

*Anthropology through
the looking-glass*

*Critical ethnography in
the margins of Europe*

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1 *Romanticism and Hellenism: burdens of otherness*

The dilemmas of marginal identity: anthropology as ethnographic object

Ancient Greece is the idealized spiritual and intellectual ancestor of Europe. Anthropology, the study of humankind that emerged from the heyday of European dominance, has nevertheless found disproportionately little theoretical use for the Greece of today. This is all the more noteworthy in that anthropologists have worked productively in contemporary Greek communities, and because issues in the development of anthropological theory closely and instructively parallel ideological conflicts in modern Greece. A curious silence enfolds the connections between modern Greek culture and the practice of anthropology.

Probing that silence is an investigation of anthropology and its assumptions. More specifically, the labile boundary between the exotic and the familiar in Greek ethnography illuminates the problem of exoticism in anthropological thinking generally. The present project is political as well as epistemological; ethnographic as well as anthropological; and descriptive as well as analytical. Indeed, these are not mutually exclusive or radically polar opposites, any more than are modern anthropological theory and the ethnographic study of modern Greece, although such pairs may have been so treated in the past.

The task is a comparative one. The poles of the comparison are, respectively, the culture of modern Greece, and the discourse of anthropology. By taking as its touchstone a society that brings together the stereotypes of the exotic and the European, this approach highlights the symbolic character of anthropology as the exploration and expression, not of exotic societies, but on the contrary of the cultural identities of those globally dominant societies that themselves created the discipline. It will thus allow us to explore the relationship between theory and the cultural practices in which it is embedded. This relationship has always represented a pragmatic issue for anthropologists, whose task is *empirical* but who are themselves not necessarily *empiricists*.

The relationship between theory and practice troubles scholars in vir-

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tually all fields of cultural analysis and criticism: art, literature, aesthetics, linguistics, and legal studies, to name a few prominent areas. The empirical concerns of anthropology, however, may make a distinctive contribution. By selecting Greece for special attention, we shall be paying particularly close attention to an *absence*, to a topical, geographical, and cultural entity whose unquestionable marginality to the development of general theory in this discipline provokes some productively embarrassing questions about what that theory is supposed to be and to do. Because a number of literary and other non-anthropological scholars are also asking related questions about Greece specifically, moreover, the very narrowness of the Greek example will help to broaden the implications of the inquiry beyond the self-determined boundaries of one particular subject.

Such a project challenges some familiar habits of thought. Anthropologists who read this book may hitherto have thought of the ethnography of Greece as a charming but theoretically secondary field. They should now suspend both their scepticism about the broader anthropological significance of modern Greece, and their suspicion of the deep involvement of modern Greek studies with the traditionally Eurocentric disciplines (philology, folklore, and history come particularly to mind). And scholars whose major focus is modern Greece, many of them accustomed to treating that country in the established frame of reverence (as it were), must now instead redirect their attention to its practical irrelevance to the development of much social and humanistic theory. These two adjustments of perspective are closely interrelated. Anthropology is as marginal to Greece as Greece is to anthropology. This tendency to mutual exclusion suggests that prevalent ideas about the Greeks' role in the modern world may mirror, in some ironical fashion, ideas about the ways in which anthropologists – and their compatriots everywhere – go about understanding that world.

In a European tradition that takes its Classical heritage for granted, the neglect of Greek ethnography is both surprising and significant. It emphasizes the besetting ambivalence of a country that falls disconcertingly between the exotic and the familiar. Modern Greece does not fit comfortably into the duality of Europeans and Others, especially as Greeks are themselves ambivalent about the extent to which they are European; conversely, the ethnography of European societies in general is uncomfortably beset by an ambiguity of purpose, caught between grand impersonal surveys of 'folk culture' and ethnographies of communities intimate enough to seem acceptably exotic in their own right (Zonabend 1985:34). In this ethnographic record, the Greeks' perplexities – which situate them in a historically common discourse with the cultures of Western Europe – can become a productive irritant. Both from without and from within the world of the anthropological observer, these perplexities of identity doubly challenge the goals of a discipline that rejects *exoticism* (the sensationalizing

of cultural difference) but nevertheless paradoxically pursues the study of cultural *otherness*.

