Love in a Changing Greek Climate, and Other Essays

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By

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PREFACE

All of the essays in this volume were written and previously published between 1988 and 2008. All of the essays relate to the social anthropology of Greece. Most, but not all, of the essays are predominantly concerned with the tiny Ionian Island of Meganisi and the village of Spartokhori where, between April 1977 and April 1980, as a doctoral student at the (then) Institute of Social Anthropology, Oxford, I conducted a total of twenty months' fieldwork.

My research on Meganisi resulted in the very belated publication in 2000 of an ethnographic monograph, *A Greek Island Cosmos: kinship & community on Meganisi* (Oxford: James Currey, and Santa Fe: School of American Research Press), but the essays in this volume, most of which were published earlier, were scattered throughout a variety of journals and collected volumes not necessarily related to the anthropology of Greece, and where someone interested in that topic might have some difficulty in finding them. The publication of this present volume thus allows me to bring these essays together.

Nearly forty years have passed since my fieldwork on Meganisi. Greece has changed enormously over that time, and Meganisi almost beyond recognition. What was once an isolated rural enclave (albeit with connections throughout the world) has now become a tourist destination. I have taken the opportunity to tidy up some infelicities in the original essays, and I have sometimes changed the tense to the past when the present tense seemed blatantly inappropriate. On the whole, however, I have not attempted to "update" the essays in the light of the last forty years of history, or by taking account of more recently published scholarly material. To do so, would, I think, destroy whatever academic integrity these essays might have, and I am perfectly happy for them now to be read as historical pieces-the fate, after all, of all ethnographic writings.

Roger Just
Oxford, January 2018

CHAPTER ONE

LOVE IN A CHANGING GREEK CLIMATE: THE RISE OF ROMANCE IN A GREEK VILLAGE, 1977-80[1]

I start this essay with a half-hearted methodological apology, because what I really want to discuss an aspect of social (and cultural) change. But when anthropologists talk about social change they are often accused-and often accuse themselves-of contrasting the observable changes of the present with some notion of a static "traditional" past. That is not surprising, because their informants often talk in just that way: "In the old days we did this; now everything is changing and falling apart." The "system", the integrated social, cultural and moral order that could be grasped and presented as a whole, seems always to belong to some earlier and idealized way of life. The present, by contrast, seems always to be the time when that system is breaking down.

In my case, however, the changes I was observing took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s, forty years ago now. I think, therefore, that I might be spared the charge of presenting a static account of the past, for that is where my changes are now located. But in a sense the opposite problem obtains, for I suspect that any of my readers who are Greek, and certainly those who belong to a younger generation of Greeks, may wonder why I am talking about social change at all, since what I describe as change may now strike them as simply part and parcel of life "as it has always been". Forty years is after all quite a long time.

Let me go back to 1976, however, when I started fieldwork on Meganisi. I had dutifully read everything I could find in English on the ethnography of Greece (and Cyprus). It wasn't an onerous duty, because at that time there wasn't much written: Ernestine Friedl's account of a village in rural Viotia, *Vasilika* (1962); my supervisor John Campbell's study of the Sarakatsani (*Honour, Family, and Patronage*, 1964); his student Juliet

[1] First published in 2003 in *Kambos: Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* **11**, 83-100.

du Boulay's *Portrait of a Greek Mountain Village*, set in Evia (1974); Peter Loizos's *The Greek Gift: Politics in a Cypriot Village* (1975); and then Margaret Kenna's doctoral dissertation on the island of Anafi (then under the pseudonym of Nisi) (1971); Peter Allen's dissertation on a depopulated community in the Mani (1973); and a number of articles published in various anthropological journals, in collected volumes edited by John Peristiany (1965, 1968), and in a volume edited by Muriel Dimen and Ernestine Friedl (1976). Up to 1976, that was about it-although a number of other scholars who also did their fieldwork before or during 1976, notably Maria Couroucli (1985), Renée Hirschon (1989) and Michael Herzfeld (1985), subsequently published their findings.

Although the corpus was not huge, the dates of fieldwork spanned over twenty years, and ethnographic locations were scattered over Greece; but when it came to gender roles, to what might be called the division of moral labour between the sexes, and to the question of marriage, there was a remarkable consistency in reportage. As Juliet du Boulay (in a later article) reports her villagers to have remarked: "*Ta koritsia ine belas*" (girls are trouble) (1983: 245). And they were a trouble on two converging grounds. The first was economic, for young women had to be provided with dowries, which everyone complained about, but which everyone-fathers, brothers, and, when it came to providing the trousseau, mothers-also worked overtime to provide. As du Boulay argued, however, to explain the lamentation of daughters on purely economic grounds did not bear scrutiny. Setting up a son in life actually cost a great deal more than setting up a daughter, while many women married with small dowries, or even with no dowry at all-as Friedl reported for Vasilika, and as I found to have been the case on Meganisi, where people claimed that they had given "whatever we could". And given that both houses and land were reserved for sons, "whatever we could" had often turned out to be not much at all.

As du Boulay argues, it was not until the 1960s, with accelerating migration from the countryside to Athens and to other urban centres, that dowries began to spiral upwards, for urban migration meant that there was a shortage of eligible men in the village. In order to attract one, what often had then to be supplied was an urban residence. But whether dowries were large or small, it should still be pointed out that marriage entailed, and quite explicitly so, economic considerations; for parents, whether of daughters or sons, wished to ensure that their children had the best possible start in the world. And given that women were, as it were, the passive partners in marriage transactions, even if dowries were small, getting one's daughters married in a manner that would assure their future material well-being was a major parental concern. In this respect the

situation was not far removed from Jane Austen's world-though, as we shall see, with perhaps a little more sense and little less sensibility.

