Localism and the Logic of Nationalistic Folklore: Cretan Reflections

MICHAEL HERZFELD

Department of Anthropology, Harvard University

THE NATIONAL AND THE LOCAL: FOLKLORE IN THE CROSSFIRE

The object of this article is to explore a familiar paradox of folklore studies: the promotion of powerfully localist readings in the service of an inclusive national entity. In the logic of European nationalism, this might seem an irresolvable paradox. The object of the nation-state is to unify all potentially divergent cultural and social entities within a single framework, so that localist sentiment ceases to represent the threat of political separatism. In some nation-states, the most harmonious symbiosis of localism with nationalism appears in those regions that are stereotypically regarded as culturally and politically marginal and are consequently subjected to the double-edged opprobrium of being both “simple” and yet also corrupted by a vast range of allegedly foreign elements both culturally and “racially.” A study of these tension-laden matters must dodge among several levels in order to go beyond the limitations both of purely local ethnography and of national-level historiography. If the former too easily occludes the effects of larger events on local perceptions, the latter can, and often does, fail to account for the success of nationalist ideologies in securing loyalty unto death even—or perhaps especially?—from populations that are notoriously unwilling to accept state rule in more mundane matters of law and order.

In Greece, Crete offers an especially striking case in point. Here is an island, contemptuously known within Greece for its endemic animal-theft and blood feuds, for which it is despised even as the masculine ethos that undergirds these practices also serves as a guarantee of national heroism. Crete also rejoices in global fame for its distinctive Minoan civilization, which flourished centuries before the metropolitan Attic culture that represents the origins of civilization

Acknowledgments: I would especially like to express my appreciation to Beverly Stoeltje, who originally suggested that I write this piece, as also to the editor and three anonymous reviewers of Comparative Studies in Society and History for their constructive and interesting advice. I am also deeply indebted to the Department of Anthropology at the University of Adelaide, South Australia, where a three-week fellowship in the fall of 2002 gave me the necessary combination of peaceful surroundings and stimulating conversation to move this article toward its final incarnation.
for Western Europeans, and which is sometimes, if perhaps for rather unscholarly and Eurocentric reasons and in contrast to the sense of its more recent past, regarded as the site of an early cultural valorization of women’s place in society. Here, a recently learned pride in the achievements of a deep antiquity converges with a much more deeply rooted pride in a very different image that springs from an aggressive traditionalism. Crete was also home to the one major flourishing of the Italian Renaissance culture in Greece. Venetian rule, despite the brutal oppression that it entailed, also brought sustained activity in the visual and verbal arts; dramatic works from the Venetian period on Crete have achieved a certain vogue in the present era. So illustrious a connection with the so-called high culture of western Europe, especially in a form that blends the aesthetics of the latter with obvious elements of local folklore in the verse tradition, in architecture, and—most famous of all—in a vernacular tradition of icon-painting culminating in Michael Damaskinos, the teacher of the locally born El Greco (Domenico Theotokopoulos), allows local scholars to claim for Crete a level of cultural sophistication that few other geographically outlying areas of Greece can even approach.

But it is the Minoan phase that gives the Cretans a special edge in their cultural negotiations with the political and cultural center of modern Greece in Athens. There are serious questions about the origins of Minoan civilization—no trivial matter in a country where the well-documented derivation of the Greek alphabet from Semitic (Phoenician) roots is apt to cause an outcry of nationalistic rage. The Greekness of the prehistoric culture of Crete is therefore fiercely defended in the popular press. Although Crete was also an active center of culture and commerce during Classical, Roman, and Byzantine times (during which it was also occupied by the Saracens and devastated by the Byzantine reconquest of 961), it is today the Minoan period to which modern Cretans point when they wish to emphasize their island’s particular contribution to the glories of the ancient past, and the tapered russet columns of Knossos are reproduced in certain houses build after Sir Arthur Evans’ excavations and reconstruction of that site. Only with the advent of mass tourism, with its generalization of “Greek culture,” do glossy stick-on Ionic columns begin sprouting in their stead around the entrances of shops all over the island, dramatizing the key theme of this article: the subordination of fiercely independent local pride to an all-inclusive and passionate nationalism.

The Minoans are thus both emblematic of local pride and yet ultimately seen as forerunners of the greatest flowering of Greek civilization, in the Athens of the fifth century B.C.E. In more recent history, the obvious signs of passage by non-Greek invaders—notably Venetians and Turks—remain sources of potential embarrassment, although the Venetians, as “Europeans” fare rather better in this sense than do the “Oriental” (and still hated) Turks, who sometimes are simply ignored: “Especially in Crete popular art presents many resemblances with that of Ancient Crete and bears witness to the great influence of the Byzant-
tine era, without, however, being completely absolved [sic] of the influence of the various occupiers, notably of the Venetian period. Despite all these matters it clearly displays the vigorous preservation of the Cretan character even while under subjugation" (Stavroulakis 1964:2). The source for this statement, a lecture on the correct procedures for collecting folklore on Crete, reinforces the argument by reproducing an identical logic under many of the special entries, notably where material items can be brought into suggestive juxtaposition with museum objects of known antiquity and provenance. For Cretan as for other Greek folklorists, local traditions mostly "have an ancient Greek ancestry and bear witness to the unbroken continuity of our national [way of] life (Mitsotaki 1983:5).

Such ideologically motivated preferences, which also affect the progress of historic conservation and tourism (see Herzfeld 1991), must feature strongly in any critical examination of localist folklore. In the process, we may hope to shed some light on the curious sense of paradox that Crete generates. Island intellectuals and peasants alike aggressively claim cultural uniqueness for Crete, which nevertheless remains firmly attached in their writings and in everyday stereotypes to the premise of its transcendent Greekness. The ubiquity of these stereotypes may surprise observers who assume a clear demarcation between a literate intelligentsia and the rest of the population,¹ but the catalytic role of local teachers—some of whom compiled exhaustive collections of local lore—was clearly instrumental in forging a convergence between official ideology and local perceptions.

The apparent contradiction between localist enthusiasm and nationalist passion, while not unique to Greece, does display unique features that appear in especially strong form on Crete. In the attempt to homogenize Greece culturally, the island has been the site of some particularly painful reworking of the ethnic landscape. The "Turkish Cretans" were Muslims; most, like their counterparts on Cyprus, spoke a form of Greek as their native language, and many historians assume that they were mostly descended from apostate Christians (see Kondilakis 1987 [1919]:132). Virtually the entire Turkish-Cretan population departed in 1924, although some continue to preserve their linguistic and folkloric heritage on the Asia Minor coast of Turkey.² the Christian population that stayed behind, while accusing The Christians from Asia Minor who replaced

¹ For example, Bendix (1992:769) charges earlier scholars with having concentrated too heavily on the role of intellectuals in the construction of national sentiment. While she is no doubt right in general terms, she assumes too hard-and-fast a distinction between these levels—a distinction that teachers, themselves often of local (village) origin, interestingly challenge. See also Noyes 1999, for a consideration of the role of local intellectuals in folklore collection today.

² In the summer of 1990, I spent two weeks in the town of Ayvalik, talking with Turkish-Cretans (including a high proportion of individuals born in Turkey). My original contact with these people came through a family in Rethemnos, Crete, who retained ties of kinship with the community because one of the family women had been a Muslim who converted to Christianity at marriage.
the “Turkish Cretans” of being “Turkish seed” (*Tourkospori*), has itself been viewed by many Mainland Greeks as a hopelessly mixed and tainted population. Athenians, for example, are often quick to condemn what they see as an endemic Cretan proclivity for violence, and attribute it to the island’s long occupation by the Ottoman Empire; this is a very effective way of both sympathizing nationally while expressing the strong regional prejudice of which Cretans often complain in Athens. Yet, at the same time, there is a grudging recognition in Mainland Greece that the Cretans were in fact valiant opponents of the Turks and other invaders, a recognition that localist historians and folklorists have generally been quick to exploit as characterological evidence that the Cretans are, in fact, not only pure-blooded and culturally intact Hellenes, but that they are more so than anyone else: “If, however, our Race presents tradition with intensity in all places, a more impressive glory is exhibited in Crete, where it is preserved pure and untainted in the soul, in thought, in speech, in dress, in dance, in song, in the house and in the village throughout the Great Island that is the bearer of fine brave men” (Nikolaos Sp. Voulgaris, in Papadakis 1975:9).