This is not merely an academic nicety. It is an intimation of disturbing links between the goals of anthropology and the hard facts of international politics. The Greeks of today, heirs – so they are repeatedly informed – to the glories of the European past, seriously and frequently ask themselves if perhaps they now belong politically, economically, and culturally to the Third World. Whether as the land of revered but long dead ancestors, or as an intrusive and rather tawdry fragment of the mysterious East, Greece might seem condemned to a peripheral role in the modern age. The marginality of modern Greece to both western anthropological theory and the centers of modern international power highlights, if we will only allow it to do so, the Eurocentric ideology that both spawned anthropology and now elicits its most pious ire.

Taking anthropology itself as an ethnographic object is both a logical consequence and a valuable tool of a discipline that claims above all to be comparative. As an intellectual strategy, it forces us to note that all the hoary dualisms of rule and strategy, of structure and process, of competence and performance, even of Radcliffe-Brown's (1952:1) time-worn contrast between nomothetic and idiographic methods, are not merely poles in a theoretical debate. They are social phenomena, and their contrasted meanings come into especially dramatic focus when they take the form of a clash between ideological nation-statism and the pragmatic vagaries of everyday life. The Greece of today is an accessible setting in which to examine this parallel critically, since many facets of Greek national and cultural ideology share common historical sources with the assumptions of anthropological theory, and encounter comparable difficulties in accommodating the unpredictability and indeterminacy of social existence. Here, then, is a suitable context in which to ponder Giambattista Vico's cutting observation on the parallel conceits of nations and scholars.

As Strathern (1985:192) remarks, the examination "of the limits of our own representational devices . . . provides information on how these devices might be contextualized and compared with those of other societies" (see also Boon 1982:231). Such a scheme, with its focus on representation as a means of creating otherness (see also Said 1978), portrays anthropology as a discourse about how the societies that gave it birth differ from the exotic cultures that fed its growth. It is, in short, an antidote to exoticism.

Louis Dumont has already offered his study of traditional Indian hierarchy as an appropriately – because absolutely – contrasted pole to what he calls the "modern ideology" (1966, 1977). On this basis – not without its own risks of exoticism – Dumont (1977:27) argues that "to isolate our ideology is a *sine qua non* for transcending it, simply because

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otherwise we remain caught in it as the very medium of our thought.” It is a strangely Utopian optimism, perhaps, that can seriously contemplate transcending “our own” ideology, because it is not clear who “we” are: that is the fundamental problematic (see especially Boon 1982:47–8, 107–8, 236). But only a restless effort along these lines can bring the hitherto immanent principles of Eurocentrism into open comparison with other cultural ideologies – with hierarchy in India in Dumont’s own research, for example, or, as here, with the statist and nationalistic doctrines of Europe. It may be that similarities will emerge as generously as differences. But this is a question to be asked repeatedly, not begged once and for all. Otherwise, taxonomic *form* (“they/we”) suppresses reflection on what difference and similarity *mean*.

Unlike India or (to cite another popular example of an “ethnographic area”) sub-Saharan Africa, modern Greece has been conspicuous mainly by its absence from the development of anthropological theory.¹ This perhaps owes something to Greece’s ambiguous suspension between the exotic and the familiar, between the historically formulated symbolic poles of the European and the oriental; but that same ambiguity, and its emergence from Eurocentric preoccupations with otherness, are then precisely what make the ethnography of modern Greece an indispensable and distinctive source of perspective on the discipline of anthropology itself.

