the etymology of excuses:
aspects of rhetorical performance in Greece

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idioms of blame

Folk responses to bureaucratic and political intransigence are often stereotypically
dismissed as “fatalistic.” The label suggests a problematic relationship between the
cosmology of chance and the ways by which people conceptualize the much more mundane
caprices of little minds and big governments. What it does not do, however, is explore
the relationship itself. This paper begins that exploration.

Fatalism, as ordinarily conceived, is a passive resignation to the future dictates of
chance. From the standpoint of technological rationalism, therefore, it represents the worst
kind of inefficiency. As such, it also belongs to that broad spectrum of supposedly mal-
adaptive and inflexible values that are ranged against the benefits of technological pro-
gress (e.g., Banfield 1958; Diaz 1966). In such a view, the symbolic universe constitutes a
rigid barrier to the practical.

That perspective, however, fundamentally misconceives the symbolic side of the opposi-
tion: the fact that values are expressed in an apparently unchanging form (e.g., moral termi-
nology) should not be taken to imply that their content is equally static (see also Meeker
1979:30). Cultural continuity does not necessarily imply cultural sclerosis, and it certainly
does not mean that indigenous populations cannot conceptualize innovation; on the con-
trary, it may indicate the assimilation of intrusive ideas and experiences to a preexistent
understanding of events (e.g., Ardener 1970; Ossio 1977). The practical common sense of
so-called modern or technologically oriented societies is itself part of a culturally peculiar
symbolic universe (Crick 1976:142–148). There is thus no reason to suppose that an intrusive

Excuses often take strikingly similar rhetorical forms in widely divergent kinds of
situation. These forms, according to J. L. Austin, may work by evoking ideas
about impersonal agencies such as fate through etymological allusion; their con-
ventionality makes them socially acceptable as well as highly adaptable. Using
the example of modern Greece, this essay explores some implications of Austin’s
insight for the study of blame attribution in particular cultures by examining
parallels in rhetorical treatment of fate, the national bureaucracy, and the inter-
national superpowers as agents of disaster. Particular emphasis is placed on the
retrospective character of blame attribution in all three domains and on the con-
sequent inadequacy of “fatalism” as a descriptive and analytical construct.
[etymology, semiotics, symbolism, rhetoric, excuses, cultural construction of
events, Greece]
organizational form will be accorded the same significance that it had in its previous cultural context.

Bureaucratic systems illustrate this issue well. They are taken by their inventors to be rational, efficient, goal-directed organizations. These attributes, however, are not eternal verities about some kind of cultural universal; they are culturally specific interpretations of a complex artifact. Most intrusive bureaucratic systems confront indigenous populations with an operational ethic that then gets interpreted, often in quite novel ways.

Unfortunately, most of what has been written about bureaucratic systems sidesteps this question of how people apparently confront them with a ready-made set of responses. Sociological studies, for example, tend to focus predominantly on the workings of bureaucratic institutions as such (e.g., Blau 1963; Gouldner 1954; Mouzelis 1975; Weber 1958 [1946]). Handelman's (1976) sensitive treatment of Israeli official-client relations, by contrast, approaches the ideological and moral framework primarily for its relevance to those bureaucratic encounters themselves and does not suggest extensive parallels between bureaucratic and other kinds of encounter. Yet the existence of such a framework is a remarkable phenomenon in its own right. Unless we assume that it sprang into existence out of nowhere, it forces us to consider how existing cultural frames of reference might affect the perception of novel forms of social experience.

Taking Greece as my example, I suggest that the idiom in which people conceptualize responsibility and blame—bureaucratic and otherwise—may be both indigenous (in the sense that it precedes the importation of formal bureaucratic protocols and structures chronologically) and plastic (in that it provides a recognition for types of experience that actors may not have experienced before). Some vaguely perceived connection with traditional ideas may have prompted the characterization of political and bureaucratic attitudes as “fatalistic” (e.g., Kasperson 1966:61–62; cf. also Legg 1969:35). But this kind of label hardly constitutes an explanation. It is, rather, a stereotype derived from the very ethnocentrism that generated the “traditional-symbolic/modern-practical” dichotomy in the first place.

the shape of excuses

The kinds of utterance dealt with here depart from the usual sense of fatalism in one important respect: they are all attributions of blame for events that have already occurred. They are excuses for past failures, rather than for present or future inaction. They are also highly patterned, in that they show a certain consistency of vocabulary, imagery, and sequencing. Whether people believe them or not, they are evidently willing to countenance such excuses, provided only that the excuses exhibit certain appropriate, stereotypical characteristics. To focus on the credibility of the excuses thus seems a red herring; their acceptability, which is far more easily demonstrated, still demands an explanation. Indeed, acceptability is a precondition for acceptability: “Even prophets have to be socially accepted in order to be right; if not, they are wrong” (Eco 1976:256).

Acceptability is also a precondition for a successful performative utterance (Austin 1975 [1962]). In each performance, existing social relations may be recast within a prevailing idiom according to the performers’ skills (cf. Bauman 1977:43–45). J. L. Austin’s (1971 [1956–57]) eloquent “Plea for Excuses” seeks cultural explanations for the acceptability and conventionality of ways of excusing various kinds of failure and misdeed. It does so in part by appealing to historical speculations about the idioms in which people excuse themselves.

Austin argues that the manner in which people present their excuses for personal failure
has to fit a set of conventions in order for the excuses to succeed. This is a question of performative appropriateness rather than of some abstract measure of right or wrong; after all, as he points out elsewhere (Austin 1975:37), it is no good to announce a dueling challenge to pistols at dawn to someone who is not interested in the honor code associated with formal duels. Similarly, an excuse must look good. People are more likely to accept it if it is well presented—as, of course, every trial lawyer knows.

Moreover, Austin argues, the efficacy of an excuse depends to a considerable extent on its ability to draw on a substratum of ideas about causation, even though these ideas may belong to long forgotten or radically transformed systems of thought. Some trace of their earlier meaning lingers, implicitly, in the present form of the excuse, and the immediate familiarity of the idiom confers a kind of respectability that only the cleverest of novel excuses could hope to match. Thus, to cite “accident” is to draw on the implications of the Latin accidit, with its suggestion of an impersonal fate falling from on high as the efficient cause of disaster. People do not necessarily articulate these connections between a current idiom of self-justification and some past concept of causation. Austin’s (1971:99-100) description of the links as “trailing clouds of etymology” is thus suitably indefinite; his account of excuses lends itself to understanding why they are accepted without obliging us to judge the ultimately irreducible issue of their truthfulness.