Nevertheless the economic grounds on which "*ta koritsia ine belas*" must be complemented by a second set of considerations-considerations that related to beliefs about the essential vulnerability of women, who, as du Boulay explains (1986), were by nature weak, little able to exercise self-control, and whose sexuality, in a society that placed heavy emphasis on female chastity and pre-marital virginity, posed a threat not only to themselves but to the good names of their families. Girls had to be guarded. Such beliefs were, of course, closely connected to many of the teachings of the Orthodox Church, whose fathers, as Eva Topping stridently pointed out in 1983, had consistently maintained woman's innate intellectual inferiority, described her as "the weaker vessel", and equated her with the temptress, Eve. Sociologically, the consequences of such views about women (which cannot be attributed solely to the Orthodox Church, since they were, and are, widely distributed throughout non-Orthodox and non-Christian communities) were central to the anthropological discussion of "Honour and Shame" in the 1960s and 1970s. In a highly competitive environment, a family's honour depended substantially on its men-folk's ability to protect, and vouch for, the sexual chastity of its women.

Now: put together the economic considerations attendant on marriage, and the moral considerations related to the perceived nature of women, and it is hardly surprising that marriages in rural Greece were overwhelmingly, and normatively, arranged: contracted by negotiation, by *proksenia*, and often employing the services of a go-between, a *proksenitis*. It is hardly surprising, too, that what could upset the apple-cart, what could confound everybody's best-laid plans, was "love", *aghapi*. As the members of Renée Hirschon's working-class community in Piraeus put it in the 1970s: "*I aghapi ine kako pragma; pherni katastrophi*" (love is bad thing; it brings catastrophe) (1989:116). Juliet du Boulay's villagers in Evia were of very much the same opinion: marriages for love would almost certainly be regretted by both parties (1974:94). And according to Mari Clark, even in the early 1980s villagers in Methana held a strong belief that while a sound economic base was essential to the success of a marriage, love was not (1988:340). Please note, by the way, that I am not suggesting (and nor were any of the sources that I have cited) that an idea of romantic love was unknown in rural or working-class Greece, or that romantic love was not celebrated in song and verse (it most certainly was), or that it was not felt by some unhappy shepherd or cloistered farmer's daughter. Campbell's Sarakatsani had heard the

testimony of love songs in the 1950s; but as they remarked (in a manner, come to think of it, not so far removed from Plato), "the songs tell lies" (1964: 124). Love was not unknown or unrecognized; the point, rather, was that something so profoundly important as marriage, on which the future well-being of the next generation depended, and by which the present prestige of all the contracting parties was measured, could not be left to the transient emotional states of two immature individuals.

I was somewhat surprised, then, to find that on Meganisi in the late 1970s everybody was marrying "for love", and, according to my informants, always had done so-doubly surprised, since in most other respects (though not, as we shall see, quite all) gender relations were much as they had been described in all the ethnographic accounts I had read. Young women lived quite restricted lives, and though they were not locked up, they were also not much to be seen. Their appropriate place, as Renée Hirschon describes for the Piraeus, was *sto spiti*, "at home". In the evenings a group of them might walk arm-in-arm down the street, but if any young men were encountered, eyes were lowered, and no more than a mumbled "good-evening" would be exchanged. Certainly courtship, or the notion of "going-out" with a boy, was unknown in the village. Admittedly, those girls who had moved with their families to Athens for part of the year so that they, or their brothers, could study at high school or university, had a somewhat freer relationship with the opposite sex. They would go out for coffee in mixed groups, or attend the Meganisiot Society's Athenian club-rooms, but they were still always under the benign (though watchful) eye of a brother, or, at the club, of some older Meganisiot, and they did not, at least licitly, ever go out with any particular boy. Virginity, or perhaps more importantly, the unimpeachable presumption of virginity, remained the *sine qua non* of any girl's claim to respectability.

As for marriages, one way or another they were still arranged-though what might be meant by "arranged" varied quite considerably. At one end of the scale, two girls of seventeen were unceremoniously dispatched to South Africa during my stay to be married off to a couple of young Meganisiot émigrés who had made a few weeks' visit back to the island to acquire, through the good graces of their friends and relatives, suitable brides. Similarly, a young Meganisiot man, who had spent twelve years in California and who had come back to his ancestral home for a few weeks' holiday, found himself, courtesy of his relatives, suddenly engaged to be married, and was still in a slight state of shock as I sat drinking with him on the eve of his wedding. "Hey, man, I'm not sure that this is going to work out. She doesn't even speak English . . ." At the other end of the

scale, those young men and women who were living or studying most of the year in Athens, and who were joining Greece's new and growing professional bourgeoisie, denied that their marriages were arranged, and certainly they never used the term *proksenia*; but their parents still vetted potential partners, and it was noticeable that the better-to-do and educated were carefully marrying the better-to-do and educated. In the village itself, however, *proksenia* was still explicitly the norm. A young man was attracted to a young woman; he spoke to his father; his father secured the assistance of a trusted friend or relative; the friend or relative spoke with the parents of the young woman; her parents in turn consulted their close relatives-and if all parties were agreeable, the match was made. The part that any young woman played in the affair, other than giving or withholding her consent, seemed minimal. As one young man of twenty-eight told me, he had watched his seventeen-year-old bride playing in the school yard since she was a little girl, and had said to himself, "I'll have this one." It was, he remarked, "like a spider with a fly".

Finally, dowry, too, was generally given-although this is a complicated matter, for there was a village consensus that "these days the boys don't seek dowry", and it was true that in some few cases women were marrying with very small dowries or with none at all (as, I think, had always been the case on Meganisi); in general, however, in the late 1970s Meganisi was experiencing the sort of dowry inflation that was being reported for Greece as a whole. What made it possible for the Meganisiots to deny the importance of dowry was the claim that the property or money settled on a daughter at the time of her marriage played no part in determining the marriage; rather it was supplementary to it. What followed was a reclassification of the institution. The apartment in Athens, or the money given towards its acquisition, was not "dowry", *prika*-it was merely *voithia*, "help".

It could be argued, then, that in practice gender relations on Meganisi, and the concomitant bases for marriage, were pretty much as they had been reported in the ethnographic literature prior to 1977-with the notable exception that love was not considered a catastrophe. Far from it; love was extolled and very much in the air. In fact it didn't matter much who I talked to, they were all getting married "for love", or had all got married "for love", including the girls who were packed off to South Africa (at least, according to their relatives; propriety forbade me to speak to them myself). Even the elderly, those who had been married for forty or fifty years, claimed that in their youth they too had married "for love"-a claim that must have been arrived at somewhat retrospectively, since old men, bemoaning the decline of morals, also let slip the fact that they had

scarcely seen the face of their bride, much less talked to her, before their wedding day.

