending quality time with them. When others recognize that a woman chooses to spend her hard earned money on her children – to keep them in the latest fashions, to provide them with extracurriculars – this demonstrates her moral worth as a mother:

It is very difficult to have a child – these days we are a consumer society. Earlier, when we went to school we used to wear [uniform] pinafores, one would last the year with its tears mended and patched. But now, there's this consumerism. Tomorrow my child will see someone wearing such-and-such shoes and he'll tell me, "Me too!" You'll tell me I should fix it so my kid is not interested in name brands. You'll say I don't *have* to send him to extra classes to do a foreign language – in the past we grew up in another way. I was the last child of five. What my sister would wear one year I would take the next, it didn't matter to us: we weren't bombarded by television. Of course we have done this to our lives. They put this idea into our heads but we are the ones who go and implement it. We are the consumers. Tomorrow at the supermarket we see something new, we try it, we like it – and there's the good discount – so, it's difficult.

Since the 1980s, Athenian parents have felt pressure to provide the best for their children and to produce "the best" children (see Emke-Pouloupoulou 1994: 89).

Child psychologist Alikí Andoniou, the mother of a 3 year old, is critical of the consumerist drive of today's mothers: "The mistaken *noōtropia* [collective mentality] of the parents predominates, that for a child to be raised properly it must wear Kickers shoes and have a lot of expensive toys. They don't understand these aren't what satisfy a child. And because of this people aren't having kids." Some professionals argue that Greek *familism* – the notion that family relations are pre-eminent social relations, that the family should be a cohesive unit, that family loyalty supersedes all others – when combined with capitalist consumption creates unrealistic expectations for proper parenting. In research among Athenian women conducted in 1989 as part of a comparative EU study into women and poverty, another psychologist I interviewed found that children's private schooling, clothing, shoes, activities are paid for by *women's* contributions to household

economies. This financial provisioning represents a modern extension of the maternal responsibility women have long assumed, by which they earn credit for their children's success and character.

What Maila Stivens (1998: 63) writes of middle-class urban Malaysia speaks equally to Athens: "To be a modern mother is to be an active consumer under great pressure to acquire all the commodities necessary for the satisfactory performance of motherhood." In this context, women – and many men – agree it is better to have "one and raise it well," than to have many children and help alleviate the nation's demographic problem. Modern motherhood is foremost about the *quality* of childhood one can offer as a parent; concern for the *quantity* of children produced follows. Were policy-makers to realize this, they might be led to do more to help couples have a first or second child.

Gender and Modern Motherhood

For middle-class Athenians, the ability to provide children with optimal opportunities and material comfort requires first a responsible approach to birth control. Nadia, who has never married at age 40, said to me:

I tell you, only the foolish ones are having children; the intelligent ones are holding off. Because *proper* persons know what a child demands. Perhaps because the Greek has undergone indigence, before and after the War – [but] back then they had children – those who have grown up now tell you, "I don't want my child to go through what I went through then, I'll have one and it will live well, not many and live in poverty."

Phoebe agrees with her age-mate Nadia that people these days have fewer children out of an appropriate sense of responsibility, which she qualifies as "maturity":

In Greece we have a low birthrate. Why? I believe it's because things are a little difficult from the economic side. A couple thinks about when they will have a child, and wants to offer their child a good, comfortable life, meaning to have the money to be able to afford the good schools. They begin to think we can have one child only – or no children . . . This, I think up to a point, is an issue of maturity.

To explore how middle-class women go about being what Nadia calls "proper" (*sostós*) persons and demonstrating what Phoebe means by "maturity" (*orimótita*), I considered how Athenians square ideals of modern *adulthood* with notions of proper *femininity*. If women today "are less concerned with reputation in a bounded social group and more concerned with demonstrating 'modernity' in an urban setting and with establishing their own senses of personhood" (Dubisch 1993: 282, references omitted), how is this Greek modernity envisioned? And how do women reconcile this with idealized images of motherhood? In a pro-child,

pronatal climate, as one woman, an unmarried physician, said to me, motherhood is something about which every woman must decide: "Deciding against motherhood is just as hard as deciding for motherhood. But it's a decision you have to make. You cannot pass through your life and forget about it. Motherhood you have to consider." What is at stake are urban Greek understandings of what it means to be a mother and a woman, and how these complement and/or complicate one another amidst a looming sense that underfertility writ large is a problem for the nation.