Above all, Greece furnishes an ethnographic foil beyond as well as within the immediate purview of the village community. Greek ethnography is neither just a haphazard collection of unrelated ethnographic sketches, nor the drearily uniform portrait of “a culture.” Because Greece is a nation-state, and cannot conveniently be studied as a whole using the traditional methods of participant observation, it has so far escaped the sort of authoritative reduction that a generic title like “the Greeks” might suggest (cf. Clifford 1983:119).

Without simply reverting to the village ethnography genre, then, a critical ethnographic project still beckons, and one that offers far more scope to the goal of examining the discipline that makes it possible. Such an approach entails making a problem out of what is supposed to be wholly unproblematical: it shifts the emphasis from *the Greeks* “*themselves*” to “*the Greeks*.” This book, then, remains an ethnographic study; but is an ethnography of concepts and identities rather than of institutions. Its immediate focus, tentative and provisional throughout, is on the discursive constructs that have actualized *both* modern Greek identity *and* a theoretical anthropology. On the Greek side, it concentrates specifically on the effects of state attempts to control and reshape the refractions of that identity in social life. On the anthropological side, it addresses the difficulties

that anthropology – as a product of related ideological traditions – must face in resisting the temptation to do the same.

**Greece and “Mediterranean society”:
ethnography against anthropology**

Open any survey of anthropological theory: modern Greece rarely appears, and even here, away from the rarefied air of Classical scholarship, the totalizing rubric of “the Greeks” usually excludes all but those of the ancient past. Even when anthropologists turn their attention directly to Europe, modern Greece – the land to which they trace their own spiritual ancestry as well as that of European culture in general – gets astonishingly short shrift. In what must be the most comprehensive anthropological account now available of European national identity and state ideology (Grillo 1980), Greece does not merit so much as a paragraph to itself, let alone a separate chapter on its peculiar vicissitudes.

This is especially odd in a book that deals with the nation-state, an entity whose origins western Europeans conventionally trace back to their Greek heritage along with so much else. Of course, as Collingwood long ago observed (1939:61), Plato did not mean the same as Hobbes when both talked about “states”; and, certainly, the modern product of nineteenth-century romanticism is something else again. But this never prevented the West from parading Greece as the intellectual and political source. Yet the volume, while including essays on Israel and Turkey, tells us of Greece no more than that a historical legacy “may be . . . used to sustain the present, as . . . in modern Hellenism” (Grillo 1980:11). *Why* the Greeks should have found it necessary to appeal to the past in this way is never clarified. The absence of further comment, here or virtually anywhere else in the literature, is ideologically self-serving: it perpetuates the impression that the Greeks freely opted to concoct their history, dismisses the issue as uninteresting and parochial, and sidesteps the question of what is implied by the parallel involvement of several western nations in the fashioning of Greek nationalism and in the invention of modern anthropology.

Greece is of course not unique in the rarity with which it appears in theoretical discussions. Most obviously, it appears to be a special case of that more general failure to generate new theory with which John Davis, in *The People of the Mediterranean* (1977:5–10), chides his fellow Mediterraneanists. But Davis’s own offering, subtitled “an essay in comparative social anthropology” and pitched at a point intermediate between local ethnography and global generalization, does not really bridge these ill-matched levels. Mediterranean anthropology is a second-best enterprise,

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an attempt to create a parochial theory in the absence of sustained interest on the part of practitioners of the more grandly exotic ethnographies. In the attempt to generate abstract theory about a geographically defined entity, moreover, “Mediterranean *anthropology*” overlooks its own *ethnographic* status both as a collection of descriptive unities and as a product of stereotypes existing in the societies from which social and cultural anthropology emerged. In responding to these broad assumptions, we must use ethnography, not as a servant of anthropological theory, but as the source for a critique of anthropological practice – of what theory *does*.