Admittedly, there were a few dissenting voices. One old woman had been sent from Lefkadha to Meganisi as a youthful bride by her father, a merchant, who built her a dowry house there in order to procure a Meganisiot sailor as a son-in-law to transport his goods. The son-in-law died within a couple of years, leaving her stranded, a widow, on a "foreign" island. Sixty years later she still didn't think much of the Meganisiots, and she was still very cross about her marriage. It had been an *emboriko prama*, a "commercial matter", she snorted. But in general, romance glossed even tales of the island's historical settlement. Transhumant shepherds, it was said, brought their flocks across to Meganisi for winter pasturage. A shepherd would then "see" a Meganisiot girl; he would fall in love with her (*tin aghapise*); and he would marry her and settle down on the island. No mention here of the obvious advantages of permanent grazing rights, and of a house to live in instead of a shepherd's hut.

But if everyone was now marrying "for love", and if even the elderly now claimed that they too had done so in the past, it could, I suppose, still be argued that all that had changed was a form of words; that whatever "love", *aghapi*, now meant, it could not mean what it means in, say, Britain or the USA or northern Europe, since the context within which it arose was so different. This was brought home to me when I ran into a Meganisiot friend of mine in Lefkadha. He had been on a shopping trip and showed me the new laminex dining-table he had bought, explaining that now that his family was growing, he needed a larger one. I expressed surprise, since my friend and his wife were both in their late forties, and had only one child, a son, Takis.

"Well, Takis might be getting married soon," explained my friend.

"I didn't know he was engaged," I replied.

"No, he's not," said my friend, "But who knows? He's finished his military service now, so he might fall in love in the next few months."

From my friend's point of view, "love" was largely a question of ripe time-in much the same way that marriage had always been a question of ripe time in rural Greece. But now, if it was time for Takis to get married, then it was also time for Takis to fall in love.

As for young women, I was not in a position to discuss their feelings with them, but certainly they looked happy enough when their engagements were announced, and my suspicion is that if a girl's father, and mother, and brothers, and any number of other people whom she trusted-including dear old Uncle Yiorgos, who had acted as go-between-

told her that the good-looking young man whom she had seen and admired in church, who had excellent prospects, and who came from a fine family, was madly in love with her, then, *mirabile dictu*, "love" might easily label the emotional grounds on which she accepted the match. In the end, however, I think it is wrong-headed to dispute the authenticity of the Meganisiots' assertions of "love" by querying either its genesis or the social context in which it arose. After all, it is not as if the rest of the western world (that has for so long sworn by it) is particularly good at defining it. It's also not as if the rest of the west does not also "fall in love" in accordance with ripe time and any number of other socially specifiable considerations: wealth, class, reputation, education, ethnicity, or simply availability and proximity. Any sociologist will tell you that. So nowadays will any marriage bureau. Equally, I think it would be a mistake to claim that all that had changed on Meganisi in the 1970s was a form of words just because everything else connected with gender and marriage had stayed much the same. The point is surely that while we can "objectively" be shown to marry in accordance with wealth, class, education, proximity etc., no suitor (as opposed to sociologist) could dare state that truth, nor even, importantly, think it, for the role that social and economic factors play in the formation of marriage has for long been ideologically displaced, and effectively banished, from discourse by a sincere belief in the absolute moral primacy of a psychological and affective state whose determining role cannot, in all decency, be challenged.

That, I think, is what was happening on Meganisi, too, in the 1970s-and that, I think, is not just a matter of words. The Meganisiots' adoption of "love" as the basis for marriage signaled a quite radical reconstruction of events, even if, "objectively", the course of those events themselves remained much the same. We enter, as Foucault would put it, a new discursive formation-a certain dispersal of regularities, a certain connection between concepts, statements, choices (1972: 38). The re-evaluation of love was why dowry, whose size had in most cases increased, had nevertheless to be transmogrified into "help"; why it had to be seen as attendant on marriage and not formative of marriage, why boys could not "seek dowry" even though they usually got it and were happy to accept it. And the same applied to such other erstwhile criteria for marriage as coming from an honourable family, or having good prospects, or even coming from the same village (for village endogamy was much preferred). What had before constituted the grounds for marriage were now seen as the happy, but, as it were, coincidental attributes of the individual with whom one had "fallen in love"-on which grounds, and which grounds alone, one married. The real question, then, is not "what is

love?" or "what was love for the Meganisiots?" (let that remain a black box), but rather, why had a discourse of love triumphed in the late 1970s over franker recognitions of material and social considerations?

There is, of course, an easy answer: a version of good old-fashioned diffusionism. Many Meganisiots had, after all, travelled the world, either as sometime migrants, or, in the case of men, as sailors in the Greek merchant marine. They were familiar with non-Greek society and its preoccupations. Still more had lived, or continued to live, on a part-time basis in Athens-and the Greek urban bourgeoisie, long integrated with the rest of the West, was certainly producing its own homilies to love, which, by the 1970s, were transmitted to every village. Meganisi got electricity in 1973; by 1976 every coffee-shop had a television set that relayed Greek soap operas of an outrageously romantic sort. Magazines such as *Romantzo* (Romance) were available and read in the village, and as a matter of fact Mills and Boon was doing a brisk business in Greek translation. One could simply argue that rural Greece was being besieged by love-and one could also argue that there was plenty of top-down pressure within Greek society for its rural population to conform to generically western ideological modes. Socialist prime minister Andreas Papandreou's famous abolition of dowry did not take place until 1982, just after my fieldwork, but his move was symptomatic of the times, and equally symptomatic of Greece's foreign-educated leadership.

But Papandreou did not, of course, abolish dowry; he merely abolished a specific form of legal conveyance. But he did speak a new language for rural Greece:

"[Dowry)", he proclaimed, "was an anachronistic institution that humiliated women and adulterated the essence of marriage by turning it from a free choice of a profoundly human relationship into a coarse financial transaction symbolizing the woman's submission to the dominant male." (Modiano 1982)

"The essence of marriage"?; "a profoundly human relationship"?; "free choice"? Sociologically the terms may be less than pellucid; rhetorically and ideologically, however, they form a quite recognizable set: our set, indeed. Conversely, the description of dowry as "anachronistic" probably touched a few raw nerves-for there was a fear felt by many Greeks in the 1970s, and quite particularly by rural Greeks, that despite a 2,500 year head-start their society was, in comparison with the rest of Europe, culturally "backward".