The etymological connections in question are thus a form of indirect allusion. They are not links between referential meanings as such. Rather, they subsist between preexisting cosmological explanations of events and current idioms for describing similar events. I would add that the chronological implications of this argument are largely immaterial; there is no reason why, for example, a person should not claim something “was an accident” while simultaneously attributing other actions to “fate” or some similar cosmological force.

Greek excuses draw on a rich fund of conventional motifs and thus furnish a valuable ethnographic corpus with which to explore the usefulness of Austin’s suggestive essay. Ethnographically, the existence of so many common conventions may make it easier to see why and how Greeks have been thought fatalistic, even when their responses to disaster do not explicitly include mention of such concepts as fate and destiny. Through analysis of the ways in which Greeks talk about fate itself, we can see that fatalism is not an appropriate label; there is also no reason to assume that it will work any better for attitudes toward bureaucracy or politics. The fact that it has been used for all three sets of attitudes, however, is suggestive, since it implies that some level of conceptual homogeneity lies behind the stereotype.

The label of fatalism is crucial to this discussion in another way: it is a part of the same rhetoric of which it has been so inadequately used; it is a stereotype held by the Greeks about others and about the Greeks by unsympathetic observers. Greeks usually reject the stereotype as applicable to themselves. There is some uncertainty about this, however, and Greek social critics certainly do recognize the tendency to blame impersonal forces for disaster as an endemic problem. Such ambivalence reflects a central problematic of Greek cultural identity: Are Greeks Evropei (Europeans)? Stereotypically, Europeans are neither fatalistic nor inefficient. Thus, the question of fatalism can usefully be viewed as an aspect of the rhetoric of national identity and as integral part of the internal Greek debate about the past and present role of Greece in the evolution of European culture.1

specific ethnographic context

Greece may be thought insufficiently homogeneous to be treated as a single ethnographic entity. The country exhibits a considerable range of variation in social institutions,
moral ideologies, language, and political orientations (Dimen and Friedl 1976; Herzfeld 1980a; Browning 1969:119–134; Legg 1969:324–327). Equally, however, Greeks themselves generally recognize a supraregional or national level of cultural identity. National media necessarily operate within this broad cultural context; newspaper articles, which have furnished a generous proportion of the data discussed below, thus resemble other forms of popular literature in being pitched to a cultural common denominator (cf. also Howe 1981:279). Extracts from large-circulation newspapers presumably represent a construction of events couched in a familiar, shared code. It should be remembered that all such discussions are conducted in Greek—that is, in a language that protects them from foreign criticism. Although Greek newspapers are public within Greece, their language lends them a certain privacy with regard to the “Europeans” by whose alleged cultural standards Greek journalists often claim to judge Greek society.

For the purposes of this discussion, I have drawn primarily on three independent national dailies sympathetic to the Panhellenic Socialist Movement of Andreas Papandreou. Of these, Eleftherotipia (“Free Press”) probably has the most radical reputation; To Vima (“The Platform”) has usually adopted a more conventional, restrained tone; and Ta Nea (“The News”) usually comes somewhere in between the other two in terms of both political stance and rhetorical flamboyance. All three are strongly critical of the American military presence in Greece, Anglo-American policies in Cyprus, and Great Power manipulation generally; all three have made a point of carrying feature articles on matters of cultural and historical interest; and all three, though in varying degrees, pride themselves on their investigative reporting of government activities under the conservative New Democracy party (1974–81). A fourth paper, Akropolis, is essentially pro-New Democracy, although it does carry reports on administrative mismanagement from time to time.

For the material on personal interaction, and on the ideology of fate and character, I have drawn on published ethnographic materials. In moving from local-level interaction to newspaper reportage, we also move to a very different kind of discourse. Journalistic writing is not very friendly, on the whole, to petty excuses. Denuded of such gestural support as the helpless shoulder shrug, for example, excuses can be made to look quite absurd in print, where they are placed in an entirely different context. Journalistic writing is nevertheless not devoid of excuses, and these may indeed take conventional forms. Newspapers are also a good place for the social critic to begin taking those forms apart.

By and large, journalists’ discussions of bureaucratic behavior are of the accusatory kind. When they shift to questions of international politics, by contrast, much depends on the ideological sympathies and motives of the writers. Whether they excuse or accuse, however, all the journalists whose writing is discussed below operate within a common rhetorical idiom. To accuse the government of complaisance in Great Power machinations, for example, is a way of saying that one’s ideological opponents are of poor moral caliber; to defend Greece as a country on the grounds of Great Power intervention is to excuse one’s own people’s collective failure.

**blame and self-justification**

Journalistic writing in Greece reproduces on a grander scale the agonistic conventions of everyday discourse. In ordinary speech, people attribute the failure of others to character flaws. One’s own failures, conversely, are the result of bad luck, and it is one’s successes that are attributed to character. An important character trait in these rhetorical ploys is that of how hard a person works. To many Greek villagers (see du Boulay 1974:52; Herzfeld 1981:564), the attitude that outsiders would call fatalism is really just indolence. Despite its
name, it is thus a character attribution. The few who say they are resigned to the whims of chance are thought to be making excuses for their inaction. The morally good life is above all one of unceasing struggle—whether against nature or against other people (Friedl 1962: 75)—even when the cause seems hopeless. At the very moment that an individual seeks to justify past failure on the grounds of ill fortune, measures should already be underway to set matters right. These ideas, moreover, seem to be widely distributed throughout Greece.

The components of the overall pattern that are essential to the present analysis may be summarized: (1) the social character of blame and self-justification; (2) the close involvement of concepts of destiny with ideas about the inheritance of both characterological properties and material property; and (3) the pervasive image of fate as “writing” its decision.

Some brief discussion of these aspects is necessary before we proceed to bureaucratic and political embodiments of similar concepts.

the social dimension Although character is invoked as the explanation of successes and fate for Ego’s failures, there are occasions when self-accusation is appropriate. Such outbursts of candor are not necessarily expressive of a guilty conscience, but represent collective self-criticism within the reference group; this perhaps explains why outside observers get to hear such outbursts relatively rarely.