If this may strike some readers as both bombastic and defensive, we would do well to remember again that Cretans do face considerable condescension from other Greeks, notably those of the capital. Indeed, it is often those who attack the Cretans and other “akritic” populations as culturally or genetically impure who are simultaneously most adamant in insisting that all non-Greek populations within the national borders should be exterminated or expelled. Official Greek writings, reflected also in popular usage, generally exhibit a unified image of the national culture, and express deep resentment of attempts to specify local or externally derived cultural elements; some Greek commentators have worried, for example, that my own work on Crete might foster an excessive sense of local autonomy, as I was once very secretly informed, or that it would embarrass the nation through revelations of such disreputable practices as animal-theft, or again that these practices might be held to militate against the fundamentally European identity that official ideology claims for the country. Thus, a massive homogeneity at the national ideological level co-

3 The “akritic” regions are those of the national borders. The term evokes the *akrites*, border barons of the Byzantine Empire; the extensive folklore about them has often served as the basis of attempts to create a post-Classical national mythology. See Herzfeld 1982:120–21; 1987:104–6).

4 These are diagnostic examples of the defense of cultural intimacy at the national level; see Herzfeld 1997:98–105. Hints that I was suspected of fomenting separatism reached me while I was conducting fieldwork on Crete; the embarrassment that my lecturing on reciprocal animal-theft in English at an American university caused the Greek students who had invited me to speak (and none of whom hailed from Crete) can usefully be compared to the very positive response I received for a similar lecture given subsequently in Greek, at the Rethemnos (Crete) town hall. (It may also be significant that Cretans were generally less willing to join in the general disparagement of local social practices that some media were pursuing at the time.) Increasingly, however, Greek scholars, aware that the very charge of defensiveness can itself be damaging to the national image, have lately shown signs of much more readily welcoming discussions of potentially embarrassing topics in international public contexts.
exists with fractured localist perceptions that seem to infuse much local writing, including that of the schoolteachers to whom we owe the preservation of much Greek folklore ever since the middle of the last century. Instructions to would-be collectors of folklore, many of whom were again to be schoolteachers working in strategic cooperation with their pupils, specify that the task is part of a “more general National effort” (Stavroulakis 1964:1), in which the specific object of recording Cretan folklore follows categories laid down by the towering figure of Greek nationalist folklore, Nikolaos Politis (1909; see especially Kondilakis 1987 [1919]:140–42; Stavroulakis 1964:10) and elaborated by his successors (e.g., Mazarakis 1964; Spiridakis 1962). How can we explain this apparent contradiction? The sense of paradox is especially strong because the encompassing Greek nation-state has yet to accept the pattern of cultural regionalization and minority recognition that seems to have become general in the other member-states of the European Union.

In an extended earlier study of nationalism and folklore in Greece, I attempted an initial account of how Greek folklorists tried to resolve this tension between the goal of a national culture and their pride in local specificity (Herzfeld 1982). I argued, in effect, that the coexistence of localism and nationalism revealed the intensely segmentary social logic of the latter: local authors vied to represent their respective homelands (patridhes, a term that is significantly identical with that used of the national state as a whole as well as, at the other end of the spectrum, one’s home villages) as the best exemplars of the Classical Greek spirit. Thus, while they were in opposition to each other, they played by a single, unifying set of rules through which they ultimately expressed their collective subordination to the national idea.5 When I wrote that study, there was already a small corpus of research on the links between nationalism and folklore, which emphasized the role of intellectuals in creating a unified corpus (e.g., Oinas 1961; Dorson 1966; Wilson 1976). More recent work, some of it conducted in a more ethnographic spirit, has examined the reappropriation of culture for the purposes of local resistance to dominant national agendas (e.g., Badone 1991, on Brittany; Nadel-Klein 1991, on Scotland). One analyst has asked why, even given the obvious differences of language and religion, state-local relations in Switzerland appear remarkably free of any tension at all (Bendix 1992:783). In recent years, on the other hand, such tensions have arguably become more visible in the European Union’s member states, as both historians (e.g., Applegate 1999) and anthropologists (e.g., MacDonald 1996) have noted.

Greece is thus hardly unique in the tension that it exhibits between the national and local levels, and this is reflected in a survey of the folklore literature. On the surface, Italian folklore studies in particular display a similar tension be-

5 I use the term “segmentary” as it was initially popularized by Evans-Pritchard (1940), and have tried to detach it conceptually from its anchoring in patrilineal kinship while showing that on Crete, at least, it often is in fact deeply implicated in a patrilineal ideology. See Herzfeld 1983; 1987; 1997.
tween the emergent and newly created national identity and those of the nu-
merous regional cultures. Yet the resemblance is deceptive, and conceals a fun-
damentally different relationship between center and periphery in Italy and
Greece, respectively. The folklore literature reveals that these two states have
drawn on local culture in radically divergent ways, and with equally contrast-
ed effects. Above all, whereas Greece presents to the world a face of passion-
ate national intransigence that sometimes provokes exasperation but that rarely
admits of any ambiguity, Italian attempts to resolve the local-national tension
do not seem to have enjoyed such political success except, perhaps, on the foot-
ball field; Italy is today constantly beset by the powerfully centrifugal forces
that the country’s founders had ruefully acknowledged from the start, with sep-
aratist movements commanding significant political impact in several of its cul-
turally and linguistically distinct regions. Even leaving aside the obvious case
of the Lega Nord (Northern League), which eventually sacrificed its demands
for a completely independent state called Padania with its capital in Venice as
the price of entering the ruling government coalition in 2001, Italy also has a
capital city regarded as culturally and politically marginal by many citizens,
home to a widely-despised local dialect that departs in significant ways from
the national linguistic standard. That dialect is now the object of affectionate
and energetic revival movements that recognize in it a way of life that meets
the major requirement of cultural intimacy: a sense of disrepute in the larger
world, creating solidarity at the core of a collective identity. Not coincidental-
ly, where official Greek policy denies the existence of ethnic minorities, in Italy
we find a rich array of minority cultural life, including some minority-language
media. Greece’s official line—often echoed in the media and in conversational
conventions—emphasizes a transcendent homogeneity, whereas Italian politi-
cians have little choice but to make their various forms of peace with cultur-
al and regional diversity. One only has to think of the geographical fragmenta-
tion of Italian gastronomic exports and compare it with the more restricted
roster of uncomplicatedly “Greek” goods in order to understand how deeply
this contrast runs.

The marginality of the Italian national capital, with its massive and contin-
ing production of local folklore scholarship (to which Athens has no corre-
sponding corpus after the mid-nineteenth century) exemplifies a powerful dy-
namic of cultural hierarchy and hegemony. Among the extremes of internal
orientalism that the Italian dynamic has produced (see Schneider, ed., 1998),
northern stereotypes of Sicily, an island culturally not unlike Crete in its pat-
tern of blood-feuds and “honor crimes,” have provoked an especially powerful
reaction. In the reactive localist ideology (sicilianismo), the institutions of so-
cially sanctioned violence are recast in terms of autonomy, pride, and self-
sufficiency (Schneider and Schneider 1994). The groundwork for this ideolog-
ical clash appeared early in the twentieth century, as local folklorists—most
notably Giuseppe Pitrè—romanticized the island’s peasant culture in increas-
ingly idealistic terms and so detached it from the sufferings that sprang from the no-less-deeply rooted social inequalities and associated violence (Cirese 1974:25).

Here, the contrast with Greece is telling in a further respect. In Greece, the folklorists and historians mounted what I have called a defense of “cultural intimacy”—essentially concealing the core of familiar culture that would prove embarrassing on an international stage (Herzfeld 1997)—by proclaiming as national traditions the songs that celebrated those hardy guerrilla fighters (kleftes, literally “thieves”) who had struggled against the Turks, allegedly for national independence but in practice more often for personal or at most local autonomy, and by conceptually detaching these guerrillas from the “bandits” of post-independence challenges (Herzfeld 1982:60–70). In Italy, Sicilian romanticism became a means of defending island culture against mainland opprobrium, and the idea of mafia became a symbol of stalwart traditionalism that responded to Rome’s threats of bureaucratic interference: the horizon of cultural intimacy was set at a local or regional rather than a national level. In Greece, the local brigands became national heroes instead; the only condition, and it was an inflexible one, was that they should henceforth cease and desist from their violent activities—a deal that Italian governments never achieved, and one that (if the anti-corruption prosecutors are to be believed) they never had any desire to achieve, so deeply and profitably implicated in its perpetuation were many of their leading figures.6

Strong cultural regionalism—not least in the form of insisting that Rome is in no way representative of the nation’s culture—has a long history in Italy. In the middle of the nineteenth century, for example, the Jesuit Antonio Bresciani was claiming as Phoenician (and, by extension, Jewish) the peculiarities of Sardinian culture, while he also emphasized the unique features of Roman folk culture and attributed these to the powerful influence of Catholicism at its geographical and spiritual center—this, a scant nine years before Rome was wrested from papal control and, over the objections of several influential politicians of the day, made the national capital instead (see Cocchiara 1981a:110–12). The willingness to embrace a Jewish pedigree for Sardinian local culture was perhaps not as ecumenical as it might seem, since Bresciani contrasted the Jewish mode of singing with that of Arabs, Kurds, and other oriental peoples, and suggests a political agenda of reinforcing the Catholic church’s continuing dominance throughout Italy. What is more remarkable than the attempt to claim external origins for aspects of local or regional cultures, however, is the absence of any attempt to argue that the latter were realizations of a specifically national culture. Indeed, Bresciani defends the local specificity of Roman lore—again,

6 While some local politicians were rumored to be supporting prominent animal-thieves during the time of my fieldwork in highland west-central Crete (1974–1981), to the best of my knowledge there has never been any evidence of large-scale involvement in organized crime at the local level by politicians of national importance.
it is worth emphasizing that this is the lore of the national capital—by emphasizing that every regional people (popolo) has its own ways of celebrating. One hardly discerns here the stuff of which nation-state ideology is usually made, with its attempts to claim jurisdiction over “the people” and its territory as the exclusive mandate of government located in a single, all-powerful capital city.

