

Procreation Metaphors in Rural Cyprus and Greece

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with the assistance of

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Abstract

Some social scientists have been tempted to make wide ranging comparisons of whole societies, or cultures, using key metaphors as the units of comparison. Carol Delaney in her monograph on a Turkish village and subsequent wide-ranging paper suggested that concepts of bio-social procreation could be generative of wider and deeper cosmological, theological and gender ideas, for the Abrahamic religions. This idea was 'tested' using data from older people in Greek Cypriot villages and in Greece who had been less exposed to medical and bio-scientific discourses during

* This paper was originally written with the assistance of the individuals mentioned. In the process of preparing it for publication in 2013, Marios Sarris and Dimitris Theodossopoulos were contacted for further assistance. In addition, Nicos Philippou, Patrick Heady and Venetia Kantsa were also consulted, while Olga Demetriou was involved in the editing. In an effort to remain as faithful as possible to the original, substantial additions made for the purposes of clarification and updates to data have been marked out as asterisked editor's notes. All numbered notes are Peter Loizos' own. The paper reached *The Cyprus Review* with a note that it was initially presented at a conference in Harvard University in 1994. Part of Peter's plans were also to link procreation theories to nationalist thinking in a later article. In fact, in 1996 he organised a conference at LSE on the subject of procreation metaphors – in which the focus was partly on Delaney's thesis, and partly on the broader themes raised in this paper (with a correspondingly wide geographical coverage). Many of the contributions were published in the volume *Conceiving Persons* (Loizos and Heady, 1999) to which Peter Loizos contributed a joint introduction. However, he did not include his own paper in that volume.

Gill Shepherd comments that:

'The topic of procreation imagery was one Peter and I discussed a great deal, during and after the preparation of *Conceiving Persons*. It is hardly surprising that where agriculture is the main activity, imagery for human fertility follows that for crops. However, as Goody (1983) pointed out long ago, women's status in gender relations is often actually a reflection of their role in production. So women enjoy some autonomy where their labour is vital in agriculture (e.g. Africa where they do nearly all of it). However, where men and animals (or machines) do the agriculture, in plough societies throughout Europe and much of Asia, the status of women is low. (They are merely the field, waiting for the sower).

We hypothesized that in pastoral areas such as those of the Middle East and Sahel, procreation imagery, by contrast, ought to be drawn from understandings of animal-breeding, and the contribution to "good stock" of both male and female animals. Direct evidence was hard to find. However, the Koran makes frequent mention of the contribution of both man and woman to the creation of a baby, and many Middle Eastern societies place great stress on the making of endogamous marriages as a way of retaining valued assets within a tight group to which both mother and father belong.

In short, imagery about reproduction is usually drawn from the perceived realities of production.'

higher education. The findings were both suggestive, of similarities, but also did not support Delaney's wider and wilder imaginative constructions. This paper suggests we need to work closer to specific regions and identifiable social cohorts, and that we need to pay more attention to successive folkloric texts, rather than theology to understand these issues empirically.

Keywords: Carol Delaney, key metaphors, procreation beliefs, Geertz

This paper has the aim of exploring some Greek Cypriot and Greek data on concepts of procreation, in order that this interesting field starts to be flagged on the Greek ethnographic map. This has been stimulated by reading a particular study from Turkey. Later, a second aim will be introduced, in terms of the strategic levels of social thought and social practise at which it might be profitable to explore commonalities and differences between the two nation states.

Anthropologists have for a long time paid systematic attention to procreation theories because of the way they link up with other ideas about cosmos and the gendered person. There was a debate at the turn of the century, which was carried on with renewed energy in the sixties by Leach (1969) and Spiro (1968) as to whether there were peoples 'ignorant of physiological paternity'? It seemed that there were such peoples, and some denied the power of maternity, too. This debate opened up questions about how far thinking about the extent to which these biological processes are embedded in cultural assumptions. It directed us to a careful consideration of social contexts of discourses, and problems of interpretation. Which statements were intended as religious dogmas and which as descriptive facts? How could we tell what was intended at any particular time?