Self-criticism implies at least an implicit admission of collective responsibility. When voiced to outsiders, it may seem a betrayal of social boundaries. Thus, at the beginning of the 1974 Cyprus crisis, a Pefkiot remarked to me that it was all the fault of “our own donkeys [ghaidhouria]”—a venomous insult usually reserved for outsiders to the reference group. To understand this apparent solecism, it must be understood that my informant was (1) extremely unpopular with his fellow villagers; (2) unusual among them in his willingness to associate with foreigners (such as myself); and (3) known as someone who systematically violated village canons of appropriate behavior. He can thus be seen as reversing those canons in accordance with his own outsiderlike status within the community. Another reason for seeming to take the blame is that it allows one to present oneself as the person in charge. Thus, for example, when a Pefkiot is worsted in some competitive encounter, he is likely to say that it was his fault for allowing his rival to compete with him in the first place; he thereby tries to claim a degree of personal autonomy that the actual course of events otherwise belies. In the reverse phenomenon, a Pefkiot may grant others that degree of control in order to blame them for the outcome. In Glendi, cardplayers sometimes complain that others, by making so much noise, “don’t allow” them to win at cards. The latter is a significant usage in the present context; as we shall see, national humiliation over the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974 is conventionally ascribed to American refusals to “allow” the Greeks to retaliate.

More generally, however, the public or social nature of blame distribution requires that one explicitly attribute personal difficulties that have become common knowledge to the wickedness of others. Indeed, the act of retaliation can itself be construed as a symbolic statement about the locus of blame. A Glendiot unsuccessfully attempted to persuade a close friend to give a daughter in marriage to the first man’s dishonored son. This ploy ended in a public rejection by the second man of the entire relationship between the two households. His response can be read as an unambiguous attempt to pin the blame for the entire situation on his erstwhile friend, and his own comments on the situation support that interpretation.

The relation between the attribution of bad character to others and the need to take personal initiative against it oneself is nicely (if somewhat hypothetically) illustrated by
Pefkiot responses to allegations of Turkish atrocities in Cyprus in 1974. Their anger was vented in the form of a frequently reiterated call for the extermination of every Turkish woman and child. Not only were they able to endorse this programmatic crusade with an unorthodox interpretation of New Testament theology,7 but they were also thereby able to ignore the official Greek policy of forbearance toward the unarmed Turkish-Cypriot civilian population. Their justification was expressed at two levels: first, that of indignation at the unprovoked slaughter of Greek women and children by the Turks;8 second, that of the need for the total extirpation of the Turkish people so as to prevent any future recurrence. Thus, in the face of disaster, the attitude is clearly not one of fatalism in the conventional sense, but instead a call to action in the immediate future. That the disaster in question has already occurred is another matter entirely; this can be blamed on external agencies, whether fate, the United States, or NATO.

**fate, character, and inheritance**  
Personal and group character is said to be inherited and thus predictable. Published ethnographies, however, make it clear that this “prediction” is in practice a thinly disguised form of retrospection; gossip treats shameful deeds as confirming a reputation that may not in fact have been clearly articulated up to that point (e.g., de Boulay 1974:183) and can take a form that corresponds to the “I always did say” formula of some English speakers.

In determining the distribution of inheritable property, by contrast, the retrospective character of villagers’ recognition of fate’s intervention is entirely obvious, since there is no way of knowing how the distribution will work out before lots are cast. The appeal to fate through the casting of lots concerns different types of property in different parts of Greece, and it seems likely that in each case the aim is to avoid family conflict over the items of material property most likely to provoke it (Herzfeld 1980b).

Interestingly, at least in Pefko, the “lot” is conceptually opposed to the “gift.” Property distributed by lot is automatically transmitted to the succeeding generation, so that gifts (dhora) have come to represent a perversion of the normative practice (i.e., transference of a parent’s land to someone other than his/her offspring). Property is thus distributed through the decision of fate, which is conceptualized as an act of “writing”; and the decision of a parent to “write” property on anyone other than a son or daughter is an act of defiance against the writ of fate.

**the image of writing**  
Writing is the supreme act of definition. Rather than asking for a person’s name, one is likely to inquire (especially in formal contexts), pos ghratẹšę? (“How are you written?”).9 The irrevocability of fate’s decisions is symbolized by the image of a written decree (see Politis 1874:218–219). In the hands of humans, the phrase “writing the property” is used to indicate a legally documented act of transfer that conflicts with the writ of fate revealed in the custom of dividing property by lot and may not be in accordance with local property transmission norms (cf. also Gavrielides 1976:268); this encapsulates the notion that an appeal to (codified) law involves arrogating to oneself the prerogative of destiny and is expressed as “writing the property upon” the beneficiary. More generally, when someone has to explain a failure, it is described as “written” (i.e., predestined). A Glendiot who was losing badly at cards explained, “It wasn’t written that I should win.” Note that he did not stop playing at this point; instead, he was setting the scene for the likely outcome, but at the same time he may also have been trying to manipulate fate’s own malice—fate is expected to do the opposite of whatever one thinks it will.10 Even in confronting fate itself, then, he is not being fatalistic, in the usual sense of that term; he goes on trying to influence the course of events as long as he can.
In what follows, we shall meet some of these themes repeatedly. In particular, the image of writing pervades all the accounts of bureaucratic behavior, and it is also a feature of allegations about Great Power plans to subvert Greek political interests. It is further developed in the image of the paternalistic bureaucrat who “shares out” (mirazi) favors and of Great Power designs to “share out” (mirazi) dominion over the entire world. In addition, both bribery and betrayal are denoted by terms etymologically cognate with dhoro (gift)—that is, with the category of property transfer that most subverts the correct order. Etymological links of this sort enable people to recognize certain standard images like these as familiar rhetorical devices and therefore as socially and aesthetically acceptable ones.

**the letter and the spirit: civic attitudes**

There are several symbolic correspondences between the respective attitudes to fate and bureaucracy. Above all, bureaucracy resembles fate in that it is seen generically as an immovable force. This view seems to be rooted in direct experience: it is thought that the only people with sufficient power to alter the system are those whose vested interests are best served by its perpetuation (see To Vima, 7/7/76, p. 2). While the prevalence of patronage doubtless explains much of this sentiment (see Campbell 1964:260–261; Argyriades 1968), the persistent experience of bureaucrats’ everyday unwillingness to take any initiative has undoubtedly reinforced that impression.

This inflexibility most characteristically takes the form of a punctilious insistence on accurate documentation in accordance with the exact provisions of the law. A widow remarried and reported to the local police station to have her identity card altered accordingly. She took with her a copy of her marriage certificate.

The relevant Inspector told me that instead of the marriage certificate, I should have brought a certification issued by the Borough. I brought the Borough document; the relevant official did not approve it, because the profession of my husband was written down as “Pensioned Dentist” and it should have said “Dentist on pension.” I took him that too.... Three months have gone by, and I have still not been given a new identity card (To Vima, 7/7/76, p. 2).