Other folklorists were meanwhile developing theories that emphasized the north-south divide, underscoring the northerners’ cultural affinities with neighboring Romance-language traditions rather than with those of their fellow-Italians to the south (see Cirese 1974:20–21; Cocchiara 1981b:337–38). This divisive perspective, moreover, which was grounded in assumptions about the racial basis of culture, perversely also invoked a survivalist assumption that northerners could no longer sustain traditional folklore. We thus see reproduced within Italy a pattern of cultural consciousness in which a relatively prosperous northern region lords it over a despoised south, much as has been observed elsewhere in Europe (see, e.g., Fernandez 1983:166, for Spain) but that is notably absent in Greece.

These differences have important effects on the treatment of tradition in the various countries concerned. When Spanish southerners fight back, for example, it is by recreating a regional folklore (see Collier 1997:3–4) in ways that ironically echo and invert the assumption, so pervasive in Italy, that the southerners of that country are the bearers of tradition at its most genuine, and that consequently, when they cease to get it right, they are nothing at all. In Italy, moreover, unification—the most unequivocal expression of political modernism—has long been held to threaten the traditional individuality of the regions, and especially of the south; collecting folklore thus emerged as a means of institutionalizing the implicit hierarchy that Antonio Gramsci famously labeled hegemony (see, e.g., Femia 1981). As a result, localism is trapped within the nation-state’s claim to the modernist mantle of rationality; tradition and folklore are the marks of a difference that can only be rejected at the cost of losing the one feature in which peripheral regions can take pride, but that at the same time serve to debar their carriers from fully modern status.\footnote{This bitter paradox infests the academic discipline of folklore as much as it does its subject-matter. See Abrahams 1993 for an interesting attempt to preserve a critical and reflexive folklore from the condescending implications of its name. His attempt to pit this novel reflexivity against the pervasive “essentialism of those who want to cling to the ideal of the folk community and the promise of wholeness and eternal return that live within such a perspective” (Abrahams 1993:31), while laudable for its refusal of the hegemonic implications of a nostalgic traditionalism (see also Herzfeld 2003), ultimately exposes above all the risk of essentialism entailed in his own and similar attempts to define a distinctive disciplinary space for folklore. See also Noyes 1999 for an amusing demonstration, germane to my present discussion, that folklore as a branch of study may ultimately be best understood as the local or regional intellectual voice that reclaims the authority to represent and describe tradition in the face of academic and bureaucratic impositions of modernist homogeneity.}

Scholarship was deeply implicated in these cultural politics. The great Sicilian philologist and folklorist Giuseppe Pitri, for example, despite his interest in cultural bor-
rowings from both within and far beyond the borders of Italy, saw it as his fundamental task to preserve the individuality of Sicilian tradition against the encroachments of a homogenizing metropolitan and national culture (Cocchiara 1981b:357). It is here, perhaps, that we see some convergence between the Greek and Italian situations, in that in both peripheral regions are associated with a traditionalism that serves to isolate them from the center’s monopolistic grip on modernity.8

Bresciani’s fear of paganism and his intense Catholicism placed the defense of church interests above all considerations of national solidarity. In practice, however, this religious motivation was not the driving force behind the emergent cultural fragmentation that characterized the new Italian nation-state in general. Even the most anticlerical elements were often no more enamored of the ideals of national unity than was the church; many Italians saw unity as nothing better than a Piedmontese version of admittedly more variegated foreign forms of domination in the various parts of the country before independence. In Greece, by contrast, Count Capodistrias (the first president of the country) seized the initiative by labeling locally powerful landowners who dared to resist the central authority of the state, notably the so-called “primates” of the Peloponnese (or Morea), as “Christian Turks” (Dakin 1973:60)—in other words, as the local enemies of a religious and ethnic tradition that could only be defined as national. While locals sometimes resisted the central government’s authority—this notably still happens on Crete (Herzfeld 1985a:19)—and expressed their disaffection by similarly viewing the government in Athens as the Turks’ successors in rapacious tyranny, they rarely if ever opposed the national ideal as such.

Nor did they attack the official national church except in the sense that they were generically anticlerical. Cretan villagers, for example, characteristically chide priests for failing to live up to the principles of their religion; they do not attack the religion itself, although they often express the suspicion that its many restrictive rules were the priests’ self-interested inventions. On the official side, the specifically religious critique of paganism was muted by state control of church interests, and especially by the creation of an archbishopric of Athens that was independent of the Patriarchate in Istanbul. To be sure, Greek church leaders viewed the early attempts at reconstituting the ancient roots of the modern state with serious misgivings; they were especially unhappy about the heavy emphasis placed on folkloric practices that, with the greater education that had led them to recognize pagan origins, they had in fact begun to expunge wherever they encountered them (see Stewart 1991:8–9). But religious opposition to the neo-Classical image of Hellenism did not come from the established

8 I develop this idea further in Herzfeld 2003, arguing that the cultural intimacy that is defend-
ed in the name of “tradition” can only be understood as the product of an unequal political dynamic upholding the dominance of what I have called “the global hierarchy of value.”
church as much as from the moral authority of the Patriarchate, which had not initially supported the struggle for independence, because it had feared—rightly, as it turned out—that the church would be blamed by the Ottoman authorities.9 The national church, by contrast, was not going to expend much energy in criticizing the discursive survival strategies—essentially the claim on classical tradition and thus on the support of the European powers—of the very entity that, in the early decades of independence, was committed to preserving ecclesiastical authority as one of the pillars of the new national identity.

The classicizing strategies of early Italian folklorists did not have either the unifying intent or the homogenizing effects of their Greek counterparts (see Cocchiara 1981a:90, 109, etc.). They were eclectic, drawing on Etruscan and Greek as well as Roman prototypes. Similarly, the attempt to explain away the enormous cultural variety of Italy as the product of a transcendent national genius would largely have to await the arrival of the fascists and their heavy-handed management of folklore exhibits (see, e.g., Bona 1940), although it was anticipated early in the twentieth century by a nostalgic folklore discourse through which “the ‘myth’ of the province constitutes an overcoming of the province” (Cocchiara 1981b:354); a few short years after World War II, in 1948, we again find the greater emphasis being placed on regional distinctiveness—not least, in respect of the local culture of Rome, the nation’s capital, and even at the hands of an author writing partially in celebration of the centenary of unification (Toschi 1963:108—9).

In Greece, the tendency to subordinate the local to the national set in early in folklore studies. This precocious unity was predicated on the projection of Athens as the moral, spiritual, and political center back onto an ancient world that certainly would not have been unanimous in according it such primacy. For theologians as much as for the populace at large, “the city” remained Constantinople/Istanbul, not Athens; but Athens, the national capital—and, as such, a secular, neo-Classical, and pragmatic convention—has remained effectively unchallenged. Despite the enthusiasm of its Catholic protagonists, Rome has never enjoyed such cultural authority over the country of which it is the administrative center; even among its own citizens there are those, still today, who would like to locate the capital elsewhere. In Greece, even local enthusiasts who can claim an archaeological heritage and a recorded history older than that of Athens generally phrase their claims as those of precursors of high (that is, Athenian) Hellenism rather than of a specifically local antiquity alone. Again, the apparent persistence of ancient ritual dating back at least to the sixth century B.C.E. among children’s caroling customs on the island of Rhodes was sub-

9 Moreover, the new state represented a Western-inspired and secular drive that threatened church authority. The criticisms have nevertheless shown a remarkable persistence within Greece, and have recently shown signs of permeating the major political parties despite the general tendency toward greater secularism; some theologians in Greece today even criticize the official national church, with its Athens bureaucracy and its rationalistic modus operandi, as—in a recognizably Weberian sense—“protestant” (Yannaras 1972; 1992).
ordinated to generic Greek notions of an ancient national culture cast in this same Athenocentric mold (see Herzfeld 1982:108). Even on Crete, where local resistance to the expatriation of Minoan antiquities to foreign museums has become fiercely localist in tone (see Hamilakis and Yalouri 1996:125–27), Athens remains the political center, the interests of which all claims to local cultural continuity ultimately serve.