Lela, whose 15-month-old son is largely being brought up by her own mother and father, who live downstairs, said, "I do not think that motherhood has changed from the past. That is, the relationship between mother and child hasn't changed. What *has* changed is the position of the woman in society. Motherhood stays the same, but the woman who works doesn't sit at home and raise the kid, as happened before." In many families the burden of accumulated demands from today's fast-paced world is landing in the lap of those who remain at home: grandparents. Maro, a 38-year-old unmarried dentist who spent much of her adult life trying to move away from her parents, sees this as a problem:

Because the economic situation is difficult, kids have returned to the family . . . They have a child and leave it with their parents, then take it home for the weekend. The mothers are hanging over them and for I don't know how many it's becoming the same family bond. That is, the mothers are mothering again for their daughters' children. "Since [her] Mother will cook anyway it's better, we are spared from fatigue, hardship, and a few minutes." That's the mentality [*noötropia*]. [A woman's mother, the grandmother] puts in two casseroles instead of putting in one casserole and she's willing!

Maro is suspicious of younger women's willingness to rely on their mothers' domestic labor, just as she judges the complicity of older women willing to mother again for the next generation. The "modern," wage-earning mother, Maro points out, requires quite "traditional" forms of support, even dependence. "The child of my child is two times my child," an old saying goes, or, as another woman said, "The grandmother is like twice mother." But this is one tradition Maro would like to see left in the past:

I see that we are turning back with this. I believe one takes a step forward as one arranges one's life on one's own and faces it on one's own. You want to have a child, you assume the responsibilities of having a child; you work, you assume the responsibilities of working. I consider it to be a step ahead to stand up in one's life . . . to have it in one's own hands. I think anymore there's a step backwards in this.

For Maro, the modern woman should conduct her life without heavily relying on her natal family, and she should be accountable for her own actions. This sounds

similar to the logic of politicians wanting to rely on women's reproductive responsibility and personal choice to solve the demographic problem. The differences are that Maro wants the state to offer more comprehensive social services to enable individuals to realize their goals, and for her, increasing the nation's demographic numbers is insufficient reason to have a child. Indeed, Maro is one of only two women I encountered who described themselves as having consciously decided *not* to become mothers. Bowing to others' expectations that women *should*, by all means, for whatever reasons, become mothers would be to "take another step back" from the kind of modern society that might, potentially, offer women more of a say in their lives.

Maro is the exception. Most Athenian women aspire to motherhood. For them, what relationship, if any, obtains between personal and national underfertility? My friend Phoebe divorced a few years before I met her. She never gave birth during eight years of marriage because she and her former husband "couldn't communicate. I thought about what a problem it would be if we tried to raise a child together and so I decided not to have a child, consciously." Prior to her present administrative position, Phoebe held a variety of office jobs and owned a clothing boutique in the neighborhood. I knew Phoebe as an energetic woman who dressed fashionably, spoke French and English, and enjoyed her work. Aside from the fact that her 30-something brother had moved into her one-bedroom flat after a girlfriend broke up with him, to me Phoebe seemed, like Maro, to be a "modern" woman with independent sensibilities. It was somewhat of a surprise to me when – early in my research – Phoebe described feeling something missing from her life: "I believe that with having a child comes as well the fulfillment of the woman . . . The woman is completed having a child." "Of course" she would like to have children.

I continued to meet middle-class women – single, married, divorced, with and without children – who echoed Phoebe's assurance that motherhood "completes a woman." Weeks after this conversation with Phoebe I met Maro's sister, Niki, and their 70-year-old mother, Maria. Affirming her mother's announcement that "all women want to become mothers," 35-year-old Niki, who had worked in insurance but was then unemployed, explained that while often "there are economic problems so they decide not to do it, I believe that all women want to become mothers. How can I tell you? It completes them [*tis olokiróni*]." I pressed Niki, who was married and childless, "But you are a woman now, you don't feel complete?" "No," she replied. "I do not feel complete, how do you say? Full [*yemáti*]. Simply, the child is a mission [*proörisμός*], a goal [*skopós*]. That you have formed a new life . . . I consider that this is the goal of the woman. Not only this. It's not the only thing, of course." Talking with Daphne, an unmarried high school teacher and feminist in her early thirties, helped me to recognize the significance of Niki's concluding sentence:

For my mother's generation . . . becoming a mother was the purpose of a woman's life. But for women my age or maybe younger – the *modern* woman, let's say – they work and they have a social life and they are involved with different activities. Maternity is something that could make you a *whole* woman . . . I think especially here in Athens, in the cities, they accept you if you don't have a child, but they admire you more, they accept you more if you are a working woman and you have your husband, your family, your house, *and* your children.