Without such a card, one has no official existence as a Greek citizen; in common speech the same term (taftotita) is used for both “identity card” and “identity.”

Associated with the insistence on correct documentation is the concept of ethinofovia (fear of responsibility), the unwillingness to take the initiative in any even slightly anomalous situation. Ethinofovia is seen by social critics as endemic (e.g., Akropolis, 4/16/76, p. 2; To Vima, 8/4/76, p. 2; Tamiolakis 1976:90–91; Dimou 1976:45) and is cited as the reason for many of the delays and inefficiencies of the bureaucracy. In one incident, a 20-minute power outage disabled all the electrical equipment of an Athens hospital. There was a generator in the main hall, bought at considerable cost for just such an eventuality.

The generator, however, was left to rot, as the bureaucratic procedures for determining who was responsible for its functioning had not been resolved. Truly, if “someone had died of disgust” [i.e., during the power outage], who would have been responsible? (To Vima, 8/5/76, p. 2).

Perhaps the extreme of ethinofovia arises in conjunction with the verification of personal identity. This is especially well illustrated by the procedures that a male Greek studying abroad has to undergo in order to have his military service deferred:

He must take a Borough certificate of identity verification to the Military Board. The Borough, in order to give him the certificate requires him to go to the Civil Court or to a notary public and get a sworn affidavit to the effect that the person studying abroad is the same as the one who was born in such-and-such a place and is registered in the roster of male inhabitants of such-and-such a Borough (Akropolis, 11/10/77, p. 2).
The journalist who raised this issue commented that the need for such a complex procedure was dubious at best, on the grounds that “in that case it would be a straightforward case of false identity, which is indeed severely punishable by law. And we do not believe that there exist families that would expose their children to such a danger.” Clearly, however, the existing legal arrangement encourages dependence upon written forms; indeed, the civil servants’ national organization has consistently rejected the view that it is possible for government employees to do anything other than apply the letter of the law with unwavering strictness, since they are themselves liable to sanctions from above in an unbroken stream of “buck-passing” that only ends with a fatelike “unknown manager” (To Vima, 7/7/76, p. 2).

As an impersonal and malignant power, the bureaucracy itself may be explicitly blamed for individual misfortunes. This happened, for example, when villagers, desperate to gain control of afforested land long before the tedious bureaucratic procedure had ground to its appointed end, set fire to the forest and then held the bureaucracy responsible for what they had done (Resvanis 1977:7). Similarly, du Boulay (1974:269–270) reports a tendency to blame intracommunal hostilities on the arbitrary application of land-tenure legislation by a local court.

A set of written instructions (endoli) allows no flexibility and provides a formulaic excuse in the face of the most reasonable complaints. Thus, the owner of a country house near Athens discovered that his telephone service had been cut off. When he complained, he was told that his bill had not been paid.

So he thought that nothing could be more natural than to put an end to the whole adventure by showing his paid invoice. . . . But this—supposedly—official document, the receipt with official stamp and signature attesting payment, was of no interest to the telephone company employee, who simply declared, “This is the endoli I received”—that is, to charge the hapless subscriber over again.

The latter was thus obliged to pay his bill twice, as well as a fine and a reconnection fee (To Vima, 8/5/76, p. 2). Other complaints are met with the equally conventional response, “That’s what the directive [engiklios] says.” Here, too, we encounter a bitter comment on the apparent priority of written orders over standard practice: “. . . and it’s well known that public service offices function with directives which they regard as above the law” (T. Paraskevopoulos, letter in To Vima, 8/21/76, p. 5).

What these extracts from journalistic commentary make very clear is that such incidents are commonplace and formulaic. The appeal to a directive, though often recognized as ethinofovia, is conventionally acceptable, since it conforms to previously encoded experience. Many of the problems in question do not arise from the administrative apparatus as such, but from the literal application of the principle that, as it were, the last directive to be received always takes precedence. Note that appeals to fate work in a very similar way: since the edict of fate cannot be known until after the event, each new development requires a further appraisal or interpretation of what the edict actually “wrote.”

For many Greek commentators, the problem is one of bureaucratic mentality. Whether the attitudes in question are confined to bureaucrats is itself dubious; a doctrinally far from orthodox folk interpretation of the sign of the cross illustrates the radical distrust of altruistic initiative (see Figure 1).11

Moreover, the similarities between attitudes toward fate and bureaucracy respectively suggest something far more fundamental to Greek cultural recognition than is likely to have appeared with the relatively recent importation of an essentially foreign bureaucratic system. It is true, however, that the educated Greeks had a long and intimate involvement with Ottoman administrative practice (see Dakin 1973:16–21), and some commentators (e.g., Bakoyannis 1977) see the present pattern of bureaucrat-client interaction as “nothing
but a continuation of the landlord-serf relationship of Turkish times." Such statements require careful evaluation. While a senior official may behave with calculated rudeness to illiterate country folk (e.g., Campbell 1964:227-228, 241-242), the junior clerk often turns out to be a cowed and unctuous underling in the presence of administrative superiors. The description of the bureaucratic system as a continuation of Turkish practices and attitudes is a popular and not altogether unconvincing device in Greek political rhetoric, one which goes back to the earliest years of Greek statehood (Dakin 1973; Katsoulis 1975:216; Kiriakidou-Nestoros 1975:238). Employees claim that they too are victims of the bureaucratic system (e.g., To Vima, 8/4/76, p. 2). What can they do? History, the Turks, even the hot climate (Paleologos 1976), are all blamed for the endemic evasion of bureaucratic responsibility, a feature that is nevertheless accounted as a national failing. Clearly, the Greeks do not lack the capacity for collective self-criticism, but it is softened for them by the convention of attributing ultimate responsibility to some impersonal, external agency, even while the problem itself is energetically (if perhaps inconclusively) tackled. This provides a rhetoric that satisfies the ever-present concern with potential criticism from abroad.