Evans-Pritchard's classic paper on Azande procreation ideas did not raise explicitly issues about the distribution of knowledge, because he had already made a great deal of this in his book on Azande witchcraft. His procreation beliefs paper was a model of ethnographic detail, and other Oxford trained scholars such as Ott (1979), and Pina-Cabral (1986) have followed his lead. Later, Aijmer (1992) and MacCormack (1982, 1994) produced valuable comparative collections. However, ethnographers of Greece have said little on the topic. Greek folklorists and gynaecologists have collected suggestive data, and anthropological research by Venetia Kantsa* is in train in Athens on the new reproductive technologies and their implications.

If we look back some fifty years in Greece and Cyprus before rates of both infant mortality and completed family started to fall dramatically (McNeill, 1978, p. 237) we can readily appreciate that social continuity normally involved the desire to produce healthy children in sufficient numbers both to ensure a degree of comfort in old age, and to see one's self and one's substance (blood, name, *soi* [lineage]) continued into the future, both physically and symbolically. The

* Peter Loizos was Venetia Kantsa's supervisor at LSE and was aware of her new research on reproduction technologies. Dr Kantsa confirms that Peter Loizos participated in a workshop organised by her at the Department of Social Anthropology and History in May 2008 under the title 'Motherhood at the Forefront: Recent Research in Greek Ethnography'. For more information see Kantsa, 2011 and 2013.

processes of human reproduction were accompanied by a good deal of uncertainty and anxiety. Some families failed to produce any children; some had girls, only; some had a few sickly children who died before themselves reproducing, or, worse still, died prematurely after having reproduced, but leaving their dependants poorly provided for.¹

Turkish Procreation Theory, from Delaney's Village

My original impetus for this paper came from the way some fragments of my own field data were illuminated by some material drawn from Carol Delaney's book *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Society*. The fundamental ideas for this book were also set out in a paper in *Man*, 1986. Delaney noted, as had other ethnographers in Turkey, that when talking about the way a child is produced, people used a metaphor, or analogy, of the seed and the soil. The man, the producer of semen, could be understood to sow his seed in the woman, who is likened to a field. The Turkish word *döl* means seed, foetus, and child. But the verb *döllemek* does not mean to fertilise the ovum, it means, to put the seed in the seedbed. Delaney insisted that her villagers did not know much about the ovum and genetic theory.

Delaney extends her argument in several directions, but the essence is that in the views of the village men, the child's future development and character is contained in and determined by a single drop of semen. The woman is no more than a nutrient medium. 'The creative, life-giving ability of men is felt to be godlike', Delaney argues. As God is to man, (creator, rule-maker) so man is to woman. A whole paradigm of patriarchal gender relations is thus derived from this metaphor, and others associated with it: 'It is not just a theory of procreation, but a fundamental principle of the universe' (1991, p. 35). Delaney explains, convincingly to my mind, the emphasis on virginity in this kind of patrilineal society in terms of the desire of a man to be sure that his wife is bearing his seed, and no-one else's. 'A woman's value in Turkish society depends ... on her ability to guarantee the legitimacy of a man's seed' (1991, p. 40). One is tempted to say that it must depend on many other things, too, but Delaney's style of argument is full of such reductionist flourishes.

The local word for abortion or miscarriage is *düşük*, from *düşmek*, to fall. That is not obviously consistent with the agrarian seed-and-soil metaphor, and is perhaps suggestive of unripe fruit falling from a tree, but Delaney makes nothing of this. In Cyprus, *pephto* [to fall] is used in a similar way – men describing to me their wives' miscarriages would say '*epesen tis ena*' [one fell from her]. When an abortion is referred to, the verb *richno*, to throw, is used, as in '*cripsen enani*' [she threw one]. Only God knows what sex a child will be, and all over Turkey there are divinatory rituals to find this out. In Delaney's village there is the belief that if the child in the womb is positioned to the right hand side, it is likely to be a male. In some parts of Turkey it is believed that

1 From my own fieldwork, I can recall a woman from a wealthy family who was pregnant thirteen times, but produced only one child. In another family, tuberculosis killed four siblings each in their twenties, and ate up the family land in the process.

white foods like milk, yoghurt, and rice are likely to make a woman have a girl, but if the mother ate meat, tomato paste, and fried foods, (red foods) the child would be male.