And yet while I have no doubt that Meganisi (and rural Greece as a whole) was influenced by the media and by outside voices, whether Greek and foreign, I do not think this is a sufficient explanation for their adoption

of love as the only acceptable motivation for marriage. Pretty much everywhere in the world these days is subject to such influences, but they have not everywhere been embraced. Why did not the Meganisiots say, much as John Campbell's Sarakatsani had said twenty-five years earlier, "The poets-and Mills and Boon, and the television, and even Andreas Papandreou-lie"? Besides which, having invoked Foucault, I can hardly retreat to saying that all the Meganisiots were doing was parroting what they had heard, and I'm too much of an old-fashioned materialist not to want to look for other conditions, other changes, that allowed the adoption of love to form part of a new and self-evident common sense.

One line of thought-and I mention it largely because it was a line of thought often articulated by the villagers themselves-was that with economic progress came, automatically, social and cultural advancement. For them, prosperity and "modernity" were inextricably linked (and love was decidedly western and "modern"). It is true that from the 1960s onwards the Meganisiots had become wealthier than they had ever been before, for those who were young enough and fit enough had taken full advantage of the lucrative employment then being offered in the Greek merchant shipping industry. By the time of my stay, there was scarcely an able-bodied man who was not, or who had not been at some stage, a sailor. Second, and in common with much of rural Greece, Meganisi had reaped the benefits of overseas emigration to the US, Canada, Australia and South Africa. Remittances flowed in to village relatives; but further, many Meganisiot emigrants returned to Greece after ten or fifteen years overseas bringing their fortunes with them. Finally, a new generation of professionals and technicians was beginning to emerge: young doctors, lawyers, engineers and mechanics educated on the proceeds of their fathers' years at sea or their parents' foreign savings. But while the linking of economic prosperity with forms of social and cultural liberalism-whether the creation of "profoundly human relationships" or, for that matter, democracy-seems to be something of an article of faith amongst many of those professionally engaged with "development", I'm afraid I remain a skeptic. There seem to be just too many counter-instances; besides which, I see no reason why western social and cultural forms should constitute the inevitable ends of "modernity".

What the elevation of love as the basis for marriage really signaled was, I think, a shift towards a quite particular form of modernity (if one still wishes to retain that word): towards an ideology of individualism, as opposed to collectivism, in terms of which individual choice, individual freedom, individual happiness, individual fulfilment as defined by the individual, are granted absolute priority over any external or collective

assessments of where an individual's best interests might lie. The decisive elevation of some uniquely experienced affective state-call it love-exemplifies that ideology, while any suggestion that family, friends, money, property, land, or reputation should play a part in the choice of a marital partner is seen to render that choice inauthentic (and therefore immoral) simply by displacing it from the realm of individual desire. And what makes such an ideology possible, or at least what supplies the conditions for its adoption, is not actually a question of wealth or prosperity-though it remains, I would claim, a question of economic conditions. Here, I confess, I am about to travel a well-worn path: a path first marked out by Engels, but followed by any number of European social historians (Macfarlane 1987: 123-43). What makes such an ideology possible is a change in the relations of production: specifically, the demise of a peasant agricultural economy, and a shift towards wage labour or individual entrepreneurship.

Put simply, in a peasant agricultural society the family was a corporate unit of production and consumption, dependent for its well-being, indeed for its very survival, not exactly on the collective ownership of property (for that was usually vested in the male head of the household), but at least on the collective exploitation of the family's property. Moreover, each generation was dependent on the preceding generation for the transmission of that property-house and land-which alone would allow them to take their place in society. People were not only morally and affectively tied to each other as family; they were also economically bound to each other through their dependence on a common resource.

That system had survived on Meganisi up to the time of my fieldwork, but it was also rapidly disintegrating (as it was disintegrating all over rural Greece in the 1970s). And it was disintegrating on Meganisi as a result of the two factors that I have already mentioned: emigration, and the employment of Meganisi's men as sailors. Actually it is not important for my argument that the Meganisiots' particular employment was at sea; nor is it important where the Meganisiots emigrated to. What is important is that the wages and salaries that the Meganisiots earned at sea, and the capital and skills that they had acquired overseas, were totally transforming the Meganisiot economy, not only in that the Meganisiots were becoming a great deal wealthier, but also in that the nexus between making a living and the ownership of land was completely broken. And with the break between land and employment came also, of course, a shattering of the interdependence of family members as co-workers of their common resource. Economically, the Meganisiots were becoming atomized. Sons were no longer dependent on fathers for their inheritance.

Brothers no longer worked their land together. Success was now individual success, dependent on individual skills, individual commitments, and individual entrepreneurship-and so, I might add, was failure (for what was also emerging by the end of 1970s was an entirely new form of social stratification). But either way, wage labour and entrepreneurship liberated the individual from the family as a unit of production.

This had some immediate consequences for the criteria on which brides were selected (as I mentioned, not everything about gender roles stayed exactly the same). A young woman's reputation, her sexual chastity, was still a primary consideration-hence the continued oversight of daughters and sisters. But any notion that a prospective bride had also to be a hale, hearty and experienced agricultural worker had completely fallen by the way. So, I might add (and for quite some time), had any notion that a prospective bride had to be capable of bearing a large family. To put matters bluntly, in a wage labour economy, as Susan Buck Sutton (1986) also noted with regard to rural migrants to Athens, women's work had become redundant, and the female role was rapidly being transformed from the productive to the frankly decorative. One of the notable side effects of this was a quite remarkable drop in the age of marriagefor women from an average of nearly 26 years up to 1974 (with one in five women being over the age of 30 at the time of their marriage) to an average of only 20 years during the period of my fieldwork (with nearly 20% of the brides being 18 years old or less). The boys, as they put it, might no longer be openly seeking dowry, but they were openly seeking something just, alas, as unfairly distributed: youth and beauty. As one of my older friends remarked, once upon a time if a woman was a little bit old or a little bit ugly, you could always give her a large dowry; now it didn't matter how much you gave, she was *sto rafi*, "on the shelf".