Despite the bitter complaints about bureaucracy in general, the attitude of ethinofovia and the appeal to written directives appear to be a conventionally appropriate idiom of self-defense by bureaucrats. This does not mean, of course, that all statements of this sort will be accepted, any more than will every attempt to explain a personal failure as the work of fate. But the recognition of the directive motif as a recurrent characteristic suggests, at the very least, an expectation on the part of the bureaucrats themselves that it will sometimes prove persuasive. This is very different from what are seen as violations of the same code by officials and wealthy clients whose trade in bribes offends the sensibilities of others in a less fortunate position (e.g., To Vima, 8/18/76, p. 2). Bribery, in Greek, is denoted by a term (dhorodhokia) that can be rendered literally as "gift-giving." This translation is misleadingly innocent-sounding, however, since its connotations in Greek are almost entirely negative and smack of the underhand dealings of the unscrupulous and powerful. Although the term probably originated in the neoclassical katharevousa language, its component lexemes are sufficiently close to their ordinary-language equivalents for there to be no ambiguity. Here, again, the "gift" represents a diversion of benefits from their rightful destinations (see especially To Vima, 8/18/76, p. 2), as in the "gift" that violates a traditional rule for the transmission of property and arrogates the power of an impersonal and remote power to a few individuals.
Given the extremely high value Greeks attach to hospitality (e.g., Friedl 1962:106), this negative evaluation of “gift-giving” may seem surprising. This, however, is a question of context. Just as excessive generosity may be socially as disruptive as a total failure to engage in normative reciprocity, so too “gift-giving” can become a symbol of other kinds of deviancy. On Crete, for example, the covillager who directs a sheep-thief from elsewhere to one’s flocks and assists in their disposal is known as the *dhotis*, “one who gives or betrays.”

More generally, the standard Greek term for betrayal, *prodhosia*, is yet another etymological cognate. Once again, there is the sense of the immoral disposal of something held in trust and the enrichment of one partner to the detriment of others.

In the aftermath of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, both NATO in general and the United States in particular were accused by many Greeks of *prodhosia* (but see critiques in Vatikiotis 1977; Grigoriadis 1981). This usage is instructive in that the English translation is clearly inadequate. English does not use “betrayal” for the actions of the larger social group of which the speaker is a member; it applies only to the actions of an at least nominally equal partner or member. One can only be betrayed from within. In the Greek use of *prodhosia* for the actions of the NATO allies, there is in fact an explicit sense of the father (the United States) who makes an unfair distribution of his property between two quarrelsome sons—his image is part of the rhetoric of both the right wing, where it is meant to imply that NATO is a “family affair” (e.g., *Ta Nea*, 4/4/77, p. 16), and the liberal and left-wing groups, for which the theme of paternalism is not necessarily a positive one (cf., e.g., *To Vima*, 4/4/77, p. 2), especially as “The British gave both to Turkey in Cyprus; the Americans gave both to Turkey in the Aegean conflict over oil” (*To Vima*, 8/15/76, p. 1). It is perhaps significant in this regard that most of the active opposition to patronage and influence peddling, especially in its exploitation of kinship and spiritual kinship, has come from the socialist PA.SO.K. party and its supporters (e.g., *Eleftherotipia*, series of articles during September 1976).

The concept of *prodhosia* provides an “explanation of misfortune” (Evans-Pritchard 1937), but this must be seen in terms of a larger symbolic context: How does one explain such national misfortunes when the received wisdom also has it that “one Greek is worth ten Turks”? External agency must be invoked, and the long historical experience of constant Western failures to come to the aid of beleaguered Greek Christians may have furnished a model. Above and beyond the perfidy of squabbling allies, moreover, Greek popular imagery attributed the Fall of Constantinople (1453) to the “will of God” (*thelima Theu*). The vicious internal feuds of the last years of Byzantium, by contrast, were internal to Orthodox Christianity and perhaps for this reason did not provide a palatable explanation for Greek singers.

Appealing to the will of God fits the retrospective pattern of attributions to fate. Indeed, so strong was the presumption of divinely ordained disaster and so exceptional the successful repulse of the invaders that when Malta successfully withstood a Turkish siege in 1565, the “will of God” was assumed to have occasioned a disaster that in fact never occurred (Passow 1860:365, #485d)! After the sack of Constantinople, by contrast, traditions immediately began to form that predicted the regaining of the City of Constantine for Christianity (see especially Politi 1904:21–22, 656–674). These optimistic traditions were later emblematically adopted by Greek irredentists for their own secular purposes, with a success that further demonstrates how far the Greeks’ orientation to future events is from being fatalistic (Herzfeld 1982:129–138).

As we turn again to events in the recent past, it is clear that divine intervention as such is
no longer a widely accepted explanation for disaster. Instead, the impersonal force called Ameriki is said to “want” (theli) Turkish victory; the assumption that the Great Powers can do as they wish is so prevalent that one Glendiot even claimed that the Americans had lost the war in Vietnam “because they wanted to”! Again, this is a widespread idiom: Glendidots who find they are losing at cards will exclaim, “It [a card] doesn’t want [theli] me!” While part of the aim may be to inspire overconfidence in the opposing player, such expressions also seem to appear when the game has become manifestly irretrievable. In this context, note that the sequence of cards (i sindhesi tu khartiu) is perceived as dependent on how the cards are dealt; the term for “dealing” (mirazi) is also used: (1) for the activity of fate in general (i mira mirazi, [fate divides]; the pun shows etymological awareness); (2) for the division by lots, especially by a father; (3) for the distribution of political favors; and (4) for the division of the world arranged by the Great Powers at Yalta. Public awareness of Yalta is fostered by some newspapers, as, for example, when fears of a “new Yalta” were expressed in an article (To Vima, 8/15/76) that also accused the United States of setting Greece and Turkey at each other’s throats in order to gain influence as mediators in the ensuing conflict.

Conflict, indeed, is seen as “in the program” (proskhedhiasmenos, proghrammatismenos) in both ordinary speech and journalism (e.g., To Vima, 8/24/76, p. 5). The image has long figured in political rhetoric, having been used in the 19th century to explain setbacks in the gradual enlargement of the Greek territorial boundaries (e.g., Vivilakis 1866). The image here is that instrument of destiny, the pen. Internally, especially during periods of repression, it carries the sinister implications of fakellosi (“having one’s political life recorded in a dossier”); as one Glendiot remarked, there is a “huge pencil” (moliva) that records every false step and thus restricts the ambitions of all but the politically well connected. Externally, the same image is attached to Great Power treaties that condemn the small nations to effective servitude. The superpowers, it is said, “do not allow us” (dhe mas afinun) to fight the Turks and beat them as we would otherwise easily do. Sometimes, the agent is not specified; “they” do not allow the Greeks or their leaders to act in the nation’s best interests. This rhetoric is as popular with the extreme right wing as it is with the opposition parties; for example, a projunta functionary who somehow managed to remain in the civil service after the collapse of the colonels’ regime claimed that Ioannidis, the junta leader responsible for the Cyprus fiasco of 1974, had not been “allowed” to carry out his task to its appointed conclusion; the same official claimed that Karamanlis, the first postjunta prime minister, had been a traitor (prodhotis) (To Vima, 8/14/76, p. 1). By far the commonest use of this rhetoric nevertheless remains the complaint that the NATO powers have subordinated Greek interests to their own; or, in the words of a proverb often cited in this connection, “The big fish eats the little one.”