After a birth a woman is dangerously and intensely 'open', and her blood is dangerously polluting to her husband. This lasts for 40 days after the birth. This sounds somewhat similar to Greek beliefs about the *lechona* (Cypriot, *lechousa*) (du Boulay, 1984). Indeed, Delaney's informants used the word *lohusa*, which sounds Greek in origin. The period of vulnerability is the same as that among Greeks, and the Greek idea of vulnerability is also expressed in the term *anikti*, open. And as in Greece, an immoral woman is one who is open, (Turkish: *açık*) Delaney suggests that the sense is of a woman who is not covered, owned, protected, by a man. She sees this as a metaphor from the difference between an enclosed, owned field, and a piece of open land, which is there for the taking. The word *soy* in Turkish is a descent notion, meaning family, race, lineage, and ancestors. A similar word, *soi* is used both among the Sarakatsani of Epirus (see Campbell, 1964), and Greek Cypriots of the Morphou region. It is widespread in both Greece and Cyprus and it appears in standard Greek dictionaries.

There are numerous other major and minor similarities to elements of the ethnography of Greece and Cyprus in the core gender ideas Delaney reports. For example, her villagers have the same negative attitude to an in-marrying husband as is reported widely in Greece. It is certainly the case in Zakynthos (Theodossopoulos, 2003), and in Argaki, Cyprus (Loizos, 1975) (in some other Greek islands, like Lesbos, the majority of husbands have 'married in' at least at the level of neighbourhood, and often, of village). Another similarity is the great importance of sons as a seed-line, and there is the general feeling that people without children are incomplete. (Such a view extends, of course, far beyond Greece and Turkey). And there is a way of talking about agreeing a marriage, *söz kesmek*, to cut words, rather like *ekopsamen kouventa*, and *edokamen logon* similar Greek phrases for the same event.²

Now, Delaney is not content with developing an argument about gender ideas at the village level. She allows the seed: soil metaphor to take her far and wide, both through Islam and Christianity as male-favouring religions, and to the Turkish state, with its tendency to one-party Weberian patrimonialism, and strong government.* Delaney has been criticised by scholars of Turkey in various ways. One way, most important for my later analysis is the argument that Turkey is ethnologically heterogeneous, and that it is methodologically unsafe to take data from a single

2 Moving away from gender, to an issue of great general regional interest the attitude to bread is quasi-mystical. It is, as in Greece, a nearly holy-substance. And the word for yeast is *mayia* (which etymologically alludes to magic), the same word as in Cypriot Greek.

* Peter Loizos includes at this point a comment on politics in Turkey at that moment, which may now seem outdated, yet is indicative of the paper he had planned to write (see editor's note on first page). He had said: 'Mrs Ciller was elected after the book was published, and her continuing difficulties could be said to support Delaney's view rather than contradict it. In ways I cannot fully understand, the tension between Kemal's secularism and Islamic radicalism is also related back to this root metaphor. I shall not take up these issues in this paper, but in a later one.'

village and project it onto the whole of the Turkish state and society. Many of us would be sympathetic to such reservations. To use a free-floating structuralist analysis may be plausible when dealing with a few hundred or a few thousand closely related people, living within a compact area, and not differentiated by literacy, and other related features, but the method is a problematic one for an understanding of a country the size of Greece or Turkey. Having been at some pains to spell out patterns of regional variation in Greece and Cyprus on matters of kinship-and-gender, (Loizos and Papataxiarchis, 1991) and having regard to much more detailed and highly scholarly attempts to spell out Greek island variations (Syvilla Dimitriou, 1988) I think there are grounds for dissent from Delaney's willingness to move so confidently from a single village to Turkish state and society.

Delaney's wide ranging outreach is not supported by equally wide-ranging local ethnography, for while telling us that the villagers rely for half their sustenance on livestock rearing, animals raised on common pastureland, she tells us nothing about core ideas, still less on the metaphors relating to animal fertility. She allows agriculture, and the individually owned field to tell the whole story. Since livestock, according to Richard Tapper, are very often given matrilineal kinship attributes by their owners, precisely, he proposes, in contrast to human beings, there were issues to be discussed here, at very least. Delaney, then, privileges a single set of metaphors in an area where there is reason to believe that other metaphors, with rather different implications, may play an interesting role.