But more important than the criteria by which brides were chosen was the issue of who chose them. And it seemed that overwhelmingly it was now the young men themselves. The process of *proksenia*, of arrangement, had still to be gone through, for in the absence of any tolerated means of direct courtship within the village, they still had to approach their prospective bride through the intermediary of friends and family. But the choice was theirs alone. Old men and women grumbled that these days they were marrying mere babies who couldn't even boil an egg, but any resistance to a match by a young man's parents could be dismissed on the grounds that, frankly, it was none of their business. And it was none of their business because wage labour made men independent at an early age from the economic authority of their elders. Moreover, that same economic independence allowed them to build a new house for themselves

and their bride prior to, or on, marriage, rather than having to go through a period of married cohabitation with their parents until their father died and they inherited. Neolocal residence was becoming the norm, and a young woman, once subject to the authority (and, I suspect, choice) of her mother-in-law, was no longer the family's bride (*i nifi mas*, "our bride"), but solely her husband's wife. As for dowry, or "help", in most cases, as I have suggested, it was increasing rather than decreasing, but in a non-agricultural economy it no longer contributed to the basic requirements of existence. Moreover, given the shortage of eligible men in the village (since as non-agricultural workers they were no longer tied to the village), men could exercise their free choice in selecting a bride and still expect to receive financial assistance from their parents-in-law without having to demand it. Precisely as the Meganisiots argued, dowry had become supplementary to a match, not a determinant of it.

So the choice of a marriage partner was now left to the unencumbered desire of a young man, and the at least willing acceptance of a young woman. So much was self-evident to all, grumbling elders included. And that desire already had a renowned label: "love", whose occurrence was not, of course, a catastrophe, because now it was about the only way left of getting your daughter married. But let me end with a reflection that exceeds my scholarly competence. The Meganisiots were, through their work at sea, and as a result of emigration, getting richer. But, in conformity with the views of many social historians, I have suggested that it was not wealth per se, but the change in the mode of production from peasant agriculture to wage labour that allowed a discourse of love to flourish. In England, where a peasant class ceased to exist long ago (or, according to some scholars, never properly existed at all), the very early and popular celebration of marital love (pushed back, in some radical interpretations, as far as the thirteenth century) can be explained in much the same way: not because most people had become rich, but quite the opposite; because, as landless labourers, and later factory workers, as an essentially property-less and, in the Marxist sense, "alienated" work-force, they too possessed no other grounds on which to base a marriage (Macfarlane 1986: 119-208). It was only the propertied classes, the gentry and the aristocracy, who had to be more cautious. All of which makes me wonder whether when, back in 1968, my generation were so loudly singing "All you need is love", it might have been pointed out from a more beady-eyed perspective that in fact love was all that most of us had.

CHAPTER TWO

THE REFORMATION OF CLASS[1]

I

Whatever the criteria adopted for the definition of class, Greece is-and, so far as I can see, always has been-a class society. Yet class has not featured prominently in most anthropologists' analyses of Greek rural communities.

In the light of an article by Diane Bennett (1988) that, exceptionally, did examine a class-based rural Greek community[2], it might now be suggested that to some extent the omission might have been due to the accidents (or choices) of earlier fieldwork locations. Certainly it was not the result of ethnographic blindness. Most Greek communities studied by anthropologists simply did not show the obvious manifestations of "class,"[3] and it is instructive to compare ethnographies of Greece with their counterparts set in rural Italy, Spain, or even Portugal, for the differences are staggering-differences that cannot be attributed merely to the ethnographer's adoption or rejection on ideological grounds of "class" as an analytic tool. Friedl, Campbell, du Boulay, Allen, Herzfeld, and, if we include Cyprus, Peristiany and Loizos (to cite but the best known names) did not encounter the sort of conditions, for all their variety,

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[1] First published in 1994 in the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* **12,** 37-56.

[2] Bennett's article was concerned with the farming community of Lehonia on the Pelion peninsular near Volos, whose population "is differentiated into landowners and labourers."

[3] As Bennett comments (1988: 218), "Lehonia's internal class structure sets it apart from most of the villages represented in the ethnography of Greece." Although, as Bennett notes, some class distinctions have been recorded in the countryside (Hoffman1976: 330-331; McNeill 1978; Dimen 1979; Schein 1970, 1974), "class differences in Greece have been observed primarily within the city, or between the rural and urban sectors," and "completely missing from the picture of rural Greek society is a description of the social and cultural structures in communities where there are, or were, landowners who lived without doing agricultural work."

described by Pitt-Rivers, or Cutileiro, or Gilmore, or Blok, or Silverman. Neither did I.[4]

In fact gross differences of individual wealth did exist among the members of the village community of Spartokhori; but there were no latifundia, there were no absentee aristocratic or bourgeois landowners, there was no proletariat of landless laborers, and certainly there were no palazzi nor even particularly distinguished private houses, no public buildings (except the church, the primary school, and the village president's office), no squares, no fountains-none of that provincial microcosm of class distinction, as evident in buildings as in bank balances, that Silverman, for example, describes for an Italian town no bigger than an average Greek village.[5]

What I encountered instead was what, on the basis of my reading, I had more or less expected to encounter: a community that was culturally homogeneous; a community that was deeply imbued with a spirit of competitive egalitarianism; a community that recognized no group's claim

[4] For Greece, see Friedl (1962), Campbell (1964), du Boulay (1974), Allen (1976), Herzfeld (1985), Peristiany (1965), Loizos (1975a); for Spain, see Pitt-Rivers (1954), Gilmore (1980); for Portugal, see Cutileiro (1971); for Italy, see Blok (1974), Silverman (1975). The above represent, of course, only a random selection from the ethnography of southern Europe, but the differences between Greece, on the one hand, and rural Spain, Portugal, and Italy, on the other, are abundantly clear. It may well be true, as Gilmore argues (1980: 4-8), that, following Pitt-Rivers, anthropologists of Spain tended during the 1960s and 1970s to deny social stratification and class conflict in favour of a presentation of the pueblo as "culturally homogeneous" and "egalitarian." Nevertheless, the information they recorded speaks for itself, and Pitt-Rivers most certainly acknowledges the existence of an elite of landowning "senoritos," on the one hand, and of "plebeians," on the other, even if he makes a case for village solidarity and vertical integration through patronage and a common system of moral values. See O'Neill (1987) for a similar criticism of Iberian ethnography.