friendship, politics, and identity

In short, the Greeks’ experiences of internal administration and international politics have often been extremely discouraging. The effects of foreign interference and domination in both arenas are well documented (e.g., Couloumbis, Petropulos, and Psomiades 1976; Couloumbis and Iatrvides 1980; Freeman 1975). In the present discussion I have been less concerned with the historical causes of these problems than with the ways in which Greeks try to make some sense of them. By encoding their accounts of specific events in an imagery derived from the rhetoric of personal interaction, they represent seemingly uncontrollable forces in a more accessible way.
The emphasis here is on the rhetorical, rather than on the personal in any literal sense. Greeks conventionally represent political conflicts in terms of personal relationships between political leaders. Two qualifications need to be made, however. First, it is no longer an invariable feature of newspaper commentary that “friendship” can be invoked as a serious principle of international relations (e.g., To Vima, 8/15/76, p. 10; Vatikiotis 1977). The bitterness often expressed by villagers at the perfidy of the Greek allies of World War II is no longer always the persuasive argument it once was; during my most recent visit (1981) to Glendi, at least one young man explicitly denied the possibility that “friendship” had any role to play in international politics. Second, even within the conceptual framework of older generations, it is clear that the personal character of political forces is of a highly stylized kind; it is cast in the image of an implacable being with a pen, with opaque but ultimately destructive designs upon the speaker’s side. Friendship is formulaic: under the guise of representing events in personal terms, it actually recasts them stereotypically.

In addition, while friendship is a highly prized virtue in rural Greece, it does not impose the stable obligations that are associated with kinship, affinal, and spiritual ties. In some communities, of which Pefko is an example, filia is even explicitly pointed out as an inferior kind of relationship. Thus, the attribution of “friendship” to political allies is in fact a metaphor for the instability of that relationship, which may, in addition, be essentially one of asymmetrical patronage (cf. Loizos 1975:89-92). The dependency relationship is even more explicitly spelled out, of course, in the representation of America as a “parent.”

The ambivalence of the friendship between Greece and the Western powers reproduces in the political domain the ambiguity that Greeks express about their cultural relationship with the West. Torn between conflicting ideologies, one of which stresses the European status of their classical heritage, while the other looks to the more recent periods of Byzantine and Turkish domination as the main source of cultural models, the Greeks have long experienced a degree of uncertainty that is reflected in the double sense of Evropi (Europe) as both inclusive and exclusive of the Greeks themselves (Herzfeld 1982:10-11, 53-60). The semantic ambiguity of Evropi thus expresses a pervasive unease about the status and identity of modern Greek culture.

The desire to be included in Evropi generates a certain defensiveness about cultural traits thought to derive from the Turkish experience. One such trait is the evasion of personal responsibility in bureaucratic interaction (cf. Argyriades 1968:342). Some foreign commentators have concluded that Greeks suffer from a basic incapacity for self-awareness (e.g., Holden 1972). This view, however, apparently reflects the commentators’ insensitivity to their own status as outsiders. Among themselves, Greeks are often quite severely critical of what they see as national failings, and their coinage of a term for the evasion of responsibility (efthinofovia) implies a fairly general recognition of that particular problem.

Many critics of the bureaucracy point out that it combines fear of personal accountability with an institutionalized exploitation of the underdog and that these two features prevent it from conforming to the European ideal (e.g., Bakoyannis 1977; Filippidis 1977; cf. also To Vima, 1/25/77, p. 8). These critics are clearly responding to external criteria of excellence. Both the desire to be European and the contempt for what is seen as the oriental fatalism of the Turks are aspects of an orientalist thesis that itself largely derives from Western European cultural ideologies (cf. Said 1978:102). The conservative New Democracy party had as its 1981 election slogan “We belong to the West”—a claim that was hotly contested by the political left. Similarly, right-wing social critics decry what they see as un-European attitudes blocking their political integration with the European Economic Community; their opponents criticize the domination of political and administrative life by a pro-Western elite. Both groups, in short, argue their respective posi-
tions in terms of a symbolic opposition between Europe and the Orient. The long predominance of political conservatism, inspired by the concept of Greece as the quintessence of European culture and assiduously fostered by the Western powers, has probably been primarily responsible for locking the debate into this particular symbolic format.

Attitudes toward personal and collective responsibility cannot be understood independently of the Eurocentric cultural yardstick. The accusation that the Turks are fatalistic reproduces on an Aegean-wide scale the local-level charge of laziness brought against particular individuals (see, e.g., Herzfeld 1981:565): it says that the Turks, although neighbors, are unworthy of serious consideration and are to blame for their own woes. It also says that they are not European. By contrast, when the Greeks turn to self-characterization, they take pains to deny that they are fatalists, since this would be tantamount to excluding themselves from the conceptual unity of Europe. Admitting to fatalism would thus involve accepting from foreigners the very taint that the Greeks themselves stereotypically confer on the Turks. The charge of fatalism expresses a moral differentiation; it serves as a negotiable means of justifying social boundaries in terms of what are presented as fixed truths about selves and others.

Thus, Greeks usually deny charges of fatalism when these are leveled by foreigners. In this they conform to a more general pattern of presenting a stereotypically European face to the outside world. Internally, however, a good deal of doubt remains. Even when the charge of fatalism as such is absent, Greeks worry about the implications of endemic et-thinolovia for the national self-image and well-being, and—in an ironic echo of the very rhetoric we are discussing—attribute it stereotypically to “four centuries of Turkish rule” (Argyriadis 1968:342; but cf. Kiriakidou-Nestoros 1975:235).

This cultural ambivalence cannot today be treated separately from the somewhat similar attitude toward political relationships with the West. Just as Western Europe was long seen as the repository of the values first generated by classical Greece, so the NATO alliance is represented by its Greek supporters as a necessary counter to the “Slavic dogma” of communism; these are long-standing rhetorical terms in Balkan history. For most Greeks, in the ordinary course of events, both the European virtues and the steadfast friendship of the West are at best rather vague and problematic concepts, fraught with the doubt born of actual experience. Among themselves, Greeks often oppose their culture to that of Evropi; I have already mentioned the comparably double-edged nature of the friendship metaphor for international alliances.