I came to discern a subtle yet crucial distinction between viewing motherhood as that which gives single-minded "purpose" to a woman's life – a view many now relegate to past generations – and the modern woman's attitude that motherhood is a virtuous goal which she works to achieve while engaged in other social roles and commitments.

In regarding motherhood as an achievement, Athenian women are well aware that their own goals for having children are not automatically obtainable. I was struck by how pragmatically these women regard the limits of choice. I was impressed by the political-economic perspective they brought to bear on obstacles they personally faced, and a bit envious of how many seem able to shrug off feelings of inadequacy for "failing" to meet their own and others' expectations. These women know of Greece's *ipoyenitikótita* (underfertility). They shake their heads in dismay that they live in a "country of aged people." The ideal that people should have bigger families "stays in the air," a friend told me.

Incessantly one hears in Greece the refrain, "What can I do?" (*ti na káno*). Anthropologists (e.g. du Boulay 1974: 95) have interpreted this as a move to avoid responsibility for an act whose outcome is attributed to the whims of *tíchi*, chance. Greeks appeal to a sense of fate (*míra*) to carry on in a world not under their control. They do not act because it is their fate to do so; rather, fate – which in modern settings can be shorthand for the emotional, moral, material factors impinging on (supposedly) otherwise rational action – allows them to cope with events that do not accord with their ideals. In addition, appeals to fate permit actors to manipulate circumstances behind the scrim of public scrutiny without upsetting dominant ideological order.

I heard Athenians utter the phrases "What can I do?" or "What can one do?" to accompany actions that do not meet social, often gendered, ideals such as delaying marriage or neglecting to have children. Economic trouble can serve as an alibi for choosing not to have children: "What can I do?" Couples who for physiological reasons cannot procreate, as well as others who may not want children, can hide what might be viewed as moral/character deficiency under the alibi of material scarcity. At the same time, when economic crisis is the most common justification Athenians offer for the country's low birthrate, women and men who nevertheless manage to have children are able to spin for themselves tales of heroic achievement and self-sacrifice. Mothers are exemplary women.

In a pronatal climate, childless women can call upon essentialized notions of maternal nature to portray themselves as proper women. For Phoebe, who decided not to bring a child into a tension-filled marriage, the realization of woman's maternal nature does not require childbirth: "I believe that within a woman exist feelings of motherhood. You will see this even in women who haven't had a child; it comes out in their behavior towards an animal, a dog, or a cat. It's a special behavior that seems somewhat like the feeling of motherhood." It is no coincidence to another middle-aged woman that she, after suffering four miscarriages and never having a child, has devoted her adult life to teaching school children. If "motherhood completes a woman," as both of these women said to me, the fact that "motherhood" is inside them anyway lets them off the hook for failing to produce children by this point in their lives.

The statement "motherhood completes a woman" mediates contradictions between a modern woman's ideal expectations for being a woman (which should include being a mother) and her lived reality as a woman (with or without children). It may be paradoxical but it is *not* inconsistent that 35-year-old Niki, after insisting that she is "not complete as a woman" shrugged off her childlessness by concluding, "What can I do?" By expressing a supposedly natural desire that all women (should) wish to become mothers they signal moral approval of motherhood, and in so doing are, to borrow from Michael Herzfeld (1985), both "being good at being" women and are being "good" women.

The notion that motherhood completes a woman also signals that reproduction is valued for *creating mothers*. Birthing and raising just one child is sufficient to transform a woman into a mother. This sort of reproductive arithmetic does not add up to population replacement. Then again, neither does it signal any lack of maternal sentiment, nor weakening of family values. Middle-class Athenian women want to be mothers to feel complete, but they do not want their social identities to be defined exclusively by motherhood. Nationalist politicians, wanting women to return to traditionally large families, have largely failed to recognize this.