[5] In 1960 the total population of the commune of Montecastello di Vibio in central Italy stood at 1,885, but of those only 345 individuals (or 112 households) lived within the town walls. Nevertheless, this tiny town boasted walls, a number of imposing palazzi, a soccer field, an elementary school, public gardens, three piazzas, a church with its famous bell tower, a town hall containing a tax office and a medical center, a post office a police barracks, a pharmacy, a number of cafes and bars, 27 permanent places of commercial activity, and even a theater (Silverman 1975: 15-20). The Greek Statistical Service classifies as "rural" the population of those municipalities and communes in which the largest locality has fewer than 2,000 inhabitants (National Statistical Service of Greece, 1981). In 1980 the permanent population of Spartokhori stood, by my own household census, at 551, while the official census of 1981 recorded 561

to established superiority, but in which the assertion "we are all [just] people" was endlessly repeated as part of a continual jockeying for material and moral advantage in a world in which cleavages and animosities related not to class but to the relatively impermanent successes and failures of individuals and their families. If the Spartokhoriots had a notion of class-and, since most of them supported either KKE or PaSoK, most of them did[6]- they applied it not to relations within the village but to their relationship as villagers with those external forces of oppression and evil somewhat vaguely designated as "the rich," "the big people," "the capitalists," "the bureaucracy," "the government," "the politicians," and last but by no means least, the United States and the CIA.

The fact that most ethnographers of rural Greece (including myself) did not find the same sort of local class structures as those found by ethnographers of Spain, Italy, and Portugal is not, of course, in itself surprising. The history of Greece (and the history of each of those countries) has been different-and the peculiarities of Greece's economic development are well enough known.[7] We should not expect any "pan-Mediterranean" uniformity. Moreover, Bennett's excellent article pointed to the degree of regional variation still to be explored within rural Greece rather than demanding a wholesale reevaluation of previous studies in the light of her findings.[8] Nevertheless, I am still prompted by Bennett's article to consider that the existence of the sort of "egalitarian" rural communities that ethnographers of Greece have so often described may relate also to the accidents of field work timing-in my case, to the fact that I happened to be in Spartokhori during the late 1970s and early 1980s. For the Spartokhoriots' own recollection of the past was not of equality, economic or otherwise. As Bennett remarks on the history of rural Greek communities as a whole:

> A pattern appears to emerge: localized structures of class differentiation disappeared or diminished as they became more firmly integrated into the Greek nation and the international economy (1988: 219-220).

[6] Spartokhori enjoyed some notoriety as a left-wing village; indeed, most of the older generation were supporters of Greece's Communist Party of the Exterior (KKE). During the period of my stay, however, the younger and the more educated were inclining toward Andreas Papandreou's Panhellenic Socialist Party (PaSoK).

[7] See particularly the writings of Mouzelis (1978) and Mouzelis and Attalides (1971).

[8] Bennett modestly proposed her article as a corrective to the ethnographic record.

In the case of Spartokhori, however, I also believe that what I recorded during the period of my fieldwork had not long to last. Even while I was in Spartokhori something was definitely afoot. The sort of classless communities that have dominated Greece's ethnographic record may well turn out to be no more than historical hiccups. As Spartokhori's president told me (in a manner strikingly reminiscent of Bennett's informants) there was now much more "democracy" than in the past, for the rich had become poor and the poor had become rich.[9] And this, he explained to me-and it is perhaps worth noting that he was an old communist-was a sort of "natural law."

In what follows, then, for the most part I shall merely be amplifying and unpacking the president's statement; but this, I hope, will mean situating Spartokhori's "egalitarian" society within a continuing historical transformation of local class structure that not only involved the demise of earlier forms of domination but that, as the president's words implied (perhaps despite his intentions), was resulting in the re-formation of class along quite new lines-a process that then calls into question the stability of the definition of class itself.

II

When the president talked about "democracy," he was talking first of all about land. According to him, everybody in the village now owned their land; "in the past," "before the war," it had been different.[10] Half the villagers had been landless and had had to work as laborers and as sharecroppers for the wealthy.

In fact it was extraordinarily difficult to find any reliable quantitative historical data for Spartokhori, and I admit that my knowledge of Spartokhori's economic history is uncertain. But what factual material I could glean from independent sources accorded with the president's account (and with the accounts of many other Spartokhoriots who told much the same tale). A sample of 111 Spartokhoriot households whose land holdings were registered with the Agricultural Bank in Lefkadha gave an average holding of 37 *stremmata*,[11] and most families had holdings close to that average. Fourteen households owned less than ten *stremmata*,

[9] Bennett's informant stated, "The poor have much more money"-the title of Bennett's article.

[10] In Spartokhoriot popular discourse, history seemed to divide in two: "today" and "in the old days" / "before the war."

[11] One *stremma* equals one-tenth of a hectare, or approximately one-quarter of an acre.

and a very few families, most of them recent immigrants, owned no land.[12] At the other end of the scale, one family, again recently arrived, owned 200 *stremmata* used for sheep and goat grazing, and the largest landowner possessed 524 *stremmata*. Those few families who had no land had non-agricultural occupations, and no one worked as an agricultural laborer for any one else except by way of a favor to a kinsman or (on advantageous terms) to help out an old widow or widower. This, then, is the "democratic" situation to which the president was referring. However imprecise the picture I shall be drawing of the past, that time contrasts starkly with the period of my fieldwork.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century, Meganisi had absentee landlords, for after Venice's capture of Lefkadha from the Ottoman Turks the Venetian Senate awarded at least part of the island to a group of Catholic refugees from Chios, and in 1725 their privileges were extended to collecting a tithe on all the island's produce. But most of the Chiots had left Lefkadha by 1750, and for the Meganisiots the episode was ancient history about which few knew anything (though certain areas on the island are still known as "*Ta Hiotika*", while one of the commoner family names on Meganisi is "Skiotis").[13] But what did impinge on the memories of Meganisi's older inhabitants was a class of absentee landlords from Lefkadha who possessed considerable holdings on Meganisi during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In brief, it seems that during the period of British rule (1810-1864) the opening up and liberalization of trade throughout the Ionian Islands created a new mercantile class in Lefkadha whose members, allying themselves with Lefkadha's traditional elite, invested their fortunes in land. Their accumulation of property was aided by the high interest rates that, as merchants, they exacted on loans made to the peasantry.[14] The

[12] Spartokhori's history has been one of continual immigration since the beginning of the eighteenth century, largely by shepherds from Lefkadha, but also by families from mainland Greece. During the twentieth century, and especially from the 1950s to the 1980s there has also been very considerable emigration both overseas and to Athens. But a number of families were still quite newly arrived.