Some Greek Procreation Ideas

The work I shall report on below has been carried out by three Greek and Greek Cypriot anthropologists at my request. My initial fieldwork (1968) was in Argaki village, Cyprus, a mixed village with a numerous Greek population and a small Turkish population; I tried among other things, to understand the formally bilateral kinship system of the Greeks³ which seemed to give both parents equally important roles in creating the child, and in giving it social legitimacy.

But there was a 'male bias' which seemed slightly at odds with bilaterality, as Herzfeld has argued against Campbell (Herzfeld, 1983). Greek Cypriot men said to me a number of times: 'Look, it's this way: the woman is like a field. The man sows his seed (*sporos*) in the woman, and what he sows, he gets later. If you sow barley, you get barley, you don't get something else. The child takes after the father'. The men were usually smiling when saying such things. It was not, it seemed, a heavy-duty official statement, of the kind which men made when they told me that Argaki was a village where no-one seduced, or even commented on the attractiveness of the wives or daughters of other men. To say these things they spoke with measured seriousness, solemnly, without smiles.

3 I have given my reasons for not having conducted intensive field research among the Turkish Cypriots in Argaki, in Loizos 1975: Appendix Two, 'The Turks of Kalo', pp. 304–306. Further background both on the Turkish minority, and on the tenseness of intercommunal relations in Cyprus at the time of my initial fieldwork are given in Loizos, 1981 and 1988.

And Greek Cypriot men used the same serious tone in other villages, when I was introduced as half-English, half-Cypriot. 'Which parent is from Cyprus?' they invariably asked. When I replied that my father was born there, they tended to say '*O sporos itan Ellinikos*' or '*O sporos einai Kyprios*' [The seed is Greek-Cypriot]. What did this really mean?

When I later, and separately, asked kinswomen to comment on the seed-field analogy, they laughed, and said 'That's the sort of thing the men say. But who really does most for the child – the man who takes his pleasure in a few moments, or the woman who carries the child inside her for nine months, and who nourishes the child with what she has inside her, and later with her breasts?' The women's laughter seems important, and I cannot resist pointing out that women are not reported to laugh over such issues by Delaney.

Further support for a half-serious male view of the primacy of paternity came when my father visited the village. People commented on our physical likeness, whereupon my father put an arm around my shoulder and said (somewhat to my discomfort) '*Dhen m'eyelase i mana tou*' [his mother did not deceive me (with another man, understood)]. Finally, there were cases of infertile couples where in my hearing an old man said loudly and angrily 'My wife is no use' but her young male and female relatives took me aside and said, in whispers 'It is **not** her fault – they both had medical tests, and it is he who has the problem. His seed ...'.

So, here, among men and women in their forties, in 1968, was a half-serious, half-humorous, and clearly, contested account of something. As these men and women had recourse to doctors, and the women gave birth in hospitals, and had been to secondary school, they were even then somewhat removed from Delaney's more 'traditional' informants. I did not then pursue these issues with older men and women. But on reading Delaney and thinking about other people's procreation theories (e.g. the Azande, the French Basques, the Sudanic Uduk, the Trobrianders, and the inhabitants of Karpathos, the Greek island studied by Vernier) I began to wonder how much more there was behind these chance remarks. Inquiries were conducted in 1993 in villages near Limassol, among elderly men and women by Marios Sarris and Egli Pittaka, and in Zakynthos and Alonnesos, by Dimitris Theodossopoulos.⁴

First and foremost, children are the gift of God, and arrive as male or female, strong or weak, many or few according to God's will. That, from our point of view, is the vital initiating cause. But once that divine encompassment has been stated, it becomes possible to talk of human agencies. Women blamed men for having more children than they could support, and they knew that *coitus interruptus* would prevent pregnancy. They also knew that both men and women could have fertility problems. Men responded to initial questions on this issue by saying 'It is the woman who is at fault', and only then subsequently allowing the possibility of men having a problem more