Ethnicity and the Demographic Problem

When I asked women what the state offered by way of family support that might help them have additional children, children many profess to want, most replied with some version of, "the state does nothing." But Eleni, a publisher and mother of three grown children, responded further that the government, in reducing demographic concerns to questions of reproduction, sidesteps politically contentious issues of immigration. In the mid-1990s, Greek residents routinely witnessed on television thousands of Albanians – undocumented, destitute – corralled in shipyard warehouses outside Athens to await being packed onto military buses, driven north,

and dumped at the border. Sensing my interest in her concern over escalating violence between residents and refugees, Eleni told me she was a member of a feminist group, the Greek Chapter of the European Forum of Left Feminists, who, directly motivated by the 1993 parliamentary demographic report mentioned above, were planning a public meeting on "Nationalism, Racism and Gender." "They're coming over tonight," she remarked. "Would you like to stay?" I positioned myself by the open window to watch this non-academic, well-read group of middle-class, age-diverse feminists assemble under a burgeoning cloud of cigarette smoke.

At this and subsequent meetings of the Forum of Left Feminists I attended in early 1994, activists discussed how the country's demographic situation constitutes a problem *not* because women are birthing fewer children, but because the nation-state and ideals for citizenship are conceived through racism and sexism (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). A conflation of *ethnicity* and *national identity*, common throughout Europe, is promoted in Greece by the linguistic misfortune that these two distinct political concepts are subsumed under the same term, *ethnikótita*. The adjective *ethnikós* refers to both national (citizenship) and ethnic (language, custom, religion) criteria. The 1993 parliamentary report (I received a photocopy from one of the forum members) acknowledged that successful repatriation of political refugees and the mass arrival of ethnic Greeks leaving homelands in southern Albania and the Pontus region of the Black Sea could have a "positive effect" on the Greek demographic situation: "Common cultural roots and Orthodox Christianity help greatly in their adaptation to and assimilation into Greek society" (Parliament of Greece 1993: 15). Nearly 15 percent of immigrants entering Greece in the 1990s are of Greek origin from Black Sea areas of the former Soviet Union (Bagavos 2001: 4).

Forum members are critical of an exclusionary, essentialist ideology consistent with Greek ethnic nationalism (opposed to civic nationalism based on shared principles or beliefs). Greeks often refer to their own ethnic population in positive terms as the Greek race (*i elleniki fili*) (on metaphors of blood in Greek nationalism, see Just 1989; Herzfeld 1992). The parliamentary report claims that "other" immigrants, "chiefly Muslims from Afro-Asiatic countries . . . create serious socio-economic problems" because "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" (Parliament of Greece 1993: 15). Nevertheless, forum members noted, "other" (non-Greek) immigrants fill an important role in the economy, taking up the lowest paying jobs Greeks disdain. Greeks favor Filipinas as domestics and nannies; as Catholic Christians, they are seen as "less other" than Islamic Africans or Albanians (Lazaridis 2000).

In a collectively written 1993 newspaper article, the Forum of Left Feminists challenged Parliamentarians, charging that their "report's direct incitement, that we should birth children in order to replace the economic migrants with a pure

national labor force, is racist [*ratsistiki*], 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" (Evropaikó Forum 1993: 44). They argued, in other words, that if all immigrants were accommodated and welcomed, rather than excluded and mistrusted, they could solve many facets of Greece's demographic "problem" concerning labor and national defense. Reluctance to do so suggests that political concern is not about sheer numbers of the population, but about the future of "Greekness."

Acknowledging that racisms are specific to national and social context, these women argued that social and economic class divisions exacerbate racism against even Greek immigrants. While Greeks descended from merchant families in Cairo or Constantinople (Istanbul) tend to be wealthier and better educated than the average indigenous Greek and are visible participants in Greek society, Pontic Greeks from the Black Sea are poor, from rural backgrounds, and join the working-class ghettos established by Greek refugees from Asia Minor in the 1920s following a mandated exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. At one meeting, a woman mentioned how common it is to hear Greeks identify individuals as "Albanian" by how dirty and ill-clothed they appear (see Seremetakis 1996: 489). Several generations ago things were different, forum members recalled. Because ethnic Greek and Slavic families migrating from Albania and other Balkan areas, particularly after the northern expansion of Greek national territory following the 1912–1913 Balkans War, came to settle in villages throughout the country they "became like natives" and were accepted (Seremetakis 1991; Panourgia 1995). Since the 1980s, most Slavic migrants, men outnumbering women, have come to Greece hoping to move on to America and view their labor and life in Greece as temporary. People today are thus more conscious of ethnic difference, the women speculated. Albanians have become the scapegoats for the ills of modern Greek society, blamed for crime, harassment, a drop in wealthy tourists (Panourgia 1995). The parliamentary report baldly states, "The demographic aging of the population leads to social decline with the weakening and degeneration of many institutions (family-child-motherhood), and with the appearance of the socially weak [immigrants] there is an elevation of criminality, narcotics and acts of arbitrary violence in general" (Parliament of Greece 1993: 32). Foreign immigrants are blamed for rising crime, drug abuse and violence that alternatively could be viewed as endemic to urbanization and a weak economy. In the terms of Omi and Winant (1994: 56), this is a racial formation, in which "race is a matter of both social structure and cultural representation."