In an apparent retreat from his promising observation that “anthropology has helped create the history of the mediterranean [*sic*]” (1977:3), Davis’s subsequently reiterated desire (1980) to reinsert Mediterranean ethnography into history overlooks the anthropologists’ own active role in constructing the rules for the management of that same history. This role is no different from that played by the people whom anthropologists study (Appadurai 1981). But theory has always claimed a degree of creative originality; this is what elevates it over its object, suppressing the (historical) circumstance that it is itself a historically constituted construction (Said 1975:362). In this regard, it closely resembles the claims of nation-statism to the “eternal” status of national identities embodied in bureaucratic systems and sanctified by myths of origin. The Mediterranean is a region of nationalisms one of which – the Greek – is held to have originated the very idea of Europe, and, in the writings of Herodotus, the discipline of anthropology itself. In this context, it is more than usually difficult to maintain the separation of theory from its local object, as other regional ethnographies have tended to do, or to pretend that the absolute claims of nationalism bear no resemblance whatever to those of anthropological theory.² A historically conscious Mediterranean ethnography therefore challenges the traditional separation of theory from ethnography; in doing so, however, it also fatally punctures the project of creating a discrete theoretical subdiscipline of Mediterranean anthropology.

This dilemma goes some way toward explaining the strangely irrelevant status of Mediterranean ethnography within the discipline as a whole. Davis is only partially correct when he attributes to “[t]he desire to be as primitive as every other colleague” (1977:7–8) the typically Mediterraneanist decision to do fieldwork in a marginal community, in isolation from its regional and national contexts. This is a methodological issue; but there is also an epistemological problem that can best be elucidated by turning the searchlight of anthropological theory on to its own categories.

We have already seen that Davis’s program calls for comparison within the region, not outside it, thereby begging the fundamental question of whether there is a clearly defined region at all. In the global comparative context, however, Mediterranean cultures create a problem of category as-

cription: they are neither exotic nor wholly familiar, and the embarrassment their presence creates is scarcely assuaged by the current fashion for discussing exoticism as a central issue.

Mary Douglas's (1966) model of ritual pollution as "matter out of place" is richly suggestive here. She has argued that ritual pollution and sanctity are analogous to each other in that both represent exclusion from the normative and ordinary; entities that cut across or stand outside everyday categories symbolize either uncleanness or holiness, being potentially dangerous violations of normal expectations. Mediterranean ethnographies not only frequently address such category violations in indigenous systems; they also themselves, as an ethnographic phenomenon in their own right, confuse the symbolic boundary that defines anthropological activity. Ernestine Friedl (1962:5), for example, expresses wonderment at the blend of cultural familiarity with strange detail that she found soon after her arrival in the Greek village where she was to work. This sense of contradictory first impressions reveals some of the specific assumptions that anthropologists entertain as members of their own cultures, and that inevitably color their reactions to an alien environment. In terms of the ideology of Eurocentrism, at once the source and the foe of modern anthropology, Greece is symbolically both holy and polluted. It is holy in that it is the mythic ancestor of all European culture; and it is polluted by the taint of Turkish culture – the taint that late medieval and Renaissance Europe viewed as the embodiment of barbarism and evil.

To varying degrees, the same paradox applies to the entire Mediterranean region, the "cradle of civilization" from which (western) Europe considers itself to have emigrated long since (see also Ciabod 1964:23–47). If this region is ancestral to "us," it is removed from us through mythic time; if merely exotic, then its distance is one of cultural space. In either case, it is "not us," even though we claim it as "our own." Its paradoxical status lies in the Eurocentric ideology rather than in anything intrinsic to the region itself. In a discipline constantly trying to escape its own ethnocentrism, the ethnography of a Mediterranean trapped in this sort of logic can hardly be anything other than embarrassing.

Honor and the state:

practical and theoretical triumphs of survivalism

Less inclined than Davis to make a theoretical unity of the Mediterranean, or indeed to privilege theory at all, is Pierre Bourdieu in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977). This justly influential work, despite a diagnostic concern with "honor and shame," avoids the trap of presenting itself primarily as a Mediterraneanist essay. On the contrary, it is thoroughly grounded in the local ethnography of the Kabylia region of Algeria. In its

criticisms of the anthropological tendency to reduce all observation of human activity to formalized rules, moreover, it is an important contribution to any discussion of the relations between anthropological theory and ethnographic practice, as is the same author's more recent discussion of the relationship between language and power (Bourdieu 1982).