4 In 1993, Sarris and Theodossopoulos were writing their PhD theses at the London School of Economics. Ms Pittaka was working towards her PhD at the University of New Mexico under the supervision of Prof Jill Dubisch. The material described below was paid for by research grants to me from the London School of Economics. We acknowledge this support gratefully.

rarely. But women said 'Sometimes the woman is at fault, sometimes the man'. The woman's problem was usually described as 'a closed womb', and the man's problem as 'weak seed'. A recent discussion of male and female infertility rates in the industrial world suggested that women have roughly 70% of the standard fertility problems, and men 30%, but that would not explain the 'male bias' in the Cypriot data – the readiness of men to stigmatise women as being 'at fault'.⁵

According to the same procreation theory, semen (*sporos*, seed) originates in an area known as *ta nephra*, [Cypriot: *nevfra*] literally, the kidneys, but including the lower and middle back, and perhaps being synonymous with the bones. One Cypriot man explained that semen came down the backbone to reach the genitals, but most informants were rather vaguer than this.⁶ Men could strain this area by having too much sex, or perhaps, immoral sex. Some informants produced the seed/field metaphor but it seems more likely to be produced by male than female informants. And there is a notable spread or scattering of metaphors – they are a mixed set, and not a single, unified master-metaphor: One Greek Cypriot woman remarked that 'a woman is like the tree, which you must hoe and give sustenance and then it bears fruit'. On being asked what she meant, did she mean a woman was cultivated and so fertilised, she replied 'Certainly – the man cultivates her with his thing and fertilizes her with his seed'. Another woman said a woman is like a hen which lays an egg. A third said that a woman is like a potato because a man plants it and cultivates it in a field. Women would also say that a woman gives birth as a goat does, but made no other analogies between women and goats, and explicitly did not relate them in terms of sexuality (Cf Campbell, 1964).

Women see men as agents who get them with child, from a single act of intercourse. The man 'makes' the child, but the woman nourishes it with her blood and juices, and the food she eats. The man may get the woman pregnant, but the woman 'gives birth' [*yennaeri*]. These two processes, then, are equated by women as complementary acts, but whereas the man's act involves a brief moment of pleasure, the woman carries the child for many months, and gives birth slowly, with pain. Whereas the man might suffer strain during the sexual act, a woman might strain *ta nephra tis* in the act of birth. So, the complementarity is asymmetrical.

A drunken man is likely to create a child with problems. But an even stronger likelihood of damage to the child would come if a man had intercourse with his wife while she was menstruating. That is sinful, polluting and dangerous. Some men in Cyprus said you should not have sex or plant crops at certain phases of the moon [Cypriot: *lypsi phengoma*, when the moon

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- 5 This readiness to blame is also noticeable when Greek Cypriots discuss the once rare, now more commonplace issue of marital separation. The first question on hearing of a separation is *poios pftaeti?* – who is to blame? The Turkish Cypriot psychiatrist and author Vamik Volkan assures me that when Turkish Cypriots hear of separation or divorce they immediately ask, in Turkish, the identical question. We should keep in mind this zero-sum attitude to disharmony when thinking about the Cyprus problem. Why is it so hard to think of blame as shared?
- 6 Marios Sarris, who collected this information, thinks there may be some connection in the classic Greek words for (bone) marrow (*myelos*), and the word for mind [*myalo*].

is waning]. And one woman cautioned against getting injured at this time, because one would not heal properly.

So, in summarising: We can see some similarities but also marked differences from Delaney's material. The seed/field metaphor is sometimes present, but it does not seem to have the same dominance and centrality as Delaney (1991) argues based on her fieldwork in the Turkish village – there is a scattering of useful metaphors. There is a greater sense of a gendered division of labour, between two members of the same human species [both have *ta nephra* as sites of procreation, for a start], species which are biologically somewhat different, whereas it is possible to get a sense, reading Delaney, of women as much more radically 'other' in the view of village men, **almost** a different kind of being.

It is interesting to note certain differences between Cyprus, and the island of Zakynthos, where Theodossopoulos (2003) carried out research on the human environmental relationship. The Zakynthians will also use the seed/field analogy at times, but Theodossopoulos, who was accompanied in his research by his partner and their infant son, said that the islanders used a phrase with several senses. They repeatedly said *oti speireis, tha theriseis*, that which you sow, you will reap, which can be interpreted to fit with the notion of seed producing its own likeness, but also can imply 'You have intercourse, and a child is the result'. And he suggests there is a third meaning implied, 'When you get a child, you get the responsibility for bringing it up'.