In their meetings, forum members further addressed how gender and sexuality are enlisted as a technique of racism and nationalism. When the category of race or ethnicity delimits a nation's or a people's "own" women from "others," Eleni

noted, racism is used to exploit women sexually. This, they agreed, is because women are figured in the parliamentary report and elsewhere as passive symbols of the nation (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Gal and Kligman 2000). The group discussed the systematic rape of Bosnian Muslim women by Serbian soldiers as a weapon of ethnic cleansing in the early 1990s, an act of defiling not only individual women, but also the nation for which they stand – and of cuckolding their symbolic husbands, Bosnian soldiers (Mostov 1995; Allen 1996; Gal and Kligman 2000). In Greece, the word for prostitutes, *pórnes*, is often synonymous with *Póntes*, or women from the Pontus region. *Smirniári*, or “woman from Smyrna,” is another slang expression for “whore.” Smyrna (now Izmir) is a city on the Aegean coast of Turkey whose Greek-speaking Christian population was relocated to the Athens area following the 1919–1922 Greek–Turkey War.

Women continue to be called upon by states to serve as the symbolic “bearers” of nations (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989). Quantitatively, women have been responsible, and frequently commended, for birthing new citizens and workers (Kligman 1998; Krengel and Greifeld 2000: 205; Kanaaneh 2002); hence, the Greek state pays modest pensions to mothers of four or more children (Paxson 1997). Qualitatively, women’s nurturance and domestic labor “civilizes” nationally/ethnically identified children. Demographic calculations (how many children – and abortions – do women have?) codify a national identity that is born of women. When the strength of the nation-state is measured in terms of fecundity, as it is when demographics are reduced to fertility rates, a fertile *Ellas* (Greece) can be represented by – as it depends on – the fertile *ellinidha*, Greek woman. And when women are made responsible for reproductive practices, they are often held personally accountable for all accidents, errors, and failures to meet rational ideals (Tsing 1990; Gal and Kligman 2000). The demographic condition of a nation-state can be thus viewed, mistakenly, as the country’s “woman problem” – the problem of a “barren state.”

Conclusion: Rethinking “Barren” States and Population “Implosions”

Applying to Greece the notion of a “barren state,” as journalists and nationalist politicians have done, is triply problematic. First, it overestimates the power of personal desire or choice in effecting behavior. Second, it feminizes reproductive responsibility and naturalizes women’s maternal citizenship. Third, it reduces demographics to reproduction – skirting the xenophobia underlying migration issues. Greek Parliament members, nearly 95 percent of whom are men, overemphasize the centrality of women to reproductive practices in holding women’s attitudes ultimately accountable for reproductive outcome, to the neglect of economic constraints, lack of childcare provisions, and the role of men (e.g. Gabriel, Chapter

4 in this volume). Moreover, the notion of a “barren state” as applied to Greece obscures a continuing and real maternalism that lays claim to even the most modern of women’s desires and sense of womanhood, and it obfuscates the racial economy of demographics.

It is similarly instructive to question, as does Elizabeth L. Krause (Chapter 8 in this volume), the semantics of “population implosion.” Implosion is an interesting metaphor, suggesting forces leading to a “violent compression” or “a collapse inward as if from external pressure.” What might such forces be? Greek authors of the parliamentary demographic report suggest cultural forces, including a non-rational tradition that keeps women having abortions as well as a modernity that directs women away from producing large families. But it is precisely such a view, what Susan Greenhalgh (1995: 7) refers to as an “ideational” account of demographic forces, that overlooks the class, gender and ethnic formations that shape everyday experience. When we look at *these* forces there is no self-evident implosion. Take class: implosion exists only when reproduction is figured as a means of production, while Athenians themselves view it in terms of consumption. Gender: implosion, based on a quantitative view of Greek maternalism harnessed to pronatalism, exists only when motherhood is viewed as an exclusive identity (the idea that once a woman becomes a mother she may as well have several children), rather than as a personal achievement attained alongside other goals, and one reached with the birth of just one child. Race/ethnic nationalism: population implosion exists only when one imagines the reproduction – *replacement* in demographic argot – of a discrete kind of person.