[13] For the scant mentions of the early history of Meganisi, see Machairas (1951) and Vlandis (1902), much of whose information is also contained in Rondoyiannis (1982). For the Chiots, see also Svoronos (1940). The name Skiotis (variously Sikiotis) presumably derives from "Chios," but it is more likely that the ancestors of those presently bearing the name were not themselves Chiots, but had worked for them.

[14] To the best of my knowledge, the economic history of Lefkadha has not been written, although a very interesting short publication by Dimos Malakasis (1982), Public Notary in Lefkada during my stay, does document the rise and fall of the

Meganisiots' own version of events is simpler. Certain people on Lefkadha became "friends of the British," and therefore whatever they wanted was granted them. This, say the Meganisiots, included large tracts of their island.

But whether we are talking of eighteenth-century Chiots or nineteenth-century Lefkadhiots, both groups were precisely absenteeland-owners. Any class relationship between a peasantry and what might be termed a "landed gentry" was not internal to the Meganisiot community itself, not part of its own social structure. More interesting, then, is the information contained in the detailed Greek Government census of 1870, for it appears to reveal evidence of internal class divisions.

In a total population of 928 persons in 1870 (492 males and 436 females) for the deme of Taphos (i.e., Meganisi and some tiny islands off its shores), the census records five "landowners" (*ktematiai/proprietaires*), fifty-six "manufacturers" (*viomekhanoi/industriels*), six "merchants" (*emboroi/commerçants*), one hundred and ninety "farmers" (*georgoi/agriculteurs*), fifty-five shepherds (*poimenes/bergerers*), three female "workers" (ergatriai/ouvrières), three "male servants" (*uperatiai/domestiques*), one priest, and eight local and government functionaries.

The categories, given in both French and Greek, are not easy to interpret. The first problem is the 56 "manufacturers." It seems, however, that "*viomekhanoi*" was used as a general term for artisans, and doubtless there were some on the island-carpenters, perhaps a stone-mason, possibly a blacksmith-but fifty-six seems far too large a number. It is notable, however, that no "male workers" (*ergatai*) are listed in the census, and since by common consent a very large number of men even in the 1920s owned little or no land but did "whatever they could," this omission, too, is surprising. Perhaps the answer is that those who found work seasonally in the oil and flour mills, and who perhaps assisted in the grape-pressing, were classified, or chose to classify themselves, as *viomekhanoi* rather than as *ergatai*.[15]

"merchant-landowner" class from 1820 to 1920. The general point I make here, however, derives from conversations I had with Mr. Malakasis

[15] There is one other possible explanation. Ansted (1863: 197) remarks in his very brief mention of Meganisi that the island "is remarkable for quarries of excellent stone . . . [which] is exported to various islands and the mainland, besides being almost exclusively used for the newer buildings of the town of Santa Maura (i.e. Lefkadha town)." Strangely, however, I could find no one on Meganisi who knew anything about this; nor, although I explored the island thoroughly, could I find anything that resembled a quarry (although the amount of surface stone was prodigious).

Two things, however, are clear: (1) the Meganisiot population in 1870 had a greater division of labour than did the island's permanent population in 1980; (2) this division of labour looks very much like an indigenous class-structure. By all accounts the traditional economy of Meganisi was based on a mixture of peasant agriculture (wheat, barley, olives, and flax), sheep- and goat-herding, fishing, and caique[16] trading and transport between the Ionian Islands. The "merchants" can thus be accounted for: they were caique traders (and not necessarily wealthy men). The bulk of the island's population, "farmers" and "shepherds", is also as one would expect (though it is again odd that no one is classified as a fisherman). But apart from the problem of the fifty-six "manufacturers/artisans" there is the intriguing mention of five "landowners" at one end of the scale, and three "male servants" at the other. Somebody (or-bodies) was rich enough on Meganisi in 1870 to have a servant or servants. Moreover, the census also distinguishes between "farmers" and "landowners". On what basis was the distinction made? Was it a quantitative one based on the amount of land owned, or is the implication that even the 190 "farmers" (and presumably the 55 shepherds as well) did not own their own land, but worked as tenant farmers and herders for the five "landowners"?

These are questions to which I have been unable to find secure answers; but although the oral tradition does not extend back to the 1870s, it does offer some elaboration on inequalities that continued to exist up to roughly the end of the second World War, and that may parallel those of the earlier period. Older Spartokhoriots frequently cited the names of certain individuals and families for whom in their youth they had worked, and who, they claimed, "owned half the island." The general drift of accounts-often vague and sometimes contradictory-was that these large local landowners were either the clients of Lefkadha's ruling elite (the absentee landlord class) whom they served as political party bosses on the island, and by whom they were generously rewarded, or else that they were immigrants who came to the island with sufficient wealth to establish themselves in an advantageous position. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that with a system of high-interest loans it was possible even at the local level for individuals to create small fortunes. Shopkeepers, or those who had been able to accumulate surplus produce, could extend credit for goods-largely foodstuffs-that resulted in a spiral of indebtedness for the less fortunate; and owning an oil mill, owning a flour mill, owning

[16] "Caique" is a general term for the traditional Greek timber-built boat, which has no keel, so that it can negotiate shallow waters or be beached. Caiques, however, ranged (and range) very considerably in size from small fishing boats to quite large transport vehicles.

a general store, or owning a trading and transport caique were all occupations that could profitably be pursued in conjunction with agriculture and the accumulation of land.