The Zakynthians yielded several other insights. One high-status visitor to the island was heard to say 'My wife is sterile – she has borne only two girls'. To which his male Zakynthos friend replied 'No – she isn't sterile – she produced what you planted in her'. This seems at first sight to add weight to the Delaney doctrine of the primacy of the male seed, but with the fascinating twist, apparently not appreciated by Delaney, that the man and not his wife becomes responsible for a lack of sons. (I have been told by a Cypriot doctor many years ago, a man whose wife produced only girls might be angry with her and beat her). Delaney seems not to have seen the implications of male seed producing only girls. It seems to me this is an important possibility which might have given many a Turkish woman a counter-argument to use with a frustrated husband, whether or not she would actually have dared argue it out with him.

The Cypriot Greeks interviewed seem to have very few ideas about factors which might influence the sex of a child. Indeed, one woman said to Ms Pittaka, 'It isn't like rolling out dough, and making what you like with it'. And one Alonnessos woman said, sceptically, about herbs which were said to determine the gender of the foetus 'If these things were true, I would not have had six girls!' But on Zakynthos, there were all kinds of ideas. The moon could play a part. The waxing moon at the time of labour [rather than insemination] would lead to males, and the waning moon to females. Sometimes, a woman may secrete so much vaginal fluid that it 'drowns' the sperm which would produce males. (In fact, modern medicine can identify a condition in which vaginal mucus can impede the entry of the sperm to the neck of the womb). And after intercourse, a woman should turn to her right side if she wants a boy, a triumphant vindication of Durkheim and Mauss.

On Metaphors

Where, if anywhere, has this got us? Bourdieu, with his notions of *habitus* and *doxa* suggested that many important things in cultural life are lived and practised without much formal conceptual elaboration, and form complexes of assumptions which are rarely expressed in words, and certainly not in coherent and elaborated forms. What are the implications for our appreciation of striking procreation metaphors?

At first sight some procreation beliefs look like important Geertzian 'root metaphors', and might be thought to imply attractive possibilities for rock-bottom understandings, even across major differences of culture. So, to read Delaney, and to recall the 'seed-and-field' talk of one's male informants immediately raises interesting possibilities. It seems to add to the list of grounds for Greco-Turkish mutuality. Let me sketch a hypothetical argument: Greeks and Turks may both understand fundamental issues of the creation of life and the person in similar ways. Perhaps their views of the nation are very similar,* and perhaps they are in some way derived from these more primary views about birth, the person, identity, blood, seed, and the core kinship group. But is this satisfactory? I am sceptical on several grounds.

1. First, I think the notion of root metaphors is seductive but probably finally unhelpful. People in complex multi-ethnic societies, with elite literate and folk traditions intertwined, do not have their lives organised for them by a few major metaphors, no matter how resonant, unless these are organised for them from above by an authoritarian state. When they do 'follow', metaphors very literally it often causes terrible trouble for someone, as in the metaphor of 'ethnic cleansing', because many metaphors are shorthand, encapsulated ways of saying things people are unsure about, and unable or unwilling to say more descriptively and explicitly. That tiny drop of semen which supposedly predicts the future development and nature of a child is also, when viewed more analytically, a man's point of vulnerability, for if his wife does not produce a son, logic would point to an undermining of male status claims, and a critical view of the all-powerful, all creative male. Delaney has little to say about the possibility of critical thinking by her subordinated women informants.
2. Until the impact of bio-medical science, human beings have often had few certainties and many uncertainties about the way human procreation works (Barnes, 1973). It has been a chancy, unpredictable affair, causing much pain and difficulty for the unfortunate. With the incidence of infertility running (until recently) at the rate of about 10% of all couples, and with the possibility of a run of girls-only, the peoples of Greece, Turkey and Cyprus would have had much to worry about. The frequent remark that all such matters were ultimately in the hands of God, common to both Christians and Muslims, can be read both as a statement of faith, and a statement of the complete unpredictability of the outcomes. (Think how many

* See, for example recent work by Theodossopoulos (2007).

tones of voice can be used to say something is in the hands of God!)