As a result of its local focus, however, the *Outline* also misses the chance to address one of the principal points of theoretical interest shared by virtually all circum-Mediterranean societies (and many others besides): although the author has evinced deep interest in the complexities of the relations between local community and nation-state in Algeria (see particularly Bourdieu 1962, 1979), he systematically excludes any such conjuncture between local-level ethnography and nationalist or regionalist ideologies in the *Outline*. The ethnographic props of his argument are treated monolithically as Kabyle material, rather than in any identifiable sense as part of the larger Algerian picture. This has consequences for, and is a consequence of, his categorical distinction between societies of greater and lesser internal differentiation, a refraction of the Eurocentric division between bureaucratic and informal concepts of social action that informs the entire *Outline*. Most seriously, it loses the chance of examining possible parallels between the ways in which nation-state ideology and anthropological theory respectively treat the pragmatics of everyday life.

In fact Bourdieu's uncritical acceptance of the notion of "honor" is symptomatic of this omission, in that it hermetically separates the values of the local community from those of the encompassing bureaucratic and religious institutions. In other words, it presupposes the conventional separation of official from informal discourse. Bourdieu clearly regards honor as a feature of local societies dominated by strategic competition rather than by the effective legal regulation of state systems. His thesis turns on the assumption that local societies lack permanent hierarchy, much as early Indologists assumed the egalitarianism of the Indian "village community" (see Dumont 1966; 1975:112) and for comparable reasons. Hidden behind this asymmetrical distinction between local and national societies lies at least a vestigially survivalist thesis – that is, an argument that treats the values of local societies as relatively simple features surviving from a prestatist era.

The characteristic view of honor in the Mediterraneanist literature allows for much less stable internal differentiation as well as for a much lower degree of actual variation than are to be found in the formal structures of the encompassing state systems. This notion consigns peasant concepts of prestige to an evolutionarily earlier phase. In India, the virginal Indo-European culture created by Sanskritic scholarship played this role, thereby permitting the conquering Europeans to treat their Indian contemporaries as premodern (see also Said 1978). In Europe, in addition to the

moral values of a simpler age, local-level studies sought out the remnants of bygone social institutions, as in what Davis (1977:197) revealingly dubs “residual patriliney” – the “debris of traits and peoples surviving from the wreckage of deceased civilizations,” to quote another equally survivalist argument (Quigley 1973:320).³

This assumption of local archaism within the modern nation-state belongs to a long, Eurocentric tradition. Its appearance here is ironical, however, in that modern anthropologists commonly reject historicist forms of philology and linguistics; these disciplines, with their diachronic emphasis on etymology and on the survival of particular forms and nuclei of meaning, have seemed to offer scant help to a field whose concern was supposedly with ahistorical societies. But before the golden age of romantic nationalism, in the eighteenth century, Giambattista Vico proposed a *critical* science of etymology that would rebuff the foolish claims of states and scholars alike to possession of the most ancient and therefore the most certain forms of knowledge. Read his stricture again: “To this conceit of nations we may add here the conceit of the learned, who want whatever they know to be as old as the world.”

Vico’s thoughts provide an incisive start to any critique of statism, and of its effects on the constitution of knowledge and society. But it is the expropriation of his ideas over two centuries following his death in 1744 that most ironically illuminates their present relevance. The ideologues of romantic statism, though often respectful of Vico, used him for precisely the vainglorious rewriting of history in terms of modern political needs that he had critically rejected. The path taken by his own fame confirmed his most pessimistic expectations.