To speak of implosion, then, is to entertain an ahistorical view of family, motherhood, and reproduction. It is a view that neglects a key feature of reproduction: as Marilyn Strathern writes, “the ideas that reproduce themselves in our communications *never reproduce themselves exactly*. They are always found in environments or contexts that have their own properties or characteristics” (Strathern 1992: 6, emphasis in original). And, as Kath Weston (2002) argues in *Gender in Real Time*, constructions of femininity and masculinity transform over time in response to these environments: one generation’s view of womanhood and motherhood is not the same as another’s. The implosion metaphor ignores the forward motion of time, leaning instead on a vision of reversed time, or what Athanasia Athanasiou (1999) calls “timeless time.” At stake are meanings of womanhood, motherhood, Greekness. If dominant demographic discourse is ahistorical, everyday Athenian conversations are often explicitly historical. Middle-class urban Greeks elucidate both change and continuity between past and present, blurring distinctions between tradition and modernity, in narrating for themselves – and for their nation – considered, virtuous reproductive histories.

While calls to attend to the nation’s underfertility have not significantly affected Athenians’ reproductive behavior, they *have* pressed women to explain to others

if not also to themselves, why they have fewer children than they might like. Alarmist cries over Greece's "demographic problem" highlight women's self-consciousness about reproductive decision-making within socio-economic constraints. Middle-class women's sense that they must think hard about having children is significant because it at once *follows* the appropriately modern, rational model of the state-supported family planning imperative that couples should consciously prepare for children, yet *challenges* the assumption that this is simply a choice to be made, based on personal desire and/or appreciation of traditional values. These women's narratives call to mind Rayna Rapp's observation that the "individualism implied in the concept of choice" masks the "the structured situations over which individuals have very little control, but within which they regularly operate and compose their lives" (Rapp 1999: 226–227). By taking seriously these structured economic, social and cultural situations, well articulated by women I interviewed, I hope to convey an understanding of demographic conditions that begins from the complicated, relational and historically meaningful lives of people – parents, grandparents, aspiring parents, the happily childfree – rather than rationalized members of populations.

Acknowledgment

Many thanks to Carrie B. Douglass, Gail Kligman and Stefan Helmreich for their helpful suggestions regarding this chapter's organization and revision.

References

- Allen, B. (1996), *Rape Warfare: The Hidden Genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Anderson, B. (2000), *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*, London: Zed Books.
- Anthias, F. and Yuval-Davis, N. (eds) (1989), *Woman-Nation-State*, New York: St Martin's Press.
- (1992), *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle*, London: Routledge.
- Athanasiou, A. (1999), "Crafting Timeless Time: The Quest for Future in Constructions of Demographic Dystopias," paper presented at the 98th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Chicago, IL.
- Bagavos, C. (2001), "The Situation of Families in Greece, 2001," prepared for the European Observatory on the Social Situation, Demography and Family of the European Union, European Communities, 1995–2001.
- Collier, J. (1997), *From Duty to Desire: Remaking Families in a Spanish Village*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Council of Europe (2001), *Demographic Yearbook, 2001*, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Dubisch, J. (1993), "'Foreign Chickens' and Other Outsiders: Gender and Community in Greece," *American Ethnologist*, 20(2): 272–87.
- du Boulay, J. (1974), *Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Emke-Pouloupoulou, I. (1994), *To dhimoghrafikó* [Demographics], Athina: Ellin. Evropaikó Forum Aristerón Feministríon (Ellinikó Tmíma) [European Forum of Left Feminists, Greek Chapter] (1993), "Dhimoghrafikó: I yinēkes ke páli énohes [Demographics: women are again to blame]," *Eleftherotipía*, December 12: 44.
- Gal, S. and Kligman, G. (2000), *The Politics of Gender after Socialism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Greenhalgh, S. (1995), "Anthropology Theorizes Reproduction: Integrating Practice, Political Economic, and Feminist Perspectives," in S. Greenhalgh (ed.), *Situating Fertility: Anthropology and Demographic Inquiry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Halkias, A. (1998), "Give Birth for Greece! Abortion and Nation in Letters to the Editor of the Mainstream Greek Press," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 16(1): 111–138.
- Herzfeld, M. (1985), *The Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- (1992), *The Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Just, R. (1989), "Triumph of the Ethnos," in E. Tonkin, M. Capman and M. McDonald (eds), *History and Ethnicity*, London: Routledge.
- Kanaaneh, R. (2002), *Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Kligman, G. (1998), *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Krause, E.L. (2001), "'Empty Cradles' and the Quiet Revolution: Demographic Discourse and Cultural Struggles of Gender, Race, and Class in Italy," *Cultural Anthropology*, 16(4): 576–611.
- Krengel, M. and Greifeld, K. (2000), "Uzbekistan in Transition – Changing Concepts in Family Planning and Reproductive Health," in A. Russell, E.J. Sobo and M.S. Thompson (eds), *Contraception across Cultures: Technologies, Choices, Constraints*, Oxford: Berg.
- Lazaridis, G. (2000), "Filipino and Albanian Women Migrant Workers in Greece: Multiple Layers of Oppression," in F. Anthias and G. Lazaridis (eds), *Gender and Migration in Southern Europe: Women on the Move*, Oxford: Berg.
- Margaritidou, V. and Mesteneos, E. (1992), "The Family Planning Centers in