In a sense, then, the metaphors people have used to talk about procreation have been inventive, poetic ways of talking about areas of very great importance, where facts and security are in short supply. If we think yet once more about the seed and the field, we can see that the statements that if you plant barley, the field gives you barley, immediately lay themselves open to challenge. For, as every peasant knows, agriculture is nothing if not *unpredictable*. If the man sows his seed, and the woman is as a field, there are still other unknowns that are not inconsistent with the basic metaphor: Too much rain or a lack of rain; disease attacking a crop, and so on.

3. The problem of *causal models*. It has long been noted by Geertz and others that people seem to operate on at least two levels – a level of ‘common sense perspectives’ and a level of ‘religious perspectives’ (Geertz, 1973, Chapter 4, ‘Religion as a Cultural System’; see also, Bloch*, 1977). Other anthropologists, such as Bourdieu and Sahlins, have rejected this kind of ‘separation’ since it implies practical actions which are somehow ‘culture free’. Instead, they suggest that cultural thinking always complicates and encompasses all technical processes, and perceptions of biological processes. This puts all cultural action within any particular culture on an equal footing. If analysts wish to make such separations, in the name of analytic clarity, they are free to continue to do so, but particular cultures in terms of what we could call cultural phenomenology, may treat as a single system, matters which seem to straddle the practical/religious divide. This question has not been exhausted in Greek ethnography – Charles Stewart (1991) just recently re-opened it, and has taken a firmly unitarist view.

Delaney’s account of villagers’ views of cause is no more sophisticated than the accounts in most classical Greek ethnographies and very much less subtle than the work of Stewart (1991) or du Boulay (1974). But if we step back from the later ethnographies, we still do not know what sorts of causal models villagers in Greece or Turkey have used for explaining most of the agricultural tasks they performed, the relationship of soil, weather, fertiliser, temperature, to agriculture; the step-by-step experimental nature of cheese-making, brick-making, and a dozen other ‘practical’ activities. We do not know if their views of cause were as developed as the sophistication of their plant and animal breeding knowledge might lead us to believe. So, having only relatively thin descriptions of their views about instrumental productive procedures, we are not yet well placed to assess how they viewed the metaphors they used to discuss the mysteries of human reproduction. We need an entirely different ethnography here, which starts from the perceiving actor, and works outwards by separating out his and her modes of thinking, and contexts for particular styles of

* This bracketing together of Geertz and Bloch is rather unusual. Although (as Peter Loizos writes) Geertz does distinguish between ‘religious’ and ‘common sense’ perspectives, he also stresses the importance of the former for practical action. Bloch argues that, in effect, Geertz allows the ‘religious’ perspective to over-ride the ‘common sense’ viewpoint. See Gell (1992) chapters 8 and 9 for a discussion of Bloch and Geertz which is consistent with Peter Loizos’ view.

explaining, classifying, and analysing the material and social worlds. The most subtle published work known to me in this respect has been done by Juliet du Boulay in her discussions of the notion of *blood* in Greek kinship, and in her work on gender, nature and the cosmos (du Boulay, 1984, 1991) and by Pina-Cabral (1986) in North Portugal.

The suggestion that in some way the ethnography of the rural Mediterranean in general, and Greece in particular has been mined to exhaustion can only be viewed as eccentric, given how much more there is to understand about recent modes of conceptualisation. Prior to the gradual impact of modern science and medicine, delivered to villages by schools, the market and professional services, it is clear that rural people had their own ways of thinking about such profoundly important matters as how human beings are reproduced. In the formal ethnography of Greece, we have only recently made a start on these issues, and there is still much to be done. Much greater recourse will have to be made to written sources. Perhaps some changes in field research and writing up are also needed, in which the hesitations, the ranges of opinion, the styles of questioning, and the conversations, and even the gestures, and facial expressions which pass between researchers and informants are more fully reported and contextualised. Matters which have been made the subjects of coherent consensus in earlier monographs may need to be re-examined more thoughtfully.

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