Since we shall be looking at nineteenth-century nationalism and its effects on modern discourse, the fate of Vico’s ideas in the heyday of romantic statism is a striking object lesson. Vico has been claimed as the ancestor of both nationalism and anthropology; modern scholarship suggests that he also prefigured many of the *criticisms* currently levelled at both, and particularly at their respective formalisms. Vico’s critique of both scientism and statism was at the same time an appreciation of the value of ordinary discourse, which romantic statism treated with the regulatory dead hand that it also laid to Vico’s own flexible view of society.⁴

The anthropological contemporary of systematic nationalism was the doctrine known as survivalism. It is best known from the work of E. B. Tylor, author of the revealingly titled *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization* (1865) and *Primitive Culture* (1871). It was an unabashedly Eurocentric doctrine of cultural survivals, which Tylor treated as cases of arrested development in a broadly universal pattern of evolution. He argued that the European peoples of his day rep-

resented the apogee and culmination of this process. In this respect, survivalism was nationalism writ large, a claim to the moral and cultural superiority of Europe over the entire world.

Conversely, the survivalist argument could be transferred to more parochial nationalisms. European statisticians used Tylor's general schema to argue that the modern state rested on an ancient foundation that had survived, relatively undamaged if also unappreciated, amongst the uneducated rural populations. There was thus a close relationship between global models of evolution and nationalistic doctrines of cultural continuity. Many European nationalists intentionally coopted the rhetoric of survivalism for their own ends. The Greek intelligentsia, in particular, found it useful to treat the local peasantry internally as a backward population while simultaneously presenting folk culture to the outside world as evidence of the glorious common heritage of all Greeks. Tylor's own respect for modern Greek civilization was not very deep, however, and nationalistic survivalisms masked a radical difference between domestic and international readings of their significance.

At that time, what are now folklore and anthropology were methodologically almost the same discipline, sharing a common ideology, but pointed in different directions; folklore studied the *domestic* exotics, as it were. The grand comparative studies of such scholars as Tylor and J. G. Frazer mixed European and exotic folk practices with instances from the ancient civilizations of East and West. European peasants appeared to validate the survivalist thesis in two complementary ways: first, by demonstrating the persistence of traits from the childhood of the human race even in the most civilized countries; and second, by showing that only the intellectual independence of the educated classes could achieve final escape from the burden of superstition and ignorance. This created a double hierarchy: the European intellectual emerged as the peasant's superior; but the European peasant claimed pride of place over all exotic peoples.

The subsequent drifting apart of anthropology and folklore merely let that hierarchy ossify. In post-War Greece, however, they again found a common object, and today Greece is one of the few terrains where a largely foreign anthropology and an indigenous though foreign-inspired survivalist folklore continue to be practiced side by side. The by now rather rare coexistence of the two disciplines in a single territory is a fair index of the ambiguity that surrounds Greek identity – a tension between European and exotic stereotypes.

Anthropology has never fully succeeded in escaping the intimations of inequality and Eurocentrism that we associate with nationalist folklore studies. Its failure to do so is of course, in some ultimate sense, inevitable. But there has been a remarkable blindness to the persistence of ideas whose specific embodiments in Victorian ethnology are now considered hope-

lessly ethnocentric. Survivalism, for example, informs modern anthropological theory much more extensively than current histories of the discipline claim. This is notably true of the emergent “subspecialty” (Gilmore 1982:176) of Mediterranean anthropology. Just as Victorian survivalism translated the Eurocentric hierarchy of cultures into a global historical sequence (Hodgen 1964:511), Mediterranean anthropology has done the same on a more parochial scale: the extension of ethnography to the circum-Mediterranean has created a need for exoticizing devices to justify research in what is otherwise a familiar cultural backyard.