Given these mixed feelings, it is hardly surprising that Greeks should represent both bureaucratic and international setbacks in the agonistic idiom of personal interaction. This does not mean that they literally attribute every such setback to personal malice; on the contrary, just as the imagery of fate depersonalizes one’s individual accountability for failure, so the rhetoric of European identity and political friendship provides a flexible idiom for impugning the character of others while blaming one’s own failures on crushingly superior and implacable forces. In these terms, the charge of fatalism is best seen as a device for creating cultural otherness, which it does by creating discrete oppositions out of a cultural and social continuum.16

Fate is something to be struggled against until there is no hope left. Possibly this is true of all societies; it is at least certain that the old stereotype of the fatalistic peasant has already lost a good deal of ground in anthropological thinking, where its uncritical use could only be evidence of a persistent strain of Eurocentrism. In fact, many authors have already shown how misleading it can be as a descriptive tool (see Ingersoll 1966; Joseph 1974; Srinivas 1976). It is no more apposite in those areas of social life where the concept of fate itself is iconographically replaced—as, in the Greek materials given here, when its role is
taken over by the faceless bureaucracy or the impersonal superpowers. In these cases, too, the charge of fatalism fails to capture the retrospective and strategic character of the speaker's evasion of blame. Greek villagers may indeed say that it does not matter for whom they vote, as the Americans will intervene anyway. Not only does this declaration not prevent them from campaigning for anti-American candidates, but it may also be a part of the electoral strategy itself, much like the cardplayer's ploy to lull his opponent into a false sense of security. It is also good insurance for the future: if and when events eventually seem to have justified it, it falls neatly into place as part of the retrospective etiology of political life.

conclusions

Much of what has been called fatalism in Greek culture turns out to consist of a set of rhetorical strategies. The key question thus shifts from how belief in fate influences action, to how declarations about fate constitute a form of action—the performative action of excuses. Instead of literal statements of belief in fate, it addresses performances that invoke the idea of fate through oblique allusion. How, then, is such indirectness a source of efficacy in the performance of excuses?

The first thing to realize in answering this question is that fate is not necessarily the object of religious activity as such. Villagers do not specify the attributes of fate as consistently as they do those of deity or the saints. In Pefko, for example, there are no visual icons of fate, verbal accounts are minimally descriptive, the relationship between fate and the pluralized "fates" is unclear, and the role of God in directing the activities of fate seems to deprive fate of an autonomous identity. Questions about "the fates" may elicit an identification of them with "angels." Asking whether people believe in fate is therefore of dubious relevance. Religion is the domain of belief; the fates, although historically cosmological, have been elbowed aside by Christian ideology.

They have not, however, lost their evocative or allusory significance in the process. While Greek villagers may take pride in their rejection of paganism as such, the pre-Christian etymology of their rhetoric of fate remains a source of implicit validation. In such a context, the ethnographer's questions about belief in fate are impertinent both socially and methodologically.

Excuses that appeal to fate are thus not necessarily believed. They are nevertheless often accepted, and their acceptability seems to draw on a generous fund of discourse conventions. Even these, however, are not sufficient to guarantee acceptance, since an explanation that works in front of one audience may flop disastrously in front of another. The composition of the audience, too, must be appropriate to the excuse offered. A hostile addressee will discount the speaker's appeal to fate; this is a form of dissociation from the speaker's interpretation of experience.

In the same way, when individuals blame some mishap on the bureaucracy; there is always an implied appeal to shared experience. If those addressed accept that appeal, they will always be able to recall similar occasions when they themselves were victimized by some unsympathetic official; if they do not want to accept that appeal, they will in effect suggest that they would not have made such a mess of things. Whether they share in the speaker's experience or differentiate it from their own is thus not usually a question of plausibility alone. Most Greeks can draw on a fund of negative experiences of the bureaucracy; they do not always choose to do so. In the same way, ideological considerations will affect the extent to which individuals are willing to accede to criticisms of superpower intervention in Greek politics.
The rhetoric of blame attribution thus furnishes a strategic means of defining national, cultural, ideological, and social boundaries. Acceptance of an excuse expresses and articulates the common experience of speaker and addressee. It also entails recognition that speaker and addressee share a common code.

This complex recognition of cultural commonality is triggered, at least in part, by the implicit etymological links between ways of representing the various domains of social experience. The forms of blame evasion are unmistakably Greek, and an individual must adopt those forms in order to encode a personal experience so that it will be understood sympathetically by others. They, in turn, recognize the experience as belonging to a known type of situation. Recognition, in this sense, occurs when an event “comes to be viewed by an addressee as the expression of a given content” (Eco 1976:221), and it is immaterial that this content may—as here—be a vaguely formulated situation type. The lack of specificity is highly significant. Greeks do not usually explicate the etymological link. They do not, for instance, represent their responses to political crisis as resembling traditional ideas about fate (but cf. Dimou 1976:46); perhaps this is because any such parallelism might imply that they were fatalists. The situation type, and the explanation for it, are articulated through a set of images such as writing, sharing, and gift giving. These images may be partly conveyed by words, but they are not articulated in words or collected together under a simple categorical label. For this reason the rhetorical code cannot simply be reduced to a verbal folk taxonomy.

In general, since no purely linguistic description of the code will suffice, I also hesitate to describe the code as possessing a symbolic syntax (cf. Crick 1976:73, 77). “Symbolic syntax” is a linguistic metaphor and the component images do not exhibit the combinatorial complexity of linguistic syntax. Such linguistic metaphors may be misleading and they are certainly also unnecessarily restrictive.

Austin’s (1971) view of etymology, by contrast, has semiotic rather than purely linguistic implications. Ardener (1971:222–227) has already stressed the etymological character of much of the informant exegesis on which anthropologists build their analyses of predominantly nonverbal symbolic systems. By combining these two insights, we see that verbal idioms may be sustained in use by their ability to invoke inchoate images; the “trailing clouds of etymology” that make an excuse conventionally acceptable do so by investing it with a virtually iconographic flavor. The implacable pen hardly loses its force, for example, as it passes from the writing hand of fate to those of bureaucracy and the superpowers; on the contrary, bitter experience confirms its aptness. Austin himself was mainly interested in the etymological suggestiveness of words, and we have seen how certain verbal etymologies strengthen the fatelike appearance of the more mundane bureaucratic and political powers. Nevertheless, that resemblance does not entirely depend on purely verbal links; the writing and gift-giving images might well have sufficed even if all the verbal etymologies had vanished.