It is true that Cretans have long emphasized the “Doric” aspect of their ancestry, with (they maintain) its characteristic sense of gravity (see, e.g., Marandis 1973, a work completed in 1925). This, however, seems little more than a device for claiming a segment of the collective Hellenic past without in any sense challenging the political authority of Athens, which itself claimed partially Doric connections in ancient times. Rather, what we are seeing is the projection of a segmentary present onto the ancient past, which is then brought back in circular fashion to legitimate local pride within a national collectivity. It is a device that lives on, no doubt nurtured by dimly remembered schoolroom history, in everyday conversation, as when a proud Sfakian from southwest Crete claims that his Dorian ancestry endows him with a purer sense of warrior pride than that of the allegedly “Minoan” animal-thieves of Mount Ida further to the northeast (Herzfeld 1997:160–61)!

Ideas like these, which occur repeatedly throughout the writings of folklorists, pervade the public imagination and inspire a mobilization that is at once nationalistic and localistic, and that feeds on the aggressive performance of stereotypical identities; it is no coincidence that, in Rethemnos, the most vociferous advocate of organizing a battalion of volunteers to fight for the Greek cause in Macedonia, a tall, elderly man with bristling white whiskers and a stooped carriage but dramatically measured step, always dressed ostentatiously in a Sfakian costume with high white boots and a black knitted turban. There is a tight logical convergence between these admittedly rather extreme expressions of patriotic sentiment and the structure of ideas that informs the collecting and publishing activities of folklorists. Within Greece, so the local Cretan folklorists have often argued, the national ideal reaches its apogee: “In our Crete things are still more beautiful. . . . Our grandfathers . . . passed on from generation to generation the diamantine wealth of Greek traditions that became the unquenchable hearth that held in its core the flame of our National traditions and the proof of our continuous descent from our glorious Ancient ancestors” (Lambithianaki-Papadaki 1925:5; my emphases). 11


11 As I have noted elsewhere (Herzfeld 1985:35, where a fuller quotation is given in the context of showing the convergence between village and scholarly perspectives), the more obviously segmentary part of this passage was apparently copied directly from an earlier work (Frangaki 1949:4).
lected local folklore in the national cause were local teachers and who published locally so that they, too, “could add a small stone to the great work of our Folklorists” (Oustayannaki-Takhataki 1976:9). Teachers throughout Greece have served as a conduit for the flow of ideas between local communities and official and academic discourse, and the process has not developed in only one direction.

Teachers were important early collectors of folklore throughout Europe during and beyond the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of ethnographic vignette and folklorists’ texts that I have just presented suitably introduces what makes the Greek case so different from the Italian. Italy at unification had thrown off the control of a varied grab-bag of powers; it faced no serious risk of overall reconquest by these or other neighboring states, whatever tensions may have continued to subsist in specific border zones. Its prehistoric, medieval, and Renaissance histories emphasized local autonomy and internal cultural difference, as well as a continuing engagement with, and participation in, the “high culture” of Western Europe. For Greece, a much smaller country faced with the single but real danger of reabsorption into the Ottoman Empire and despised as a mere relic of its glorious past now deeply tarnished by the years of Ottoman rule (see St. Clair 1972:18–19), cultural homogeneity was a crucial goal of national consolidation. Folklore studies played a remarkably consistent and active part in sustaining that goal. While local teachers and others were encouraged to gather folkloric materials and preserve the traditions of every region or district, as employees of the state they were expected to do so in ways that reinforced national unity. Localism was an affirmation of national unity, not a challenge to it. While occasional separatist mutterings have been heard in Crete and the Dodecanese, they have been rare and short-lived exceptions to a strikingly consistent pattern of a passionate national solidarity that in practice often far exceeds what one ordinarily encounters nearer the capital itself.

**The Cretan Case: Patriotic Localism**

The usefully extreme example of Crete—one of the more recent additions to the Greek national territory (1913)—dramatically suggests that three factors converged to invest the project of national unity with imperative urgency at the

---

Rather than seeing this as plagiarism, I suspect that its logic was so self-evident to local Cretan writers that the passage in question must have seemed proverbial and public rather than the product of a particular author’s pen. In any event, Frangaki (*loc. cit.*) voices her own sense of this segmentary relationship: “Would that others, too, will do this, both Cretans and people from the other Greek borderlands, so that this priceless *komboloi* [string of worry beads—a telling term in that it evokes images of vernacular culture and its Turkish and Greek Orthodox rather than classical connections] that is called Greek Folklore might be filled out.” In the same passage, she also expresses enthusiasm for what others might have regarded as a form of cultural contamination—the spread of folk-songs among the various Greek regions: “But I find that beneficial too. I think that it demonstrates the ethnic unity of the Greeks.”
local level in ways that simply did not happen to the same degree—and rarely happened at all, except in the fascist era—in Italy. These factors are: (1) the confusion of religious and ethnic modes of identity, especially with respect to the “Turks”; (2) a strong model of social segmentation—allied, on Crete, with clear and locally potent emphasis on patrilineal kinship; and (3) a belief, successfully fostered by successive central governments and arguably based on the realities of international politics, that Greece was extremely vulnerable to foreign attack. Greece’s experience as a client state of various unreliable Western powers has shown that, in the military and political domain, there are good grounds for uncertainty about the degree to which the country can depend on international guarantees in the event of attack from the north or the east. This unease is matched in the cultural sphere by the expectation—again based on experience—that these same powers, having demanded that the Greeks adhere to a highly selective model of neo-Classical identity, will nonetheless ridicule them as obsessive for their insistence of “three thousand years of history” and will deride them mercilessly for their alleged failures to behave like Pericles. While, therefore, Greek nationalism can, like all the modes of cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke 1995), take unpleasant forms, Greek charges of hypocrisy against the European Union and the United States cannot be dismissed as mere defensiveness. The current Balkan climate provides both elaborate excuses and, I suggest, entirely plausible reasons for both intransigence and fear.

It thus transpires that Greek nationalism must fight on two fronts simultaneously. These two fronts—stereotypically those of the fanatically Islamic East and the secularist-humanist West, a binarism that continues to have tragic currency in world affairs today and in which Greek political discourse is heavily implicated—effectively collude in the humiliation that Greeks experience; for Western powers have often used the presence of the East (or of some hypothetical Balkan atavism) in Greek culture as an excuse for not treating Greece as a full partner either culturally or politically. Indeed, the dynamics of this double and curiously consistent threat has preserved and generated an emphasis on cultural unity in the face of undeniable cultural diversity and of equally undeniable political fractionalism.

The peculiar circumstances of Greek nation-state formation, with an internally segmentary understanding of social and cultural relations, has thus, for the entirety of post-Independence Greek history, been subjected to constant external pressure both from an allegedly expansionist Turkey to the east (and by other potentially invasive countries to the north) and a culturally and economically tutelary West. Indeed, these two pressures form twin aspects of the same problem for the Greeks: held to a standard of “Western” or “European” culture, of which they are cruelly regarded as at once the primeval ancestors and the inept modern imitators, they can afford neither to tolerate internal separatism (itself allegedly a sign of “non-Western” fractiousness) nor to concede any contributory influence to the Turks, Albanians, or Slavs (which, in the language of
the West’s ability to reconfigure geography to suit its cultural prejudices, would be taken as evidence of “non-European” identity. Unlike the Italians, whose claims to be part of European cultural and political history are grounded in the Renaissance rather than in Classical antiquity, and whose own occupiers since medieval times were virtually all European powers themselves, the Greeks have always had to defend their cultural identity against the crudest forms of orientalism (in Said’s [1978] sense).

The Greek elite, privy through education to some at least of the trappings of occidental cultural identity, then used the same judgmental stick to beat the provincial peasantry. One effect of this process has been the removal, in the name of a doubtless perfectly sincere respect for local forms but also surely motivated by a desire to maintain the distance between elite and rural laity, of linguistically archaic and formal elements, not only from older manuscripts of folk verse, but also in at least one instance (Tsouderos 1993:8), from the published poetic offerings of contemporary Cretan versifiers—an inversion of the earlier tendency to “cleanse” all local texts of dialectal idioms in order to lend them panhellenic respectability (see Kondilakis 1987 [1919]:140–41). The effect of such moves was to disenfranchise local discourse even while localist discourse—the rhetoric of a more formally educated segment of the population—sought legitimacy at the national level.