One of these devices is a complex literature that presents honor and shame as *the* moral values of Mediterranean society (e.g. Peristiany 1965; Pitt-Rivers 1977). By concentrating the weight of its attention on these values, Mediterraneanist anthropology suggests a pervasive archaism. This reinforces the hierarchical relationship between nation-state and village culture that is such a prominent feature of nationalistic folklore studies also. The nation-state – by its own reckoning, the ultimate symbol and embodiment of modernity – serves as the touchstone against which Mediterranean society and culture acquire their distinctive characteristics, their fundamental otherness, and above all their removal to a more primitive age.

It is the state, according to Anton Blok (1981), a committed Mediterraneanist, that usurped the code of honor in the northern and western parts of Europe – that is, in precisely those European cultures from which anthropology emerged as a by-product of colonial rule and exploration. In the Mediterranean lands, so his essentially survivalist argument runs, the code remained relatively unaffected, a testimony to older values and virtues. But since the Mediterranean state bureaucracies were largely modelled on Great Power prototypes, we could just as easily assume that the ideology of honor was transferred back to the Mediterranean as a component of these new structures. It was the rise of bourgeois nationalism in northern and western Europe, after all, that elevated the medieval chivalric code to the status of a generic morality (Mosse 1985:13), and there is at least some Balkan evidence that the extreme sexual pudicity of rural folk is a phenomenon of the nineteenth century or not much before (on Greece: Llewellyn Smith 1965:91; Herzfeld 1983a; on Bulgaria: Lodge 1947).

Sexual self-control was certainly a major component of the Victorian ethos. We also know that it was often violated, but it has taken a long withdrawal from Victorian rhetoric to make that clear. Mediterranean nation-states that began their existence in an atmosphere where this ethos still prevailed throughout Europe are understandably reticent about drawing back the veil in turn. It begins to look as though the Mediterraneanist argument represents a suppression of history, and especially of the critical rôle

of the anthropologists' own cultures in forming the defensive ideology that they now dub "Mediterranean."

At the broadest level, treating honor and shame as Mediterranean (or Greek) overlooks the extraordinary resemblance that this pair of idealized values bears to the public rhetoric of international relations. The village focus of most ethnography in the area has tended to obscure the complex web of relations between local, national, and international politics and economics (see Mouzelis 1978:68–9; Wolf 1982:4–5). By paying exclusive attention to these relatively functional links, however, we risk obscuring the ways in which local values mirror larger *ideational* structures, with their prominent history in our own "cultivated" arts. *Onore* rings out in many an Italian grand opera of the *Risorgimento*, and "national honor" quietly persists throughout folkloristic writing in Greece and Italy throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Anthropologists have been reluctant to take such texts as germane to their task – indeed, Wagner (1975:30) specifically names opera as a component of the sense of culture that anthropologists will *not* tackle – and they have largely ignored the attendant historical connections between local-level interaction and the values of the nation-state.

Blok has tried to remedy the omission. According to his argument (1981), the powerful nation-state societies of industrialized Europe bureaucratized a code of honor that is still preserved in its localized and pristine form in Mediterranean societies. This scenario, however, is little more than a corollary of Banfield's (1956) earlier claims that "amoral familism" (a judgmental *denial* of morality) characterized the "backward society" (a clearly survivalist concept) of the Italian village he studied. For Banfield, the definitive failure of the Italian peasants lay in their preference of family allegiance over bureaucratic values. He thus endorsed one of the key assumptions of the nation-state concept, which makes the formal political structure the highest incarnation of national aspirations. If we take the positions of Banfield and Blok together, the resemblance between them becomes apparent. The state both usurps the distinctive ethos of the local community and uses it to proclaim the latter a backward rendition of the national culture.

This process also informs the professional discourse of anthropology. The study of a constructed phenomenon such as "the Mediterranean code of honor and shame" is a study of our own relationship to the cultures in question. For this reason, the honor and shame argument, which was originally designed to tease out the coherent uniqueness of Mediterranean societies, ultimately undermines itself: it shows how these societies share with the ideology of the western nation-state a set of values that we have nonetheless tried to treat as unique to them. It makes our claim to be studying "them" curiously unconvincing. We, too, are in the picture.