

Making Modern Mothers: Ethics and Family Planning in Urban Greece

based on fieldwork I conducted in Athens 1993-95

how I set out, and with what questions...

can you explain the title?

what cultural changes do I track?

women evaluated on basis of sexuality —> mothering
motherhood as purpose —> achievement (consumerism)
controlling nature of sensuality —> controlling nature of fertility

questions, points of clarification?

discussion questions:

How do I use "ethics" to understand how gender operates, and has changed, in urban Greece? How does "nature" enter into gender constructions? Do you think this model is specific to Greece, or might it be usefully applied to and/or adapted for another cultural setting, like the US?

How would you characterize the moral discourse of abortion in Greece? How does it contrast with how abortion is debated in the US? Under what circumstances are Greek women seemingly able to reconcile use of abortion and proper motherhood? In what ways might this be both "good" and "bad" for women?

How does family planning advocacy in Greece (and elsewhere) "rationalize sex"? What repercussions does this have? Given that family planning is something that Greeks want to be able to do, how might condoms and other contraceptive methods be better advertised and presented to potential users? Or sex ed promoted?

How is it that the Greek government, which professes nationalist concern over Greece's declining birthrate (pronatalism), offers legal, potentially state-subsidized abortion and other liberal family planning policies? How do intersecting ideologies of gender and nationalism (i.e., maternal citizenship) inform these apparently paradoxical governmental positions, and with what repercussions for Greek families?

In so far as motherhood is a "choice," then, politicians see it as an either/or choice — you are a mother or you are not; if you are, might as well have many children.

Meanwhile, urban Greek women want the "choice" to have children *and* a career or employment.

not surprisingly, legalized abortion has not had the demographic effect the politicians hoped for.

The state politicians' naive belief in the power of "rational choice" neglects the economic and infrastructural constraints on reproductive "choice."

Rather than see the maternal pensions and legalized abortion in conflict with one another, viewed together we can see them contribute to a *modern* construction of women's civic duty that is based on the liberal, western ideology of "choice" but which is nonetheless circumscribed by the notion that women's ultimate civic duty, patriotic duty, is a maternal duty to produce new citizens.

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