Austin’s framework can be expanded to incorporate nonverbal elements of the discourse itself. An expressive shrug of the shoulders, or a journalist’s exclamation mark, may serve indexically to remind the audience of the fatelike implacability of bureaucracy. These elements are part of the code and possess at least a crudely etymological suggestiveness in linking people’s reactions to quite different areas of social and political experience.

Nonverbal elements also demonstrate still further the priority of the implicit over the verbally explicit in the rhetoric of excuses. Like verbal etymologies, they operate at a subdued level; spelling out the cosmological allusions would simply deflate the rhetoric and possibly provoke all the usual defensiveness about fatalism. The apparent vagueness of
these etymological allusions, a counterpart to the "fuzzy concepts" of recent linguistics and logic (cf. Eco 1976:82), may have deterred anthropologists from making use of the "Plea for Excuses" when it originally appeared in 1956–57. At that time, too, the term "etymology" smacked of unfashionable, diachronic concerns. Today, however, these objections have lost much of their force. The present explosive increase in the anthropological study of rhetoric should prove highly conducive to a more general exploration of the central issue discussed here: that of how etymology lends acceptability to particular interpretations of events.

notes

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1 The core of the debate is the question of how much emphasis should be given to the classical elements in the modern Greek heritage; this aspect of Greek identity was a preoccupation of Greek thinkers long before independence and statehood (Henderson 1970) and was the focus of an ideological struggle that revealed itself most clearly in the development of an indigenous scholarly tradition in ethnology (Herzfeld 1982). It proved especially divisive in the still partially unresolved "language question" (glossiako zitima), or diglossic problem, the socioeconomic and ideological dimensions of which have been discussed with great clarity by Sotiropoulos (1977). See also Augustinos (1977) and Clogg (1976).

2 In rural communities, men usually read national newspapers with great avidity; women less so, as newspapers are principally read in the coffeehouses, which they do not frequent. On the historical development of the Greek press, see Dimakis (1977). McNeill (1978:242–244) stresses the heavy influence of imported television programs. It should not be thought, however, that villagers necessarily believe media reports; much depends on their ideological position, and in any case people's political convictions are extremely opaque (cf. Loizos 1975:301).

3 The general attitude is that Greek is too difficult for foreigners to learn properly. This reproduces a parallel view that local dialects cannot be learned by outsiders; du Boulay (1974:48) recounts a story illustrative of this kind of linguistic localism that I have also heard about the national language. In both cases, language is viewed as a defense against inquisitive outsiders.

4 In Crete, I was told (1981) that suicide was wrong even for a person in immense pain; one should struggle up to the appointed end of one's life.

5 My own field data from two strongly differentiated communities in Rhodes (Pefto) and Crete (Glendi) appear to corroborate the folklorists' accounts in several matters of detail (see especially Politis 1874:207–236; Lawson 1910:120–130; see also Blum and Blum 1970:100, 313). "Pefto" and "Glendi" are pseudonyms; for further details, see Herzfeld (1980a, 1980b, 1981).

6 The point of this insult seems to be that the donkey is unpredictable, and this, in conjunction with viciousness, is thought to be an attribute of outsiders, rather than of those one knows well through everyday interaction; see also Herzfeld (1980a:346).

7 The reference, taken entirely out of context, is to Jesus' response to the disciple who cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, one of those who came to take Jesus before Pilate: "Then said Jesus unto him put up again, the sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matt. 27:52). This injunction thus inveighed against the very code of vengeful behavior my informants sought to justify by it; its particular sense of the inevitability of Jesus' death comes far closer to the stereotypical notion of "fatalism" than any comparable village usage.

8 "How is she/at fault for you?"—where "you" refers to the Turk.

9 See below on the homonymy of personal identity with the document that attests it.

10 Glendiots, when asked how they are, usually reply, "Let's say 'well'" (as ta leme(ne) kala). This is apparently an apotropaic formula; too positive a reply might attract the evil eye (thiarmos) or some other active embodiment of envy. In both Pefto and Glendi, there is a general reluctance to admit to good fortune, either present or prospective, for this reason; pessimistic predictions, conversely, are thought to improve one's chances. Glendiots also play on the delicate balance between the ironic, the strategic, and the apotropaic when they assure their cardplaying opponents that the latter will win.
11 Recorded in Pefto in 1974, but apparently derived from the informant's conversations in Rhodes Town. This folk exegesis shows that Jesus is perceived as the ultimate victim of too keen a desire to "get involved" and in particular to tangle with government on behalf of some good cause.

12 A popular post-1974 slogan is NATO-SIA [=C.I.A.], PRODHOSIA. Note that this device absolves not only the nation as a collectivity, but also individuals whose acts might otherwise portray the nation in an unfavorable act abroad. Thus, when a Greek arsonist was convicted of setting fire to a Moslem (i.e., "Turkish") school, the prosecutor [sic] claimed that "the Great Powers were at least the moral culprits in the crime of the accused" (To Vima, 8/24/76). More right-wing journalists, apparently identifying their perspective with the generally pro-Western stance of the New Democracy party, discount some of the more extreme accounts of Anglo-American involvement in the 1974 crisis.

13 Historically, consciousness of "the West" (i dhisi) has shifted its exact referents. The bitter experience of 1204, when the Crusaders sacked Byzantium, left scars that were hardly appeased by the indifference of the Christian powers to the later collapse of the Byzantine Empire and the advance of Ottoman power. Indeed, there is evidence that on several occasions, notably in Crete in 1645, the local population welcomed the Turks as saviors from the oppressive rule of the Christian powers (Venice in the case of Crete).

14 In Pefto, this is in part because nonkin are ideally also non-Peftiots; the community is normatively endogamous.

15 See Langrod (1965:40), Munkman (1958), and McNeill (1978:226--228) for illustrations of these technocratic criteria applied to Greece by foreigners.

16 I use the notion of "continuum" in Drummond's (1981:657, n. 4; cf. 1980) sense of "intersystem": "a conceptualized system of identity/difference/relations that ties 'We' to 'Other', as a fundamental attribute of culture."

17 To Greek commentators, however, such parallelisms may also seem too obvious to be worth discussing. In either case, we see here the process that Douglas (1975:3--8) has called "backgroundering."

18 A major difficulty seems to be that such indeterminacy is not, and cannot be, catered for by formalized techniques for data collection in the field; on this, see Karp and Kendall (1982).

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