As a result, there virtually never emerged an intellectual representation of peasant values such as might have challenged the hegemony of the state. The elite had as profound an interest in maintaining existing inequalities as did the foreign powers. As a result, what in Italy has become the material basis of centrifugal cultural claims worked in the opposite direction in Greece: the very threat of being exposed as more Turkish than Greek was sufficient embarrassment to keep the provinces in line, and the very relativity of cultural identity within Greece fed the insecurity that still fuels the rhetoric of infrangible unity—a rhetoric, grounded in claims to a common heritage in the ancient past, that seeks to placate a critical international audience. Thus the more outlandish—conceptually and geographically—a provincial culture was seen to be, the more energetically it could be forced to vie for the mantle of Hellenic perfection, and the less easily it could proclaim any form of cultural independence from the metropolitan center. Crete approximates a fairly extreme point on this scale of marginality.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of their predicament is the extent to which the Cretans engage in special pleading by arguing that, loyal as they are to the national cause, they are the best and perhaps the only Greeks whose traditions of bellicose heroism could save the entire country from its external enemies. These are claims often heard in everyday discourse. Indeed, in the last decade of the twentieth century, the formation of a volunteer battalion of Cretans to fight in defense of Macedonia if called upon and the dispatch of humanitarian aid to the “Serbian brethren” (i.e., Orthodox coreligionists) of Bosnia underscore this last
aspect, and suggests ways in which fierce agniclans ideology and the sustenance of a belief in “hereditary enemies” (i.e., the Turks, here an inclusive term for Balkan Muslims of all varieties) can coalesce in a united front surprising only because Cretans are, by their own stereotypical admission, highly prone to factionalism, localism, and the pursuit of personal and familial interests.12

There have been spasms of separatism on Crete from time to time, and the general view seems to be that Athens is an ungrateful tyrant and morally not better than the Ottoman Sultanate. Even these sentiments, however, arguably have more to do with claims that the Cretans are the best Greeks of all than with any desire, such as has manifested itself in Cyprus, to dissociate the island politically or culturally from the highly centralized system of the Greek nation-state. Thus, Cretans are always more wary of the center than of any other part of the country, for it is to the center that the case for cultural and patriotic superiority must always be made. This bias has unambiguous effects on the practices of popular folklore scholarship. To local writers, there is nothing incongruous in the idea of celebrating the Cretan mandinadha [assonant distich] as a local folklore idiom that speaks to the Hellenic genius of the “simple people” of the villages, while totally ignoring the existence of exactly the same song genre, with exactly the same name and formal characteristics, on several other, important Greek islands.

If the mandinadha is an idiom of relatively benign social contest in which versifiers compete to best each other in wit and ingenuity, war is literally a matter of life and death. Much Cretan folklore boasts a rich vocabulary and imagery of violence, and the theme—though mediated by considerations of patriotic propriety—colors much of what local folklorists have had to say about the island’s culture. Yet much of the violence in question is illegal. For rural males, at least, the explanation is simple: they do not always accept the state’s moral primacy (see Campbell 1976; Herzfeld 1985a). For folklorists, who saw their task as one of recording the essentially Hellenic genius of these people as a testimony to national unity, such subversive attitudes represent a dilemma of no small magnitude, and a particularly serious challenge to their ability to deploy local fractiousness in support of the image of national unity. It may thus be useful to open this part of the discussion with an example of such writing: it exemplifies the paradox with which we began, and typifies the way in which that paradox gets pragmatically resolved.

Methodologically, I take as my starting-point the importance of examining folklore texts as a source of information about educated (scholarly and political) constructions of popular culture. This in turn allows us to identify elements of a common logic, shared by scholars and lay people alike, and even to see how these ideas are worked out in the practice of national and international pol-

---

12 It is less surprising, however, when we apply the model of segmentation, which—at least in Evans-Pritchard’s (1940) formulation—allows for processes of “fusion” as much as of “fission.”
itics—always to some degree dependent, especially during the early years of consolidation, on securing the active approval of the populace in the task of nation-building. It is certainly not my intention to suggest that the folklorists in question were major trend-setters. On the contrary, their rather humbler role may have been much more important than that. They were largely followers of the dominant ideology and, as such, were crucial cogs in the articulation of local sentiment with the discourse of national redemption. By treating their discursive practices as a set of conventions (while recognizing some degree of internal elasticity and negotiability), we can identify the principal presuppositions that informed their methods. It becomes clear that they were an important catalyst in the mutual recognition between an educated and often arrogant elite on the one hand, and a largely powerless peasantry on the other, that was so necessary to the success of the integrative project of nationhood.

**OF LOVE AND WAR**

Let us then first turn to a short piece written by a philologist, himself (as his surname shows) connected by patrilineal kinship to one of the more peaceable villages of the generally bellicose Upper Milopotamos district. This fluent narrative incorporates a scheme of collective, cultural self-justification that underscores the reasons why folklore data were collected and classified in specific ways.

*The Abduction of Persephone (A Wedding on Crete)* (Dafermos 1951) is an account of how a young woman was abducted by a relatively poor suitor. Such events are far from uncommon even today, and, in that they are often contests between patrilinea groups as much as between prospective son- and father-in-law, they reproduce many of the symbolic features that one can also discern in other arenas of masculine self-display in the mountain communities (Herzfeld 1985a:52; 1985b). It is not clear whether the name of the heroine given in title and text, Persephone, was her real one, or whether the writer introduces it to sound the appropriate Classical parallel; indeed, the two possibilities are not mutually exclusive.

The only aspect that seems somewhat unusual about this document is that it records, in print, a type of activity over which Upper Milopotamites profess great embarrassment before the wider world. Given the likely origins of the author, however, it seems likely that his intended audience was not a foreign one so much as the supercilious elite to which he, as an educated man, could claim admission. This is confirmed by a key passage (Dafermos 1951:4–5) in which he attributes the despised and violent practices of the villagers, not only to the cultural and moral deprivation that repeated wars and foreign occupations brought upon the hapless villagers (as he represents them), but also to the repressive practices of the urban center. Indeed, in a sentence (Dafermos 1951:5) that strongly recalls village discourse (see Herzfeld 1985a:22, 107), he castigates the political establishment of extracting votes from the villagers on the basis of
promises never to be realized: "and [the villager’s] education [is] such that it enlarges the cunning that he has already inherited in infinite measure from his mother’s womb, and gives him the ability to bargain over his vote with the parliamentary candidate whom he only ever sees on the eve of elections." Dafermos makes it abundantly clear that his motive in writing this account is to make sense of what to urban Greeks would appear the very antithesis of decent and civilized behavior; his decoding of “otherness” bears a strong resemblance to the concerns of anthropologists. But his account, unlike anthropological writings, is a view both from and for the regional, if not the national, community.

Thanks to this revealing instance of internal segmentation, we can see more clearly than would otherwise be possible how the internal bellicosity of a clan-divided population could gradually be absorbed by the rhetoric of national unity. Moreover, the description of the village girding up for the pursuit of the abductor and his potentially dishonored prey—the consequences of his refusing to marry her would have been a cry for total and final vengeance on the abductor and perhaps for the young woman’s execution as well (see also Campbell 1964:172)—directly invokes the national and statist parallel: “Knives and pistols were slipped out of their storage cases. War had been declared before the diplomats had withdrawn, as we say . . . Total war, as military language would have it” (Dafermos 1951:2).

The narrative is divided into two parts. The first is an account of the abduction and its aftermath, and it is here that the rhetoric of collective self-justification occurs. In the second half, the author explicitly explains his decision to describe the wedding itself as an attempt to lend weight to his theme of unity out of disunity. This theme does not only reproduce a common aspect of rural Greek social relations (see Campbell 1964:125); it also matches a peculiarly local set of practices—including that of formal reconciliation, which he also mentions (Dafermos 1951:7-8)—to the encompassing imperatives of national integration. This dual format, along with a persistent play on the relationship between patriotic valor and the insubordinate aggressiveness to which the villagers have allegedly been condemned by their historical circumstances, together suggest a formula in which official rhetoric echoes and absorbs village values: as feuding leads to alliance (especially through marriage), war leads to peace. It is perhaps not surprising, in this light, that a very large number of Cretan works on folklore have had marriage as their major focus (e.g., Dafermos 1961; Frangedakis 1961; Lambithianaki-Papadaki 1972; Papadakis 1975). Among these, one early essay stands as a landmark of local scholarship (Vlastos 1893). At least one of the later works (Lambithianaki-Papadaki 1972:3) particularly highlights a distich about the joining of two patrigroups through marriage; that same work also describes Crete itself as “the beautiful, sweet, calm bride of the Mediterranean” (Lambithianaki-Papadaki 1972:7). In the culture of the Cretan hinterland, marriage is often the only possible barrier to the continuation of a feud.
For Dafermos, the image of reconciliation through the eventual staging of the abductor’s marriage to his victim—even though it is here ruefully attributed to the assuaging power of the cash that an agnic kinsman living in the United States contributed to the poor suitor’s cause (Dafermos 1951:7)—provides proof of the ultimate virtue even of these poor, benighted mountain Cretans: “The theft had been purified. The sinners had been made innocent [or, acquitted]” (Dafermos 1951:16). In the context of linguistic and ethnic purism, such total absolution of the wicked abductor (*kleftis*, literally “thief”) encompasses also that of the entire nation whose national revolution was spearheaded by guerrillas themselves subsequently and categorically canonized as *kleftes* (again, literally, “thieves”). In this way, folkloristic writing serves the cause of dispelling cultural embarrassment at the level of community, region, and nation.13