- Greece," *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 3(1): 25-31.
- Mostov, J. (1995), "'Our Women'/'Their Women': Symbolic Boundaries, Territorial Murders and Violence in the Balkans," *Peace and Change*, 20(4): 515-529.
- National Statistical Service of Greece (NSSG) (1992), *Statistical Yearbook of Greece, 1989*, Athens: NSSG.
- (2002), *Greece in Figures, 2002*, Athens: NSSG.
- Omi, M. and Winant, H. (1994), *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd edn, New York: Routledge.
- Panourgia, N. (1995), *Fragments of Death, Fables of Identity: an Athenian Anthropography*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Papadopoulos, T.N. (1998), "Greek Family Policy from a Comparative Perspective," in E. Drew, R. Emerek and E. Mahon (eds), *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*, London: Routledge.
- Parliament of Greece (1993), *Pórisma, Yia ti Meléti tou Dhimoghrafikou Provlímatis tis Hóras ke Dhiatíposi Protáseon yia tin Apotelesmatiki Antimetopisi tou* [Findings, for the Study of the Demographic Problem of the Country and the Formulation of Recommendations for its Effective Confrontation], Athens: Parliament of Greece.
- Paxson, H. (1997), "Demographics and Diaspora, Gender and Genealogy: Anthropological Notes on Greek Population Policy," *South European Society and Politics*, 2(2): 34-56.
- (2004), *Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and Family Planning in Urban Greece*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Rapp, R. (1999), *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus: The Social Impact of Amniocentesis in America*, New York: Routledge.
- Schneider, J. and Schneider, P. (1995), "Coitus Interruptus and Family Respectability in Catholic Europe," in F. Ginsburg and R. Rapp (eds), *Conceiving the New World Order: The Global Politics of Reproduction*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Seremetakis, N. (1991), *The Last Word: Women, Death, and Divination in Inner Mani*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- (1996), "In Search of the Barbarians: Borders in Pain," *American Anthropologist*, 98(3): 487-511.
- Stivens, M. (1998), "Modernizing the Malay Mother," in K. Ram and M. Jolly (eds), *Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and Postcolonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strathern, M. (1992), *Reproducing the Future: Anthropology, Kinship, and the New Reproductive Technologies*, New York: Routledge.
- Symeonidou, H. (1990), *Apaskhólisi ke ghonimótita ton yinekón stin periohi tis protévousas* [Occupation and fertility of women in greater Athens], Athens:

- Ethnikó Kéndro Kinonikón Erevnón.
- Tsing, A.L. (1990), "Monster Stories," in A. Tsing and F. Ginsburg (eds), *Uncertain Terms: Negotiating Gender in America*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Vaiou, D. (1992), "Gender Divisions in Urban Space: Beyond the Rigidity of Dualist Classifications," *Antipode*, 24(4): 247-62.
- Valaoras, V. and Trichopoulos, D. (1970), "Abortion in Greece," in R.E. Hall (ed.), *Abortion in a Changing World*, vol. 1, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Weston, K. (2002), *Gender in Real Time: Power and Transience in a Visual Age*, New York: Routledge.