But if prewar inequalities of wealth and landowning on Meganisi are not to be doubted, the question remains, I think, whether such local landowners really constituted a "class," or whether it might be wiser to see them simply as "rich peasants"-as local entrepreneurs and brokers who, at any particular time, were able to enrich themselves at the expense of their neighbors, but who remained culturally identical with them and structurally incapable of reproducing and consolidating their advantage to become a separate "class." The stories of their demise-that is, of the workings of the president's democratic "natural law"-perhaps give some answer to the question.

III

It was Meganisi's absentee landlords who were the first to go. In general terms it seems that the agricultural crises of the late nineteenth century, the relatively low returns to be gained from land, a general fear of social unrest following the first World War and the Asia Minor Catastrophe, and the growing opportunities for the redeployment of wealth in the national and international economy, meant that by the mid-1920s virtually the entirety of Lefkadha's landed elite had sold out.[17]

The Meganisiots' own version of events is different in one curious detail, for it is popularly claimed on the island that the large absentee landlords gave, rather than sold, their land to the locals, and that they did so in return for votes. This seems a scarcely credible piece of generosity, although there may be an element of truth to the story: that the returns on land on Meganisi were so low that the absentee landlords were willing to sell cheap, and sold cheap to "their men" as part of the not uncommon process whereby economic favors from the top were traded for political allegiance from the bottom. At all events, by the 1930s all of Meganisi's land was in the hands of its local inhabitants.

But the disappearance of absentee landlords did not, of course, put an end to economic inequalities on the island-indeed, it may well have aggravated them. As I have mentioned, landlessness for a large section of the community, and a local system of credit, loans, sharecropping, and indebtedness seem to have persisted up to the second World War. What

[17] Again I express my gratitude to Lefkadha's Public Notary, Mr. Dimos Malakasis, for his instruction on this issue.

overturned this situation is a rather more complex matter. In some cases I was told that certain "wealthy" families had, like Lefkadha's "aristocrats," sold out and gone to Athens. More commonly, however, when I inquired about the fate of the rich families of the past I heard tangled tales of an excess of daughters (and hence dowries), or of simply an excess of children, or in some cases of no children at all, or of wastrel sons who "ate" their fathers' fortunes and bequeathed to their children only a fraction of what they had themselves inherited. In short, I got life-histories about the falls of individual families-all of which fits with a view of such landowners as "rich peasants" who had managed, whether by luck, skill, or a degree of ruthlessness, to raise themselves within the community, but whose success was always precarious. As the Meganisiot saying went, "A man may last a hundred years, but not his wealth." But while such stories may explain why the so-and-sos who were once rich were no longer so, they do not explain the end of the system of inequalities itself. Underlying these individual life-histories has been a quite profound structural change in the economy of the island as a whole.

Those who were once wealthy on Meganisi were wealthy because of the land they possessed and/or because they owned the means of production (olive and flour mills) or the means of distribution (village shops with credit facilities, caiques for transport) in an essentially agricultural economy. By the 1970s land was worth little-at least in terms of what it could produce-and, as a whole, the Meganisiots were no longer really agriculturalists, for after the second World War two things occurred: large-scale emigration to the United States, Canada, Australia, and South Africa, and the opening up of shipping as a major source of employment.[18]

It should be noted in passing that emigration to the above countries did not necessarily mean, and in most cases was not intended to mean, a definitive departure from Greece or, indeed, from Meganisi. The islanders went overseas with the express purpose of "economizing," of accumulating sufficient capital to be able to return to Greece to set up a small business, or alternatively of staying long enough in the host country to educate their children, who could then return to Greece with overseas professional and technical qualifications. In this enterprise, many were successful, and emigration turned out to have been merely a stepping-stone in a transition from village peasantry to membership in Greece's new professional and entrepreneurial middle class. Perforce, such returnees spent most of the year in Athens or Patras, where they were

[18] Emigration to the United States also took place around the turn of the century (as it did for Greece as a whole).

employed (and here we touch upon the peculiarly complex demography of Meganisi in the 1970s); nevertheless, such people were not lost to the Meganisiot community-they formed the core of the island's activists, and most managed to spend the summer months resident on the island, where they still had houses and often their aged parents.

As for shipping, this was something for which the Meganisiots were ideally suited since, as I have mentioned, caique trading (not to mention fishing) formed a traditional part of the island's economy. The Meganisiots (unlike the Lefkadhiots) were historically seafarers, and up to the second World War they virtually monopolized the transport of Lefkadha's imports (grain and manufactured goods) and exports (salt and wine). In their wooden-hulled caiques they regularly sailed as far as Italy to the west, and Piraeus to the east. But by the 1950s the postwar development of Greece's road system, the centralization of most commercial activities in Athens (at the expense of regional trade networks), and, most importantly, the rapid growth of Greece's commercial shipping fleet had all put paid to the Meganisiots' island-based caique trading; but the Meganisiots were quick to take advantage of the opportunities created by the postwar shipping boom. By the time of my fieldwork, there were few able-bodied men under sixty years of age who had not for some time at least worked "on the ships," and almost all of Spartokhori's permanent male residents of middle age or younger were employed as *naftik*i. (Like the Spartokhoriots, I am careful to say *naftiki* i.e. "seamen" or "mariners" and not *naftes* "sailors" or "deck-hands", for most held officer or petty-officer rank and were by national standards highly paid.)

The influx of money into the community-money sent back in the form of remittances, money saved overseas and brought back, and money earned aboard ship-was quite remarkable; indeed, the Lefkadhiots enviously claimed that the banks in Lefkadha town overflowed with the Meganisiots' cash. If I stress the word "money," it is because the change that occurred in the island's economy should be seen not just as a transition from comparative poverty to comparative wealth but as a change in the island's mode of production and relations of production: a shift from peasant agriculture, in which landowning formed the basis of wealth, to highly paid wage labour, or the employment of particular acquired (professional) skills.

It is this transition that explains the president's comment: not that everybody was prospering but that it was the rich who had become poor and the poor who had become rich. For, as he happily pointed out, it was precisely the poorest families and men, those who had owned little or no