The example I have just examined shows how sensitive Greek writers can be to any imputation that their rural compatriots might be less than European or “civilized,” and how tightly they calibrate such judgments to statist and West European values. Once again, the contrasted example of Italy is instructive. In the absence of political considerations that demanded national self-abasement as the price of even nominal independence, Italian folklorists could not invoke the specter of Western disapproval—so strikingly parallel, in the Greek case, with the usual local-level attention to appearances (e.g., du Boulay 1974:201-13; Friedl 1962:83)—in order to marshal local support for the project of national cultural integration. While Italians certainly express stereotypical anguish about the “Africanness” of the south, and while Romans in particular often seem to cast themselves in rueful opposition to an idealized “Europe” much as do Greeks in general, these are discourses about largely internal dynamics. Greek politicians worry much more about external appearances, which they view as crucial to maintaining the legal integrity of the national territory: this is why successive Greek governments have systematically denied Macedonian and Turkish minority demands for self-determination, arguing that these moves might legitimate territorial claims by aggressive neighbors. Here, paradoxically, Western (and global) disapproval counts for much less, and occasions more resentment than fear, as does the apparent inability or reluctance of Western Europeans—Italians prominently included—to understand why the Greeks appear to be so fiercely nationalistic.

Rome’s agenda was never that of Athens. Rome was not answerable to a tutelary West bent on casting it in the role of heroic ancestor fallen on dispiriting—

---

13 As I found (see note 4), speaking in public in the United States about Cretan animal-theft can annoy (especially) non-Cretan Greeks who feel that such things undercut their national reputation. Cretans appear to have a much less defensive reaction, and, within Crete and when the lecture is given in Greek, seem instead to welcome such discussion. This is necessarily an impressionistic comment, but it does, I think, illustrate the segmentary dynamics of what I am here calling cultural embarrassment.
ly grubby times. While Romans know that their fellow Italians deride their supposedly uncouth ways, they largely rejoice in the paradoxical marginality of a city that also has claims to be the center of the (Western) world, and also seem confident of keeping the cultural respect of the rest of Europe.\textsuperscript{14} From the start, Athens far more desperately needed its folklorists’ efforts to create bridges with high antiquity, in order to garner the West’s grudging, often ungenerous, and usually tardy support. Ironically, then, as I have just indicated, it seems to have been precisely this bullying overlordship that gave Greece the unity that Italy lacks. It is also this sense of an external enemy (or at least critic) who must be placated at all costs—not the stereotypically evil East but the hypocritically moralistic West—that allows Athens both to treat the provinces with the same kind of disdain as it experiences from the other Western capitals, and, at the same time, to expect from those same provinces a high degree of \textit{categorical loyalty} despite the widely acknowledged existence of an almost equally high degree of \textit{situation-specific subversion}. No part of Greece reproduces both aspects of this dual dilemma in quite such an extreme form as Crete, which both marshals volunteer forces for a potential war over Macedonia and yet continues—admittedly with unofficial but highly placed political support\textsuperscript{15}—to entertain such dramatically anti-statist activities as the stockpiling of weapons, animal-theft, and the pursuit of clan vendettas.

Such bellicosity forms a central focus of Cretan folklore studies, largely because it generated a rich tradition of celebratory verse. Local-level conflicts and animal-theft, of which there are occasional hints in this literature (e.g., Romanias 1965:97 [tune 87, song 10]), are largely screened out. A lengthy poem about a “battle” narrowly averted between two Milopotamos villages, for example, would have created embarrassing testimony to disunity within the island and the nation. I remember playing the recording of a song from one of the Khania villages to a local expert in 1967, only to be told that this was merely about a local matter and was therefore of no interest. When texts are vague about the frame of reference, or when nonverbal materials are under consideration, they can all be adumbrated to the national struggle against a common enemy. Thus, in a particularly engaging example, Romanias (1965:69) argues that the \textit{sirtos} (“shuffling”) dance was named thus “because the warriors dragged \textit{esiran} the whole people off to the revolution, while the \textit{pendozalis} (“five-step”), with its characteristic pause after each fifth step, expressed the historical experience of national resistance: “the revolution would make five steps [forward], the Turks would [then] strike against it, [and] stopped it, and it made

\textsuperscript{14} For an initial account of my fieldwork in Rome in 1999–2000 and 2001, which addressed some of these issues, see Herzfeld 2001.

\textsuperscript{15} It is of course extremely difficult to get specific details of just how effective political patronage really is in securing the release of convicted animal-thieves from jail. My sense is, however, that the wide range of narratives on this theme bear witness at least to a recognizable pattern, however extensive or otherwise it may be at present.
a pause. . . . Thus, the national dance of Crete has this meaning” (Romanias 1965:67). Folklore scholarship “entextualizes” dance, placing it within the tight semantic constraints of an ideologically motivated segment of discourse, and turns its richly nonreferential idiom into a tightly referential text. As a result, conflict at the local level is represented as war at the national, so that the idea of a “national” Cretan dance, far from suggesting a separatist stance, implies the full conflation of Cretan sentiment and national patriotism.

Moreover, this explanation even incorporates into the theme of all-out war that other dimension of Cretan folklore that local scholars have emphasized so strongly, the theme of love (already separated from the wider context of sexuality through the folklorists’ strict self-censorship [e.g., Th. Detorakis in Kondilakis 1987 [1919]:14–157]). “The old Cretans, however, did not forget woman, that is [sic] physical love [erotas], affectionate love [aghapi], or reproduction [anaparaghoyi]. That is to say, with dance they wanted to bring woman closer to man through dance, through merrymaking.” But there is a danger in giving in too easily to the lure of love and the fatal attractions of women, in the ideology of this powerfully androcentric culture. While the organization of the sirtos, in which (so Romanias claims) the groom and bride, the matchmaker, and the fathers of the newlyweds danced in a row, is read here as a translation of the warlike pendozalis into the (social) expression of love, it is for this reason, we are told, that the often pro-Turkish large landowners wanted to make the sirtos the national dance of Crete, in the hope that the Cretan people would forget the struggles which it had carried out against the Turks—and against suspected collaborators—for its freedom (Romanias 1965:70). The fundamental importance of reproduction notwithstanding, war was the encompassing translation of local identity into national sentiment. To that sentiment, ordinary people suspected the big landowners—who had been predominantly Turks (that is, Muslims) until the end of the nineteenth century, and whose Christian successors are still regarded as no less rapacious—of being faithful only when it suited them. When Capodistrias accused the Peloponnesian landowners of being “Christian Turks,” he was voicing a widespread attitude that lingers to this day on Crete, the one part of Greece that also still maintains the patrilineal kinship ideology and the practices of reciprocal animal-theft that appear to have informed the social lives of the heroic guerrillas of the struggle for independence.

Indeed, the warlike aspect of Cretan culture occupies a focal position in most local writing on Cretan folklore. War offers this discourse both opportunities and risks, for it is here that the violence of patriotism and the violence of in-

16 On entextualization, see the collection by Silverstein and Urban, eds., 1996, and, for a discussion of particular relevance to the uses of folklore, Raheja 1996.

17 Greek distinguishes between aghapi (affective love; cf. New Testament agapē) and erotas (sexual love). Since aghapi seems to be the basis of elopements, and since the language in which it is celebrated is often highly physical, it is not clear that the distinction is as clear-cut as the Classical Greek contrast between agapē and erōs might lead one to expect.
subordination and subversion come most obviously into juxtaposition and the potential for conflict between two different kinds of loyalty becomes most obvious. Against whom do Cretan mountain villagers bear arms—each other, the state, or the enemy outside? Otherness, it transpires, is always relative to the situation. The songs, narrative poems, and even love distichs are full of references to collective violence in various forms. To admit that such violence is directed both against the officers of the state and, more particularly, in defiance of their attempts at control, would go against the grain of most folklorists' ideological convictions. To see it both as the product of long-term oppression by the hated Turks and as the most valued ingredient of the national fight against them, on the other hand, resolves the potential dilemma in a most efficient manner. It is the Turks' fault that Cretans must resort to such disreputable and "un-European" wildness, whereas it is the Cretans' virtue to have deployed it in the national cause. This is the clear corollary of the Cretan villagers' own frequently expressed view that the politicians in Athens are virtual Turks themselves, and that it is up to the pure-minded and warlike Cretans to bail them out of the consequences of their effete corruption while continuing to exploit the venality—especially in the delicately negotiated trading of votes for protection from the consequences of illegal actions—that this corruption sustains.

What we are confronting here, as I have remarked elsewhere (Herzfeld 1987:154–57), is a pattern of segmentary relations, in which the regional sub-units of the nation-state reproduce in their relations with the center the latter's relationship with the external powers on which it depends. Moreover, there is a remarkable convergence between the German-derived positivism that undergirds Greek legal practices on the one hand (see especially Pollis 1992), and popular morality on the other, in their shared focus on categorical ascription rather than specifically individual rights and obligations: identity is never admitted to be a matter of choice. This curious but powerful convergence contributes to the Greeks' amazement that the world seems unable to understand why they do not wish to countenance ethnic minorities within their borders, despite the prevalence of a highly relativistic way of dealing with social relations. Categorical terms carry specific moral charges. Thus, while it is perfectly possible to be a dhikos/-i mas (insider, therefore trustworthy) as a co-villager and a ksenos/-i (outsider, therefore an object of suspicion) as a non-kinsperson at the same time, it is inconceivable that one should be both a Turk (categorically defined as the member of another national entity) and trustworthy (i.e., un-Turkish) at the same time, and this exclusionary perception is in perfect harmony with the legal insistence that minorities are defined by their institutional (rather than selfascriptive) status. In this reading, in which statist discourse perfectly matches the values of a markedly antistatist people, one cannot have a religion without a church, and one cannot have an ethnic identity (ethniki tafiotita) without being in some sense a member of a non-Greek nation (ethnos) as defined by its own statehood—and so being always potentially an enemy.
Thus, collective experience colludes with official discourse to provide an especially profound sensitivity over any external threat to the idea of Greek cultural unity, the diachronic expression and validation of which lies in Greek claims to direct links with classical antiquity. To this day, relatively unlettered Cretan villagers will often talk about whether particular words are “Greek” or not, so effectively has that ideological premise penetrated the popular imagination. There are even songs that, presumably under the influence of local teachers, recall an ancient past that less than a century and a half earlier had been unknown to most peasants (e.g., Romanias 1965:110 [tune 38, song 2]; cf. Pashley 1837:267–69). Today, there can hardly be a single adult Cretan of even minimal education who is unaware that Crete was the legendary birthplace of Zeus. As one rural versifier put it: “The Parthenons [sic] and Delphi and the national path [poria] take their starting-point from the island of Crete” (Kanakis Yeronimakis, quoted in Khandambakis 1986:145). Thus claims to the Classical past have given distinctive coloration to a conceptual system in which center and periphery both accept a tense but infrangible symbiosis. The phenomenon of progonoplaxisia (“being ancestor-struck”), a recurrent plaint in Greek social criticism and conventional wisdom alike, palpably overdetermines Greek national self-perceptions, but in a manner that supports that symbiosis rather than feeding the impetus of separatism.

**HISTORY THROUGH CATEGORIES**

These apparent contradictions are especially evident in virtually all discourse that deals with the unavoidable evidence of strong Turkish influence on Greek culture. The distinction between genetic descent and cultural heritage is one that has little place in official discourse—social anthropology is a relatively novel discipline in Greece—18—and as a result, coming to terms with the clear marks of Turkishness at the local level provokes certain conceptual moves that reveal the logic of this symbiosis. By way of an introductory comment, let me remark that it is often those same people who decry the apparently greater degree of Turkishness in outlying areas of the Greek-speaking world (Crete, Cyprus, the Pontus) who also make the most romantic claims about the purity of their Hellenic heritage and the directness of their descent from even pre-classical Greeks.

Such attitudes represent the extreme cultural expression of power over the outlying rural populations. It is important in the present context to bear in mind that this in itself partly disposes of the sense of paradox described here. It is the ability of the center to monopolize the terms of national self-definition that also

---

18 Social anthropology only began as a university discipline in Greece with the founding conference of the appropriate department of the University of the Aegean, Mytilene, in 1986. More recently, the Pandio University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens has begun a program. Both are expanding rapidly and the subject seems to be highly popular with students interested in the social sciences.
allows it, in effect to provoke the periphery into an exact replication of the center’s defensive adoption of “European” identity. The center decides what is really Greek and dismisses as corrupt but also as quaintly belonging to another age (see Danforth 1984; Fabian 1983) every attempt that the periphery makes to claim a pure Classical heritage. This institutionalized condescension has as one result the defensive local production of national virtue and national history.

Two examples will illustrate the point clearly. First, Cretan children learn in school that the characteristic black Cretan male headdress (sarići or bolidha) owes its color to the Cretans’ mourning for their domination by the Turks. The evidence for this is at best questionable, especially given the existence of similar kinds of headgear in other cultures of the region, and the use of black may well have arisen from the puritanical nineteenth-century movements that also dulled the brilliant colors of female finery—a form of dress, incidentally, that has been brought back into use as an official folklore idiom.

The other example is especially illustrative for our present purposes. Children are taught that the characteristic Cretan surname ending in -akis (e.g., Theodorakis, Hadjidakis), which is the masculine form of the standard Greek diminutive ending -aki (neuter), was imposed on the Greeks by the Turks as a collective humiliation. This is why, in the Upper Milopotamos region, so few surnames have the ending; the area was allegedly never fully conquered by the Turks. If this were a valid explanation, however, it would be difficult to explain the prevalence of such names both among Turkish-Cretans (names like Kounelakis are found still among families of Turkish-Cretan origin in the Dodecanese) and in Sfakia, the other region where the Turks supposedly never gained an effective foothold. (In fact, both of the supposedly “free” zones seem to have been under fairly direct Turkish control for most of the period of Turkish rule; see Damer 1988).

What is odd here is that a far more plausible explanation is readily available to the Cretans from their everyday experience. This is the common practice, when a new surname is created out of a nickname (as often occurs especially in the pastoral communities), of adding the -akis suffix to the surname for the bearer’s son to create terms of both address and reference. This usage, which carries the approximate meaning of “young X,” is exactly parallel to that of -poulos suffix in the Peloponnese (a region that, like Crete, though less so in the present, was once marked by a strong emphasis on agnatic kinship as the basis of association). It is also extremely common. When I first realized that this was an everyday usage that everyone seemed perfectly able to understand in these terms, I was very puzzled by the Cretans’ insistence on the “official” explanation. That puzzlement disappears, however, once one realizes that the Cretans have thereby translated a standard idiom of social ascription into the patriotic expression of adhesion to a national history of suffering under the Turks. This device is especially appropriate in that the “Race” (fili or ratsa) of all persons of Greek descent is usually conceptualized in agnatic terms: descent
in the male line is what guarantees national identity. This is a striking example of the phenomenon mentioned above, whereby the emphasis on various kinds of categorical ascription at the local level fits perfectly with the logic of Greek legal and political discourse. It illustrates with particular clarity the translation of segmentary thinking between a local level where it is still closely tied to a particular (unilineal) mode of kinship reckoning to a national one where the only permissible expression of disunity lies in vying with other regions for the mantle of patriotic valor and ethnic purity—a contest orchestrated from the Athenian center.

One aspect of this categorical process is the disappearance of the concept of “Greek Muslims” as a possible option. While all Cretan Muslims were known in Greek as Tourki in the nineteenth century, the term “Turk” was not a national or ethnic term in Turkey itself until after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. It is thus an irony of history that it was to be the newly secularizing Turkish state to which most “Turkish-Cretans,” most of whom were speakers of various Cretan dialects of Greek, found themselves displaced, for it was their religion that got them there. The few so-called Muslims who succeeded in remaining on Crete did so through baptism or through marriage to Christians, a circumstance that unequivocally highlights the substantively religious basis of this identity and reveals religious affiliation (that word is peculiarly apt here!) as a sort of higher-order or fictive patriline. These complexities of the definition of “Turk” in the Cretan context also have important echoes in the collection and classification of folklore.

**TEXTS OF COMMUNITY AND DIFFERENCE**

The lack of fit between the actual development of Turkish-Cretan identity and the achronic categories of official discourse leaves a strong mark on the scholarly treatment of folklore. It is not my intention here to attempt an extended analysis of the history of Turkish conquest and Islamic proselytization of Crete. Suffice it to say that, by the time Crete became at least nominally autonomous in 1899, very large numbers of so-called Turks even in the predominantly Ottoman city of Resime (or Rethimnos) spoke Cretan Greek as their primary domestic language. This they carried with them to the Turkish communities in which they were placed, notably after the compulsory exchange of population between Greece and Turkey in 1924. Indeed, on a 1990 field visit to Ayvalık (Greek Áivali or Kidhonies; “place of quince-trees” in both languages), I encountered one octogenarian woman whose knowledge of Turkish was limited to a few greetings only, while I still recall in the early 1970s encountering in Kermete (Platania), a Turkish village on the island of Kos (the local Greek Christians still called it Turkish rather than Muslim at that time) a woman who had grown up in a village on Crete and who spoke fluent Cretan Greek, quite unaffected by either the standard Greek or the Dodecanesian dialect to be heard all around her.
Moreover, the common cultural framework was not solely linguistic. The mandinadha idiom was certainly found in both confessional communities; in Ayvalik, I heard several mandinadhes from a Muslim woman who described herself as being from Khania (one of the major cities of Crete) although she herself had been born in Turkey. I mention these facts in order to underscore the close symbolic association often made between this verse-and-song genre and Cretan identity, and its persistence among even the uprooted “Turkish-Cretans” of today.

This evidence of a common heritage is handled in very gingerly fashion even by quite recent scholars. Thus, Theokharis Detorakis, in publishing a long-forgotten manuscript of folklore materials assembled by the important nineteenth-century Cretan novelist Yannis Kondilakis, marks off three of the mandinadhes in the collection as 487 Cretan mandinadhes, distinguishing between the majority as “genuinely Cretan” and the small set of three as “Turkish-Cretan” (Kondilakis 1987 [1919]:14). The implications of this brief notation are enormous. When one examines the three texts in question (Kondilakis 1987 [1919]:56), which are placed in a separate space from the others, one does indeed see that they all contain references to Turkish names or Islamic terminology. But does Turkish terminology, especially in this linguistically hellenized form, necessarily mean that the singer was a Turk or even an islamized Greek? In 1967, I heard what I believe to be a common enough distich in a village of the Khania prefecture, in which the apostrophe nouri mou (“my light”)—a term of Arabic derivation—served as an endearment offered to the listener. Of course any allusion to Rabi, a term of address for Allah, implies a Muslim singer; but the stark separation of so-called “Turkish-Cretan” texts suggests a greater degree of cultural separation in the minds of modern editors than was perhaps experienced by Kondilakis, in whose time the cultural relationships between the two confessional communities were not always hostile and entailed an enormous amount of mutual visiting, shared feasting, and amicable greeting—a circumstance that the oldest refugees in Ayvalik still recalled. Indeed, it was the mandinadha that especially confirmed the common ground between two religious groups separated not only by their beliefs and ritual practices but also by a powerfully differentiated relationship to the locus of political authority under Ottoman rule.

It is important to remember in this context that wherever Muslims and Christians shared the Greek language they were apt to share also the expressive devices that gave form to their social and historical experiences. Although we do not have comparable data from Crete, we do know, for example, that the laments for the fall of a citadel were shared by the Muslims and Christians of the Peloponnese, so that—no matter who was the aggressor and who the victim—the framework of collective tragedy appears to be remarkably constant given the alleged mutual hostility of the two groups (see Herzfeld 1982:63; see textual materials in Passow 1860). The point of the mandinadha is precisely
that it provides both a common framework and, *ipso facto*, a basis for the expression of difference. This is what makes it an ideal vehicle for verbal dueling: “matching” or “coupling” (verb *teriazō*) such *mandinadhes* is an art which, appropriately in a society where verbal skills are viewed as a mark of aggressive masculinity, implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) parallels verbal wit with sexual contest. Perhaps inadvertently, the folklorists’ taxonomic habits reproduce this logic of difference within a shared idiom. Thus, their practice of presenting “Turkish-Cretan” *mandinadhes* as examples of the genre, but as differentiated from those that are judged to be “genuinely Cretan,” does in the realm of expressive genres what the rereading of the -*akis* surname suffix does in the realm of social relations: it recasts a recognizably local and non-ethnic idiom in the terms of the Eurocentric nation-state. This observation takes us beyond the usual pieties about the importance of looking at folklore genres in their performative context, for it shows us that academic entextualization is itself a kind of performance, one that makes far better sense when it is lined up for direct comparison with the local comparisons it has been designed to engulf. What is more, the suppression of social and performative context is itself a common academic and nationalistic strategy. It has allowed editors, then and now, to present as categorical and exclusionary a social and religious division that also served at feasts, at which Muslims and Christians once apparently exchanged these poetic compliments and insults, as a basis of communication. It takes the socially relative and renders it culturally absolute.

The rejection of the Turks as “genuine” Cretans illustrates the extent to which Cretan folklore studies have been cast in terms of national categories and ideology. Symbolic representations of descent (usually by “blood” and in a patrilineal idiom) are still often, and dangerously, conflated with religious categories, with the result that non-Orthodox affiliation can lead to official doubts about the genuineness of one’s Greek ancestry (*Eleftherotipia* 1993). The Orthodox church has mounted a sustained and effective resistance to the removal of religion as a compulsory category of identity on national identity cards. Once again we see how Greek cultural classification represents a convenient match between legal and popular categories. The niceties of technical distinctions between “Turk” and “Muslim” are as irrelevant to the concerns of most Greeks as is the distinction between cultural and genetic heritage. As long as the Turks remain the definitive enemy, such conflation of blood and belief continues to reinforce pan-Orthodox sentiments favoring the Serbs in the Bosnian conflict as much as anti-Muslim attitudes at home.

**DIVERSITY AND HOMOGENEITY**

Thus, a segmentary perception of social and cultural relations does not necessarily conflict with the unifying demands of statist ideology. On the contrary, as in any segmentary context, unity is always thinkable, even if it is not always translated into practice as obedience to central authorities. The external threats
of tutelary philhellenism in the West and aggressive expansionism in the East, whether real or imagined, are sufficiently consistent with Greek experience to exert a strongly centripetal effect on the expression of localism.

Folklore, ever the source of historicist accounts of national identity,19 served the promotion of this perspective admirably. Both strongly distinctive and at the same time grounded in recognizably pan-Greek cultural forms, Cretan folklore provided a useful set of materials for objectifying and conceptualizing the complex tensions that subsisted in the fractious, disobedient, but overwhelmingly loyal island. The expulsion of the Turks in 1924, part of a process of mutual “ethnic cleansing” to which Greece and Turkey agreed in the Treaty of Lausanne, simplified matters considerably. Although “Turkish-Cretans” sometimes make sentimental pilgrimages to their ancestral homes on Crete, much as their Christian counterparts visit their own places of origin in Asia Minor, neither the authorities nor civilians are today confronted with the embarrassment of that categorical anomaly, the “Greek Muslim.” That, in turn, enormously simplifies the business of reclaiming Crete for Hellas, while at the same time claiming the best of Hellas for Crete; both, in concentric fashion, reclaim the ancestry of Europe. It is hardly a matter of surprise, then, that Cretans have professed themselves incapable of understanding why the European Union should be in the business of supporting, as they saw it, the outrageous and intrusive claims of Bosnian Muslims on what is, after all, European soil.

The success of the official discourse in exploiting local-level ideas about social and cultural identity is another important factor in the ultimately centripetal direction of localist sentiment. We should not be too surprised at this. The principles of legal positivism, while claiming objective status, appear to be grounded in a symbolic value system that was probably of enormous antiquity in Europe and beyond long before the invention of the nation-state as we know it today. The conflation of intellectual rationality and popular common sense produces a powerful device for suppressing dissension in the matter of ethnic and local identity. That it is nonetheless ultimately a symbolic system, rather than the product of some culture-free rationality, should be clear from the extent to which the folklorists sought to bring all their materials into line with the taxonomy, rather than the other way around. When we study academic classifica-

19 For an early example of the analysis of nationalist concerns with folklore, see Wilson 1976, on Finland. Such studies have proliferated over the years, as interest in the “invention of tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983)—an elitist model to which much of the nationalist folklore literature fits well—has grown. Many of the early folklorists were teachers and government officials, and their involvement in the spread of literacy confirms the importance that Anderson (1983:47–49) attributes to “print capitalism”; their attempts to create what Anderson calls “imagined communities” (although “imagined” might be a more appropriate and less psychologistic adjective) are grounded in the principle of iconicity; cultural differences separating the modern population from its newly constituted precursors are grounded in a carefully constructed sense of cultural, linguistic, and even phenotypical resemblance, all marshaled in the service of collapsing historical time into the image of eternity (as in the slogan “Macedonia was, is, and always will be Greek”) and nostalgic identification into hermetic identity (see also Herzfeld 1997:64, 72).
tion in the same terms as we would examine folk classification—when, indeed, we treat the scholars as “folk” in their own right—we take their claims of cultural membership seriously by challenging their claims of intellectual hegemony over, and separation from, the people they so condescendingly call “simple.” At that point, it becomes clear that the underlying assumptions of the folklore they have studied also guide their own reactions to the national and international crises of their time. The local-level mode of segmentary feuding on Crete translates with remarkable ease into the nesting of local pride within the production of an externally unified and culturally homogeneous patriotism. In these circumstances, there is no practical contradiction between that patriotism and the most aggressive pride in the local culture of Crete.

REFERENCES


Eleftherotipia [Athens daily newspaper]. 1993. Articles of 4 August (pp. 19, 20, 29); 5 August (pp. 20, 29); and 6 August (14, 15).  
Lambethianaki-Papadaki, Evangelia. 1972. O Sevdas tou Delikani: To proksenio, O Ar- 


